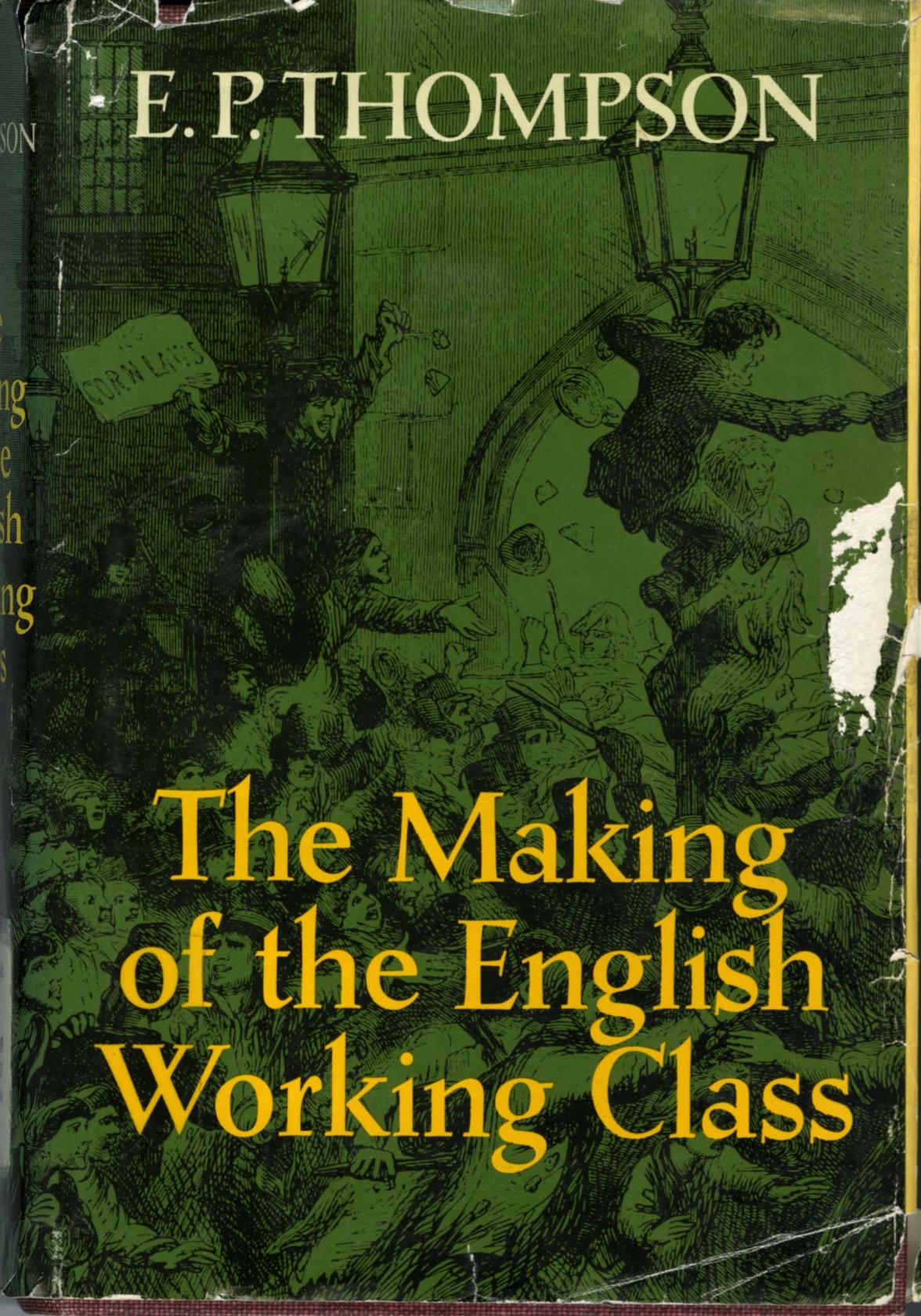


E. P. THOMPSON



The Making
of the English
Working Class

THE MAKING OF THE
ENGLISH WORKING CLASS

by

E. P. THOMPSON

PANTHEON BOOKS
A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE
NEW YORK

CONTENTS

Preface	9
<i>Part One: THE LIBERTY TREE</i>	
I Members Unlimited	17
II Christian and Apollyon	26
III "Satan's Strongholds"	55
IV The Free-born Englishman	77
V Planting the Liberty Tree	102
<i>Part Two: THE CURSE OF ADAM</i>	
VI Exploitation	189
VII The Field Labourers	213
VIII Artisans and Others	234
IX The Weavers	269
X Standards and Experiences	314
i. Goods	314
ii. Homes	318
iii. Life	322
iv. Childhood	331
XI The Transforming Power of the Cross	350
i. Moral Machinery	350
ii. The Chiliasm of Despair	375
XII Community	401
i. Leisure and Personal Relations	401
ii. The Rituals of Mutuality	418
iii. The Irish	429
iv. Myriads of Eternity	444

Part Three: THE WORKING-CLASS PRESENCE

XIII	Radical Westminster	451
XIV	An Army of Redressers	472
	i. The Black Lamp	472
	ii. The Opaque Society	484
	iii. The Laws against Combination	497
	iv. Croppers and Stockingers	521
	v. Sherwood Lads	552
	vi. By Order of the Trade	575
XV	Demagogues and Martyrs	603
	i. Disaffection	603
	ii. Problems of Leadership	607
	iii. Hampden Clubs	631
	iv. Brandreth and Oliver	649
	v. Peterloo	669
	vi. The Cato Street Conspiracy	700
XVI	Class Consciousness	711
	i. The Radical Culture	711
	ii. William Cobbett	746
	iii. Carlile, Wade and Gast	762
	iv. Owenism	779
	v. "A Sort of Machine"	807
	Bibliographical Note	833
	Acknowledgements	837
	Index	838

frighten the authorities. To throw open the doors to propaganda and agitation in this "unlimited" way implied a new notion of democracy, which cast aside ancient inhibitions and trusted to self-activating and self-organising processes among the common people. Such a revolutionary challenge was bound to lead on to the charge of high treason.

The challenge had, of course, been voiced before—by the 17th-century Levellers. And the matter had been argued out between Cromwell's officers and the Army agitators in terms which look forward to the conflicts of the 1790s. In the crucial debate, at Putney,¹ the representatives of the soldiers argued that since they had won the victory they should benefit by being admitted to a greatly extended popular franchise. The claim of the Leveller Colonel Rainborough is well known:

For really I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government. . . . I should doubt whether he was an Englishman or no, that should doubt of these things.

The reply of Cromwell's son-in-law, General Ireton—the spokesman of the "Grandeers"—was that "no person hath a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom . . . that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom." When Rainborough pressed him, Ireton grew warm in return:

All the main thing that I speak for, is because I would have an eye to property. I hope we do not come to contend for victory—but let every man consider with himself that he do not go that way to take away all property. For here is the case of the most fundamental part of the constitution of the kingdom, which if you take away, you take away all by that.

"If you admit any man that hath a breath and being," he continued, a majority of the Commons might be elected who had no "local and permanent interest". "Why may not those men vote against all property? . . . Show me what you will stop at; wherein you will fence any man in a property by this rule."

This unqualified identification of political and property rights brought angry expostulations. From Sexby—

¹ A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (1933), pp. 53 et seq.

There are many thousands of us soldiers that have ventured our lives; we have had little propriety in the kingdom as to our estates, yet we have had a birthright. But it seems now, except a man hath a fixed estate in this kingdom, he hath no right . . . I wonder we were so much deceived.

And Rainborough broke in ironically:

Sir, I see that it is impossible to have liberty but all property must be taken away. If it be laid down for a rule . . . it must be so. But I would fain know what the soldier hath fought for all this while? He hath fought to enslave himself, to give power to men of riches, men of estates, to make him a perpetual slave.

To which Ireton and Cromwell replied with arguments which seem like prescient apologetics for the compromise of 1688. The common soldier had fought for three things: the limitation of the prerogative of the Crown to infringe his personal rights and liberty of conscience: the right to be governed by representatives, even though he had no part in choosing them: and the "freedom of trading to get money, to get estates by"—and of entering upon political rights in this way. On such terms, "Liberty may be had and property not be destroyed."

For 100 years after 1688 this compromise—the oligarchy of landed and commercial property—remained unchallenged, although with a thickening texture of corruption, purchase, and interest whose complexities have been lovingly chronicled by Sir Lewis Namier and his school. The Leveller challenge was altogether dispersed—although the spectre of a Leveller revival was often conjured up, as the Scylla to the Charybdis of Papists and Jacobites between which the good ship Constitution must steer her course. But until the last quarter of the 18th century the temperate republican and libertarian impulses of the "Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthsman" seem to be transfixed within the limits of Ireton's definition.¹ To read the controversies between reformers and authority, and between different reforming groups, in the 1790s is to see the Putney Debates come to life once again. The "poorest he" in England, the man with a "birthright", becomes the *Rights of Man*: while the agitation of "unlimited" members was seen by Burke as the threat of the "swinish multitude". The great semi-official agency for the intimidation of reformers was called the Association for "Protecting Liberty and Property against Republicans

¹ See Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthsman* (Harvard, 1959).

and Levellers". The moderate Yorkshire reformer, the Reverend Christopher Wyvill, as to whose devotion there can be no question, nevertheless believed that a reform on the principle of universal suffrage "could not be effected without a Civil War":

In times of warm political debate, the Right of Suffrage communicated to an ignorant and ferocious Populace would lead to tumult and confusion. . . . After a series of Elections disgraced by the most shameful corruption, or disturbed by the most furious commotion, we expect that the turbulence or venality of the English Populace would at last disgust the Nation so greatly, that to get rid of the intolerable evils of a profligate Democracy, they would take refuge . . . under the protection of Despotic Power.¹

"If Mr Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes," he wrote in 1792, "their interference will probably be marked by wild work, and all we now possess, whether in private property or public liberty, will be at the mercy of a lawless and furious rabble."²

It is the old debate continued. The same aspirations, fears, and tensions are there: but they arise in a new context, with new language and arguments, and a changed balance of forces. We have to try to understand both things—the continuing traditions and the context that has changed. Too often, since every account must start somewhere, we see only the things which are new. We start at 1789, and English Jacobinism appears as a by-product of the French Revolution. Or we start in 1819 and with Peterloo, and English Radicalism appears to be a spontaneous generation of the Industrial Revolution. Certainly the French Revolution precipitated a new agitation, and certainly this agitation took root among working people, shaped by new experiences, in the growing manufacturing districts. But the question remains—what were the elements precipitated so swiftly by these events? And we find at once the long traditions of the urban artisans and tradesmen, so similar to the *menu peuple* or "little people" whom Dr. George Rudé has shown to be the most volatile revolutionary element in the Parisian crowd.³ We may see something of the complexities of these continuing traditions if we isolate three problems: the

¹ C. Wyvill to John Cartwright, 16 December 1797, in Wyvill's *Political Papers* (York, 1804), V, pp. 381-2.

² *Ibid.*, V, p. 23.

³ See G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959).

Rule and Government of the World should be put into their hands" until the Last Judgement. Until such time it was their portion "patiently to suffer from the world . . . than anywhere to attain the Rule and Government thereof".¹ At the end of the Commonwealth, the rebellious tradition of Antinomianism "curved back from all its claims". Where the ardent sectaries had been zealous—indeed, ruthless—social gardeners, they were now content to say: "let the tares (if tares) alone with the wheat . . ."² Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger, helps us to understand the movement of feeling, turning away from the "kingdom without" to the "kingdom within":

The living soul and the creating spirit are not one, but divided, the one looking after a kingdom without him, the other drawing him to look and wait for a kingdom within him, which moth and rust doth not corrupt and thieves cannot break through and steal. This is a kingdom that will abide, the outward kingdom must be taken from you.³

An understanding of this withdrawal—and of what was preserved despite the withdrawal—is crucial to an understanding of the 18th century and of a continuing element in later working-class politics. In one sense, the change can be seen in the different associations called up by two words: the positive energy of *Puritanism*, the self-preserving retreat of *Dissent*. But we must also see the way in which the resolution of the sects to "patiently suffer from the world" while abstaining from the hope of attaining to its "Rule and Government" enabled them to combine political quietism with a kind of slumbering Radicalism—preserved in the imagery of sermons and tracts and in democratic forms of organisation—which might, in any more hopeful context, break into fire once more. We might expect to find this most marked among the Quakers and the Baptists. By the 1790s, however, the Quakers—who numbered fewer than 20,000 in the United Kingdom—seem little like a sect which once contained such men as Lilburne, Fox and Penn. They had prospered too much: had lost some of their most energetic spirits in successive emigrations to America: their hostility to State and authority had diminished to formal symbols—the refusal to swear oath or to bare the head: the

¹ A. C. Underwood, *History of the English Baptists* (1947), pp. 84-5.

² G. Huehns, *Antinomianism in English History* (1951), p. 146.

³ *Fire in the Bush in Selections . . . from Gerrard Winstanley*, ed. L. Hamilton (1944), pp. 30-1.

continuing tradition, at its best, gave more to the social conscience of the middle class than to the popular movement. In the mid-century there were still humble congregations like that which met in the meeting-house in Cage Lane, Thetford—adjoining the gaol, with its pillory and stocks—where young Tom Paine received (by his own avowal) "an exceeding good moral education". But few Quakers seem to have come forward when Paine, in 1791, combined some of their own notions of service to humanity with the intransigent tone of *Rights of Man*. In 1792 the Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of Friends urged on its members "true quietude of mind" in the "state of unsettlement which at present exists in our nation". They should not unite in political associations, nor should they promote "a spirit of disaffection to the King and to the Government under which we live and enjoy many privileges and favours which merit our grateful subjection thereto".¹

Their forebears had not accepted *subjection*, nor would they have admitted the word *grateful*. The tension between the kingdoms "without" and "within" implied a *rejection* of the ruling powers except at points where co-existence was inevitable: and much nice argument had once turned on what was "lawful" to the conscience and what was not. The Baptists, perhaps, showed the greatest consistency: and they remained most Calvinist in their theology and most plebeian in their following. And it is above all in Bunyan that we find the slumbering Radicalism which was preserved through the 18th century and which breaks out again and again in the 19th. *Pilgrim's Progress* is, with *Rights of Man*, one of the two foundation texts of the English working-class movement: Bunyan and Paine, with Cobbett and Owen, contributed most to the stock of ideas and attitudes which make up the raw material of the movement from 1790-1850. Many thousands of youths found in *Pilgrim's Progress* their first adventure story, and would have agreed with Thomas Cooper, the Chartist, that it was their "book of books".²

"I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away . . . laid up in heaven, and safe there . . . to be bestowed, at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it. Read it so, if you will, in my book." Here is Winstanley's kingdom which "moth and rust doth not corrupt",

¹ Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (1921), I, p. 315.

² See Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), Ch. II.

comfort, enlightenment and liberty. What they have lost is their moral integrity and their compassion; the incorruptible inheritance of the spirit, it seems, could not be preserved if the inheritance of struggle was forgotten.

This is not all that *Pilgrim's Progress* is about. As Weber noted, the "basic atmosphere" of the book is one in which "the after-life was not only more important, but in many ways also more certain, than all the interests of life in this world".¹ And this reminds us that faith in a life to come served not only as a consolation to the poor but also as some emotional compensation for present sufferings and grievances: it was possible not only to imagine the "reward" of the humble but also to enjoy some revenge upon their oppressors, by imagining their torments to come. Moreover, in stressing the positives in Bunyan's imagery we have said little of the obvious negatives—the unction, the temporal submissiveness, the egocentric pursuit of personal salvation—with which they are inseparably intermingled; and this ambivalence continues in the language of humble Nonconformity far into the 19th century. The story seemed to Bamford to be "mournfully soothing, like that of a light coming from an eclipsed sun". When the context is hopeful and mass agitations arise, the active energies of the tradition are most apparent: Christian does battle with Apollyon in the real world. In times of defeat and mass apathy, quietism is in the ascendant, reinforcing the fatalism of the poor: Christian suffers in the Valley of Humiliation, far from the rattling of coaches, turning his back on the City of Destruction and seeking the way to a spiritual City of Zion.

Moreover, Bunyan, in his fear of the erosion of the inheritance by compromise, added to the forbidding Puritan joylessness his own figurative portrayal of the "straight and narrow" path, which emphasised the jealous sectarianism of the Calvinist elect. By 1750 those very sects which had sought to be most loyal to "Christ's poor" were least welcoming to new converts, least evangelistic in temper. Dissent was caught in the tension between opposing tendencies, both of which led away from any popular appeal: on the one hand, the tendency towards rational humanitarianism and fine preaching—too intellectual and genteel for the poor; on the other hand, the rigid Elect, who

¹ M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), pp. 109-10, 227. See also A. Kettle, *Introduction to the English Novel* (1951), pp. 44-5.

"Scarlet Whore of Babylon".¹ The very anarchy of Old Dissent, with its self-governing churches and its schisms, meant that the most unexpected and unorthodox ideas might suddenly appear—in a Lincolnshire village, a Midlands market-town, a Yorkshire pit. In the Somerset woollen town of Frome (Wesley noted in his *Journal* in 1768) there was "a mixture of men of all opinions, Anabaptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Arians, Antinomians, Moravians and what not". Scottish tradesmen and artisans brought other sects into England; in the last decades of the 18th century the Glasites or Sandemanians made a little headway, with their zealous church discipline, their belief that the "distinctions of civil life [were] annihilated in the church" and that membership implied some community of goods, and—in the view of critics—their inordinate spiritual pride and "neglect of the poor, ignorant, perishing multitude".² By the end of the century, there were Sandemanian societies in London, Nottingham, Liverpool, Whitehaven and Newcastle.

The intellectual history of Dissent is made up of collisions, schisms, mutations; and one feels often that the dormant seeds of political Radicalism lie within it, ready to germinate whenever planted in a beneficent and hopeful social context. Thomas Spence, who was brought up in a Sandemanian family, delivered a lecture to the Newcastle Philosophical Society in 1775 which contained in outline his whole doctrine of agrarian Socialism; and yet it was not until the 1790s that he commenced his serious public propaganda. Tom Paine, with his Quaker background, had shown little sign of his outrageously heterodox political views during his humdrum life as an exciseman at Lewes; the context was hopeless, politics seemed a mere species of "jockeyship". Within one year of his arrival in America (November 1774) he had published *Common Sense* and the *Crisis* articles which contain all the assumptions of *Rights of Man*. "I have an aversion to monarchy, as being too debasing to the dignity of man," he wrote. "But I never troubled others with my notions till very lately, nor ever published a

¹ Dissent's term for Erastianism—in the first place the Papacy and the Roman Church, but often attached to the Church of England or any church accused of prostituting its spiritual virtue to reasons of State and worldly power. Cobbett recalled: "I most firmly believed when I was a boy, that the Pope was a prodigious woman, dressed in a dreadful robe, which had been made red by being dipped in the blood of Protestants." *Political Register*, 13 January 1821.

² Bogue and Bennett, op. cit., IV, pp. 107-24. Despite their severity, the Sandemanians were less bigoted than other Dissenters about some social observances, and approved of the theatre.

syllable in England in my life." What had changed was not Paine, but the context in which he wrote. The seed of *Rights of Man* was English: but only the hope brought by the American and French Revolutions enabled it to strike.

If some sect of Old Dissent had set the pace of the evangelical revival—instead of John Wesley—then 19th-century Non-conformity might have assumed a more intellectual and democratic form. But it was Wesley—High Tory in politics, sacerdotal in his approach to organisation—who first reached "Christ's poor", breaking the Calvinist taboo with the simple message: "You have nothing to do but save souls."

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!
He spreads his arms to embrace you all;
Sinners alone His grace receives:
No need for him the righteous have;
He came the lost to seek and save.

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
Groaning beneath your load of sin!
His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in;
He calls you now, invites you home:
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.

There is, of course, a certain logic in the fact that the evangelical revival should have come from within the Established Church. The Puritan emphasis upon a "calling" was (as Weber and Tawney have shown) particularly well adapted to the experience of prospering and industrious middle class or petty bourgeois groups. The more Lutheran traditions of Anglican Protestantism were less adapted to exclusive doctrines of "election"; while as the established Church it had a peculiar charge over the souls of the poor—indeed, the duty to inculcate in them the virtues of obedience and industry. The lethargy and materialism of the 18th-century Church were such that, in the end and against Wesley's wishes, the evangelical revival resulted in the distinct Methodist Church. And yet Methodism was profoundly marked by its origin; the poor man's Dissent of Bunyan, of Dan Taylor, and—later—of the Primitive Methodists was a religion of the poor; orthodox Wesleyanism remained as it had commenced, a religion for the poor.

through with masochism: the "bleeding love", the wounded side, the blood of the Lamb:

Teach me from every pleasing snare
 To keep the issues of my heart.
 Be Thou my Love, my Joy, my Fear!
 Thou my Eternal Portion art.
 Be Thou my never-failing Friend,
 And love, O love me to the end.

In London a Jacobin engraver went to the "Garden of Love" and found "a Chapel . . . built in the midst, / Where I used to play on the green":

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
 And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door . . .

In the Garden were "tomb-stones where flowers should be":

And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
 And binding with briars my joys & desires.

So much has been said, in recent years, of Methodism's positive contribution to the working-class movement that it is necessary to remind ourselves that Blake and Cobbett, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, saw the matter differently. We might suppose, from some popular accounts, that Methodism was no more than a nursing-ground for Radical and trade union organisers, all formed in the image of the Tolpuddle martyr, George Loveless, with his "small theological library" and his forthright independence. The matter is a great deal more complex. At one level the reactionary—indeed, odiously subservient—character of official Wesleyanism can be established without the least difficulty. Wesley's few active interventions into politics included pamphleteering against Dr. Price and the American colonists. He rarely let pass any opportunity to impress upon his followers the doctrines of submission, expressed less at the level of ideas than of superstition.¹ His death (1791) coincided with the early enthusiasm for the French Revolution; but successive Methodist Conferences continued the tradition of their founder, reaffirming their "unfeigned loyalty to the King and sincere attachment to the Constitution" (Leeds Conference, 1793). The statutes drawn up in the year after Wesley's death were explicit: "None of us shall either in writing

¹ For a succinct account of Wesley's political prejudices, see Maldwyn Edwards, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century* (1933).

or in conversation speak lightly or irreverently of the Government.”¹

Thus, at this level Methodism appears as a politically regressive, or “stabilising”, influence, and we find some confirmation of Halévy’s famous thesis that Methodism prevented revolution in England in the 1790s. But, at another level, we are familiar with the argument that Methodism was indirectly responsible for a growth in the self-confidence and capacity for organisation of working people. This argument was stated, as early as 1820, by Southey:

Perhaps the manner in which Methodism has familiarized the lower classes to the work of combining in associations, making rules for their own governance, raising funds, and communicating from one part of the kingdom to another, may be reckoned among the incidental evils which have resulted from it. . . .

And, more recently, it has been documented in Dr. Wearmouth’s interesting books; although readers of them will do well to remember Southey’s important qualification—“but in this respect it has only facilitated a process to which other causes had given birth”.² Most of the “contributions” of Methodism to the working-class movement came in spite of and not because of the Wesleyan Conference.

Indeed, throughout the early history of Methodism we can see a shaping democratic spirit which struggled against the doctrines and the organisational forms which Wesley imposed. Lay preachers, the break with the Established Church, self-governing forms within the societies—on all these questions Wesley resisted or temporised or followed after the event. Wesley could not escape the consequences of his own spiritual egalitarianism. If Christ’s poor came to believe that their souls were as good as aristocratic or bourgeois souls then it might lead them on to the arguments of the *Rights of Man*. The Duchess of Buckingham was quick to spot this, and observed to the Methodist Countess of Huntingdon:

¹ Cited in Halévy, *op. cit.*, III, p. 49. Halévy adds the comment: “Such conduct ensured that . . . the unpopularity of Jacobin principles did not prejudice the Methodist propaganda.” However, since Jacobin principles were gaining in popularity in 1792 (see pp. 102-13 below), it is more true that the Methodist propaganda was designed to make these principles unpopular, and that this was prejudicial to the liberties of the English people. See also E. Hobsbawm’s critique of Halévy, “Methodism and the Threat of Revolution”, *History Today*, February, 1957.

² Southey, *op. cit.*, p. 571.

I Thank Your Ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their Superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.¹

Smollett had pointed out much the same thing, in the high comedy of a coachman, Humphrey Clinker, preaching to the London rabble. And—for their part—hundreds of lay preachers who followed in John Nelson’s footsteps were learning this in a very different way. Again and again Establishment writers voice this fear. An anti-Jacobin pamphleteer, in 1800, laid blame upon the “beardless boys, and mechanics or labourers” who preached in Spa Fields, Hackney, and Islington Green. Among the preachers of the sects he found a Dealer in Old Clothes, a Grinder, a Sheep’s-Head Seller, a Coach-painter, a Mangle-maker, a Footman, a Tooth-drawer, a Puke-maker and Phlebotomist, a Breeches-maker, and a Coal-heaver. The Bishop of Lincoln saw in this a darker threat: “the same means might, with equal efficacy, be employed to sap and overturn the state, as well as the church.”²

And from preaching to organisation. There are two questions here: the temporary permeation of Methodism by some of the self-governing traditions of Dissent, and the transmission to working-class societies of forms of organisation peculiar to the Methodist Connexion. For the first, Wesley did not only (as is sometimes supposed) take his message to “heathen” outside the existing churches; he also offered an outlet for the land-locked emotions of Old Dissent. There were Dissenting ministers, and whole congregations, who joined the Methodists. Some passed through the revival, only to rejoin their own sects in disgust at Wesley’s authoritarian government; while by the 1790s Dissent was enjoying its own evangelistic revival. But others maintained a somewhat restive membership, in which their older traditions struggled within the sacerdotal Wesleyan forms. For the second, Methodism provided not only the forms of the class meeting, the methodical collection of penny subscriptions and the “ticket”, so frequently borrowed by radical and trade union organisations, but also an experience of efficient

¹ Cited in J. H. Whiteley, *Wesley’s England* (1938), p. 328.

² W. H. Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies of the Metropolis* (1800), pp. 45-8.

centralised organisation—at district as well as national level—which Dissent had lacked. (Those Wesleyan Annual Conferences, with their “platform”, their caucuses at work on the agendas, and their careful management, seem uncomfortably like another “contribution” to the Labour movement of more recent times.)

Thus late 18th-century Methodism was troubled by alien democratic tendencies within itself, while at the same time it was serving despite itself as a model of other organisational forms. During the last decade of Wesley’s life internal democratic pressures were restrained only by reverence for the founder’s great age—and by the belief that the old autocrat could not be far from entering upon his “great reward”. There were a score of demands being voiced in dissident societies: for an elected Conference, for greater local autonomy, for the final break with the Church, for lay participation in district and quarterly meetings. Wesley’s death, when the general radical tide was rising, was like a “signal gun”. Rival schemes of organisation were canvassed with a heat which is as significant as were the matters under dispute. “We detest the conduct of persecuting Neros, and all the bloody actions of the great Whore of Babylon, and yet in our measure, we tread in their steps,” declared Alexander Kilham in a pamphlet entitled *The Progress of Liberty*.¹ And he set forward far-reaching proposals for self-government, which were canvassed throughout the Connexion, by means of pamphlets, and in class meetings and local preachers’ meetings, and whose discussion must itself have been an important part of the process of democratic education.²

In 1797 Kilham led the first important Wesleyan secession, the Methodist New Connexion, which adopted many of his proposals for a more democratic structure. The greatest strength of the Connexion was in manufacturing centres, and (it is probable) among the artisans and weavers tinged with Jacobinism.³ Kilham himself sympathised with the reformers, and

¹ *The Progress of Liberty Amongst the People Called Methodists* (Alnwick, 1795).

² See *An Appeal to the Members of the Methodist Connexion* (Manchester, 1796); E. R. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics, 1791-1851* (Cambridge, 1935), Ch. 2; W. J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), pp. 128-31.

³ Kilham’s support was strong in Sheffield, Nottingham, Manchester, Leeds, Huddersfield, Plymouth Dock, Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham, Burslem, Macclesfield, Bolton, Wigan, Blackburn, Oldham, Darlington, Newcastle, Alnwick, Sunderland, Ripon, Otley, Epworth, Chester, Banbury. See E. R. Taylor, op. cit., p. 81; J. Blackwell, *Life of Alexander Kilham* (1838), pp. 290, 343.

although his political convictions were kept in the background, his opponents in the orthodox Connexion were at pains to bring them forward. “We shall lose all the turbulent disturbers of our Zion,” the Conference addressed the members of the Church in Ireland, when accounting for the secession: “all who have embraced the sentiments of Paine . . .”. In Huddersfield the members of the New Connexion were known as the “Tom Paine Methodists”. We may guess at the complexion of his following from an account of the principal Kilhamite chapel in Leeds, with a congregation of 500 “in the midst of a dense, poor, and unruly population, at the top of Ebenezer Street, where strangers of the middle class could not reasonably be expected to go”. And in several places the link between the New Connexion and actual Jacobin organisation is more than a matter of inference. In Halifax, at the Bradshaw chapel, a reading club and debating society was formed. The people of this weaving village discussed in their class meetings not only Kilham’s *Progress of Liberty* but also Paine’s *Rights of Man*. Writing forty years later, the historian of Halifax Methodism still could not restrain his abomination of “that detestable knot of scorpions” who, in the end, captured the chapel, excluded the orthodox circuit minister, bought the site, and continued it as a “Jacobin” chapel of their own.¹

The progress of the New Connexion was unspectacular. Kilham himself died in 1798, and his following was weakened by the general political reaction of the later 1790s. By 1811 the New Connexion could claim only 8,000 members. But its existence leads one to doubt Halévy’s thesis. On Wesley’s death it was estimated that about 80,000 people made up the Methodist societies. Even if we suppose that every one of them shared the Tory principles of their founder, this was scarcely sufficient to have stemmed a revolutionary tide. In fact, whatever Annual Conferences resolved, there is evidence that the Radical groundswell of 1792 and 1793 extended through Dissent generally and into most Methodist societies. The Mayor of Liverpool may have shown sound observation when he wrote to the Home Office in 1792:

In all these places are nothing but Methodist and other Meeting houses and . . . thus the Youth of the Country are training up under

¹ J. Blackwell, op. cit., p. 339; E. R. Taylor, op. cit., p. 85; J. Wray, “Facts Illustrative of Methodism in Leeds” [c. 1835], MS. in Leeds Reference Library; J. U. Walker, *Wesleyan Methodism in Halifax* (Halifax, 1836), pp. 216-23.

the Instruction of a Set of Men not only Ignorant, but whom I believe we have of late too Much Reason to imagine, are inimical to Our Happy Constitution.¹

It was in the counter-revolutionary years *after* 1795 that Methodism made most headway amongst working people and acted most evidently as a stabilising or regressive social force. Drained of its more democratic and intellectual elements by the Kilhamite secession, and subjected to severer forms of discipline, it appears during these years almost as a new phenomenon—and as one which may be seen as the *consequence* of political reaction as much as it was a *cause*.²

Throughout the whole period of the Industrial Revolution, Methodism never overcame this tension between authoritarian and democratic tendencies. It is in the seceding sects—the New Connexion and (after 1806) the Primitive Methodists—that the second impulse was felt most strongly. Moreover, as Dr. Hobsbawm has pointed out, wherever Methodism was found it performed, in its rupture with the Established Church, certain of the functions of anti-clericalism in 19th-century France.³ In the agricultural or mining village, the polarisation of chapel and Church might facilitate a polarisation which took political or industrial forms. For years the tension might seem to be contained; but when it did break out it was sometimes charged with a moral passion—where the old Puritan God of Battles raised his banners once again—which secular leaders could rarely touch. So long as Satan remained undefined and of no fixed class abode, Methodism condemned working people to a kind of moral civil war—between the chapel and the pub, the wicked and the redeemed, the lost and the saved. Samuel Bamford related in his *Early Days* the missionary zeal with which he and his companions would tramp to prayer-meetings in neighbouring villages “where Satan had as yet many strongholds”. “These prayers were looked upon as so many assaults on ‘the powers of the Prince of the Air’.” (A similar zeal inspired, on the other side of the Pennines, the notable hymn: “On Bradford likewise look Thou down, / Where Satan keeps his seat.”) Only a few years later Cobbett had taught the weavers of upland Lancashire to look for Satan, not in the ale-houses of a rival village, but in “the Thing” and Old

¹ Cited in J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer* (2nd edn., 1925), p. 270.

² See below, Chapter Eleven.

³ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (1959), p. 146.

Corruption. It was such a swift identification of Apollyon with Lord Liverpool and Oliver the Spy which led the weavers to Peterloo.

Two other features of the Dissenting tradition should be noted. While neither was of great influence in the 18th century, both assumed new significance after 1790. In the first place, there is a continuous thread of communitarian ideas and experiments, associated with the Quakers, Camisards, and in particular the Moravians. It was in Bolton and Manchester that a ferment in a small group of dissident Quakers culminated in the departure, in 1774, of “Mother Ann” and a small party to found the first Shaker communities in the United States; forty years later Robert Owen was to find encouragement in the success of the Shakers, whose ideas he popularised in secular form.¹ The Moravians, to whom Wesley owed his conversion, never became fully naturalised in England in the 18th century. Although many English people entered their communities at Fulneck (Pudsey), and Dukinfield and Fairfield (near Manchester), as well as the Moravian congregation in London, the societies remained dependent upon German preachers and administrators. While the first Methodist societies arose in association with the Moravian Brotherhood, the latter were distinguished from the former by their “stillness”, their avoidance of “enthusiasm”, and their practical communitarian values; “the calm, soft, steady, sweet and impressive character of the service [at Fulneck] was such as appeared as a kind of rebuke to the earnestness, noise, and uproar of a [Methodist] revival meeting”. The influence of the Moravians was threefold: first, through their educational activities—Richard Oastler and James Montgomery (the Radical poet and editor of the *Sheffield Iris*) were educated at Fulneck; second, through the evident success of their communities, which—along with those of the Shakers—were often cited by early 19th-century Owenites; and third, through the perpetuation within the Methodist societies—long after Wesley had disowned the Moravian connection—of the yearning for communitarian ideals expressed in the language of “brotherhood” and “sisterhood”.²

The communitarian tradition was sometimes found in

¹ See W. H. G. Armytage, *Heavens Below* (1961), I, Chs. 3 and 5.

² See C. W. Towson, *Moravian and Methodist* (1957); Armytage, *op. cit.* I, Ch. 6; J. Lawson, *Letters to the Young on Progress in Pudsey* (Stanningley, 1887), Ch. 15; C. Driver, *Tory Radical* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 15-17.

association with another underground tradition, that of millennarianism. The wilder sectaries of the English Revolution—Ranters and Fifth Monarchy Men—were never totally extinguished, with their literal interpretations of the Book of Revelation and their anticipations of a New Jerusalem descending from above. The Muggletonians (or followers of Ludovic Muggleton) were still preaching in the fields and parks of London at the end of the 18th century. The Bolton society from which the Shakers originated was presided over by Mother Jane Wardley who paced the meeting-room “with a mighty trembling”, declaiming:

Repent. For the Kingdom of God is at Hand. The new heaven and new earth prophesied of old is about to come. . . . And when Christ appears again, and the true church rises in full and transcendent glory, then all anti-Christian denominations—the priests, the church, the pope—will be swept away.¹

Any dramatic event, such as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, aroused apocalyptic expectations. There was, indeed, a millennarial instability within the heart of Methodism itself. Wesley, who was credulous to a degree about witches, Satanic possession, and bibliomancy (or the search for guidance from texts opened at random in the Bible), sometimes voiced premonitions as to the imminence of the Day of Judgement. An early hymn of the Wesleys employs the customary millennarial imagery:

Erect Thy tabernacle here,
The *New Jerusalem* send down,
Thyself amidst Thy saints appear,
And seat us on Thy dazzling throne.

Begin the great millennial day;
Now, Saviour, with a shout descend,
Thy standard in the heavens display,
And bring the joy which ne'er shall end.

Even if literal belief in the millennium was discouraged, the apocalyptic manner of Methodist revival meetings inflamed the imagination and prepared the way for the acceptance of chiliastic prophets after 1790. In London, Bristol and Birmingham small congregations of the Swedenborgian Church of the

¹ E. D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York, 1953), p. 6.

New Jerusalem were preparing some artisans for more intellectual and mystical millennarial beliefs.¹

Although historians and sociologists have recently given more attention to millennarial movements and fantasies, their significance has been partly obscured by the tendency to discuss them in terms of maladjustment and “paranoia”. Thus Professor Cohn, in his interesting study of *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, is able—by a somewhat sensational selection of the evidence—to proceed to generalisations as to the paranoiac and megalomaniac notion of “the Elect”, and the “chronically impaired sense of reality” of “chiliastically-minded movements.” When messianic movements gain mass support—

It is as though units of paranoia hitherto diffused through the population suddenly coalesce to form a new entity: a collective paranoiac fanaticism.²

One doubts such a process of “coalescence”. Given such a phenomenon, however, the historical problem remains—why should grievances, aspirations, or even psychotic disorders, “coalesce” into influential movements only at certain times and in particular forms?

What we must not do is confuse pure “freaks” and fanatical aberrations with the *imagery*—of Babylon and the Egyptian exile and the Celestial City and the contest with Satan—in which minority groups have articulated their experience and projected their aspirations for hundreds of years. Moreover, the extravagant imagery used by certain groups does not always reveal their objective motivations and effective assumptions. This is a difficult question; when we speak of “imagery” we mean much more than figures of speech in which ulterior motives were “clothed”. The imagery is itself evidence of powerful subjective motivations, fully as “real” as the objective, fully as effective, as we see repeatedly in the history of Puritanism, in their historical agency. It is the sign of how men felt and hoped, loved and hated, and of how they preserved certain values in the very texture of their language. But because the luxuriating imagery points sometimes to goals that are clearly

¹ For Wesleyanism, see Southey, op. cit., p. 367; Joseph Nightingale, *Portraiture of Methodism* (1807), pp. 443 ff.; J. E. Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (1948), p. 249. For Swedenborgianism, Bogue and Bennett, op. cit., IV, pp. 126-34; R. Southey, *Letters from England* (1808), III, pp. 113 ff. For the end of 17th-century millennarialism, see Christopher Hill “John Mason and the End of the World”, in *Puritanism and Revolution* (1958). For some indications of the 18th-century tradition, see W. H. G. Armytage, op. cit., I, Ch. 4.

² N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957), p. 312.

illusory, this does not mean that we can lightly conclude that it indicates a "chronically impaired sense of reality". Moreover, abject "adjustment" to suffering and want at times may indicate a sense of reality as impaired as that of the chiliast. Whenever we encounter such phenomena, we must try to distinguish between the psychic energy stored—and released—in language, however apocalyptic, and actual psychotic disorder.

Throughout the Industrial Revolution we can see this tension between the "kingdom without" and the "kingdom within" in the Dissent of the poor, with chiliasm at one pole, and quietism at the other. For generations the most commonly available education came by way of pulpit and Sunday School, the Old Testament and *Pilgrim's Progress*. Between this imagery and that social experience there was a continual interchange—a dialogue between attitudes and reality which was sometimes fruitful, sometimes arid, sometimes masochistic in its submissiveness, but rarely "paranoiac". The history of Methodism suggests that the morbid deformities of "sublimation" are the most common aberrations of the poor in periods of social reaction; while paranoiac fantasies belong more to periods when revolutionary enthusiasms are released. It was in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution that the millennial current, so long underground, burst into the open with unexpected force:

For the real Chiliast, the present becomes the breach through which what was previously inward bursts out suddenly, takes hold of the outer world and transforms it.¹

Image and reality again became confused. Chiliasm touched Blake with its breath: it walked abroad, not only among the Jacobins and Dissenters of artisan London, but in the mining and weaving villages of the Midlands and the north and the villages of the south-west.

But in most minds a balance was held between outer experience and the kingdom within, which the Powers of the World could not touch and which was stored with the evocative language of the Old Testament. Thomas Hardy was a sober, even prosaic, man, with a meticulous attention to the practical detail of organisation. But when recalling his own trial for high treason, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that he

¹ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (1960 edn.), p. 193. See below pp. 116-19 and 382-8.

should draw upon the Book of Kings for the language which most common Englishmen understood:

The people said "what portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel. . . . So Israel rebelled against the House of David unto this day."

No easy summary can be offered as to the Dissenting tradition which was one of the elements precipitated in the English Jacobin agitation. It is its diversity which defies generalisation and yet which is, in itself, its most important characteristic. In the complexity of competing sects and seceding chapels we have a forcing-bed for the variants of 19th-century working-class culture. Here are Unitarians or Independents, with a small but influential artisan following, nurtured in a strenuous intellectual tradition. There are the Sandemanians, among whom William Godwin's father was a minister; the Moravians with their communitarian heritage; the Inghamites, the Muggletonians, the Swedenborgian sect which originated in a hairdresser's off Cold Bath Fields and which published a *Magazine of Heaven and Hell*. Here are the two old Dissenting ministers whom Hazlitt observed stuffing raspberry leaves in their pipes, in the hope of bringing down Old Corruption by boycotting all taxed articles. There are the Calvinist Methodist immigrants from Wales, and immigrants brought up in the Covenanting sects of Scotland—Alexander Somerville, who became a famous anti-Corn Law publicist, was educated as a strict Anti-Burgher in a family of Berwickshire field-labourers. There is the printing-worker, Zachariah Coleman, the beautifully re-created hero of *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, with his portraits of Burdett, Cartwright, and Sadler's Bunyan on the wall: "he was not a ranter or revivalist, but what was called a moderate Calvinist; that is to say, he held to Calvinism as his undoubted creed, but when it came to the push in actual practice he modified it." And there are curious societies, like the Ancient Deists of Hoxton, who spoke of dreams and (like Blake) of conversations with departed souls and Angels, and who (like Blake) "almost immediately yielded to the stronger impulse of the French Revolution" and became "politicians".¹

Liberty of conscience was the one great value which the common people had preserved from the Commonwealth. The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt

¹ W. H. Reid, op. cit., p. 90.

corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all: but the chapel, the tavern and the home were their own. In the "unsteeped" places of worship there was room for a free intellectual life and for democratic experiments with "members unlimited". Against the background of London Dissent, with its fringe of deists and earnest mystics, William Blake seems no longer the cranky untutored genius that he must seem to those who know only the genteel culture of the time.¹ On the contrary, he is the original yet authentic voice of a long popular tradition. If some of the London Jacobins were strangely unperturbed by the execution of Louis and Marie Antoinette it was because they remembered that their own forebears had once executed a king. No one with Bunyan in their bones could have found many of Blake's aphorisms strange:

The strongest poison ever known
Came from Caesar's laurel crown.

And many, like Blake, felt themselves torn between a rational Deism and the spiritual values nurtured for a century in the "kingdom within". When Paine's *Age of Reason* was published in the years of repression, many must have felt with Blake when he annotated the final page of the Bishop of Llandaff's *Apology for the Bible* (written in reply to Paine):

It appears to me Now that Tom Paine is a better Christian than the Bishop.

When we see Dissent in this way we are seeing it as an intellectual tradition: out of this tradition came many original ideas and original men. But we should not assume that the "Old Dissenters" as a body were willing to take the popular side. Thomas Walker, the Manchester reformer, who—a Churchman himself—had laboured hard for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts—was contemptuous of their timidity:

Dissenters . . . have as a body constantly fallen short of their own principles; . . . through fear or some other motive they have been so strongly the advocates of an Overstrained Moderation that they have rather been the enemies than the friends of those who have

¹ David V. Erdman, in his *Blake, Prophet against Empire* (Princeton, 1954), has helped us to see Blake in this context and—in doing so—has thrown much light upon the intellectual life of Jacobin London. See also (for Blake's "Ranting" and Muggletonian, forebears) A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel* (1958).

ventured the most and effected the most for the rights of the people.¹

We see here, perhaps, a tension between London and the industrial centres. The Dissenters at Manchester, the members of the Old Meeting at Birmingham or the Great Meeting at Leicester, included some of the largest employers in the district. Their attachment to civil and religious liberty went hand in hand with their attachment to the dogmas of free trade. They contributed a good deal—and especially in the 1770s and 1780s—to forms of extra-parliamentary agitation and pressure-group politics which anticipate the pattern of middle-class politics of the 19th century. But their enthusiasm for civil liberty melted away with the publication of *Rights of Man* and in very few of them did it survive the trials and persecution of the early 1790s. In London, and in pockets in the great cities, many of the Dissenting artisans graduated in the same period from Dissent through Deism to a secular ideology. "Secularism", Dr. Hobsbawm has written,

is the ideological thread which binds London labour history together, from the London Jacobins and Place, through the anti-religious Owenites and co-operators, the anti-religious journalists and booksellers, through the free-thinking Radicals who followed Holyoake and flocked to Bradlaugh's Hall of Science, to the Social Democratic Federation and the London Fabians with their unconcealed distaste for chapel rhetoric.²

Nearly all the theorists of the working-class movement are in that London tradition—or else, like Bray the Leeds printer, they are analogues of the skilled London working men.

But the list itself reveals a dimension that is missing—the moral force of the Luddites, of Brandreth and young Bamford, of the Ten Hour men, of Northern Chartists and I.L.P. And some of this difference in traditions can be traced to the religious formations of the 18th century. When the democratic revival came in the last years of the century, Old Dissent had lost much of its popular following, and those artisans who still adhered to it were permeated by the values of enlightened self-interest which led on, in such a man as Francis Place, to the acceptance of a limited Utilitarian philosophy. But in those great areas in the provinces where Methodism triumphed in the

¹ T. Walker, *Review of some Political Events in Manchester* (1794), p. 125.

² Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

CHAPTER THREE

“SATAN’S STRONGHOLDS”

BUT WHAT OF the denizens of “Satan’s strongholds”, the “harlots and publicans and thieves” whose souls the evangelists wrestled for? If we are concerned with historical change we must attend to the articulate minorities. But these minorities arise from a less articulate majority whose consciousness may be described as being, at this time, “sub-political”—made up of superstition or passive irreligion, prejudice and patriotism.

The inarticulate, by definition, leave few records of their thoughts. We catch glimpses in moments of crisis, like the Gordon Riots, and yet crisis is not a typical condition. It is tempting to follow them into the archives of crime. But before we do this we must warn against the assumption that in the late 18th century “Christ’s poor” can be divided between penitent sinners on the one hand, and murderers, thieves and drunkards on the other.

It is easy to make a false division of the people into the organised or chapel-going good and the dissolute bad in the Industrial Revolution, since the sources push us towards this conclusion from at least four directions. Such facts as are available were often presented in sensational form, and marshalled for pejorative purposes. If we are to credit one of the most industrious investigators, Patrick Colquhoun, there were, at the turn of the century, 50,000 harlots, more than 5,000 publicans, and 10,000 thieves in the metropolis alone: his more extended estimates of criminal classes, taking in receivers of stolen property, coiners, gamblers, lottery agents, cheating shopkeepers, riverside scroungers, and colourful characters like Mudlarks, Scufflehunters, Bludgeon Men, Morocco Men, Flash Coachmen, Grubbers, Bear Baiters and Strolling Minstrels totals (with the former groups) 115,000 out of a metropolitan population of less than one million. His estimate of the same classes, for the whole country,—and including one million in receipt of parish relief—totals 1,320,716. But these

estimates lump together indiscriminately gipsies, vagrants, unemployed, and pedlars and the grandparents of Mayhew's street-sellers; while his prostitutes turn out, on closer inspection to be "lewd and immoral women", including "the prodigious number among the lower classes who cohabit together without marriage" (and this at a time when divorce for the poor was an absolute impossibility).¹

The figures then are impressionistic estimates. They reveal as much about the mentality of the propertied classes (who assumed—not without reason—that any person out of steady employment and without property must maintain himself by illicit means) as they do about the actual criminal behaviour of the unpropertied. And the date of Colquhoun's investigations is as relevant as his conclusions; for they were conducted in the atmosphere of panic in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In the two decades before this there was an important access of humanitarian concern amongst the upper classes; we can see this in the work of Howard, Hanway, Clarkson, Sir Frederick Eden, and in the growing concern for civil and religious liberties among the small gentry and the Dissenting tradesmen. But "the awakening of the labouring classes, after the first shock of the French Revolution, made the upper classes tremble", Frances, Lady Shelley, noted in her *Diary*: "Every man felt the necessity for putting his house in order. . . ."²

To be more accurate, most men and women of property felt the necessity for putting the houses of the poor in order. The remedies proposed might differ; but the impulse behind Colquhoun, with his advocacy of more effective police, Hannah More, with her halfpenny tracts and Sunday Schools, the Methodists with their renewed emphasis upon order and submissiveness, Bishop Barrington's more humane Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, and William Wilberforce and Dr. John Bowdler, with their Society for the Suppression of Vice and Encouragement of Religion, was much the same. The message to be given to the labouring poor was simple, and was summarised by Burke in the famine year of 1795: "Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality and religion, should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright fraud." "I know nothing better calculated to fill a country

¹ Patrick Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (1797), pp. vii-xi; *Observations and Facts Relative to Public Houses* (1796), Appendix; *Treatise on Indigence* (1806), pp. 38-43.

² *The Diary of Frances Lady Shelley, 1787-1817*, ed. R. Edgcumbe (1912), pp. 8-9.

with barbarians ready for any mischief," wrote Arthur Young, the agricultural propagandist, "than extensive commons and divine service only once a month. . . . Do French principles make so slow a progress, that you should lend them such helping hands?"¹ The sensibility of the Victorian middle class was nurtured in the 1790s by frightened gentry who had seen miners, potters and cutlers reading *Rights of Man*, and its foster-parents were William Wilberforce and Hannah More. It was in these counter-revolutionary decades that the humanitarian tradition became warped beyond recognition. The abuses which Howard had exposed in the prisons in the 1770s and 1780s crept back in the 1790s and 1800s; and Sir Samuel Romilly, in the first decade of the 19th century, found that his efforts to reform the criminal law were met with hostility and timidity; the French Revolution had produced (he recalled) —"among the higher orders . . . a horror of every kind of innovation". "Everything rung and was connected with the Revolution in France," recalled Lord Cockburn (of his Scottish youth): "Everything, not this thing or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event." It was the pall of moral equivocation which settled upon Britain in these years which stung Blake to fury:

Because of the Oppressors of Albion in every City and Village . . .
They compell the Poor to live upon a crust of bread by soft mild arts:
They reduce the Man to want, then give with pomp and ceremony:
The praise of Jehovah is chaunted from lips of hunger and thirst.²

Such a disposition on the part of the propertied classes was not (as we have seen in the case of Colquhoun) conducive to accurate social observation. And it reinforced the natural tendency of authority to regard taverns, fairs, any large congregations of people, as a nuisance—sources of idleness, brawls, sedition or contagion. And this general disposition, at the end of the 18th century, to "fudge" the evidence was abetted from three other directions. First, we have the utilitarian attitudes of the new manufacturing class, whose need to impose a work discipline in the factory towns made it hostile to many traditional amusements and levities. Second, there is the Methodist pressure itself, with its unending procession of breast-beating

¹ *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lincoln* (1799), p. 439.

² For a further discussion of the attack upon the amusements and traditions of the poor, see below pp. 401 ff. See also the challenging analysis of V. Kiernan, "Evangelicalism and the French Revolution", *Past and Present*, I, February 1952.

sinner, pouring confessional biographies from the press. "Almighty Father, why didst thou bear with such a rebel?" asks one such penitent, a redeemed sailor. In his dissolute youth he—

went to horse-races, wakes, dances, fairs, attended the play-house, nay, so far had he forsaken the fear of his Maker and the counsel of his mother, that he several times got intoxicated with liquor. He was an adept in singing profane songs, cracking jokes, and making risible and ludicrous remarks. . . .

As for the common sailor—

His song, his bumper and his sweetheart (perhaps a street-pacing harlot) form his trio of pleasure. He rarely thinks, seldom reads, and never prays. . . . Speak to him about the call of God, he tells you he hears enough of the boatswain's call. . . . If you talk of Heaven, he hopes he shall get a good berth aloft: is hell mentioned? he jokes about being put under the hatchway.

"O my children, what a miracle that such a victim of sin should become a preacher of salvation!"¹

Such literature as this must be held up to a Satanic light and read backwards if we are to perceive what the "Jolly Tar" or the apprentice or the Sandgate lass thought about Authority or Methodist preachers. If this is not done, the historian may be led to judge the 18th century most harshly for some of the things which made life endurable for the common people. And, when we come to assess the early working-class movement, this kind of evidence is supplemented from a third direction. Some of the first leaders and chroniclers of the movement were self-educated working men, who raised themselves by efforts of self-discipline which required them to turn their backs upon the happy-go-lucky tavern world. "I cannot, like many other men, go to a tavern," wrote Francis Place: "I hate taverns and tavern company. I cannot drink, I cannot for any considerable time consent to converse with fools."² The self-respecting virtues often carried with them corresponding narrowing attitudes—in Place's case leading him on to the acceptance of Utilitarian and Malthusian doctrines. And since Place was the greatest archivist of the early movement, his own abhorrence

¹ Joshua Marsden, *Sketches of the Early Life of a Sailor* . . . (Hull, n.d. 1812?); for a different view of the 18th-century sailor, see R. B. Rose, "A Liverpool Sailor's Strike in the 18th Century", *Trans. Lancs. and Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, LXVIII, 1958.

² Graham Wallas, *Life of Francis Place* (1918), p. 195.

of the improvidence, ignorance, and licentiousness of the poor is bound to colour the record. Moreover, the struggle of the reformers was one for enlightenment, order, sobriety, in their own ranks; so much so that Windham, in 1802, was able to declare with some colour that the Methodists and the Jacobins were leagued together to destroy the amusements of the people:

By the former . . . everything joyous was to be prohibited, to prepare the people for the reception of their fanatical doctrines. By the Jacobins, on the other hand, it was an object of important consideration to give to the disposition of the lower orders a character of greater seriousness and gravity, as the means of facilitating the reception of their tenets.¹

Those who have wished to emphasise the sober constitutional ancestry of the working-class movement have sometimes minimised its more robust and rowdy features. All that we can do is bear the warning in mind. We need more studies of the social attitudes of criminals, of soldiers and sailors, of tavern life; and we should look at the evidence, not with a moralising eye ("Christ's poor" were not always pretty), but with an eye for Brechtian values—the fatalism, the irony in the face of Establishment homilies, the tenacity of self-preservation. And we must also remember the "underground" of the ballad-singer and the fair-ground which handed on traditions to the 19th century (to the music-hall, or Dickens' circus folk, or Hardy's pedlars and showmen); for in these ways the "inarticulate" conserved certain values—a spontaneity and capacity for enjoyment and mutual loyalties—despite the inhibiting pressures of magistrates, mill-owners, and Methodists.

We may isolate two ways in which these "sub-political" traditions affect the early working-class movement: the phenomena of riot and of the mob, and the popular notions of an Englishman's "birthright". For the first, we must realise that there have always persisted popular attitudes towards crime, amounting at times to an unwritten code, quite distinct from the laws of the land. Certain crimes were outlawed by both codes: a wife or child murderer would be pelted and execrated on the way to Tyburn. Highwaymen and pirates belonged to popular ballads, part heroic myth, part admonition to the

¹ Windham was speaking in a debate on bull-baiting, and on this issue no doubt most Methodists and Jacobins were united. See L. Radzinowicz, *History of the English Criminal Law* (1948-56), III, 205-6.

young. But other crimes were actively condoned by whole communities—coining, poaching, the evasion of taxes (the window tax and tithes) or excise or the press-gang. Smuggling communities lived in a state of constant war with authority, whose unwritten rules were understood by both sides; the authorities might seize a ship or raid the village, and the smugglers might resist arrest—"but it was no part of the smuggling tactics to carry war farther than defence, or at times a rescue, because of the retaliatory measures that were sure to come. . . ."¹ On the other hand, other crimes, which were easily committed and yet which struck at the livelihood of particular communities—sheep-stealing or stealing cloth off the tenters in the open field—excited popular condemnation.²

This distinction between the legal code and the unwritten popular code is a commonplace at any time. But rarely have the two codes been more sharply distinguished from each other than in the second half of the 18th century. One may even see these years as ones in which the class war is fought out in terms of Tyburn, the hulks and the Bridewells on the one hand; and crime, riot, and mob action on the other. Professor Radzinowicz's researches into the *History of English Criminal Law* have added a depressing weight of evidence to the picture long made familiar by Goldsmith:

Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw,
Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the law. . . .

It was not (an important reservation) the judge but the legislature which was responsible for enacting ever more capital punishments for crimes against property: in the years between the Restoration and the death of George III the number of capital offences was increased by about 190—or more than one for every year: no less than sixty-three of these were added in the years 1760-1810. Not only petty theft, but primitive forms of industrial rebellion—destroying a silk loom, throwing down fences when commons were enclosed, and firing corn ricks—were to be punished by death. It is true that the police force was totally inadequate and the administration of "justice" haphazard. It is true also that in the latter years of the 18th century, while capital offences multiplied, some juries became reluctant to convict, and the proportion of convicted offenders who were

¹ Serjeant Paul Swanston, *Memoirs of . . . a Soldier's Life* (n.d.)

² For insight into the unwritten traditions of the transported, see Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne, 1958), Ch. II.

actually brought to execution fell.¹ But the death sentence, if respited, was generally exchanged to the terrible living death of the hulks or to transportation. The procession to Tyburn (later, the scaffold outside Newgate) was a central ceremonial of 18th-century London. The condemned in the carts—the men in gaudy attire, the women in white, with baskets of flowers and oranges which they threw to the crowds—the ballad-singers and hawkers, with their "last speeches" (which were sold even before the victims had given the sign of the dropped handkerchief to the hangman to do his work): all the symbolism of "Tyburn Fair" was the ritual at the heart of London's popular culture.

The commercial expansion, the enclosure movement, the early years of the Industrial Revolution—all took place within the shadow of the gallows. The white slaves left our shores for the American plantations and later for Van Diemen's Land, while Bristol and Liverpool were enriched with the profits of black slavery; and slave-owners from West Indian plantations grafted their wealth to ancient pedigrees at the marriage-market in Bath. It is not a pleasant picture. In the lower depths, police officers and gaolers grazed on the pastures of crime—blood-money, garnish money, and sales of alcohol to their victims. The system of graduated rewards for thief-takers incited them to magnify the offence of the accused. The poor lost their rights in the land and were tempted to crime by their poverty and by the inadequate measures of prevention; the small tradesman or master was tempted to forgery or illicit transactions by fear of the debtor's prison. Where no crime could be proved, the J.P.s had wide powers to consign the vagabond or sturdy rogue or unmarried mother to the Bridewell (or "House of Correction")—those evil, disease-ridden places, managed by corrupt officers, whose conditions shocked John Howard more than the worst prisons. The greatest offence against property was to have none.

The law was hated, but it was also despised. Only the most

¹ See Radzinowicz, *op. cit.*, I, Parts 1 and 2. Dr. Radzinowicz shows that of 527 sentenced to death in London and Middlesex between 1749 and 1753 365 were executed; whereas in 1790-9 745 were sentenced and only 220 executed. Thus the ratio of executed to sentenced falls from roughly two in three to one in three: and continues to fall in the 1800s. On the other hand, the majority of executions were for offences against property; e.g. of ninety-seven executions in London and Middlesex in 1785, only one was for murder, forty-three for burglary, and the remainder for offences against property (forgery, horse-stealing, etc.). He concludes that these figures indicate national tendencies, and that "in 1785 the death penalty was inflicted almost exclusively for economic offences".

hardened criminal was held in as much popular odium as the informer who brought men to the gallows. And the resistance movement to the laws of the propertied took not only the form of individualistic criminal acts, but also that of piecemeal and sporadic insurrectionary actions where numbers gave some immunity. When Wyvill warned Major Cartwright of the "wild work" of the "lawless and furious rabble" he was not raising imaginary objections. The British people were noted throughout Europe for their turbulence, and the people of London astonished foreign visitors by their lack of deference. The 18th and early 19th century are punctuated by riot, occasioned by bread prices, turnpikes and tolls, excise, "rescue", strikes, new machinery, enclosures, press-gangs and a score of other grievances. Direct action on particular grievances merges on one hand into the great political risings of the "mob"—the Wilkes agitation of the 1760s and 1770s, the Gordon Riots (1780), the mobbing of the King in the London streets (1795 and 1820), the Bristol Riots (1831) and the Birmingham Bull Ring riots (1839). On the other hand it merges with organised forms of sustained illegal action or quasi-insurrection—Luddism (1811-13), the East Anglian Riots (1816), the "Last Labourer's Revolt" (1830), the Rebecca Riots (1839 and 1842) and the Plug Riots (1842).

This second, quasi-insurrectionary, form we shall look at more closely when we come to consider Luddism. It was a form of direct action which arose in specific conditions, which was often highly organised and under the protection of the local community, and as to which we should be chary of generalisation. The first form is only now beginning to receive the attention of historians. Dr. Rudé, in his study of *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, suggests that "the term 'mobs', in the sense of hired bands operating on behalf of external interests . . . should be invoked with discretion and only when justified by the particular occasion". Too often historians have used the term lazily, to evade further analysis, or (with the suggestion of criminal elements motivated by the desire for loot) as a gesture of prejudice. And Dr. Rudé suggests that the term "revolutionary crowd" may be more useful when discussing riot in late 18th-century England as well as in revolutionary France.

The distinction is useful. In 18th-century Britain riotous actions assumed two different forms: that of more or less spontaneous popular direct action; and that of the deliberate

use of the crowd as an instrument of pressure, by persons "above" or apart from the crowd. The first form has not received the attention which it merits. It rested upon more articulate popular sanctions and was validated by more sophisticated traditions than the word "riot" suggests. The most common example is the bread or food riot, repeated cases of which can be found in almost every town and county until the 1840s.¹ This was rarely a mere uproar which culminated in the breaking open of barns or the looting of shops. It was legitimised by the assumptions of an older moral economy, which taught the immorality of any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of the people.

In urban and rural communities alike, a consumer-consciousness preceded other forms of political or industrial antagonism. Not wages, but the cost of bread, was the most sensitive indicator of popular discontent. Artisans, self-employed craftsmen, or such groups as the Cornish tin miners (where the traditions of the "free" miner coloured responses until the 19th century),² saw their wages as regulated by custom or by their own bargaining. They expected to buy their provisions in the open market, and even in times of shortage they expected prices to be regulated by custom also. (The God-provided "laws" of supply and demand, whereby scarcity inevitably led to soaring prices, had by no means won acceptance in the popular mind, where older notions of face-to-face bargaining still persisted.) Any sharp rise in prices precipitated riot. An intricate tissue of legislation and of custom regulated the "Assize of Bread", the size and quality of the loaf.³ Even the attempt to impose the standard Winchester measure for the sale of wheat, in the face of some customary measure, could ensue in riots. When the North Devon Agricultural Society imposed the standard Winchester Bushel in Bideford market in 1812, one of its leading members was the recipient of a blood-chilling letter:

. . . Winter Nights is not past therefore your person shall not go home alive—or if you chance to escape the hand that guides this pen, a

¹ For the incidence of riots, see R. F. W. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (1946).

² The Cornish "tributers" or "tut-workers" were direct-contract workers, a minority of whom still in the late 18th century varied their work with pilchard fishing, small-holding (as did some Yorkshire lead miners), &c.: see J. Rowe, *Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (Liverpool, 1953), pp. 26-7.

³ For this complex position, see C. R. Fay, *The Corn Laws and Social England* (Cambridge, 1932), Ch. IV.

lighted Match will do equal execution. Your family I know not But the whole shall be involed in flames, your Carkase if any such should be found will be given to the Dogs if it Contains any Moisture for the Animals to devour it . . .¹

Food riots were sometimes uproarious, like the "Great Cheese Riot" at Nottingham's Goose Fair in 1764, when whole cheeses were rolled down the streets; or the riot in the same city, in 1788, caused by the high price of meat, when the doors and shutters of the shambles were torn down and burned, together with the butcher's books, in the market-place.² But even this violence shows a motive more complex than hunger: retailers were being punished, on account of their prices and the poor quality of the meat. More often the "mobs" showed self-discipline, within a customary pattern of behaviour. Perhaps the only occasion in his life when John Wesley commended a disorderly action was when he noted in his journal the actions of a mob in James' Town, Ireland; the mob—

had been in motion all the day; but their business was only with the forestallers of the market, who had bought up all the corn far and near, to starve the poor, and load a Dutch ship, which lay at the quay; but the mob brought it all out into the market, and sold it for the owners at the common price. And this they did with all the calmness and composure imaginable, and without striking or hurting anyone.

In Honiton in 1766 lace-workers seized corn on the premises of the farmers, took it to market themselves, sold it, and returned the money and even the sacks back to the farmers.³ In the Thames Valley in the same year the villages and towns (Abingdon, Newbury, Maidstone) were visited by large parties of labourers, who styled themselves "the Regulators", enforcing a popular price on all provisions. (The action commenced with gangs of men working on the turnpike road, who said "with one Voice, Come one & all to Newbury in a Body to Make the Bread cheaper".)⁴ A Halifax example of 1783 repeats the same pattern of mass intimidation and self-discipline. The crowd was gathered from weaving villages outside the town, and descended upon the market-place in some sort of order

¹ Enclosure from "Thomas Certain", in Skurray to H.O., 25 March 1812, H.O. 42.121.

² J. Blackner, *History of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1815), pp. 383-4.

³ See R. B. Rose, "18th Century Price-Riots, the French Revolution, and the Jacobin Maximum", *International Review of Social History*, IV, 1959, p. 435.

⁴ T.S. 11.3707.

be seen as arising out of this background; where the custom of the market-place was in dissolution, paternalists attempted to evoke it in the scale of relief. But the old customary notions died hard. There was a scatter of prosecutions for forestalling between 1795 and 1800; in 1800 a number of private prosecuting societies were formed, which offered rewards for convictions; and an important conviction for forestalling was upheld in the High Courts, to the evident satisfaction of Lord Kenyon.¹ But this was the last attempt to enforce the old paternalist consumer-protection. Thereafter the total break-down of customary controls contributed much to popular bitterness against a Parliament of protectionist landlords and *laissez faire* commercial magnates.

In considering only this one form of "mob" action we have come upon unsuspected complexities, for behind every such form of popular direct action some legitimising notion of right is to be found. On the other hand, the employment of the "mob" in a sense much closer to Dr. Rude's definition ("hired bands operating on behalf of external interests") was an established technique in the 18th century; and—what is less often noted—it had long been employed by authority itself. The 1688 settlement was, after all, a compromise; and it was convenient for the beneficiaries to seek to confirm their position by encouraging popular antipathy towards Papists (potential Jacobites) on the one hand, and Dissenters (potential Levellers) on the other. A mob was a very useful supplement to the magistrates in a nation that was scarcely policed. John Wesley, in his early years, and his first field-preachers, often encountered these mobs who acted under a magistrate's licence. One of the most violent encounters was at Wednesbury and Walsall in 1743. By Wesley's account the mob was highly volatile and confused as to its own intentions. The "captains of the rabble" were the "heroes of the town": but the only ones identified are an "honest butcher" and a "prize-fighter at the bear-garden" who both suddenly changed sides and took Wesley's part. The matter

¹ See Fay, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-3; J. Ashton, *The Dawn of the 19th Century in England* (1906), pp. 240-1; W. Smart, *Economic Annals of the 19th Century* (1910), I, pp. 5-6; Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 94, 103; J. A. Langford, *A Century of Birmingham Life* (Birmingham, 1868), II, pp. 101-2; and especially J. S. Girdler, *Observations on the Pernicious Consequences of Forestalling, Regrating, and Ingrossing* (1800), pp. 209-15. The Earl of Warwick, who moved unsuccessfully a resolution in the House of Lords authorising J.P.s to fix the price of corn, declared that "there had been no less than 400 convictions for forestalling, regrating, and monopolising" within the previous months: *Hansard*, XXXV (1800), 839.

whether it be a man or a horse". The riots were directed in the first place against Catholic chapels and the houses of wealthy Catholics, then against prominent personalities in authority—including Lord Chief Justice Mansfield and the Archbishop of York—who were believed to sympathise with Catholic emancipation, then against the prisons—whose inmates were released—and finally culminated in an attack on the Bank itself. Throughout this second phase, the sense of a "licensed" mob continued: the Wilkite city authorities were conspicuous by their inactivity or absence, in part through fear of incurring popular odium, in part through actual connivance at disorders which strengthened their hands against the King and his Government. It was only when the third phase commenced—the attack on the Bank on one hand, and indiscriminate orgies of drunkenness, arson, and pick-pocketing on the other—that the "licence" was withdrawn: the inactive Lord Mayor at last sent a desperate message to the Commander-in-Chief calling for "Horse and Foot to assist the civil power" and Alderman Wilkes himself went out to repel the mob on the steps of the Bank. The rapidity with which the riots were quelled emphasises the previous inactivity of the City authorities.

We have here, then, something of a mixture of manipulated mob and revolutionary crowd. Lord George Gordon had tried to emulate Wilkes, but he had nothing of Wilkes's well-judged audacity and splendid sense of the popular mood. He released a spontaneous process of riot, which yet was under the immunity of the Wilkite City fathers. Groups of rioters threw up their own temporary leaders, reminiscent of Thomas Spencer the Halifax coiner—James Jackson, a watch-wheelcutter, who rode a carhorse and waved a red and black flag, and Enoch Foster, a circus strong man, who amused the mob by hurling floorboards through the windows of a Whitechapel house. But this kind of mixture is never seen in the metropolis again. In 1780 the London people, despite their excesses, were under the protection of the libertarian Whigs, who saw them as a counterweight to the pretensions of the Throne: Burke deplored the use of the military in subduing the riots, while Fox declared that he would "much rather be governed by a mob than a standing army". But after the French Revolution no Whig politician would have risked, no City father condoned, the tampering with such dangerous energies; while the reformers, for their part, worked to create an organised public opinion, and

true by 1812: "the mob" (a Sheffield diarist noted), "dislike all but a thorough Reformer".¹ By the time that the Wars ended (1815), it was not possible, either in London or in the industrial North or Midlands, to employ a "Church and King" mob to terrorise the Radicals.

From time to time, between 1815 and 1850, Radicals, Owenites, or Chartists complained of the apathy of the people. But—if we leave out of account the usual election tumults—it is generally true that reformers were shielded by the support of working-class communities. At election times in the large towns, the open vote by show of hands on the "hustings" which preceded the poll usually went overwhelmingly for the most radical candidate. The reformers ceased to fear "the mob", while the authorities were forced to build barracks and take precautions against the "revolutionary crowd". This is one of those facts of history so big that it is easily overlooked, or assumed without question; and yet it indicates a major shift in emphasis in the inarticulate, "sub-political" attitudes of the masses.

The shift in emphasis is related to popular notions of "independence", patriotism, and the Englishman's "birthright". The Gordon Rioters of 1780 and the "Church and King" rioters in Birmingham in 1791 had this in common: they felt themselves, in some obscure way, to be defending the "Constitution" against alien elements who threatened their "birthright". They had been taught for so long that the Revolution settlement of 1688, embodied in the Constitution of King, Lords and Commons, was the guarantee of British independence and liberties, that the reflex had been set up—Constitution equals Liberty—upon which the unscrupulous might play. And yet it is likely that the very rioters who destroyed Dr. Priestley's precious library and laboratory were proud to regard themselves as "free-born Englishmen". Patriotism, nationalism, even bigotry and repression, were all clothed in the rhetoric of liberty. Even Old Corruption extolled British liberties; not national honour, or power, but freedom was the coinage of patrician, demagogue and radical alike. In the name of freedom Burke denounced, and Paine championed, the French Revolution: with the opening of the French Wars (1793), patriotism and liberty occupied every poetaster:

¹ T. A. Ward, *Peeps into the Past*, ed. A. B. Bell (1909), p. 192.

prepared to be "pushed around", and the limits beyond which authority did not dare to go, is crucial to an understanding of this period. The stance of the common Englishman was not so much democratic, in any positive sense, as anti-absolutist. He felt himself to be an individualist, with few affirmative rights, but protected by the laws against the intrusion of arbitrary power. More obscurely, he felt that the Glorious Revolution afforded a constitutional precedent for the right to riot in resistance to oppression. And this indeed was the central paradox of the 18th century, in both intellectual and practical terms: constitutionalism was the "illusion of the epoch". Political theory, of traditionalists and reformers alike, was transfixed within the Whiggish limits established by the 1688 settlement, by Locke or by Blackstone. For Locke, the chief ends of government were the maintenance of civil peace, and the security of the person and of property. Such a theory, diluted by self-interest and prejudice, might provide the propertied classes with a sanction for the most bloody code penalising offenders against property; but it provided no sanction for *arbitrary* authority, intruding upon personal or property rights, and uncontrolled by the rule of law. Hence the paradox, which surprised many foreign observers, of a bloody penal code alongside a *liberal* and, at times, meticulous administration and interpretation of the laws. The 18th century was indeed a great century for constitutional theorists, judges and lawyers. The poor man might often feel little protection when caught up in the law's toils. But the jury system *did* afford a measure of protection, as Hardy, Horne Tooke, Thelwall and Binns discovered. Wilkes *was* able to defy King, Parliament and administration—and to establish important new precedents—by using alternately the law courts and the mob. There was no *droit administratif*, no right of arbitrary arrest or search. Even in the 1790s, each attempt to introduce a "continental" spy system, each suspension of Habeas Corpus, each attempt to pack juries, aroused an outcry beyond the reformers' own ranks. If any—faced by the records of Tyburn and of repression—are inclined to question the value of these limits, they should contrast the trial of Hardy and his colleagues with the treatment of Muir, Gerrald, Skirving and Palmer in 1793-4 in the Scottish courts.¹

¹ See pp. 124 ff. below. The evidence is fully discussed in Lord Cockburn's learned and lively *Examination of the Trials for Sedition . . . in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1888).

This constitutionalism coloured the less articulate responses of the "free-born Englishman". He claimed few rights except that of being left alone. No institution was as much hated, in the 18th century, as the press-gang. A standing Army was deeply distrusted, and few of Pitt's repressive measures aroused as much discontent as the erection of barracks near the industrial towns. The right of individuals to bear arms in their own defence was claimed by reformers. The profession of a soldier was held to be dishonourable. "In arbitrary Monarchies," wrote one pamphleteer,

where the Despot who reigns can say to his wretched subjects, "Eat straw", and they eat straw, no wonder that they can raise Armies of human Butchers, to destroy their fellow creatures; but, in a country like Great Britain, which at least is *pretended to be free*, it becomes a matter of no small surprize that so many thousands of men should deliberately renounce the privileges and blessings attendant on Freemen, and voluntarily sell themselves to the most humiliating and degrading *Slavery*, for the miserable pittance of sixpence a day. . . .¹

The "crimping-houses" used for military recruiting in Holborn, the City, Clerkenwell and Shoreditch were mobbed and destroyed in three days of rioting in August 1794.² At the height of the agitation by the framework-knitters for protective legislation in 1812, the secretary of the Mansfield branch wrote in alarm when he learned that the workers' representatives were proposing a clause authorising powers of inspection and search into the houses of manufacturers suspected of evading the proposed regulations: "if iver that bullwark is broke down of every english mans hous being his Castil then that strong barrer is for iver broke that so many of our ancestors have bled for and in vain".³ Resistance to an effective police force continued well into the 19th century. While reformers were prepared to agree that a more effective *preventive* police was necessary, with more watchmen and a stronger nightly guard over property, any centralised force with larger powers was seen as:

¹ Anon., *Letters on the Impolicy of a Standing Army in Time of Peace, and on the unconstitutional and illegal Measure of Barracks* (1793). John Trenchard's *History of Standing Armies in England* (1698) was republished in 1731, 1739, 1780 and in the *Jacobin Philanthropist* (1795).

² See Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty*, p. 14; S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism, 1786-1832* (1955), p. 91. It was said that prostitutes, known as "gallows bitches", enticed men into the house where they were forcibly "recruited": see H. M. Saunders, *The Crimps* (1794).

³ *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, VIII (1952), p. 152.

a system of tyranny; an organised army of spies and informers, for the destruction of all public liberty, and the disturbance of all private happiness. Every other system of police is the curse of despotism. . . .¹

The Parliamentary Committee of 1818 saw in Bentham's proposals for a Ministry of Police "a plan which would make every servant of every house a spy on the actions of his master, and all classes of society spies on each other". Tories feared the over-ruling of parochial and chartered rights, and of the powers of the local J.P.s; Whigs feared an increase in the powers of Crown or of Government; Radicals like Burdett and Cartwright preferred the notion of voluntary associations of citizens or rotas of householders; the radical populace until Chartist times saw in any police an engine of oppression. A quite surprising consensus of opinion resisted the establishment of "one supreme and resistless tribunal, such as is denominated in other countries the 'High Police'—an engine . . . invented by despotism. . . ."²

In hostility to the increase in the powers of any centralised authority, we have a curious blend of parochial defensiveness, Whig theory, and popular resistance. Local rights and customs were cherished against the encroachment of the State by gentry and common people alike; hostility to "the Thing" and to "Bashaws" contributed much to the Tory-Radical strain which runs through from Cobbett to Oastler, and which reached its meridian in the resistance to the Poor Law of 1834. (It is ironic that the main protagonists of the State, in its political and administrative authority, were the middle-class Utilitarians, on the other side of whose Statist banner were inscribed the doctrines of economic *laissez faire*.) Even at the peak of the repression of the Jacobins, in the middle 1790s, the fiction was maintained that the intimidation was the work of "voluntary" associations of "private" citizens (Reeves' Anti-Jacobin Society or Wilberforce's Society for the Suppression of Vice); while the same fiction was employed in the persecution of Richard Carlile after the Wars. State subsidies to the "official" press during the Wars were administered guiltily, and with much hedging and diplomatic denial. The employment of spies and of *agents provocateurs* after the Wars was the signal for a genuine outburst of indignation in which

¹ J. P. Smith, *An Account of a Successful Experiment* (1812).

² *The Times*, 31 January 1823; see Radzinowicz, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 354-64.

into discredit. And it was at this point that Paine entered, with *Rights of Man*.

The French Revolution had set a precedent of a larger kind: a new constitution drawn up, in the light of reason and from first principles, which threw "the meagre, stale, forbidding ways/Of custom, law, and statute" into the shadows. And it was not Paine, but Burke, who effected the first major evacuation of the grounds of constitutional argument. The French example, on one hand, and the industrious reformers quarrying for pre-1688 or pre-Norman precedent, on the other, had made the old ground untenable. In his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) Burke supplemented the authority of precedent by that of wisdom and experience, and reverence for the Constitution by reverence for tradition—that "partnership . . . between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born". The theory of checks and balances upon the exercise of specific powers was translated into the moody notion of checks and balances upon the imperfections of man's nature:

The science of constructing a commonwealth . . . is not to be taught *a priori*. . . . The nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity; and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs. . . . The rights of men in governments are . . . often in balances between differences of good; in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil. . . .

Radical reformers "are so taken up with their theories about the rights of man, that they have totally forgotten his nature". "By their violent haste and their defiance of the process of nature, they are delivered over blindly to every projector and adventurer, to every alchemist and empiric."¹

The argument is deduced from man's moral nature in general; but we repeatedly glimpse sight of the fact that it was not the moral nature of a corrupt aristocracy which alarmed Burke so much as the nature of the populace, "the swinish multitude". Burke's great historical sense was brought to imply a "process of nature" so complex and procrastinating that any innovation was full of unseen dangers—a process in which the common people might have no part. If Tom Paine was wrong to dismiss Burke's cautions (for his *Rights of Man* was written in

¹ *Reflections on the French Revolution* (Everyman edn.) pp. 58-9, 62, 166.

reply to Burke), he was right to expose the inertia of class interests which underlay his special pleading. Academic judgement has dealt strangely with the two men. Burke's reputation as a political philosopher has been inflated, very much so in recent years. Paine has been dismissed as a mere populariser. In truth, neither writer was systematic enough to rank as a major political theorist. Both were publicists of genius, both are less remarkable for what they say than for the *tone* in which it is said. Paine lacks any depth of reading, any sense of cultural security, and is betrayed by his arrogant and impetuous temper into writing passages of a mediocrity which the academic mind still winces at and lays aside with a sigh. But the popular mind remembers Burke less for his insight than for his epochal indiscretion—"the swinish multitude"—the give-away phrase which revealed another kind of insensitivity of which Paine was incapable. Burke's blemish vitiates the composure of 18th-century polite culture. In all the angry popular pamphleteering which followed it might almost seem that the issues could be defined in five words: Burke's two-word epithet on the one hand, Paine's three-word banner on the other. With dreary invention the popular pamphleteers performed satirical variations upon Burke's theme: *Hog's Wash, Pig's Meat, Mast and Acorns: Collected by Old Hubert, Politics for the People: A Salamagundy for Swine* (with contributions from "Brother Grunter", "Porculus" and *ad nauseam*) were the titles of the pamphlets and periodicals. The sty, the swineherds, the bacon—so it goes on. "Whilst ye are . . . gorging yourselves at troughs filled with the daintiest wash; we, with our numerous train of *porkers*, are employed, from the rising to the setting sun, to obtain the means of subsistence, by . . . picking up a few acorns," runs an *Address to the Hon. Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude* (1793). No other words have ever made the "free-born Englishman" so angry—nor so ponderous in reply.

Since the *Rights of Man* is a foundation-text of the English working-class movement, we must look at its arguments and tone more closely.¹ Paine wrote on English soil, but as an American with an international reputation who had lived for

¹ Paine returned to England in 1787, and was much preoccupied with his experiments in bridge-building. The First Part of *Rights of Man* was published in 1791; the Second Part in 1792. The most recent biography of Paine—A. O. Aldridge, *Man of Reason* (1960)—is thorough but pedestrian, and adds little to our knowledge of Paine's English influence and connections. It should be read beside the lively but partisan *Life* (1892) by Moncure D. Conway; or the brief sketch by H. N. Brailsford in *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle*.

close on fifteen years in the bracing climate of experiment and constitutional iconoclasm. "I wished to know," he wrote in the Preface to the Second Part, "the manner in which a work, written in a style of thinking and expression different to what had been customary in England, would be received." From the outset he rejected the framework of constitutional argument: "I am contending for the rights of the *living*, and against their being willed away, and controuled, and contracted for, by the manuscript-assumed authority of the dead." Burke wished to "consign over the rights of posterity for ever, on the authority of a mouldy parchment", while Paine asserted that each successive generation was competent to define its rights and form of government anew.

As for the English Constitution, no such thing existed. At the most, it was a "sepulchre of precedents", a kind of "Political Popery"; and "government by precedent, without any regard to the principle of the precedent, is one of the vilest systems that can be set up". All governments, except those in France and America, derived their authority from conquest and superstition: their foundations lay upon "arbitrary power". And Paine reserved his particular invective for the superstitious regard attached to the means by which the continuation of this power was secured—the hereditary principle. "A banditti of ruffians overrun a country, and lay it under contributions. Their power being thus established, the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings." As for the right of inheritance, "to inherit a Government, is to inherit the People, as if they were flocks and herds". "Kings succeed each other, not as rationals, but as animals. . . . It requires some talents to be a common mechanic; but to be a King, requires only the animal figure of a man—a sort of breathing automaton":

The time is not very far distant when England will laugh at itself for sending to Holland, Hanover, Zell, or Brunswick for men, at the expense of a million a year, who understood neither her laws, her language, nor her interest, and whose capacities would scarcely have fitted them for the office of a parish constable.

"What are those men kept for?", he demanded:

Placemen, Pensioners, Lords of the Bed-chamber, Lords of the Kitchen, Lords of the Necessary-house, and the Lord knows what besides, can find as many reasons for monarchy as their salaries,

paid at the expence of the country, amount to: but if I ask the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the tradesman . . . the common labourer, what service monarchy is to him, he can give me no answer. If I ask him what monarchy is, he believes it is something like a sinecure.

The hereditary system in general was consigned to the same oblivion: "an hereditary governor is as inconsistent as an hereditary author".

All this was (and has some of the dare-devil air of) blasphemy. Even the sacred Bill of Rights Paine found to be "a bill of wrongs and of insult". It is not that Paine was the first man to think in this way: many 18th-century Englishmen must have held these thoughts privately. He was the first to dare to express himself with such irreverence; and he destroyed with one book century-old taboos. But Paine did very much more than this. In the first place he pointed towards a theory of the State and of class power, although in a confused, ambiguous manner. In *Common-Sense* he had followed Locke in seeing government as a "necessary evil". In the 1790s the ambiguities of Locke seem to fall into two halves, one Burke, the other Paine. Where Burke assumes government and examines its operation in the light of experience and tradition, Paine speaks for the governed, and assumes that the authority of government derives from conquest and inherited power in a class-divided society. The classes are roughly defined—"there are two distinct classes of men in the nation, those who pay taxes, and those who receive and live upon taxes"—and as for the Constitution, it is a good one for—

courtiers, placemen, pensioners, borough-holders, and the leaders of the Parties. . . ; but it is a bad Constitution for at least ninety-nine parts of the nation out of a hundred.

From this also, the war of the propertied and the unpropertied: "when the rich plunder the poor of his rights, it becomes an example to the poor to plunder the rich of his property".¹ By this argument, government appears as court parasitism: taxes are a form of robbery, for pensioners and for wars of conquest: while "the whole of the Civil Government is executed by the People of every town and country, by means of parish officers, magistrates, quarterly sessions, juries, and assize,

¹ These last three passages are taken from Paine's *Letter Addressed to the Addressers* (1792), pp. 19, 26, 69. All others from *Rights of Man*.

as the rich, will then be interested in the support of Government, and the cause and apprehension of riots and tumults will cease. Ye who sit in ease, and solace yourselves in plenty . . . have ye thought of these things?

This is Paine at his strongest. The success of the First Part of *Rights of Man* was great, but the success of the Second Part was phenomenal. It was this part—and especially such sections as these—which effected a bridge between the older traditions of the Whig “commonwealthsman” and the radicalism of Sheffield cutlers, Norwich weavers and London artisans. Reform was related, by these proposals, to their daily experience of economic hardship. However specious some of Paine’s financial calculations may have been, the proposals gave a new constructive cast to the whole reform agitation. If Major Cartwright formulated the specific demands for manhood suffrage which were to be the basis for a hundred years of agitation (and Mary Wollstonecraft, with her *Rights of Women*, initiated for the second sex an even longer era of struggle), Paine, in this chapter, set a course towards the social legislation of the 20th century.

Few of Paine’s ideas were original, except perhaps in this “social” chapter. “Men who give themselves to their Energetic Genius in the manner that Paine does are no Examiners”—the comment is William Blake’s. What he gave to English people was a new rhetoric of radical egalitarianism, which touched the deepest responses of the “free-born Englishman” and which penetrated the sub-political attitudes of the urban working people. Cobbett was not a true Paineite, and Owen and the early Socialists contributed a new strand altogether; but the Paine tradition runs strongly through the popular journalism of the 19th century—Wooler, Carlile, Hetherington, Watson, Lovett, Holyoake, Reynolds, Bradlaugh. It is strongly challenged in the 1880s; but the tradition and the rhetoric are still alive in Blatchford and in the popular appeal of Lloyd George. We can almost say that Paine established a new framework within which Radicalism was confined for nearly 100 years, as clear and as well defined as the constitutionalism which it replaced.

What was this framework? Contempt for monarchical and hereditary principles, we have seen:

I disapprove of monarchical and aristocratical governments, however modified. Hereditary distinctions, and privileged order of

every species . . . must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement. Hence it follows that I am not among the admirers of the British Constitution.

The words happen to be Wordsworth’s—in 1793. And Wordsworth’s also the retrospective lines which recapture more than any other the optimism of those revolutionary years when—walking with Beauvuy—he encountered a “hunger-bitten” peasant girl—

. . . and at the sight my friend
In agitation said, “’Tis against *that*
That we are fighting,” I with him believed
That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood, that poverty
Abject as this would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
All institutes for ever blotted out
That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,
Whether by edict of the one or few;
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand
In framing their own laws; whence better days
To all mankind.

An optimism (which Wordsworth was soon to lose) but to which Radicalism clung tenaciously, founding it upon premisses which Paine did not stop to examine: unbounded faith in representative institutions: in the power of reason: in (Paine’s words) “a mass of sense lying in a dormant state” among the common people, and in the belief that “Man, were he not corrupted by Governments, is naturally the friend of Man, and that human nature is not of itself vicious.” And all this expressed in an intransigent, brash, even cocksure tone, with the self-educated man’s distrust of tradition and institutes of learning (“He knew by heart all his own writings and knew nothing else”, was the comment of one of Paine’s acquaintances), and a tendency to avoid complex theoretical problems with a dash of empiricism and an appeal to “Common Sense”.

Both the strengths and the weaknesses of this optimism were reproduced again and again in 19th-century working-class Radicalism. But Paine’s writings were in no special sense aimed at the working people, as distinct from farmers, tradesmen and

1793 under the shadow of the guillotine, saw proofs of a God in the act of Creation and in the universe itself, and appealed to Reason as opposed to Mystery, Miracle or Prophecy. It was published in England in 1795, by Daniel Isaac Eaton who sustained no fewer than seven prosecutions and—by 1812 fifteen months of imprisonment and three years of outlawry—for his activities as a printer. Despite the brash provocations of its tone, *The Age of Reason* contained little that would have surprised the 18th-century Deist or advanced Unitarian. What was new was the popular audience to which Paine appealed, and the great authority of his name. The Second Part—published in 1796 (also by the courageous Eaton)¹—was an assault on the ethics of the Old Testament, and the veracity of the New, a pell-mell essay in biblical criticism:

I have . . . gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulders, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow.

It has to be said that there are other uses for woods. Blake acknowledged the force and attack of Paine's arguments, rephrasing them in his own inimitable shorthand:

That the Bible is all a State Trick, thro' which tho' the People at all times could see, they never had the power to throw off. Another Argument is that all the Commentators on the Bible are Dishonest Designing Knaves, who in hopes of a good living adopt the State religion . . . I could name an hundred such.

But Paine was incapable of reading any part of the Bible as (in Blake's words) "a Poem of probable impossibilities". For many of Paine's English followers during the years of repression, *The Age of Reason* was as "a sword sent to divide". Some Jacobins who maintained their membership of Dissenting or Methodist churches resented both Paine's book and the opportunity which it afforded to their enemies to mount a renewed attack upon "atheists" and "republicans". The authorities, for their part, saw Paine's latest offence as surpassing all his previous outrages; he had taken the polite periods of the comfortable Unitarian ministers and the scepticism of Gibbon, translated them into literal-minded polemical

¹ Eaton published a "Third Part" in 1811, and was sentenced in 1812—at the age of sixty—to a further eighteen months imprisonment and to the pillory. T. S. Howell, *State Trials* (1823), XXXI, pp. 927 ff.

every where tampered with." "The state of the country . . . seems very critical," Wilberforce noted in his diary. And he informed his Leeds correspondent, "I think of proposing to the Archbishop of Canterbury . . . the appointment of a day of fasting and humiliation." But from Leeds there came better news: a loyal mob had paraded the streets,

carrying an image of Tom Paine upon a pole, with a rope round his neck which was held by a man behind, who continually lashed the effigy with a carter's whip. The effigy was at last burned in the market-place, the market-bell tolling slowly. . . . A smile sat on every face . . . "God Save the King" resounded in the streets. . . .¹

The streets of Sheffield, however, witnessed scenes of a very different nature. Demonstrations were held at the end of November to celebrate the successes of the French armies at Valmy, and they were reported in the *Sheffield Register* (30 November 1792), a weekly newspaper which supported the reformers. A procession of five or six thousand drew a quartered roasted ox through the streets amid the firing of cannon. In the procession were—

a caricature painting representing Britannia—Burke riding on a swine—and a figure, the upper part of which was the likeness of a Scotch Secretary,² and the lower part that of an Ass . . . the pole of Liberty lying broken on the ground, inscribed "Truth is Libel"—the Sun breaking from behind a Cloud, and the Angel of Peace, with one hand dropping the "Rights of Man", and extending the other to raise up Britannia.

—"As resolute and determined a set of villains as I ever saw", remarked a hostile observer.

Here is something unusual—pitmen, keelmen, cloth-dressers, cutlers: not only the weavers and labourers of Wapping and Spitalfields, whose colourful and rowdy demonstrations had often come out in support of Wilkes, but working men in villages and towns over the whole country claiming *general* rights for themselves. It was this—and not the French Terror—which threw the propertied classes into panic.

We may see this if we look more closely at the events surrounding the publication of *Rights of Man*. The first popular societies were not formed until more than two years after the storming of the Bastille. There was a general disposition among

¹ Wilberforce, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 1-5.

² Henry Dundas, Home Secretary.

People was at pains to affirm its allegiance to the settlement of 1688, to dissociate itself from any notion of a National Convention, and from Paine's "indefinite language of delusion, which . . . tends to excite a spirit of innovation, of which no wisdom can foresee the effect, and no skill direct the course" (May 1792).¹ Christopher Wyvill, the Yorkshire gentleman reformer, published *A Defence of Dr Price* (1791) against Burke, in which he took occasion to deplore the "mischievous effects" of Paine's work, in tending to "excite the lowest classes of the People to acts of violence and injustice".² After the publication of Part Two of *Rights of Man* Wyvill's tone hardened. In his nation-wide correspondence with moderate reformers he exerted his considerable influence to urge them to mount a counter-agitation to minimise the effect of "Mr. Paine's ill-timed, and . . . pernicious counsels". In April 1792 he was urging the London Constitutional Society to dissociate itself from the "popular party":

As Mr. Paine . . . backs his proposal by holding out to the Poor annuities to be had out of the superfluous wealth of the Rich, I thought the extremely dangerous tendency of his licentious doctrines required opposition. . . .

There can be no doubt that it was the sharper spirit of class antagonism precipitated by Paine's linking of political with economic demands which gave Wyvill greatest alarm: "it is unfortunate for the public cause", he wrote to a Sheffield gentleman in May 1792, "that Mr Paine took such unconstitutional ground, and has formed a party for the Republic among the lower classes of the people, by holding out to them the prospect of plundering the rich".³

Wyvill's supporters in the Constitutional Society in London (of which Paine was himself a member) were outnumbered by Painites. The Society had officially welcomed Part One of *Rights of Man*, while at the same time passing a general resolution affirming support for the mixed constitution (March and May 1791). Throughout the rest of the year the moderates lost ground to the inflexible Major Cartwright, to the opportunist but adventurous Horne Tooke, to the Jacobin attorney John Frost, and to Paine's immediate circle. "Hey for the New

¹ Wyvill, *Political Papers*, III, Appendix, pp. 154-5.

² *Ibid.*, III, Appendix, pp. 67-8. It is to Wyvill's credit that he opposed any prosecution of Paine.

³ *Ibid.*, V, pp. 1, 23-4, 51.

war, unpopular at its outset, reactivated the long tradition of anti-Gallican sentiment among the people. Each fresh execution, reported with copious detail—the September massacres—the King—Marie Antoinette—added to these feelings. In September 1793, also, Paine's friends the Girondins were expelled from the Convention, and their leaders sent to the guillotine, while in the last week of 1793 Paine himself was imprisoned in the Luxembourg. These experiences provoked the first phase of that profound disenchantment, of which Wordsworth is representative, in an intellectual generation which had identified its beliefs in too ardent and utopian a way with the cause of France. The unity between intellectual and plebeian reformers of 1792 was never to be regained.

In 1794 the war fever became more intense. Volunteer corps were formed: public subscriptions raised: traditional fairs were made the occasion for military demonstrations. The Government increased its subsidies to, and influence over, the newspaper press: popular anti-Jacobin sheets multiplied. In Exeter a handbill was circulated:

. . . as for them that do not like . . . the present CONSTITUTION, let them have their deserts, that is a HALTER and a GIBBET, and be burnt afterwards, not as PAINE hath been, in effigy, but in body and person. To which every loyal heart will say Amen.

In Birmingham a scurrilous anti-Jacobin pamphleteer, "Job Nott", addressed reformers:

Do be off—only think of the New Drop—you may be recorded in the Newgate Calendar—transportation may reform you—you deserve to be highly exalted—Did you ever see the New Drop?

In London parishes, where the influence of Reeves' Association was strongest, house-to-house enquiries were made: in St. Anne's a register was kept with the "complexion, age, employment, &c. of lodgers and strangers": in St. James' inhabitants were called upon to denounce for "incivism" all housekeepers who would not oblige their servants, workmen and apprentices to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Constitution, no tradesman was to be employed who had not been cleared by Reeves' agents, and publicans were refused licences who failed to report "suspected persons". Collections of flannel waistcoats for the troops were pressed forward by members of Reeves' Committee, as an auxiliary means of testing loyalty; and from waistcoats collections went on to "mitts, drawers, caps, shirts,

Welch-wigs, stockings, shoes, trowsers, boots, sheets, great-coats, gowns, petticoats, blankets . . .".¹

The existence of a heresy-hunt of these proportions, in time of war, does not *prove* the widespread existence of heresy. "Loyalism" at such times always supposes the existence of "treason", if only as a foil to itself. And yet something more than "war fever", or the guilt and uneasiness of the propertied classes, is indicated by the outpourings of tracts and sermons, and the attacks on specific Jacobins in outlying parts. It was in April, 1794, that a gang of roughs, armed with cudgels, terrified young Samuel Bamford, as they passed through Middleton—with curses and broken windows for the "Painites"—on their way to Royton. Here they smashed up the "Light Horseman" public house, where reformers were meeting, and beat up those in attendance. Meanwhile the magistrate refused to stir from his home, a few score yards from the scene of the riot, and the parson stood on a hillock pointing out fugitives to the ruffians: "There goes one. . . . That's a Jacobin; that's another!"² It is as if the authorities sensed some sea-change in the opinion of the masses, some subterranean alteration in mood—not such as to make the English nation Painite and Jacobin, but yet such as disposed it to harbour and tolerate the seditious. Some slight event might be enough to set all that "combustible matter" aflame. Reformers must be watched and intimidated, the societies isolated and ringed round with suspicion, the prejudices of the ignorant whipped up and given licence. In particular, professional men with access to printing-press, bookshop, pulpit or rostrum, who associated with plebeian reformers, were the subject of intimidation.

A confirmation of this sea-change in the attitudes of the inarticulate—or in the structure of feeling of the poor—may be found in an unexpected place. 1793 and 1794 saw a sudden emergence of millennial fantasies, on a scale unknown since the 17th century. Where Holcroft's "New Jerusalem" was a rational conceit, and Blake's "Jerusalem" was a visionary image (although owing more to the millennial background than critics have noted), the poor and the credulous found a

¹ Several of the examples in this paragraph are taken from an anonymous pamphlet, *Peace and Reform; against War and Corruption* (1794). For anti-Jacobin publications (including Job Nott) see also R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader* (1955), pp. 41-51; M. J. Jones, *Hannah More* (Cambridge, 1952), Ch. VI.

² Bamford, *Early Days* (1893 edn.), pp. 55-6.

stationer, hatter, baker, upholsterer, locksmith, wire-worker, musician, surgeon, founder, glazier, tinsmith, japaner, bookseller, engraver, mercer, warehouseman, and labourer, with the remainder unclassified.¹ If several of the society's most active propagandists, like Gale Jones and Thelwall, were medical men and journalists, most of the committeemen were artisans or tradesmen: Ashley, a shoemaker, Baxter, a journeyman silversmith, Binns, a plumber, John Bone, a Holborn bookseller, Alexander Galloway, a mathematical machine-maker (later to become the leading engineering employer in London), Thomas Evans, a colourer of prints and (later) patent brace-maker, Richard Hodgson, a master hatter, John Lovett, a hairdresser, Luffman, a goldsmith, Oxlade, a master book-binder, while others can be identified as shoemakers, bakers, turners, booksellers and tailors. In June 1794 "Citizen Groves" gave to his employers a revealing account of the society's social composition:

There are some of decent tradesmanlike appearance, who possess strong, but unimproved faculties, and tho' bold, yet cautious. The delegates of this description are but few. There are others of an apparent lower order—no doubt journeymen, who though they seem to possess no abilities and say nothing, yet they appear resolute . . . and regularly vote for every motion which carries with it a degree of boldness. The last description . . . and which is the most numerous, consist of the very lowest order of society—few are ever decent in appearance, some of them are filthy and ragged, and others such wretched looking blackguards that it requires some mastery over that innate pride, which every well-educated man must necessarily possess, even to sit down in their company; and I have seen at one Oyer & Terminer at the Old Bailey much more decent figures discharged by proclamation at the end of the Session, for want of prosecution. These appear very violent & seem ready to adopt every thing tending [to] Confusion & Anarchy.²

These English Jacobins were more numerous, and more closely resembled the *menu peuple* who made the French Revolution, than has been recognised. Indeed, they resemble less the Jacobins than the *sans-culottes* of the Paris "sections", whose zealous egalitarianism underpinned Robespierre's revolutionary war dictatorship of 1793-4.³ Their strongholds were not yet in the new mill towns, but among urban craftsmen with longer

¹ P.C. A.38.

² T.S. 11.3510 A (3).

³ Cf. A. Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II* (Paris, 1958), Book II, and the valuable discussion of the social basis of the *sectionnaires* in R. Cobb, "The People in the French Revolution", *Past and Present*, XV, April 1959.

intellectual traditions: in the old industrial city of Norwich, which had not yet lost its pre-eminence in the worsted industry to the West Riding: in Spitalfields, where the silk industry, with its notoriously turbulent apprentices, was suffering from competition with Lancashire cottons: and in Sheffield, where many journeymen cutlers were half-way to being little masters. Just as in Paris in the Year II, the shoemakers were always prominent. These artisans took the doctrines of Paine to their extreme,—absolute political democracy: root-and-branch opposition to monarchy and the aristocracy, to the State and to taxation. In times of enthusiasm, they were the hard centre of a movement which drew the support of thousands of small shopkeepers, of printers and booksellers, medical men, schoolmasters, engravers, small masters, and Dissenting clergy at one end; and of porters, coal-heavers, labourers, soldiers and sailors at the other.

The movement produced only two considerable theorists; and they reveal the tensions at its heart. John Thelwall, the son of a silk mercer, was the most important—he straddled the world of Wordsworth and of Coleridge, and the world of the Spitalfields weavers. After the decline of the movement it became customary to disparage "poor Thelwall": in the early 19th century he was a figure of pathos—vain, haunted by a not unjustifiable sense of persecution, earning his living as a teacher of elocution. He also had the misfortune to be a mediocre poet—a crime which, although it is committed around us every day, historians and critics cannot forgive. De Quincey, who was brought up "in a frenzied horror of jacobinism . . . and to worship the name of Pitt" was only expressing the opinion current amongst the next generation of intellectual radicals when he referred to "poor empty tympanies of men, such as Thelwall". The opinion has followed him to this day.

But it required more than an empty tympany to stand forward, in the aftermath of the trials of Gerrard and of Margatrot, as the outstanding leader of the Jacobins: to face trial for high treason: and to continue (as Tooke and Hardy did not do) until—and beyond—the time of the Two Acts. To do this required, perhaps, a dash of the actor in his temperament; the vice of the English Jacobins (except for Hardy) was self-dramatisation, and in their histrionic postures they sometimes seem ridiculous. But it was an age of rhetoric, and the rhetoric of a *parvenu* is bound to be less composed than the rhetoric of a

Burke. The flourishes of the Tribunes of Liberty (who really were tribunes of *real* liberty) can surely be forgiven if they served to give them courage. Moreover, in the press of political engagement, between 1793 and 1795, Thelwall was both courageous and judicious. Throughout 1793 he fought a public battle with the London authorities to secure the right to lecture and debate: after being driven from hall to hall, he eventually secured (with the help of a committee of patrons) the premises at Beaufort Buildings which served both as a centre for his lectures and for the general activities of the society in 1794 and 1795.¹ On Hardy's arrest, he immediately rallied the society. When spies attended his lectures, he turned the tables by lecturing on the spy system; when an attempt was made to provoke riot, he led the audience quietly out of the hall. He modified intemperate resolutions and was watchful for provocations. His command over crowds was great, and when at the final demonstration against the Two Acts the cry went up of "Soldiers, soldiers!" he is said to have turned a wave of panic into a wave of solidarity, by preaching the society's doctrine of fraternisation with the troops.

In 1795 and 1796 his lectures and writings have a depth and consistency much in advance of that in any other active Jacobin. He defined clearly an English estimate of events in France:

That which I glory in, in the French Revolution, is this: That it has been upheld and propagated as a principle of that Revolution, that ancient abuses are not by their antiquity converted into virtues . . . that man has rights which no statutes or usages can take away. . . that thought ought to be free . . . that intellectual beings are entitled to the use of their intellects . . . that one order of society has no right, how many years soever they have been guilty of the pillage, to plunder and oppress the other parts of the community. . . . These are the principles that I admire, and that cause me, notwithstanding all its excesses, to exult in the French Revolution.

He stood up during Robespierre's Terror to declare that "the excesses and violences in France have not been the consequence of the new doctrines of the Revolution; but of the old leaven of revenge, corruption and suspicion which was generated by the systematic cruelties of the old despotism". He identified his support neither with the ineffective Girondins nor with the Mountain, criticising "the imbecility of the philosophic and the ferocity of the energetic party". But on the death of

¹ See C. Cestre, *op. cit.*, pp. 74 ff.

These "rights" included "a right to the share of the produce . . . proportionate to the profits of the employer", and the right to education through which the labourer's child might rise to the "highest station of society". And, among a score of other ideas and proposals which entered into the stream of 19th-century working-class politics (for *The Tribune* and *The Rights of Nature* were still found in the library of 19th-century Radicals), Thelwall tried to trace the ancestry of the eight-hour day as the traditional "norm" for the labouring man.

We can say that Thelwall offered a consistent ideology to the *artisan*. His further examination of *The Rights of Nature* consisted in the analysis of the "Origin and Distribution of Property" and the "Feudal System". While, like Paine, he stopped short at the criticism of private capital accumulation *per se*, he sought to limit the operation of "monopoly" and "commercial" exploitation, seeking to depict an ideal society of smallholders, small traders and artisans, and of labourers whose conditions and hours of labour, and health and old age, were protected.¹

Thelwall took Jacobinism to the borders of Socialism; he also took it to the borders of revolutionism. The dilemma here was not in his mind but in his situation: it was the dilemma of all Radical reformers to the time of Chartism and beyond. How were the unrepresented, their organisations faced with persecution and repression, to effect their objects? As the Chartists termed it, "moral" or "physical" force? Thelwall rejected Place's policy of educational gradualism, as the auxiliary of the middle class. He accepted an unlimited agitation; but rejected the extreme course of underground revolutionary organisation. It was this predicament which was to face him (and subsequent reformers) with the choice between defiant rhetoric and capitulation. Again and again, between 1792 and 1848, this dilemma was to recur. The Jacobin or Chartist, who implied the threat of overwhelming numbers but who held back from actual revolutionary preparation, was always exposed, at some critical moment, both to the loss of the confidence of his own supporters and the ridicule of his opponents.

It is clear that some members of the L.C.S. were prepared to go further. It goes without saying that much will always

¹ *Tribune*, 3 Volumes, *passim*; Cestre, *op. cit.*, pp. 175 f.; J. Thelwall, *The Rights of Nature* (1796), Letters I to IV.

One of the prisoners whose release he helped to secure was Colonel Edmund Despard. The story of 19th-century Radicalism commences with these two men.¹

What is the price of Experience? do men buy it for a song?
 Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No, it is bought with the price
 Of all that a man hath, his house, his wife, his children.
 Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
 And in the wither'd field, where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

Thus William Blake, writing *Vala, or the Four Zoas* in 1796-7. As the Jacobin current went into more hidden underground channels, so his own prophecies became more mysterious and private. Through the years the imprisonment went on: Kyd Wake, a Gosport bookbinder, sentenced at the end of 1796 to five years hard labour, and to the pillory, for saying "No George, no war" (in 1803 Blake was himself to escape narrowly from such a charge): Johnson, the bookseller and friend of Godwin, imprisoned; prosecutions for sedition in Lancashire and Lincolnshire; a Somerset basket-maker imprisoned for saying "I wish success to the French".² The Duke of Portland, at the Home Office, himself sent out instructions to shut down tavern societies, and to commit to the House of Correction little children selling Spence's $\frac{1}{2}d.$ sheets.³ At Hackney the eccentric classical scholar, Gilbert Wakefield, looked out from his books and offered the opinion that the labouring classes had little to lose by a French invasion: "Within three miles of the house, where I am writing these pages, there is a much greater number of starving, miserable human beings . . . than on any equal portion of ground through the habitable globe."⁴ Fox's friendship and his own scholarship did not save him from prison. "The Beast and the Whore rule without control," Blake noted on the title-page of Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible*: "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life." Kyd Wake indeed died in prison, while Wakefield was released only in time to die.

The persecution tore the last Jacobin intellectuals apart from the artisans and labourers. In France, as it seemed to Wordsworth,

¹ T. Evans, *Christian Polity*, p. iv; *Reasoner*, 26 March 1808; "Narrative of John Oxlade", Add. MSS. 27809; P.C. A.161.

² T.S. 11.5390.

³ H.O. 119.1; H.O. 65.1.

⁴ G. Wakefield, *Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1798), p. 36.

Jacobin Lord Daer sat with artisans and weavers as plain "Citizen Daer". But the belief that "a man's a man, for a' that" found expression in other ways which may still be recalled in criticism of the practices of our own day. *Every* citizen on a committee was expected to perform some part, the chairmanship of committees was often taken in rotation, the pretensions of leaders were watched, proceedings were based on the deliberate belief that every man was capable of reason and of a growth in his abilities, and that deference and distinctions of status were an offence to human dignity. These Jacobin strengths, which contributed much to Chartism, declined in the movement of the late 19th century, when the new Socialism shifted emphasis from political to economic rights. The strength of distinctions of class and status in 20th-century England is in part a consequence of the lack, in the 20th-century labour movement, of Jacobin virtues.

It is unnecessary to stress the evident importance of other aspects of the Jacobin tradition; the tradition of self-education and of the rational criticism of political and religious institutions; the tradition of conscious republicanism; above all, the tradition of internationalism. It is extraordinary that so brief an agitation should have diffused its ideas into so many corners of Britain.¹ Perhaps the consequence of English Jacobinism which was most profound, although least easy to define, was the breaking-down of taboos upon agitation among "members unlimited". Wherever Jacobin ideas persisted, and wherever hidden copies of *Rights of Man* were cherished, men were no longer disposed to wait upon the example of a Wilkes or a Wyvill before they commenced a democratic agitation. Throughout the war years there were Thomas Hardys in every town and in many villages throughout England, with a kist or shelf full of Radical books, biding their time, putting in a word at the tavern, the chapel, the smithy, the shoemaker's shop, waiting for the movement to revive. And the movement for which they waited did not belong to gentlemen, manufacturers, or rate-payers; it was *their own*.

As late as 1849 a shrewd Yorkshire satirist published a sketch of such a "Village Politician" which has the feel of authenticity. He is, typically, a cobbler, an old man and the sage of his industrial village:

¹ W. A. L. Seaman, *op. cit.*, p. 20 notes evidence of societies in over 100 places in England and Scotland.

the word "Tyrants" had been pasted, and no-one stirred to take it down.¹ "Long have we been endeavouring to find ourselves men," declared the mutineers of the fleet in 1797: "We now find ourselves so. We will be treated as such."²

In 1812, looking round him in dismay at the power of Scottish trade unionism and of Luddism in England, Scott wrote to Southey: "The country is mined below our feet." It was Pitt who had driven the "miners" underground. Men like our "Village Politician" were scarcely to be found in the villages of 1789. Jacobin ideas driven into weaving villages, the shops of the Nottingham framework-knitters and the Yorkshire croppers, the Lancashire cotton-mills, were propagated in every phase of rising prices and of hardship. It was not Pitt but John Thelwall who had the last word. "A sort of Socratic spirit will necessarily grow up, wherever large bodies of men assemble":

. . . Monopoly, and the hideous accumulation of capital in a few hands . . . carry in their own enormity, the seeds of cure. . . . Whatever presses men together . . . though it may generate some vices, is favourable to the diffusion of knowledge, and ultimately promotive of human liberty. Hence every large workshop and manufactory is a sort of political society, which no act of parliament can silence, and no magistrate disperse.³

¹ J. W. Cartwright to Duke of Portland, 19 June 1798, H.O. 42.43.

² C. Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, p. 300.

³ Thelwall, *Rights of Nature*, I. pp. 21, 24.

only expressing this with unusual vigour when he declared: "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord: the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist." And it was not only the mill-owner but also the working population brought into being within and around the mills which seemed to contemporaries to be "new". "The instant we get near the borders of the manufacturing parts of Lancashire," a rural magistrate wrote in 1808, "we meet a fresh race of beings, both in point of manners, employments and subordination . . ."; while Robert Owen, in 1815, declared that "the general diffusion of manufactures throughout a country generates a new character in its inhabitants . . . an essential change in the general character of the mass of the people."

Observers in the 1830s and 1840s were still exclaiming at the novelty of the "factory system". Peter Gaskell, in 1833, spoke of the manufacturing population as "but a Hercules in the cradle"; it was "only since the introduction of steam as a power that they have acquired their paramount importance". The steam-engine had "drawn together the population into dense masses" and already Gaskell saw in working-class organisations an "imperium in imperio" of the most obnoxious description".¹ Ten years later Cooke Taylor was writing in similar terms:

The steam-engine had no precedent, the spinning-jenny is without ancestry, the mule and the power-loom entered on no prepared heritage: they sprang into sudden existence like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter.

But it was the human consequence of these "novelties" which caused this observer most disquiet:

As a stranger passes through the masses of human beings which have accumulated round the mills and print works . . . he cannot contemplate these "crowded hives" without feelings of anxiety and apprehension almost amounting to dismay. The population, like the system to which it belongs, is NEW; but it is hourly increasing in breadth and strength. It is an aggregate of masses, our conceptions of which clothe themselves in terms that express something portentous and fearful . . . as of the slow rising and gradual swelling of an ocean which must, at some future and no distant time, bear all the elements of society aloft upon its bosom, and float them Heaven

¹ P. Gaskell, *The Manufacturing Population of England* (1833), p. 6; Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-century England", in *Essays in Labour History*, ed. Briggs and Saville (1960), p. 63.

and weaving mills of cotton, wool, and silk combined.¹ Still, in 1830, the adult male cotton-spinner was no more typical of that elusive figure, the "average working man", than is the Coventry motor-worker of the 1960s.

The point is of importance, because too much emphasis upon the newness of the cotton-mills can lead to an underestimation of the continuity of political and cultural traditions in the making of working-class communities. The factory hands, so far from being the "eldest children of the industrial revolution", were late arrivals. Many of their ideas and forms of organisation were anticipated by domestic workers, such as the woollen workers of Norwich and the West Country, or the small-ware weavers of Manchester. And it is questionable whether factory hands—except in the cotton districts—"formed the nucleus of the Labour Movement" at any time before the late 1840s (and, in some northern and Midland towns, the years 1832-4, leading up to the great lock-outs). Jacobinism, as we have seen, struck root most deeply among artisans. Luddism was the work of skilled men in small workshops. From 1817 onwards to Chartism, the outworkers in the north and the Midlands were as prominent in every radical agitation as the factory hands. And in many towns the actual nucleus from which the labour movement derived ideas, organisation, and leadership, was made up of such men as shoemakers, weavers, saddlers and harnessmakers, booksellers, printers, building workers, small tradesmen, and the like. The vast area of Radical London between 1815 and 1850 drew its strength from no major heavy industries (shipbuilding was tending to decline, and the engineers only made their impact later in the century) but from the host of smaller trades and occupations.²

Such diversity of experiences has led some writers to question both the notions of an "industrial revolution" and of a "working class". The first discussion need not detain us here.³ The term is serviceable enough in its usual connotations. For the second, many writers prefer the term working *classes*, which emphasises the great disparity in status, acquisitions, skills, conditions, within the portmanteau phrase. And in this they echo the complaints of Francis Place:

¹ Estimates for U.K., 1833. Total adult labour force in all textile mills, 191,671. Number of cotton hand-loom weavers, 213,000. See below, p. 311.

² Cf. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, Ch. 11.

³ There is a summary of this controversy in E. E. Lampard, *Industrial Revolution*, (American Historical Association, 1957). See also Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2.

If the character and conduct of the working-people are to be taken from reviews, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, reports of the two Houses of Parliament and the Factory Commissioners, we shall find them all jumbled together as the 'lower orders', the most skilled and the most prudent workman, with the most ignorant and imprudent labourers and paupers, though the difference is great indeed, and indeed in many cases will scarce admit of comparison.¹

Place is, of course, right: the Sunderland sailor, the Irish navy, the Jewish costermonger, the inmate of an East Anglian village workhouse, the compositor on *The Times*—all might be seen by their "betters" as belonging to the "lower classes" while they themselves might scarcely understand each others' dialect.

Nevertheless, when every caution has been made, the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of "the working class". This is revealed, first, in the growth of class-consciousness: the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interests of other classes. And, second, in the growth of corresponding forms of political and industrial organisation. By 1832 there were strongly-based and self-conscious working-class institutions—trade unions, friendly societies, educational and religious movements, political organisations, periodicals—working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community-patterns, and a working-class structure of feeling.

The making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic, history. It was not the spontaneous generation of the factory-system. Nor should we think of an external force—the "industrial revolution"—working upon some nondescript undifferentiated raw material of humanity, and turning it out at the other end as a "fresh race of beings". The changing productive relations and working conditions of the Industrial Revolution were imposed, not upon raw material, but upon the free-born Englishman—and the free-born Englishman as Paine had left him or as the Methodists had moulded him. The factory hand or stockinger was also the inheritor of Bunyan, of remembered village rights, of notions of equality before the law, of craft traditions. He was the object of massive religious indoctrination and the creator of new political traditions. The working class made itself as much as it was made.

¹ Cit. M. D. George, *London Life in the 18th Century* (1930). p. 210.

To see the working class in this way is to defend a "classical" view of the period against the prevalent mood of contemporary schools of economic history and sociology. For the territory of the Industrial Revolution, which was first staked out and surveyed by Marx, Arnold Toynbee, the Webbs and the Hammonds, now resembles an academic battlefield. At point after point, the familiar "catastrophic" view of the period has been disputed. Where it was customary to see the period as one of economic disequilibrium, intense misery and exploitation, political repression and heroic popular agitation, attention is now directed to the rate of economic growth (and the difficulties of "take-off" into self-sustaining technological reproduction). The enclosure movement is now noted, less for its harshness in displacing the village poor, than for its success in feeding a rapidly growing population. The hardships of the period are seen as being due to the dislocations consequent upon the Wars, faulty communications, immature banking and exchange, uncertain markets, and the trade-cycle, rather than to exploitation or cut-throat competition. Popular unrest is seen as consequent upon the unavoidable coincidence of high wheat prices and trade depressions, and explicable in terms of an elementary "social tension" chart derived from these data.¹ In general, it is suggested that the position of the industrial worker in 1840 was better in most ways than that of the domestic worker of 1790. The Industrial Revolution was an age, not of catastrophe or acute class-conflict and class oppression, but of improvement.²

The classical catastrophic orthodoxy has been replaced by a new anti-catastrophic orthodoxy, which is most clearly distinguished by its empirical caution and, among its most notable exponents (Sir John Clapham, Dr. Dorothy George, Professor Ashton) by an astringent criticism of the looseness of certain writers of the older school. The studies of the new orthodoxy have enriched historical scholarship, and have qualified and revised in important respects the work of the classical school. But as the new orthodoxy is now, in its turn, growing old and entrenched in most of the academic centres,

¹ See W. W. Rostow, *British Economy in the Nineteenth Century* (1948), esp. pp. 122-5.

² Some of the views outlined here are to be found, implicitly or explicitly, in T. S. Ashton, *Industrial Revolution* (1948) and A. Radford, *The Economic History of England* (2nd edn. 1960). A sociological variant is developed by N. J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959), and a knockabout popularisation is in John Vaizey, *Success Story* (W.E.A., n.d.).

so it becomes open to challenge in its turn. And the successors of the great empiricists too often exhibit a moral complacency, a narrowness of reference, and an insufficient familiarity with the actual movements of the working people of the time. They are more aware of the orthodox empiricist postures than of the changes in social relationship and in cultural modes which the Industrial Revolution entailed. What has been lost is a sense of the whole process—the whole political and social context of the period. What arose as valuable qualifications have passed by imperceptible stages to new generalisations (which the evidence can rarely sustain) and from generalisations to a ruling attitude.

The empiricist orthodoxy is often defined in terms of a running critique of the work of J. L. and Barbara Hammond. It is true that the Hammonds showed themselves too willing to moralise history, and to arrange their materials too much in terms of "outraged emotion".¹ There are many points at which their work has been faulted or qualified in the light of subsequent research, and we intend to propose others. But a defence of the Hammonds need not only be rested upon the fact that their volumes on the labourers, with their copious quotation and wide reference, will long remain among the most important source-books for this period. We can also say that they displayed throughout their narrative an understanding of the political context within which the Industrial Revolution took place. To the student examining the ledgers of one cotton-mill, the Napoleonic Wars appear only as an abnormal influence affecting foreign markets and fluctuating demand. The Hammonds could never have forgotten for one moment that it was also a war against Jacobinism. "The history of England at the time discussed in these pages reads like a history of civil war." This is the opening of the introductory chapter of *The Skilled Labourer*. And in the conclusion to *The Town Labourer*, among other comments of indifferent value, there is an insight which throws the whole period into sudden relief:

At the time when half Europe was intoxicated and the other half terrified by the new magic of the word citizen, the English nation was in the hands of men who regarded the idea of citizenship as a challenge to their religion and their civilisation; who deliberately sought to make the inequalities of life the basis of the state, and to emphasise and perpetuate the position of the workpeople as a subject class. Hence it happened that the French Revolution has divided the

¹ See E. E. Lampard, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

people of France less than the Industrial Revolution has divided the people of England. . . .

"Hence it happened . . ." The judgement may be questioned. And yet it is in this insight—that the revolution which did not happen in England was fully as devastating, and in some features more divisive, than that which did happen in France—that we find a clue to the truly catastrophic nature of the period. Throughout this time there are three, and not two, great influences simultaneously at work. There is the tremendous increase in population (in Great Britain, from 10.5 millions in 1801 to 18.1 millions in 1841, with the greatest rate of increase between 1811-21). There is the Industrial Revolution, in its technological aspects. And there is the political counter-revolution, from 1792-1832.

In the end, it is the political context as much as the steam-engine, which had most influence upon the shaping consciousness and institutions of the working class. The forces making for political reform in the late 18th century—Wilkes, the city merchants, the Middlesex small gentry, the "mob"—or Wyvill, and the small gentry and yeomen, clothiers, cutlers, and tradesmen—were on the eve of gaining at least some piecemeal victories in the 1790s: Pitt had been cast for the rôle of reforming Prime Minister. Had events taken their "natural" course we might expect there to have been some show-down long before 1832, between the oligarchy of land and commerce and the manufacturers and petty gentry, with working people in the tail of the middle-class agitation. And even in 1792, when manufacturers and professional men were prominent in the reform movement, this was still the balance of forces. But, after the success of *Rights of Man*, the radicalisation and terror of the French Revolution, and the onset of Pitt's repression, it was the plebeian Corresponding Society which alone stood up against the counter-revolutionary wars. And these plebeian groups, small as they were in 1796, did nevertheless make up an "underground" tradition which ran through to the end of the Wars. Alarmed at the French example, and in the patriotic fervour of war, the aristocracy and the manufacturers made common cause. The English *ancien régime* received a new lease of life, not only in national affairs, but also in the perpetuation of the antique corporations which misgoverned the swelling industrial towns. In return, the manufacturers received important concessions: and notably the abrogation or repeal

of "paternalist" legislation covering apprenticeship, wage-regulation, or conditions in industry. The aristocracy were interested in repressing the Jacobin "conspiracies" of the people, the manufacturers were interested in defeating their "conspiracies" to increase wages: the Combination Acts served both purposes.

Thus working people were forced into political and social *apartheid* during the Wars (which, incidentally, they also had to fight). It is true that this was not altogether new. What was new was that it was coincident with a French Revolution: with growing self-consciousness and wider aspirations (for the "liberty tree" had been planted from the Thames to the Tyne): with a rise in population, in which the sheer sense of numbers, in London and in the industrial districts, became more impressive from year to year (and as numbers grew, so deference to master, magistrate, or parson was likely to lessen): and with more intensive or more transparent forms of economic exploitation. More intensive in agriculture and in the old domestic industries: more transparent in the new factories and perhaps in mining. In agriculture the years between 1760 and 1820 are the years of wholesale enclosure, in which, in village after village, common rights are lost, and the landless and—in the south—pauperised labourer is left to support the tenant-farmer, the landowner, and the tithes of the Church. In the domestic industries, from 1800 onwards, the tendency is widespread for small masters to give way to larger employers (whether manufacturers or middlemen) and for the majority of weavers, stockingers, or nail-makers to become wage-earning outworkers with more or less precarious employment. In the mills and in many mining areas these are the years of the employment of children (and of women underground); and the large-scale enterprise, the factory-system with its new discipline, the mill communities—where the manufacturer not only made riches out of the labour of the "hands" but could be *seen* to make riches in one generation—all contributed to the transparency of the process of exploitation and to the social and cultural cohesion of the exploited.

We can now see something of the truly catastrophic nature of the Industrial Revolution; as well as some of the reasons why the English working class took form in these years. The people were subjected simultaneously to an intensification of two intolerable forms of relationship: those of economic exploitation

and man: the transparency of the exploitation at the source of their new wealth and power: the loss of status and above all of independence for the worker, his reduction to total dependence on the master's instruments of production: the partiality of the law: the disruption of the traditional family economy: the discipline, monotony, hours and conditions of work: loss of leisure and amenities: the reduction of the man to the status of an "instrument".

That working people felt these grievances at all—and felt them passionately—is itself a sufficient fact to merit our attention. And it reminds us forcibly that some of the most bitter conflicts of these years turned on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series. The issues which provoked the most intensity of feeling were very often ones in which such values as traditional customs, "justice", "independence", security, or family-economy were at stake, rather than straightforward "bread-and-butter" issues. The early years of the 1830s are aflame with agitations which turned on issues in which wages were of secondary importance; by the potters, against the Truck System; by the textile workers, for the 10-Hour Bill; by the building workers, for co-operative direct action; by all groups of workers, for the right to join trade unions. The great strike in the north-east coalfield in 1831 turned on security of employment, "tommy shops", child labour.

The exploitive relationship is more than the sum of grievances and mutual antagonisms. It is a relationship which can be seen to take distinct forms in different historical contexts, forms which are related to corresponding forms of ownership and State power. The classic exploitive relationship of the Industrial Revolution is depersonalised, in the sense that no lingering obligations of mutuality—of paternalism or deference, or of the interests of "the Trade"—are admitted. There is no whisper of the "just" price, or of a wage justified in relation to social or moral sanctions, as opposed to the operation of free market forces. Antagonism is accepted as intrinsic to the relations of production. Managerial or supervisory functions demand the repression of all attributes except those which further the expropriation of the maximum surplus value from labour. This is the political economy which Marx anatomised in *Das Kapital*. The worker has become an "instrument", or an entry among other items of cost.

In fact, no complex industrial enterprise could be conducted

according to such a philosophy. The need for industrial peace, for a stable labour-force, and for a body of skilled and experienced workers, necessitated the modification of managerial techniques—and, indeed, the growth of new forms of paternalism—in the cotton-mills by the 1830s. But in the overstocked outwork industries, where there was always a sufficiency of unorganised “hands” competing for employment, these considerations did not operate. Here, as old customs were eroded, and old paternalism was set aside, the exploitive relationship emerged supreme.

This does not mean that we can lay all the “blame” for each hardship of the Industrial Revolution upon “the masters” or upon *laissez faire*. The process of industrialisation must, in any conceivable social context, entail suffering and the destruction of older and valued ways of life. Much recent research has thrown light upon the particular difficulties of the British experience; the hazards of markets; the manifold commercial and financial consequences of the Wars; the post-war deflation; movements in the terms of trade; and the exceptional stresses resulting from the population “explosion”. Moreover, 20th-century preoccupations have made us aware of the overarching problems of economic growth. It can be argued that Britain in the Industrial Revolution was encountering the problems of “take-off”; heavy long-term investment—canals, mills, railways, foundries, mines, utilities—was at the expense of current consumption; the generations of workers between 1790 and 1840 sacrificed some, or all, of their prospects of increased consumption to the future.¹

These arguments all deserve close attention. For example, studies of the fluctuations in the demand of the South American market, or of the crisis in country banking, may tell us much about the reasons for the growth or retardation of particular industries. The objection to the reigning academic orthodoxy is not to empirical studies *per se*, but to the fragmentation of our comprehension of the full historical process. First, the empiricist segregates certain events from this process and examines them in isolation. Since the conditions which gave rise to these events are assumed, they appear not only as explicable in their own terms but as inevitable. The Wars had to be paid for out of heavy taxation; they accelerated growth in this way and

¹ See S. Pollard, “Investment, Consumption, and the Industrial Revolution,” *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd Series, XI (1958), pp. 215-26.

retarded it in that. Since this can be shown, it is also implied that this was necessarily so. But thousands of Englishmen at the time agreed with Thomas Bewick's condemnation of “this superlatively wicked war”.¹ The unequal burden of taxation, fund-holders who profited from the National Debt, paper-money—these were not accepted as given data by many contemporaries, but were the staple of intensive Radical agitation.

But there is a second stage, where the empiricist may put these fragmentary studies back together again, constructing a model of the historical process made up from a multiplicity of interlocking inevitabilities, a piecemeal processional. In the scrutiny of credit facilities or of the terms of trade, where each event is explicable and appears also as a self-sufficient cause of other events, we arrive at a *post facto* determinism. The dimension of human agency is lost, and the context of class relations is forgotten.

It is perfectly true that what the empiricist points to was there. The Orders in Council had in 1811 brought certain trades almost to a standstill; rising timber prices after the Wars inflated the costs of building; a passing change of fashion (lace for ribbon) might silence the looms of Coventry; the power-loom competed with the hand-loom. But even these open-faced facts, with their frank credentials, deserve to be questioned. Whose Council, why the Orders? Who profited most from corners in scarce timber? Why should looms remain idle when tens of thousands of country girls fancied ribbons but could not afford to buy. By what social alchemy did inventions for saving labour become engines of immiseration? The raw fact—a bad harvest—may seem to be beyond human election. But the way that fact worked its way out was in terms of a particular complex of human relationships: law, ownership, power. When we encounter some sonorous phrase such as “the strong ebb and flow of the trade cycle” we must be put on our guard. For behind this trade cycle there is a structure of social relations, fostering some sorts of expropriation (rent, interest, and profit) and outlawing others (theft, feudal dues), legitimising some types of conflict (competition, armed warfare) and inhibiting others (trades unionism, bread riots, popular political organisation)—a structure which may appear, in the eyes of the future, to be both barbarous and ephemeral.

It might be unnecessary to raise these large questions, since

¹ T. Bewick, *Memoir* (1961 edn.), p. 151.

the historian cannot always be questioning the credentials of the society which he studies. But all these questions were, in fact, raised by contemporaries: not only by men of the upper classes (Shelley, Cobbett, Owen, Peacock, Thompson, Hodgskin, Carlyle) but by thousands of articulate working men. Not the political institutions alone, but the social and economic structure of industrial capitalism, were brought into question by their spokesmen. To the facts of orthodox political economy they opposed their own facts and their own arithmetic. Thus as early as 1817 the Leicester framework-knitters put forward, in a series of resolutions, an under-consumption theory of capitalist crisis:

That in proportion as the Reduction of Wages makes the great Body of the People poor and wretched, in the same proportion must the consumption of our manufactures be lessened.

That if liberal Wages were given to the Mechanics in general throughout the Country, the Home Consumption of our Manufactures would be immediately more than doubled, and consequently every hand would soon find full employment.

That to Reduce the Wage of the Mechanic of this Country so low that he cannot live by his labour, in order to undersell Foreign Manufacturers in a Foreign Market, is to gain one customer abroad, and lose two at home. . . .¹

If those in employment worked shorter hours, and if child labour were to be restricted, there would be more work for hand-workers and the unemployed could employ themselves and exchange the products of their labour directly—short-circuiting the vagaries of the capitalist market—goods would be cheaper and labour better-rewarded. To the rhetoric of the free market they opposed the language of the “new moral order”. It is because alternative and irreconcilable views of human order—one based on mutuality, the other on competition—confronted each other between 1815 and 1850 that the historian today still feels the need to take sides.

It is scarcely possible to write the history of popular agitations in these years unless we make at least the imaginative effort to understand how such a man as the “Journeyman Cotton Spinner” read the evidence. He spoke of the “masters”, not as an aggregate of individuals, but as a class. As such,

¹ H.O. 42.160. See also Hammonds, *The Town Labourer*, p. 303, and Oastler's evidence on the hand-loom weavers, below, p. 298.

“they” denied him political rights. If there was a trade recession, “they” cut his wages. If trade improved, he had to fight “them” and their state to obtain any share in the improvement. If food was plentiful, “they” profited from it. If it was scarce, some of “them” profited more. “They” conspired, not in this or that fact alone, but in the essential exploitive relationship within which all the facts were validated. Certainly there were market fluctuations, bad harvests, and the rest; but the experience of intensified exploitation was constant, whereas these other causes of hardship were variable. The latter bore upon working people, not directly, but through the refraction of a particular system of ownership and power which distributed the gains and losses with gross partiality.

These larger considerations have been, for some years, overlaid by the academic exercise (through which all students must march and counter-march) known as the “standard-of-living controversy”. Did the living standards of the bulk of the people rise or fall between 1780 and 1830—or 1800 and 1850?¹ To understand the significance of the argument, we must look briefly at its development.

The debate on values is as old as the Industrial Revolution. The controversy on the standard-of-living is more recent. The ideological *muddle* is more recent still. We may start at one of the more lucid points of the controversy. Sir John Clapham, in his Preface to the first edition of his *Economic History of Modern Britain* (1926) wrote:

The legend that everything was getting worse for the working man, down to some unspecified date between the drafting of the People's Charter and the Great Exhibition [1837 and 1851: E.P.T.], dies hard. The fact that, after the price fall of 1820-1, the purchasing power of wages in general—not, of course, of everyone's wages—was definitely greater than it had been just before the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, fits so ill with the tradition that it is very seldom mentioned, the work of statisticians on wages and prices being constantly ignored by social historians.

To this, J. L. Hammond offered a reply in the *Economic History Review* (1930) of two kinds: first, he criticised Clapham's statistics of agricultural earnings. These had been based on totting up the country averages, and then dividing them

¹ The futility of one part of this discussion is shown by the fact that if different datum-lines are taken, different answers may come up. 1780-1830 favours the “pessimists”; 1800-1850 favours the “optimists”.

by the number of counties in order to reach a national average; whereas the population in the low wage-earning counties of the south was more numerous than that of the high wage-earning counties (where agricultural earnings were inflated by the proximity of industry) so that Hammond was able to show that the "national average" concealed the fact that 60% of the labouring population was in counties where wages were below the "average" figure. The second part of his reply consisted in a switch to discussions of value (happiness) in his most cloudy and unsatisfactory manner. The first part of this reply Clapham, in his Preface to his second edition (1930), accepted; the second part he met with dry caution ("a curve in words", "higher matters") but nevertheless acknowledged: "I agree most profoundly . . . that statistics of material well-being can never measure a people's happiness." Moreover, he asserted that when he had criticised the view that "everything was getting worse"—"I did not mean that everything was getting better. I only meant that recent historians have too often . . . stressed the worsenings and slurred over or ignored the betterings." The Hammonds, for their part, in a late revision of *The Bleak Age* (1947 edition), made their own peace: "statisticians tell us that . . . they are satisfied that earnings increased and that most men and women were less poor when this discontent was loud and active than they were when the eighteenth century was beginning to grow old in a silence like that of autumn. The evidence, of course, is scanty, and its interpretation not too simple, but this general view is probably more or less correct." The explanation for discontent "must be sought outside the sphere of strictly economic conditions".

So far, so good. The most fertile—but loose—social historians of the period had encountered the astringent criticism of a notable empiricist; and in the result both sides had given ground. And, despite the heat which has subsequently been generated, the actual divergence between the hard economic conclusions of the protagonists is slight. If no serious scholar is now willing to argue that everything was getting worse, no serious scholar will argue that everything was getting better. Both Dr. Hobsbawm (a "pessimist") and Professor Ashton (an "optimist") agree that real wages declined during the Napoleonic Wars and in their immediate aftermath. Dr. Hobsbawm will not vouch for any marked general rise in the

standard-of-living until the mid-1840s; whereas Professor Ashton notes a "more genial" economic climate after 1821—a "marked upward movement broken only by the slumps of 1825-6 and 1831"; and in view of increasing imports of tea, coffee, sugar, etc., "it is difficult to believe that the workers had no share in the gain". On the other hand his own table of prices in the Oldham and Manchester districts show that "in 1831 the standard diet of the poor can hardly have cost much less than in 1791", while he offers no corresponding wage-tables. His conclusion is to suggest two main groups within the working class—"a large class raised well above the level of mere subsistence" and "masses of unskilled or poorly skilled workers—seasonally employed agricultural workers and handloom weavers in particular—whose incomes were almost wholly absorbed in paying for the bare necessities of life". "My *guess* would be that the number of those who were able to share in the benefits of economic progress was larger than the number of those who were shut out from these benefits and that it was steadily growing."¹

In fact, so far as the period 1790-1830 goes, there is very little in it. The condition of the majority was bad in 1790: it remained bad in 1830 (and forty years is a long time) but there is some disagreement as to the size of the relative groups within the working class. And matters are little clearer in the next decade. There were undoubted increases in real wages among organised workers during the burst of trade union activity between 1832-4: but the period of good trade between 1833 and 1837 was accompanied by the smashing of the trade unions by the concerted efforts of Government, magistrates, and employers; while 1837-42 are depression years. So that it is indeed at "some unspecified date between the drafting of the People's Charter and the Great Exhibition" that the tide begins to turn; let us say, with the railway boom in 1843. Moreover, even in the mid-40s the plight of very large groups of workers remains desperate, while the railway crash led to the depression years of 1847-8. This does not look very much like a "success story"; in half a century of the fullest development of industrialism, the standard-of-living still remained—for very large but indeterminate groups—at the point of subsistence.

¹ My italics. T. S. Ashton, "The Standard of Life of the Workers in England, 1790-1830", in *Capitalism and the Historians* (ed. F. A. Hayek), pp. 127 ff.; E. J. Hobsbawm, "The British Standard of Living, 1790-1850", *Economic History Review*, X, August 1957.

This is not, however, the impression given in much contemporary writing. For, just as an earlier generation of historians who were also social reformers (Thorold Rogers, Arnold Toynbee, the Hammonds) allowed their sympathy with the poor to lead on occasions to a confusion of history with ideology, so we find that the sympathies of some economic historians today for the capitalist entrepreneur have led to a confusion of history and apologetics.¹ The point of transition was marked by the publication, in 1954, of a symposium on *Capitalism and the Historians*, edited by Professor F. A. Hayek, itself the work of a group of specialists "who for some years have been meeting regularly to discuss the problems of the preservation of a free society against the totalitarian threat". Since this group of international specialists regarded "a free society" as by definition a capitalist society, the effects of such an admixture of economic theory and special pleading were deplorable; and not least in the work of one of the contributors, Professor Ashton, whose cautious findings of 1949 are now transmuted—without further evidence—into the flat statement that "generally it is now agreed that for the majority the gain in real wages was substantial".² It is at this stage that the controversy degenerated into a muddle. And despite more recent attempts to rescue it for scholarship,³ in many respects it is as a muddle of assertion and special pleading that the controversy remains.

The controversy falls into two parts. There is, first, the very real difficulty of constructing wage-series, price-series, and statistical indices from the abundant but patchy evidence. We shall examine some of the difficulties in interpreting such evidence when we come to the artisans. But at this point a further series of difficulties begins, since the term "standard"

¹ Lest the reader should judge the historian too harshly, we may record Sir John Clapham's explanation as to the way in which this selective principle may order the evidence. "It is very easy to do this unawares. Thirty years ago I read and marked Arthur Young's *Travels in France*, and taught from the marked passages. Five years ago I went through it again, to find that whenever Young spoke of a wretched Frenchman I had marked him, but that many of his references to happy or prosperous Frenchmen remained unmarked." One suspects that for ten or fifteen years most economic historians have been busy marking up the happy and prosperous evidence in the text.

² T. S. Ashton, "The Treatment of Capitalism by Historians", in *Capitalism and the Historians*, p. 41. Professor Ashton's essay on "The Standard of Life of the Workers in England", reprinted in this volume, originally appeared in the *Journal of Economic History*, 1949.

³ The most constructive appraisal of the controversy is in A. J. Taylor's "Progress and Poverty in Britain, 1780-1850", *History*, February 1960.

leads us from data amenable to statistical measurement (wages or articles of consumption) to those satisfactions which are sometimes described by statisticians as "imponderables". From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work-discipline, education and play, intensity of labour, and so on. From standard-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and sometimes an evaluation) of qualities. Where statistical evidence is appropriate to the first, we must rely largely upon "literary evidence" as to the second. A major source of confusion arises from the drawing of conclusions as to one from evidence appropriate only to the other. It is at times as if statisticians have been arguing: "the indices reveal an increased *per capita* consumption of tea, sugar, meat and soap, *therefore* the working class was happier", while social historians have replied: "the literary sources show that people were unhappy, *therefore* their standard-of-living must have deteriorated".

This is to simplify. But simple points must be made. It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A *per capita* increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships, and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time. Next to the agricultural workers the largest single group of working people during the whole period of the Industrial Revolution were the domestic servants. Very many of them were household servants, living in with the employing family, sharing cramped quarters, working excessive hours, for a few shillings' reward. Nevertheless, we may confidently list them among the more favoured groups whose standards (or consumption of food and dress) improved on average slightly during the Industrial Revolution. But the hand-loom weaver and his wife, on the edge of starvation, still regarded their status as being superior to that of a "flunkey". Or again, we might cite those trades, such as coal-mining, in which real wages advanced between 1790 and 1840, but at the cost of longer hours and a greater intensity of labour, so that the breadwinner was "worn out" before the age of forty. In statistical terms, this reveals an upward curve. To the families concerned it might feel like immiseration.

of labourers had been rising in the decades before 1790, especially in areas contiguous to manufacturing or mining districts. "There wants a war to reduce wages," was the cry of some northern gentry in the 1790s.¹ And the reflexes, of panic and class antagonism, inflamed in the aristocracy by the French Revolution were such as to remove inhibitions and to aggravate the exploitive relationship between masters and servants. The Wars saw not only the suppression of the urban reformers but also the eclipse of the humane gentry of whom Wyvill is representative. To the argument of greed a new argument was added for general enclosure—that of social discipline. The commons, "the poor man's heritage for ages past", on which Thomas Bewick could recall independent labourers still dwelling, who had built their cottages with their own hands,² were now seen as a dangerous centre of indiscipline. Arthur Young saw them as a breeding-ground for "barbarians", "nursing up a mischievous race of people"; of the Lincolnshire Fens, "so wild a country nurses up a race of people as wild as the fen".³

Ideology was added to self-interest. It became a matter of public-spirited policy for the gentleman to remove cottagers from the commons, reduce his labourers to dependence, pare away at supplementary earnings, drive out the smallholder. At a time when Wordsworth was extolling the virtues of old Michael and his wife, in their struggle to maintain their "patrimonial fields", the very much more influential *Commercial and Agricultural Magazine* regarded the "yeoman" in a different light:

A wicked, cross-grained, petty farmer is like the sow in his yard, almost an insulated individual, who has no communication with, and therefore, no reverence for the opinion of the world.

As for the rights of the cottager in enclosure, "it may seem needless to notice his claims":

But the interest of the other claimants is ultimately concerned in permitting the labouring man to acquire a certain portion of land . . . for by this indulgence the poor-rates must be speedily diminished; since a quarter of an acre of garden-ground will go a great way towards rendering the peasant independent of any assistance.

¹ R. Brown, *General View of the Agriculture of the West Riding* (1799), Appendix, p. 13.

² Bewick, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 ff.

³ A. Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Lincolnshire* (1799), pp. 223, 225, 437.

High rents or falling prices: war debt and currency crises: taxes on malt, on windows, on horses: Game Laws, with their paraphernalia of gamekeepers, spring-guns, mantraps and (after 1816) sentences of transportation: all served, directly or indirectly, to tighten the screw upon the labourer. "The Jacobins did not do these things," exclaimed Cobbett:

And will the Government pretend that "Providence" did it? . . . Poh! These things are the price of efforts to crush freedom in France, *lest the example of France should produce a reform in England*. These things are the price of that undertaking. . . .¹

Nor could the labourer expect to find a protector in the "average" parson—who, to Cobbett, was an absentee pluralist, entertaining his family at Bath while an underpaid curate attended services:

If you talk to them [the parsons], they will never acknowledge that there is any misery in the country; because they well know how large a share they have had in the cause of it. They were always haughty and insolent; but the anti-jacobin times made them ten thousand more so than ever. . . . These were the glorious times for them. They urged on the war: they were the loudest of all the trumpeters. They saw their tithes in danger. . . .²

For nearly four decades, there is a sense of the erosion of traditional sanctions and of a countryside governed with counter-revolutionary licence. "In regard to the *poor-rates*," one Bedfordshire "feelosofer" (Dr. Macqueen) wrote to the Board of Agriculture in 1816, "I always view these as coupled with the idleness and depravity of the working classes":

The morals as well as the manners of the lower orders of the community have been degenerating since the earliest ages of the French Revolution. The doctrine of equality and the rights of man is not yet forgotten, but fondly cherished and reluctantly abandoned. They consider their respective parishes as their right and inheritance, in which they are entitled to resort. . . .³

One recalls with difficulty that England belonged to the labourers as well.

In the southern and eastern parishes the long war of attrition centred on the right of poor-relief. After the commons were lost, it was the last—the only—right the labourer had. The young and the single—or the village craftsmen—might venture

¹ *Rural Rides*, (Everyman edn.), I. p. 174.

² *Ibid.*, II, p. 96.

³ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (1816), p. 25.

behind Mr. Twist's and Mr. Grab's and Mr. Screw's . . . were all open fields, and children used to be there at eight, nine, ten, eleven, aye, and twelve years of age, idling their time at play, at cricket, at trap, and marbles, and ball . . . and leap-frog. . . ." Then came the time "when rich folk frightened poor folk out of their sense with 'He's a coming' and 'They're a coming.'" "Who are 'they', Robin?"

Why, Boney and the French, to be sure. Well, that time when rich folk frightened poor folk and stole all the land. This was all common, then, Mr Smith . . . All reet and left, up away to bastile and barracks was all common. And all folk in Devil's Dust would have a cow, or donkey, or horse on common, and they'd play cricket, and have running matches, and wrestling. . . .

. . . They built barrack at one end and church at 'tother . . . and, at last, almost all folk had to sell cow, to pay Lawyer Grind, and Lawyer Squeeze . . . and now the son of one of 'em is mayor, and t'other . . . is manager of bank. Aye, dearee me, many's the honest man was hung and transported over ould common.¹

It is an historical irony that it was not the rural labourers but the urban workers who mounted the greatest coherent national agitation for the return of the land. Some of them were sons and grandsons of labourers, their wits sharpened by the political life of the towns, freed from the shadow of the squire. Some—the supporters of the Land Plan—were weavers and artisans of rural descent: "faither, and grandfaither and all folk belonging to I worked on land and it didn't kill them, and why should it kill me?"² Faced with hard times and unemployment in the brick wastes of the growing towns, the memories of lost rights rose up with a new bitterness of deprivation.

We have strayed far from averages. And that was our intention. For we cannot make an average of well-being. We have seen something of the other side of the world of Jane Austen's novels; and for those who lived on that side the period *felt* catastrophic enough. "When farmers became *gentlemen*," Cobbett wrote, "their labourers become *slaves*." If it is possible to argue that there was gain at the end of the process, we must remember that the gain came to other people. In comparing a Suffolk labourer with his grand-daughter in a cotton-mill we are comparing—not two standards—but two ways of life.

¹ F. O'Connor, *The Employer and the Employed* (1844), pp. 15, 41-2, 56.

² *The Labourer* (1847), p. 46.

There are, however, two relevant points which may be made about these averages. The first is that it is possible, given the same figures, to show both a relative decline and an absolute increase in poverty. Agriculture is an inelastic industry in its demand for labour: if ten labourers were required for a given farm in 1790, there might be ten—or, with improved ploughs and threshing machines—eight in 1830. We might show that the labourer or carter in regular employment increased his real wages over this period; while the increase in population in the village—casual labour and unemployed—led to an absolute increase in the number of the poor. And while this might be most evident in agriculture, the same hypothesis must be borne in mind when discussing the overall national picture. If, for the sake of argument, we take the hypothesis that 40% of the population (10.5 millions) was living below a given “poverty-line” in 1790, but only 30% of the population (18.1 millions) in 1841, nevertheless the absolute number of the poor will have increased from about four millions to well over five millions. More poverty will be “felt” and, moreover, there will in fact be more poor people.

This is not juggling with figures. It is possible that something of this sort took place. But at the same time no such assessment of averages can tell us about “average” human relationships. To judge these, we are forced to pick our way as we can through conflicting subjective evidence. And a judgement on this period must surely take in some impression of the “average” English gentleman. We need not accept Cobbett’s invective—“the most cruel, the most unfeeling, the most brutally insolent” of all God’s creatures. But we surely need not fall back into some of the queerer notions which have recently made a re-appearance: “The English country gentlemen were indeed perhaps the most remarkable class of men that any society has ever produced anywhere in the world”.¹ In the place of this we may offer a Norfolk labourer’s opinion, in an anonymous letter to “the Gentlemen of Ashill”—“You have by this time brought us under the heaviest burden & into the hardest Yoke we ever knowed”:

It is too hard for us to bear, you have often times blinded us saying that the fault was all in the Place-men of Parliament, but . . . they have nothing to do with the regulation of this parish.

You do as you like, you rob the poor of their Commons right,

¹ R. J. White, *Waterloo to Peterloo* (1957), pp. 40-1.

plough the grass up that God send to grow, that a poor man may feed a Cow, Pig, Horse, nor Ass; lay muck and stones on the road to prevent the grass growing. . . . There is 5 or 6 of you have gotten all the whole of the Land in this parish in your own hands & you would wish to be rich and starve all the other part of the poor . . .

“We have counted up that we have gotten about 60 of us to 1 of you: therefore should you govern, so many to 1?”¹

But it was for the tithe-consuming clergy that the especial hatred of the rural community was reserved. “Prepare your wicked Soul for Death,” an Essex vicar was threatened in 1830, in a letter which enclosed two matches: “You & your whole Crew are biggest Paupers in the parish . . .” The Rector of Freshwater (Isle of Wight) received an even more explicit intimation from one of his parishioners, in the form of some mild arson, with an accompanying letter. “For the last 20 years wee have been in a Starving Condition to maintain your Dam Pride”:

What we have done now is Soar against our Will but your harts is so hard as the hart of Pharo . . . So now as for this fire you must not take it as a front [an affront], for if you hadent been Deserving it wee should not have dont [done it]. As for you my Ould frend you dident hapen to be hear, if that you had been rosted I fear, and if it had a been so how the farmers would lagh to see the ould Pasen [Parson] rosted at last . . .

“As for this litel fire,” the writer concluded, with equable ill-humour, “Don’t be alarmed it will be a damd deal wors when we Burn down your barn . . .”²

¹ Enclosure in Rev. Edwards to Sidmouth, 22 May 1816, H.O. 42.150.

² Enclosures in Rev. W. M. Hurlock, 14 December 1830, and the Very Rev. Dean Wood, 29 November 1830, in H.O. 52.7.

trimmers are considered too good to be despised; a foreman of painters they may treat with respect, but working painters can at most be favoured with a nod.¹

These conditions were supported by the activities of a "Benevolent Society of Coachmakers"; and they survived the conviction under the Combination Acts of the General Secretary and twenty other members of the society in 1819. But it is important, at this stage, to note this early use of the term "aristocracy", with reference to the skilled artisan.² It is sometimes supposed that the phenomenon of a "labour aristocracy" was coincident with the skilled trade unionism of the 1850s and 1860s—or was even the consequence of imperialism. But in fact there is both an old and a new élite of labour to be found in the years 1800-50. The old élite was made up of master-artisans who considered themselves as "good" as masters, shopkeepers, or professional men.³ (The *Book of English Trades* lists the apothecary, attorney, optician and statutory alongside the carpenter, currier, tailor and potter.) In some industries, the craftsman's privileged position survived into workshop or factory production, through the force of custom, or combination and apprenticeship restriction, or because the craft remained highly skilled and specialised—fine and "fancy" work in the luxury branches of the glass, wood and metal trades. The new élite arose with new skills in the iron, engineering and manufacturing industries. This is plain enough in engineering; but even in the cotton industry we must remember the warning, "we are not cotton-spinners all". Overlookers, skilled "tenters" of various kinds who adjusted and repaired the machines, pattern-drawers in calico-printing, and scores of other skilled subsidiary crafts, at which exceptional wages might be earned, were among the 1,225 sub-divisions of heads of employment in cotton manufacture enumerated in the 1841 Census.

If a specially favoured aristocracy was to be found in the London luxury trades and on the border-line between skills and technical or managerial functions in the great manufacturing industries, there was also a lesser aristocracy of artisans or

¹ W. B. Adams, *English Pleasure Carriages* (1837), cited in E. Hobsbawm, "Custom, Wages and Work-load in Nineteenth Century Industry", in *Essays in Labour History*, ed. A. Briggs and J. Saville, p. 116.

² Another early use is in the *First Report of the Constabulary Commissioners* (1839), p. 134, in a context which suggests that the term was widespread at the time.

³ For the 18th-century "aristocracy", see M. D. George, *op. cit.*, Ch. IV.

Here, in the Black Country, the process of specialisation in the first three decades of the 19th century tended to take the simpler processes, such as nail and chain-making, to the surrounding villages of outworkers, while the more highly skilled operations remained in the metropolis of Birmingham itself.¹ In such artisan trades the gulf between the small master and the skilled journeyman might, in psychological and sometimes in economic terms, be less than that between the journeyman and the common urban labourer. Entry to a whole trade might be limited to the sons of those already working in it, or might be bought only by a high apprenticeship premium. Restriction upon entry into the trade might be supported by corporate regulations (such as those of the Cutler's Company of Sheffield, not repealed until 1814), encouraged by masters, and maintained by trade unions under the aliases of friendly societies. Among such artisans at the commencement of the 19th century (the Webbs suggested) "we have industrial society still divided vertically trade by trade, instead of horizontally between employers and wage-earners".² Equally, it might be that a privileged section only of the workers in a particular industry succeeded in restricting entry or in elevating their conditions. Thus, a recent study of the London porters has shown the fascinating intricacy of the history of a section of workers—including the Billingsgate porters—who might easily be supposed to be casual labourers but who in fact came under the particular surveillance of the City authorities, and who maintained a privileged position within the ocean of unskilled labour until the middle of the 19th century.³ More commonly, the distinction was between the skilled or apprenticed man and his labourer: the blacksmith and his striker, the bricklayer and his labourer, the calico pattern-drawer and his assistants, and so on.

The distinction between the artisan and the labourer—in terms of status, organisation, and economic reward—remained as great, if not greater, in Henry Mayhew's London of the late 1840s and 1850s as it was during the Napoleonic Wars. "In passing from the skilled operative of the west-end to the unskilled workman of the eastern quarter of London," Mayhew

¹ See S. Timmins (Ed.), *Birmingham and the Midland Hardware District* (1866), pp. 110 *et passim*; H. D. Fong, *Triumph of Factory System in England* (Tientsin, 1930), pp. 165-9.

² S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (1950 edn.), pp. 45-6.

³ W. M. Stern, *The Porters of London* (1960).

commented, "the moral and intellectual change is so great, that it seems as if we were in a new land, and among another race":

The artisans are almost to a man red-hot politicians. They are sufficiently educated and thoughtful to have a sense of their importance in the State. . . . The unskilled labourers are a different class of people. As yet they are as unpolitical as footmen, and instead of entertaining violent democratic opinions, they appear to have no political opinions whatever; or, if they do . . . they rather lead towards the maintenance of "things as they are", than towards the ascendancy of the working people.¹

In the south, it was among the artisans that the membership of friendly societies was largest² and trade union organisation was most continuous and stable, that educational and religious movements flourished, and that Owenism struck deepest root. It was, again, among the artisans that the custom of "tramping" in search of work was so widespread that it has been described by one historian as "the artisan's equivalent of the Grand Tour".³ We shall see how their self-esteem and their desire for independence, coloured the political radicalism of the post-war years. And, if stripped of his craft and of his trade union defences, the artisan was one of the most pitiful figures in Mayhew's London. "The destitute mechanics," Mayhew was told by the Master of the Wandsworth and Clapham Union, "are entirely a different class from the regular vagrants." Their lodging-houses and "houses of call" were different from those of the tramps and the fraternity of "travellers"; they would turn to the workhouse only in final despair: "Occasionally they have sold the shirt and waistcoat off their backs before they applied for admittance. . . ." "The poor mechanic will sit in the casual ward like a lost man, scared. . . . When he's beat out he's like a bird out of a cage; he doesn't know where to go, or how to get a bit."⁴

The London artisan was rarely beaten down so low—there were many half-way stages before the workhouse door was reached. His history varies greatly from trade to trade. And if

¹ H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1884), III, p. 243. Against this should be set the statement of one of Mayhew's scavengers: "I cares nothing about politics neither; but I'm a chartist."

² On the social composition of friendly societies, see P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England* (Manchester, 1961), pp. 71 ff.

³ E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Tramping Artisan", in *Econ. Hist. Review*, Series 2, III (1950-1), p. 313.

⁴ Mayhew, *op. cit.*, I, p. 351.

forget that the old skill and the new almost always were the prerequisite of different people. Manufacturers in the first half of the 19th century pressed forward each innovation which enabled them to dispense with adult male craftsmen and to replace them with women or juvenile labour. Even where an old skill was replaced by a new process requiring equal or greater skill, we rarely find the same workers transferred from one to the other, or from domestic to factory production. Insecurity, and hostility in the face of machinery and innovation, was not the consequence of mere prejudice and (as authorities then implied) of insufficient knowledge of "political economy". The cropper or woolcomber knew well enough that, while the new machinery might offer skilled employment for his son, or for someone else's son, it would offer none for him. The rewards of the "march of progress" always seemed to be gathered by someone else.

We shall see this more clearly when we examine Luddism. But even so, we are only at the fringe of the problem; for these particular insecurities were only a facet of the *general* insecurity of all skills during this period. It is surprising that the standard-of-living controversy, which has now occupied a generation of economic historians, should have thrown so little light upon the whole question of casual labour, depressed industries and unemployment. As Dr. Hobsbawm—the only recent writer to attempt an assessment of the problem—has noted, Sir John Clapham did not even discuss unemployment during the Industrial Revolution in his *Economic History*. It is true that "hard" economic data are scarcely available. There are some sketchy returns of the numbers of paupers relieved in different years, or parts of years;¹ but the figures are quite unreliable, and while they may be supplemented with other data—vagrancy passes on roads, friendly society records, known unemployment in particular industries or towns in depression years—they are still misleading. First, because parish relief or the hated workhouse (after 1834) was the last resort of despair; second, because the very notion of regularity of employment—at one place of work over a number of years for regular hours and at

¹ In the *10th Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1844), p. 285 there are figures which show 1,040,716 paupers relieved in 1803, 1,426,065 in 1813, 1,319,851 in 1815; then a period of "no returns" until 1839. With the new Poor Law in full operation, returns were made of the number of paupers relieved in one quarter of each year from 1840 to 1848: these show a steep gradient throughout the un-hungry forties, from 1,119,529 (1840) to 1,876,541 (1848), with a slight recovery between 1844 and 1846.

a standard wage—is an anachronistic notion, imposed by 20th-century experience upon 19th-century realities. We have seen that the problem in agriculture was that of chronic semi-employment. This was also the problem in most industries, and in urban experience generally. The skilled and apprenticed man, who owned his own tools and worked for a lifetime in one trade, was in a minority. It is notorious that in the early stages of industrialisation, the growing towns attract uprooted and migrant labour of all types; this is still the experience of Africa and Asia today. Even the settled workers pass rapidly through a succession of employments. Wage-series derived from the rates paid in skilled trades do not give us the awkward, unstatistical reality of the cycle of unemployment and casual labour which comes through in the reminiscences of a Yorkshire Chartist, recalling his boyhood and youth from the late 1820s to the 1840s.

Tom Brown's Schooldays would have had no charm for me, as I had never been to a day school in my life; when very young I had to begin working, and was pulled out of bed between 4 and 5 o'clock . . . in summer time to go with a donkey $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away, and then take part in milking a number of cows; and in the evening had again to go with milk and it would be 8 o'clock before I had done. I went to a card shop afterwards and there had to set 1500 card teeth for a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. From 1842 to 1848 I should not average 9/- per week wages; outdoor and labour was bad to get then and wages were very low. I have been a woollen weaver, a comber, a navvy on the railway, and a barer in the delph that I claim to know some little of the state of the working classes.¹

There is some evidence to suggest that the problem was becoming worse throughout the 1820s and 1830s and into the 1840s. That is, while wages were moving slowly but favourably in relation to the cost-of-living, the proportion of workers chronically under-employed was moving unfavourably in relation to those in full work. Henry Mayhew, who devoted a section of his great study of the London poor to the problem of casual labour, understood that this was the crux of the problem:

In almost all occupations there is . . . a *superfluity of labourers*, and this alone would tend to render the employment of a vast number of the hands of a casual rather than a regular character. In the generality of trades the calculation is that one-third of the hands are

¹ B. Wilson, *The Struggles of an Old Chartist* (Halifax, 1887), p. 13. A "barer in the delph" was a quarryman.

fully employed, one-third partially, and one-third unemployed throughout the year.¹

Mayhew was incomparably the greatest social investigator in the mid-century. Observant, ironic, detached yet compassionate, he had an eye for all the awkward particularities which escape statistical measurement. In a fact-finding age, he looked for the facts which the enumerators forgot: he wrote consciously against the grain of the orthodoxies of his day, discovering his own outrageous "laws" of political economy—"under-pay makes over-work" and "over-work makes under-pay". He knew that when an easterly wind closed the Thames, 20,000 dock-side workers were at once unemployed. He knew the seasonal fluctuations of the timber trade, or of the bonnet-makers and pastry-cooks. He bothered to find out for how many hours and how many months in the year scavengers or rubbish-carters were actually employed. He held meetings of the workmen in the trades investigated, and took down their life-histories. If (as Professor Ashton has implied) the standard-of-living controversy really depends on a "guess" as to which group was increasing most—those "who were able to share in the benefits of economic progress" and "those who were shut out"—then Mayhew's guess is worth our attention.

Mayhew's guess is given in this form:

. . . estimating the working classes as being between four and five million in number, I think we may safely assert—considering how many depend for their employment on particular times, seasons, fashions, and accidents, and the vast quantity of over-work and scamp-work in nearly all the cheap trades . . . the number of women and children who are being continually drafted into the different handicrafts with the view of reducing the earnings of the men, the displacement of human labour in some cases by machinery . . . all these things being considered I say I believe that we may safely conclude that . . . there is barely sufficient work for the regular employment of half of our labourers, so that only 1,500,000 are fully and constantly employed, while 1,500,000 more are employed only half their time, and the remaining 1,500,000 wholly unemployed, obtaining a day's work *occasionally* by the displacement of some of the others.²

¹ Mayhew, *op. cit.*, II, p. 338. The parts of Mayhew's work upon which I have drawn most extensively in the next few pages include his account of the tailors and boot-and-shoemakers in the *Morning Chronicle*, 1849, and *London Labour and the London Poor*, II, pp. 335-82, III, pp. 231 ff.

² Mayhew, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 364-5. Cf. *Mechanics Magazine*, 6 September 1823: "It is obvious that the reason why there is no work for one half of our people is, that the other half work twice as much as they ought."

spirits, and weakened by undernourishment and ill-health. Possessions gained in the "golden age" had passed out of the weaving households. A Bolton witness declared:

Since I can recollect, almost every weaver that I knew had a chest of drawers in his house, and a clock and chairs, and bedsteads and candlesticks, and even pictures, articles of luxury; and now I find that those have disappeared; they have either gone into the houses of mechanics, or into houses of persons of higher class.

The same witness, a manufacturer, could not "recollect an instance but one, where any weaver of mine has bought a new jacket for many years". A coarse coverlid, of the value of 2s. 6d. when new, often did service for blankets: "I have seen many houses with only two or three three-legged stools, and some I have seen without a stool or chair, with only a tea chest to put their clothes in, and to sit upon."

There is unanimity as to the diet of the poor weaver and his family: oatmeal, oatcake, potatoes, onion porridge, blue milk, treacle or home-brewed ale, and as luxuries tea, coffee, bacon. "They do not know what it is, many of them," declared Richard Oastler, "to taste flesh meat from year's end to year's end . . . and their children will sometimes run to Huddersfield, and beg, and bring a piece in, and it is quite a luxury. . . ." If confirmation was needed, it was brought by the careful investigations of the Assistant Commissioners who toured the country after the appointment of the Royal Commission in 1838. The very worst conditions, perhaps, were those found in the cellar dwellings of the big towns—Leeds and Manchester—where Irish unemployed attempted to earn a few shillings by the loom.

But it is easy to assume that the country weavers in the solid, stonebuilt cottages, with the long mullioned windows of the loom-shops, in the beautiful Pennine uplands—in the upper Calder Valley or upper Wharfedale, Saddleworth or Clitheroe—enjoyed amenities which compensated for their poverty. A surgeon who investigated a typhus epidemic in a hamlet near Heptonstall (a thriving little woollen township during the Civil War) has left a terrible picture of the death of one such community. Situated high on the moors, nevertheless the water-supplies were polluted: one open stream, polluted by a slaughter-house, was in summer "a nursery of loathsome animal life". The sewer passed directly under the flags of one of the weaver's cottages. The houses were wet and cold, the ground floors beneath the surface of the earth: "It may be

which their members greatly preferred to the higher material standards of the factory town. The son of a weaver from the Heptonstall district, who was a child in the 1820s, recalled that the weavers "had their good times". "The atmosphere was not fouled by . . . the smoke of the factory."

There was no bell to ring them up at four or five o'clock . . . there was freedom to start and to stay away as they cared. . . . In the evenings, while still at work, at anniversary times of the Sunday schools, the young men and women would most heartily join in the hymn singing, while the musical rhythm of the shuttles would keep time. . . .

Some weavers had fruit, vegetables, and flowers from their gardens. "My work was at the loom side, and when not winding my father taught me reading, writing, and arithmetic." A Keighley factory child, who left the mill for a handloom at the age of eighteen, informed Sadler's Committee (1832) that he preferred the loom to the mill "a great deal": "I have more relaxation; I can look about me, and go out and refresh myself a little." It was the custom in Bradford for the weavers to gather in their dinner break at noon:

. . . and have a chat with other weavers and combers on the news or gossip of the time. Some of these parties would spend an hour talking about pig-feeding, hen-raising, and bird-catching, and now and then would have very hot disputes about free grace, or whether infant baptism or adult immersion was the correct and scriptural mode of doing the thing. I have many a time seen a number of men ready to fight one another on this . . . topic.¹

A unique blend of social conservatism, local pride, and cultural attainment made up the way of life of the Yorkshire or Lancashire weaving community. In one sense these communities were certainly "backward"—they clung with equal tenacity to their dialect traditions and regional customs and to gross medical ignorance and superstitions. But the closer we look at their way of life, the more inadequate simple notions of economic progress and "backwardness" appear. Moreover, there was certainly a leaven amongst the northern weavers of self-educated and articulate men of considerable attainments. Every weaving district had its weaver-poets, biologists, mathematicians, musicians, geologists, botanists: the old weaver in *Mary Barton* is certainly drawn

¹J. Greenwood, "Reminiscences", *Todmorden Advertiser*, 10 September 1909; J. Hartley, "Memorabilia", *Todmorden and District News*, 1903; W. Scruton, op. cit., p. 92.

Eawr Marget declares, if hoo'd clooas to put on,
 Hoo'd go up to Lunnon to see the great mon;
 Un' if things didno' awter, when theree hoo had been,
 Hoo says hoo'd begin, un' feight blood up to th' e'en,
 Hoo's nout agen th' king, bur hoo loikes a fair thing,
 Un' hoo says hoo con tell when hoo's hurt.¹

The other kind of weaver-poet was the auto-didact. A remarkable example was Samuel Law, a Todmorden weaver, who published a poem in 1772 modelled on Thomson's *Seasons*. The poem has few literary merits, but reveals a knowledge of Virgil, Ovid and Homer (in the original), of biology and astronomy:

Yes, the day long, and in each evening gloom,
 I meditated in the sounding loom . . .
 Meanwhile, I wove the flow'ry waved web,
 With fingers colder than the icy glebe;
 And oftentimes, thro' the whole frame of man,
 Bleak chilling horrors, and a sickness ran.²

Later weaver-poets often convey little more than pathos, the self-conscious efforts to emulate alien literary forms (notably "nature poetry") which catch little of the weaver's authentic experience. A handloom weaver from 1820 to 1850, who then obtained work in a power-loom factory, lamented the effect of the change upon his verses:

I then worked in a small chamber, overlooking Luddenden Churchyard. I used to go out in the fields and woods . . . at meal-times, and listen to the songs of the summer birds, or watch the trembling waters of the Luddon. . . . Sometimes I have been roused from those reveries by some forsaken lovesick maiden, who . . . has poured forth her heartwailing to the thankless wind. I have then gone home and have written. . . . But it is all over; I must continue to work amidst the clatter of machinery.

It is sad that years of self-education should result only in a patina of cliché. But it was the attainment itself which brought genuine satisfactions; as a young man in the late 1820s his observation of nature appears far more soundly-based than his observation of lovesick maidens:

I collected insects, in company with a number of young men in the village. We formed a library. . . . I believe I and a companion of

¹ J. Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire* (1865), pp. 223-7.

² *A Domestic Winter-piece*. . . . By Samuel Law, of Barewise, near Todmorden, Lancashire weaver (Leeds, 1772).

... I find that from the very commencement of the manufacture of muslins at Bolton, the trade of weaving has been subject to arbitrary reductions, commencing at a very high rate. One would suppose that the reward of labour would find its proper level; but from the very commencement of it, it has been in the power of any one manufacturer to set an example of reducing wages; and I know it as a fact, that when they could not obtain a price for the goods, such as they thought they ought to get, they immediately fell to reducing the weavers' wages.

But at the same time, in Bolton in 1834—a good year—"there are no weavers out of employment; there is no danger of any being out of employment at this time".¹

The breakdown of custom and of trade unionism was directly influenced by State intervention. This was "inevitable" only if we assume the governing ideology and the counter-revolutionary tone of these years. The weavers and their supporters opposed to this ideology a contrary analysis and contrary policies, which turned on the demand for a regulated minimum wage, enforced by trade boards of manufacturers and weavers. They offered a direct negative to the homilies of "supply-and-demand". When asked whether wages ought not to be left to find their own "level", a Manchester silk-weaver replied that there was no similarity between "what is called capital and labour":

Capital, I can make out to be nothing else but an accumulation of the products of labour. . . . Labour is always carried to market by those who have nothing else to keep or to sell, and who, therefore, must part with it immediately. . . . The labour which I . . . might perform this week, if I, in imitation of the capitalist, refuse to part with it . . . because an inadequate price is offered me for it, can I bottle it? can I lay it up in salt? . . . These two distinctions between the nature of labour and capital, (viz. that labour is always sold by the poor, and always bought by the rich, and that labour cannot by any possibility be stored, but must be every instant sold or every instant lost,) are sufficient to convince me that labour and capital can never with justice be subjected to the same laws. . . .²

The weavers saw clearly, Richard Oastler testified, that "*capital and property are protected and their labour is left to chance*". Oastler's evidence before the Select Committee, when he was heckled by one of the partisans of "political economy", dramatises the alternative views of social responsibility:

¹ S.C. on Hand-Loom Weavers' Petitions, 1834, p. 381 (4901), p. 408 (5217).

² Ibid., 1835, p. 188 (2686).

[Oastler]. The time of labour ought to be shortened, and . . . Government ought to establish a board . . . chosen by the masters and the men . . . to settle the question of how wages shall be regulated. . . .

Q. You would put an end to the freedom of labour?

A. I would put an end to the freedom of murder, and to the freedom of employing labourers beyond their strength; I would put an end to any thing which prevents the poor man getting a good living with fair and reasonable work: and I would put an end to this, because it was destructive of human life.

Q. Would it have the effect you wished for?

A. I am sure the present effect of free labour is poverty, distress and death . . .

Q. Suppose you were to raise the price very considerably, and . . . could not export your goods?

A. We can use them at home.

Q. You would not use so much, would you?

A. Three times as much, and a great deal more than that, because the labourers would be better paid, and they would consume them. The capitalists do not use the goods, and there is the great mistake . . . If the wages were higher, the labourer would be enabled to clothe himself . . . and to feed himself . . . and those labourers are the persons who are after all the great consumers of agricultural and manufacturing produce, and not the capitalist, because a great capitalist, however wealthy he is, wears only one coat at once, at least, he certainly does seldom wear two coats at once; but 1,000 labourers, being enabled to buy a thousand coats, where they cannot now get one, would most certainly increase the trade. . . .

As to the commission-houses or "slaughter-houses", Oastler favoured direct legislative interference:

You never make a Law of this House but it interferes with liberty; you make laws to prevent people from stealing, that is an interference with a man's liberty; and you make laws to prevent men from murdering, that is an interference with a man's liberty . . . I should say that these slaughter-house men shall not do so. . . .

The capitalists "seem as if they were a privileged order of being, but I never knew why they were so".¹

"There is the great mistake"—weavers, who wove cloth when they themselves were in rags, were forcibly educated in the vitiating error of the orthodox political economy. It was before the competition of power—and while their numbers

¹ *S.C. on Hand-Loom Weavers' Petitions*, 1834, pp. 283-8.

All this "handling and channelling" had at least two effects: it transformed the weavers into confirmed "physical force" Chartists, and in cotton alone there were 100,000 fewer weavers in 1840 than in 1830. No doubt Fielden's Bill would have been only partially effective, would have afforded only slight relief in the 1830s as power-loom competition increased, and might have pushed the bulge of semi-unemployment into some other industry. But we must be scrupulous about words: "slight relief" in the 1830s might have been the difference between death and survival. "I think there has been already too long delay," Oastler told the Select Committee of 1834: "I believe that delay that has been occasioned in this question has sent many hundreds of British operatives to their graves." Of the 100,000 weavers lost to Lancashire in that decade, it is probable that only a minority found other occupations: a part of the majority died in their natural term while the other part just "died off" prematurely.¹ (Some would have been supported by their children who had entered the mills.) But it was in 1834 that the Legislature which found itself unable to offer them any measure of relief struck directly and actively at their conditions with the Poor Law Amendment Bill. Out-relief—the stand-by of many communities, sometimes on a "Speenhamland" scale—was (at least in theory) replaced by the "Bastilles" from the late 1830s. The effect was truly catastrophic. If Professor Smelser will examine the "dominant value-system" of the weavers he will find that *all* poor relief was disliked but to the Malthusian workhouse the values of independence and of marriage offered an absolute taboo. The new Poor Law not only denied the weaver and his family relief, and *kept* him in his trade to the final end, but it actually drove others—like some of the poor Irish—into the trade. "I cannot contemplate this state of things with any degree of patience," a Bolton muslin-weaver told the Committee of 1834:

I am in a certain situation; I am now at this moment within a twelvemonth of 60 years of age, and I calculate that within the space of eight years I shall myself become a pauper. I am not capable, by my most strenuous exertions, to gain ground to the amount of a shilling; and when I am in health it requires all my exertions to keep

¹ See the diary of W. Varley, a weaver, in W. Bennett, *History of Burnley* (Burnley, 1948), III, pp. 379-89; e.g. (February, 1827) "sickness and disease prevails very much, and well it may, the clamming and starving and hard working which the poor are now undergoing . . . The pox and measles takes off the children by two or three a house."

soul and body together. . . . I speak feelingly upon the subject as a man in these circumstances; I view the present Poor Law Amendment Bill as a system of coercion upon the poor man, and that very shortly I shall be under its dreadful operation. I have not merited these things. I am a loyal man, strongly attached to the institutions of my country, and a lover of my country. "England, with all thy faults, I love thee still", is the language of my soul. . . .¹

It was in such weaving districts as Ashton (where the Chartist parson, Joseph Rayner Stevens, made insurrectionary speeches), Todmorden (where Fielden flatly defied the law), Huddersfield and Bradford that resistance to the Poor Law was violent, protracted, and intense.

But when the second phase of the weavers' decline—full competition with the power-loom—was entered, what remedies were there? "What enactment," Clapham wrote, "other than state pensions for weavers, the prohibition of the power-loom, or the prohibition of training in hand-loom weaving, would have been of the least use it is hard to see."² These were not among the weavers' own demands, although they protested against:

. . . the unrestricted use (or rather abuse) of improved and continually improved machinery. . . .

. . . the neglect of providing for the employment and maintenance of the Irish poor, who are compelled to crowd the English labour market for a piece of bread.

. . . The adaptation of machines, in every improvement, to *children*, and *youth*, and *women*, to the exclusion of those who ought to labour—THE MEN.³

The response of the weavers to machinery was, as these resolutions indicate, more discriminating than is often supposed. Direct destruction of power-looms rarely took place except when their introduction coincided with extreme distress and unemployment (West Houghton, 1812; Bradford, 1826). From the late 1820s, the weavers brought forward three consistent proposals.

First, they proposed a tax on power-looms, to equalise conditions of competition, some part of which might be allocated towards the weavers' relief. We should not forget that the hand-loom weaver was not only himself assessed for poor-rates, but paid a heavy burden in indirect taxation:

¹ Loc. cit., 1834, pp. 456-60.

² Clapham, op. cit., I, p. 552.

³ *Report and Resolutions of a Meeting of Deputies from the Hand-Loom Worsted Weavers residing in and near Bradford, Leeds, Halifax, &c.* (1835).

Their labour has been taken from them by the power-loom; their bread is taxed; their malt is taxed; their sugar, their tea, their soap, and almost every other thing they use or consume, is taxed. But the power-loom is not taxed—

so ran a letter from the Leeds stuff weavers in 1835.¹ When we discuss the minutiae of finance we sometimes forget the crazy exploitive basis of taxation after the Wars, as well as its redistributive function—from the poor to the rich. Among other articles taxed were bricks, hops, vinegar, windows, paper, dogs, tallow, oranges (the poor child's luxury). In 1832, of a revenue of approximately £50 millions, largely raised in indirect taxation on articles of common consumption, more than £28 millions were expended on the National Debt and £13 millions on the armed services as contrasted with £356,000 on the civil service, and £217,000 on the police. A witness before the Select Committee in 1834 offered the following summary of taxation liable to fall annually upon a working man:

No. 1. Tax on malt, £4. 11s. 3d. No. 2. On sugar, 17s. 4d. No. 3. Tea or coffee, £1. 4s. No. 4. On soap, 13s. No. 5. Housing, 12s. No. 6. On food, £3. No. 7. On clothing, 10s. Total taxes on the labourer per annum, £11. 7s. 7d. Taking a labourer's earnings at 1s. 6d. per diem, and computing his working 300 days in the year (which very many do), his income will be £22. 10s.; thus it will be admitted that at the very least, 100 per cent., or half of his income is abstracted from him by taxation . . . for do what he will, eating, drinking, or sleeping, he is in some way or other taxed.²

The summary includes items which few hand-loom weavers could afford, including, only too often, bread itself:

Bread-tax'd weaver, all can see
What that tax hath done for thee,
And thy children, vilely led,
Singing hymns for shameful bread,
Till the stones of every street
Know their little naked feet.

—so ran one of Ebenezer Elliott's "Corn Law Rhymes".³

It is no wonder that Cobbett's attacks on the fund-holders met with a ready reception, and that Feargus O'Connor first won the applause of the "fustian jackets and unshorn chins" of the north by striking the same note:

¹ *Leeds Times*, 25 April 1835.

² S.C. on *Hand-Loom Weavers' Petitions*, 1834, pp. 293 ff. The witness, R. M. Martin, was author of *Taxation of the British Empire* (1833).

³ E. Elliott, *The Splendid Village, &c.* (1834), I, p. 72.

You think you pay nothing: why, it is you who pay all. It is you who pay six or eight millions of taxes for keeping up the army; for what? for keeping up the taxes. . . .¹

Certainly, a tax on power-looms seems no more "impossible" than taxes on windows, oranges, or bricks.

Two other proposals related to the restriction of hours in power-loom factories, and the employment of adult male power-loom weavers. The first of these was a powerful influence leading many hand-loom weavers to give their support to the 10 Hour agitation. Heavy weather has been made of this, from the 1830s to the present day, with the men coming under the accusation of "sheltering behind the skirts of the women" or of using the plight of the children as a stalking-horse in their own demand for shorter hours. But, in fact, the aim was openly declared by factory operatives and weavers. It was intrinsic to their alternative model of political economy that shorter hours in the factory should at one and the same time lighten the labour of children, give a shorter working day to the adult operatives, and spread the available work more widely among the hand-workers and unemployed. In the second case, whereas mule-spinning was generally reserved to male operatives, the power-loom more often was attended by women or juveniles. And here we must look further at the reasons for the hand-loom weaver's opposition to the factory system.

"Reason" is not the appropriate word, since the conflict is between two cultural modes or ways of life. We have seen that even before the advent of power the woollen weavers disliked the hand-loom factories. They resented, first, the discipline; the factory bell or hooter; the time-keeping which over-rode ill-health, domestic arrangements, or the choice of more varied occupations. William Child, a journeyman weaver victimised for his activities with "the Institution" of 1806, refused to enter a hand-loom factory because of his objections to "being confined to go exactly at such an hour and such a minute, and the bad conduct that was carried on there. . . ."

A tender man when he had his work at home could do it at his leisure; there you must come at the time: the bell rings at half past five, and then again at six, then ten minutes was allowed for the door to be opened; if eleven expired, it was shut against any person

¹ *Halifax Guardian*, 8 October 1836.

either man, woman, or child; there you must stand out of door or return home till eight.¹

In the "golden age" it had been a frequent complaint with employers that the weavers kept "Saint Monday"—and sometimes made a holiday of Tuesday—making up the work on Friday and Saturday nights. According to tradition, the loom went in the first days of the week to the easy pace of "Plen-ty of time. Plen-ty of time." But at the week-end the loom clacked, "A day t' lat. A day t' lat." Only a minority of weavers in the 19th century would have had as varied a life as the smallholder weaver whose diary, in the 1780s, shows him weaving on wet days, jobbing—carting, ditching and draining, mowing, churning—on fine.² But variety of some sorts there would have been, until the very worst days—poultry, some gardens, "wakes" or holidays, even a day out with the harriers:

So, come all you cotton-weavers, you must rise up very soon,
For you must work in factories from morning until noon:
You mustn't walk in your garden for two or three hours a-day,
For you must stand at their command, and keep your shuttles in
play.³

To "stand at their command"—this was the most deeply resented indignity. For he felt himself, at heart, to be the real *maker* of the cloth (and his parents remembered the time when the cotton or wool was spun in the home as well). There had been a time when factories had been thought of as kinds of workhouses for pauper children; and even when this prejudice passed, to enter the mill was to fall in status from a self-motivated man, however poor, to a servant or "hand".

Next, they resented the effects upon family relationships of the factory system. Weaving had offered an employment to the whole family, even when spinning was withdrawn from the home. The young children winding bobbins, older children watching for faults, picking over the cloth, or helping to throw the shuttle in the broad-loom; adolescents working a second or third loom; the wife taking a turn at weaving in and among her domestic employments. The family was together, and however poor meals were, at least they could sit down at chosen times. A whole pattern of family and community life had grown up around the loom-shops; work did not prevent conversation

¹ *Committee on the Woollen Trade* (1806), p. 111 *et passim*.

² T. W. Hanson, "Diary of a Grandfather", *Trans. Halifax Antiq. Soc.* 1916.

³ J. Harland, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

or singing. The spinning-mills—which offered employment only for their children—and then the power-loom sheds, which generally employed only the wives or adolescents—were resisted until poverty broke down all defences. These places were held to be "immoral"—places of sexual licence, foul language, cruelty, violent accidents, and alien manners.¹ Witnesses before the Select Committee put now one, now another, objection to the front:

... no man would like to work in a power-loom, they do not like it, there is such a clattering and noise it would almost make some men mad; and next, he would have to be subject to a discipline that a hand-loom weaver can never submit to.

... all persons working on the power-loom are working there by force, because they cannot exist any other way; they are generally people that have been distressed in their families and their affairs broken up . . . they are apt to go as little colonies to colonize these mills. . . .

A Manchester witness whose own son had been killed in a factory accident declared:

I have had seven boys, but if I had 77 I should never send one to a cotton factory. . . . One great objection that I have is, that their morals are very much corrupted . . . They have to be in the factories from six in the morning till eight at night, consequently they have no means of instruction . . . there is no good example shown them. . . .

"I am determined for my part, that if they will invent machines to supersede manual labour, they must find iron boys to mind them."²

Finally, we have all these objections, not taken separately, but taken as indicative of the "value-system" of the community. This, indeed, might be valuable material for a study in historical sociology; for we have, in the England of the 1830s, a "plural society", with factory, weaving, and farming communities impinging on each other, with different traditions, norms, and expectations. The history of 1815 to 1840 is, in part, the story of the confluence of the first two in common

¹ See statement of the Manchester weavers (1823): "The evils of a Factory-life are incalculable,—There uninformed, unrestrained youth, of both sexes mingle—absent from parental vigilance. . . . Confined in artificial heat to the injury of health,—The mind exposed to corruption, and life and limbs exposed to Machinery—spending youth where the 40th year of the age is the 60th of the constitution . . ." (Hammonds, *The Town Labourer*, p. 300).

² *S.C. on Hand-Loom Weavers' Petitions*, 1834, p. 428 (5473), p. 440 (5618); p. 189 (2643-6).

gasworks, building; in canal and railway building; in cartage and portorage. Coal was still carried on men's backs up the long ladders from ships' holds: in Birmingham men could still, in the 1830s, be hired at 1s. a day to wheel sand in barrows nine miles by road, and nine miles empty back. The disparity between the wages of an engineer (26s. to 30s.) or carpenter (24s.) and the spademan (10s. to 15s.) or weaver (say, 8s.) in 1832 is such that we cannot allow social conservatism alone to explain it. It suggests that it is the skilled trades which are exceptional, and that conditions in unskilled manual labour or in outwork industries, so far from being "specially unhappy", were characteristic of a system designed by employers, legislators and ideologists to cheapen human labour in every way. And the fact that weaving became overstocked at a time when conditions were rapidly declining is eloquent confirmation. It was in the outwork industries, Marx wrote, that exploitation was most "shameless", "because in these last resorts of the masses made 'redundant' by Modern Industry and Agriculture, competition for work attains its maximum".¹

There is, of course, a "futurist" argument which deserves attention. It is, in fact, an argument which many working men who lived through until better times adopted. However full of suffering the transition, one such working man commented:

. . . power-loom weavers have not to buy looms and a jenny to spin for them; or bobbins, flaskets, and baskets; or to pay rent and taxes for them standing; nor candles, or gas and coal for lighting and warming the workshop. They have not to pay for repairs, for all wear and tear . . . nor have they to buy shuttles, pickers, side-boards, shop-boards, shuttle-boards, picking-sticks, and bands and cords. . . . They have not to be propped up on the treadles and seatboards . . . or have their wrists bandaged to give strength. . . . They have not to fetch slubbing, warp their webs, lay up lists, size, put the webs out to dry, seek gears, leck pieces, tenter, teem, dew, and cuttle them; and least of all would they think of breaking wool, scouring, and dyeing it *all for nothing too*.²

If we see the hand-loom weaver's work in this light, it was certainly painful and obsolete, and any transition, however full of suffering, might be justified. But this is an argument which discounts the suffering of one generation against the gains of the future. For those who suffered, this retrospective comfort is cold.

¹ *Capital* (1938 edn.), p. 465.

² J. Lawson, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

CHAPTER TEN

STANDARDS AND EXPERIENCES

i. *Goods*

THE CONTROVERSY AS to living standards during the Industrial Revolution has perhaps been of most value when it has passed from the somewhat unreal pursuit of the wage-rates of hypothetical average workers and directed attention to articles of consumption: food, clothing, homes: and, beyond these, health and mortality. Many of the points at issue are complex, and all that can be attempted here is to offer comments upon a continuing discussion. When we consider measurable quantities, it seems clear that over the years 1790-1840 the national product was increasing more rapidly than the population. But it is exceedingly difficult to assess how this product was distributed. Even if we leave other considerations aside (how much of this increase was exported owing to unfavourable terms of trade? how much went in capital investment rather than articles of personal consumption?) it is not easy to discover what share of this increase went to different sections of the population.

The debate as to the people's diet during the Industrial Revolution turns mainly upon cereals, meat, potatoes, beer, sugar and tea. It is probable that *per capita* consumption of wheat declined from late 18th-century levels throughout the first four decades of the 19th century. Mr. Salaman, the historian of the potato, has given a convincing blow by blow account of the "battle of the loaf", by which landowners, farmers, parsons, manufacturers, and the Government itself sought to drive labourers from a wheaten to a potato diet. The critical year was 1795. Thereafter war-time necessity took second place to the arguments as to the benefits of reducing the poor to a cheap basic diet. The rise in potato acreage during the Wars cannot be attributed to wheat shortage alone: "some deficiency there was, but unequal division between the different classes of society consequent on inflated prices was a

far more potent factor . . .". The great majority of the English people, even in the north, had turned over from coarser cereals to wheat by 1790; and the white loaf was regarded jealously as a symbol of their status. The southern rural labourer refused to abandon his diet of bread and cheese, even when near the point of starvation; and for nearly fifty years a regular dietary class-war took place, with potatoes encroaching on bread in the south, and with oatmeal and potatoes encroaching in the north. Indeed, Mr. Salaman finds in the potato a social stabiliser even more effective than Halévy found in Methodism:

. . . the use of the potato . . . did, in fact, enable the workers to survive on the lowest possible wage. It may be that in this way the potato prolonged and encouraged, for another hundred years, the impoverishment and degradation of the English masses; but what was the alternative, surely nothing but bloody revolution. That England escaped such a violent upheaval in the early decades of the nineteenth century . . . must in large measure be placed to the credit of the potato.¹

Nutritional experts now advise us that the potato is full of virtue, and certainly whenever standards rose sufficiently for the potato to be an *added* item, giving variety to the diet, it was a gain. But the substitution of potatoes for bread or oatmeal was felt to be a degradation. The Irish immigrants with their potato diet (Ebenezer Elliott called them, "Erin's root-fed hordes") were seen as eloquent testimony, and very many Englishmen agreed with Cobbett that the poor were victims of a conspiracy to reduce them to the Irish level. Throughout the Industrial Revolution the price of bread (and of oatmeal) was the first index of living standards, in the estimation of the people. When the Corn Laws were passed in 1815, the Houses of Parliament had to be defended from the populace by troops. "NO CORN LAWS" was prominent among the banners at Peterloo, and remained so (especially in Lancashire) until the anti-Corn Law agitation of the 1840s.

Meat, like wheat, involved feelings of status over and above its dietary value. The Roast Beef of Old England was the artisan's pride and the aspiration of the labourer. Once again, *per capita* consumption probably fell between 1790 and 1840, but the figures are in dispute. The argument turns mainly upon

¹ R. N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge, 1949), esp. pp. 480, 495, 506, 541-2. J. C. Drummond and A. Wilbraham, the historians of *The Englishman's Food* (1939), also see this as a period of decline.

the number and weight of beasts killed in London slaughter-houses. But even if these figures are established, we still cannot be sure as to which sections of the people ate the meat, and in what proportions. Certainly, meat should be a sensitive indicator of material standards, since it was one of the first items upon which any increase in real wages will have been spent. The seasonal workers did not plan their consumption meticulously over fifty-two Sunday dinners, but, rather, spent their money when in full work and took what chance offered for the rest of the year. "In the long fine days of summer," Henry Mayhew was told,

the little daughter of a working brickmaker used to order chops and other choice dainties of a butcher, saying, "Please, sir, father don't care for the price just a-now; but he must have his chops good; line-chops, sir, and tender, please—'cause he's a brickmaker." In the winter, it was, "O please, sir, here's a fourpenny bit, and you must send father something cheap. He don't care what it is, so long as it's cheap. It's winter, and he hasn't no work, sir—'cause he's a brick-maker."¹

Londoners tended to have higher standards of expectation than labourers in the provinces. In the depth of the 1812 depression, it was the impression of an observer that the London poor fared better than those of the north and the west:

The Poor of the Metropolis, notwithstanding the enormous price of the necessaries of life, are really living comparatively in comfort. The humblest labourer here frequently gets meat (flesh meat) and always bread and cheese, with beer of some sort, for his meals, but a West Country peasant can obtain for his family no such food.²

There was, of course, a variety of inferior "meats" on sale: red herrings and bloaters, cow-heel, sheep's trotters, pig's ear, fagots, tripe and black pudding. The country weavers of Lancashire despised town food, and preferred "summat at's deed ov a knife"—a phrase which indicates both the survival of their own direct pig-keeping economy and their suspicion that town meat was diseased—if forced to eat in town "every mouthful went down among painful speculations as to what the quadruped was when alive, and what particular reason it had for departing this life".³ It was not a new thing for town dwellers

¹ Mayhew, *op. cit.*, II, p. 368.

² *Examiner*, 16 August 1812.

³ E. Waugh, *Lancashire Sketches*, pp. 128-9.

to be exposed to impure or adulterated food; but as the proportion of urban workers grew, so the exposure became worse.¹

There is no doubt that *per capita* beer consumption went down between 1800 and 1830, and no doubt that *per capita* consumption of tea and of sugar went up; while between 1820 and 1840 there was a marked increase in the consumption of gin and whiskey. Once again, this is a cultural as well as dietetic matter. Beer was regarded—by agricultural workers, coal-whippers, miners—as essential for any heavy labour (to "put back the sweat") and in parts of the north beer was synonymous with "drink". The home-brewing of small ale was so essential to the household economy that "if a young woman can bake oatcake and brew well, it is thought she will make a good wife": while "some Methodist class-leaders say they could not lead their classes without getting a 'mugpot' of drink".² The decline was directly attributed to the malt tax—a tax so unpopular that some contemporaries regarded it as being an incitement to revolution. Remove the malt tax, one clerical magistrate in Hampshire argued in 1816, and the labourer—

would go cheerfully to his daily employ, perform it with manly vigour and content, and become attached to his house, his family, and, *above all*, his country, which allows him to share, in common with his superiors, in a plain wholesome beverage, which a poor man looks up to, more, indeed, than to any thing that could possibly be granted them by a British Parliament.³

The additional duty upon strong beer led to widespread evasion: and "hush-shops" sprang up, like that in which Samuel Bamford was nearly murdered as a suspected excise-man until he was recognised by one of the drinkers as a *bona fide* radical "on the run".

The effect of the taxes was undoubtedly to reduce greatly the amount of home-brewing and home-drinking; and, equally, to make drinking less of a part of normal diet and more of an extra-mural activity. (In 1830 the duty on strong beer was repealed and the Beer Act was passed, and within five years 35,000 beer-shops sprang up as if out of the ground.) The increase in tea-drinking was, in part, a replacement of beer and, perhaps also, of milk; and, once again, many contemporaries—with Cobbett well to the fore—saw in this evidence of

¹ See J. Burnett, "History of Food Adulteration in Great Britain in the 19th Century", *Bulletin of Inst. of Historical Research*, 1959, pp. 104-7.

² J. Lawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 10.

³ *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (1816), p. 95.

speculators "who could command only a few hundred pounds", and some of whom "actually cannot write their names".¹ Prices were kept high by duties on Baltic timber, bricks, tiles, slates; and Professor Ashton is able to give an absolute discharge to all the accused: "it was emphatically not the machine, not the Industrial Revolution, not even the speculative bricklayer or carpenter that was at fault".² All this may be true: it is notorious that working-class housing provides illustrations of the proverb as to every flea having "lesser fleas to bite 'em". In the 1820s, when many Lancashire weavers went on rent-strike, it was said that some owners of cottage property were thrown on the poor-rate. In the slums of the great towns publicans and small shopkeepers were among those often quoted as owners of the worst "folds" or human warrens of crumbling mortar. But none of this mitigates the actual conditions by one jot; nor can debate as to the proper allocation of responsibility exonerate a process by which some men were enabled to prey upon other's necessities.

A more valuable qualification is that which stresses the degree to which, in some of the older towns, improvements in paving, lighting, sewerage and slum clearance may be dated to the 18th century. But, in the often-cited example of London, it is by no means clear whether improvements in the centre of the City extended to the East End and dockside districts, or how far they were maintained during the Wars. Thus the sanitary reformer, Dr. Southwood Smith, reported of London in 1839:

While systematic efforts, on a large scale, have been made to widen the streets . . . to extend and perfect the drainage and sewerage . . . in the places in which the wealthier classes reside, nothing whatever has been done to improve the condition of the districts inhabited by the poor.³

Conditions in the East End were so noisome that doctors and parish officers risked their lives in the course of their duties. Moreover, as the Hammonds pointed out, it was in the boom towns of the Industrial Revolution that the worst conditions were to be found: "what London suffered [in the Commercial Revolution] Lancashire suffered at the end of the eighteenth

¹ G. C. Holland, *The Vital Statistics of Sheffield* (1843), pp. 56-8.

² *Capitalism and the Historians*, pp. 43-51.

³ *Fifth Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners* (1839), p. 170. See also *Fourth Report* (1838), Appendix A, No. 1.

and at the beginning of the nineteenth century".¹ Sheffield, an old and comparatively prosperous town with a high proportion of skilled artisans, almost certainly—despite the jerry-builders—saw an improvement in housing conditions in the first half of the 19th century, with an average, in 1840, of five persons per house, most artisans renting a family cottage on their own, with one day room and two sleeping rooms. It was in the textile districts, and in the towns most exposed to Irish immigrations—Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Preston, Bolton, Bradford—that the most atrocious evidence of deterioration—dense overcrowding, cellar-dwellings, unspeakable filth—is to be found.²

Finally, it is suggested, with tedious repetition, that the slums, the stinking rivers, the spoliation of nature, and the architectural horrors may all be forgiven because all happened so fast, so haphazardly, under intense population pressure, without premeditation and without prior experience. "It was ignorance rather than avarice that was often the cause of misery."³ As a matter of fact, it was demonstrably both; and it is by no means evident that the one is a more amiable characteristic than the other. The argument is valid only up to a point—to the point in most great towns, in the 1830s or 1840s, when doctors and sanitary reformers, Benthamites and Chartists, fought repeated battles for improvement against the inertia of property-owners and the demagoguery of "cheap government" rate-payers. By this time the working people were virtually segregated in their stinking enclaves, and the middle-classes demonstrated their real opinions of the industrial towns by getting as far out of them as equestrian transport made convenient. Even in comparatively well-built Sheffield,

All classes, save the artisan and the needy shopkeeper, are attracted by country comfort and retirement. The attorney—the manufacturer—the grocer—the draper—the shoemaker and the tailor, fix their commanding residences on some beautiful site. . . .

Of sixty-six Sheffield attorneys in 1841, forty-one lived in the country, and ten of the remaining twenty-five were newcomers

¹ See M. D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Ch. II; *England in Transition* (Penguin edn.), p. 72; Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, Ch. III and Preface to 2nd edition; Dr. R. Willan, "Observations on Disease in London", *Medical and Physical Journal*, 1800, p. 299.

² G. C. Holland, op. cit., p. 46 *et passim*. An excellent account of the working man's urban environment in mid-century Leeds is in J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living* (1961), pp. 7-20.

³ R. M. Hartwell, op. cit., p. 413.

to the town. In Manchester the poor in their courts and cellars lived,

... hidden from the view of the higher ranks by piles of stores, mills, warehouses, and manufacturing establishments, less known to their wealthy neighbours—who reside chiefly in the open spaces of Cheetham, Broughton, and Chorlton—than the inhabitants of New Zealand or Kamtschatka.

“The rich lose sight of the poor, or only recognise them when attention is forced to their existence by their appearance as vagrants, mendicants, or delinquents.” “We have improved on the proverb, ‘One half of the world does not know how the other half lives,’ changing it into ‘One half of the world *does not care* how the other half lives.’ Ardwick knows less about Ancoats than it does about China. . . .”¹

Certainly, the unprecedented rate of population growth, and of concentration in industrial areas, would have created major problems in any known society, and most of all in a society whose *rationale* was to be found in profit-seeking and hostility to planning. We should see these as the problems of industrialism, aggravated by the predatory drives of *laissez faire* capitalism. But, however the problems are defined, the definitions are no more than different ways of describing, or interpreting, the same events. And no survey of the industrial heartlands, between 1800 and 1840, can overlook the evidence of visual devastation and deprivation of amenities. The century which rebuilt Bath was not, after all, devoid of aesthetic sensibility nor ignorant of civic responsibility. The first stages of the Industrial Revolution witnessed a decline in both; or, at the very least, a drastic lesson that these values were not to be extended to working people. However appalling the conditions of the poor may have been in large towns before 1750, nevertheless the town in earlier centuries usually embodied some civic values and architectural graces, some balance between occupations, marketing and manufacture, some sense of variety. The “Coketowns” were perhaps the first towns of above 10,000 inhabitants ever to be dedicated so single-mindedly to work and to “fact”.

iii. *Life*

The questions of health and longevity present even greater

¹ G. C. Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 51; W. Cooke Taylor, *Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire* (1842), pp. 12-13, 160.

difficulties in interpretation. Until recently it was widely accepted that the main factor in Britain's population “explosion” between 1780 and 1820 was in the declining death-rate, and in particular the decline in the rate of infant mortality. It was therefore reasonable to assume that this was effected by improvements in medical knowledge, nutrition (the potato), hygiene (soap and the cotton shirt), water supplies or housing. But this whole line of argument has now been called in question. The population “explosion” can be seen as an European phenomenon, taking place simultaneously in Britain and in France, and in Spain and Ireland where many of these factors did not operate to the same degree. Second, demographers are now disputing the accepted evidence: and able arguments have been put forward which place renewed emphasis on the rise in the birth-rate, rather than a decline in the death-rate, as the causative factor.¹

If we accept Dr. Krause's view that the birth-rate rose after 1781 and declined after 1831 and that “no important change in the death-rate is indicated”, this by no means provides evidence as to the improving health and longevity of the working class. It is interesting to note that the fertility ratio (that is, the number of children aged 0-4 per 1,000 women in the child-bearing age-groups) was highest in 1821; first, in the heartland of the Industrial Revolution (Lancashire, the West Riding, Cheshire, Staffordshire): second, in the worst hit “Poor Law counties” of the south. On the face of it, this would appear to provide confirmation for the Malthusian arguments—so widely held at the time, and so much disliked by Cobbett—that Speenhamland relief and the opportunities for employment in the mills (including child labour) boosted the birth-rate. We do not have to suppose that parents consciously decided to have more children in order to provide additional wage-earners or claims on the poor-rate. A rise in the birth-rate might be explicable in terms of the break-up of traditional patterns of community and family life (both Speenhamland and the mills could weaken taboos against early and “improvident” marriage), the decline in “living-in” among farm servants and apprentices, the impact of the Wars, concentration in new towns, or even genetic selection of the most fertile. Moreover, a rise in

¹ See especially J. T. Krause, “Changes in English Fertility and Mortality, 1781-1850”, *Econ. Hist. Review*, 2nd Series, XI, No. 1, August 1958, and “Some Neglected Factors in the English Industrial Revolution”, *Journal of Economic History*, XIX, 4 December, 1959.

So long as the essential demographic statistics are in dispute, any conclusion must be tentative. Nothing should lead us to underestimate the appalling mortality rates of London during the gin "epidemic" of the early 18th century. But it would seem that the living and working conditions of artisans and of some rural labourers were rather healthier in the second half of the 18th century than that of factory operatives or out-workers in the first half of the 19th. If London and Birmingham show a declining death-rate in these years, this was perhaps because they remained to a high degree "artisan" cities, with higher standards of child care and slightly less unhealthy working conditions. In the industrial north, in the Potteries and in most coalfields, infant mortality increased, and life became shorter and more painful. Perhaps in consequence the consumption of alcohol, and the use of opiates, increased, adding to the hazards of occupational disease. And sheer misery may have contributed to raising the rate of reproduction. Dr. Holland found "the most dissipated, reckless and improvident" among the worst paid and least organised Sheffield workers: "we speak from extensive enquiries when we assert, that the more wretched the condition of the artisans and the earlier do they marry".¹

If we accept that the national death-rate—and more particularly infant mortality rate—showed a slight decline over the first four decades of the 19th century, we must still ask of the statistics exactly the same questions as we have asked of wages and articles of consumption. There is no reason to suppose that dying children or disease were distributed more equitably than clothes or meat. In fact, we know that they were not. The moneyed man might—as Oastler noted—rarely wear two coats at once, but his family had tenfold the chances of diagnosis, medicine, nursing, diet, space, quiet. Attempts were made to assess the average age at death according to different social groups in various centres in 1842:

	<i>Gentry</i>	<i>Tradesmen</i>	<i>Labourers</i>
Rutlandshire	52	41	38
Truro	40	33	28
Derby	49	38	21
Manchester	38	20	17
Bethnal Green	45	26	16
Liverpool	35	22	15

¹ G. C. Holland, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.

was the atrophy of the conscience of the country gentry, the only men who had the authority or the traditional duty to protect the poor.

Nothing more confirms this atrophy, and the profound moral alienation of classes, than the manner of the real "awakening" when it came. Scores of gentlemen and professional men, who gave some support to humanitarian causes in the 1830s and 1840s, appear to have been living in the 1820s in the midst of populous manufacturing districts, oblivious to abuses a few hundred yards from their gates. Richard Oastler himself lived on the edge of Huddersfield, but it was not until the Bradford manufacturer, John Wood, *told* him about child labour that he noticed it. When girls were brought half-naked out of pits, the local luminaries seem to have been genuinely astonished:

Mr. Holroyd, solicitor, and Mr. Brook, surgeon, practising in Stainland, were present, who confessed that, although living within a few miles, they could not have believed that such a system of unchristian cruelty could have existed.¹

We forget how long abuses can continue "unknown" until they are articulated: how people can look at misery and not notice it, until misery itself rebels. In the eyes of the rich between 1790 and 1830 factory children were "busy", "industrious", "useful"; they were kept out of their parks and orchards, and they were cheap. If qualms arose, they could generally be silenced by religious scruples: as one honourable Member remarked, of the climbing-boys in 1819, "the boys generally employed in this profession were not the children of poor persons, but the children of rich men, begotten in an improper manner".² This showed a fine sense of moral propriety, as well as a complete absence of class bias.

But the conscience of "the rich" in this period is full of complexity. The argument that the impassioned "Tory" attacks, in the 1830s, upon the abuses of industrialism, voiced by such men as Sadler, Shaftesbury, Oastler, Disraeli, were little more than the revenge of the landowning interest upon the manufacturers and their Anti-Corn Law League makes some sense in "party political" terms. It is true that they revealed deep sources of resentment and insecurity among traditionalists before the innovations and the growing power of the moneyed middle class. But even a hasty reading of *Sybil*, of

¹ *Children's Employment Commission. Mines* (1842), p. 80.

² Cited in *The Town Labourer*, p. 190.

with Cobbettites, but with Owenites, free-thinkers, and Chartists. Joseph Rayner Stephens actually called for arson against the "Bastilles" and Oastler stirred up civil—and, sometimes, very uncivil—disobedience and, in his rôle as protector of the factory children, even urged the use of industrial sabotage against mill-owners who violated the law:

I will in that event print a little card about *Needles and Sand and Rusty Nails*, with proper and with very explicit directions, which will make these law-breakers look about them and repent that they were ever so mad as to laugh at the Law and the King. These cards of mine shall then be the catechism of the factory children.¹

For ten years Oastler trod the edges of revolution; but the title which he gave to one of his periodicals was *The Home, the Altar, the Throne, and the Cottage*.

We can scarcely attribute this eruption of compassion to an "age" which also jailed Stephens and vilified Oastler. Many of those who really exerted themselves on behalf of the factory children in the earlier years met with abuse, ostracism by their class, and sometimes personal loss. And as Mr. Driver has shown, the crucial moment in Oastler's career was not his awakening to the fact of child labour, but the "Fixby Hall Compact" between himself and Radical trade unionists. The awakening was not, in any case, characteristic of Toryism as a whole: if we wished to anatomise the Tory conscience of 1800 or 1830, we should commence with the squire's attitude to his own labourers. The humanitarianism of the 1830s can certainly be found to have had a cultural ancestry, both in Tory paternalism and in the more subdued traditions, of service and "good works", of liberal Dissent. But, as an effective force, it crops up only here and there, in individual men and women; Oastler and Bull are no more representative of the Tory than Fielden and Mrs. Gaskell are representative of the liberal-nonconformist conscience.

If Tawney was right, and the treatment of childhood and of poverty are the two "touchstones" which reveal "the true character of a social philosophy",² then it is the liberal and Nonconformist tradition which suffers most severely, in 1830, from this test. It is true that there is a humble twilight world, half-septic, half-dissenting, from which much that is best in

¹ C. Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 327-8.

² R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Penguin edn.), p. 239.

swatch of him, and a corner of that chapel is mine, and it all belongs to his workpeople."¹

Cragg Dale, an isolated off-shoot of the Calder, was a veritable "Deep Dale". A Minister of unidentified affiliations declared:

If there was one place in England that needed legislative interference, it was this place, for they work 15 and 16 hours a day frequently, and sometimes all night:—Oh! it is a murderous system, and the mill-owners are the pest and disgrace of society. Laws human and divine are insufficient to restrain them; they take no notice of Hobhouse's Bill, and they say "Let Government make what laws they think fit, they can drive a coach and six through them in that valley."

He related the story of a boy whom he had recently interred who had been found standing asleep with his arms full of wool and had been beaten awake. This day he had worked seventeen hours; he was carried home by his father, was unable to eat his supper, awoke at 4 a.m. the next morning and asked his brothers if they could see the lights of the mill as he was afraid of being late, and then died. (His younger brother, aged nine, had died previously: the father was "sober and industrious", a Sunday school teacher.) The Anglican curate here gave his unreserved support to the limitation of child labour:

I have seen the poor in this valley oppressed, I have thought it my duty to expose it . . . I am bound, from the responsible nature of my office, to bring it into contrast with the liberal and kindly truth of the Gospel. . . . And where oppression is exercised it generally falls most heavily upon those who are least able to bear it . . . because the widow has no husband, and her children no earthly father . . . we often find them most hardly used. . . .

As a consequence of his sermons—and of personal protests to the masters—the mill-owners had cursed and insulted him and his daughters in the streets. These exposures were followed by a protest meeting in the valley, which was placarded in Oastler's characteristic style:

. . . you are more Tyrannical, more Hypocritical than the slave drivers of the West Indies. . . . Your vaunted *Liberality* . . . I shall prove to be *Tyranny*—your boasted *Piety* . . . neither more nor less

¹ It was believed of many mill-owners that they kept a special fund from the fines raised from their workers, and used it for charitable or chapel-building purposes. A large chapel in Dewsbury is still known among the older generation as "brokken shoit chapel" after the fines taken for broken threads.

than *Blasphemy*. . . . Your system of "*Flogging*"—of "*Fines*", of "*Innings up Time*", of "*Truck*", of "*cleaning machinery during mealtimes*"—of "*Sunday Workings*", of "*Low Wages*" . . . shall all undergo the Ordeal of "*Public Examination*". . . .

"The very Saturday night when I was returning from the meeting," Oastler declared:

I saw two mills blazing like fury in the valley. Their inmates, poor little sufferers, had to remain there until 11.30 o'clock, and the owner of one of them I found to be a noted sighing, praying, canting religionist. . . .¹

We shall return to the Methodists, and see why it was their peculiar mission to act as the apologists of child labour.² There can be no doubt that it was the Nonconformist mill-owners whom Parson Bull had chiefly in mind when he attacked the "race" of masters:

. . . a race whose whole wisdom consists in that cunning which enables them to devise the cheapest possible means for getting out of the youngest possible workers the greatest possible amount of labour, in the shortest possible amount of time, for the least possible amount of wages . . . a race of men of whom Agur would have said: *there is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth are as knives to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.*³

On the other hand, while the virtual unanimity of complicity on the part of official Nonconformity exposed it to the biblical attacks of Bull and Oastler, as well as of Short-Time Committee operatives (some of whom had first learned their texts in the mill-owners' own Sunday schools), it should by no means be supposed that the Established Church was working unitedly and without remission on the children's behalf. Indeed, we have it from Shaftesbury himself—who would surely have given credit to the Church if it were due—that with the notable exception of Bull the Anglican clergy as "a body . . . will do nothing".⁴

The claim, then, as to a general "awakening of conscience" is

¹ G. Crabtree, operative, *Brief Description of a Tour through Calder Dale* (1833); *Voice of the West Riding*, 20, 27 July 1833; *Account of a Public Meeting Held at Hebden Bridge*, 24 August 1833.

² It is interesting, however, to note that Cecil Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 110, says that the Primitive Methodists often loaned their chapels to Richard Oastler.

³ *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 29 November 1835.

⁴ E. Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury* (1887 edn.), pp. 175, 378.

misleading. What it does is to belittle the veritable fury of compassion which moved the few score northern professional men who took up the cause of the children; the violence of the opposition to them, which drove them on occasions into near-revolutionary courses; and—as humanitarian historians have tended to do—it underestimates the part played in the agitation over twenty and more strenuous years, by such men as John Doherty and the workers' own Short-Time Committees. More recently, one writer has surveyed the issue with that air of boredom appropriate to the capacious conscience of the Nuclear Age. The modern reader, he says, "well disciplined by familiarity with concentration camps" is left "comparatively unmoved" by the spectacle of child labour.¹ We may be allowed to reaffirm a more traditional view: that the exploitation of little children, on this scale and with this intensity, was one of the most shameful events in our history.

¹ R. M. Hartwell, "Interpretations of the Industrial Revolution in England", *Journal of Econ. Hist.*, XIX, 2, June 1959.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE CROSS

i. *Moral Machinery*

Puritanism—Dissent—Nonconformity: the decline collapses into a surrender. *Dissent* still carries the sound of resistance to Apollyon and the Whore of Babylon, *Nonconformity* is self-effacing and apologetic: it asks to be left alone. Mark Rutherford, one of the few men who understood the full desolation of the inner history of 19th-century Nonconformity—and who is yet, in himself, evidence of values that somehow survived—noted in his *Autobiography* the form of service customary in his youth:

It generally began with a confession that we were all sinners, but no individual sins were ever confessed, and then ensued a kind of dialogue with God, very much resembling the speeches which in later years I have heard in the House of Commons from the movers and seconders of addresses to the Crown at the opening of Parliament.

The example is taken from the Calvinistic Independents: but it will also serve excellently to describe the stance of Methodism before temporal authority. This surrender was implicit in Methodism's origin—in the Toryism of its founder and in his ambivalent attitude to the Established Church. From the outset the Wesleyans fell ambiguously between Dissent and the Establishment, and did their utmost to make the worst of both worlds, serving as apologists for an authority in whose eyes they were an object of ridicule or condescension, but never of trust. After the French Revolution, successive Annual Conferences were forever professing their submission and their zeal in combating the enemies of established order; drawing attention to their activity "in raising the standard of public morals, and in promoting loyalty in the middle ranks as well as subordination and industry in the lower orders of society."¹

¹ Cited in Halévy, *op. cit.*, III, p. 53. For accounts of Methodism's political stance during these years, see E. R. Taylor, *Methodism and Politics, 1791-1850*; and R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850* (1937), especially the chapters on "The Methodist Loyalty" and "The Methodist Neutrality". See also *The Town Labourer*, Ch. XIII, "The Defences of the Poor".

within, by adding to them the active ingredient of submission; and they fostered within the Methodist Church those elements most suited to make up the psychic component of the work-discipline of which the manufacturers stood most in need.

As early as 1787, the first Robert Peel wrote: "I have left most of my works in Lancashire under the management of Methodists, and they serve me excellently well."¹ Weber and Tawney have so thoroughly anatomised the interpenetration of the capitalist mode of production and the Puritan ethic that it would seem that there can be little to add. Methodism may be seen as a simple extension of this ethic in a changing social milieu; and an "economist" argument lies to hand, in the fact that Methodism, in Bunting's day, proved to be exceptionally well adapted, by virtue of its elevation of the values of discipline and of order as well as its moral opacity, both to self-made mill-owners and manufacturers and to foremen, overlookers, and sub-managerial groups. And this argument—that Methodism served as ideological self-justification for the master-manufacturers and for their satellites—contains an important part of the truth. So much John Wesley—in an often-quoted passage—both foresaw and deplored:

. . . religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world. . . . How then is it possible that Methodism, that is, a religion of the heart, though it flourishes now as a green bay tree, should continue in this state? For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Hence they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away.

Many a Methodist mill-owner—and, indeed, Bunting himself—might serve as confirmation of this in the early 19th century.² And yet the argument falters at a critical point. For it is exactly at this time that Methodism obtained its greatest success in serving *simultaneously* as the religion of the industrial bourgeoisie (although here it shared the field with other Non-conformist sects) and of wide sections of the proletariat. Nor can there be any doubt as to the deep-rooted allegiance of many

¹ L. Tyerman, *John Wesley* (1870), III, p. 499. See also J. Sutcliffe, *A Review of Methodism* (York, 1805), p. 37.

² See W. J. Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-80.

workers gladly exchanged their employments for a month of harvesting; many of the adult operatives in the early cotton mills were "of loose and wandering habits, and seldom remained long in the establishment".¹ A few of the managerial problems in early enterprises are suggested by the list of fines at Wedgwood's Etruria works:

. . . Any workman striking or likewise abusing an overlooker to lose his place.

Any workman conveying ale or liquor into the manufactory in working hours, forfeit 2/-.

Any person playing at fives against any of the walls where there are windows, forfeit 2/- . . .²

Whether his workers were employed in a factory or in their own homes, the master-manufacturer of the Industrial Revolution was obsessed with these problems of discipline. The outworkers required (from the employers' point of view) education in "methodical" habits, punctilious attention to instructions, fulfilment of contracts to time, and in the sinfulness of embezzling materials. By the 1820s (we are told by a contemporary) "the great mass of Weavers" were "deeply imbued with the doctrines of Methodism". Some of the self-made men, who were now their employers, were Methodists or Dissenters whose frugality—as Wesley had foreseen—had produced riches. They would tend to favour fellow-religionists, finding in them a "guarantee for good conduct" and "a consciousness of the value of character".³ The "artisan" traditions of the weavers, with their emphasis on the values of independence, had already prepared them for some variant of Puritan faith.⁴ What of the factory operatives?

It is in Dr. Andrew Ure's *Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835)—a book which, with its Satanic advocacy, much influenced Engels and Marx—that we find a complete anticipation of the "economist" case for the function of religion as a work-discipline. The term *Factory*, for Ure:

¹ A. Redford, op. cit., pp. 19-20. As late as the 1830s, Samuel Greg was complaining of "that restless and migratory spirit which is one of the peculiar characteristics of the manufacturing population".

² V. W. Bladen, "The Potteries in the Industrial Revolution", *Econ. Journal* (Supplement), 1926-9, I, p. 130. See also M. McKendrick, "Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline," *Hist. Journal*, IV, I, 1961, p. 30. It was Wedgwood's aim to "make such *Machines* of the *Men* as cannot err."

³ R. Guest, *A Compendious History of the Cotton Manufacture* (1823), pp. 38, 43.

⁴ In the 17th century the Puritan sects had a large weaver following, but—except in the West of England—this tradition had little life in the early 18th century.

involves the idea of a vast automaton, composed of various mechanical and intellectual organs, acting in uninterrupted concert for the production of a common object, all of them being subordinated to a self-regulated moving force.

"The main difficulty" of the factory system was not so much technological but in the "distribution of the different members of the apparatus into one co-operative body", and, above all, "in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton":

To devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline, suited to the necessities of factory diligence, was the Herculean enterprise, the noble achievement of Arkwright. Even at the present day, when the system is perfectly organized, and its labour lightened to the utmost, it is found nearly impossible to convert persons past the age of puberty, whether drawn from rural or from handicraft occupations, into useful factory hands. After struggling for a while to conquer their listless or restive habits, they either renounce the employment spontaneously, or are dismissed by the overlookers on account of inattention.

"It required, in fact, a man of a Napoleonic nerve and ambition, to subdue the refractory tempers of work-people accustomed to irregular paroxysms of diligence. . . . Such was Arkwright." Moreover, the more skilled a workman, the more intractable to discipline he became, "the more self-willed and . . . the less fit a component of a mechanical system, in which, by occasional irregularities, he may do great damage to the whole". Thus the manufacturers aimed at withdrawing any process which required "peculiar dexterity and steadiness of hand . . . from the *cunning* workman" and placing it in charge of a "mechanism, so self-regulating, that a child may superintend it". "The grand object therefore of the modern manufacturer is, through the union of capital and science, to reduce the task of his work-people to the exercise of vigilance and dexterity,—faculties . . . speedily brought to perfection in the young."¹

For the children, the discipline of the overlooker and of the machinery might suffice; but for those "past the age of puberty"

¹ Ure, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-21. Cf. also p. 23: "It is in fact the constant aim and tendency of every improvement in machinery to supersede human labour altogether, or to diminish its cost, by substituting the industry of women and children for that of men; or that of ordinary labourers, for trained artisans." As an expression of the mill-owners' intentions this is interesting, and relevant to the textile industries; but as an expression of a "law" of capitalist development, Marx and Engels perhaps gave Ure's claims too much credence.

"Godliness is great gain," is more applicable than to the administration of an extensive factory.¹

The argument is thus complete. The factory system demands a transformation of human nature, the "working paroxysms" of the artisan or outworker must be methodised until the man is adapted to the discipline of the machine.² But how are these disciplinary virtues to be inculcated in those whose Godliness (unless they become overlookers) is unlikely to bring any temporal gain? It can only be by inculcating "the first and great lesson . . . that man must expect his chief happiness, not in the present, but in a future state". Work must be undertaken as a "*pure act of virtue . . . inspired by the love of a transcendent Being, operating . . . on our will and affections*":

Where then shall mankind find this transforming power?—in the cross of Christ. It is the sacrifice which removes the guilt of sin: it is the motive which removes love of sin: it mortifies sin by showing its turpitude to be indelible except by such an awful expiation; it atones for disobedience; it excites to obedience; it purchases strength for obedience; it makes obedience practicable; it makes it acceptable; it makes it in a manner unavoidable, for it constrains to it; it is, finally, not only the motive to obedience, but the pattern of it.³

Ure, then, is the Richard Baxter of Cottonopolis. But we may descend, at this point, from his transcendental heights to consider, more briefly, mundane matters of theology. It is evident that there was, in 1800, casuistry enough in the theology of all the available English churches to reinforce the manufacturer's own sense of moral self-esteem. Whether he held an hierarchic faith, or felt himself to be elected, or saw in his success the evidence of grace or godliness, he felt few promptings to exchange his residence beside the mill at Bradford for a monastic cell on Bardsey Island. But Methodist theology, by virtue of its promiscuous opportunism, was better suited than any other to serve as the religion of a proletariat whose members had not the least reason, in social experience, to feel themselves to be "elected". In his theology, Wesley appears to have dispensed with the best and selected unhesitatingly the worst elements of Puritanism: if in class terms Methodism was herma-phroditic, in doctrinal terms it was a mule. We have already

¹ Ibid., III, Chs. 1 and 3. My italics.

² Cf. D. H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow*: "They believe that they must alter themselves to fit the pits and the place, rather than alter the pits and the place to fit themselves. It is easier."

³ Ure, op. cit., pp. 423-5.

noted Methodism's rupture with the intellectual and democratic traditions of Old Dissent. But Luther's doctrines of submission to authority might have served as the text for any Wesleyan Conference in the years after 1789:

Even if those in authority are evil or without faith, nevertheless the authority and its power is good and from God. . . .

God would prefer to suffer the government to exist, no matter how evil, rather than allow the rabble to riot, no matter how justified they are in doing so. . . .

(Jabez Bunting, however, unlike Luther, could never have admitted the notion that the rabble could ever be "justified".) The general Lutheran bias of Wesleyanism has often been noted.¹ Wesley's espousal of the doctrine of the universality of grace was incompatible with the Calvinist notion of "election". If grace was universal, sin was universal too. Any man who came to a conviction of sin might be visited by grace and know himself to be ransomed by Christ's blood. Thus far it is a doctrine of spiritual egalitarianism: there is at least equality of opportunity in sin and grace for rich and poor. And as a religion of "the heart" rather than of the intellect, the simplest and least educated might hope to attain towards grace. In this sense, Methodism dropped all doctrinal and social barriers and opened its doors wide to the working class. And this reminds us that Lutheranism was also a religion of the poor; and that, as Munzer proclaimed and as Luther learned to his cost, spiritual egalitarianism had a tendency to break its banks and flow into temporal channels, bringing thereby a perpetual tension into Lutheran creeds which Methodism also reproduced.

But Christ's ransom was only provisional. Wesley's doctrine here was not settled. He toyed with the notion of grace being perpetual, once it had visited the penitent; and thus a dejected form of Calvinism (the "elected" being now the "saved") re-entered by the back door. But as the 18th century wore on the doctrine of justification by faith hardened—perhaps because it was so evident that multitudes of those "saved" in the revivalist campaigns slid back to their old ways after years or

¹ Weber, in his brief discussion of Methodism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, exaggerates the Calvinist elements in its theology, and thereby fails to see its special adaptability as a religion of the proletariat. He thus presses too far the sense of a "calling" among the Wesleys, especially when he seeks to apply it to the "calling" of the working man, a doctrine which has less significance in England than those of submission and obedience.

building chapels for their own work-people). The poor were fortunate in being less tempted by "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life". They were more likely to remain graced, not because of their "calling", but because they faced fewer temptations to backslide.

Three obvious means of maintaining grace presented themselves. First, through service to the Church itself, as a class leader, local preacher, or in more humble capacities. Second, through the cultivation of one's own soul, in religious exercises, tract-reading, but—above all—in attempts to reproduce the emotional convulsions of conversion, conviction of sin, penitence, and visitation by grace. Third, through a methodical discipline in every aspect of life. Above all, in labour itself (which, being humble and unpleasant, should not be confused with good works), undertaken for no ulterior motives but (as Dr. Ure has it) as "a pure act of virtue" there is an evident sign of grace. Moreover, God's curse over Adam, when expelled from the Garden of Eden, provided irrefutable doctrinal support as to the blessedness of hard labour, poverty, and sorrow "all the days of thy life".

We can now see the extraordinary correspondence between the virtues which Methodism inculcated in the working class and the desiderata of middle-class Utilitarianism.¹ Dr. Ure indicates the point of junction, in his advice to the mill-owner "to organize his moral machinery on equally sound principles with his mechanical". From this aspect, Methodism was the desolate inner landscape of Utilitarianism in an era of transition to the work-discipline of industrial capitalism. As the "working paroxysms" of the hand-worker are methodised and his unworkful impulses are brought under control, so his emotional and spiritual paroxysms increase. The abject confessional tracts are the other side of the dehumanised prose style of Edwin Chadwick and Dr. Kay. The "march of intellect" and the repression of the heart go together.

But it was Wesley's claim that Methodism was, above all things, a "religion of the heart". It was in its "enthusiasm" and emotional transports that it differed most evidently from the older Puritan sects.² We might note some of the approved

¹ Weber and Tawney, of course, direct attention to the parallel development of Puritan and Utilitarian dogmas: cf. Tawney, *op. cit.*, p. 219: "Some of the links in the Utilitarian coat of mail were forged . . . by the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century." It was Methodism, however, which forged the last links of the Utilitarian chains riveted upon the proletariat.

² Excepting, of course, the Baptists—notably in Wales.

labourer or artisan was violently recast into that of the submissive industrial worker. Here, indeed, is Ure's "transforming power". It is a phenomenon, almost diabolic in its penetration into the very sources of human personality, directed towards the repression of emotional and spiritual energies. But "repression" is a misleading word; these energies were not so much inhibited as displaced from expression in personal and in social life, and confiscated for the service of the Church. The box-like, blackening chapels stood in the industrial districts like great traps for the human psyche. Within the Church itself there was a constant emotional drama of backsliders, confessions, forays against Satan, lost sheep; one suspects that the pious sisterhood, in particular, found in this one of the great "consolations" of religion. For the more intellectual there was the spiritual drama of:

trials, temptations, heart sinkings, doubts, struggles, heaviness, manifestations, victories, coldnesses, wanderings, besetments, deliverances, helps, hopes, answers to prayer, interpositions, reliefs, complaints . . . workings of the heart, actings of faith, leadings through the mazes of dark dispensations . . . fiery trials, and succour in the sinking moment.¹

But what must be stressed is the *intermittent character* of Wesleyan emotionalism. Nothing was more often remarked by contemporaries of the workaday Methodist character, or of Methodist home-life, than its methodical, disciplined and repressed disposition. It is the paradox of a "religion of the heart" that it should be notorious for the inhibition of all spontaneity. Methodism sanctioned "workings of the heart" only upon the occasions of the Church; Methodists wrote hymns but no secular poetry of note; the idea of a passionate Methodist lover in these years is ludicrous. ("Avoid all manner of passions", advised Wesley.) The word is unpleasant: but it is difficult not to see in Methodism in these years a ritualised form of psychic masturbation. Energies and emotions which were dangerous to social order, or which were merely unproductive (in Dr. Ure's sense) were released in the harmless form of sporadic love-feasts, watch-nights, band-meetings or revivalist campaigns. At these love-feasts, after hymns and the ceremonial breaking of cake or water-biscuit, the preacher then spoke, in a raw emotional manner, of his spiritual experiences, temptations and contests with sin:

¹ *Sketches of the Early Life of a Sailor*, pp. 104, 111.

While the preacher is thus engaged, sighs, groans, devout aspirations, and . . . ejaculations of prayer or praise, are issuing from the audience in every direction.

In the tension which succeeded, individual members of the congregation then rose to their feet and made their intimate confessions of sin or temptation, often of a sexual implication. An observer noted the "bashfulness, and evident signs of inward agitation, which some of the younger part of the females have betrayed, just before they have risen to speak".¹

The Methodists made of religion (wrote Southey) "a thing of sensation and passion, craving perpetually for sympathy and stimulants".² These Sabbath orgasms of feeling made more possible the single-minded weekday direction of these energies to the consummation of productive labour. Moreover, since salvation was never assured, and temptations lurked on every side, there was a constant inner goading to "sober and industrious" behaviour—the visible sign of grace—every hour of the day and every day of the year. Not only "the sack" but also the flames of hell might be the consequence of indiscipline at work. God was the most vigilant overlooker of all. Even above the chimney breast "Thou God Seest Me" was hung. The Methodist was taught not only to "bear his Cross" of poverty and humiliation; the crucifixion was (as Ure saw) the very pattern of his obedience: "True followers of our bleeding Lamb, Now on Thy daily cross we die . . .".³ Work was the Cross from which the "transformed" industrial worker hung.

But so drastic a redirection of impulses could not be effected without a central disorganisation of the human personality. We can see why Hazlitt described the Methodists as "a collection of religious invalids."⁴ If Wesley took from Luther his authoritarianism, from Calvinism and from the English Puritan divines of the 17th century Methodism took over the joylessness: a methodical discipline of life "combined with

¹ Joseph Nightingale, *Portraiture of Methodism* (1807), pp. 203 ff.

² R. Southey, *Life of Wesley and Rise and Progress of Methodism* (1890 edn.), 381 ff.

³ J. E. Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (1948), p. 240:

We cast our sins into that fire
Which did thy sacrifice consume,
And every base and vain desire.
To daily crucifixion doom.

⁴ W. Hazlitt, "On the Causes of Methodism", *The Round Table* (1817), *Works*, IV, pp. 57 ff.

maternal, Oedipal, sexual and sado-masochistic. The extraordinary assimilation of wounds and sexual imagery in the Moravian tradition has often been noted. Man as a sinful "worm" must find "Lodging, Bed and Board in the Lamb's Wounds". But the sexual imagery is easily transferred to imagery of the womb. The "dearest little opening of the sacred, precious and thousand times beautiful little side" is also the refuge from sin in which "the Regenerate rests and breathes":

O precious Side-hole's cavity
 I want to spend my life in thee. . . .
 There in one Side-hole's joy divine,
 I'll spend all future Days of mine.
 Yes, yes, I will for ever sit
 There, where thy Side was split.¹

Sexual and "womb-regressive" imagery appears here to be assimilated. But, after the Wesleys broke with the Moravian brethren, the language of their hymns and the persistent accusation of Antinomian heresy among Moravian communities, had become a public scandal. In the hymns of John and Charles Wesley overt sexual imagery was consciously repressed, and gave way to imagery of the womb and the bowels:

Come, O my guilty brethren, come,
 Groaning beneath your load of sin!
 His bleeding heart shall make you room,
 His open side shall take you in. . . .

This imagery, however, is subordinated to the overpowering sacrificial imagery of blood, as if the underground traditions of Mithraic blood-sacrifice which troubled the early Christian Church suddenly gushed up in the language of 18th-century Methodist hymnody. Here is Christ's "bleeding love", the blood of the sacrificial Lamb in which sinners must bathe, the association of sacrifice with the penitent's guilt. Here is the "fountain" that "gushes from His side,/Open'd that all may enter in":

Still the fountain of Thy blood
 Stands for sinners open'd wide;
 Now, even now, my Lord and God,
 I wash me in Thy side.

¹ See R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 408-17; G. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7.

And sacrificial, masochistic, and erotic language all find a common nexus in the same blood-symbolism:

We thirst to drink Thy precious blood,
We languish in Thy wounds to rest,
And hunger for immortal food,
And long on all Thy love to feast.

The union with Christ's love, especially in the eucharistic "marriage-feast" (when the Church collectively "offers herself to God" by "offering to God the Body of Christ"),¹ unites the feelings of self-mortification, the yearning for the oblivion of the womb, and tormented sexual desire, "harbour'd in the Saviour's breast":

'Tis there I would always abide,
And never a moment depart,
Conceal'd in the cleft of Thy side,
Eternally held in Thy heart.²

It is difficult to conceive of a more essential disorganisation of human life, a pollution of the sources of spontaneity bound to reflect itself in every aspect of personality. Since joy was associated with sin and guilt, and pain (Christ's wounds) with goodness and love, so every impulse became twisted into the reverse, and it became natural to suppose that man or child only found grace in God's eyes when performing painful, laborious or self-denying tasks. To labour and to sorrow was to find pleasure, and masochism was "Love". It is inconceivable that men could actually *live* like this; but many Methodists did their best. Whitefield, when planning to marry, consoled himself with the thought: "If I know anything of my own heart, I am free from that foolish passion the world calls love." Wesley's itinerant philandering seems to have been a form of pseudo-courtship which never reached consummation and which both mortified himself and humiliated the woman.

¹ J. E. Rattenbury, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 109-11, 202-4, 224-34; and J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (1941), p. 184. This subject is due for renewed and more expert attention. Mr. G. R. Taylor's study of *The Angel-Makers* is suggestive, but his attempt to find a "sexual" explanation of historical change in patrist and matrist child-orientations is pressed to the point of absurdity. It should be noted that the "side" was a current euphemism for the female sexual organs as well as for the womb. A suggestion as to the assimilation of erotic and masochistic-sacrificial imagery is this: the "bleeding side" may suggest the menstrual period (Eve's "curse") in which intercourse is forbidden or polluted; thus the notions both of sexual pleasure and of its absolute prohibition become associated with the crucifixion; and, equally, the sinner can only be "taken in" to Christ's side with a sense of aggravated guilt and self-pollution.

deluged, throughout the early 19th century, with the tracts which celebrated "Holy Dying". No Methodist or evangelical magazine, for the mature or for children, was complete without its death-bed scene in which (as Leigh Hunt also noted) death was often anticipated in the language of bride or bridegroom impatient for the wedding-night. Death was the only goal which might be desired without guilt, the reward of peace after a lifetime of suffering and labour.

So much of the history of Methodism has, in recent years, been written by apologists or by fair-minded secularists trying to make allowances for a movement which they cannot understand, that one notes with a sense of shock Lecky's judgement at the end of the 19th century:

A more appalling system of religious terrorism, one more fitted to unhinge a tottering intellect and to darken and embitter a sensitive nature, has seldom existed.¹

Over the Industrial Revolution there brooded the figure of the Reverend Jabez Branderham (almost certainly modelled upon Jabez Bunting) who appears in Lockwood's grim nightmare at the opening of *Wuthering Heights*: "good God! what a sermon; divided into *four hundred and ninety* parts . . . and each discussing a separate sin!" It is against this all-enveloping "Thou Shalt Not!", which permeated *all* religious persuasions in varying degree in these years, that we can appreciate at its full height the stature of William Blake. It was in 1818 that he emerged from his densely-allegorical prophetic books into a last phase of gnomic clarity in *The Everlasting Gospel*. Here he reasserted the values, the almost-Antinomian affirmation of the joy of sexuality, and the affirmation of innocence, which were present in his earlier songs. Almost every line may be seen as a declaration of "mental war" against Methodism and Evangelicism.² Their "Vision of Christ" was his vision's "greatest Enemy". Above all, Blake drew his bow at the teaching of humility and submission. It was this nay-saying humility which "does the Sun & Moon blot out", "Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole",

Rooting over with thorns & stems
The buried Soul & all its Gems.

¹ Lecky, op. cit. III, pp. 77-8.

² Cf. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, p. 437: "Remember that we are all fallen creatures, born in sin, and naturally depraved. Christianity recognises no *innocence* or *goodness of heart*."

play *football* instead! The next Sunday the children are admonished, and told the story of the forty-two children who mocked the aged Elijah and who were torn in pieces, at the behest of a merciful God. The infants then carol another of Watts' hymns:

When children in their wanton play,
 Serv'd old Elisha so;
 And bid the prophet go his way,
 "Go up, thou bald-head, go:"
 GOD quickly stopt their wicked breath,
 And sent two raging bears,
 That tore them limb from limb to death,
 With blood, and groans, and tears.

In the end, the piety of John and of his father are rewarded by an inheritance from a stranger, deeply moved by their patience and submission to poverty.

One might laugh; but the psychological atrocities committed upon children were terribly real to them. One may doubt the emphasis placed by a recent writer upon the repressive effect of even Puritan infant-binding (in tight swaddling clothes) and anal training, although the point cannot be dismissed.¹ But despite all the platitudes repeated in most textbooks as to the "educational initiatives" of the Churches at this time, the Sunday schools were a dreadful exchange even for village dame's schools. 18th-century provision for the education of the poor—inadequate and patchy as it was—was nevertheless provision *for education*, in some sort, even if (as with Shenstone's schoolmistress) it was little more than naming the flowers and herbs. In the counter-revolutionary years this was poisoned by the dominant attitude of the Evangelicals, that the function of education began and ended with the "moral rescue" of the children of the poor.² Not only was the teaching of writing discouraged, but very many Sunday school scholars left the schools unable to read, and in view of the parts of the Old Testament thought most edifying this at least was a blessing. Others gained little more than the little girl who told one of the Commissioners on Child Labour in the Mines: "if I died a good girl I should go to heaven—if I were bad I should have to be burned in brimstone and fire: they told me that at school yesterday, I did not know it before".³ Long before the age of puberty

¹ G. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*

² Cf. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961), pp. 135-6.

³ Cited in J. L. and B. Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury* (Penguin edn.), p. 74.

Radical Sunday School movement which must have been staffed, in part, by former teachers and scholars of the orthodox schools.¹

And this should be seen, not only in the schools, but also in relation to the general influence of the Methodist churches. As a dogma Methodism appears as a pitiless ideology of work. In practice, this dogma was in varying degrees softened, humanised, or modified by the needs, values, and patterns of social relationship of the community within which it was placed. The Church, after all, was more than a building, and more than the sermons and instructions of its minister. It was embodied also in the class meetings: the sewing groups: the money-raising activities: the local preachers who tramped several miles after work to attend small functions at outlying hamlets which the minister might rarely visit. The picture of the fellowship of the Methodists which is commonly presented is too euphoric; it has been emphasised to the point where all other characteristics of the Church have been forgotten.² But it remains both true and important that Methodism, with its open chapel doors, did offer to the uprooted and abandoned people of the Industrial Revolution some kind of community to replace the older community-patterns which were being displaced. As an unestablished (although undemocratic) Church, there was a sense in which working people could make it their own; and the more closely-knit the community in which Methodism took root (the mining, fishing or weaving village) the more this was so.

Indeed, for many people in these years the Methodist "ticket" of church-membership acquired a fetishistic importance; for the migrant worker it could be the ticket of entry into a new community when he moved from town to town. Within this religious community there was (as we have seen) its own drama, its own degrees of status and importance, its own gossip, and a good deal of mutual aid. There was even a slight degree of social mobility, although few of the clergy came from proletarian homes. Men and women felt themselves to have some *place* in an otherwise hostile world when within the Church. They obtained recognition, perhaps for their sobriety, or chastity, or piety. And there were other positives,

¹ See D. Read, *Peterloo* (Manchester, 1957), pp. 51 ff., and below, p. 717.

² The sense of fellowship in the early years of the Church is expressed sympathetically in L. F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (1948). See also, of course, Dr. Wearmouth's books, among many others.

pieces, and nine tenths of the congregation appeared to be struck with the same panic.

At Chapel-en-le-Frith, he recorded in 1786, this hysteria had already become habit-forming:

Some of them, perhaps many, scream all together as loud as they possibly can. Some of them use improper, yea, indecent expressions in prayer. Several drop down as dead, and are as still as a corpse; but in a while they start up and cry, Glory, glory. . . .

Such excesses of hysteria Wesley condemned, as "bringing the real work into contempt".¹ But throughout the Industrial Revolution more muted forms of hysteria were intrinsic to Methodist revivalism. Tight communities, miners, hill-farmers or weavers, might at first resist the campaign of field-preaching and prayer-meetings among them; then there might be "a little moving among the dry bones"; and then "the fire broke out; and it was just as when the whins on a common are set on fire,—it blazed gloriously".²

The example is taken from propaganda in West Riding weaving villages in 1799-1801, when whole communities declared themselves—at least temporarily—"saved". And it is rarely noted that not only did the war years see the greatest expansion of Methodism, notably in the northern working class, but that this was also accompanied by renewed evidence of hysteria. For example, in the years 1805-6, when numbers flocked to the Methodists in Bradford, "no sooner, in many cases, was the text announced, than the cries of persons in distress so interrupted the preacher, that the service . . . was at once exchanged for one of general and earnest intercession".³ "Three fell while I was speaking," a preacher of the Bible Christians in Devon noted complacently in his diary in 1816: "we prayed, and soon some more fell; I think six found peace." The ministrations of this sect among the moorland farmers and labourers were often accompanied by agonies, prostrations, "shouts of praise", and "loud and pious cries of penitents".⁴

Methodism *may* have inhibited revolution; but we can affirm with certainty that its rapid growth during the Wars was a component of the psychic processes of counter-revolution. There is a sense in which any religion which places great emphasis on

¹ See the discussion of the "enthusiasm" in R. A. Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 520-35.

² F. A. West, *Memoirs of Jonathan Saville* (Halifax, 1844).

³ W. M. Stamp, *Historical Notice of Wesleyan Methodism in Bradford*, (1841), p. 85.

⁴ F. W. Bourne, *The Bible Christians*, (1905), pp. 36-42.

the after-life is the Chiliasm of the defeated and the hopeless. "The utopian vision aroused a contrary vision. The Chiliastic optimism of the revolutionaries ultimately gave birth to the formation of the conservative attitude of resignation. . . ."—the words are Karl Mannheim's, describing another movement. And he also gives us a clue to the nature of the psychic process:

Chiliasm has always accompanied revolutionary outbursts and given them their spirit. When this spirit ebbs and deserts these movements, there remains behind in the world a naked mass-frenzy and a de-spiritualized fury.¹

Since, in England of the 1790s, the revolutionary impulse was stifled before it reached the point of "outburst", so also when the spirit ebbed, the reaction does not fall to the point of "frenzy". And yet there are many phenomena in these decades which can scarcely be explained in any other way. Authentic millennialism ends in the late-1790s, with the defeat of English Jacobinism, the onset of the Wars, and the confining of Richard Brothers in a mad-house. But a number of sects of "New Jerusalemites" prospered in the next fifteen years.² Prophet after prophet arose, like Ebenezer Aldred, a Unitarian minister in an isolated village in the Derbyshire Peak (Hucklow):

There he lived in a kind of solitude, became dreamy and wild; laid hold on the prophecies; saw Napoleon in the Book of Revelation: at last fancied himself the Prophet who, standing neither on land nor water, was to proclaim the destruction of a great city. . . .

and, clothed in a white garment, his grey hair flowing down his shoulders, sailed in a boat on the Thames, distributing booklets and prophesying doom.³ Radical, mystic and militarist contested for the robes of Revelation: the lost tribes of Israel were discovered in Birmingham and Wapping: and "evidence" was found that "the British Empire is the peculiar possession of Messiah, and his promised naval dominion".⁴

But the most startling evidence of a "despiritualized fury" is to be found in the movements surrounding—and outliving—the greatest Prophetess of all, Joanna Southcott. It was in

¹ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (1960 edn.), pp. 192-6.

² In March 1801, Earl Fitzwilliam was enquiring into the activities of the followers of Brothers in Bradford, led by Zacchaeus Robinson, a weaver, who "was for many years a strong Methodist, & what is here called a Class Leader". Fitzwilliam Papers, F. 45 (a).

³ T. A. Ward, op. cit., pp. 188-9; Eben-Ezer, *The Little Book* (1811).

⁴ R. Wedgwood, *The Book of Remembrance* (1814).

There was even an echo of Paine's "Bastard and his armed banditti", and a suggestion that the land would be returned to the labouring people:

But now the heirs I mean to free,
 And all these bondmen I'll cast out,
 And the true heirs have nought to doubt;
 For I'll cut off the bastard race,
 And in their stead the true heirs place
 For to possess that very land. . . .

It is probable that Joanna Southcott was by no means an impostor, but a simple and at times self-doubting woman, the victim of her own imbalance and credulity. (One's judgement as to some members of the circus which "promoted" her may be more harsh.) There is a pathos in her literal-minded transcriptions of her "Voices". The long messages which the Lord instructed her to communicate were full of the highest testimonials to the ability of Joanna herself:

For on the earth there's something new appears.
 Since earth's foundation plac'd I tell you here,
 Such wondrous woman never was below . . .

So flattered by the best of all Referees, she was able to exert upon the credulous a form of psychic blackmail no less terrifying than that of the hell-fire preachers. One day, while sweeping out a house after a sale, "she was permitted by the Lord to find, *as if by accident*", a commonplace seal. Thereafter her followers—the "Johannas" or Southcottians—were able to obtain from her a special seal, a sort of promissory note that the bearer should "inherit the Tree of Life to be made Heirs of God & joint-heirs with Jesus Christ". The promise of the millennium was available only to "THE SEALED PEOPLE", while the scoffers received more dreadful threats:

And now if foes increase, I tell you here,
 That every sorrow they shall fast increase,
 The Wars, her tumults they shall never cease
 Until the hearts of men will turn to me
 And leave the rage of persecuting thee.

Thousands upon thousands (in one estimate, 100,000) were "sealed" in this way. There was, indeed, a market in seals at one time comparable to the late medieval market in relics of the Cross. The emotional disequilibrium of the times is revealed, not only in the enthusiasm of the "Johannas" but also in the

attitude of the authorities. What members they lost to the cult were probably soon regained. But this does not mean that we can dismiss the cult as a mere "freak", irrelevant to the stolid lines of social growth. On the contrary, we should see the "Johannas" and the Methodist revival of these years as intimate relations. The Wars were the heyday of the itinerant lay preachers, with their "pious ejaculations, celestial groans, angelic swoonings"¹—the "downright balderdash" which so much enraged Cobbett:

Their heavenly gifts, their calls, their inspirations, their feelings of grace at work within them, and the rest of their canting gibberish, are a gross and outrageous insult to common sense, and a great scandal to the country. It is in vain that we boast of our *enlightened state*, while a sect like this is increasing daily.²

As orthodox Wesleyanism throve, so also did breakway groups of "Ranters"—the Welsh "Jumpers" (cousins to the American "Shakers"), the Primitive Methodists, the "Tent Methodists", the "Magic Methodists" of Delemere Forest, who fell into trances or "visions", the Bryanites or Bible Christians, the "Quaker Methodists" of Warrington and the "Independent Methodists" of Macclesfield. Through the streets of war-time and post-war England went the revivalist missionaries, crying out: "Turn to the Lord and seek salvation!"

One is struck not only by the sense of disequilibrium, but also by the *impermanence* of the phenomenon of Methodist conversion. Rising graphs of Church membership are misleading; what we have, rather, is a revivalist pulsation, or an oscillation between periods of hope and periods of despair and spiritual anguish. After 1795 the poor had once again entered into the Valley of Humiliation. But they entered it unwillingly, with many backward looks; and whenever hope revived, religious revivalism was set aside, only to reappear with renewed fervour upon the ruins of the political messianism which had been overthrown. In this sense, the great Methodist recruitment between 1790 and 1830 may be seen as the Chiliasm of despair.

This is not the customary reading of the period; and it is offered as an hypothesis, demanding closer investigation. On the eve of the French Revolution the Methodists claimed about 60,000 adherents in Great Britain. This indicated little more than footholds in all but a few of the industrial districts.

¹ Halifax Theatre Royal playbill, 1793.

² *Political Register*, 12 June 1813.

Thereafter the figures claimed advance like this: 1795, 90,347; 1805, 107,000; 1811, 154,000; 1827, 237,000.¹ Years especially notable for revivalist recruitment were 1797-1800, 1805-7, 1813-18, 1823-4, 1831-4. These years are so close to those of maximum political awareness and activity that Dr. Hobsbawm is justified in directing attention to the "marked parallelism between the movements of religious, social and political consciousness".² But while the relationship between political and religious excitement is obviously intimate, the nature of the relationship remains obscure: the conclusion that "Methodism advanced when Radicalism advanced and not when it grew weaker" does not necessarily follow.³ On the contrary, it is possible that religious revivalism took over just at the point where "political" or temporal aspirations met with defeat. Thus we might almost offer a spiritual graph, commencing with the far-reaching emotional disturbances associated with the French Revolution and *Rights of Man*. In the early 1790s we find secular Jacobinism and the millennial hopes of Richard Brothers: in the late 1790s and the 1800s, Methodist revivalism and the frenzy of the "Johannas", which more than one contemporary witness saw as being part of the same stock, and appealing to the same audience;⁴ in the aftermath of Luddism (1811-12) a renewed wave of revivalism, giving way to the political revival of the winter of 1816-17. In the latter two years the Primitive Methodists broke through into the framework-knitters' villages of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire, and the relationship between revivalism and political radicalism appears to have been especially close. On Whit Sunday 1816, 12,000 were claimed at a camp-meeting in Nottingham Forest. From the autumn of 1816 until the summer of 1817 popular energies appear to have been absorbed in radical agitation, culminating in the Pentridge "rising" of June 1817 in which at least one local preacher took a leading

¹ These figures include the New Connexion and smaller groups, but not the Calvinistic Methodists of North Wales. Orthodox Wesleyan circuits with over 1,000 members in 1815 were claimed to be: London, Bristol, Redruth, St. Ives, Birmingham, Burslem, Macclesfield, Manchester, Bolton, Liverpool, Colne, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Birstal, Bradford, Halifax, Isle of Man, Sunderland, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Epworth, York, Hull, Darlington, Barnard Castle, Newcastle, Shields. See M. E. Edwards, "The Social and Political Influence of Methodism in the Napoleonic Period", (London Ph.D. Thesis, 1934), p. 244.

² *Primitive Rebels*, pp. 129-30.

³ See E. J. Hobsbawm, "Methodism and the Threat of Revolution", *History Today* (1957), VII, p. 124.

⁴ See e.g. Leigh Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

religious revivalism at the negative, and radical politics (tinged with revolutionary millennialism) at the positive pole. The connecting notion is always that of the "Children of Israel". At one pole, the Chiliasm of despair could reduce the Methodist working man to one of the most abject of human beings. He was constantly warned by his ministers against reformers, as "these sons of Belial": "We . . . ought to wait in silence the salvation of the Lord. In due time he will deliver his *own dear peculiar people*."¹ As such a "peculiar person" his tools were occasionally destroyed, or he was refused entry to trade unions, upon suspicion of being an employer's "nark". Cobbett pressed the attack upon the Methodists further: "Amongst the people of the north they have served as spies and blood-money men."²

On the other hand, as if to baffle expectation, Methodist working men, and, indeed, local preachers, repeatedly emerged in the 19th century—in handfuls here and there—as active workers in different fields of working-class politics. There were a few Methodist Jacobins, more Methodist Luddites, many Methodist weavers demonstrating at Peterloo, Methodist trade unionists and Chartists. They were rarely (with the exception of trade unionism in the pits and, later, in agriculture) *initiators*; this rôle was more often filled by Owenites and free-thinkers who emerged from a different moral pattern. But they were often to be found as devoted speakers and organisers, who carried with them—even after their expulsion from the Methodist Church—the confidence of their communities.

One reason for this lies in the many tensions at the heart of Wesleyanism. Just as the repressive inhibitions upon sexuality carried the continual danger of provoking the opposite—either in the form of the characteristic Puritan rebel (the forerunner of Lawrence) or in the form of Antinomianism; so the authoritarian doctrines of Methodism at times bred a libertarian antithesis. Methodism (and its evangelical counterparts) were highly politically-conscious religions. For 100 years before 1789, Dissent, in its popular rhetoric, had two main enemies: Sin and the Pope. But in the 1790s there is a drastic re-orientation of hatred; the Pope was displaced from the seat of commination and in his place was elevated Tom Paine.

¹ These words are put into the mouth of a Methodist preacher in a radical tract, *A Dialogue between a Methodist Preacher and a Reformer* (Newcastle, 1819), but they faithfully represent Methodist sermons of the time.

² *Political Register*, 3 January 1824.

élite.¹ It was the professional ministry, and not the local preachers, whom Cobbett accused of being "the bitterest foes of freedom in England":

. . . hostile to freedom as the established clergy have been, their hostility has been nothing in point of virulence compared with that of these ruffian sectarians. . . . Books upon books they write. Tracts upon tracts. Villainous sermons upon villainous sermons they preach. Rail they do . . . against the West Indian slave-holders; but not a word do you ever hear from them against the slave-holders in Lancashire and in Ireland. On the contrary, they are continually telling the people here that they ought to thank the Lord . . . not for a bellyful and a warm back, but for that abundant grace of which they are the bearers, and for which they charge them only one penny per week each.²

Cobbett's attacks were not wholly disinterested. He had attacked the Methodists, in the same unmeasured way, but for the opposite reasons, in his Tory days, when he discovered that several of Colonel Despard's associates were Methodists.³ This was one of his consistent prejudices. And he was enraged, in the early 1820s, not only by the high Toryism of Bunting and the "CONCLAVE" but also by the facility with which the Methodist Church tapped the pennies of the very same men who attended Radical demonstrations. But without doubt many of the lay preachers and class leaders shared his dislike of the full-time ministry, as well as of such practices as pew-rents and privileges for the wealthy. And this dislike Cobbett was at pains to foster. "A man who has been making shoes all the week," he wrote, "will not preach the worse for that on the Sunday."

There are thousands upon thousands of labourers and artizans and manufacturers, who never yet attempted to preach, and who are better able to do it than the members of the Conference, who for the far greater part have been labourers and artizans, and who have become *preachers*, because it was pleasanter to *preach* than to *work*.

¹ "The members of this Conference have a School at *King's Wood*, at which *their* sons (and not the sons of their congregations,) are *educated!* . . . This, too, is maintained at the expense of the congregations. . . . The sons, thus educated, sally out, in due time, to be *gentlemen*; that is to say . . . to be Excisemen, Tax-gatherers, Clerks and Officers of various sorts." *Political Register*, 27 January 1820.

² *Ibid.*, 3 January 1824.

³ *Ibid.*, 23 July 1803: "Of the six traitors . . . executed with Despard . . . *three* were *Methodists*, and had a methodist teacher to attend them in their last moments. . . . The sect consists chiefly of grovelling wretches in and about great towns and manufacturing places. . . ." Cf. T. E. Owen, *Methodism Unmasked* (1802).

CHAPTER TWELVE

COMMUNITY

i. *Leisure and Personal Relations*

THE METHODIST REVIVAL of the war years mediated the work-discipline of industrialism. It was also, in some part, a reflex of despair among the working population. Methodism and Utilitarianism, taken together, make up the dominant ideology of the Industrial Revolution. But in Methodism we see only the clearest expression of processes at work within a whole society. Many of its features were reproduced in the evangelical movement in all the churches, and in the social teaching of some Utilitarians and Deists. Hannah More held quite as strongly as Wesley to the view that it was a "fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings", rather than as beings of "a corrupt nature and evil dispositions".¹ And in the Sunday schools which were promoted by the Church of England in many villages in the 1790s and 1800s we find exactly the same emphasis (although sometimes with a more paternalist tone) upon discipline and repression as we have noted in the schools of Stockport or Halifax. Their function is uniformly described as being to cherish in the children of the poor "a spirit of industry, economy, and piety"; Sunday school teachers at Caistor (Lincs) were instructed to—

. . . tame the ferocity of their unsubdued passions—to repress the excessive rudeness of their manners—to chasten the disgusting and demoralizing obscenity of their language—to subdue the stubborn rebellion of their wills—to render them honest, obedient, courteous, industrious, submissive, and orderly . . .²

The pressures towards discipline and order extended from the factory, on one hand, the Sunday school, on the other, into every aspect of life: leisure, personal relationships, speech, manners. Alongside the disciplinary agencies of the mills,

¹ H. More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), p. 44.

² R. C. Russell, *History of Elementary Schools & Adult Education in Nettleton and Caistor* (Caistor, 1960), pp. 5, 7.

churches, schools, and magistrates and military, quasi-official agencies were set up for the enforcement of orderly moral conduct. It was Pitt's moral lieutenant, Wilberforce, who combined the ethos of Methodism with the unction of the Establishment, and who was most active between 1790 and 1810 in this cause. In 1797 he expounded at length "the grand law of subordination", and laid down articles for the management of the poor:

. . . that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects, about which wordly men conflict so eagerly, are not worth the contest. . . .¹

By 1809 he was satisfied that overt Jacobinism was no longer a danger; but in every manifestation of moral indiscipline he saw the danger of Jacobin revival. "We are alive to the political offence," he wrote, "but to the moral crime we seem utterly insensible."

In this he was too modest, since his own Society for the Suppression of Vice had clocked up 623 successful prosecutions for breaking the Sabbath laws in 1801 and 1802 alone.² But his conviction as to the intimate correlation between moral levity and political sedition among the lower classes is characteristic of his class. Prosecutions for drunken and lewd behaviour increased; Blake's old enemy, Bishop Watson of Llandaff, preached a sermon in 1804 in which he found the rôle of the common informer to be "a noble Design . . . both in a religious and in a political Point of View". The amusements of the poor were preached and legislated against until even the most innocuous were regarded in a lurid light. The Society for the Suppression of Vice extended its sphere of interference to "two-penny hops, gingerbread fairs, and obscene pictures".³ Nude sea bathers were persecuted as if they were forerunners of tumbrils and guillotine. "With regard to adultery," wrote John Bowdler darkly, "as it was punished capitally by the Jewish law, some think it ought to be so . . .

¹ W. Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians* (1797), pp. 405-6.

² See L. Radzinowicz, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 504-6, and Parts 3 and 4 *passim*. See also G. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 36: ". . . the period of decisive moral change was not at the time of Victoria's accession, or even in the nineteenth century at all, but . . . during the decade 1790-1800."

³ *Gorgon*, 24 April 1819.

newspaper; although papers are taken (and read aloud) at the blacksmith's, the barber's and several public houses. Much of the news still comes by way of broadsheet vendors and street singers. Old superstitions are a living source of terror to old and young. There are ghosts at Jumble's Well, Bailey Gallows, Boggard Lane; parents commonly discipline their children by shutting them "in cellars and other dark places for the black boggards to take them". "Another most serious and mischievous superstition, everywhere prevalent, was the belief that when any child died, it was the will of the Lord that it should be so." Sanitary reformers were regarded as "Infidels". Dog-fighting and cock-fighting were common; and it was also common at feast-times "to see several rings formed, in which men stripped to their bare skin would fight sometimes by the hour together, till the combatants were not recognisable . . .". Drunkenness was rife, especially at holidays and on "Cobbler's Monday", which was kept by weavers and burlers as well as cobblers. But there were plenty of less violent pastimes: knur and spell, "duck knop", and football through the streets. The village was clannish within, and a closed community to outsiders from only two or three miles distant. Some very old traditions survived, such as "Riding the Steng", whereby if a man was known to ill-use his wife, or a woman was thought to be lewd, a straw effigy would be carried through the streets by a hooting crowd, and then burnt by the offender's door.¹

So far from extinguishing local traditions, it is possible that the early years of the Industrial Revolution saw a growth in provincial pride and self-consciousness. South Lancashire and the West Riding were not rural wildernesses before 1780; they had been centres of domestic industry for two centuries. As the new factory discipline encroached upon the hand-worker's way of life, and as the Corporation and Coronation Streets were built over Yep-fowd and Frogg Hole and T'Hollins, so self-consciousness was sharpened by loss, and a quasi-nationalist sentiment mingles with class feeling in the culture of the industrial workers (new machines versus old customs, London tyranny or "foreign" capital against the local clothier, Irish labour undercutting the native weaver). George Condy, a leading publicist of the 10 Hour Movement, wrote a foreword to Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire* (1830); Bamford was only one among a score of plebeian authors who followed in

¹ J. Lawson, *Progress in Pudsey*, *passim*.

the steps of the 18th-century "Tim Bobbin", in celebrating and idealising local customs and dialect.

But this was a conscious resistance to the passing of an old way of life, and it was frequently associated with political Radicalism.¹ As important in this passing as the simple physical loss of commons and "playgrounds",² was the loss of leisure in which to play and the repression of playful impulses. The Puritan teachings of Bunyan or Baxter were transmitted in their entirety by Wesley: "Avoid all lightness, as you would avoid hell-fire; and trifling, as you would cursing and swearing. Touch no woman . . .". Card-playing, coloured dresses, personal ornaments, the theatre—all came under Methodist prohibition. Tracts were written against "profane" songs and dancing;³ literature and arts which had no devotional bearing were profoundly suspect; the dreadful "Victorian" Sabbath began to extend its oppression even before Victoria's birth.

A characteristic tract shows the extent of Methodist determination to uproot pre-industrial traditions from the manufacturing districts.⁴ It had been noted at a Sheffield Quarterly Meeting in 1799 that some members were not "altogether free from conforming to the custom of *visiting* or *receiving visits*, at the *annual Feast*". Such feasts, known variously as "Wakes" (Derbyshire and Staffordshire), "Rushbearing" (Lancashire) and "Revels" (west of England) might in origin have been permissible but had become "dreadfully prostituted to the most diabolical purposes". Time was spent in "eating and drinking intemperately; talking prophanely, or at least unprofitably; in laughing and jesting, fornication and adultery . . .". The least participation was "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness". Money was wasted by the poor which might have been saved; many contracted debts. Methodists who mixed in such festivities were exposed to the worldly ways of the unconverted—backsliding was a common result. They should

¹ Cobbett springs to mind. But William Hone perhaps did more to record old customs, publishing his *Date Book*, *Every-Day Book*, and *Table Book*, as well as Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes*, all in the 1820s.

² See the Hammonds, *The Bleak Age*, Ch. VI.

³ Apologists had some difficulty with the reference in *Ecclesiastes* to "a time to dance". But since "no instances of dancing are found upon record in the Bible, in which the two sexes united in the exercise", it was argued that the permission could only extend to members of *one* sex (segregated from the other) dancing upon a sacred occasion in full daylight on a weekday. (No such occasions are recorded.) See A. Young, *A Time to Dance* (Glasgow, n.d.); also Southey, *op. cit.*, pp. 546-9.

⁴ Rev. James Wood, *An Address to the Members of the Methodist Societies* (1799), *passim*.

“average” English working man became more disciplined, more subject to the productive tempo of “the clock”, more reserved and methodical, less violent and less spontaneous. Traditional sports were displaced by more sedentary hobbies:

The Athletic exercises of Quoits, Wrestling, Foot-ball, Prison-bars and Shooting with the Long-bow are become obsolete . . . they are now Pigeon-fanciers, Canary-breeders and Tulip-growers—

or so a Lancashire writer complained in 1823.¹ Francis Place often commented upon a change, which he saw in terms of a growth in self-respect and an elevation in “the character of the working-man”. “Look even to Lancashire,” he wrote a month after Peterloo:

Within a few years a stranger walking through their towns was “touted,” i.e. hooted, and an “outcomling” was sometimes pelted with stones. “Lancashire brute” was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any occasion. Bakers and butchers would at the least have been plundered. Now 100,000 people may be collected together and no riot ensue. . . .²

It is here that evaluation becomes most difficult. While many contemporary writers, from Cobbett to Engels, lamented the passing of old English customs, it is foolish to see the matter only in idyllic terms. These customs were not all harmless or quaint.

In the first decades of the 19th century, cases of wife-selling were reported from places as widely scattered as Colne, Plymouth, Sheffield, and Smithfield Market; indeed, where the wife admitted that she had been unfaithful, this was held in folklore to be the husband’s *right*—“many people in the country” (said one husband who had offered his wife in the Plymouth cattle-market) “told him he could do it.”³ The unmarried mother, punished in a Bridewell, and perhaps repudiated by the parish in which she was entitled to relief,

¹ Guest, op. cit., p. 38-9.

² Wallas, op. cit., pp. 145-6.

³ *A True and Singular Account of Wife Selling* (Gateshead, 1822); J. Carr, *Annals and Stories of Colne* (Colne, 1876), p. 83; *Leeds Mercury*, 28 August 1802; *Trades Newspaper*, 14 August 1825; *The Times*, 23 November 1822; G. C. Miller, *Blackburn*, p. 92 (for *Blackburn Mail*, 4 September 1793); Pinchbeck, op. cit. p. 83 (for Croydon, 1815); H. W. V. Temperly, “The Sale of Wives in England in 1823,” *Hist. Teachers Miscellany* (Norwich, 1925), III, p. 67; and (of course) Hardy’s *Mayor of Casterbridge*. Several of the cases suggest that the practice was not always barbarous, but could be a popular form of divorce, with the consent of the wife. She was “purchased” for a token sum by her lover; and the transaction in the open market legitimised the exchange in popular lore. No other form of divorce was available.

had little reason to admire “merrie England”. The passing of Gin Lane, Tyburn Fair, orgiastic drunkenness, animal sexuality, and mortal combat for prize-money in iron-studded clogs, calls for no lament. However repressive and disabling the work-discipline of Methodism, the Industrial Revolution could not have taken place without *some* work-discipline, and, in whatever form, the conflict between old and new ways must inevitably have been painful.

But the alignments for and against traditional “amusements” are so complex as to defy analysis. For example, it is often supposed that the old-fashioned Tory squire looked with tolerance upon old customs, or actively defended them against attack. There is evidence that, in the rural counties, this was sometimes the case. But these same squires were notorious for the vindictive measures which they employed in the defence of their game. The nearer they dwelled to the manufacturing centres, the more jealous they were of their privacy and privileges. For the daughters of Sheffield cutlers there was to be no gathering of nuts in May (the streets were posted with warning notices threatening the prosecution of nutters):

The great ones of the Nation [complained a pamphleteer in 1812] have claimed . . . all the Hares, Partridges, Woodcocks, Moor Game, &c. &c., to say nothing of fish; and at length they are beginning to turn their attention to the common hasel Nut.¹

Or, to take another example, while the Methodist and Evangelical assault upon the Sunday amusements of the poor seems often to have been motivated by officious bigotry, or by the desire to find some dramatic occasion for an encounter with Satan,² more complex issues were sometimes involved. In the Newcastle area in the Thirties a sharp contest was fought by the Evangelicals of all denominations to suppress the practice of “Sunday hirings” in the summer, where the farmers obtained

¹ One Who Pities the Oppressed, *The Beggar’s Complaint* (Sheffield, 1812). In times of great distress, poaching, in the neighbourhood of manufacturing districts, sometimes assumed the forms of civil war. An account of Nottingham Luddism (H.O. 42.119, 24 December 1811) concludes: “a desperate Gang of Poachers entered Lord Middleton’s Preserves at Wollaton near Nottingham and destroyed upwards of 100 Pheasants.” See also the excellent account of “The Poaching War” in E. W. Bovill’s *English Country Life 1780-1830* (1962), Ch. XII.

² Hugh Bourne, the founder of the Primitive Methodists, learned in 1808 that it was the custom to hold revelries on the summit of the Wrekin on the first Sunday in May: “It immediately arose in my mind to get preachers, and hold a camp-meeting there.” See also his hostility to Norton “wakes”, and the origin of the first camp-meetings at Mow Cop, 1807. J. T. Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne*, pp. 43-7, 58-9.

their harvest labour at fairs, to which labourers were attracted by gaming stalls, racing, and much liquor. Some of the trade unionists supported the Evangelicals, while on the side of the Sunday fairs were Chartists, farmers, hucksters, bookies, and publicans.¹

It is by no means clear that the change in the deportment of working men can be so far attributed to the influence of Wesleyan teaching, as historians of Methodism have tended to assume.² Undoubtedly the evangelical movement generally, and the Sunday school in particular, contributed greatly to the Puritan character-structure of the 19th-century artisan, even when (like Lovett) he repudiated the narrowness of his upbringing and became a free-thinker. It is right to see the Methodist chapel at Todmorden, built on the site of the old bull-ring, as emblematic of this change. But the evidence is often presented in too one-sided a manner. If some old superstitions perished, hysterical illusions of new kinds multiplied. Wesley himself perpetuated ignorant and barbaric superstitions: bibliomancy, belief in possession by the devil, and medical remedies as dangerous or cruel as any known to the 18th century. We have noted the aberrations of the Methodist Ranters, and of the Southcottians. Moreover, beneath the bigoted exterior of the evangelical tradesman or artisan, colder and meaner forms of witch-hunting and obscurantism might linger; fatalism towards child mortality, violent intolerance of "atheists" and free-thinkers.

Indeed, between old superstition and new bigotry, it is proper to be cautious when meeting the claims of the Evangelicals to have been an agency of intellectual enlightenment. We have already noted the tendency of the Methodists to harden into a sect, to keep their members apart from the contagion of the unconverted, and to regard themselves as being in a state of civil war with the ale-house and the denizens of Satan's strongholds. Where the Methodists were a minority group within a community, attitudes hardened on both sides; professions of virtue and declamations against sin reveal less about actual manners than they do about the rancour of hostilities. Moreover, the air of the early 19th century is thick with assertions and counter-

¹ See J. Everett, *Sunday Hirings* (Newcastle, 1837); and the periodical *Newcastle Sabbath*, 16 June 1838 et seq.

² For examples, see J. Wesley Bready, *England Before and After Wesley* (1938); J. H. Whiteley, *Wesley's England* (1938), and Dr. Wearmouth's books. For the moral sobriety of Radicalism, see below, pp. 737-43.

assertions, especially where the values of handworkers and factory workers were in conflict, or those of the opponents and defenders of child labour. Critics of the factory system saw it as destructive of family life and constantly indicted the mills as centres of the grossest sexual immorality; the coarse language and independent manners of Lancashire mill-girls shocked many witnesses. Gaskell contrasted the idyllic innocence of the domestic workers, whose youth was spent in a pagan freedom which entailed the obligation of marriage only if conception took place, with the febrile promiscuity of the factory where some of the employers enacted scenes with the mill-girls which—

put to blush the lascivious Saturnalia of the Romans, the rites of the Pagoda girls of India, and the Harem life of the most voluptuous Ottoman.¹

Such colourful accounts were, not unnaturally, resented not only by the employers but by the factory workers themselves. They pointed out that the illegitimacy rate in many rural districts compared unfavourably with that in mill-towns. In many mills the greatest propriety was enforced. If there were "Ottomans" among the mill-owners, there were also paternalists who dismissed any girl detected in a moral lapse.

The discussion is unrewarding, not because of the paucity of evidence as to family life and sexual behaviour, but because the evidence tells us so little about essential relations between parents and children, or between men and women. The Churches undoubtedly won converts from among those who had witnessed the suffering brought upon children by drunken or feckless parents. But there is no evidence that a repressive sexual code and patriarchal family relations brought enhancement of either happiness or of love. Even animalism might be preferable to cold and guilty sexuality; while, as sexual conduct in the early 19th century became more inhibited and secretive, so also, in the great towns, prostitution grew. Nor can we assume any direct correlation between church membership, or even the forms of marriage, and family loyalties. Mayhew was to discover that groups like the costermongers, among whom paganism and concubinage were customary, showed as much mutual loyalty as professing Christians.

Working people discovered in the Industrial Revolution a

¹ *The Manufacturing Population of England*, p. 64.

moral rhetoric which was authentic and deeply expressive of their collective grievances and aspirations, but which seems stilted and inadequate when applied to personal relations. But there is plenty of evidence as to the heroic family loyalties which sustained many people in these years. And there is evidence also as to a minority of men and women, in the main Radicals and free-thinkers, who consciously sought for a comradeship and equality unknown among working people in the 18th century. William Lovett, the cabinet-maker, whose engagement was broken off for a year because his fiancée (a lady's maid) found him heretical on doctrinal points; and who, after his marriage, shared with her his self-education, "reading and explaining to her the various subjects that came before us", may be taken as an example.

It is here that it is most difficult to draw a balance. On the one hand, the claim that the Industrial Revolution raised the status of women would seem to have little meaning when set beside the record of excessive hours of labour, cramped housing, excessive child-bearing and terrifying rates of child mortality. On the other hand, the abundant opportunities for female employment in the textile districts gave to women the status of independent wage-earners. The spinster or the widow was freed from dependence upon relatives or upon parish relief. Even the unmarried mother might be able, through the laxness of "moral discipline" in many mills, to achieve an independence unknown before. In the largest silk-mills at Macclesfield, righteous employers prided themselves upon dismissing girls who made a single "false step". A witness who contrasted this with the easier-going manners of Manchester came up with observations disturbing to the moralist:

I find it very generally . . . the case, that where the mills and factories are nearly free from mothers of illegitimate children, there the streets are infested with prostitutes; and on the contrary, where the girls are permitted to return to their work, after giving birth to a child, there the streets are kept comparatively clear of those unhappy beings.¹

The period reveals many such paradoxes. The war years saw a surfeit of sermonising and admonitory tracts limiting or refuting claims to women's rights which were associated with

¹ W. Dodd, *The Factory System Illustrated*, p. 194. Margaret Hewitt discusses some of the evidence, in the main from post-1840 sources, in *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry* (1958), esp. Ch. V.

in 1793, 704,350 in 1803, 925,429 in 1815. Although registration with the magistrates, under the first Friendly Society Act of 1793, made possible the protection of funds at law in the event of defaulting officers, a large but unknown number of clubs failed to register, either through hostility to the authorities, parochial inertia, or through a deep secretiveness which, Dr. Holland found, was still strong enough to baffle his enquiries in Sheffield in the early 1840s. Nearly all societies before 1815 bore a strictly local and self-governing character, and they combined the functions of sick insurance with convivial club nights and annual "outings" or feasts. An observer in 1805 witnessed near Matlock—

. . . about fifty women preceded by a solitary fiddler playing a merry tune. This was a female benefit society, who had been to hear a sermon at Eyam, and were going to dine together, a luxury which our female benefit society at Sheffield does not indulge in, having tea only, and generally singing, dancing, smoking, and negus.¹

Few of the members of friendly societies had a higher social status than that of clerks or small tradesmen; most were artisans. The fact that each brother had funds deposited in the society made for stability in membership and watchful participation in self-government. They had almost no middle-class membership and, while some employers looked upon them favourably, their actual conduct left little room for paternalist control. Failures owing to actuarial inexperience were common; defaulting officers not infrequent. Diffused through every part of the country, they were (often heart-breaking) schools of experience.

In the very secretiveness of the friendly society, and in its opaqueness under upper-class scrutiny, we have authentic evidence of the growth of independent working-class culture and institutions. This was the sub-culture out of which the less stable trade unions grew, and in which trade union officers were trained.² Union rules, in many cases, were more elaborate versions of the same code of conduct as the sick club. Sometimes, as in the case of the Woolcombers, this was supplemented by the procedures of secret masonic orders:

¹ T. A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 78. See also J. H. Priestley, "Ripponden Female Society", *Trans. Halifax Antiq. Soc.*, 1943.

² It was a continual complaint of the authorities that friendly societies allowed members to withdraw funds when on strike. Macclesfield was described in 1812 as "a nest of illicit association", "full of sick and burial societies which are the germ of revolution": C. S. Davies, *History of Macclesfield* (Manchester, 1961), p. 180.

Mr. Raymond Williams has suggested that "the crucial distinguishing element in English life since the Industrial Revolution is . . . between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship". As contrasted with middle-class ideas of individualism or (at their best) of service, "what is properly meant by 'working-class culture' . . . is the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions which proceed from this".¹ Friendly societies did not "proceed from" an idea; both the ideas and the institutions arose in response to certain common experiences. But the distinction is important. In the simple cellular structure of the friendly society, with its workaday ethos of mutual aid, we can see many features which were reproduced in more sophisticated and complex forms in trade unions, co-operatives, Hampden Clubs, Political Unions, and Chartist lodges. At the same time the societies can be seen as chrystallising an ethos of mutuality very much more widely diffused in the "dense" and "concrete" particulars of the personal relations of working people, at home and at work. Every kind of witness in the first half of the 19th century—clergymen, factory inspectors, Radical publicists—remarked upon the extent of mutual aid in the poorest districts. In times of emergency, unemployment, strikes, sickness, child-birth, then it was the poor who "helped every one his neighbour". Twenty years after Place's comment on the change in Lancashire manners, Cooke Taylor was astounded at the way in which Lancashire working men bore "the extreme of wretchedness",

with a high tone of moral dignity, a marked sense of propriety, a decency, cleanliness, and order . . . which do not merit the intense suffering I have witnessed. I was beholding the gradual immolation of the noblest and most valuable population that ever existed in this country or in any other under heaven.

"Nearly all the distressed operatives whom I met north of Manchester . . . had a thorough horror of being forced to receive parish relief."²

It is an error to see this as the *only* effective "working-class" ethic. The "aristocratic" aspirations of artisans and mechanics, the values of "self-help", or criminality and demoralisation, were equally widely dispersed. The conflict between alternative

¹ *Culture and Society* (Penguin edn.), pp. 312-14.

² Cooke Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-9. Taylor was writing at the time of the cotton depression of 1842.

The Sunday schools were bringing an unexpected harvest.¹

The weakening hold of the churches by no means indicated any erosion of the self-respect and discipline of class. On the contrary, Manchester and Newcastle, with their long tradition of industrial and political organisation, were notable in the Chartist years for the discipline of their massive demonstrations. Where the citizens and shopkeepers had once been thrown into alarm when the "terrible and savage pitmen" entered Newcastle in any force, it now became necessary for the coal-owners to scour the slums of the city for "candy-men" or rag-collectors to evict the striking miners. In 1838 and 1839 tens of thousands of artisans, miners and labourers marched week after week in good order through the streets, often passing within a few feet of the military, and avoiding all provocation. "Our people had been well taught," one of their leaders recalled, "that it was not riot we wanted, but revolution."²

iii. *The Irish*

One ingredient in the new working-class community has necessarily evaded this analysis: the Irish immigration. In 1841 it was estimated that over 400,000 inhabitants of Great Britain had been born in Ireland; many more tens of thousands were born in Britain of Irish parentage. The great majority of these were Catholics, and among the poorest-paid labourers; most of them lived in London and in the industrial towns. In Liverpool and in Manchester anything between one-fifth and one-third of the working population was Irish.

This is not the place to rehearse the appalling story of the immiseration of the Irish people in the first half of the 19th century. But the disasters which afflicted Ireland came less from the potato-blight than from the after-effects of a counter-revolution following upon the merciless repression of the United Irishmen's rebellion (1798) far more savage than anything enacted in England; and from the political, economic and social consequences of the Act of Union (1800). In 1794 a clergyman of the Church of Ireland named William Jackson, who was acting as a go-between between William Hamilton Rowan, of the United Irishmen, and the French, was seized in Dublin

¹ Engels, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-6; Cooke Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-5; *Newcastle Chronicle, Inquiry into the Condition of the Poor* (Newcastle, 1850), pp. 32, 56. See also Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 181, 186.

² Fynes, *op. cit.*, p. 19; Thomas Burt, *Autobiography* (1924), p. 34; T. A. Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1882), pp. 184-5.

with a paper outlining the position in Ireland and the prospects of support in the event of a French invasion. The population of Ireland was estimated (erroneously) at 4,500,000,¹ of whom 450,000 were supposed to be Anglicans, 900,000 Dissenters, and 3,150,000 Catholics. Of the Dissenters ("the most enlightened body of the Nation") it said:

They are steady Republicans, devoted to Liberty and through all the Stages of the French Revolution have been enthusiastically attached to it. The Catholics, the Great body of the People, are in The Lowest degree of Ignorance and Want, ready for any Change because no Change can make them worse, the Whole Peasantry of Ireland, the Most Oppressed and Wretched in Europe, may be said to be Catholic.

Whereas the anti-Gallican prejudices of the English would "unite all ranks in opposition to the Invaders", in Ireland "a Conquered, oppressed and Insulted Country the Name of England and her Power is Universally Odious . . .".

The Dissenters are enemies to the English Power from reason and Reflection, the Catholics from a Hatred of the English Name. . . .

In a Word, from Reflection, Interest, Prejudice, the spirit of Change, the misery of the great bulk of the nation and above all the Hatred of the English name resulting from the Tyranny of near seven centurys, there seems little doubt but an Invasion would be supported by the People.²

It is arguable that the French lost Europe, not before Moscow, but in 1797, when only a Navy in mutiny stood between them and an Ireland on the eve of rebellion.³ But the invasion, when it came, was of a different order; it was the invasion of England and Scotland by the Irish poor. And Jackson's brief reminds us that the Irish emigration was more differentiated than is often supposed. In the years before and after '98, the Dissenters of Ulster, the most industrialised province, were not the most loyal but the most "Jacobinical" of the Irish; while it was only after the repression of the rebellion that the antagonism between the "Orangemen" and "Papists" was deliberately fostered by the Castle, as a means of maintaining power. The emigrants included seasonal harvest-workers from Connaught, fugitive Wexford smallholders, and Ulster artisans, who differed as greatly from each other as Cornish labourers and Manchester

¹ The first Census, in 1821, gave a figure of 6,803,000.

² T. S., 11.3510 A (2); *Trial of the Rev. Wm. Jackson* (1795), pp. 80-1.

³ See E. H. S. Jones, *The Invasion that Failed* (Oxford, 1950).

came to this country. Once here, as soon as employment was found, heroic efforts were made to send remittances back to Ireland, and often to raise the small sum needed to bring relatives across and to reunite the family in England.¹

The conditions which the greater part of the post-war immigrants left behind them were, in the language of the Blue Books, insufficient to support "the commonest necessities of life":

Their habitations are wretched hovels, several of a family sleep together upon straw or upon the bare ground . . . their food commonly consists of dry potatoes, and with these they are . . . obliged to stint themselves to one spare meal on the day. . . . They sometimes get a herring, or a little milk, but they never get meat except at Christmas, Easter, and Shrovetide.²

As the cheapest labour in Western Europe, this part of their story is familiar. Page after page of the Blue Books concerned with sanitary conditions, crime, housing, hand-loom weavers, are filled with accounts of the squalor which the Irish brought with them to England: of their cellar-dwellings: the paucity of furnishings and bedding: the garbage thrust out at the doors: the overcrowding: the under-cutting of English labour. Their utility to the employers in the last respect needs no stressing. A Manchester silk manufacturer declared, "the moment I have a turn-out and am fast for hands I send to Ireland for ten, fifteen, or twenty families . . ."³

But the influence of the Irish immigration was more ambivalent and more interesting than this. Paradoxically, it was the very success of the pressures effecting changes in the character-structure of the English working man which called forth the need for a supplementary labour force unmoulded by the industrial work-discipline. This discipline, as we have seen, required steady methodical application, inner motivations of sobriety, forethought, and punctilious observation of contracts; in short, the controlled paying-out of energies in skilled or semi-skilled employments. By contrast, the heavy manual occupations at the base of industrial society required a spendthrift expense of sheer physical energy—an alternation of intensive labour and boisterous relaxation which belongs to

¹ For the migration generally, see Redford, *op. cit.*, pp. 114 ff.; for an excellent summary of its economic and social causes, see E. Strauss, *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy* (1951), esp. Chs. IX and X.

² *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland* (1836), p. 3.

³ *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain* (1836) p. vii.

They scarcely ever make good mechanics; they don't look deep into subjects; their knowledge is quick, but superficial; they don't make good millwrights or engineers, or anything which requires thought. . . . If a plan is put in an Irishman's hand, he requires looking after continuously, otherwise he will go wrong, or more probably not go on at all.

This was the consequence of "want of application" rather than any "natural incapacity"; it was a "moral" and not an "intellectual" defect:

A man who has no care for the morrow, and who lives only for the passing moment, cannot bring his mind to undergo the severe discipline, and to make those patient and toilsome exertions which are required to form a good mechanic.¹

The *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, which is one of the most impressive essays in sociology among the Blue Books of the Thirties, came to this conclusion:

The Irish emigration into Britain is an example of a less civilized population spreading themselves, as a kind of substratum, beneath a more civilized community; and, without excelling in any branch of industry, obtaining possession of all the lowest departments of manual labour.

The employers found this "advantageous", one master in the Potteries noted, "as the native population is fully employed in the more ingenious and skill-requiring works". Nevertheless, in the view of many employers the immigration "has not been an unmingled benefit". For the Irish displayed the same exuberance and indiscipline in their relaxation as in their work. "A large number of the labouring Irish in the manufacturing towns . . . spend their earnings in the following manner":

On the Saturday night, when they receive their wages, they first pay the score at the shop . . . and their rent . . . and when their debts are thus paid, they go drinking spirits as long as the remnant of their wages holds out. On the Monday morning, they are penniless . . .

Maintaining a "fixed standard of existence, little superior to that which they observed in their own country", they lacked the Puritan virtues of thrift and sobriety as much as those of application and forethought. Every Saturday night the streets of Manchester, Liverpool and other manufacturing towns were taken over by hundreds of drunken and brawling Irishmen.

¹ *Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, pp. ix, xxx-xxxii.

Moreover, in a score of ways the Irishman's virtues and vices were the opposite of those of the disciplined English artisan. The Irish had a sometimes violent, sometimes good-humoured contempt of English authority. Not only were the rulers' laws and religion alien, but there were no community sanctions which found prosecution in the English law courts a cause of shame. Well-treated, an employer said, they were trustworthy: "If one among them is detected in a petty theft, the others will avoid him". But the Irishman detected in pilfering from unpopular employers or farmers or refusing to pay rent was supported not only by the licence of his compatriots but by their collective force. A Manchester cotton master declared, there is "no recklessness of conduct which they do not at times display". Constantly fighting among themselves, they turned as one man if any individual was attacked from outside. Attempts to seize illicit stills led to wars of cutlasses and brickbats, in which the Irish women were not the most backward. In Manchester's Little Ireland attempts to serve legal executions for rent, debt, or taxes, had to be conducted like a minor military action against an embattled population. "It is extremely dangerous," said the Deputy Constable of Manchester in 1836, "to execute a warrant in a factory where many Irish are employed; they will throw bricks and stones on the officers' heads as they are coming up stairs. . . ." And the Superintendent of the Manchester Watch gave evidence that—

. . . in order to apprehend one Irishman in the Irish parts of the town, we are forced to take from ten or twenty, or even more, watchmen. The whole neighbourhood turn out with weapons; even women, half-naked, carrying brickbats and stones for the men to throw. A man will resist, fighting and struggling, in order to gain time till his friends collect for a rescue. . . .¹

These Irish were neither stupid nor barbarians. Mayhew often remarked upon their generosity, their "powers of speech and quickness of apprehension". They adhered to a different value-system than that of the English artisan; and in shocking English proprieties one feels that they often enjoyed themselves and acted up the part. Often, a Bolton attorney recalled, they played the fool in the dock, bringing forward a tribe of country-

¹ *State of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, pp. x, xvi-xvii, x; *First Report of the Constabulary Commissioners* (1839), pp. 167-9.

men as "character witnesses", showing an acute knowledge of legal procedure in their prevarications, and making magistrates dizzy with their blarney. The same disregard for veracity made many of them consummate beggars. Generous to each other, if they saved money it was for some definite project—emigration to Canada or marriage. To bring wives and children, brothers and sisters, to England they would "treasure up halfpenny after halfpenny" for years, but "they will *not* save to preserve either themselves or their children from the degradation of a workhouse . . .". As street-sellers they remained in the poorest grades, as hawkers or rag-dealers; their temperament, Mayhew dryly commented, was not adapted to "buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest". To the English Poor Laws they maintained a cheerful predatory attitude. They turned the obsolete Settlement Laws to their advantage, joy-riding up and down the country at parochial expense (and who would know whether Manchester was or was not the parish of origin of Paddy M'Guire?) and slipping out of the overseer's cart when the stopping-place seemed congenial. They would accept parochial relief "without the least sense of shame".¹

This was an unsettling element in the formative working-class community—a seemingly inexhaustible flow of reinforcements to man the battlements of Satan's strongholds. In some towns the Irish were partially segregated in their own streets and quarters. In London in 1850 Mayhew found them in the labyrinth of alleys off Rosemary-lane, in whose folds could be seen "rough-headed urchins running with their feet bare through the puddles, and bonnetless girls, huddled in shawls, lolling against the door-posts". In the cellars of Manchester and Leeds there was a similar segregation. And there was also the segregation of religion. In 1800 the native working-class population which adhered to the Catholic faith was miniscule. In the Irish immigration the Catholic Church saw evidence of a divine plan to recover England to the Faith; and wherever the Irish went, the priests followed closely after. Moreover, this Irish priesthood was poorer and closer to the peasantry than any in Europe. With an average income which has been estimated at £65 a year, in a literal sense they lived off their flocks, taking their meals in the homes of their parishioners and

¹ H. M. Richardson, *Reminiscences of Forty Years in Bolton* (Bolton, 1885), pp. 129-31; Mayhew, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 109, 121.

prevented this from happening. But this lies beyond the limits of this study.

iv. *Myriads of Eternity*

If we can now see more clearly many of the elements which made up the working-class communities of the early 19th century, a definitive answer to the "standard-of-living" controversy must still evade us. For beneath the word "standard" we must always find judgements of value as well as questions of fact. Values, we hope to have shown, are not "imponderables" which the historian may safely dismiss with the reflection that, since they are not amenable to measurement, anyone's opinion is as good as anyone else's. They are, on the contrary, those questions of human satisfaction, and of the direction of social change, which the historian ought to ponder if history is to claim a position among the significant humanities.

The historian, or the historical sociologist, must in fact be concerned with judgements of value in two forms. In the first instance, he is concerned with the values *actually held* by those who lived through the Industrial Revolution. The old and newer modes of production each supported distinct kinds of community with characteristic ways of life. Alternative conventions and notions of human satisfaction were in conflict with each other, and there is no shortage of evidence if we wish to study the ensuing tensions.

In the second instance, he is concerned with making some judgement of value upon the whole process entailed in the Industrial Revolution, of which we ourselves are an end-product. It is our own involvement which makes judgement difficult. And yet we are helped towards a certain detachment, both by the "romantic" critique of industrialism which stems from one part of the experience, and by the record of tenacious resistance by which hand-loom weaver, artisan or village craftsman confronted this experience and held fast to an alternative culture. As we see them change, so we see how we became what we are. We understand more clearly what was lost, what was driven "underground", what is still unresolved.

Any evaluation of the quality of life must entail an assessment of the total life-experience, the manifold satisfactions or deprivations, cultural as well as material, of the people concerned. From such a standpoint, the older "cataclysmic" view of the Industrial Revolution must still be accepted. During the

years between 1780 and 1840 the people of Britain suffered an experience of immiseration, even if it is possible to show a small statistical improvement in material conditions. When Sir Charles Snow tells us that "with singular unanimity . . . the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them", we must reply, with Dr. Leavis, that the "actual history" of the "full human problem [was] incomparably and poignantly more complex than that".¹ Some were lured from the countryside by the glitter and promise of wages of the industrial town; but the old village economy was crumbling at their backs. They moved less by their own will than at the dictate of external compulsions which they could not question: the enclosures, the Wars, the Poor Laws, the decline of rural industries, the counter-revolutionary stance of their rulers.

The process of industrialisation is necessarily painful. It must involve the erosion of traditional patterns of life. But it was carried through with exceptional violence in Britain. It was unrelieved by any sense of national participation in communal effort, such as is found in countries undergoing a national revolution. Its ideology was that of the masters alone. Its messianic prophet was Dr. Andrew Ure, who saw the factory system as "the great minister of civilization to the terraqueous globe", diffusing "the life-blood of science and religion to myriads . . . still lying 'in the region and shadow of death'."² But those who served it did not *feel* this to be so, any more than those "myriads" who were served. The experience of immiseration came upon them in a hundred different forms; for the field labourer, the loss of his common rights and the vestiges of village democracy; for the artisan, the loss of his craftsman's status; for the weaver, the loss of livelihood and of independence; for the child, the loss of work and play in the home; for many groups of workers whose real earnings improved, the loss of security, leisure and the deterioration of the urban environment. R. M. Martin, who gave evidence before the Hand-Loom Weavers' Committee of 1834, and who had returned to England after an absence from Europe of ten years, was struck by the evidence of physical and spiritual deterioration:

I have observed it not only in the manufacturing but also in agricultural communities in this country; they seem to have lost

¹ C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (1959); F. R. Leavis, "The Significance of C. P. Snow", *Spectator*, 9 March 1962.

² *Philosophy of Manufactures*, pp. 18-19.

their animation, their vivacity, their field games and their village sports; they have become a sordid, discontented, miserable, anxious, struggling people, without health, or gaiety, or happiness.

It is misleading to search for explanations in what Professor Ashton has rightly described as "tedious" phrases,—man's "divorce" from "nature" or "the soil". After the "Last Labourers' Revolt", the Wiltshire field labourers—who were close enough to "nature"—were far worse degraded than the Lancashire mill girls. This violence was done to *human* nature. From one standpoint, it may be seen as the outcome of the pursuit of profit, when the cupidity of the owners of the means of production was freed from old sanctions and had not yet been subjected to new means of social control. In this sense we may still read it, as Marx did, as the violence of the capitalist class. From another standpoint, it may be seen as a violent technological differentiation between work and life.

It is neither poverty nor disease but work itself which casts the blackest shadow over the years of the Industrial Revolution. It is Blake, himself a craftsman by training, who gives us the experience:

Then left the sons of Urizen the plow & harrow, the loom,
The hammer & the chisel & the rule & compasses . . .
And all the arts of life they chang'd into the arts of death.
The hour glass contemn'd because its simple workmanship
Was as the workmanship of the plowman & the water wheel
That raises water into Cisterns, broken & burn'd in fire
Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the shepherds
And in their stead intricate wheels invented, Wheel without wheel,
To perplex youth in their outgoings & to bind to labours
Of day & night the myriads of Eternity, that they might file
And polish brass & iron hour after hour, laborious workmanship,
Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the days of wisdom
In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of bread,
In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All,
And call it demonstration, blind to all the simple rules of life.

These "myriads of eternity" seem at times to have been sealed in their work like a tomb. Their best efforts, over a lifetime, and supported by their own friendly societies, could scarcely ensure them that to which so high a popular value was attached—a "Decent Funeral". New skills were arising, old satisfactions persisted, but over all we feel the general pressure of long hours of unsatisfying labour under severe discipline for alien

purposes. This was at the source of that "ugliness" which, D. H. Lawrence wrote, "betrayed the spirit of man in the nineteenth century".¹ After all other impressions fade, this one remains; together with that of the loss of any felt cohesion in the community, save that which the working people, in antagonism to their labour and to their masters, built for themselves.

¹ "Nottingham and the Mining Country", *Selected Essays* (Penguin edn.), pp. 119, 122.

Burdett's victory was the signal for illuminations almost on the scale of the celebration of the peace. "It will have this most dreadful effect," mourned Cobbett. "It will embolden and increase the disorderly and dishonest part of this monstrously overgrown and profligate metropolis."¹

Even Lancaster saw a contest in which a "Jacobinical mob" was addressed by a lady, who told them that "the contest was between shoes and wooden clogs, between fine shirts and coarse ones, between the opulent and the poor, and that the people were everything if they chose to assert their rights."² It seemed that a movement of greater force than that of 1792-5 was maturing. The course of English history might have been changed if there had been five years of peace. But events occurred which threw all into confusion. In November 1802, Colonel Despard was seized on a charge of high treason; in January executed.³ In the winter of 1802-3 relations between Britain and France became acrimonious. In May 1803, the two countries were once again at war.

But this appeared to many reformers as a different kind of war. In 1802 Napoleon had become First Consul for life; in 1804 he accepted the crown as hereditary Emperor. No true follower of Paine could stomach this. The hardened Jacobin was cut as deeply by this as more moderate reformers had been dismayed by Robespierre. However much they had sought to maintain a critical detachment, the morale of English reformers was closely involved with the fortunes of France. The First Empire struck a blow at English republicanism from which it never fully recovered. The *Rights of Man* had been most passionate in its indictment of thrones, Gothic institutions, hereditary distinctions; as the war proceeded, Napoleon's accommodation with the Vatican, his king-making and his elevation of a new hereditary nobility, stripped France of its last revolutionary magnetism. *Ça Ira* faded in the memories even of the Nottingham crowd. If the Tree of Liberty was to grow, it must be grafted to English stock.

France appeared to many now simply in the guise of a commercial and imperial rival, the oppressor of Spanish and

¹ Elected, Byng (Whig), 3,843, Burdett (Radical), 3,207; Not elected, Mainwaring (Tory), 2,936. See *Cobbett's Political Register*, 10, 17, 24 July, 1802; J. G. Alger, *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives* (1904); J. Dechamps, *Les Iles Britanniques et La Revolution Française* (Brussels, 1949), Ch. V; M. W. Patterson, *Sir Francis Burdett* (1931), Chs. IV and VII.

² J. Bowles, *Thoughts on the late General Election*, p. 63.

³ See below, pp. 478-84.

Italian peoples. Between 1803 and 1806 the Grand Army was poised across the Channel, waiting only for mastery of the seas. "Jacobinism is killed and gone," declared Sheridan, who had himself joined Addington's Ministry, in December 1802: "And by whom? By him who can no longer be called the child and champion of Jacobinism; by Buonaparté." And Windham, fresh from his Norwich defeat, made an extraordinary appeal in the House for national unity in the face of the return of war:

To the Jacobins I would appeal, not as lovers of social order, of good government, of monarchy, but as men of spirit, as lovers of what they call liberty, as men of hot and proud blood—I would ask them if they are content to be put under the yoke, and crushed by France?¹

With the renewal of war, the Volunteers drilled Sunday after Sunday. They were not, perhaps, as popular as contemporary publicists and patriotic legend suggest. "Volunteers" is, in any case, a misnomer. Officers came forward a great deal more readily than the miscellaneous, ill-disciplined, incurably anti-militaristic rank-and-file, who were losing their only day of rest. Pains were taken, also, to keep arms out of the hands of the disaffected. "In large towns," Sheridan said on behalf of the Government, "such as Birmingham, Sheffield, and Nottingham, he should prefer associations of the higher classes, and in the country and villages those of the lower." In Norwich, *The Times* reported in 1804,

the common people in the city . . . and its vicinity have taken an aversion to the system of volunteering. On Monday an attempt was made by them, particularly the females, to obstruct the volunteers of the Norwich regiment from mustering. They abused and insulted the officers, and accused the volunteers of being the cause of small loaves and the advance in corn.

The sons of the squire, the attorney, and the manufacturer, enjoyed dressing up on horseback and attending Volunteer balls. A common understanding grew up between aristocracy and middle class, forming that *esprit de corps* which was later to carry the day on the field of Peterloo; while at the balls their sisters selected husbands who facilitated that cross-fertilisation of landed and commercial wealth which distinguished the English Industrial Revolution. The rank-and-file had few such

¹ *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates*, II, Supplement, 1667, 1752.

rewards: in one Northumberland village, with a high percentage of "volunteers", "13 offered to serve in the infantry, 25 in the cavalry, 130 as guides, 260 as waggons, and 300 as drivers of cattle".¹

But despite this undercurrent, Sheridan was right. Jacobinism, as a movement deriving inspiration from France, was almost dead. Between 1802 and 1806 there was certainly a revival of popular patriotic feeling. "Boney", if he was admired, was admired as a "warrior", not as an embodiment of popular rights. Britain was inundated with patriotic chap-books, broadsheets, and prints. If the women of Norwich resisted and if Northumberland villagers played dumb, thousands of Lancashire weavers joined the Volunteers. Nelson was as popular a war hero as England had known since Drake; he was thought to be a man with sympathy for popular rights, and his intercession for the life of Colonel Despard was remembered; the bitter-sweet victory of Trafalgar (1805) was the theme of a hundred ballads and the talk of every tavern and hamlet. In 1806 Fox (in the last year of his life) himself joined the national coalition—the "Ministry of All-the-Talents"—and became resigned to the continuance of war.²

Once again, Radicalism was not extinguished. But the terms of argument shifted beyond recognition. Former Jacobins became patriots, as eager to denounce Napoleon for his apostasy to the republican cause as legitimists were to denounce him for his usurpation from the House of Bourbon. (In 1808 a former Secretary of the L.C.S., John Bone, made a significant attempt to reawaken the old cause by publishing the *Reasoner*, a journal which supported both the war and many old "Jacobin" demands.³) Others, like Redhead Yorke of Sheffield, suffered the classic compulsions of guilt and the desire for self-exculpation, so familiar in the disenchanted romantics of more recent times; Yorke had become by 1804 an "anti-Jacobin" publicist so virulent that Cobbett was driven by him towards the reformers out of sheer disgust.

¹ *Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates*, IV, 1191, 1362; *The Times*, 5 November 1804. For a contemporary record of the reconciliation between land and commerce in the Volunteers, see T. A. Ward's Sheffield diary, *Peeps into the Past*, *passim*. And Jane Austen.

² For the literature of popular patriotism, see F. Klingberg and S. Hustvedt, *The Warning Drum . . . Broad-sides of 1803* (Univ. of California, 1944). Even John Thelwall contributed a *Poem and Oration on the Death of Lord Nelson* (1805).

³ This honourably-named periodical failed through lack of support. See *Reasoner*, 16 April 1808.

With respect to the nocturnal meetings, they continue, though the place is never known to others till they take place. On Friday evening at or near midnight a meeting was held in a hollow way, or narrow valley about six miles from Leeds and two from Birstall, at some distance from any public road. A man of perfect veracity assures me that he attempted to form one of the party, but found that scouts were stationed on all sides at some distance, the outermost of whom accosted him and aimed at drawing him off in a different direction. On his persevering he found another irregular and moving line of scouts, who asked his business, and upon his continuing to proceed towards the "Black Lamp" of men, a whistling was made, and he heard expressions and tones of voice that quite deterred him from his purpose. That some particular persons whom they called gentlemen were expected and were not then arrived, he could easily recollect from what he overheard on the way. . . .

From another quarter on which I can depend, I learn that the committee forming the "Black Lamp," and which on Friday night might be composed of about 200 men, consists of those who have discoursed on the subject with nine others, and have sworn them in, each of which again, *ad infinitum*, becomes a Committee man on the same grounds. "Abolition of all taxes, and the full enjoyment of their rights" are the subjects on which the leaders hold forth, and the cement which holds them together. "By Christmas they should be able to carry their points, and on one night the rise was to take place in every quarter."¹

Whatever organisation there was had access to the printing-press. In June 1802 a small eight-page "Address to United Britons" was sent to the Home Office by a West Riding magistrate. This claimed to unite "in a chain of affection" all those seeking to overthrow the nation's oppressors:

The independent LIBERTY of a wise people, they deem TREASON, because they dread that justice may fall on their own guilty heads. . . .²

In the autumn two Sheffield men, William Lee and William Ronkesley, were brought to trial for administering secret oaths. It was alleged that between October 1801 and August 1802 they had been members of a secret association, comprising 1,000 members in Sheffield, which had manufactured pikes and had secret depots of buried arms. The organisation was officered by "Directors & Conductors", who drilled the members at

¹ H.O. 42.66, printed in full in Aspinall, *Early English Trade Unions*, pp. 52-3. Original in Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (d).

² R. Walker, to H.O. 28 June 1802 (enclosure), H.O. 42.64.

night. Its aims were vague, but (the Mayor of Leeds wrote to Fitzwilliam) "an Idea has place amongst the poor—that they *should* pay no Taxes . . . Thousands carry about with them a Secret Conviction & Indulge a Hope that Matters are growing Ripe."¹ Lee and Ronkesley were sentenced to seven years transportation.²

In November Despard and his associates were seized in London. There were more reports, in December, of the preparation of arms in Sheffield. As late as August 1803 Fitzwilliam was told by an informant that oath-taking and pike-manufacture continued. Secret organisation "has pervaded the great body of the People in the manufacturing district of this Country", he wrote to the Secretary of State, despite his habitual scepticism. "Vast numbers of the Army & Militia were sworn", with the same oath as taken in the Despard business. There were special envoys between districts: "Little is committed to paper, but whatever is, is destroy'd as soon as communicated." "The Managers never meet in their own towns: when they have occasion to deliberate they go to a distance from their homes."³ Thereafter the "Black Lamp" appears to go out.

Similar reports came in, during the same period, from south Lancashire and parts of the Midlands. Clearly there was some underground organisation in existence, which sought to turn discontent at the soaring prices and food shortages into a revolutionary channel. There is too much evidence, and from too many independent sources, for it to be possible to uphold the accepted historical fiction that "sedition" had no existence except in the imaginations of Ministers, magistrates and spies. But at this point the sources lead only into obscurity. Did the "United Britons" have any real *national* existence? Was Colonel Despard connected with it, and with the underground in Lancashire and the West Riding? Were there links with France and with Robert Emmet in Dublin? Did the underground continue after 1802?

The Despard trial revealed little, although a great deal was suggested. Colonel Despard (1751-1803) came of an Irish landowning family, and had a distinguished military record.

¹ J. Dixon, 17 July 1802; W. Cookson, 27 July 1802; J. Lowe, 3 December 1802: all in Fitzwilliam Papers, F. 45(d).

² L. T. Rede, *York Castle in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 198-201.

³ Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (c). The informant, Fitzwilliam adds, is "a steady, industrious man, not young, I see but little reason to suppose this the idle tale of a flippant prater. . . ."

"We went on the Spanish Main together," declared Nelson, who was called by the Defence at the trial: "We slept many nights together in our clothes upon the ground; we have measured the height of the enemies' wall together. In all that period . . . no man could have shown more zealous attachment to his Sovereign and his Country than Colonel Despard."¹ Nelson had thought so highly of his comrade-in-arms that he had expected him to rise to one of the most distinguished positions in the Army. But this was many years before: the two men had not met since 1780. From 1772, Despard served continuously in the West Indies and British Honduras, until his recall on half-pay in 1790. He appears to have been the very type of numbers of officers in this period, who, possessing neither wealth nor influence enough to secure recognition, found themselves defrauded of promotion, overtaken by nincompoops with interest at court, subjected to accusations of misconduct by their rivals, and left to kick their heels for years in the corridors of power.² We can see in Despard some of the same mixture of the private grievances of a serving officer and of general disgust at the corruption and insincerities of political life which made Lord Cochrane into a Radical.

But Despard was also an Irishman, and by 1796 or 1797 he had become so deeply committed to the cause of Irish independence that he was serving both on the committee of the London Corresponding Society and in the more shadowy circles of the United Irishmen and United Englishmen in London. He was one of the group with whom O'Coigly had made contact in Furnival's Inn Cellar.³ Early in 1798 the Privy Council received various reports as to his activities, which suggested that he was building an underground *military* organisation, in which the style of the Elizabethan soldier of fortune and that of the 19th-century revolutionary were curiously compounded. While the aims of the organisation were Jacobinical, those enlisting in Despard's service were promised high rank and reward in the event of success. Imprisoned under the suspension of Habeas Corpus between 1798 and 1800, Despard's case was prominent among those which featured in

¹ Cf. *London Gazette*, 18 July 1780; "There was scarcely a gun fired, but was pointed by Captain Nelson, of the *Hinchinbroke*, or Lieutenant Despard, chief engineer. . . ."

² For Despard's early career, see Sir Charles Oman, *The Unfortunate Colonel Despard* (1922); J. Bannantine, *Memoirs of E. M. Despard* (1799).

³ See above, p. 169.

the "No Bastille" agitation of Sir Francis Burdett and of the London crowd. On his release in 1800, it would seem that Despard set to work once more to construct his revolutionary army.

He was arrested in the last week of November 1802, at "The Oakley Arms", Lambeth, in the company of about forty working men and soldiers. Certain facts were proved at his trial beyond question. Despard and certain of his associates had been passing in the previous months from one meeting-place to another in the taverns of working-class London: "The Flying Horse" at Newington, "The Two Bells" and "The Coach and Horses" in Whitechapel, "The Ham and Windmill" in the Haymarket, "The Brown Bear" and "The Black Horse" in St. Giles's, "The Bleeding Heart" in Hatton Garden. The company in all these places included labourers and soldiers, with a high proportion of Irish, and certainly some kind of Jacobin conspiracy was mooted.

Other facts were adduced, at his trial or in the contemporary press, which must be viewed with a more critical eye. Thus it was alleged that Jacobin guardsmen at both the Chatham and London barracks had enrolled a considerable number of followers, bound to the conspiracy by secret oaths. Papers found on the prisoners gave the "constitution" of their society:

The independence of Great Britain and Ireland—An equalization of civil, political, and religious rights—An ample provision for the families of the heroes who shall fall in the contest.

A liberal reward for distinguished merit—These are the objects for which we contend, and to obtain these objects we swear to be united.¹

Soldiers had been invited to join this "Constitution Society" in order "to fight, to burst the chain of bondage and slavery". The organisation (it was alleged) had no fewer than seven divisions and eight sub-divisions in Southwark alone, with further divisions in the Borough, Marylebone, Spitalfields and Blackwall, principally among "day-labourers, journeymen, and common soldiers," discharged sailors, and Irish dockers. It was a para-military organisation, with "ten men in each company, and when they amounted to eleven, the eleventh took the command" of a new company. Each company was commanded by a "captain", each group of five companies amounted to a "deputy division", commanded by a "colonel". On the other

¹ Identical papers were found in Yorkshire in 1802; Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (d).

hand, if this was the approved model, it does not appear to have been carried widely into effect. According to one witness, Despard said that:

a regular organization in London is dangerous to us, it is under the eye of Government; but a regular organization in the country is necessary, and, I believe, general . . .

Such an organisation in London would be "a moral impossibility". But he mentioned Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester and Chatham as "country" centres where such organisation existed, with which he claimed to be in touch.

The trial brought further allegations. Colonel Despard and his revolutionary army were accused of preparing an imminent *coup d'état*. The Tower and the Bank were to be stormed, the barracks seized from within, the prisons thrown open, and the King was to be assassinated or taken prisoner. "I have weighed everything well within myself," Despard was alleged to have said, "and God may know, my heart is callous." The Cabinet were known to the conspirators as "the Man Eaters". The seizure of the Tower or of the King's person was to be the signal to the London crowd to rise; and the mail coaches (which all left London from a central point, at Piccadilly) were "to be stopped, as a signal to the people in the country that they had revolted in town".

There is no real evidence to suggest that the case against Despard was a "frame-up", although his innocence was widely believed at the time¹ and the suggestion has been handed down in the Whig tradition of history. It is true that the Crown witnesses were disreputable—notably John Emblin, a former Jacobin watchmaker, and one of the guardsmen, both of whom turned King's evidence, and the second of whom swore away the life of his own brother. It is true also that a good deal of the evidence as to the conspiracy in the Army implicated Despard himself only indirectly, and may have taken place independently of him or even against his advice; while the more colourful details as to the intended assassination of the King and seizure of the Tower may have been trumped up for the occasion. On the other hand, neither Despard nor his counsel offered the least explanation as to the purpose of these

¹ See, for example, C. F. Mortimer, *A Christian Effort to Exalt the Goodness of the Divine Majesty, even in a Memento, on Edward Marcus Despard, Esq. And Six Other Citizens, undoubtedly now with God in Glory* (1803), which quotes Matthew Chap. 28, v. 12: "They gave large Sums of Money to the Soldiers, &c."

frequent meetings in obscure London taverns, in which a gentleman of Despard's rank was an unlikely customer. Despard broke the silence which he maintained throughout the trials of himself and his fellow conspirators only after sentence of death had been passed. And then it was to expostulate:

Your Lordship has imputed to me the character of being the seducer of these men; I do not conceive that anything appeared in the trial or the evidence adduced against me, to prove that I am the seducer of these men.

In the circumstances this can only be taken as an admission that a conspiracy existed, but that Despard, so far from initiating it, was drawn into it by others, as to whose identity he maintained a loyal silence.

"Colonel Despard," Francis Place (who had served with him on the Committee of the L.C.S.) annotated a manuscript over thirty years later: "he . . . was a singularly mild gentlemanly person—a singularly good-hearted man." "Orator" Hunt, whose first contact with Jacobin notions was when (imprisoned in the King's Bench) he met Despard, wrote in similar vein: "a mild gentleman-like man". Must we accept the usual accounts—that his following was "microscopic" or that "it is hardly possible to explain the folly of his plot except on the supposition that his mind was disordered"?¹ The state of Ireland in 1798 was enough to disorder the mind of any Irish patriot. And if we suppose (as we reasonably may) that Despard and his circle had access to former contacts of the L.C.S. as well as to the "United Irishmen" in Britain,² and that there was some loose link between them and such organisations as the "Black Lamp" in Yorkshire,³ then the conspiracy was a serious business. Moreover, the mutinies of the fleet remind us that a revolutionary organisation in the Army was by no means inconceivable. No less than the Navy, the Army seethed with grievances—as to pay, food and accommodation,

¹ See Cole and Postgate, *The Common People*, p. 163; H. W. C. Davis, *The Age of Grey and Peel*, p. 95.

² At least one other of the conspirators, Charles Pendrill, was formerly a leading member of the L.C.S. Confined in 1798-1800 in Gloucester gaol with Binns, he was a journeyman shoemaker (a former master), of Tooley Street. Although cited in the trials as a leading conspirator, he was released under a general pardon after Despard and his associates had been executed; only to reappear in a similar conspiratorial rôle in 1817. See below, pp. 652-3.

³ In 1801 several "United Englishmen" were arrested at Bolton, and one, Callant, was later executed on a charge of seducing soldiers from their allegiance; W. Brimelow, *Political History of Bolton* (1882), I, p. 14; G. C. Miller, *op. cit.* p. 404.

We shall propose a different answer. But in attempting any answer the historian faces difficulties in the interpretation of the sources which must be explained. From the 1790s until 1820 these sources are unusually clouded by partisanship.

First, there is the conscious partisanship of the authorities. From Pitt to Sidmouth, Government pursued a single policy. Disaffection must be ringed round and isolated; and this might be done by attaching to it the suspicion of pro-Bonapartist conspiracy or (after 1815) wild, insurrectionary intention. Successive Committees of Secrecy of the House (1801, 1812, 1817) presented lurid and unsubstantiated allegations of insurrectionary networks. In a sense, the Government *needed* conspirators, to justify the continuation of repressive legislation which prevented nation-wide popular organisation.

But the myth that all reformers were French agents or conspirators set in motion a curious logic. Not only did it mean that reformers were driven perforce into obscure, secretive forms of activity. It also meant that, in order to penetrate these forms, the authorities were prompted to employ spies and informers on a scale unknown in any other period. The line between the spy and the *agent provocateur* was indistinct. The informer was paid by piece-rate; the more alarmist his information, the more lucrative his trade. Fabricated information might be eagerly accepted by the authorities who propagated the myth. At a certain stage, it is impossible to know how far they were themselves deluded by conspiracies which their own informers engendered. To isolate and terrorise potential revolutionaries, it was possible to adopt a policy of deliberate provocation. In this sense, it was the policies of Pitt, in repressing the corresponding societies, which set in motion the logic which led to both Oliver the Spy and the Pentridge Rising of 1817. These years reveal such a foul pattern of faked evidence, intimidation and double agents, that it is possible to regret that the logic did not work itself out to its proper conclusion. If the Cato Street conspirators had achieved their object in the assassination of the Cabinet, the Cabinet would have been slain by conspirators whom their own repressive policies had engendered, and their own spies had armed.

Thus, evidence presented by the authorities as to a conspiratorial underground between 1798 and 1820 is dubious and sometimes worthless. This was, indeed, the main line of counter-attack of contemporary reformers, including Burdett

union organisation, and if there had been any serious political underground its organisers would certainly not have admitted Place into its secrets.¹

And here we are close to the heart of the problem. For the third great reason why the sources are clouded is that working people *intended* them to be so. And "intention" is too rational a term. There were, indeed, two cultures in England. In the heartlands of the Industrial Revolution, new institutions, new attitudes, new community-patterns, were emerging which were, consciously and unconsciously, designed to resist the intrusion of the magistrate, the employer, the parson or the spy. The new solidarity was not only a solidarity *with*; it was also a solidarity *against*. From the point of view of the authorities, two-thirds of their problem was to obtain any reliable information at all. Magistrates rode through thronged neighbourhoods a few hundred yards from their seats, and found themselves received like hostile aliens. They were more powerless to uncover trade union lodges than Pizzarro's freebooters were to uncover golden chalices in the villages of Peru.

Hence the Home Office records (our main first-hand sources) often make perplexing reading. Like uncomprehending travellers, the magistrates and commanding officers were at the mercy of their informants. A friendly society might appear as an engine of sedition to a man who had never thought of the cost of burial to the poor. A ranting field preacher might sound like an agent of Despard. Employers might *wish* to freeze the magistrate's blood with tales of Jacobins in order to ensure harsh treatment for trade unionists. The J.P.s hawked for scraps of news from informers (paid or anonymous), and miscellaneous go-betweens such as publicans, travelling salesmen, and soldiers. Here we find one solemnly passing on to the Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding the gossip which his barber had brought that morning. There we find another, writing from Barnsley in 1802, to say that "the women all talk mysteriously. There is a general expectation of they know not what." And there we find a Methodist minister writing to the Duke of Portland about a Grand Association of revolutionaries, based on Bolton in 1801—the story having come from a "confidential friend" who got it from the "leader of the Methodist Singers"

¹ Add MSS. 27809, ff. 16, 17. See also W. E. S. Thomas, "Francis Place and Working Class History", *Hist. Journal* (1962), p. 61.

at a Sheffield chapel, who in turn got it from someone else.¹

This kind of tittle-tattle is of course worthless. But here we must look rather more closely at the rôle of informers. It was the fond belief of the English people that the employment of spies in domestic affairs was un-British, and belonged to "the continental spy system". In fact it was an ancient part of British Statecraft as well as of police practice. It goes back long before the time at which Christopher Marlowe was caught up in its toils; and espionage and counter-espionage against the Catholics, the Commonwealth, and the Jacobites take us well into the 18th century. It was sustained in criminal practice (and became most widespread in the fifty years between 1780 and 1830) for a quite different reason. The very inadequacy of the regular police forces had led to the system of "payment by results", or graduated rewards (or Tyburn tickets) for securing different degrees of conviction. And this, in turn, had bred a nauseous kind of middleman, who profited from the disclosure of crimes which it was in his interest to magnify, or even to manufacture. The early 19th century saw several appalling disclosures of such provocations in purely criminal cases, and no doubt many others went undetected. The Luddites were pursued, like any group of criminal offenders, by large offers of rewards for information leading to convictions. Joseph Nadin, the notorious Manchester Deputy Constable, had come under suspicion of profiting from the sale of Tyburn tickets obtained by malpractices. In 1817 the Bank of England prosecuted 124 people for forging or uttering forged notes, and the Radical press exposed cases in which blood-money informers "planted" forged bank notes on innocent victims, and then secured the reward for their conviction.²

Thus both a political and a criminal tradition endorsed the employment of spies; and, especially after 1798, this was much strengthened by the experience gained in the "pacification" of Ireland. But the spies so employed were of very different

¹ Fitzwilliam Papers, F.44 (a), 45 (d); R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working-Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, p. 60. Compare T. A. Abdy to Duke of Portland, 20 December 1795, passing on information from "my own Gamekeeper, who from his situation has opportunities of learning more than I, as a Magistrate, can . . .": H.O. 42.37.

² For the whole system of criminal information and its abuses, see L. Radzinowicz, *op. cit.*, I. pp. 333 ff. Southey, *Letters from England* (1808, 2nd edn.), I, p. 173; Hazlitt, "On the Spy System", *Works*, VII, pp. 208 ff. For Nadin, see D. Read, *Peterloo* (Manchester, 1957), p. 65. For the bank note forgeries, see the *Black Dwarf*, 1816-18, *passim*; *Duckett's Dispatch*, 9 February 1818; H. Hunt *Memoirs* (1822), III, p. 483.

"influential member" preferred to take them with him to his grave.¹

So far from discounting the story of some effective Luddite underground, Henson's "repugnance" to disclose the facts lends weight to it. And here we must pass from criticism of the sources to constructive speculation. From Despard to Thistlewood and beyond there is a tract of secret history, buried like the Great Plain of Gwaelod beneath the sea. We must reconstruct what we can.

iii. *The Laws against Combination*

One of the "hidden hands" behind the disorder, whom the authorities most suspected, was Thomas Spence. Spenceans were believed to have instigated bread riots in 1800 and 1801, although when Spence was tried and imprisoned in the latter year it was on account of his seditious publications. In 1817 once again a Secret Committee of the House detected a conspiracy by the "Society of Spencean Philanthropists". Place on the other hand, said the Spenceans were "next to nobody and nothing", "harmless and simple".

We shall return to the events of 1816-17. But it is probable that, until Spence's death in 1814, Place's account is nearest to the truth. Spence did not have the discretion, nor the practical application, for a serious conspirator. On the other hand, his group kept some sort of underground discontent alive in London, with chalking and rough handbills. More important, in the context of repression, Spence did not believe in a centralised, disciplined underground. His policy was that of the *diffusion* of agitation. In March 1801, the Spenceans agreed to organise themselves as loosely as possible, with "field preachers". Supporters should form societies, meeting in tap-rooms "after a free and easy manner, without encumbering themselves with rules"—their function was to talk and to circulate Citizen Spence's pamphlets. (A society called the "Free and Easy" met every Tuesday at "The Fleece" in Little Windmill Street in 1807.) Their intention seems to have been to make disaffection so amorphous that the authorities could find no centre and no organising sinews.²

¹ W. Felkin, *History of the Machine-Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures* (1867), pp. xvii, 240-1; *Nottingham Review*, 19 November 1852; W. H. Wylie, *Old and New Nottingham* (1853), p. 234. The influential member, in one account, was Alderman John Bradley. The discovery of these manuscripts would be of the greatest interest.

² O. D. Rudkin, *Thomas Spence and his Connections*, pp. 122-3, 146-7; Add. MSS. 27808.

This was not the method of the "Black Lamp" and of Luddism. But it provides a clue, in the very policy of diffusion. For the illegal tradition, from 1800 to 1820, never had a centre. There was no Baboevian Conspiracy of Equals, no Buonarrotti who sent emissaries up and down the land; and if we search for one, we make the same mistake as the authorities. Jacobinism had become indigenous in working-class communities at exactly the same time as it had lost any national centre as well as most middle-class support. It was in old centres of Jacobin propaganda—Sheffield, Nottingham, south Lancashire, Leeds—that Thelwall's "Socratic spirit" was now endemic in the workshops and mills. In part this was a conscious tradition. Groups of Painites, who knew and trusted each other, met together in secret; the *Rights of Man* passed from hand to hand; in Merthyr, according to one colourful account,

a few who thought highly of his *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* would assemble in secret places on the mountains, and taking the works from concealed places under a large boulder or so, read them with great uncton.¹

Mayhew took down the account of an old London bookseller who used to sell "Tom Paine on the sly":

If anybody bought a book and would pay . . . three times as much as was marked, he'd *give* the "Age of Reason" in . . . His stall was quite a godly stall, and he wasn't often without a copy or two of the "Anti-Jacobin Review" . . . though he had "Tom Paine" in a drawer.²

In Sheffield "old Jacks" still met to toast Paine's health and sing "God Save Great Thomas Paine":

Facts are seditious things
When they touch courts and Kings.
Armies are rais'd.
Barracks and bastilles built,
Innocence charged with guilt,
Blood most unjustly spilt,
Gods stand amaz'd. . . .³

¹ C. Wilkins, *History of Merthyr Tydfil* (1867). By the same account, "religious men had the nails in their boots arranged to form T.P., that they might figuratively tread Tom Paine underfoot".

² Mayhew, *op. cit.*, I, p. 318.

³ John Wilson, *The Songs of Joseph Mather* (Sheffield, 1862), pp. 56-7. Cf. B. Brierley, *Failsforth, My Native Village*, pp. 14-16.

propaganda of a minority had now become "intimately incorporated with the state of society". And the stock upon which Jacobinism had been grafted was the illegal trade union.

There is little evidence as to any deliberate decision on the part of Painites to "permeate" trade unions and friendly societies.¹ But at any time before the 1840s it is a mistake to segregate in our minds political disaffection and industrial organisation. In friendly societies which, while legal, were debarred from forming regional or national links, the "no politics" rule was often observed. Some of the old-established trades clubs had a similar tradition. But in most manufacturing communities the initiation of *any* organised movement is likely to have fallen upon a minority of active spirits; and the men who had the courage to organise an illegal union, the ability to conduct its correspondence and finances, and the knowledge to petition Parliament or consult with attorneys, were likely also to have been no strangers to the *Rights of Man*. As younger trade union leaders came forward, they will have quickly been driven toward an extreme Radicalism by the very conditions of their conflict with employers, magistrates, and an indifferent or punitive House of Commons.

It was Pitt who, by passing the Combination Acts, unwittingly brought the Jacobin tradition into association with the illegal unions. This was especially the case in Lancashire and Yorkshire, where the Act of 1799 jolted the Jacobins and trade unionists into a widespread secret combination, half political, half industrial, in emphasis. "It originated at Sheffield," an informer (Barlow) reported:

... in the republican society there—is connected with the principal manufacturing towns in Yorkshire—and communicated to this Town [Manchester], Stockport, & particularly Bury.

In Sheffield the same informer found a "general spirit of disaffection created in every class of artisan & mechanics by the late Bill . . . which I am afraid has already caused more to *combine* than would have thought of such a measure but for the Bills". The trade unionists (he reported) were making returns of the number of workers likely to be adversely affected by the Combination Act, and calculated 60,000 in Lancashire, 50,000 in Yorkshire, and 30,000 in Derbyshire. The secret

¹ W. H. Reid, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies*, p. 20, declares that "the Clubbists" thought "their business was to worm themselves into convivial societies of every kind", in particular benefit societies.

committees of the new organisation were "under the Management of Republicans". Thereafter, it is interesting to note, the surviving political clubs in the north and Midlands dropped such titles as "Patriotic" or "Constitutional" Societies, and called themselves "Union Societies"—a term whose ambivalence enabled them to encompass both political and industrial aims. The term (if not the clubs) survived into the Union Societies and Political Unions of the post-war years.¹

In Lancashire the resistance to the Combination Acts was organised by a committee of skilled unionists, comprising the fustian-cutters, cotton-spinners, shoemakers, machine-makers, and calico-printers.² In Yorkshire, persistent reports attributed to the cloth-dressers or croppers the rôle of initiators in secret organisations for both industrial and ulterior purposes. A Memorandum laid before the Privy Council at the time when the Combination Act of 1799 was passed singled out the croppers for particular condemnation: "the Despotic power they really possess and Exercise almost exceeds belief".³ In 1802 Earl Fitzwilliam, the temperate Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding, sent successive reports to the Home Office, in which the organisation of the croppers and more general illegal combination appear to be inextricably intermingled. Fitzwilliam inclined at first to take reports of serious insurrectionary conspiracy with a tablespoonful of salt. "The true Jacobinical sort of conspiracy," he wrote in July, "I fear does exist, in a greater or lesser degree . . . I trust, the real secret is in *very few* hands, that the rest are dupes. . . ." Most nocturnal meetings, he considered, were only "for the purpose of raising their wages, and from which nothing is to be apprehended". As to the propriety of acceding to the request of some large manufacturers that such meetings be forcibly put down, he was guarded. The need to suppress seditious meetings ought not to be made into a pretext for "obtaining more restrictive laws against combinations of journeymen for increase of wages". Such men were entitled to their share of "the season of harvest" when trade was good. To penalise their combinations would be unjust:

¹ P.C. A.161, 164. At about this time Major Cartwright was "much consulted in the formation of several infant societies", called Union Societies. F. D. Cartwright, *op. cit.*, I, p. 243.

² T. Bayley to H.O., 6 November 1799, in P.C. A.164.

³ "Observations on Combinations among Workmen", in P.C. A.152. See below, p. 524.

a general show-down between Gott and the croppers, and thereby for the whole West Riding trade, on the apprenticeship question.) Earl Fitzwilliam now wrote to Lord Pelham, calling for "further restriction against the combination of journeymen":

I cannot help feeling a strong opinion that all the meetings, and suspicion of meetings, takes its rise in the combination of the very men I am now speaking about, the croppers. They are the tyrants of the country; their power and influence has grown out of their high wages, which enable them to make deposits that puts them beyond all fear of inconvenience from misconduct. They are, however, an order of men not necessary to the manufacture, and if the merchants had firmness to do without them, their consequence would be lost, their banks would waste, their combinations would fall to the ground, and we should hear no more of meetings of any sort. . . .¹

We do not know whether any of the moving spirits in the cropper's union were former members of the society of "Working Mecanicks" who had written to the L.C.S. five years before.² We do know, however, that small producers had established at the turn of the century in Leeds a new hall for free trade in cloth, by-passing the wealthy clothiers, and that it was known universally as the "Tom Paine Hall". We know also that the main intermediary for postal communication between the croppers of Yorkshire and the shearmen of the West Country was a Leeds shoemaker, George Palmer, in whom we can surely detect the proverbial Radical cobbler? It is reasonable to suppose that some of these literate, skilled, and very able men were Painites.

Moreover, the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 had forced the trade unions into an illegal world in which secrecy and hostility to the authorities were intrinsic to their very existence. The position of unions between 1799 and the repeal of the Combination Acts (1824-5) was complex. We have first to face the paradox that it was in the very years when the Acts were in force that trade unionism registered great advances. Not only did unions which reach far back into the 18th century—woolcombers, hatters, cordwainers and shoemakers, shipwrights, tailors—continue more or less unperturbed through many of the years in which the Combinations Acts were in

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-64. See also the Hammonds, *The Skilled Labourer*, pp. 174-8.

² See above, p. 177.

committeemen even from the union membership. (In certain cases, the officers were appointed by a secret ballot within the committee, and their names were known only to the Secretary or Treasurer.)¹ Hence, if one part of the organisation became known to the authorities, other parts might remain intact.

Awe-inspiring oaths and initiation ceremonies were probably fairly widespread. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the well-known ceremony of the woolcombers (or builders?), with its inside and outside tilers, its bandaging of the eyes, its solemn oath of secrecy sworn before the figure of death:

I call upon God to witness this my most solemn declaration, that neither hopes, fears, rewards, punishments, nor even death itself, shall ever induce me directly or indirectly, to give any information respecting any thing contained in this Lodge, or any similar Lodge connected with the Society; and I will neither write, nor cause to be written, upon paper, wood, sand, stone, or any thing else, whereby it may be known. . . .²

Such oaths had a long ancestry, owing something to freemasonry, something to old guild traditions, and something to commonplace civil ceremonies, such as the burgess oath. Thus an oath of the "Freemen of the Company of Basket-Makers", in use in the mid-18th century, bound members to "well and faithfully keep" the secrets of the craft, which might not be taught "to any Man but to such as be Free of the same Science", and to pay "all manner of Duties, as becometh a Brother and a Freeman to do".³ One of Colonel Fletcher's Bolton "missionaries" dug up a more horrific oath, supposedly imported by Irish "ribbon-men":

I do swear in the presence of you my brethren and of our blessed lady Mary that I will maintain and support our holy Religion by destroying Heretics as far as my person and property will go, not one excepted.⁴

From these disparate sources, the oaths of the early 19th century were compounded, the Luddites drawing most upon the Irish tradition, the unionists upon the craft and masonic traditions.⁵ The union oaths probably fell into disuse earliest

¹ See A. B. Richmond, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

² [E. C. Tuffnell], *Character, Objects and Effects of Trades' Unions* (1834; 1933 edn.), p. 67.

³ Rules in Brit. Mus. press-mark L.R. 404.a.4. (52). See also the great variety of forms in *The Book of Oaths* (1649).

⁴ H.O. 42.119.

⁵ For the masonic tradition, and for the rôle of ritual and initiation ceremonies generally, see E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, Ch. IX.

among the London crafts and the artisans of the large towns. But initiation ceremonies and oath-taking persisted in the Midlands and north (and elsewhere) for many years after the repeal of the Combination Acts, not only as a measure of security against the employers, but also because they had become part of the moral culture—solidarity, dedication, and intimidation—essential to the union's existence. The Huddersfield branch of the Old Mechanics bought, on its formation in 1831, a pistol, a Bible, and ten yards of curtain material; clearly, the properties of the initiation ceremony were a first charge on the members' funds.¹ During the great wave of general unionism between 1832 and 1834, there appears to have been a revival in oath-taking, especially in the shadowy Yorkshire "Trades' Union". Paradoxically, the tradition of *taisez vous* seems to have flared up into a last phase of bombastic ceremony which was far from silent. The gentry were alarmed by rumours of "solemn and dreadful oaths" binding men to kill traitors or bad masters. Colliers and building workers were seen entering inns where "they make a noise as if they were at a military drill, and . . . forty or fifty pistol shots are commonly fired off in one night. A pistol is fired over every man's head immediately on his taking the oath . . .".² Simeon Pollard, the Union's leader, denied that any such oaths were taken; but John Tester, a leader of the woolcomber's strike in 1825 (and now a bitter opponent of unionism) wrote caustically about the expense of union paraphernalia—"swords, death-scenes, gowns, banners, battle-axes, and large empty boxes like military chests". At an inquest upon a young Irish blackleg who died as a result of being beaten by unidentified assailants at Farsley, near Leeds (December 1832), details came out which seem credible. A branch of the union had met weekly at the "Bay Mare", paying 3d. each week for the use of a private room on the second floor:

Extraordinary precautions were used to prevent what passed in the room from being overheard, the underside of the joists were planked with inch boards, and the interstices filled with wood savings, and during meetings a guard was stationed on the outside of the door, and all the ale and other liquor was fetched into the room by one of the Unionmen.

¹ See facsimile in J. B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, facing p. 20.

² MS. Diary of Anne Lister (Bankfield Museum, Halifax), 31 August, 9 September 1832.

feeling against the magistrates and the large employers alike.¹

Moreover, in April and May 1812, Luddism was the focus for a more diffused (and confused) insurrectionary tension. A part of this arose from the general economic crisis of 1811-12, the growing unpopularity of the war, and the agitation against the Orders in Council. The mutual blockades of Britain and France, and the severance of American trade, had given rise to extreme difficulties in many sections of manufacturing industry—in Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, the textile districts—between 1807 and 1812. Poor harvests added their toll of food shortage and soaring prices. Manufacturers attributed all grievances to the continuation of the war, and specifically to the Orders in Council which placed much of Europe in a state of blockade. It is significant that Luddism broke out in those industries where the large employers had alienated public support by taking advantage of this period of economic extremity to introduce new practices or machines; whereas in those centres—Sheffield, Birmingham and to some extent Manchester—where the whole industry was partially paralysed, and the employers themselves had initiated demonstrations and petitions against the Orders in Council (under the leadership of Brougham and, in Birmingham, young Thomas Attwood) working-class discontent remained largely within “constitutional” forms.²

In fact, by 1812, the old squirearchy was scarcely able to control the manufacturing districts, unless it had the support of the large employers. But, paradoxically, where the employers were hostile to the administration, the problems of order were less. Luddism illustrates this whole problem of order. In the summer of 1812 there were no fewer than 12,000 troops in the disturbed counties, a greater force than Wellington had under his command in the Peninsula. For months at a time these considerable forces were singularly ineffective. This may partly have been due to the fact that many of the common soldiers sympathised with the population, so that the authorities were

¹ The “folklore” of Luddism is found in A.L., *Sad Times*; F. Peel, *Risings of the Luddites*, and *Spenn Valley: Past and Present*; Sykes and Walker, *Ben o’ Bill’s*. Where possible these accounts have been checked with those in the *Leeds Mercury* and in the ensuing trials. Cartwright’s letters, describing the attack and the “treachery” of his soldiers, are in the Hammonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-6; and in H. A. Cadman, *Gomersal: Past and Present* (Leeds, 1930), pp. 114-16.

² See A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*, pp. 164-6; A. Prentice, *Historical Sketches of Manchester*, pp. 41-7; Chester New, *Life of Henry Brougham* (Oxford, 1961), Chs. IV and VI.

under the necessity of continually moving them from one district to another for fear of “disaffection” spreading in their ranks. It was also due to the superb security and communications of the Luddites, who moved silently through well-known terrain while the cavalry trotted noisily from village to village. In the West Riding, whose hills were crossed and re-crossed with bridle-paths and old pack-horse tracks, the Luddites moved with immunity. The movements of the cavalry were “well-known, and the clash of their swords, the tramp of their horses’ feet were to be heard at a long distance at night, it was easy for the Luddites to steal away behind hedges, crouch in plantations, or take by-roads . . .”¹ The objectives of the Luddites were in a multitude of dispersed villages and scattered mills. These villages were virtually unpoliced, and the military were reluctant to billet soldiers in fives and sixes in dangerous isolation. The mounted magistrate, who understood little of the industry and of the people, was almost helpless. Only the mill-owner or manufacturer, whose premises and wage-book commanded the village, was able to exert control. Hence, where the employers had lost the allegiance of their workers, the entire structure of order was endangered, and could only be repaired by supplementing their authority as at Rawfolds, where not Roberson but Cartwright was in command. But in those districts, like Sheffield and Birmingham, where the manufacturers and workers were still bound to each other by a common sense of grievance against authority, the danger of actual disorder was kept under the masters’ control.

Thus Luddism not only brought magistrate and mill-owner together, it also made inevitable concessions by the administration to the manufacturing interest. And these concessions were received with triumph, with the repeal of the Orders in Council in June 1812.² Luddism perhaps hastened this event as much as the constitutional agitation of Attwood and Brougham. But repeal took place against an even more threatening background, for by this time serious disorders in Lancashire had been added to the Luddism of Yorkshire and the Midlands.

It is difficult to know how far the unrest in Lancashire may be described as authentic Luddism. It was made up in part of spontaneous rioting, in part of illegal but “constitutional” agitation for political reform, in part of incidents fabricated by

¹ D. F. E. Sykes, *History of the Colne Valley* (Slaithwaite, 1906), p. 309.

² And also the repeal of 5 Eliz. c.4 in 1813 and 1814.

the Manchester Exchange) was the trigger for Yorkshire Luddism:

The immediate Cause of us beginning when we did was that Rascally letter of the Prince Regents to Lords Grey & Grenville, which left us no hopes of any Change for the better, & by his falling in with that Damn'd set of Rogues, Percival & Co to whom we attribute all the Miseries of our Country. But we hope for assistance from the French Emperor in shaking off the Yoke of the Rottenest, Wickedest and most Tyrannious Government that ever existed, then down come the Hanover Tyrants, and all our Tyrants from the greatest to the smallest, and we will be governed by a just Republic, and may the Almighty hasten those happy Times is the wish and Prayer of Millions in this Land. . . .¹

If we accept both letters as authentic, then it would suggest that Yorkshire Luddism commenced with divided counsels. If so, the insurrectionary temper became dominant as one event followed another. Some weight must be placed upon the verbal tradition, collected by Frank Peel, according to which Baines, the old Halifax hatter, was indeed at the centre of a group of "Tom Painers" who formed "a democratic or republican club" meeting at the St. Crispin's Inn, Halifax. Here an important meeting of Luddite delegates took place in March, and Baines welcomed their movement from the Chair:

For thirty years I have struggled to rouse the people against this evil, and . . . have suffered much for my opinions in body and estate. I am now nearing the end of my pilgrimage, but I will die as I have lived; my last few days shall be devoted to the people's cause. I hail your rising against your oppressors, and hope it may go on until there is not a tyrant to conquer. I have waited long for the dawn of the coming day, and it may be, old as I am, I shall yet see the glorious triumph of democracy.

According to the same tradition, a Nottingham delegate named Weightman also spoke: "Our council is in daily communication with the societies in all the centres of disaffection, and urge a general rising in May."²

There are reasons to suppose that, not the words, but the general tendency of this account, is true. The authorities were clearly determined to secure a conviction against Baines, despite the very shaky evidence of their spies. One witness

¹ W. B. Crump, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

² Peel, *op. cit.*, (1880 edn.), pp. 23-6. In the preface to the second edition, 1888, Peel recounts how this tradition was preserved.

be comforted by the knowledge that in twenty years (when many of them would be dead) the middle class would secure the vote. In 1812 the weavers had experienced a disastrous decline in their status and living standards. People were so hungry that they were willing to risk their lives upsetting a barrow of potatoes. In these conditions, it might appear more surprising if men had *not* plotted revolutionary uprisings than if they *had*; and it would seem highly unlikely that such conditions would nourish a crop of gradualist constitutional reformers, acting within a Constitution which did not admit their political existence.

At the least, one might suppose that a democratic culture would approach the predicament of such men with caution and humility. In fact, this has scarcely been the case. Several of the historians who pioneered the study of this period (the Hammonds, the Webbs and Graham Wallas) were men and women of Fabian persuasion, who looked back upon the "early history of the Labour Movement" in the light of the subsequent Reform Acts, and the growth of T.U.C. and Labour Party. Since Luddites or food rioters do not appear as satisfactory "forerunners" of "the Labour Movement" they merited neither sympathy nor close attention. And this bias was supplemented, from another direction, by the more conservative bias of the orthodox academic tradition. Hence "history" has dealt fairly with the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and fulsomely with Francis Place; but the hundreds of men and women executed or transported for oath-taking, Jacobin conspiracy, Luddism, the Pentridge and Grange Moor risings, food and enclosure and turnpike riots, the Ely riots and the Labourers' Revolt of 1830, and a score of minor affrays, have been forgotten by all but a few specialists, or, if they are remembered, they are thought to be simpletons or men tainted with criminal folly.

But for those who live through it, history is neither "early" nor "late". "Forerunners" are also the inheritors of another past. Men must be judged in their own context; and in this context we may see such men as George Mellor, Jem Towle, and Jeremiah Brandreth as men of heroic stature.

Moreover, bias has its way of working into the very minutae of historical research. This is particularly relevant in the matter of Lancashire Luddism. There is only one reason for believing that the various depositions in the Home Office papers as to its revolutionary features are false, and this is the assumption

attempt to overthrow authority on their own.¹ "There was, it seems, no evidence to prove a *setting on*; no evidence to prove a *plot*." So Cobbett commented on the Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons in 1812. "And this is the circumstance that will most puzzle the ministry. They can find no *agitators*. It is a movement of the *people's own*."²

It was a movement, however, which could engage for a few months 12,000 troops, and which led the Vice-Lieutenant of the West Riding, in June 1812, to declare that the country was taking the "direct Road to an open Insurrection":

. . . except for the very spots which were occupied by Soldiers, the Country was virtually in the possession of the lawless . . . the disaffected outnumbering by many Degrees the peaceable Inhabitants.³

From one aspect, Luddism may be seen as the nearest thing to a "peasant's revolt" of industrial workers; instead of sacking the *chateaux*, the most immediate object which symbolised their oppression—the gig-mill or power-loom mill—was attacked. Coming at the close of twenty years in which the printing-press and the public meeting had been virtually silent, the Luddites knew of no national leadership which they could trust, no national policy with which they could identify their own agitation. Hence it was always strongest in the local community and most coherent when engaged in limited industrial actions.

Even while attacking these symbols of exploitation and of the factory system they became aware of larger objectives; and pockets of "Tom Painers" existed who could direct them towards ulterior aims. But here the tight organisation which served to destroy a mill or stocking-frames was no longer of such service; there was no Old Sarum in their community which they could pull down, and the Houses of Parliament were beyond their reach. Undoubtedly the Luddites of different districts reached out to each other; and undoubtedly, in Yorkshire and Nottingham, some kind of district leadership, known only to a few of the "Captains" like Towle and Mellor, was established. But if, as is likely, the accounts of delegate meetings at Ashton, Stockport and Halifax are true, it was

¹ See *The Historical Account of the Luddites*, p. 11: "An opinion prevailed that the views of some of the persons engaged in these excesses extended to revolutionary measures, and contemplated the overthrow of the government; but this opinion seems to have been supported by no satisfactory evidence; and it is admitted on all hands, that the leaders of the riots, although possessed of considerable influence, were all of the labouring classes."

² Cole, *Life of Cobbett*, p. 180.

³ Darvall, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

Parliament for the "scot and lot" constituency of Preston in 1830 and was the solitary champion of the working-class reform movement in the unreformed House of Commons. From 1830 to 1832 he remained loyal to the demand for manhood suffrage, and attacked the 1832 Bill as a betrayal of the plebeian reformers. His very consistency and pugnacity made him a centre of controversy and a target for abuse.

The abuse, however, was not groundless, for Hunt possessed both the qualities and the defects of the demagogue. These characteristics are to be found in a score of leaders of this period so that we must consider them as characteristic of the movement of the time. There was, first, the old Wilkesite tradition, only gradually breaking down, by which even the democratic movement looked to the aristocratic or gentlemanly leader. Only the gentleman—Burdett, Cochrane, Hunt, Feargus O'Connor—knew the forms and language of high politics, could cut a brave figure on the hustings, or belabour the Ministers in their own tongue. The reform movement might use the rhetoric of equality, but many of the old responses of deference were still there even among the huzzaing crowds. Whenever a working man appeared to be rising "above himself" even in the reform movement he quickly drew the jealousy of many of his own class. Next, there was that demagogic element, inevitable in a popular movement excluded from power or hope of power, which encouraged the wholly unconstructive rhetoric of denunciation. Alongside its martyrs and its intrepid voluntary organisers, the Radical movement had its share of drunkards, runaway Treasurers and ephemeral quarrelsome journalists—and these were not the least bombastic and flamboyant in their language. The very frustrations of a popular movement, in which thousands of powerless men were pitted against an armed Establishment, were released in hyperbole; and Hunt, as the orator at the great reform assemblies, knew how to touch these responses. His style of oratory was given to him by the frustrations of those whom he addressed.

But many other factors contributed to the elevation of the demagogue. At the national level, Radicalism never knew the self-discipline of political organisation. Since any party or corresponding centre was illegal, and since no elected executive determined policy and strategy, leadership inevitably fell to individual orators and journalists. Genuine disagreements upon matters of policy spilled over into personal jealousies;

and, equally, the leader whose policy was endorsed by popular acclaim found in this food for his personal vanity. The conditions of agitation fostered the personalisation of issues. The great mass meeting demanded its colourful figurehead. Hunt, in his white top hat, liked to be known as the "Champion of Liberty" or (during his imprisonment after Peterloo) as "Saint Henry of Ilchester", just as Oastler subsequently described himself as "King of the Factory Children" and O'Connor as "The Lion of Freedom".

Moreover, popular Radicalism and Chartism lived, for half a century, with the dilemma which beset Thelwall, Gale Jones, and the Jacobin "tribunes" of the 1790s. The conflict between "moral" and "physical" force reformers is sometimes expressed too dogmatically, as if a clear line can be drawn between determined conspirators like Dr. Watson and Thistlewood, on the one hand, and immaculate constitutionalists like Place or Bamford,¹ on the other. In fact, both Radicalism and Chartism inhabited a region somewhere between these two extremes. Few reformers before 1839 engaged in serious preparations for insurrection; but fewer still were willing to disavow altogether the ultimate right of the people to resort to rebellion in the face of tyranny. The Chartist slogan, "Peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must", expresses also the common notion held by the Radicals of 1816-20 and 1830-32. Major Cartwright insisted on the citizen's right to carry arms. Henry White, the editor of the moderate *Independent Whig*, was only one among many Radical journalists who reminded readers of the precedent of the Glorious Revolution of 1688:

It is to a *Revolution* they owe every portion of civil and religious Liberty they are yet permitted to enjoy, and . . . it is to a *Revolution* they will be ultimately compelled to resort, if all other legal means be denied of obtaining a Redress of Grievances. . . .²

The name of the Hampden Clubs recalled an even more drastic precedent, and Cobbett was at pains to stress that Revolution was good Whig doctrine. The right to resist oppression by force (he wrote) "is distinctly claimed and established by the laws and usages of England":

¹ While Bamford presents himself as a sober constitutional reformer in his *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, written in 1839, there are many indications that the author (who had moved so far from his own agitational past that he was willing to serve as a special constable against the Chartists) took pains to cover over his own connections with the conspiratorial side of the movement.

² *Independent Whig*, 27 July 1817.

I do not say, that the right ought to be now exercised at all . . . I say, therefore, upon this point, what JUDGE BLACKSTONE says: and that is, that the right to resist oppression always exists, but *that those who compose the nation at any given time must be left to judge for themselves when oppression has arrived at a pitch to justify the exercise of such right.*

More than this, Cobbett was willing to come forward with a defence of the Pentridge Rising: "What did Brandreth do more than was done by the Whigs at the Revolution?"¹

Cobbett deliberately pitched upon this ambiguity: the people had the right to rebel, but only if oppression passed a certain undefined point. Wooler adopted the same stance in the *Black Dwarf*: "the right of the people to resist oppression always exists, and . . . the requisite power to do this always resides in the general will of the people".² Carlile, in the *Republican*, went further after Peterloo, and advocated tyrannicide.³ Every popular Radical journal and orator made some reference, oblique or direct, to the right of rebellion. It was part of the essential rhetoric of a movement, which had almost no access to legal redress through the franchise, to hint, warn, or bluster about the ultimate recourse of the people to physical force. When Henry Hunt addressed the first great Spa Fields meeting (15 November 1816) he went no further than a score of other orators:

He knew the superiority of mental over physical force; nor would he counsel any resort to the latter till the former had been found ineffectual. Before physical force was applied to, it was their duty to petition, to remonstrate, to call aloud for timely reformation. Those who resisted the just demands of the people were the real friends of confusion and bloodshed . . . but if the fatal day should be destined to arrive, he assured them that if he knew anything of himself, he would not be found concealed behind a counter, or sheltering himself in the rear.⁴

Such references as these, to the "fatal day", or "the day of reckoning", drew the loudest huzzas of the crowds. Nor should we gloss over the vices attendant upon such a style. It fostered also the tap-room demagogue whose Radicalism had more froth than body; and even the paid itinerant orators (whom Bamford so much deprecated) "who made a trade of speechifying" and who vied with each other for the acclamation of the crowd

¹ *Political Register*, 4 April, 6 and 20 June, 26 December 1818.

² *Black Dwarf*, 30 December 1818.

³ See below, p. 764. Also Sherwin's *Political Register*, 23 May 1818.

⁴ *Examiner*, 16 November 1816.

by indulging in "the wildest and most extravagant rhodomontade".¹ The national leaders—Cobbett and Wooler with their pens, Hunt with his voice—were adept at pitching their rhetoric just on the right side of treason; but they laid themselves open (as did Oastler and O'Connor after them) to the charge of encouraging other men to take illegal or treasonable actions, from the consequences of which they themselves escaped.

This was one source of quarrels among the Radical leadership. Another perpetual source of strife was money-matters. It was an expensive business being a Radical leader, as both Cobbett and Hunt had reason to know. In addition to speech-making, publications, travelling and correspondence, there were heavy expenses incurred for legal defence or during electoral contests. Cobbett and, more especially, Hunt were extravagant in their tastes—Cobbett in his farming ventures, Hunt in his general style of living. Both were careless in their financial dealings. The incoherent Radical movement, with no elected executive, and no accredited Treasurer, was perpetually subjected to appeals from *ad hoc* committees to assist with funds for this or that emergency. Cobbett recouped his losses by his publishing profits, while Hunt sought to turn propaganda to his advantage by selling "radical breakfast powder" (a concoction based on roasted corn which was sold as a substitute for tea or coffee, and which was recommended to Radicals as a means of boycotting taxed articles). No clear line was drawn between their private business concerns and the finances of the movement. Questions as to the use and trusteeship of Radical funds, or the confusion of public and private interests became—as they were to become for O'Connor and Ernest Jones—subjects of humiliating public recrimination.²

But the greatest cause of Radical disagreement was sheer vanity. And vanity was so common a disorder among the Radical leaders that it appears less as a cause of disagreement than as a symptom of the general lack of coherent organisation. Nearly all the reform leaders were quick to impugn the motives of their fellows at the first sign of disagreement. Suspicions were fed by the disclosure of the parts played by the *provocateurs*,

¹ Bamford, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

² For example, after Peterloo Hunt was engaged in a long public wrangle with his fellow reformer, Joseph Johnson of Manchester, in which the cost of mutual exchanges of hospitality, laundry bills, the amount of oats fed to Hunt's horse, and the tip given (or not given) to a chamber-maid at an inn were all exposed to view. See J. Johnson, *A Letter to Henry Hunt* (Manchester, 1822).

Castle, Oliver and Edwards. From 1817 the air became thick with the rancour of men accusing each other of being "spies".

In default of democratic political organisation, Radical politics were personalised. The movement after 1816 had many of the virtues of the movement of the 1790s; but not those of *égalité*. Cobbett had set a fashion, for which it is scarcely just to criticise him. The emergence of an independent Radical press after the Wars was in great degree his personal triumph. His own account of this achievement (written in 1817 and 1819) is close to the truth:

Many years ago . . . I set out as a sort of *self-dependant politician*. My opinions were my own. I dashed at all prejudices. I scorned to follow any body in matters of opinion. Before my time, every writer of talent enlisted himself under the banners of one party, or one minister, or other. I stood free from all such connections. . . . So that, for many years, I have been an object of hatred with men in power, with men aiming at power. . . .

By the end of the Wars he had become (in Hazlitt's description) "a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country", and "unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day". "The Reformers read him when he was a Tory, and the Tories read him now that he is a Reformer." Successive acts to raise the tax on newspapers and periodicals, and to tighten the law of seditious libel, were aimed in large part at Cobbett himself. "There is nothing savouring of *egotism* in my saying this," Cobbett avowed; and his conclusions are characteristically personal:

That man cannot be guilty of egotism, to check the progress of whose writings a total revolution has been made in the laws of a great kingdom. Such a man necessarily becomes a great subject of discussion and of record; all his actions, his manners, the habits of his life, and almost the size of his body and the colour of his hair, become, with the people of that kingdom, objects of some interest.

Cobbett's favourite subject, indeed, was William Cobbett of Botley. Page after page of his *Register* is filled with his affairs, self-justifications, arguments, feelings, chance impressions and encounters. The cause of reform was personalised into the encounter between William Cobbett and Old Corruption. Castle-reagh, "Bolton Fletcher", Wilberforce, Malthus, Brougham, Burdett, were—or became—his *personal* enemies. Fellow reformers moved uneasily within the fickle warmth of his

personal approbation; "he quarrels with his own creatures" Hazlitt noted with some justice, "as soon as he has written them into a little vogue—and a prison".

We have to accept Cobbett's vices as the dark side of his genius, a genius which enabled him to exert more influence, week after week for thirty years, than any journalist in English history. It is when these vices are found without his genius that they appear less amiable. For Cobbett set a style which, inevitably, his colleagues and competitors sought to imitate: Hunt, in his *Memoirs*, published in instalments from Ilchester gaol, Carlile in the *Republican*, and a dozen lesser men. The years between the close of the Wars and the Reform Bill were the age of the "self-dependent politician". Every Radical was a political protestant; every leader avowed himself to be an individualist, owing deference to no authority but that of his own judgement and conscience. "A Reformer," wrote Hazlitt in 1819, "is governed habitually by a spirit of contradiction."

He is a bad tool to work with; a part of a machine that never fits its place; he cannot be trained to discipline, for . . . the first principle of his mind is the supremacy of conscience, and the independent right of private judgement. . . . His understanding must be satisfied in the first place, or he will not budge an inch; he cannot for the world give up a principle to a party. He would rather have slavery than liberty, unless it is a liberty precisely after his own fashion. . . .

One reform leader (Hazlitt continued) "quarrels with all those who are labouring at the same oar . . . and thinks he has done a good piece service to the cause, because he has glutted his own ill-humour and self-will, which he mistakes for the love of liberty and the zeal for truth!"

Others . . . get into committees. . . set up for the heads of a party, in opposition to another party; abuse, vilify, expose, betray, counteract and undermine each other in every way, and throw the game into the hands of the common enemy. . . .¹

The virtues of this intractable individualism can be seen in Carlile's long contest with authority.² But, whether in Hunt or in Carlile, the vices were offensive, and were thoroughly damaging to the reform movement. From the surging unrest of the people, the vanity of great or petty leaders rose like vapour. Place saw everyone except himself and a few Benthamites as

¹ W. Hazlitt, Preface to *Political Essays* (1819), *Works*, VII, pp. 13-17.

² See below, pp. 720-8.

fools who must be manipulated. Bamford exemplifies the complacent self-esteem of the autodidact; his principles were proof against persecution, but were not proof against a kind word from Lord Sidmouth or a compliment from a gentleman upon his verses. Carlile was the ultimate individualist, so confident of his own judgement that he repudiated the very notion of political consultation or organisation. Hunt (if we are to believe only a part of the charges brought against him by colleagues like Bamford and Johnson) was at times contemptible in his vanity. On one occasion, Hunt and his co-defendants after Peterloo made a public progress, while awaiting trial, through the Lancashire cotton towns. "I was amused," recalled Bamford, "as well as a little humiliated, by what was continually occurring near me":

Hunt sat on the box-seat . . . Moorhouse stood on the roof of the coach, holding by a rope which was fastened to the irons at each side. He had kept that position all the way from Bolton . . . Hunt continually doffed his hat, waved it lowly, bowed gracefully, and now and then spoke a few kind words to the people; but if some five or ten minutes elapsed without a huzza or two, or the still more pleasing sound, "Hunt for Ever." . . . he would rise from his seat, turn round, and, cursing poor Moorhouse in limbs, soul, or eyes, he would say, "Why don't you shout man? Why don't you shout? Give them the hip, — you, don't you see they're fagging?"¹

We have to remember, when we consider Hunt or Burdett or Oastler or O'Connor, that their progresses resembled those of the most popular Royalty, and their appearances those of a *prima donna*. Hunt was received in one Lancashire village in 1819 with the road carpeted with flowers. To the slogans—"Burdett and No Bastille!", "Hunt and Liberty!"—there were added the songs:

With Henry Hunt we'll go, we'll go,
With Henry Hunt we'll go;
We'll raise the cap of liberty,
In spite of Nadin Joe.²

At the Manchester Radical Sunday school, the monitors wore locket-portraits of Hunt around their necks in place of crucifixes.³ No meeting was complete unless the horses had been unharnessed from the carriage of the main speaker, and he had

¹ Loc. cit., p. 200.

² J. Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, p. 262.

³ D. Read, *Peterloo* (Manchester, 1957), p. 54.

been drawn in triumph by the people through the streets. The great demonstrations had a ritualistic character, in which the speaker moved through declamations and rhetorical questions, playing for the expected tumultuous responses.¹ The charismatic orators were those with a taste for self-dramatisation. The roar of approbation from the throats of 20,000 people would have inflated the self-esteem of most men. As vanity grew, so the orators became addicted to the sight and sound of the throng cheering below the hustings. "His appetite," Prentice noted of Hunt, "grew with what it fed on." He became jealous of rivalry, constantly on the look-out for opportunities to strike a dramatic pose, and careless and off-hand with his less important colleagues, who in their turn found their vanity bruised by popular neglect—why not "Johnson and Liberty!" or "Bamford and Liberty!"?

The demagogue is a bad or ineffectual leader. Hunt voiced, not principle nor even well-formulated Radical strategy, but the emotions of the movement. Striving always to say whatever would provoke the loudest cheer, he was not the leader but the captive of the least stable portion of the crowd. According to Place,

Hunt says his mode of acting is to dash at good points, and to care for no one; that he will mix with no committee, or any party; he will act by himself; that he does not intend to affront anyone, but cares not who is offended.

But Place also wrote (in a letter to Hobhouse) in more generous terms of Hunt, after his triumphal reception in London at the summit of his popularity after Peterloo:

Aye, and he deserved it [i.e. London's welcome] too, and more than he got. If the people—I mean the working people—are to have but one man, they will, as they ought, support that man at least with their shouts. And there are very many cases too in which they would fight with him, or for him. Whose fault is it that no better man goes among the people? Not theirs; they will cling to the best man that makes common cause with them. I remember how I felt when I was a working man. . . . If none shows himself but Hunt, Hunt must be their man.²

¹ For example, Saxton at Rochdale: "the whole country has only to *unite* . . . and *demand* their rights as MEN determined to be free, or die nobly in the struggle. —(*Great applause.*)" Sherwin's *Weekly Political Register*, 7 August 1819.

² Wallas, *op. cit.*, pp. 120, 146.

deal of revolutionary bluster over dinner, at which none other than Castle proposed the toast: "May the last of Kings be strangled with the guts of the last priest." (Watson and Thistlewood waited upon Hunt the next day, and apologised for Castle's behaviour!) At about the same time, some "committee of trades" was formed in the metropolis, with which Preston was actively associated, and of which yet another spy (T. Thomas) succeeded in being elected as Chairman. According to Thomas, Preston was meeting with success in organising the Spitalfields weavers; in private conversation he was speaking of doing away with all landowners and fund holders, and was mooted a rising in which the Bank, the Tower and prisons were to be attacked. Castle eagerly seconded these proposals, and actually placed a few arms in a cart which was taken to Spa Fields on December 2nd. The crowd at this meeting was even greater than that at the former one, and it included many soldiers and sailors. The rumour had got abroad that "something" was going to "happen" at the meeting, and the rumour had even travelled as far as the north of England.¹ In Preston's view the Army was on the edge of mutiny, not only because of the grievances of the soldiers but also because of general sympathy with the people.² One of the banners displayed at Spa Fields declared: "The brave soldiers are our friends, treat them kindly."

"... the wants of the Belly creates a fever of the Brain . . .". So ran a fragment of a handbill, drafted for use among the troops, allegedly found in Dr. Watson's home after the Spa Fields affair. But the most notable fever of the brain, on December 2nd, would appear to have been, not that of the soldiers, but that of Dr. Watson's son. Both Watsons (Preston said) had been drinking before the meeting, and young Watson had drunk immoderately. Arriving early at the hustings, he harangued a part of the crowd, many of whose members (like Cashman) would appear to have been as drunk as himself. Then, leaping off the cart, he plunged into the crowd and led a contingent in the direction of the Tower. Other fragments surged off in different directions. Several gunsmith's shops were

¹ In Manchester on December 3rd expectant groups of delegates from the surrounding Hampden Clubs awaited the coming of the London mail. There were similar expectations in Sheffield.

² Preston declared: "their situation is more comfortable than the mechanic—but the miserable state of their friends and relatives weigh on their minds." (T.S. 11.203.) The troops had, in fact, shown a marked lack of ardour when called out against the Corn Law riots of 1815: Hammonds, *The Town Labourer*, p. 86.

were apprehended benefited from the revulsion of feeling occasioned by the *Leeds Mercury* disclosures as to the rôle of Oliver; when they were brought to trial in July, the jury refused to convict.¹

We have told the story of Oliver at length because it is one of the great stories of English history which came to partake almost of the quality of myth. Oliver was the archetype of the Radical Judas, and his legendary rôle was to carry influence throughout 19th-century history. We may distinguish between the immediate and the longer-term influence. The employment of informers had become virtually a routine practice on the part of magistrates in the larger industrial centres during the Luddite years; and ever since the 1790s a part of the Government's own resources had been appropriated for such secret service purposes. But the practice was regarded by a very wide section of public opinion as being wholly alien to the spirit of English law. The notion of "preventive" police action even in criminal cases was shocking, and when this was extended to matters of "domestic" political belief it was an affront to every prejudice of the free-born Englishman. The exposure in the *Leeds Mercury* of Oliver's rôle as an *agent provocateur* literally astounded public opinion. While the historian may read Oliver's reports in the Home Office papers with little surprise—seeing in him only one of the most industrious and daring of a Corps of informers—there were thousands of shopkeepers, country squires, Dissenting Ministers, and professional men who, in 1817, had no idea that such things could take place in England.

Hence the *Leeds Mercury* disclosures, published less than a week after the risings, had a disastrous effect upon the reputation of the Government. In the very week that the Pentridge affair took place, Dr. Watson was standing his trial for high treason. The Defence tore the leading prosecution witness, Castle, into shreds, and the jury had time to hear of the first revelations about Oliver before reaching their verdict. It was "Not Guilty". This was only one of a series of defeats in the courts: the acquittals of the Glasgow and Folley Hall "conspirators", and of Wooler and (in December) of Hone on charges of seditious libel. Although throughout 1817 many

¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 19 and 26 July 1817; D. F. E. Sykes, *History of Huddersfield* (1908), pp. 292-4; depositions of John Buckley and John Langley, in Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (k); T.S. 11.3336 and 4134 (2).

persuaded Hunt to attend at Derby), that any national aid was forthcoming. Indeed, it is not impossible that Government brought some pressure to bear on the Defence. Even on the scaffold, pains were taken to prevent the victims from exercising their customary right to their "last words", the chaplain interposing himself between the condemned men and the crowd. The Radical press argued with some colour that an understanding had been reached with the Prosecution, attributing the worst motives to "Lawyer Cross". Brandreth's case was hopeless. Might the Crown have hinted that the lives of some, or all, of his fellows might be spared, if the Defence made no mention of Oliver's part? Or might the Prosecution have threatened to implicate many more reformers if Oliver's testimony had been called upon?¹

But in this speculation it is easy to forget the prisoners. Who *was* Jeremiah Brandreth? The Hammonds, characteristically, describe him as "a half-starved, illiterate, and unemployed framework-knitter", "ready to . . . forward any proposal however wild". This is pejorative writing. We know that Brandreth was not illiterate. If he was half-starved and unemployed, so were many hundreds of his fellow stockingers, notably in the "Derbyshire Ribs" trade in which he was employed. We know that he had a house in Nottingham, and that when he was arrested his wife was sent as a pauper to her settlement in Sutton-in-Ashfield. From there she wrote to her husband, on learning from him of his sentence:

. . . if you have (which is the general opinion) been drawn in by that wretch Oliver, forgive him, and leave him to God and his own conscience. That God who will give to every man his reward, though, when I call him a human being I scarce think him so (though in the shape of one). O that I could atone for all and save your life.

(Even this letter was suppressed from Brandreth by the jailor.) Ann Brandreth, being penniless, walked from Sutton to Derby to say farewell to her husband. His own last letter to her was written in a "clear, plain and steady" hand:

I feel no fear in passing through the shadow of death to eternal life; so I hope you will make the promise of God as I have, to your own soul, as we may meet in Heaven. . . . My beloved . . . this

¹ T.S. 11.351; H. Hunt, *Memoirs*, III, pp. 499-502; *Black Dwarf*, 12 November 1817; Cobbett's *Political Register*, 25 April 1818; Hammonds, *op. cit.*, p. 368; R. J. White, *op. cit.*, p. 172; E. P. Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4.

Luddite—perhaps even a Luddite “captain”.¹ The Holmfirth valley, from which the “Folley Hall” insurgents came, was an area persistently connected with the Luddite oath-takings of 1812. At least one of the insurgents had “an old Halbert which he said had been used in Ludding time”. An officer noted that the attempt was accompanied by signal lights on the hills and the firing of signal-guns: “the system seems to be exactly similar to that practised at the time of the Luddites”. The Leeds cropper, James Mann, may have been a leader of Leeds Luddism, while another of the arrested delegates at Thornhill Lees (Smaller) was said to be “a notorious stealer of arms in 1812”. “A Rising on the 8th or 9th,” a Leeds magistrate reported, “has been the common Conversation in the Croppers’ Shops for 2 or 3 weeks past.”²

There is reason, then, to suppose that some of those involved were not dupes but experienced revolutionaries. Brandreth’s long silence had in it a heroism which has been little understood. It is probable that he kept silent about Oliver in the hope that his own death would atone for the offences of his fellows, and in order to prevent the involvement of fellow reformers. “Brandreth,” according to one account, “is said to have declared, that his blood ought to be shed, as he had shed blood; but he hoped he should be the only victim.” But, at the same time, he “felt no contrition” for the murder which he had committed. Although “ready to join in any act of religion”, he was “insensible of any remorse, and proof against all fear”. “God gave me great fortitude,” he wrote to his wife, “to bear up my spirits on trial.”³

We may see the Pentridge rising as one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection, without any middle-class support. The objectives of this revolutionary movement cannot perhaps be better characterised than in the words of the Belper street song—“The Levelation is begun . . .”⁴

¹ See e.g. *Legislator*, 1 March 1818, and Lord G. Cavendish to Fitzwilliam, 25 August 1817, Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (k). More remarkably, Brandreth was present at Despard’s execution—when offered an explanation of the forms of the penalty for high treason, he said that this could be spared, as he had witnessed it in the case of Colonel Despard (*Independent Whig*, 9 November 1817). Two other conspirators of this time were involved in the Despard affair—Pendrill, and Scholes of Wakefield. See also Oliver’s testimony, above, p. 598 n. 3.

² Wood to Fitzwilliam, 6-7 and 9 June 1817; deposition of John Buckley; Capt J. Armytage to Fitzwilliam; all in Fitzwilliam Papers, F.45 (i) and (k). For Mann see above, p. 590.

³ *Independent Whig*, 9 November 1817; *Nottingham Review*, 24 October 1817.

⁴ B. Gregory, *Autobiographical Recollections*, p. 129. The Pentridge men styled themselves “the Regenerators”.

had no Burdett and no Westminster elections. More influential here were the friendly society and trade unions. We have noted the medieval ceremonial of the Preston Guilds and of the woolcombers, from which the legal benefit societies had largely borrowed.¹ In the post-war years there is growing evidence that the "illegal" trade unions were openly displaying their strength. The miners at Dewsbury proceeded through the town, in 1819, with bands and banners flying; the framework-knitters formed orderly demonstrations in Nottingham in 1819; in Manchester, during the great strike of 1818, the spinners "marched By piccadilly on Tuesday and was 23½ minets in going Bye", reported the informer, Bent: "One man from Eich shop is chose by the People and he commands them he forms them in Ranks and . . . they obey him as Strickley as the army do their Colonel and as Little Talking as in a Regiment."²

"The peaceable demeanour of so many thousand unemployed Men is not natural," General Byng commented on this occasion. It is a phrase worth pausing over. The gentry, who had decried the reformers as a rabble, were appalled and some were even panic-stricken when they found that they were *not*.

. . . that very ORDER they cried up before
Did afterwards gall them ten thousand times more,
When they found that these men, in their "Radical Rags",
March'd peaceably on, with their Banners and Flags.³

The comment, from Newcastle, serves with redoubled force for Manchester. Norris, the Chairman of the Bench, when committing Hunt for trial after Peterloo, spoke (perhaps in self-extenuation) of a meeting,

assembled, with such insignia and in such a manner, with the *black flag*, the *bloody dagger*, with "Equal Representation or Death". . . . They came in a threatening manner—they came under the banners of death, thereby showing they meant to overturn the Government.⁴

Bamford admitted that the pitch-black flag of the Lees and Saddleworth Union, lettered in white paint with "Love", two hands joined and a heart, was "one of the most sepulchral looking objects that could be contrived". But it was not the

¹ See above, pp. 425-7.

² Dewsbury, see Aspinall, *op. cit.*, p. 341; Nottingham, see *ibid.*, p. 320; Manchester, see *The Skilled Labourer*, p. 100.

³ "Bob in Gotham", *Radical Monday* (Newcastle, 1821), p. 4.

⁴ An Observer, *Peterloo Massacre* (Manchester, 1819), p. 46.

the pacific character of a meeting which (the reformers knew) all England was watching. The attack was made on this multitude with the venom of panic.

But the panic was not (as has been suggested) the panic of bad horsemen hemmed in by a crowd. It was the panic of class hatred. It was the *Yeomanry*—the Manchester manufacturers, merchants, publicans, and shopkeepers on horseback—which did more damage than the regulars (Hussars). In the *Yeomanry* (a middle-class reformer testified) “there are . . . individuals whose political rancour approaches to absolute insanity.”¹ These were the men who pursued the banners, knew the speakers by name and sought to pay off old scores, and who mustered and cheered at the end of their triumph. “There was whiz this way and whiz that way,” declared one cotton-spinner: “whenever any cried out ‘mercy’, they said, ‘Damn you, what brought you here?’” We may get the feel of the confused field from such a passage as this:

I picked up a Cap of Liberty; one of the Cavalry rode after me and demanded it; I refused to give it up. Two others then came up and asked what was the matter, when the first said, this fellow won't give up this Cap of Liberty. One of the others then said, damn him, cut him down. Upon this, I ran. . . . One of the Cavalry cut at Saxton, but his horse seemed restive, and he missed his blow. He then called out to another, “There's Saxton, damn him run him through.” The other said, “I had rather not, I'll leave that for you to do.” When I got to the end of Watson-street, I saw ten or twelve of the *Yeomanry Cavalry*, and two of the *Hussars* cutting at the people, who were wedged close together, when an officer of *Hussars* rode up to his own men, and knocking up their swords said, “Damn you what do you mean by this work?” He then called out to the *Yeomanry*, “For shame, gentlemen; what are you about? the people cannot get away.” They desisted for a time, but no sooner had the officer rode to another part of the field, than they fell to work again.²

There is no term for this but class war. But it was a pitifully one-sided war. The people, closely packed and trampling upon each other in the effort to escape, made no effort at retaliation

¹ J. E. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-6. Hunt published a list of the occupations of the *Yeomanry* who actually served on August 16th: these included several sons of publicans and manufacturers, a wine-merchant, commission-agent, dancing-master, cheese-monger, butcher, &c.; *Address to the Radical Reformers*, 29 October 1822, pp. 13-16. See also D. Read, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

² *Inquest on John Lees* (1820), pp. 70, 180. Compare Tyas's account in *The Times*: “Two *Yeomanry* privates rode up to Saxton. ‘There . . . is that villain, Saxton; do you run him through the body.’—‘No,’ replied the other, ‘I had rather not—I leave it to you.’ The man immediately made a lunge at Saxton.”

Even the Prince Regent's speech at the opening of Parliament was matter for another parody:

But lo!

CONSPIRACY and TREASON are abroad!

Those imps of darkness, gender'd in the wombs
Of spinning-jennies, winding-wheels, and looms,

In Lunashire—

O Lord!

My L——ds and G——tl——n, we've much to fear!

Reform, Reform, the swinish rabble cry—

Meaning of course rebellion, blood, and riot—

Audacious rascals! you, my Lords, and I,

Know 'tis their duty to be starved in quiet. . . .¹

Peterloo outraged every belief and prejudice of the “free-born Englishman”—the right of free speech, the desire for “fair play”, the taboo against attacking the defenceless. For a time, ultra-Radicals and moderates buried their differences in a protest movement with which many Whigs were willing to associate. Protest meetings were held: on the 29th August in Smithfield, with Dr. Watson in the chair, and Arthur Thistlewood as a speaker: on the 5th September a much larger meeting in Westminster, with Burdett, Cartwright, Hobhouse and John Thelwall among the speakers.² When Hunt made his triumphal entry into London ten days later, *The Times* estimated that 300,000 were in the streets.

No one can suppose that the tradition of the “free-born Englishman” was merely notional who studies the response to the news of Peterloo. In the months which followed, political antagonism hardened. No one could remain neutral; in Manchester itself the “loyalists” were placed in an extreme isolation, and the Methodists were the only body with a popular following to come (with fulsome declarations) to their side.³ But if there were many gentry and professional men who were shocked by Peterloo, at the same time they had no desire to conjure up *further* monster demonstrations of the people.⁴ Thus the effective movement after Peterloo, which swung from the

¹ W. Hone (with Cruikshank), *The Man in the Moon* (1819).

² *Independent Whig*, 29 August, 5 September 1819.

³ H.O. 42.198. The Committee of the Manchester Sunday Schools resolved (24 September 1819) to exclude all children who attended in white hats or wearing radical badges. See, however, D. Read, *op. cit.*, p. 203 for dissensions in the Methodist body.

⁴ There were exceptions: for example, in Yorkshire and in Norfolk protest meetings were held under Whig auspices.

The men died like heroes. Ings, perhaps, was too obstreperous in singing "Death or Liberty," and Thistlewood said, "Be quiet, Ings; we can die without all this noise."

The crowd was barricaded at a distance from the scaffold so that no rescue could be attempted and no dying speeches be heard. When the heads of the victims were displayed, the crowd was wild with anger—"the yells and execrations from the assembled crowds exceeded all conception".¹

So ended the "old Radicalism", which, in its way, was an extension into the 19th century of the Jacobinism of the 1790s. (The shoemakers of Cato Street were some of the last to use the term "Citizen" and other Jacobin forms.) We have sought to redress, a little, the customary picture of a gang of criminal desperadoes. Thistlewood was certainly guilty of folly, in exposing the lives of his followers to such patent provocation. ("I am like a bullock drove into Smithfield market to be sold," Ings burst out at his trial: "Lord Sidmouth knew all about this for two months.") His plans—to seize cannon and arsenals, fire the barracks, and set up a Provisional Government in the Mansion House—were little more than fantasies. He derived a justification for his plot from the Roman apologists of tyrannicide. At his trial he declared that "high treason was committed against the people at Manchester":

Brutus and Cassius were lauded to the very skies for slaying Caesar; indeed, when any man, or set of men, place themselves above the laws of their country, there is no other means of bringing them to justice than through the arm of a private individual.

But even if some variant of the Cato Street Conspiracy had succeeded in its immediate objective, it is difficult to see what would have followed. Perhaps, for a few days, the "Gordon Riots" on a larger and much bloodier scale; followed, in all probability, by a "White Terror", with Peterloo re-enacted in a dozen English and Scottish towns. Thistlewood had overlooked Shakespeare's ironic comment, set in the mouth of Brutus:

¹ Thistlewood, Ings, Brunt, Tidd and Davidson were executed on May 1st. Five others were transported. This account is based on G. T. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, *passim*; H. Stanhope, *The Cato Street Conspiracy*, esp. Ch. VI (for the rôle of Edwards); Cobbett's *Political Register*, 6 May 1820; R. F. Wearmouth, *op. cit.*, p. 71; *Independent Whig*, 7 May 1820; Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, (1909), II, p. 126; E. Aylmer, *Memoirs of George Edwards* (1820).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

i. *The Radical Culture*

WHEN CONTRASTED WITH the Radical years which preceded and the Chartist years which succeeded it, the decade of the 1820s seems strangely quiet—a mildly prosperous plateau of social peace. But many years later a London costermonger warned Mayhew:

People fancy that when all's quiet that all's stagnating. Propagandism is going on for all that. It's when all's quiet that the seed's a-growing. Republicans and Socialists are pressing their doctrines.¹

These quiet years were the years of Richard Carlile's contest for the liberty of the press; of growing trade union strength and the repeal of the Combination Acts; of the growth of free thought, co-operative experiment, and Owenite theory. They are years in which individuals and groups sought to render into theory the twin experiences which we have described—the experience of the Industrial Revolution, and the experience of popular Radicalism insurgent and in defeat. And at the end of the decade, when there came the climactic contest between Old Corruption and Reform, it is possible to speak in a new way of the working people's consciousness of their interests and of their predicament *as a class*.

There is a sense in which we may describe popular Radicalism in these years as an intellectual culture. The articulate consciousness of the self-taught was above all a *political* consciousness. For the first half of the 19th century, when the formal education of a great part of the people entailed little more than instruction in the Three R's, was by no means a period of intellectual atrophy. The towns, and even the villages, hummed with the energy of the autodidact. Given the elementary techniques of literacy, labourers, artisans, shopkeepers and clerks and schoolmasters, proceeded to instruct themselves,

¹ Mayhew, *op. cit.*, I, p. 22.

convict. Wooler conducted his own defence; he was a capable speaker, with some experience of the courts, and defended himself with ability in the grandiloquent libertarian manner. The result of his two trials (5 June 1817) was one verdict of "Not Guilty" and one muddled verdict of "Guilty" (from which three jurymen demurred) which was later upset in the Court of King's Bench.¹ The three trials of William Hone in December 1817 are some of the most hilarious legal proceedings on record. Hone, a poor bookseller and former member of the L.C.S., was indicted for publishing blasphemous libels, in the form of parodies upon the Catechism, Litany, and Creed. Hone, in fact, was only a particularly witty exponent of a form of political squib long established among the newsvendors and patterers, and practised in more sophisticated form by men of all parties, from Wilkes to the writers in the *Anti-Jacobin*. Hone, indeed, had not thought his parodies worth risking liberty for. When the repression of February 1817 commenced, he had sought to withdraw them; and it was Carlile, by republishing them, who had forced the Government's hand. Here is a sample:

Our Lord who art in the Treasury, whatsoever be thy name, thy power be prolonged, thy will be done throughout the empire, as it is in each session. Give us our usual sops, and forgive us our occasional absences on divisions; as we promise not to forgive those that divide against thee. Turn us not out of our places; but keep us in the House of Commons, the land of Pensions and Plenty; and deliver us from the People. Amen.

Hone was held in prison, in poor health, from May until December, because he was unable to find £1,000 bail. He had aroused the particular and personal fury of members of the Cabinet to whom he had attached names that were never forgotten: "Old Bags" (Lord Chancellor Eldon), "Derry Down Triangle" (Castlereagh), and "the Doctor" (Sidmouth). Not much was expected when it was learned that he intended to conduct his own defence. But Hone had been improving the time in prison by collecting examples, from the past and present, of other parodists; and in his first trial before Justice Abbott he secured an acquittal. In the next two days the old, ill and testy Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough himself presided over the trials. Page after page of the record is filled with Ellenborough's interruptions, Hone's unruffled reproofs to the Chief Justice on his conduct, the reading of

¹ *The Two Trials of T. J. Wooler* (1817).

ludicrous parodies culled from various sources, and threats by the Sheriff to arrest "the first man I see laugh". Despite Ellenborough's unqualified charge ("... in obedience to his conscience and his God, he pronounced this to be a most impious and profane libel") the jury returned two further verdicts of "Not Guilty", with the consequence (it is said) that Ellenborough retired to his sick-room never to return. From that time forward—even in 1819 and 1820—all parodies and squibs were immune from prosecution.¹

Persecution cannot easily stand up in the face of ridicule. Indeed, there are two things that strike one about the press battles of these years. The first is, not the solemnity but the delight with which Hone, Cruikshank, Carlile, Davison, Benbow and others baited authority. (This tradition was continued by Hetherington, who for weeks passed under the noses of the constables, in his business as editor of the unstamped *Poor Man's Guardian*, in the highly unlikely disguise of a Quaker.) Imprisonment as a Radical publisher brought, not odium, but honour. Once the publishers had decided that they were ready to go to prison, they outdid each other with new expedients to exhibit their opponents in the most ludicrous light. Radical England was delighted (and no one more than Hazlitt) at the resurrection by Sherwin of *Wat Tyler*—the republican indiscretion of Southey's youth. Southey, now Poet Laureate, was foremost in the clamour to curb the seditious licence of the press, and sought an injunction against Sherwin for infringement of copyright. Lord Eldon refused the injunction: the Court could not take notice of property in the "unhallowed profits of libellous publications". "Is it not a little strange," Hazlitt enquired, "that while this gentleman is getting an injunction against himself as the author of *Wat Tyler*, he is recommending gagging bills against us, and thus making up by force for his deficiency in argument?"² On the other hand, Carlile (who had taken over Sherwin's business) was more than pleased that the injunction was refused—for the sales of

¹ *Second Trial of William Hone* (1818), pp. 17, 45; *Proceedings at the Public Meeting to form a subscription for Hone* (1818); F. W. Hackwood, *William Hone* (1912), Chs. IX-XI; Wickwar, op. cit., pp. 58-9. An old patterer told Mayhew (I, p. 252) that despite the acquittals, it remained difficult to "work" Hone's parodies in the streets: "there was plenty of officers and constables ready to pull the fellows up, and... a beak that wanted to please the high dons, would find some way of stopping them...."

² Hazlitt, *Works*, VII, pp. 176 ff. "Instead of applying for an injunction against *Wat Tyler*," Hazlitt opined, "Mr. Southey would do well to apply for an injunction against Mr. Coleridge, who has undertaken his defence in *The Courier*."

the poem were a staple source of profit in his difficult period at the start of business. "Glory be to thee, O Southey!", he wrote six years later: "*Wat Tyler* continued to be a source of profit when every other political publication failed. The world does not know what it may yet owe to Southey."¹

The incidents of the pirating of *Queen Mab* and the *Vision of Judgement* were part of the same ebullient strategy. No British monarch has ever been portrayed in more ridiculous postures nor in more odious terms than George IV during the Queen Caroline agitation, and notably in Hone and Cruikshank's *Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong*, *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*, *Non Mi Ricordo*, and *The Man in the Moon*. The same author's *Slap at Slop and the Bridge-Street Gang* (1822), appeared in the format of the Government-subsidised *New Times*, complete with a mock newspaper-stamp with the design of a cat's paw and the motto: "On Every Thing He Claps His Claw", and with mock advertisements and mock lists of births and deaths:

MARRIAGE

His Imperial Majesty Prince Despotism, in a consumption, to Her Supreme Antiquity, The IGNORANCE of Eighteen Centuries, in a decline. The bridal dresses were most superb.

While Carlile fought on from prison, the satirists raked his prosecutors with fire.

The second point is the real toughness of the libertarian and constitutional tradition, notwithstanding the Government's assault. It is not only a question of support in unexpected places—Hone's subscription list was headed by donations from a Whig duke, a marquis, and two earls—which indicates an uneasiness in the ruling class itself. What is apparent from the reports of the law officers of the Crown, in all political trials, is the caution with which they proceeded. In particular they were aware of the unreliability (for their purposes) of the jury system. By Fox's Libel Act of 1792 the jury were judges of the libel as well as of the fact of publishing; and however judges might seek to set this aside, this meant in effect that twelve Englishmen had to decide whether they thought the 'libel' dangerous enough to merit imprisonment or not. One State prosecution which failed was a blow at the morale of authority which could only be repaired by three which succeeded. Even

¹ Sherwin's *Republican*, 29 March 1817; Carlile's *Republican*, 30 May 1823.

Street was scarcely left untenanted for more than a day. The men and women who came forward were, in nearly every case, entirely unknown to Carlile. They simply came out of London; or arrived on the coach from Lincolnshire, Dorset, Liverpool and Leeds. They came out of a culture.

It was not the "working-class" culture of the weavers or Tyneside pitmen. The people most prominent in the fight included clerks, shop assistants, a farmer's son; Benbow, the shoemaker turned bookseller; James Watson, the Leeds warehouseman who "had the charge of a saddlehorse" at a drysalter's; James Mann, the cropper turned bookseller (also of Leeds). The intellectual tradition was in part derived from the Jacobin years, the circle which had once moved around Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, or the members of the L.C.S., the last authentic spokesman of which—John Gale Jones—was one of Carlile's most constant supporters. In part it was a new tradition, owing something to Bentham's growing influence and something to the "free-thinking Christians" and Unitarians, such as Benjamin Flower and W. J. Fox. It touched that vigorous sub-culture of the "editors of Sunday newspapers and lecturers at the Surrey Institute" which *Blackwood's* and the literary Establishment so scorned—schoolmasters, poor medical students, or civil servants who read Byron and Shelley and the *Examiner*, and among whom, not Whig or Tory, but "right and wrong considered by each man abstractedly, is the fashion".¹

It is scarcely helpful to label this culture *bourgeois* or *petit-bourgeois*, although Carlile had more than his share of the individualism which (it is generally supposed) characterises the latter. It would seem to be closer to the truth that the impulse of rational enlightenment which (in the years of the wars) had been largely confined to the Radical intelligentsia was now seized upon by the artisans and some of the skilled workers (such as many cotton-spinners) with an evangelistic zeal to carry it to "numbers unlimited"—a propagandist zeal scarcely to be found in Bentham, James Mill or Keats. The subscription lists for Carlile's campaign drew heavily upon London; and, next,

¹ Keats to his brother George, 17 September 1819, *Works* (1901), V, p. 108. The letter continues: "This makes the business of Carlile the bookseller of great moment in my mind. He has been selling deistical pamphlets, republished Tom Paine, and many other works held in superstitious horror. . . . After all, they are afraid to prosecute. They are afraid of his defence; it would be published in all the papers all over the empire. They shudder at this. The trials would light a flame they could not extinguish. Do you not think this of great import?"

Hawkers (Mayhew was told), in order to avoid "selling" the *Republican*, sold straws instead, and then gave the paper to their customers. In the Spen Valley, in the days of the "unstamped", a penny was dropped through a grating and the paper would "appear". In other parts, men would slip down alleys or across fields at night to the known rendezvous. More than once the "unstamped" were transported under the noses of the authorities in a coffin and with a godly cortège of free-thinkers.

We may take two examples of the shopmen and vendors. The first, a shopwoman, serves to remind us that, in these rationalist and Owenite circles, the claim for women's rights (almost silent since the 1790s) was once again being made, and was slowly extending from the intelligentsia to the artisans. Carlile's womenfolk, who underwent trial and imprisonment, did so more out of loyalty than out of conviction. Very different was Mrs. Wright, a Nottingham lace-mender, who was one of Carlile's volunteers and who was prosecuted for selling one of his *Addresses* containing opinions in his characteristic manner:

A Representative System of Government would soon see the propriety of turning our Churches and Chapels into Temples of Science and . . . cherishing the Philosopher instead of the Priest. Kingcraft and Priestcraft I hold to be the bane of Society. . . . Those two evils operate jointly against the welfare both of the body of mind, and to palliate our miseries in this life, the latter endeavour to bamboozle us with a hope of eternal happiness.

She conducted her long defence herself¹ and was rarely interrupted. Towards the end of her defence,

Mrs. Wright requested permission to retire and suckle her infant child that was crying. This was granted, and she was absent from the Court twenty minutes. In passing to and fro, to the Castle Coffee House, she was applauded and loudly cheered by assembled thousands, all encouraging her to be of good cheer and to persevere.

Some time later she was thrown into Newgate, on a November night, with her six-months' baby and nothing to lie on but a mat. Such women as Mrs. Wright (and Mrs. Mann of Leeds) had to meet not only the customary prosecutions, but also the abuse and insinuations of an outraged loyalist press. "This wretched and shameless woman," wrote the *New Times*, was attended by "several females. Are not these circumstances enough to shock every reflecting mind?" She was an "abandoned

¹ Most of Carlile's shopmen were provided with long written defences by Carlile, and this was probably so in her case.

creature" (the conventional epithet for prostitutes) "who has cast off all the distinctive shame and fear and decency of her sex". By her "horrid example" she had depraved the minds of other mothers: "these monsters in female form stand forward, with hardened visages, in the face of day, to give their public countenance and support—for the first time in the history of the Christian world—to gross, vulgar, horrid blasphemy". She was a woman, wrote Carlile, "of very delicate health, and truly all spirit and no matter".¹

The longest sentences endured by a news vendor were probably those served by Joseph Swann, a hat-maker of Macclesfield. He was arrested in 1819 for selling pamphlets and a seditious poem:

Off with your fetters; spurn the slavish joke;
Now, now, or never, can your chain be broke;
Swift then rise and give the fatal stroke.

Shunted from gaol to gaol, and chained with felons, he was eventually sentenced to two years imprisonment for seditious conspiracy, two years for blasphemous libel, and a further six months for seditious libel to run consecutively. When these monstrous sentences had been passed, Swann held up his white hat and enquired of the magistrate: "Han ye done? Is that all? Why I thowt ye'd got a bit of hemp for me, and hung me." His wife also was briefly arrested (for continuing the sale of pamphlets); she and her four children survived on a parish allowance of 9s. a week, with some help from Carlile and Cobbett. Cobbett, indeed, interested himself particularly in the case of Swann, and when Castlereagh committed suicide it was to Swann that Cobbett addressed his triumphant obituary obloquies: "CASTLEREAGH HAS CUT HIS OWN THROAT AND IS DEAD! Let that sound reach you in the depth of your dungeon . . . and carry consolation to your suffering soul!" After serving his four and a half years, Swann "passed the gate of Chester Castle . . . in mind as stubborn as ever", and resumed his trade as a hatter. But he had not yet been discharged from service. In November 1831 the *Poor Man's Guardian* reported proceedings at the Stockport magistrate's court, where Joseph Swann was charged with selling the "unstamped". The Chairman of the Bench, Captain Clarke, asked him what he had to say in his defence:

¹ See Wickwar, op. cit., pp. 222-3; *Trial of Mrs. Susannah Wright* (1822), pp. 8, 44, 56; *New Times*, 16 November 1822.

Defendant.—Well, Sir, I have been out of employment for some time; neither can I obtain work; my family are all starving. . . . And for another reason, the weightiest of all; I sell them for the good of my fellow countrymen; to let them see how they are misrepresented in Parliament . . . I wish to let the people know how they are humbugged. . .

Bench.—Hold your tongue a moment.

Defendant.—I shall not! for I wish every man to read these publications . . .

Bench.—You are very insolent, therefore you are committed to three months' imprisonment in Knutsford House of Correction, to hard labour.

Defendant.—I've nothing to thank you for; and whenever I come out, I'll hawk them again. And *mind you* [looking at Captain Clarke] the first that I hawk shall be to your house . . .

Joseph Swann was then forcibly removed from the dock.¹

In the 20th-century rhetoric of democracy most of these men and women have been forgotten, because they were impudent, vulgar, over-earnest, or "fanatical". In their wake the subsidised vehicles of "improvement", the *Penny Magazine* and the *Saturday Magazine* (whose vendors no one prosecuted) moved in; and afterwards the commercial press, with its much larger resources, although it did not really begin to capture the Radical reading public until the Forties and the Fifties. (Even then the popular press—the publications of Cleave, Howitt, Chambers, Reynolds, and Lloyd—came from this Radical background.) Two consequences of the contest may be particularly noticed. The first (and most obvious) is that the working-class ideology which matured in the Thirties (and which has endured, through various translations, ever since) put an exceptionally high value upon the rights of the press, of speech, of meeting and of personal liberty. The tradition of the "free-born Englishman" is of course far older. But the notion to be found in some late "Marxist" interpretations, by which these claims appear as a heritage of "bourgeois individualism" will scarcely do. In the contest between 1792 and 1836 the artisans and workers made this tradition peculiarly their own, adding to the claim for free speech and thought their own claim for the untrammelled propagation, in the cheapest possible form, of the products of this thought.

In this, it is true, they shared a characteristic illusion of the

¹ Wickwar, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-7; *Independent Whig*, 16 January 1820; Cobbett's *Political Register*, 17 August 1822; *Poor Man's Guardian*, 12 November 1831; A. G. Barker, *Henry Hetherington*, pp. 12-13.

and militant Radical or Chartist bodies. In Ipswich we find weavers, saddlers, harness-makers, tailors, shoemakers; in Cheltenham shoemakers, tailors, stonemasons, cabinet-makers, gardeners, a plasterer and a blacksmith—"earnest and reputable people—much above the average in intelligence".¹ These are the people whom Cobbett, Carlile, Hetherington and their newsvendors had "multiplied".

"Earnest and reputable people . . ."—this autodidact culture has never been adequately analysed.² The majority of these people had received some elementary education, although its inadequacy is testified from many sources:

I well remember the first half-time school in Bingley. It was a cottage at the entrance to the mill-yard. The teacher, a poor old man who had done odd jobs of a simple kind for about 12s. a week, was set to teach the half-timers. Lest, however, he should teach too much or the process be too costly, he had to stamp washers out of cloth with a heavy wooden mallet on a large block of wood during school hours.³

This is, perhaps, the "schooling" of the early 1830s at its worst. Better village schools, or cheap fee-paying schools patronised by artisans, could be found in the Twenties. By this time, also, the Sunday schools were liberating themselves (although slowly) from the taboo upon the teaching of writing, while the first British and National schools (for all their inadequacies) were beginning to have some effect. But, for any secondary education, the artisans, weavers, or spinners had to teach themselves. The extent to which they were doing this is attested by the sales of Cobbett's educational writings, and notably of his *Grammar of the English Language*, published in 1818, selling 13,000 within six months, and a further 100,000 in the next fifteen years.⁴ And we must remember that in translating sales (or the circulation of periodicals) into estimates of readership, the same book or paper was loaned, read aloud, and passed through many hands.

¹ W. E. Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 169. I am indebted to Mr. A. J. Brown for information about Ipswich. See also *Chartist Studies*, ed. A. Briggs, for Chartism in Somerset and East Anglia.

² J. F. C. Harrison's admirable account in *Learning and Living* tends to underestimate the vigour of radical culture before 1832. The best first-hand accounts are in William Lovett's autobiography and (for Chartist times) Thomas Frost, *Forty Years Recollections* (1880).

³ Thomas Wood, *Autobiography (1822-80)* (Leeds, 1956). See also An Old Potter, *When I Was a Child* (1903), Ch. 1.

⁴ M. L. Pearl, *William Cobbett* (1953), pp. 105-7. There were also many pirated editions.

Dancers",¹ was reinforced by the dislike felt by employers for the dangerous ebullience of the audience. In 1798 the "opulent Merchants, Shipbuilders, Ropemakers" and other employers around London Docks memorialised the Government, complaining that the performances at the Royalty Theatre, near the Tower, encouraged "habits of dissipation and profligacy" among "their numerous Manufacturers, Workmen, Servants, &c."² (The complaint had been going on for more than two hundred years.) In 1819 disorder raged through central London, night after night, and week after week, in the notorious "O.P." riots, when the prices were raised at Drury Lane. It was Authority's particular dislike of the theatre's blend of disorder and sedition which enabled the Patent Theatres to preserve at least the forms of their monopoly until as late as 1843.

The vitality of the plebeian theatre was not matched by its artistic merit. The most positive influence upon the sensibility of the Radicals came less from the little theatres than from the Shakespearian revival—not only Hazlitt, but also Wooler, Bamford, Cooper, and a score of self-taught Radical and Chartist journalists were wont to cap their arguments with Shakespearian quotations. Wooler's apprenticeship had been in dramatic criticism; while the strictly trades unionist *Trades Newspaper* commenced, in 1825, with a theatre critic as well as a sporting column (covering prize-fighting and the contest between "the Lion Nero and Six Dogs").³ But there was one popular art which, in the years between 1780 and 1830, attained to a peak of complexity and excellence—the political print.

This was the age, first, of Gillray and of Rowlandson, and then of George Cruikshank, as well as of scores of other caricaturists, some competent, some atrociously crude. Theirs was, above all, a metropolitan art. The models for the cartoonists drove in their coaches past the print-shops where their political (or personal) sins were mercilessly lampooned. No holds whatsoever were barred, on either side. Thelwall or Burdett or Hunt would be portrayed by the loyalists as savage incendiaries, a flaming torch in one hand, a pistol in the other,

¹ See H.O. 119.3/4 for the accusations and counter-accusations passing between Covent Garden and Drury Lane, on the one hand, and the "illegitimate" little theatres on the other, 1812-18.

² H.O. 65.1.

³ *Trades Newspaper*, 31 July, 21 August 1825 et. seq. The Editor felt called upon to apologise for carrying news of prize-fighting and animal-baiting; but the paper was governed by a committee of London trades unions, and the members' wishes had to be met.

character-structure underlies the moral earnestness and self-discipline which enabled men to work on by candle-light after a day of labour. But we have to make two important reservations. The first is that Methodism was a strongly *anti-intellectual* influence, from which British popular culture has never wholly recovered. The circle to which Wesley would have confined the reading of Methodists (Southey noted) "was narrow enough; his own works, and his own series of abridgements, would have constituted the main part of a Methodist's library".¹ In the early 19th century local preachers and class leaders were encouraged to read more: reprints of Baxter, the hagiography of the movement, or "vollams of the Missionary Register". But poetry was suspect, and philosophy, biblical criticism, or political theory taboo. The whole weight of Methodist teaching fell upon the blessedness of the "pure in heart", no matter what their rank or accomplishments. This gave to the Church its egalitarian spiritual appeal. But it also fed (sometimes to gargantuan proportions) the philistine defences of the scarcely-literate. "It is *carte blanche* for ignorance and folly," Hazlitt exploded:

Those . . . who are either unable or unwilling to think connectedly or rationally on any subject, are at once released from every obligation of the kind, by being told that faith and reason are opposed to one another.²

From the successive shocks of Paine, Cobbett, Carlile, the Methodist ministers defended their flocks: the evidence was abundant that unmonitored literacy was the "snare of the devil".

Some of the off-shoots from the main Methodist stem—the Methodist Unitarians (an odd conjunction) and notably the New Connexion—were more intellectual in inclination, and their congregations resemble the older Dissenting Churches. But the main Methodist tradition responded to the thirst for enlightenment in a different way. We have already noted³ the submerged affinities between Methodism and middle-class Utilitarianism. Strange as it may seem, when we think of Bentham and his hatred of "juggical" superstition, the spirit of the times was working for a conjunction of the two traditions. If intellectual *enquiry* was discouraged by the Methodists, the acquisition of *useful* knowledge could be seen as godly and full of merit. The emphasis, of course, was upon the *use*. Work-

¹ Southey, *Life of Wesley*, p. 558.

² *Works*, IV, pp. 57 ff., from *The Round Table* (1817). ³ See above, p. 365.

discipline alone was not enough, it was necessary for the labour force to advance towards more sophisticated levels of attainment. The old opportunist Baconian argument—that there could be no evil in the study of nature, which is the visible evidence of God's laws—had now been assimilated within Christian apologetics. Hence arose that peculiar phenomenon of early Victorian culture, the Nonconformist parson with his hand on the Old Testament and his eye on a microscope.

The effects of this conjunction can already be felt within the working-class culture of the Twenties. Science—botany, biology, geology, chemistry, mathematics, and, in particular, the applied sciences—the Methodists looked upon with favour, provided that these pursuits were not intermixed with politics or speculative philosophy. The solid, statistical, intellectual world which the Utilitarians were building was congenial also to the Methodist Conference. They also compiled their statistical tables of Sunday school attendances, and Bunting (one feels) would have been happy if he could have calculated degrees of spiritual grace with the accuracy that Chadwick calculated the minimum diet that might keep a pauper in strength to work. Hence came that alliance between Nonconformists and Utilitarians in educational endeavour, and in the dissemination of "improving" knowledge alongside godly exhortation. Already in the Twenties this kind of literature is well established, in which moral admonishments (and accounts of the drunken orgies of Tom Paine on his unvisited deathbed) appear side by side with little notes on the flora of Venezuela, statistics of the death-roll in the Lisbon earthquake, recipes for boiled vegetables, and notes on hydraulics:

Every species . . . requires a different kind of food. . . . Linnaeus has remarked, that the cow eats 276 species of plants and rejects 218; the goat eats 449 and rejects 126; the sheep eats 387 and rejects 141; the horse eats 262 and rejects 212; and the hog, more nice in its taste than any of those, eats but 72 plants and rejects all the rest. Yet such is the unbounded munificence of the Creator, that all these countless myriads of sentient beings are amply provided for and nourished by his bounty! "The eyes of all these look unto Him, and he openeth his hand and satisfieth the desire of every living being."¹

¹ Thomas Dick, *On the Improvement of Society by the Diffusion of Knowledge* (Glasgow, 1833), p. 175. See also p. 213, where it is argued that "arithmetic, algebra, geometry, conic sections, and other departments of mathematics" are particularly godly studies since they "contain truths that are eternal and unchangeable".

And already in the Twenties, Political Economy can be seen as a third partner alongside Morality and Useful Knowledge, in the shape of homilies upon the God-given and immutable laws of supply and demand. Capital, even nicer in its taste than the hog, would select only the industrious and obedient worker and reject all others.

Thus Methodism and Evangelicism contributed few active intellectual ingredients to the articulate culture of the working people, although they can be said to have added an earnestness to the pursuit of *information*. (Arnold was later to see the Nonconformist tradition as deeply philistine, and indifferent to "sweetness and light".) And there is a second reservation to be made, when the sobriety of the artisan's world is attributed to this source. Moral sobriety was in fact demonstrably a product of the Radical and rationalist agitation itself; and owed much to the old Dissenting and Jacobin traditions. This is not to say that there were no drunken Radicals nor disorderly demonstrations. Wooler was only one of the Radical leaders who, it was said, was too fond of the bottle; while we have seen that the London taverns and Lancashire hush-shops were important meeting-places. But the Radicals sought to rescue the people from the imputation of being a "mob"; and their leaders sought continually to present an image of sobriety.

Moreover, there were other motives for this emphasis. One of the Rules of the Bath Union Society for Parliamentary Reform (established in January 1817) is characteristic:

It is earnestly recommended to every Member not to spend his Money at public houses, because half of the said Money goes in Taxes, to feed the Maggots of Corruption.¹

In the post-war years Hunt and Cobbett made much of the call for abstinence from all taxed articles, and in particular of the virtues of water over spirits or beer. The sobriety of the Methodists was the one (and only) attribute of their "sect" which Cobbett found it possible to praise: "I look upon drunkenness as the root of much more than half the mischief, misery and crimes with which society is afflicted."² This was not always Cobbett's tone; on other occasions he could lament the price, for the labourer, of beer. But a general moral primness is to be found in most quarters. It was, particularly, the

¹ H.O. 40.4.

² *Political Register*, 13 January 1821. The Temperance Movement can be traced to this post-war campaign of abstinence.

ideology of the artisan or of the skilled worker who had held his position in the face of the boisterous unskilled tide. It is to be found in Carlile's account of his early manhood:

I was a regular, active, and industrious man, working early and late . . . and when out of the workshop never so happy anywhere as at home with my wife and two children. The alehouse I always detested. . . I had a notion that a man . . . was a fool not to make a right application of every shilling.¹

Many a day he had missed out a meal, and "carried home some sixpenny publication to read at night". It is to be found, in its most admirable and moving form, in William Lovett's *Life and Struggles . . . in Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, a title which, in itself, condenses all that we are seeking to describe.

It was a disposition strengthened, among the republicans and free-thinkers, by the character of the attacks upon them. Denounced in loyalist lampoons and from Church pulpits as disreputable exemplars of every vice, they sought to exhibit themselves as bearing, alongside their unorthodox opinions, an irreproachable character. They struggled against the loyalist legends of revolutionary France, which was presented as a sanguinary thieves' kitchen, whose Temples of Reason were brothels. They were particularly sensitive to any accusation of sexual impropriety, of financial misconduct, or of lack of attachment to the familial virtues.² Carlile published in 1830 a little book of homilies, *The Moralist*, while Cobbett's *Advice to Young Men* was only a more hearty and readable essay upon the same themes of industry, perseverance, independence. The rationalists, of course, were especially anxious to counter the accusation that the rejection of the Christian faith must inevitably entail the dissolution of all moral restraints. Alongside Volney's influential *Ruins of Empire* there was translated, and circulated as a tract, his *Law of Nature*, which served to argue—in the form of a dialogue—that the respectable virtues must all be adhered to according to the laws of social utility:

¹ See Wickwar, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

² Cf. T. Frost, *Forty Years' Recollections*, p. 20 (of the anti-Owenite propaganda of the Thirties): "It was a very common device for complainants and witnesses to say of a person charged with larceny, wife desertion, or almost any other offence, 'He is a Socialist'; and reports of all such cases had the side-head, 'Effect of Owenism' . . .".

must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one towers above society (in Robert Owen, for example)—

So ran Marx's third thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach. If social character was (as Owen held) the involuntary product of "an endless multiplicity of circumstances", how was it to be changed? One answer lay in education, where one of the most creative influences of the Owenite tradition can be seen. But Owen knew that until "circumstances" changed he could not gain access to the schooling of a generation. The answer must therefore lie in the sudden change of heart, the millenarian leap. The very rigour of his environmental and mechanical materialism meant that he must either despair or proclaim a secular Chiliasm.

Mr. Owen, the Philanthropist, threw the mantle of Joanna Southcott across his shoulders. The tone of the ranter was noted, not only by Hazlitt, but by others of his contemporaries. A writer in Sherwin's *Register* compared him to Joanna, who—deluded thousands for the moment, by telling them that a Shiloh was about to come into the world; a Prince of Peace, under whose standard all the nations of the earth were to unite; by telling them that . . . swords were to be converted into plough-shares.¹

It was also to be examined by Engels and by Marx, and the more recent promulgation of the discovery in academic circles is not original.² Owen was promising, in 1820, to "let prosperity loose on the country", and in his communities he offered no less than "Paradise". By 1820 an Owenite society was forming in the metropolis, and the hand-bill advertising its periodical, the *Economist*, declared:

Plenty will overspread the land!—Knowledge will increase!—Virtue will flourish!—Happiness will be recognized, secured, and enjoyed.

Owen frequently used analogies drawn from the great advance in productive techniques during the Industrial Revolution: some individuals "forget that it is a modern invention to enable one man, with the aid of a little steam, to perform the labour of 1,000 men". Might not knowledge and moral improvement advance at the same pace? His followers took up the same imagery:

¹ Sherwin's *Political Register*, 20 September 1817.

² See, however, Engels' generous tribute to Owen in *Anti-Dühring* (1878; Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), pp. 287-92: "a man of almost sublimely child-like simplicity of character, and at the same time a born leader of men."

culture had grown more complex with each phase of technical and social change. Delaney, Dekker and Nashe: Winstanley and Lilburne: Bunyan and Defoe—all had at times addressed themselves to it. Enriched by the experiences of the 17th century, carrying through the 18th century the intellectual and libertarian traditions which we have described, forming their own traditions of mutuality in the friendly society and trades club, these men did not pass, in one generation, from the peasantry to the new industrial town. They suffered the experience of the Industrial Revolution as articulate, free-born Englishmen. Those who were sent to gaol might know the Bible better than those on the Bench, and those who were transported to Van Diemen's Land might ask their relatives to send Cobbett's *Register* after them.

This was, perhaps, the most distinguished popular culture England has known. It contained the massive diversity of skills, of the workers in metal, wood, textiles and ceramics, without whose inherited "mysteries" and superb ingenuity with primitive tools the inventions of the Industrial Revolution could scarcely have got further than the drawing-board. From this culture of the craftsman and the self-taught there came scores of inventors, organisers, journalists and political theorists of impressive quality. It is easy enough to say that this culture was backward-looking or conservative. True enough, one direction of the great agitations of the artisans and outworkers, continued over fifty years, was to resist being turned into a proletariat. When they knew that this cause was lost, yet they reached out again, in the Thirties and Forties, and sought to achieve new and only imagined forms of social control. During all this time they were, as a class, repressed and segregated in their own communities. But what the counter-revolution sought to repress grew only more determined in the quasi-legal institutions of the underground. Whenever the pressure of the rulers relaxed, men came from the petty workshops or the weavers' hamlets and asserted new claims. They were told that they had no rights, but they knew that they were born free. The Yeomanry rode down their meeting, and the right of public meeting was gained. The pamphleteers were gaoled, and from the gaols they edited pamphlets. The trade unionists were imprisoned, and they were attended to prison by processions with bands and union banners.

Segregated in this way, their institutions acquired a peculiar toughness and resilience. Class also acquired a peculiar

resonance in English life: everything, from their schools to their shops, their chapels to their amusements, was turned into a battle-ground of class. The marks of this remain, but by the outsider they are not always understood. If we have in our social life little of the tradition of *égalité*, yet the class-consciousness of the working man has little in it of deference. "Orphans we are, and bastards of society," wrote James Morrison in 1834.¹ The tone is not one of resignation but of pride.

Again and again in these years working men expressed it thus: "they wish to make us tools", or "implements", or "machines". A witness before the parliamentary committee enquiring into the hand-loom weavers (1835) was asked to state the view of his fellows on the Reform Bill:

Q. Are the working classes better satisfied with the institutions of the country since the change has taken place?

A. I do not think they are. They viewed the Reform Bill as a measure calculated to join the middle and upper classes to Government, and leave them in the hands of Government as a sort of machine to work according to the pleasure of Government.

Such men met Utilitarianism in their daily lives, and they sought to throw it back, not blindly, but with intelligence and moral passion. They fought, not the machine, but the exploitive and oppressive relationships intrinsic to industrial capitalism. In these same years, the great Romantic criticism of Utilitarianism was running its parallel but altogether separate course. After William Blake, no mind was at home in both cultures, nor had the genius to interpret the two traditions to each other. It was a muddled Mr. Owen who offered to disclose the "new moral world", while Wordsworth and Coleridge had withdrawn behind their own ramparts of disenchantment. Hence these years appear at times to display, not a revolutionary challenge, but a resistance movement, in which both the Romantics and the Radical craftsmen opposed the annunciation of Acquisitive Man. In the failure of the two traditions to come to a point of junction, something was lost. How much we cannot be sure, for we are among the losers.

Yet the working people should not be seen only as the lost myriads of eternity. They had also nourished, for fifty years, and with incomparable fortitude, the Liberty Tree. We may thank them for these years of heroic culture.

¹ *Pioneer*, 22 March 1834; see A. Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth Century England", loc. cit., p. 68.

Genesis of Parliamentary Reform (1913)—although Veitch's English Jacobins are too pious and constitutionalist for belief—and, for later years, W. D. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press* (1928) and J. R. M. Butler, *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (1914). (S. Maccoby's interesting volume on *English Radicalism, 1786-1832* (1955), is in general too much oriented towards parliamentary goings-on to throw light on the kinds of problem examined in this book). Samuel Bamford's *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (Heywood, 1841) and William Lovett's *Life and Struggles in Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom* (1876)—both of which have appeared in subsequent editions—are essential reading for any Englishman. Students who wish to place this history in a wider framework will find in E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (1962) and Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (1959) the materials for an European and a British frame of reference; while E. Halévy, *England in 1815* (1924) remains the outstanding general survey of early 19th century British society.

To attempt a full bibliography in a book which covers such an extensive period and so many topics must either appear pretentious or incomplete. In each section of the book I have been at pains to indicate in my footnotes the most relevant secondary authorities; and I hope that I have given sufficient indication of my main primary sources in the same place. I must therefore ask for the reader's indulgence, and leave him with the envoi of a Spitalfields silk weaver (from Samuel Sholl's *Historical Account of the Silk Manufacture* (1811)) by way of apology:

My loom's entirely out of square,
 My rolls now worm-eaten are;
 My clamps and treadles they are broke,
 My battons, they won't strike a stroke;
 My porry's covered with the dust,
 My shears and pickers eat with rust;
 My reed and harness are worn out,
 My wheel won't turn a quill about;
 My shuttle's broke, my glass is run,
 My droplee's shot—my cane is done!

- Leicester, 206, 535, 538, 609, 646n, 745, 791
- Leisure, 57-9, 211, 230-1, 276, 291, 334, 402-10, 435, 446. *See also* Monday
- Lemaitre, Paul (London watch-maker), 140n, 464-5
- Levellers, 22-4, 29-30, 112
- Lincolnshire, 35, 133, 215n, 219, 228, 431
- Liverpool, 36, 44n, 45-6, 61, 118, 321, 330, 351, 354, 429, 434, 609, 617, 643
- Literacy, 225, 265, 291, 406-7, 648, 712-7
- Locke, 80, 88, 92, 128, 765
- London, 20-1, 316, 324, 330, 404-5, 451-71, 474, 535-8, 791-2, 811-14 and Dissent, 27, 36, 50-3 and "Mob", 20-1, 69-72, 76, 604-7 and Despard, 479-84 and artisans, 236-7, 240-62, 264, 426-7, 505-6, 508, 511 and crime, 57-61, 264-6, 405, 814n and housing, 320-1 and post-war Radicalism, 193, 604-7, 611-16, 631-3, 652-3, 680, 694-6 and Westminster elections, 462, 464, 467-8, 471
- London—districts:
- Bethnal Green, 166, 172, 252, 330, 611, 614, 817
 - Clerkenwell, 81
 - Finsbury, 611, 817
 - Hackney, 43, 125, 131, 166, 175, 799
 - Holborn, 81, 161, 169, 254, 791n
 - Hoxton, 51, 149, 166, 172
 - Islington, 43, 143, 166, 611
 - Kennington Common, 473
 - Lambeth, 611, 614
 - Minorities, 635, 702
 - Moorfields, 121, 149
 - Shoreditch, 81, 172
 - Smithfield, 410, 689, 702
 - Southwark, 21, 69, 472, 480, 611, 799
 - Spa Fields, 43, 789. *See also* Riots
 - Spitalfields, 21, 69, 121, 143, 157, 238, 252, 261, 266, 269, 292n, 480, 515, 597, 611, 615, 632n, 633-4, 694, 701, 790n, 795n
 - Tower, 481, 616, 634-5, 660, 702
 - Westminster, 69, 77, 165, 176n, 180, 458-69, 471, 633, 689, 696, 813
 - Whitechapel, 72, 813
- London Corresponding Society, 152-7, 197, 464-5, 479, 493-4
- Formation, 17-21, 25, 152
- 1792-4, 83, 114, 117-18, 120-3, 129-35, 138, 153, 158
- 1795-6, 76, 138-45, 153-8, 160-6
- Last Years, 147-9, 166-74, 177, 482
- Loughborough, 573-4, 609, 646n, 648
- Loveless, George ("Tolpuddle Martyr"), 41, 394
- Lovett, William, 251-2, 262, 264, 409, 412, 414, 727, 741-2, 768, 780, 798, 802, 812, 814n, 820
- Luddism, 62, 193, 352, 364n, 389, 419n, 484, 488, 492-8, 515, 521, 543, 547-602, 642, 649, 652, 668, 713-14, 717
- Lancashire, 541-2, 553, 565-9, 577, 581n, 591-9
- Midlands, 494, 496, 534-5, 538-9, 549-50, 553-6, 573-5, 577, 586-9
- Yorkshire, 494-6, 529-30, 553, 557-65, 571-3, 577-8, 582-91, 597-8
- Ludlam, Isaac (of Pentridge), 654, 660, 663-4, 667
- Luther (and Lutheranism), 363, 369, 392
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 823-5
- Macclesfield, 44n, 288, 336, 414, 421n, 731
- Machine-breaking, 62, 225-8, 279, 515, 552-3, *see also* Luddism
- Magistrates, 150-1, 202, 277, 404, 421, 462, 487-8, 490-1, 504, 508, 535-6, 541-2, 544-5, 565, 579-80, 645-6, 658-9, 729, 731-2. *See also* Peterloo
- Malthus (and Malthusianism), 265, 267, 323, 344, 621, 742, 762, 769, 773, 776-7, 782
- Manchester, 39, 44n, 47, 53, 193, 199, 201, 223, 271, 278, 289, 308, 321-2, 326-7, 330, 336, 354, 414-15, 418-19, 429, 436-7, 471, 481, 493, 500, 567, 580-1, 609, 684-5, 816
- Mann, James (Leeds cropper), 590, 668, 722, 828-9
- Margarot, Maurice, 122, 125-7, 153-4
- Marsden, Joshua (Hull sailor), 58, 366-8
- Marx, Karl, 189, 195, 199, 203, 313, 359, 306n, 446, 552, 787, 829
- Maxwell, John (M.P. for Palisey), 300-1, 520
- Mayhew, Henry, 240-1, 249-51, 257, 261-2, 265-6, 316, 413, 437, 440
- McCulloch, J. R., 519, 521, 769, 777
- Mechanic's Institutes, 253, 743-5, 769, 777-8
- Mechanics, *see* Artisans
- Mellor, George (Yorkshire Luddite), 560, 571-2, 575, 583, 592, 600, 602
- Metal-workers, 212n, 237, 239, 242, 244, 259-60, 312, 815
- Methodist Church (and Methodism), 35, 37-48, 50, 53-4, 315, 346-8, 350-400, 402, 740 and community, 364, 368, 379 and education, 375-8, 737-9 and hysteria, 380-2 and lay preachers, 43, 69, 166, 317, 346, 365, 379, 389, 391, 393-6

post facto determination 205

BARD COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 5131 00331224 8

BARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
Annandale-on-Hudson, N. Y. 12504