DEMOCRACY
AND THE
LABOUR MOVEMENT

DEMOCRACY
AND THE
LABOUR MOVEMENT

Essays in honour of
DONA TORR

Edited by
JOHN SAVILLE
Lecturer in Economic History in the University of Hull

LONDON
LAWRENCE & WISHART LTD
1954

First published 1954

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Jarrold & Sons Ltd., Norwich

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

THESE essays have been written in honour of Dona Torr by a number of her pupils and admirers.

For many years now Dona Torr has devoted herself to Marxist scholarship and to the history of the British people. She translated and edited the *Selected Correspondence* of Marx and Engels, which was published in 1934 by Martin Lawrence. For the edition of *Capital* (Vol. 1) published by Messrs. Allen and Unwin in 1938 she translated and edited a Supplement, giving a number of important documents not previously published in English editions. In 1940 she edited, with introductions, two volumes of extracts from the Marxist classics entitled *Marxism, Nationality and War* (Lawrence and Wishart). In 1951 she edited, again with valuable notes, *Marx on China*, a collection of Karl Marx's articles from the *New York Daily Tribune* between 1853 and 1860.

All these publications are distinguished by their impeccable but unobtrusive scholarship, their modest but illuminating introductions and notes. Meanwhile Dona Torr has been proceeding with her most important work, the *Life of Tom Mann*, to be completed in two volumes. This will be a study of the whole labour movement during the lifetime of Tom Mann. In it is discussed the origin of the ideas of the labour movement in a way that throws a flood of light over the whole course of modern English history. An early summary was given in the pamphlet on *Tom Mann*, first published in 1936, and in an article entitled "Productive forces: social relations" in the *Communist Review*, May 1946; but the full work will be an immensely rich store of stimulating ideas for historians of the English democratic and labour movement.

Dona Torr celebrated her seventieth birthday in 1953. She became a foundation member of the Communist Party in 1920, and ever since then political activity and historical research have gone hand in hand. Not the least valuable part of her many-sided contribution to the labour movement is the selfless and self-sacrificial way in which she has put her learning and wisdom at the disposal of others. The "History in the Making" series,[1] which Dona Torr edited for Lawrence

[1] M. Morris, *From Cobbett to the Chartists* (1948); J. B. Jefferys, *Labour's Formative Years* (1948); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labour's Turning Point* (1948); C. Hill and E. Dell, *The Good Old Cause* (1949).

and Wishart, is the most obvious result of her capacity for collective work. She put far more thought and labour into these volumes than is normally expected of a general editor. But her help and guidance have been extended in many other directions. Hers has been a pervading influence for a whole generation of Marxist historians. Each of the contributors to this volume, and many others, can testify to the patient help and unfailing stimulus which she has given them. So fertile has she been of ideas that a whole school of Marxist historians has grown up around her, fostered by her unfailing interest and aid.

What most of us have valued above all has been the *manner* in which Dona Torr has helped us. She never patronises. Always she claims to be learning from the humblest student, to see new lines of thought opening from the tritest remark: though it is she who discovers them. She has taught us historical *passion*. For her the understanding of the historical process is an intense emotional experience. Obtuseness can move her to quick anger. All of us can recall fierce arguments with her, words sharpened by the fact that she made us know that something important was at stake. She made us feel history on our pulses. History was not words on a page, not the goings-on of kings and prime ministers, not mere events. History was the sweat, blood, tears and triumphs of the common people, our people. Above all we learnt from her, with this deep human sympathy for our forefathers, a profound but tempered optimism. The rhythm of history was seen to be not the steady progress upwards of the Victorian Whigs, still less the treadmill cycles of their degenerate successors, but a dialectical process in which gain and loss are two aspects of one movement.

> "To the stage of civilisation belong all the grandeur and beauty hitherto known by man, but also the breach at the heart of human society. The history of democracy includes the dissolution of various older democratic forms with a material basis within class society, a basis dependent on small economic units and certain forms of common labour and common property. The town, the guild, the open-field system all tell the story of the double-thrust by which as capitalism develops it brings power and wealth to some and dispossession and degradation to others, until the rise of the proletariat into a class capable of ending this process. It was with the development of a class wholly divorced from control of the means of

production that formal democracy, divorced from material control, appeared. Like Stephenson's 'Rocket' it was a very great advance in its time."[1]

From this Dona Torr looked forward to "that new era of civilisation in which, by assuming conscious, collective control over his own production and social order, [man] will abandon the blind war of every man against every man, and leave 'the conditions of animal existence behind him.'"[2] For history is present as well as past politics. Of one of her books Dona Torr declared that "it will have served its purpose if the reader . . . begins to see his own place as a maker of history. For Marxist science, always in the making, . . . is concerned not only with the understanding of past and present, but with the creation of the future; its aim is to know the world and to change it."[3]

This volume is a humble attempt by some of Dona's pupils to pay homage and return thanks. Its contents have been mainly confined to English history since the industrial revolution—not because Dona Torr's influence has been limited to those working in that period, for she has stimulated ancient and mediaeval historians as well as modernists—but because it has been to the history of the British labour movement, above all, that she has dedicated her life of scholarship and boundless generosity.

GEORGE THOMSON
MAURICE DOBB
CHRISTOPHER HILL
JOHN SAVILLE

[1] Dona Torr, "Productive forces: social relations", *Communist Review*, May 1946, pp. 16–17.
[2] *Marxism, Nationality and War*, I, p. 10 (Dona Torr's Introduction). The quotation is from Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (English edition, 1943), p. 311.
[3] *Marxism, Nationality and War*, I, p. 10.

I

THE NORMAN YOKE

CHRISTOPHER HILL

I. INTRODUCTION

STUDENTS of the radical and working class movement in 19th century England are familiar with what I shall call the theory of the Norman Yoke. The theory took many forms, but in its main outlines it ran as follows: Before 1066 the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of this country lived as free and equal citizens, governing themselves through representative institutions. The Norman Conquest deprived them of this liberty, established the tyranny of an alien king and landlords. But the people did not forget the rights they had lost. They fought continuously to recover them, with varying success. Concessions (Magna Carta, for instance) were from time to time extorted from their rulers, and always the tradition of lost Anglo-Saxon freedom was a stimulus to more insistent demands upon the successors of the Norman usurpers.

Such was the theory. As a historical account of the Norman Conquest and subsequent English history it leaves something to be desired. Anglo-Saxon society was already deeply divided into classes before William the Bastard set foot in England: and it was hardly the common people who won and profited by Magna Carta. But as a rudimentary class theory of politics, the myth had great historical significance. It was entirely secular, whereas most popular opposition theories before the 18th century had been religious.[1] It united the Third Estate against crown, church and landlords, branding them as hereditary enemies of the people. It made the permanently valid point that the ruling class is *alien* to the interests of the vast majority of the population. Even if they no longer speak French, whether or not they are of Norman descent, the upper classes are isolated from the life of the working population, to whose interests theirs are opposed. The people could conduct its own affairs better without the aristocracy, whose wealth and privileges are an obstacle to equality. The nation is the people.

[1] There was originally an appeal to the popular cult of saint-kings in the demand for a restoration of the laws of St. Edward.

The theory has been abandoned by the English working-class movement. For this there are clear class reasons, over and above its shortcomings as an interpretation of history. The Norman Yoke was the rule of privileged landlords, of their king, their church and their state. The free Anglo-Saxons enjoyed equality before the law and representative assemblies. The demand for a return to this old constitution is, in Marxist terms, a bourgeois-democratic demand, aimed against the feudal ruling class and the absolute monarchy. "Back to the Anglo-Saxons" could on occasion imply a very radical programme, far too radical for the big bourgeoisie. But it was never a socialist theory. Evolved in feudal society, before the rise of capitalism had created an independent working class, it spoke for the Third Estate as a united whole. Consequently it lost its value once capitalism was fully established and new social divisions came to the fore. It has been replaced in the labour movement by socialist theories.

My object in this essay is to look at the various ideas which have developed about the Norman Yoke. A historical approach may help to make us more aware of the continuous popular patriotic tradition, which links the working-class movement with the very earliest period of our history.

II. LOST RIGHTS

Theories of lost rights, of a primitive happy state, have existed in nearly all communities.[1] The Fall of Man; the Golden Age; Arcadia; the Noble Savage—all these in their different ways express a profound historical truth: that inequality and the exploitation of man by man have a historical origin, that there was a period of equality which survived in popular imagination and may one day be restored. In England the peasant rebels of 1381 asked

> "When Adam delved and Eve span
> Who was then the gentleman?"

A century and a quarter later Henry VII's minister listed among the enemies of tranquillity a character called Arrogancy, who said to the common people, "Ye be the children and right inheritors to Adam, as well as they [the gentry]. Why should they have these great

[1] There are some most valuable suggestions on this subject in an article by Dona Torr, "Productive forces: social relations" in *Communist Review*, May 1946, pp. 16–17. The whole of this essay was stimulated by, and has greatly benefited from, discussions with her. See also A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia* (1952), esp. chapter 1; and H. Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (1950), chapter 8.

honours, royal castles and manors, with so much lands and possessions, and ye but poor cottages and tenements?"[1]

Ruling classes always tried to twist the myths to suit their interests. The Fall of Man not only testifies to the existence of a happier condition before the introduction of private property and the state, but also shows that man is too sinful ever to maintain such a condition on earth. Paradise can be regained only in heaven, and meanwhile sin justifies inequality and social subordination. "If Paradise were to be replanted on earth," wrote a bishop in 1653, "God had never expelled man [from] Paradise".[2] The argument was frequently used against Levellers and any other reformers who wished to improve man's estate: it is not extinct today.

This dual use of the legend of the Fall is a true reflection of the dialectic of history. In primitive society economic advance was necessarily accompanied by social inequality. This is recognised in countless other legends. Everything Midas touched turned to gold: so he lost all that he most dearly loved, and starved amidst plenty. Prometheus, the great inventor, brought fire down from heaven to man: but he also caused the opening of Pandora's box, containing "the pleasures and licentiousness which the cultivation and luxury of the arts of civil life introduce by the instrumental efficacy of fire".[3] So economic advance ended the Golden Age, and Prometheus "robbed us of that happiness which we may never again enjoy so long as we remain buried in sin and degraded in brutish desires".[4] Yet, Bacon reminded his readers, Hope was placed at the bottom of Pandora's box; and the moral he drew was that men's "fond opinion that they have already acquired enough is a principal reason why they have acquired so little".[5]

Greed was the cause and luxury the consequence of progress; it was sin to eat of the tree of knowledge; sin left us incapable of any Paradise except after death, the wages of sin. Yet Hope lay at the bottom of the box; the unprivileged were continually asking, with Gerrard Winstanley, "why may not we have our heaven here (that is, a comfortable livelihood in the earth) and heaven hereafter too?"[6]

[1] Edmund Dudley, *The Tree of Commonwealth* (ed. D. M. Brodie, 1948), p. 88. In all quotations (but not titles of books) I have modernised spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.

[2] Godfrey Goodman, *The Two Great Mysteries of Christian Religion* (1653), p. 90.

[3] Francis Bacon, *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, XXVI.

[4] John Milton, *Third Academic Exercise* (c. 1629), in *Correspondence and Academic Exercises* (ed. Tillyard, 1932), p. 67.

[5] Bacon, *op. cit.*

[6] *An Appeal to All Englishmen* (1650), in *Selected Works* (ed. Hamilton), p. 101.

Such were the contradictions in the myths which recorded that contradictory event, the establishment of civilisation and class-divided society.

In the 16th and 17th centuries it was generally agreed that there had been a state of primitive communism which was also a Golden Age, and that both had ended when private property and political authority were introduced. The Fox in Spenser's *Mother Hubbard's Tale* brought together many of these legends when he grumbled that

> "—Now a few have all, and all have nought,
> Yet all be brethren, alike dearly bought.
> There is no right in this partition,
> Nor was it so by institution
> Ordained first, nor by the law of Nature,
> But that she gave like blessing to each creature,
> As well of worldly livelihood as of life
> That there might be no difference nor strife,
> Nor ought called mine or thine: thrice happy then
> Was the condition of mortal men.
> That was the Golden Age of Saturn old,
> But this might better be the world of gold.
> For without gold now nothing will be got."[1]

Cobbett in 1824 used arguments very like those of Spenser's Fox.[2]

The long life of the legend of Arcadia (where primitive communism prevailed), and the pastoral tradition in poetry, also testify to the strength, and the dualism, of traditions of pre-class society. In the hands of ruling-class poets Arcadia became a highly sophisticated escapist never-never land, inhabited by aristocratic shepherds and shepherdesses:[3] nevertheless the emphasis is always on primitive simplicity, on real human relations untramelled by property. Pastoral poetry was the vehicle which men used to convey the purest and simplest personal feelings or to criticize the corruptions of an

[1] *Works* (Globe edition), p. 514.

[2] *Advice to Young Men* (Morley's Universal Library), pp. 269–70. But already in 1814, after the experience of the French Revolution, Saint-Simon had written "The Golden Age of humanity is not behind us, it lies ahead, in the perfection of the social order." ("De la réorganisation de la société européenne" in *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin*, XV, pp. 247–8).

[3] Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590) contains a grim reminder of the class realities: for the pastoral existence of his ruling-class heroes and heroines is in continual danger from the eruption of *real* peasants, with very different manners.

over-sophisticated society, as in Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, Wither's *Philarete*, Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* or Milton's *Lycidas*.

Men had been suddenly reminded of the reality of primitive egalitarian societies by the discovery of America: and travellers' tales of "noble savages" stimulated thought about the origins of property and society. More's *Utopia*, the ancestor of all modern communist literature, was just such a traveller's story. Montaigne, the greatest 16th-century primitivist, believed that "the care to increase in wisdom and knowledge was the first overthrow of mankind". In his essay "On Cannibals", with his eye on the NewWorld, he pointed out that the use of metals, improved agriculture and trade, and the rise of the arts and sciences, have been accompanied by the end of communal ownership, by the differentiation of rich and poor, and by economic and political subjection.[1] Montaigne's *Essays* were carefully studied by the Leveller William Walwyn.

Here we are reminded of our theme, for Marchamont Nedham in 1650 and *An Historical Essay on the English Constitution* in 1771 both observed that, in the words of the last named, "this Saxon model of government, when reduced to its first principles, has a strong resemblance to the natural state of things, under which mankind was found to live at the discovery of the New World by Columbus".[2] Many anthropologists have confirmed this resemblance, and extended the parallel to the Jews of the Pentateuch, and (as Hobbes did in the 17th century) to the Homeric Greeks. "Back to the Golden Age", "back to the free Anglo-Saxons", "back to the Old Testament", "back to the Noble Savage" are so many different expressions of the same demand: return to an earlier, more equal form of tribal organisation, before the development of private property and the state.[3]

The tradition of lost rights, and the hope of recovering them, has been expressed in many other ways. The most universal is the Sleeping Hero: the leader who has not really died, but will return one day to rescue his people. Often the Hero was associated with final unsuccessful resistance to foreign conquest. The memory of Arthur, sleeping in Avalon, and the conviction of his second coming were firmly held by Britons and Welsh seven centuries after Arthur had died fighting the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Harold was believed to have survived the

[1] *Essays* (trans. Florio), World's Classics, I, p. 222; II, pp. 222–3.
[2] p. 31; cf. Nedham, *The Case of the Common-wealth of England Stated*, pp. 83–4.
[3] Hobbes, *Behemoth* (1679), in *Works* (ed. Molesworth), VI, p. 259. Cf. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Bharati Library), pp. 85–96, 122.

battle of Hastings, and his return to lead the fight against the Normans was long expected. Similar legends attached to the last leaders of Armenian resistance to Arab conquest in the 7th century, of Serbian and Montenegrin resistance to Turkish conquest in the 14th, and to Sebastian of Portugal, whose death in 1578 was followed by Spanish conquest of the kingdom.

There are stories of heroes sleeping in caves in Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx, Italian, Czech, German, Danish and Swiss mythology. Similar legends, not so directly related to foreign conquest, were told of Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, Wenceslas, Mahomet Mahadim (grandson of Mahomet's successor, Ali) whom the Persians expected, Quetzalcoatl of Mexico, Stenka Razin. Often these tales symbolize the fact that economic advance has been purchased at the cost of exploitation and suffering, in a way that reminds us of the legend of Prometheus: for the Sleeping Hero guards a treasure, which may turn to rubbish if it is sought with motives of greed. But one day it will be restored to the people.[1]

In England, significantly enough, the last Sleeping Hero was the Duke of Monmouth, leader of the last armed revolt of the common people. The most widely influential of all such stories, influential both for hope and for passive waiting, were those which received canonisation as official religions: especially that of Jesus of Nazareth, who will come again to build the New Jerusalem.

But official canonisation could not remove the double edge from these myths. In times of crisis men would ask themselves "Why wait? Why not begin preparing for the second coming now?" The economic crisis of the 16th and early 17th centuries bred Fifth Monarchism, a form of revolutionary anarchism. All existing institutions must be destroyed, so that there will be no obstacles to the reign of King Jesus. The four monarchies in *Daniel* were identified with Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome: the Reformation, by overthrowing "the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof", stimulated prophecies that the Fifth Monarchy was at hand. In the English revolution Fifth Monarchist ideas mingled curiously with those of the Norman Yoke. John Rogers in 1654 wrote a pamphlet demanding "new laws and the people's liberties from the Norman and Babylonian yokes, making discovery of the present ungodly laws

[1] E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (1927), pp. 46, 108, 221–32; A. M. Pankratova, *A History of the U.S.S.R.* (1947), I, pp. 39, 234; H. W. V. Temperley, *History of Serbia* (1917), pp. 98, 138; *Portuguese Voyages, 1498–1663* (ed. C. D. Ley, 1947), p. 341; J. H. Lawson, *The Hidden Heritage* (1950), p. 189.

and lawyers of the Fourth Monarchy and the approach of the Fifth".[1]

But here we enter upon our main subject.

III. COKE: THE LAW AND LIBERTY

The theory of the Norman Yoke may have a continuous history since 1066, though it is not within the scope of this essay to discuss the Middle Ages. Less than fifty years after the Conquest, Henry I attempted to win support by confirming what were inaccurately called "the Laws of St. Edward the Confessor"; and they helped to build up the mythology of a golden Saxon past which played its part in the struggles that won Magna Carta. The *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*, a 14th century document, purported to describe the method of holding Parliaments under the last Saxon king, as an example to be followed. Edward the Confessor was a very popular saint, so that any tradition attached to his name had a powerful emotional appeal, especially for the uneducated. There is evidence too of folk-memories of Alfred as a symbol of national independence, and as a model of valour, caution and patience.[2]

In the 17th century men discovered the theory in *The Mirror of Justices*, a treatise probably written at the end of the 13th century by Andrew Horn, an opposition London fishmonger, later chamberlain of the City of London. It contains in fact very little about the Norman Yoke. Its aim was to emphasise the sanctity of law, against false judges and even against the king. The law went back to "the coming of the English". Alfred had 44 unjust judges executed in one year. The laws should be in writing so that all could know them. Parliament should be held twice yearly. The treatise had what Maitland called "curious leanings towards liberty and equality", and was strongly anti-clerical: one can see why it appealed to the 17th century revolutionaries.[3] Ironically enough, in view of the later propagandist use to which it was put, *The Mirror* was written in French. Few Englishmen would be able to read, and those few would have learned the language of their conquerors. "Jack would be a gentleman—if he could speak

[1] *Sagrir*, title-page, in E. Rogers, *Some Account of the Life and Opinions of a Fifth-Monarchy-Man* (1867), p. 76; cf. the identification on p. 95 of the little horn of the Fourth Beast with William the Conqueror and his Norman successors, cut off for ever by the execution of Charles I in 1649.

[2] R. W. Chambers, *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (1939), p. 92. Proverbs, those summaries of peasant wisdom, tended to be fathered upon Alfred. See for instance *The Owl and the Nightingale*, an English poem written about the time of Magna Carta.

[3] *The Mirror of Justices*, ed. W. J. Whittaker, with an introduction by F. W. Maitland. (Selden Society, 1895).

French" ran the proverb.[1] A similar situation produces similar results in Africa today.

Both *The Mirror* and the *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* are examples of what Professor Galbraith has perceptively called "the underworld of largely-unrecorded thinking".[2] Opposition to the Norman Yoke was likely to be strongest in the illiterate: so the absence of evidence for the theory before the 16th century does not prove that it had no continuous existence. But it has been argued that the legend of a free Anglo-Saxon past arose as part of the mode of thought of an *urban* class which felt itself oppressed by feudal lords; such men became conscious of national unity as the market developed from the 14th century onwards. They projected their aspirations backwards, together with their dislike of those social superiors who prevented the realisation of these aspirations in the present and therefore, it was assumed, had done so in the past.[3]

It is certainly true that, with the rise of an educated laity, aided by one of its most remarkable inventions, the printing press, our evidence for the theory increases. Sir John Fortescue, who has been described as "the fifteenth-century English advocate of the middle class",[4] stressed the continuity of English law in the same way as the London merchant who wrote *The Mirror*.[5] But a new note enters with Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, written in the fifteen-thirties. Here Pole was made to urge the shaking off of the "tyrannical customs and unreasonable bonds" imposed by the Conqueror "when he subdued our country and nation". "This bondage" was "unreasonable among civil people purposing to live in a just policy." The argument was directed specifically against the feudal burdens of wardship and marriage. But Lupset later complained that the common law was written, disputed and taught in French, which was a "dishonour to our nation", witnessing "our subjection to the Normans". Pole called for a reception of Roman civil law, to wipe away "the great shame to our nation ... to be governed by the laws given to us of such a barbarous nation as the Normans be."[6] The patriotic appeal was always a strong feature of the Norman Yoke theory.

[1] Strype, *Life of Sir Thomas Smith* (1820), p. 232. We should not forget this fact in assessing *The Mirror*'s demand for the laws to be in writing.

[2] "The *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XVI, p. 94.

[3] P. Meier, "Réflexions sur la langue anglaise" in *La Pensée*, No. 53, 1954, pp. 75–91.

[4] R. B. Schlatter, *Private Property* (1951), p. 72.

[5] *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*, chapter 17.

[6] Ed. K. M. Burton (1948), pp. 110–11, 117, 175. *The Dialogue* was a literary work: it does not necessarily represent the views of the spokesmen, though it probably is not far from them.

We already have sharply opposed theories. One stressed the unbroken continuity of common law, which had carried Anglo-Saxon liberties into post-conquest England: the other, coming from the group of radical intellectuals around Thomas Cromwell in the revolutionary years of the Reformation, attacked the whole existing law as an alien imposition. Common to both versions was the conception of free Anglo-Saxon institutions. As the Reformation progressed, men like John Foxe, Archbishops Parker and Ussher looked back to Anglo-Saxon times for the pure primitive church, thus greatly stimulating Anglo-Saxon studies. For ecclesiastical corruption could be dated from the invasion of 1066, which the Pope had blessed.

Revival of interest in the Saxons was combined with an attack on the Arthurian legend. In its origins, as I have suggested, this was also one of the backward-looking myths embodying popular memories of lost rights. But in mediaeval England it had been taken up by the ruling class, and Arthur became the symbol of "chivalry". He was also much used in propaganda for the Welsh-sprung Tudor dynasty, and the debunking of the legends associated with his name played its part in the struggles against the absolute monarchy. The work of demolition was done by Camden, Verstegan, Speed, Daniel, Selden. These antiquarians, together with Nowell, Lambarde, Harrison, Holinshed and Hayward, were also sponsors of the free Anglo-Saxons. Most of them belonged to the Society of Antiquaries, founded about 1580, which had close associations with the parliamentary opposition. Papers read before the Society early in James I's reign argued that the Anglo-Saxons had held popularly-elected Parliaments; and the Society did much to elaborate and popularise the doctrine of continuity. It is hardly surprising that it fell under royal disapproval and ceased to meet. The discrediting of the royal Arthurian legend, and its replacement by that of free Anglo-Saxon institutions, was thus of direct importance in the battle of ideas which preceded the civil war.[1]

But more than one constitutional conclusion could be drawn from Anglo-Saxon freedom. The opposition urged struggle to recover lost rights: the Rev. Dr. Blackwood, in his *Apologia pro Regibus* (1581), argued that William's power after the Conquest was absolute, and that any right which his conquered subjects retained in their property thereafter was by his grace. Blackwood compared the position of the

[1] See T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (1950), chapter 6 *passim*.

American Indians after the Spanish conquest.[1] James I, before he came to the English throne, had claimed that kings of England were absolute owners of all property in the realm. For the "Bastard of Normandy", he declared in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, "set down the strangers his followers in many of the old possessors' rooms, as at this day well appeareth, a great part of the gentlemen of England being come of the Norman blood, and their old laws, which to this day they are ruled by, are written in his language, and not in theirs: and yet his successors have with great happiness enjoyed the crown to this day".[2]

The saintly but conservative Nicholas Ferrar accepted this version of the theory. Conquest by pious Normans had had a valuable disciplinary effect upon the dissolute Anglo-Saxons: indeed "the enforcement of this example were most necessary perhaps for the present age, on which the inheritance of this debauched humour of our ancestors is evidently fallen, and like a snowball much increased perhaps in the descent".[3] A far more important figure, Archbishop Laud, saw the appeal to the Saxon past as a stimulus to rebellion. Immediately after the Conquest, he thought, "the Normans and French, which made spoil of the English, would endure no law but the will of the Conqueror". They "could not endure to hear of St. Edward's laws, though the subjects of England had as much freedom by them as any in Europe.... But after a descent or two... they became English", and by the time of Magna Carta the barons were appealing to the laws of Edward to protect their property against arbitrary taxation.[4]

In Blackwood, James and Laud we note the supreme importance of the property question in these legal arguments. If the king owed his title to conquest, and consequently owned all the property in the realm, then he also had a right to arbitrary taxation. But if the sanctity of property and representative institutions were part of our inheritance, then we must struggle to preserve them. History was politics. Liberty, property and patriotism were inseparable. Elsewhere similar causes produced similar results. In France Hotman's *Franco-Gallia* (1573) urged a return to the ancient free constitution as it had existed before

[1] *Opera Omnia* (1644), pp. 42–3. Blackwood was attacking George Buchanan's *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos*. Blackwood's treatise did not attract much attention until 1607, when it was quoted in Cowell's *Interpreter* and reprinted as anti-parliamentarian propaganda.

[2] *The Political Works of James I* (ed. C. H. McIlwain, 1918), p. 63. James's argument was put forward in 1642 in the royalist H. Ferne's *A Reply unto severall Treatises pleading for the Armes now taken up by Subjects*, p. 26.

[3] *Ferrar Papers* (ed. B. Blackstone, 1938), pp. 181–2.

[4] Laud, *Works* (1860 edition), VII, pp. 627–8.

the Roman conquest and in the first generations of Frankish rule. In Sweden the cult of the Goths fostered national consciousness.

John Selden and Sir Robert Cotton, both members of the Society of Antiquaries, put their great learning at the disposal of the parliamentary opposition, even after the Society had been suppressed. Selden had to retract his *History of Tithes* (1618);[1] and in 1630 Cotton's famous library was searched, not for the first time. Now however, the government decided that its manuscripts were too dangerous to leave in private hands: henceforth Sir Robert could consult them only under official surveillance. Cotton thought William the Conqueror left the Saxons "in no better condition than villeinage" and that "he moulded their customs to the manner of his own country, and forbore to grant the laws of the holy Edward, so often called for."[2] Another member of the Society, Sir Henry Spelman, who founded a lectureship at Cambridge for the study of Saxon antiquities, attacked the servitudes and incidents of post-conquest feudal tenures as a stigma of bondage.[3] In 1646, during the civil war, Parliament abolished them.

Before 1640 antiquarian studies were dangerous. In 1627 the Dutchman Isaac Dorislaus was deprived of his newly-established history lectureship at Cambridge after the first lecture. For it had been on Tacitus, that favourite authority on Germanic liberties; and in it he had "placed the right of monarchy in the people's voluntary submission", and had spoken in praise of the Dutch rebels against Spain.[4] Law was becoming dangerous for the government too. For a change was taking place in the attitude of men of property. In the fifteen-nineties Spenser echoed Starkey: the common law was "that which William of Normandy brought in with his conquest, and laid upon the neck of England".[5] Starkey had advocated the reception of Roman law. That was of a piece with the support which the early bourgeoisie, in town and country, gave to the Tudor monarchy and its prerogative courts. But as capitalism developed, the law itself was re-interpreted by bourgeois judges. Especially under the influence of Coke it was "liberalised", adapted to the needs of capitalist society.[6] Simultaneously the government, under attack from parliaments

[1] For Selden's views on the Norman Yoke see also his *Analecton Anglo-Britannicon* (1615).
[2] *Cottoni Posthuma* (1679), p. 20. Note that Edward is still "holy".
[3] *English Works* (1727), II, esp. pp. 40–6. Cf. Starkey, p. 18 above.
[4] Dorislaus was later assassinated by royalists whilst in the diplomatic service of the English republic.
[5] *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, in *Works* (Globe edition), p. 610.
[6] D. O. Wagner, "Coke and the rise of economic liberalism", *Economic History Review*, VI, pp. 30–44.

representing landlords and merchants, began to use the prerogative courts and the Church as instruments of a reactionary policy, to dispense with parliaments and over-ride the common law.

So Coke, by reviving Fortescue's doctrine of the continuity of English law and representative institutions, in a quite different social context, became the hero of the parliamentarian opposition. Security of property depended on common law: "the ancient and excellent laws of England are the birthright and the most ancient and best inheritance that the subjects of this realm have; for by them he enjoyeth not only his inheritance and goods in peace and quietness, but his liberty and his most dear country in safety." Liberty, property and patriotism: it has rarely been more succinctly put. Royalist theories of absolutism based on conquest threatened this inheritance. "We would derive from the Conqueror as little as we could," was Coke's terse reply. "The common law of England had been time out of mind before the Conquest, and was not altered or changed by the Conqueror."[1] Coke as Speaker of the House of Commons told Elizabeth in 1593 that a bi-cameral Parliament, including representatives of shires and boroughs, dated from Anglo-Saxon times.[2] The Norman Conquest had cut across the true tradition of development. Englishmen had been struggling ever since to recover the old freedom. Coke would have agreed with a member of the Middle Temple who said it was the object of Magna Carta to restore the ancient laws and customs, especially those of St. Edward.[3] Coke popularised *The Mirror of Justices*, which had been transcribed by a member of the Society of Antiquaries, and had long circulated in manuscript. It was printed in 1642, and an English translation followed in 1646. So it helped to form the thought of the parliamentarians.

Charles I objected to Coke's history as much as his father had done to the Society of Antiquaries'. A defence of Anglo-Saxon liberties was also a defence of bourgeois property against the state, against arbitrary taxation. The parliamentary franchise itself was a property right: so the demand for the old constitution, for the supremacy of Parliament, was in effect a demand for a transfer of power to the class which was now economically predominant, and so had bought its way into the franchise. Charles would not allow the later parts of Coke's *Institutes*

[1] *Reports*, Part V, p. iii; *Third Part of the Institutes*, Proeme; cf. Preface to *Reports*, Part VIII.

[2] D'Ewes, *A Compleat Journal of the Votes, Speeches and Debates, both of the House of Lords and the House of Commons throughout the whole reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 1693, p. 465.

[3] Quoted in Faith Thompson, *Magna Carta: its rôle in the making of the English Constitution, 1300–1629* (1948), p. 194.

to be published, and they remained suppressed until the Long Parliament ordered the *Second Part* to be printed in 1641. Coke's interpretation of the law triumphed with Parliament's victory in the civil war.

The most famous statement of this interpretation was made by Pym in 1628, in the debate on the Petition of Right:

> "There are plain footsteps of those laws in the government of the Saxons. They were of that vigour and force as to overlive the Conquest; nay, to give bounds and limits to the Conqueror. . . . It is true they have been often broken, but they have been often confirmed by charters of kings, and by acts of parliament. But the petitions of the subjects, upon which those charters and acts were founded, were ever petitions of right, demanding their ancient and due liberties, not suing for any new."[1]

The reference to the Petition of Right makes the political application direct and obvious. When civil war broke out in 1642 appeals to the Saxon past became common form among parliamentarian pamphleteers.

IV. THE LAW VERSUS LIBERTY

By the 17th century, then, paradoxically, those who believed that English institutions originated in the violence of the Norman Conquest were the conservatives: believers in the continuity of those institutions were revolutionaries. We must recall the general historical context. Representative institutions were everywhere in Europe (except in the revolutionary Netherlands) being suppressed. Catholic Spain was, before 1640, and Catholic France after 1660, the model absolute monarchy. Charles I's court circle was as pro-Spanish as Charles II's was to be pro-French: and both were suspected of leanings towards Popery. So English patriotism, protestantism, and the defence of representative institutions all seemed closely linked. The association of the enemies of all three with William the Bastard, the French conqueror blessed by the Pope, was good psychological warfare. It had also a certain historical logic. The Norman Yoke theory appealed to all the under-privileged, and more specifically to the merchants and gentry who felt their property endangered by arbitrary government, arbitrary taxation and the enforcement of feudal payments.

But the Norman Yoke theory also stirred far profounder feelings of English patriotism and English protestantism. Herein lay its strength.

[1] S. R. Gardiner, *History of England*, VI, p. 314.

Men fought for the liberties of *England*, for the birthrights of *Englishmen*. The monarchy, wrote Mrs. Hutchinson, was founded by the Norman usurper "in the people's blood, in which it hath swam about five hundred years".[1]

There was here a great ambiguity. When Coke and Pym spoke of the liberties of England, they were thinking, in the first instance, of the rights of the propertied. But more radical revolutionaries were to speak of the birthrights of Englishmen, meaning thereby literally the rights of every adult male in the country. This division among the supporters of Parliament, within the Third Estate, was as yet veiled by (among other things) generalised attacks on the Norman Yoke.

If we take this broader patriotic appeal into account, then even as history the Norman Yoke theory was not quite so absurd as some 20th century historians have assumed. If we go back far enough, the Anglo-Saxons *had* a tribal organisation which was far freer than the unequal society and state which superseded it. The Norman Conquest accelerated class differentiation. "Barons and knights until the later 12th century were still essentially an alien occupying army ruling a conquered people.... All native villagers were regarded as unfree.... Freeholders, explained a lawyer in the reign of Henry I, should frequent the shire courts, but not villeins.... The peasantry ... preserved the language and the traditions of the old English communities."[2] Since the shire court was for centuries the real administrative centre, and since from 1430 only 40*s*. freeholders enjoyed the parliamentary franchise, the significance of this class distinction is clear. We should bear it in mind when we come across the apparently wild use of the phrase "Norman freeholders" by radicals in the English revolution.

Class divisions still seemed in some degree to coincide with national divisions. The names of Shakespeare's lower-class characters—Snug the joiner, Bottom the weaver, Snout the tinker, Starveling the tailor—are pure Saxon. So are those of the signatories of the Diggers' manifestoes. The point will force itself upon any student of 17th century quarter sessions records. Wentworth's gibe at "your Prynnes, Pyms and Bens, with the rest of that generation of odd names and natures,"[3] was a social sneer.

[1] *Memoirs of... Colonel Hutchinson* (ed. Firth 1885), 1, pp. 6–10. Normans and Saxons, Mrs. Hutchinson thought, soon became one people. This people, she felt with Milton, had been specially favoured by God, who therefore deserved "a greater return of duty from us than any other people in the world".

[2] M. Gibbs, *Feudal Order* (1949), pp. 58, 75. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 75–7, for the effect of the Conquest in strengthening the power of the state, the organ of the alien ruling class.

[3] *The Earle of Strafforde's Letters and Dispatches* (ed. W. Knowler, 1739), 1, p. 344.

Appeals to Anglo-Saxon precedent had the same advantages and disadvantages as appeals to the Bible. Texts and precedents gave something concrete to set against the authority of bishops and kings. Men dared not yet appeal to reason and utility alone: authority must be challenged by counter-authority. Texts dating from earlier stages of civilisation could be used to demonstrate the unlawfulness, or ungodliness, of institutions which had grown up in later centuries. Bishops were not to be found in the New Testament: away with them! The law of England should be made to conform to the law of God: which meant that most existing laws should be abolished. "I do not find anything in the law of God," said Colonel Rainborough at Putney in 1647, "that a lord shall choose 20 burgesses, and a gentleman but two, or a poor man shall choose none".[1] Ergo, accept the Agreement of the People and manhood suffrage. In Saxon times, argued Thomas Scot the regicide at his trial, "there was nothing but a house of commons"; therefore the execution of the king on the authority of a single chamber was justified.[2]

The disadvantages of the appeal to Biblical or Saxon precedent are no less obvious. It is easier to reject institutions which cannot be found in the sacred texts than to agree on what should take their place. Men quoted those texts or precedents which proved what they wished to prove, and ignored those which made against them. The Bible was ambiguous, voluminous, contradictory, providing a text for every occasion: Anglo-Saxon precedent was unknown or doubtful. "Afar off it seems a monarchy, but in approach discovers more of a democracy," wrote Nathaniel Bacon of the old constitution; and he piously hoped that "we may attain the happiness of our forefathers, the ancient Saxons."[3] But what was the Anglo-Saxon constitution? What had the effect of the Conquest been?

Here the pitiless development of revolutionary events shattered the illusory unity which the theory had preserved among the opponents of Charles I's government. Two points of view emerged. The more conservative parliamentarians argued, with that representative thinker, Philip Hunton, that 1066 had marked no decisive change. William had been voluntarily accepted by the people when the throne was vacant after Harold's death. The Conquest left untouched "trial by

[1] A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (1938), p. 56.

[2] W. H. Terry, *The Life and Times of John, Lord Finch* (1936), Appendix, pp. 571–2.

[3] *Historical and Political Discourses of the Laws and Government of England* (1647), quoted in S. Kliger, *The Goths in England* (1952), pp. 140–1, a book which I have found very useful. Bacon's work is believed to have been written from notes by Selden.

12 men, and other fundamentals of government, wherein the English freedom consists."[1] More radical thinkers agreed with the equally representative Henry Parker in admitting a breach in continuity at the Conquest, and stressed the subsequent struggle of the people. "'Tis a shameful stupidity in any man to think that our ancestors did not fight more nobly for their free customs and laws, of which the Conqueror and his successors had in part disinherited them by violence and perjury, than they which put them to such conflicts."[2] Similarly Milton had written proudly in 1641 of "our progenitors that wrested their liberties out of the Norman gripe with their dearest blood and highest prowess".[3]

But it is significant that by 1644 Parker had fallen back on Hunton's less plausible but less dangerous theory;[4] and that Milton's description of the Saxons in his *History of Britain* is extremely unflattering.[5] The challenge to the men of property came no longer from royal absolutism but from popular democracy. Hunton and Parker had seen the common law, as interpreted by Coke, as the true English inheritance; but the radicals came to regard the law itself as part of the Norman bondage.

Parliament's victory in the civil war destroyed the royalist doctrine that absolutism was justified by the Norman Conquest. Hobbes pointed out the folly of this line of defence, for it meant that the right of the monarchy was overthrown by military defeat.[6] In 1646 men in the New Model Army were asking "What were the lords of England but William the Conqueror's colonels? or the barons but his majors? or the knights but his captains?"[7] Eight years later this was

[1] P. Hunton, *A Treatise ofMonarchie* (1643), pp. 36–7.

[2] H. Parker, *Observations upon some of his Majesties late Answers and Expresses* (1642), p. 3; printed in Haller, *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution*, II.

[3] *Of Reformation in England*, in *Prose Works* (Bohn edition), II, p. 404. Before Milton finally fixed on *Paradise Lost* as the subject of his epic he had thought of some "king or knight before the conquest" as "the pattern of a Christian hero" (*The Reason of Church Government*, 1641, *ibid.*, p. 478). If it is true that the theory of the Norman Yoke, in its social significance, is closely akin to the Christian legend of the Fall, the change of subject is perhaps less great than appears on the surface. Among Milton's many projected topics for poems and plays on Anglo-Saxon subjects were Edward the Confessor's "over affection to strangers"; "Harold slain in battle by William the Norman"; "a heroical poem . . . founded somewhere in Alfred's reign". (*Works*, Columbia edition, XVIII, p. 241–4) Milton's first project, only apparently dissimilar, had been King Arthur repelling the *Saxon* invaders.

[4] *Jus Populi*, p. 14.

[5] Milton was inconsistent. In 1649 he had nothing but contempt for those who were "ready to be stroked and tamed again into the wonted and well-pleasing state of their true Norman villeinage" (*Eikonoklastes*, *Works*, I, p. 483); and in 1650 he wrote more favourably of the Saxons in his *Defence of the People of England*, quoting *The Mirror of Justices* (*op. cit.*, pp. 172–4). This inconsistency reflects Milton's wavering political position between the Levellers and the generals.

[6] *Leviathan* (Everyman edition), p. 387.

[7] *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I, p. 51.

elaborated in a pamphlet written to justify the assumption of supreme power by the generals.

> "Wheresoever tyranny or mis-government arises, it may be removed by force. . . . The kings of England (as successors, by way of conquest) have derived their power for above 500 years from the Norman sword, until now that the people have again by conquest recovered their right . . . out of the hands of regal power usurping it." [So long as the army remained] "in possession of absolute conquest," [the writer declared, it was] "thereby declared by God to have right to the execution of the supreme power for the defence and ordering of the Commonwealth."[1]

So the theory of conquest was turned against its inventors.

Such arguments were anathema to the radical revolutionaries. The re-statement of the theory of the Norman Yoke adopted by the Levellers was that made by John Hare in *St. Edwards Ghost, or Anti-Normanisme*, written in 1642 but not published till 1647.[2]

England, said Hare, was a nation in captivity and vassalage to a foreign power and an alien aristocracy. "If we contemplate the heraldry and titles of our nobility, there is scarce any other matter than inventories of foreign villages." Acceptance of this alien yoke was not "suitable to the dignity or tolerable to the spirit of this our nation". "Even the barbarous Irish" had risen against a similar state of subjection, at risk to their lives and fortunes. Their violence need not be imitated, since "it is but the carcass of an enemy that we have to remove out of our territories, even the carcass and bones of the Norman Duke's injurious and detested perpetrations".

Hare's proposals were: (1) Deprive William of the title Conqueror; (2) Let the king abandon his claim by conquest; (3) Let the Norman nobility "repudiate their names and titles brought over from Normandy . . . and disclaim all right to their possessions here, as heirs and successors to any pretended conquerors;" (4) "All laws and usages introduced from Normandy" should be abolished and the laws of Edward the Confessor restored: the laws to be in English; (5) The language should be purified of Gallicisms. Unless this programme was realised, "the alteration of the state will be to us but changing of

[1] *The Extent of the Sword* (1654), pp. 2–3.

[2] Note that when the popular version of the theory first breaks into print, Edward's *sainthood* is emphasized. His hold over popular imagination probably owed much to that, even after the reformation.

usurpant masters".[1] Magna Carta was the work of the Norman aristocracy; Parliament itself had no legal basis until its Norman origins were disavowed.[2]

This was political dynamite. Hare did not specifically call for the expropriation of the aristocracy, but it was a clear enough consequence of his argument. He did advocate drastic reform of the whole legal system, speaking in 1648 of "that general and inbred hatred which still dwells in our common people against both our laws and lawyers". And he attacked the whole existing state, including Parliament itself; he repeatedly emphasised that "all our great victories and triumphs" in the civil war were vain if Norman laws remained. The enemy was Normanism, not the king, and if "our statesmen should profess themselves as Normans, and so persecute the assertors of the English liberty as enemies", they must be resisted to the death.[3]

Such views would have horrified Coke and Pym. They witness to the breakdown of unity within the Third Estate. Anti-Normanism of this type became significant when the army rank and file and the Leveller movement became "assertors of the English liberty". As in the French Revolution, the radicals were the patriots.

V. THE LEVELLERS

With the Levellers, the most advanced democratic group which had yet appeared on the political stage in Europe, we enter upon a new phase of the theory. Speaking on behalf of the small proprietors in town and countryside—the vast majority of the population—the Levellers appealed to their version of the Anglo-Saxon past; but they also moved forward to a conception of natural rights, the rights of man. It is a momentous transition: from the recovery of rights which used to exist to the pursuit of rights because they *ought* to exist: from historical mythology to political philosophy.

Parliament's victory, the Levellers thought, "afforded an opportunity which these 600 years has been desired, but could never be

[1] *St. Edwards Ghost, or Anti-Normanisme* (1647), pp. 13–22. For the purposes of this essay I have ignored linguistic Saxonism, but it is an important subsidiary aspect of the patriotic Norman Yoke theory. Cf. Spenser's archaisms, the controversy over the importation of foreign words, and Verstegan's remark that the Normans "could not conquer the English language as they did the land" (*Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, 1605, p. 222). See also the important article by P. Meier, "Réflexions sur la langue anglaise", in *La Pensée*, No. 53, 1954. M. Meier draws attention to the fact that the series of linguistic revolts against Gallicisms always coincided with democratic and nationalist movements.

[2] *Englands Proper and onely way to an Establishment . . .*, (1648), p. 5.

[3] *Plain English* (1647), in *Harleian Miscellany* (1812), IX, p. 91; *Englands Proper and onely way*, pp. 2, 6.

attained, of making this a truly happy and wholly free nation".[1] They expected to be delivered from "the Norman bondage . . . and from all unreasonable laws made ever since that unhappy conquest".[2] Among the abuses of the Norman power they included in 1647 the peers. "When Parliaments were first begun," declared Overton, "there were few or no temporal lords: King and Commons legislated alone".[3] William the Conqueror and his successors, said another Leveller pamphlet, "made dukes, earls, barons and lords of their fellow robbers, rogues and thieves". The House of Lords had no authority which it did not derive from this tainted source. "And therefore away with the pretended power of the lords!"[4]

Lilburne began by accepting Coke's view that Magna Carta had embodied the Anglo-Saxon liberties, regained by struggle against the Normans. He quoted from *The Mirror of Justices* and from Coke's *Institutes* almost as often as from the Bible. But gradually his own experience in the courts convinced him that neither Magna Carta nor common law guaranteed those liberties which he wished to see established. Walwyn was always critical of the feudal barons' charter. It "hath been more precious in your esteem than it deserveth," he wrote to Lilburne in 1645. Magna Carta "is but a part of the people's rights and liberties", laboriously won back from Norman kings. Its importance was absurdly exaggerated when men called it "the birthright, the great inheritance of the people". On the contrary: people risked selling their natural rights as men in pursuit of chimeras like "that mess of pottage".[5] Overton, the third in the Leveller triumvirate, agreed that Magna Carta was "but a beggarly thing, containing many marks of intolerable bondage";[6] and Lilburne came to see that, Coke notwithstanding, Magna Carta fell short of Edward the Confessor's laws, despite all the blood that went to its winning.

> "The greatest mischief of all," [Lilburne wrote in 1646], "and the oppressing bondage of England ever since the Norman Yoke, is this: I must be tried before you by a law (called the common law) that I know not, nor I think no man else, neither do I know where

[1] *A Manifestation* (1649), in Haller and Davies, *The Leveller Tracts*, p. 277.
[2] *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* (1646), p. 19; in Haller, *op. cit.*, III.
[3] *A Defiance against all Arbitrary Usurpations* (1646), p. 16.
[4] *Regall Tyrannie Discovered* (1647), pp. 86, 92.
[5] *Englands Lamentable Slaverie*, pp. 3–5.
[6] *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens*, p. 15.

> to find it or read it. . . . The tedious, unknown, and impossible-to-be-understood common law practises in Westminster Hall came in by the will of a tyrant, namely William the Conqueror."[1]

The "main stream of the common law" was corrupt.[2] Before the Conquest there were neither lawyers nor professional judges, "but only twelve good and legal men, chosen in each hundred, finally to decide all controversies, which lasted till William the Conqueror subdued that excellent constitution". The judges, Lilburne told them at his trial in 1649, were "at the best, in your original, but the Norman Conqueror's intruders"; and he appealed from them to the jury as his "sole judges".[3]

Coke had wanted to establish the supremacy of judge-made law: the Levellers wanted the jury—men of small property—to define the law, rather than judges drawn from the ruling class and bound up with the state machine. This was carrying re-interpretation of the law to a point at which Coke's achievement—security for bourgeois property—would have been reversed. We can see this if we consider what would have been the respective attitudes of judge and jury to security of tenure for copyholders, or to the monopolies of trading companies. "Our very laws", said Wildman for the Levellers at Putney, "were made by our conquerors."[4]

In 1649 a less influential but interesting figure, John Warr, devoted an entire pamphlet to *The Corruption and Deficiency of the Lawes of England*. They were "full of tricks, and contrary to themselves", as one would expect since they were of *Norman* origin. There was no real continuity from Saxon times, for the conquerors retained only "those parts of former laws which made for their own interest". Those laws which "do carry anything of freedom in their bowels . . have been wrested from the rulers and princes of the world by importunity of entreaty or by force of arms".[5] Warr indeed regarded the Saxons as alien conquerors no less than the Normans. He abandoned the appeal to history. "At the foundation of governments, justice

[1] *The Just Mans Justification* (1646), p. 15.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13. Cf. Milton's reference to "their gibberish laws, . . . the badge of their ancient slavery." (*The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, 1650, in *Prose Works*, II, p. 4); and John Rogers's "The Norman iron yoke of corrupt lawyers" (E. Rogers, *Some Account of . . . a Fifth-Monarchy-Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 53).

[3] *The Trial of Lt. Col. John Lilburne* (second edition, 1710), pp. 18n., 106–7, 121.

[4] Woodhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 65. Wildman extended his condemnation to mediaeval chronicles, "because those that were our lords, and made us their vassals, would suffer nothing . . . to be chronicled" that made against them (*ibid.*, p. 66). This is throwing overboard the appeal to history with a vengeance!

[5] In *Harleian Miscellany*, VI, pp. 212–16, 219.

was in men before it came to be in laws." The people imposed laws on rulers, but the latter have twisted the laws so as to use them against the people. Hence we must not make an idol of fundamental law, "for what (I pray you) is fundamental law but such customs as are of the eldest date and longest continuance? . . . The more fundamental a law is, the more difficult, not the less necessary to be reformed."[1]

Few Levellers attained to this clarity of thought. They tended more and more to appeal to reason rather than precedent: but they clung to the belief that reason had been embodied in the laws of the Anglo-Saxons. This got them into difficulties in the Putney Debates of 1647. Commissary Cowling argued that before the Conquest the franchise had been democratic, not a legal privilege attached to property; it was only the sword "that had from time to time recovered our right". Lt.-Col. Henry Lilburne replied that "the Norman laws were not slavery introduced upon us, but an augmentation of our slavery before": and Commissary-General Ireton pointed out that no evidence had been produced to show what "the ancient constitution", of which there had been so much talk, really was. He did not wish "to derive all our tyranny from the Norman Conquest". Rainborough agreed that it would be best to abandon constitutional history and "consider the equality and reasonableness of the thing".[2]

The shift from arguments based on questionable history to arguments based on the rights of man can be illustrated most neatly in a story told by Aubrey. Henry Marten introduced a Remonstrance into Parliament, probably in 1649, in which he spoke of England being "*restored* to its ancient government of a commonwealth". When challenged on his history, "H.M., standing up, meekly replied that 'there was a text had much troubled his spirit for several days and nights of the man that was blind from his mother's womb whose sight was restored at last'—i.e. was restored to the sight which he should have had".[3] Natural right was natural right, even if it could not be proved from history. "Whatever our forefathers were, or whatever they did or suffered or were enforced to yield unto: we are the men of the present age, and ought to be absolutely free from all kinds of exorbitancies, molestations or arbitrary power."[4]

In fighting the civil war Parliament had begun by appealing to the sovereignty of Parliament. But the radicals soon found that Parliament

[1] In *Harleian Miscellany*, VI, pp. 214–17. [2] Woodhouse, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 118–21.
[3] Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. Clark, II, p. 47. Marten misquoted *John* IX in order to make his point.
[4] *A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* (1646), pp. 4–5.

had replaced the King as an irresponsible, unrepresentative authority. In their conflict with the Presbyterians, not only the Levellers but also some Independents and republicans proclaimed that the people are superior both to law and Parliament: the President of the court which tried Charles I adopted that position. But "the people" was ambiguous. In the mouths of the men of property, the phrase meant themselves. The Levellers wished to make it include the whole adult male population. Hence the parliamentary franchise became a major object of contention between the two parties. At Putney Ireton criticised the proposed extension of the franchise in the Leveller Agreement of the People because it "takes away that which is the most original, the most fundamental civil constitution of this kingdom, and, which is above all, that constitution by which I have any property".[1] "The old constitution", for men like Ireton, meant law, property and a property franchise. The Levellers' appeal to abstract "natural rights" was of no interest to such people. The law, both before and after Coke, safeguarded the rights of property rather than the rights of man.

So Hare, Warr and the Levellers reversed the values of their betters. The law became the enemy, the symbol of Normanism, instead of being the surviving pledge of Anglo-Saxon freedom. William the Conqueror had had the laws written in French, so that "the poor miserable people might be gulled and cheated, undone and destroyed".[2] "All the entries and proceedings" in the law courts were in Latin, "a language I understand not, nor one of a thousand of my native countrymen".[3] Interpretation of the law was left to the discretion of judges. And since they were "but the Norman Conqueror's intruders", were members of the ruling class themselves, they naturally interpreted in a sense hostile to the mass of the people. Mumbo-jumbo helped the propertied. Hence the Levellers demanded

> "That all the laws of the land (locked up from common capacities in the Latin or French tongues) may be translated into the English tongue. And that all records, orders, processes, writs and other proceedings whatsoever may be all entered and issued forth in the

[1] Woodhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 60. His failure to grasp the importance of their proposed extension of the franchise vitiates most of what Mr. Kliger has to say about the Levellers in *The Goths in England*, and leads him to make some remarkable statements about Ireton's devotion to democracy (see esp. pp. 261–87).

[2] *Regall Tyrannie Discovered* (1647), p. 15.

[3] Lilburne, *The Just Mans Justification* (1646), p. 11.

English tongue . . . that so the meanest English commoner that can but read written hand in his own tongue may fully understand his own proceedings in the law".[1]

The Bible, the book which decided men's destinies in the after-life, had been translated into the English language, with momentous consequences. Now the law, which decided men's destinies here on earth, was also to be wrested from the custody of a clique of mandarins, and thrown open to the comprehension (and therefore control) of "the meanest English commoner". The reformation had cast down priests from their seats of power: legal reform was to cast down lawyers. Then the *English* commons could enter peacefully into their inheritance.[2]

The Levellers (and other radicals) wanted the laws rationalised and codified, "made certain, short and plain". Lilburne would have abolished the "Norman innovation" of courts at Westminster and had all causes and differences decided in the county or hundred where they originated. This, he held, had been "part of the ancient frame of government in this kingdom before the Conqueror's days".[3] Like the elevation of the jury over the judge, this is an appeal from the existing state power to surviving vestiges of the old communal institutions.

The republic was established in 1649, but Normanism remained. There had been no fundamental change in the law or in the social relations which the law defended. The Levellers realised that they were attacking a *system*. "Government we see none, but the old tyrannical Norman government," said a *Declaration* from Hertfordshire. "All the people of this nation are yet slaves, . . . being under the laws and government of William." "We protest against the whole Norman power."[4] No wonder the Levellers were forcibly suppressed. "You must break them or they will break you," cried Cromwell in 1649. Next year we find Whitelocke, Commissioner of the Great Seal, denying that the common law had been introduced by William the

[1] *An Appeale from the degenerate Representative Body the Commons . . . To the Body Represented, the free people* (1647), in D. M. Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution* (1944), p. 192. An Act for turning the law into English was passed in November 1650.

[2] That is why so many of the radicals in the English revolution hated the universities: they turned out men with a specialised training who used it to exclude the common people from their mysteries, to their own exclusive profit.

[3] *The Just Mans Justification*, p. 15. The demand was often repeated in later Leveller pamphlets. For examples see W. Schenk, *The Concern for Social Justice in the Puritan Revolution* (1948), pp. 67–8.

[4] Schenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 68, 80.

Conqueror, and suggesting that it was neither "ingenuous nor prudent for Englishmen to deprave their birthright, the laws of their own country".[1] The law's victims thought otherwise. In 1651 prisoners petitioning for liberation said "the law was the badge of the Norman bondage".[2]

VI THE DIGGERS

A further advance came with the demand for a clean sweep of all survivals of feudalism. All men were born free, wrote a Leveller partisan in 1646; and when "that wicked and unchristian-like custom of villany was introduced by the Norman Conqueror", it violated both the law of nature and the law of the land.[3]

That good bourgeois, Samuel Hartlib, who throughout the revolutionary years devoted himself tirelessly to the advocacy of every project that could improve economic production, pointed out that both copyholds and feudal tenures were obstacles to the full development of capitalist agriculture, and hoped that these "badges of our Norman slavery", although "not in the power of the poor husbandman to remedy", would be abolished by state action.[4] Feudal tenures, affecting mainly the rich, were abolished; copyhold, affecting mainly the poor, was not. A Leveller pamphlet of 1648 called for the abolition of "all base tenures by copies, oaths of fealty, homage, fines at will of the lord, etc. (being the Conqueror's marks on the people)": there are many similar petitions.[5] Usually the Levellers, spokesmen of the richer peasantry, would have been content if copyholders could have purchased the freehold, or have been guaranteed legal security of tenure. Others asked why, if copyholds came down from the Conquest, they could not be abolished without compensation now that the Norman monarchy and the feudal tenures of the gentry had gone? *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* attacked the landed classes as a whole.

> "Our nobility and gentry [came] even from that outlandish Norman Bastard; who first being his servants and under-tyrants: secondly their rise was by cruel murder and theft by the Conquest;

[1] B. Whitelocke, *Memorials* (1853), III, pp. 260–73.

[2] *Ibid.*, III, p. 362. In 1653 a women's petition to Cromwell asked for the abolition of the "Norman Yoke" of perpetual imprisonment for debt (M. James, *Social Policy during the Puritan Revolution*, 1930, p. 329).

[3] *Vox Plebis*, p. 4. "Villany" means villeinage.

[4] S. Hartlib, *The Compleat Husband-Man* (1659), p. 45. This tract is the second edition of *Samuel Hartlib his Legacie*, first published in 1652.

[5] M. James, *op. cit.*, p. 94. Cf. the Quaker E. B., *A Mite of Affection* (1659), quoted by Schenk, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

thirdly their rise was the country's ruin, and the putting them down will be the restitution of our rights again."[1]

The most comprehensive and radical statement of this social version of the theory was made by Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers. Justifying their communal cultivation of the waste land at St. George's Hill, they declared to Fairfax and his Council of War in December 1649:

> "Seeing the common people of England by joint consent of person and purse have cast out Charles our Norman oppressor, we have by this victory recovered ourselves from under his Norman yoke, and the land now is to return into the joint hands of those who have conquered—that is, the commoners—and the land is to be held no longer from the use of them [the commoners] by the hand of any [who] will uphold the Norman and kingly power still."[2]

The Diggers, that is to say, aimed at a far more radical revolution in agrarian relations. Copyhold was to be abolished, and peasants' lands freed from feudal services, just as the gentry's lands had been by the abolition of feudal tenures. The confiscated estates of church and crown, and waste lands everywhere, were to be free for the poorest people to cultivate. Ultimately, private property in land would be abolished altogether; but communal cultivation was to be established peacefully, by voluntary associations built up from below. It was the most far-reaching programme put forward during the revolution. Its realisation would have involved not only the destruction of the *political* power of feudalism, but also its complete uprooting in its last economic stronghold, the land. If feudal relations could have been destroyed in the village, the Diggers believed, the democratic rural community was still strong enough to revive and flourish. But this radical bourgeois-democratic programme was defeated. Feudal relations survived in rural England, to act for centuries as a brake on the development of democracy.

The Diggers' aim, Winstanley told Fairfax, was "not to remove the Norman yoke only", and restore Saxon laws. They wished to return to "the pure law of righteousness before the Fall". Here again we see the curious blending of the two myths: Paradise can be regained on earth only after Normanism had been overthrown. All laws "not

[1] *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* (ed. G. H. Sabine, 1941), pp. 618–19. (This was not a Digger pamphlet.)

[2] *Clarke Papers*, II, p. 218.

grounded upon equity and reason, not giving a universal freedom to all, but respecting persons, ought . . . to be cut off with the King's head". Laws made in the days of monarchy give freedom only to the gentry and clergy.[1] "The King's blood was not our burden; it was those oppressing Norman laws whereof he enslaved us that we groaned under."[2] Parliament could not be relied on to make the necessary reforms, for the franchise itself was Norman: "The violent bitter people that are freeholders . . . are the Norman common soldiers spread abroad in the land. And who must be chosen but some very rich man who is the successor of the Norman colonels? . . . And to what end have they been thus chosen, but to establish that Norman power the more forcibly over the enslaved English, and to beat them down again, whenas they gather heart to seek for liberty?"[3]

For the rich would have none of the Digger programme. From the moment of the execution of Charles I, conservatives began to group together again in the search for a government which would defend big property, the search which led ultimately back to a "free parliament" (elected on the old freeholder franchise) and to the restoration of Charles II. With remarkable prescience the Diggers issued their warning, just over three months after the proclamation of the Republic:

> "If they get the foot fast in the stirrup, they will lift themselves again into the Norman saddle: and they do it secretly, for they keep up the Norman laws. Therefore England, beware! . . . William the Conqueror's army begins to gather into head again, and the old Norman prerogative law is the place of their rendez-vous. For though their chief captain Charles be gone, yet his colonels, which are lords of manors, his councillors and divines, which are our lawyers and priests, his inferior officers and soldiers, which are the freeholders and landlords, all which did steal away our land from us when they killed our fathers in that Norman Conquest: and the bailiffs that are slaves to their covetous lusts, and all the ignorant bawling women against our digging for freedom, are the snapsack boys and the ammunition sluts that follow the Norman camp."[4]

[1] *Selected Works* (ed. Hamilton, 1944), pp. 60, 57–8. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[3] *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* (1649), pp. 14–15.
[4] Hamilton, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–4. An anonymous pamphlet published in 1653, *No Age like unto this Age*, which appears to have been influenced by Digger ideas, referred to tithes as a Norman imposition. "Five sorts of men uncapable of bearing rule in this Commonwealth" included lawyers and lords of manors, who were "of the Normans' creating", as well as impropriators, who upheld "the tyrannical power of monarchy", royalists, and "the rich that is covetous" (pp. 17–22).

The warning proved to be correct. Winstanley's Norman power, aided by the "corrupt interests of the lawyers and the clergy", was too strong for the radicals: and in 1660 Norman king, lords and bishops came back to aid Norman lords of manors and freeholders in protecting their property and their Norman law.

VII. THE WHIGS

Thus in the revolutionary epoch we can trace four distinct interpretations of the Norman Conquest, corresponding to the position of four different social classes: (1) The royalist doctrine justifying absolutism by conquest was killed by the civil war; but its ghost walked the earth between 1660 and 1688, in the posthumous pamphlets of Filmer. Nevill and Locke both thought it worth the trouble of laying the spectre, though the events of 1688 did it more effectively than either.[1] (2) Coke's version we may call the "bourgeois" interpretation: the common law was the embodiment of Anglo-Saxon liberties; once the repressive institutions of the absolute monarchy had been abolished freedom was "by God's blessing restored".[2] For the common law had adapted itself to the needs of bourgeois society. Continuity and the sanctity of property: these were what the new ruling class wished to emphasise. The theory of surviving Anglo-Saxon freedom and "the myth of Magna Carta" are essential to the Whig interpretation of English history.[3] (3) The Leveller version may be called the "bourgeois-democratic", the interpretation of the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie. These radicals saw that the law itself legitimised inequality They agitated for drastic legal reform, for the ending of all feudal privileges. Magna Carta itself was but a beggarly thing: pre-Conquest equality could be recovered only by a wide extension of the franchise. Juries, not judges, should decide what the law was. Some Levellers based their demands on natural as well as historical rights. (4) Finally, there was the most radical group of all, the Diggers, spokesmen for the dispossessed, who advocated a clean sweep of feudalism and

[1] H. Nevill, *Plato Redivivus* (1681), pp. 106–7, denies that the Norman Conquest made any difference at all: Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (Everyman edition), p. 208. The view that William and Mary were sovereigns by conquest was condemned by both Houses of Parliament in January 1692.

[2] The inscription on the Great Seal of the Commonwealth, 1651, devised by Henry Marten.

[3] Cf. H. Butterfield, *The Englishman and his History* (1944), p. 69. Harrington's *Oceana* (1656) contains a variant of this version. Harrington attached little importance to the Norman Conquest, since in his view society before no less than after 1066 was essentially landlord-dominated. But within this "Gothic balance" representative institutions dating from Saxon times made the constitution "no other than a wrestling match" between king, lords and people. (*Works*, 1737, esp. pp. 64–8.)

the ending of private property in land. Looking both backwards and forwards, they saw dimly that true equality could be established only by means of an attack on the institution of property as such. Their aim was "to renew the ancient community of enjoying the fruits of the earth, and to distribute the benefit thereof to the poor and needy, and to feed the hungry and clothe the naked".[1]

The bourgeois theory of continuity, having done service against the old régime, was then turned against attack from the opposite flank. When the Levellers claimed the rights of all Englishmen, the conservative parliamentarians replied that those rights were enshrined in the *laws*. Thus Prynne, the victim of Charles I's arbitrary rule, defended the "fundamental laws and liberties" left to the freemen and people by their forefathers, against the Leveller attack on behalf of the natural rights of all men.[2] The royalist journalist, Marchamont Nedham, said that the Levellers "by placing the supreme power of making and repealing laws in the people do aim to establish a mere popular tyranny . . . to the destruction of our laws and liberties".[3] Here the contrast between "the people" and "*our* laws and liberties" is clear. The laws and liberties belong to a class, as they always do when "popular tyranny" or a "revolutionary majority" are denounced. Sir Matthew Hale, judge under Cromwell and under Charles II, and Coke's loyal disciple, thought it very important to maintain an unbroken pedigree for the English constitution and laws from Anglo-Saxon times.[4] Another eminent lawyer, Sir Roger Twysden, neutral in the civil war, strongly emphasised continuity and defended legally limited monarchy against the absolutism of either king or people.[5] Bishop Bramhall in exile appealed to Magna Carta, Charles I at his trial claimed to be defending law and property. Whitelocke, Nedham, Prynne, Hale, Twysden, bishops, kings . . . from extreme right to left centre the ranks were closed against revolutionary democracy. Theories of the Norman Yoke in the decades after the revolution were perforce very different from what they had been before.

After 1660, then, the third and fourth versions of the theory temporarily disappeared from sight: the first after 1688. Men might

[1] Whitelocke, *op. cit.*, III, p. 18.

[2] *The First and Second Part of a Seasonable Legal, and Historical Vindication and Chronological Collection of the Good, Old, Fundamental Liberties* (1655), p. 3.

[3] *A Plea for the King and Kingdome* (1648), pp. 24–5. Nedham subsequently changed sides and wrote for the government of the Commonwealth.

[4] *History of the Common Law* (3rd ed. 1739), pp. 70–109.

[5] *Certaine Considerations upon the Government of England* (ed. J. M. Kemble, 1849, Camden Soc.), pp. 22, 99–103, 119–21, 133.

disagree about whether the gentry of England were of Norman descent;[1] antiquarians and publicists continued to dispute about the exact nature of the Conquest: but most writers accepted what we may begin to call the Whig view, the second or bourgeois version outlined above. Algernon Sydney did.[2] Defoe used the theory to ridicule the pretensions of the aristocracy to have "come over with the Conqueror", whilst adroitly reviving the Cromwellian army's argument from conquest. If the right of the Stuarts derived from William the Conqueror, then since 1688 it had been superseded by the superior right of William the Liberator.

> "The great invading Norman let us know
> What conquerors in after-times might do.
> To every musketeer[3] he brought to town,
> He gave the lands which never were his own.
> When first the English crown he did obtain,
> He did not send his Dutchmen back again . . .
> The rascals, thus enriched, he called them lords,
> To please their upstart pride with new-made words,
> And Doomsday Book his tyranny records.
> And here begins our ancient pedigree,
> That so exalts our poor nobility:
> 'Tis that from some French trooper they derive,
> Who with the Norman Bastard did arrive."[4]

The conquest theory had ceased to be a threat and became a joke. Property is now so secure, Defoe skilfully hints, and William is so *bourgeois* a king, that there is no danger in *his* conquest. By the time of Blackstone the Whig theory was unquestioned: the law of nature, in his view, had been embodied in the pre-Conquest constitution.[5] The continuity of English law and institutions, as a peculiar and peculiarly admirable feature of English development, became a dogma of Whig historians, and has been uncritically accepted by many who

[1] Prynne, in his reaction of loyalty after the restoration, attacked the view that the nobility were merely the descendants of the Norman conquerors (Butterfield, *op. cit.*, p. 75); cf. Hobbes, p. 40 below.

[2] *Works* (1772), III, *passim:* conveniently summarized in Z. S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans* (1945), pp. 158–61.

[3] Or archer (Defoe's note).

[4] *The True Born Englishman* (1701) in H. Morley, *The Earlier Life and Works of Daniel Defoe* (1889), p. 190. Defoe's purpose was to mock at racial theories, to show that "We have been Europe's sink, the jakes where she Voids all her offal outcast progeny."

[5] *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1794), pp. 50–77.

would not call themselves Whigs. Yet in origin it is doubly propagandist: it springs from Coke's theory used against Stuart absolutism, as modified by the needs of the victorious parliamentarians to defend their position against radical attack and to pretend that there had been no revolution.

The few dissentients from the Whig view were no less partisan. One was Thomas Hobbes, always *sui generis*, who took a grim delight in reversing the values of the parliamentary revolutionaries. From the Saxons, he said, it was possible to derive only "examples of fact", no "argument of right"; and the facts, Hobbes sorrowfully added, "by the ambition of potent subjects, have been oftener unjust than otherwise". The Saxons "were a savage and heathen people, living only by war and rapine". Their lords ruled absolutely over families, servants and subjects. These lords held courts by the King's writ, and were the King's counsellors; but they were summoned at his pleasure, and had had no right to oppose his resolutions by force. But our titles of honour, said Hobbes sardonically, recalling Hare and his friends, undoubtedly derive from the Saxons.[1]

Another dissentient was Dr. Robert Brady, a Tory and a defender of Stuart absolutism. The political impulse that took him to early English history is unmistakable. Yet his real scholarship led him to conclusions which most modern historians would accept: that the Commons were not represented in Parliament until 1265; before that date they had no "communication in affairs of state unless they were represented by tenants *in capite*."[2]

Only one point of the more radical interpretation of the theory of the Norman Yoke received prominence in the century after 1660: the Saxon origin of the jury, and the rights of juries as against judges. A crop of literature was produced on this subject by Bushell's Case in 1670, arising from a conflict between judge and jury in the trial of William Penn the Quaker. Penn himself defined the birthrights of Englishmen as (1) Security of property, (2) The right to vote (though he said nothing about distribution of the franchise) and (3) The right to serve on juries, all of which had descended from the Saxons.[3] Trial by jury was the only form of trial in Anglo-Saxon England, and was confirmed by the Conqueror, said a pamphlet of 1680 which

[1] *Behemoth* (1679) in *Works* (ed. Molesworth), VI, pp. 259–60; *A Dialogue between a Philosopher and a Student of the Common Law of England*, *ibid.*, III, pp. 44, 152–3.

[2] Brady, *Introduction to Old English History* (1694), Introduction. I have passed lightly over the controversies among antiquarians between 1660 and 1730, since they have been fully treated by Professor D. C. Douglas in his *English Scholars*, esp. chapter 6.

[3] *England's Present Interest Discovered*, in *Select Works* (1782), III, pp. 203–4.

was often reprinted.[1] (Again we may note that the social significance of the jury was being transformed by the development of capitalism. Juries used to be a surviving communal institution, speaking for the village community: they were expected to have personal knowledge of the facts before the trial opened. In depersonalised capitalist society they came to be bourgeois property-owners, selected because they did *not* know the facts.)

But there was one theme which we shall encounter later in radical thought, upon which Defoe, in his brutal common-sense way, unexpectedly touched. In *Jure Divino* (1706), he treats the Saxons as violent conquerors no whit better than the Normans:

> "And thus began the royal Saxon line;
> In robbery and blood they fixed the right divine."

Defoe is still hitting at James II and his defenders, but his argument advances against prescription in general. The Saxons wrongfully dispossessed the Britons by "the *jus divinum* of the sword". All property thus originated in violence:

> "The very lands we all along enjoyed
> They ravished from the people they destroyed . . .
> And all the long pretences of descent
> Are shams of right to prop up government;
> 'Tis all invasion, usurpation all;
> The strongest powers get up, the weakest fall . . .
> Success gives title, makes possession just,
> And if the fates obey, the subjects must . . .
> Where's then the lofty pedigree of kings?
> The longest sword the longest sceptre brings."[2]

William I was no better, if no worse, than his Saxon predecessors:[3]

> "Whore in his scutcheon, tyrant in his face . . .
> Upon his sword engraved the right divine.

[1] Sir John Hawles, *The Englishman's Right* (1771 ed.), pp. 4–7. Hawles was Solicitor-General to William III. His pamphlet was reprinted in 1731, and at least four times between 1763 and 1771. Both Penn and Hawles believed that the jury existed in England before the Saxons. Winstanley had thought it a Norman institution. (Hamilton, p. 75).

[2] D. Defoe, *Jure Divino* (1706), Book IX, pp. 205–7, 212, 217.

[3] Rather better, Defoe thought, since William "received the crown by general fair assent" and "swore to the laws, with all their limitations", though he did not keep his oath. (*Ibid.*, pp. 223–4).

Of all the nations in the world there's none
Has less of true succession in their crown . . .
Since if hereditary right's the claim
The English crown has forty times been lame."

Defoe's conclusion is

"That where th'usurper reigns, the tyrant must;
He only justly holds a government
That rules a people by their own consent."[1]

That is all very well for Defoe: a bourgeois confident in his class's ability to control both crown and people. But when we next meet this attitude towards the origins of property and political authority it will be deadly earnest, not heavy-handed fun. For it will be in the writings of Tom Paine.[2]

VIII. THE RADICALS

The second half of the 18th century saw revivals of bourgeois-democratic versions of the Norman Yoke theory.[3] In 1757 Lord Hawkesbury, whilst praising the skill of the Saxons in "wisely constructing civil societies", and especially "their military establishments", admitted that they were "ridiculed for their ignorance and barbarity".[4] That soon changed. In America Thomas Jefferson "painstakingly collected every scrap of evidence to reconstruct the history of his 'Saxon ancestors' ", who, he believed, had realised his conception of political liberty.[5] In England the Wilkes agitation and the American Revolution stimulated movements for parliamentary reform which helped to revive enthusiasm for the free Anglo-Saxons. (At the same

[1] Defoe, *op. cit.*, Book IX, pp. 219–20.

[2] See below, pp. 46–54. In 1821 the radical reformer William Hone published a curious work entitled *The Right Divine of Kings to Govern Wrong*. It was a reprint of parts of Defoe's *Jure Divino*, with extensive additions. The passage on the Conquest adds nothing and omits much (pp. 49–51 of Hone's version correspond to pp. 215–25 of *Jure Divino*); but Hone has a long footnote on Alfred (whom Defoe ignored), praising especially his zeal for education. Otherwise Hone accepts Defoe's attitude towards the Saxons.

[3] All that I venture to say in the following sections is put forward very tentatively, in the hope that others better qualified may criticise the lines of thought here suggested. For much generous help I am deeply indebted to Royden Harrison, Morris Pearl, and especially E. P. Thompson. For the errors I alone am responsible.

[4] Charles, Lord Hawkesbury, *Constitutional Maxims extracted from a Discourse on the Establishment of a National and Constitutional Force* (reprinted by the London Corresponding Society in 1794), pp. 3–5. Hume's *History of England*, of which the relevant volume was published in 1761, took a similar position.

[5] G. Chinard, *The Commonplace Book of Thomas Jefferson* (1926), pp. 64–5. I follow the free Saxons no further into America: they went far.

time, significantly, there was a decline in interest in Anglo-Saxon laws among lawyers.[1])

The most comprehensive document on the radical side was the anonymous *Historical Essay on the English Constitution*, published in 1771. This constitution, the *Essay* declared, was introduced by the Saxons about 450 A.D. The English state was a federation of local communities built up from below, finally established with a bi-cameral national Parliament under "Alfred the Great, a prince of the most exalted merit that ever graced the English throne".[2] Annual Parliaments were a right enjoyed for 1,200 years before the triennial Act of 1694 robbed us of them. Trial by jury dates from earliest Saxon times. At all levels the government was democratic and representative, so that "if ever God Almighty did concern himself about forming a government for mankind to live happily under, it was that which was established in England by our Saxon forefathers."[3]

But the Norman Conquest

> "destroyed all the elective power, constitutionally placed in the people of England, and reversed the Saxon form of government which was founded on the common rights of mankind.... From this time, civil and religious tyranny walked hand in hand, two monsters till then unknown in England...[4] Since the Conquest, our arbitrary kings, and men of arbitrary principles, have endeavoured to destroy the few remaining records and historical facts that might keep in remembrance a form of government so kind, so friendly and hospitable to the human species.... Whatever is of Saxon establishment is truly constitutional, but whatever is Norman is heterogeneous to it, and partakes of a tyrannical spirit."

There has naturally been warfare ever since between these two forms of government.[5] The people at length recovered their elective power in Parliament, thanks to the "immortal barons who rescued the constitution from Norman tyranny" by Magna Carta. The civil war was fought because Charles I wished to reduce Parliament to the status of William I's Council; the M.P.s wished to raise themselves to the position of the Witenagemot.[6]

[1] Holdsworth, *The Historians of Anglo-American Law* (1928), pp. 34–6.

[2] pp. 3, 12–15, 22–33. *An Historical Essay* has been attributed, probably wrongly, to the younger Allan Ramsay (Butterfield, *George III, Lord North and the People*, 1949, pp. 349–50).

[3] *Op. cit.*, pp. 144, 165. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 43. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 8–10. [6] *Ibid*, pp. 68, 90, 103.

This *Essay* had a remarkable vogue. In 1776 it was used by Major Cartwright in his widely influential *Take Your Choice:* though Cartwright found in some other source the "god-like sentiment" of "the all-excellent Alfred" "that it was just the English should remain as free as their own thoughts".[1] The *Essay* was quoted *verbatim* in an address drafted by Cartwright and issued by the Society of Constitutional Information in April 1780.[2] In 1792 the *Essay* was serialised, without acknowledgment and with interpolations, in *The Patriot.*[3] The London Corresponding Society used its arguments to justify universal suffrage and annual Parliaments.[4] Its account of the Norman origin of the alliance between church and state was still being repeated in 1807.[5]

From the publication of the *Historical Essay* Alfred begins to play a far greater part in the legend than previously. Milton praised "the most renowned King Alfred" on many occasions. But in the 17th century St. Edward had been the Anglo-Saxon king who mattered most, because his name was associated with the lost Anglo-Saxon laws. Yet Edward, the popular saint-king, "the superstitious prince who was sainted for his ungodly chastity", as a Puritan lady described him,[6] had never been an entirely satisfactory bourgeois hero. In the 18th century he was entirely eclipsed by Alfred, whose part in the legend was much more positive. Even Burke said Alfred was "generally honoured as the founder of our laws and constitution."[7] I cannot properly explain the rise of Alfred in popular estimation. Perhaps the fact that the monarchy was no longer the principal enemy made it easier to accept a royal hero, especially one without clerical and papist associations. A *Life of Alfred the Great* by Sir John Spelman was published in 1709 and may have contributed. Spelman thought Alfred gave "being and form" to the English state, and that he instituted trial

[1] J. Cartwright, *op. cit.*, (second edition, 1777), p. 119. The other source was probably Hume.

[2] Butterfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 349–50.

[3] Vols. I–III *passim.* One long interpolation (I, pp. 289–97) attributes the origin of the jury system to Alfred, and attacks imprisonment for debt. The favourite passage from *The Mirror* is quoted which describes how Alfred executed 44 unjust judges in one year. Elsewhere footnotes aim at sharpening the political attack on the aristocracy—e.g. the statement that the Conquest saw "the origin of the immense, overgrown landed property of our race of nobles and rich commoners, a right founded in murder, desolation and proscription". The House of Lords, and rotten boroughs, derive from this usurpation. (I, p. 419).

[4] See their "Address to the Nation" in *A Narrative of the Proceedings at the General Meeting of the London Corresponding Society,* July 31, 1797, pp. 19–20.

[5] *Flower's Political Review and Monthly Register,* I, pp. 295–9.

[6] Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of . . . Colonel Hutchinson,* I, p. 6.

[7] *Abridgment of English History,* in *Works* (1818), X, p. 294.

by jury, hundred and shire courts, and Parliament.[1] A third edition of Asser's *Life of Alfred* was published in 1722 in Latin,[2] but there was no English translation until 1848. In 1723 Sir Richard Blackmore published *Alfred, An Epick Poem in Twelve Books*. This was an entirely fictitious account of the education of an ideal prince, dedicated hopefully to Prince Frederick. The poet's only original use of the legend was in remarking that the Hanoverians came to England "From the old seats, whence Alfred's fathers came". But Sir Richard was very popular with the Whigs, and may have helped to make Alfred a more familiar name.[3] It was, however, probably from Spelman that Samuel Johnson derived the remarkable tribute which he paid to Alfred in *London* (1738):

> "A single jail, in Alfred's golden reign,
> Could half the nation's criminals contain. . . .
> No spies were paid, no special juries known,
> Blessed age! but ah! how different from our own!"[4]

From the 1770s Alfred and the Anglo-Saxons advance together in popular estimation.[5]

The use of the theory of the Norman Yoke by the early parliamentary reformers drew upon and closely followed orthodox 17th century models. James Burgh quoted *The Mirror of Justices*, Camden, Verstegan, Whitelocke, Milton, Nathaniel Bacon and many others. Cartwright used *The Mirror*, Coke, Sir Henry Spelman, Prynne.[6] Granville Sharp published extracts from Prynne's *Brevia Parliamentarii Rediviva*, and also used *The Mirror of Justices*, Fortescue, Lambarde, Coke, speeches

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 94, 106–16, 157–8. Parliament, Spelman thought, was composed of bishops and thanes only. (Spelman died in 1643, and this edition was published by Thomas Hearne. An annotated Latin version by Obadiah Walker had appeared in 1678).

[2] Earlier editions had been published by Archbishop Parker (1574) and Camden (1603).

[3] *Op. cit.*, pp. xli–ii, 289–90. Blackmore cited Obadiah Walker as the best source on Alfred. Sir Richard, who was versatile, had also written a couple of epics on the Arthurian legend, as well as trifles of comparable length on *Eliza*, *The Nature of Man*, *Creation* and *Redemption*. He claimed that he composed his poems in carriages and coffee-houses in the brief leisure moments of a successful career as a physician. The poems suggest that the claim was justified.

[4] Spelman, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15. Johnson's lines were to be quoted by radical reformers with political implications which would have shocked the near-Jacobite doctor. See, e.g., *The White Hat* (1819), p. 140.

[5] Professor Butterfield noted "Alfred" and "Anglo-Saxon" as signatures to letters in the *London Chronicle* and *London Courant* in 1780 (*op. cit.*, p. 264). Cf. *Three Letters to the People of Great Britain* by "Alfred" (1785—an anti-government pamphlet), and *Alfred's Letters*, essays on foreign policy published anonymously by Sir J. B. Burges in 1793.

[6] J. Burgh, *Political Disquisitions* (1774–5), Vols. I and II; Cartwright, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

in the Ship Money Case, and Brady. In 1780 the Society for Constitutional Information planned a pamphlet composed of extracts from, *inter alios*, *The Mirror*, Fortescue, Selden, Coke, Sidney, Blackstone and the *Essay on the English Constitution*.[1] But suddenly a new note was struck—a note which had not been heard since the Levellers.

It rang out in Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, published in 1776. Discussing the title of the kings of England, Paine wrote: "A French bastard landing with an armed banditti and establishing himself King of England, against the consent of the natives, is, in plain terms, a very paltry, rascally original. It certainly hath no divinity in it.... The plain truth is that the antiquity of English monarchy will not bear looking into."[2] And he declared that although the English constitution "was noble for the dark and slavish times in which it was erected", it was nevertheless "imperfect, subject to convulsions, and incapable of producing what it seems to promise".[3] The appeal to the past was again abandoned for the appeal to reason. Common sense showed the superiority of a republic to the rule of "crowned ruffians". The full implications of this attitude, proclaimed in the year of the American Revolution, were not made manifest until Paine's controversy with Burke over the French Revolution gave him wide influence among members of the working class.

In his *Abridgment of English History* Burke criticised those who "would settle the ancient constitution, in the most remote times, exactly in the same form in which we enjoy it at this day". "That ancient constitution, and those Saxon laws", he concluded, "make little or nothing for any of our modern parties": it was neither practicable nor desirable to re-establish them.[4] In the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, Burke nevertheless emphasised the continuity through change of English institutions. "All the reformations we have hitherto made have proceeded upon the principle of reference to antiquity." Coke, Selden and Blackstone were praised for proving "the pedigree of our liberties". Our inherited privileges, franchises and liberties, and not the abstract rights of man, were the safest constitutional guarantee.[5]

Paine's reply, in *The Rights of Man* (1791), was to reject the historical English constitution altogether. "If the succession runs in the line of

[1] Butterfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 345–7, 351.
[2] *Common Sense*, in *Political and Miscellaneous Works*, ed. R. Carlile, 1819, I, p. 16.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[4] *Op. cit.*, in *Works* (1818) Book II, chapter 7, and Book III, chapter 9, esp. pp. 351, 555
[5] *Op. cit.*, Worlds Classics, pp. 33–5.

the Conqueror, the nation runs in the line of being conquered, and ought to rescue itself from this reproach." "The Parliament in England, in both its branches, was erected by patents from the descendants of the Conqueror. The House of Commons did not originate as a matter of right in the people, to delegate or elect, but as a grant or boon." Revolutionary France provided an object-lesson of the reverse process.[1] Norman rule was a tyranny founded on conquest. "The exertion of the nation, at different periods, to abate that tyranny, and render it less intolerable, has been credited for a constitution. Magna Carta . . . was no more than compelling the government to renounce a part of its assumptions." It "was, as far as it went, of the nature of a re-conquest, and not of a constitution: for could the nation have totally expelled the usurpation, as France has done its despotism, it would then have had a constitution to form".[2] "May then the example of all France contribute to regenerate the freedom which a province of it destroyed."[3]

This reminds us of Hare and the Levellers, and Paine, in his hostility to the oligarchy's state, reproduced points dear to Leveller propagandists. "The whole of the civil government [in England] is executed by the people of every town and country, by means of parish officers, magistrates, quarterly sessions, juries and assize, without any trouble to what is called the government."[4] The French Revolution gave Paine something the Levellers lacked: an example of a historic constitution totally overthrown and re-made in the name of the people. Burgh had echoed the Levellers when he wrote: "Antiquity is no plea. If a thing is bad, the longer it has done harm the worse, and the sooner abolished the better. Establishment by law is no plea. They who make laws can repeal them."[5] That was disturbing enough. But Paine carried the point to an extreme which must have been profoundly shocking to admirers of the continuous British constitution. "Government by precedent", he wrote, "without any regard to the principle of the precedent, is one of the vilest systems that can be set up."[6]

Paine's aim was to bring hereditary monarchy, the peerage, and indeed the whole constitution, into contempt; and here memories of

[1] *The Rights of Man*, Part I, in *Works*, I, pp. 49, 60.
[2] *Ibid.*, Part II, *Works*, II, p. 46.
[3] *Ibid.*, I, p. 47. In its essentials Paine's argument derives from Rousseau, and Rousseau's development is suggestive. In the *Discourse on Inequality* he posited a primitive Golden Age, from which men fell by the institution of private property: but in the *Social Contract* he is concerned with the *future* foundation of a just, rational and democratic society.
[4] Paine, *Works*, II, p. 47.
[5] J. Burgh, *Political Disquisitions*, II, pp. 296–7.
[6] Paine, *op. cit.*, II, p. 50.

Norman oppression were useful. "Though not a courtier will talk of the curfew-bell, not a village in England has forgotten it."[1] If that was at all true, it was a good reason for associating the foreign House of Brunswick and the rapacious aristocracy with the invading Bastard and his armed banditti. In the 1790s there were persistent rumours that Hanoverian troops were to be used against the reformers. The patriotic warning could be sounded with the same effectiveness, and the same justification, as when the Stuarts had been looking for foreign military support.

So Paine destroyed Burke's historical argument. Hereditary right derives from bastardy, property from theft, the state is founded by conquest, the constitution evolves by military violence. "All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny", in its origins base and brutal.[2] But Burke's conception of a sacred constitution rooted in inheritance was not only inaccurate: it was also irrelevant. For Paine the argument from natural right was more compelling than that from history. The French Revolution showed that men could *reverse* the verdict of history, and throw off the dead weight of tradition and prejudice which, as Burke saw, protected the *status quo*.

Paine was not writing academic exercises: he was calling the dispossessed to action. The Levellers had proclaimed the rights of man in the English Revolution, and were promptly suppressed. Paine wrote in a situation little less revolutionary, and potentially far more dangerous to the ruling class. The most enthusiastic response to the French Revolution came from the victims of the industrial revolution, the small craftsmen and uprooted countrymen—just those classes among whom the tradition of lost rights lingered longest. To them the rights of man furnished a telling criticism of the constitution from which they were excluded. The tramp of their feet and the muttering of their illegal discussions is the essential background to Paine's writings. Despite savage repression, although men were sent to jail for selling it, 200,000 copies of *The Rights of Man* were distributed: a circulation beyond the Levellers' wildest dreams.

But for the radicals Paine's book was a sword to divide. And the division reproduced that of the sixteen-forties and -fifties, only now the Industrial Revolution had made the working class much larger and much more desperate: and this strengthened the bourgeoisie's preference of reform to revolution. Thus the Rev. Christopher Wyvill of the Yorkshire Association wrote *A Defence of Dr. Price and the*

[1] Paine, *op cit.*, II, p. 24. [2] *Ibid.*, I, p. 87; II, p. 27.

Reformers of England in which he disavowed Paine's arguments as "ill-timed, impracticable, undesirable for England, and more likely to retard than to accelerate the recovery of our just rights".[1] In May 1792 the highly respectable London Society of the Friends of the People warned the Society for Constitutional Information in Sheffield of the dangers of Paine's approach; in December of the same year they reaffirmed their constitutionalism in a formal resolution.[2] The far more plebeian London Corresponding Society in 1794 reminded the public that "Alfred, justly styled the Great", had encouraged his people to have and to use arms; so that when three years later they also claimed that "to restore the constitution to its original purity, and the people to their long lost rights" were their only objects,[3] their interpretation of constitutional action was more ambiguous than their confidence in the common people.

The extent of the division between the two wings of the reformers was most clearly revealed in the trial of Henry Yorke. Yorke was a moderate radical, who in 1795 was accused, and convicted, for inciting to unconstitutional action at a public meeting in Sheffield. Sheffield, we saw, had been warned against Paine in 1792, but in vain; in 1794 "every cutler" there was said to have his copy of *The Rights of Man*.[4] This is the background to the trial. Although Yorke subsequently deserted the reformers, and became an enemy of the French Revolution he seems to have conducted his defence with courage and ability. So the fact that this defence turned largely on his repudiation of Paine is significant.

"In almost every speech," Yorke told the jury, "I took essential pains in controverting the doctrines of Thomas Paine, who denied the existence of our constitution. . . . I constantly asserted, on the contrary, that we had a good constitution." He had always defended "that magnanimous government which we derived from our Saxon fathers, and from the prodigious mind of the immortal Alfred".[5] "If you never read the history of Alfred," he said to one unfortunate witness,

[1] Wyvill, *Political Papers chiefly respecting the reform of the Parliament of Great Britain*, III, Appendix, pp. 67–70.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 165–9, 175–8. Cf. similar sentiments in *The Patriot*, I, pp. 212–14, etc.

[3] *An Account of the Seizure of Citizen Thomas Hardy, Secretary to the London Corresponding Society* (1794), p. 6; *Narrative of the General Meeting . . .*, July 31, 1797, pp. 22–3. For the Society's interest in military organisation, see p. 142, n. 4 above.

[4] *The Trial of Thomas Hardy* (1794–5) in *State Trials* (ed. T. J. Howell, 1818) XXIV, col. 1042 and *passim*.

[5] *The Trial of Henry Yorke for a Conspiracy* (1795), pp. 84, 128. Yorke repeated Cartwright's point that "good King Alfred", the illustrious founder of the constitution, had taught that Englishmen "should be as free in their actions as their thoughts" (p. 104).

"how can you say you have read a little into the constitution?"[1] Yorke promised to print his authorities for the Saxon constitution in an appendix, and it would have been interesting to see them; but his printer refused. They included the usual Fortescue, Camden, Coke, Sir Henry Spelman and Blackstone.[2]

Yorke saw, and welcomed the fact, that "a general wreck of the Gothic policy is taking place, and all the old and venerated governments of the world are passing gradually away". Men had natural rights, which they retained in society. If these rights were denied, they would be claimed by violence. But Yorke hoped that violence could be avoided, since "the constitution of this country, in my opinion, guarantees those rights", and all would be well if only that constitution "were administered as I think it ought to be".[3] The difference, in short, between Wyvill and Yorke on the one hand, and those who agreed with Paine on the other, is that between reformer and revolutionary. Yorke, unlike Paine, believed that "public force" was necessary, that government was "coeval and co-extended with man". Yorke spoke for "all . . . men of any property",[4] Paine for all men. Yet Yorke, his mind sharpened by his battle against imprisonment and possible transportation, saw the crux of this disagreement in his and Paine's views of the constitution and of Anglo-Saxon society.

This difference of principle went right through the radical movement, though it was rarely stated as clearly as by Yorke. For so long as oligarchical corruption and violent repression still faced the reformers, the alliance between bourgeois radicals and the emergent working class was a real one. The point of unity was the visible fact that the constitution in church and state *had* degenerated from the heroic days of the 17th century, whose history the reformers knew so well. Hence the rallying cry of a return to the true principles of Saxon freedom could unite the two wings so long as those principles were not too closely defined.

The White Hat, a short-lived periodical of 1819, written by enlightened middle-class reformers, thus traditionally defined "The Reformer's Creed": "That our ancestors enjoyed, in its fullest extent, the right of framing laws for their own government by their representatives; and that at various periods of our history this right has been

[1] *The Trial of Henry Yorke for a Conspiracy* (1795), p. 67.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 101, vii. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 135–6, 24, 89–90.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 122. In 1803–4 the pseudonym "Alfred" was used by authors of anti-French recruiting pamphlets: see *Alfred's Address to the Ladies of England* (1803) and G. H., *Alfred's Letters* (1804).

contended for and maintained against the encroachments of arbitrary power." Before the Norman Conquest "the power of the military was in the hands of the people", under elected officers.[1] "The Commons is not the British Witenagemot. It is not the representatives of the people, but the representative of an oligarchy." And *The White Hat*, intimidated into silence by the government's gagging acts, defined in a farewell article its conception of its duty as being "to unfold the principles of the British constitution, to point out its corruptions", and to prepare the public mind "for the change which must take place in the present state of the country". It was again a definition of a *reformist* task.[2]

Side by side with this "bourgeois" radicalism, however, the Painite plebeian tradition continued to develop in many variants. Most important perhaps for the working-class movement were the Spenceans. Spence himself makes little direct reference to the Norman Yoke. *The Restorer of Society* described contemporary landlords as "like a warlike enemy quartered upon us for the purpose of raising contributions, and William the Conqueror and his Normans were fools to them in the arts of fleecing. . . . Nothing less than the complete extermination of the present system of holding land, in the manner I propose, will ever bring the world again to a state worth living in".[3] And Spence's view of the origin of property, though generalised, has a strong affinity to the Norman Yoke theory. "Societies, families and tribes, being originally nothing but banditties, . . . and the greatest ruffians seizing on the principal shares of the spoils . . . introduced into this world all the cursed varieties of lordship, vassalage and slavery, as we see it at this day."[4]

But it is not so much in his view of origins that Spence drew on the traditions expressed by the demand for a restoration of Saxon freedom. It was rather in his positive proposals. He conceived of the parish as a unit of self-government, and wished to set parishes free from the tyranny of the central state power. Then they could freely federate

[1] *The White Hat*, I, p. 124.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 133. Another moderate reformer who referred to Anglo-Saxon liberties was Bentham. The Norman Conquest, he correctly pointed out, was not motivated by the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. (*Works*, ed. Bowring, 1843, VII, p. 196). The freedom of the Saxon system of local courts and juries "was too favourable to justice to be endured by lawyers", and was replaced by centralised courts whose procedure was conducted in a language unknown to the majority of the inhabitants of the country. "In British India, this state of things may, with a particular degree of facility, be conceivable." (*Ibid.*, II, pp. 151–2; V, p. 48. These passages date from the eighteen-twenties.)

[3] Letter V, September 20, 1800. This letter figured prominently in Spence's trial. See A. W. Waters, *The Trial of Thomas Spence in 1801* (1917), pp. 46–7.

[4] Attributed to Spence in the indictment at his trial (*ibid.*, pp. 78–9).

from below, in the way that *An Historical Essay on the English Constitution* described the Saxon constitution as coming into being. The Levellers had also valued highly the surviving communal institutions of the English village, and the jury: this emphasis was common to all radical versions of the Norman Yoke theory. Spence wanted parishes to become sole owners of the land. Even this more advanced conception of communal ownership had been anticipated by Gerrard Winstanley: and he linked it up closely with memories of the Saxon past.[1]

What was implicit in Spence became startlingly explicit in Thomas Evans, Librarian to the Society of Spencean Philanthropists, who in 1798 had been secretary of the London Corresponding Society. In his remarkable *Christian Policy the Salvation of the Empire*, Evans declared that there had been "three great eras from which to date the liberty of the world, that of Moses, that of the Christian, and that of Alfred." Moses saw the establishment of an agrarian commonwealth, the Christian epoch was ushered in on the broadest republican principles.[2] Alfred, the great and good, again established in England the agrarian commonwealth, federating upwards through tithings and hundreds and counties.[3] Alfred was the third saviour of the liberties of the world: his exertions "produced the present enlightened, free and improved state of European society". His is the only constitution England ever had, if it is properly called a constitution. All the tyranny of the pagan Norman Conquest could not obliterate it: and ever since Englishmen have been struggling for its recovery: constitutional and arbitrary principles have been in continual conflict.[4] Now a fourth epoch was at hand. It was time that the feudal system, introduced by the pagan Norman Conquest, should be abolished; time to call upon those whose property originated in conquest for a restoration. "They are not the nation, but the masters of the nation." They should be pensioned off.[5] "All the land, the waters, the mines, the houses, and all permanent feudal property must return to the people, the whole

[1] Cf. Morton, *The English Utopia*, pp. 118, 125–7. The demand for parochial or congregational independence of church and state was in the 17th century the hall-mark of those sectaries whose views were really radical.

[2] *Christian Policy the Salvation of the Empire* (second edition, 1816), pp. iii, 8. Both editions were published in the same year.

[3] The London Corresponding Society, by a pleasing Saxonism, had organised its members in groups of ten, with a "tithingman" at their head. (*The London Corresponding Society's Addresses and Reports*, 1792, p. 9).

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13, 22.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 16. Evans was prepared to give generous compensation. Dukes were to receive pensions of £40,000 a year, and others less on a sliding scale (p. 30).

people, to be administered in partnership" by the parishes. This "is our natural situation, all our improvements lead us towards its accomplishment, it arises out of our old Saxon institutions and the part, the very small part, recaptured as it were from the Conquest at different times . . ."[1] Whatever we may think of that as a statement of historical fact, it is a magnificent culmination to the myth. If Paine looks back to the Levellers, Spence and Evans look back to Winstanley: and all three look forward to socialism.

It is difficult to assess the influence of the Spenceans. They appear to degenerate rapidly into a politically innocuous sect. And yet—the idea of an egalitarian rural community was an unconscionable time dying. Its ghost haunted the labour movement long after the reality had disappeared. From the earliest writings of Owen to the last disintegration of Chartism, and beyond, men thought they could escape from capitalism by building rural co-operative or communist communities. The ultimate influence of this dream was diversionary; but its powerful hold over the nascent working class surely owes much to the old old traditions of Anglo-Saxon freedom, of lost rights and lost property which it was still hoped to recapture, and to those dying institutions which it was still hoped to revivify.

Paine's directly political approach was however the more obvious influence on the labour movement. For him William the Bastard was only one example among many of class tyranny: the remedy was not a restoration of lost rights, not a re-adjustment of the checks and balances of the constitution, but a real transfer of sovereignty to the people. "The SWINISH MULTITUDE", declared a committee of the London Corresponding Society in 1795, "are well aware that it matters very little who are the HOG DRIVERS, while the present wretched system of corruption is in existence."[2] Paine's works, reprinted in 1817, played a big part in moulding working-class thought. Godwin's influence must also have contributed to forming this semi-anarchist attitude. Godwin laid no stress on Anglo-Saxon liberties, but he referred contemptuously to "the feudal system" as "a ferocious monster devouring wherever it came all that the friend of humanity regards with attachment and love".[3] And Shelley took it for granted that there had been "a continual struggle for liberty on the part of the

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 16–17, 25. The idea of reconquest seems to come from Paine. See above, p. 47.

[2] *The Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society Revised and Corrected* (1795), p. 81. "The swinish multitude" was Burke's notorious phrase, used against Paine.

[3] *Political Justice* (1793), II, p. 31.

people, and an uninterrupted attempt at tightening the rein of oppression, and encouraging ignorance and impotence, by the oligarchy to whom the first William parcelled out the property of the aborigines at the conquest of England by the Normans."[1]

The Black Dwarf in 1817 drew a familiar picture of the post-Conquest period of conflict "between the people, who wished to be free, and the monarchs, who wished them to be slaves". But the moral which this fighting plebeian journal drew was not so traditional.

> "As the power is *always* on the side of the people when they choose to act, it followed as a matter of course that whenever a single point was put to the test of the sword, the people were always ultimately victorious. . . . The country has boasted of being free because Magna Carta was enacted, when the least share of penetration would have taught us that Magna Carta was only enacted because our ancestors were determined to be free."[2]

Paine, Godwin, Shelley, the Spenceans, *The Black Dwarf*: they all concentrated on inspiring hatred and contempt for the oligarchy and its state, with a view to their overthrow, rather than on reminding Englishmen of their ancient liberties with a view to reform. But so long as the main enemy was the aristocracy and the unreformed parliament, the fundamental cleavage which Yorke had so sharply described was not emphasised. *The Black Dwarf* in 1818 published Major Cartwright's "Legacy to the Reformers," which restated his creed as he had learnt it nearly half a century earlier. The only note which could not have been found in *An Historical Essay on the English Constitution* was the statement that "the constitution . . . necessarily existed anterior to all law; and very long anterior to all recorded law."[3] For that opposes an ideal constitution to actual law, as Paine opposed the rights of man to the constitution.

IX. THE WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENT

From the eighteen-twenties the emphasis shifts again.[4] The society of rural communities which nourished memories and aspirations

[1] *Proposals for an Association of . . . Philanthropists* (1812), in *Prose Works* (1912), I, p. 275.
[2] No. 1, January 29, 1817, p. 1.
[3] *The Black Dwarf*, extra number, March 23, 1818, p. 2.
[4] It is with every reservation that I venture to suggest even an approximate date. Shifts in ideas are notoriously difficult to pin down, and my own knowledge of this period is insufficient for me to speak with confidence. Perhaps I have post-dated. The

centring round survivals of ancient institutions was in full dissolution. England's industrial expansion was rapidly increasing the numbers of a proletariat which retained no links with the land. The working-class movement was slowly working out its own ideology. In the eighteen-twenties we meet the word "socialism" for the first time. The great struggles before and after 1832 showed the profound division of interests between the "bourgeois" radicals and the working class majority of the population. Both Paine and Spence made their contributions to the thought of Chartism, but the Norman Yoke was not important in the theories of either: in those of the still more influential Owen it had no place at all. And Richard Carlile, who edited Paine's works and shared his contempt for arguments from constitutional precedent, threw overboard the last remnants of belief in Anglo-Saxon freedom. In 1820 he replied in *The Republican* to "a friend to the primitive common law", who had argued that "the old common law of England", as it had existed under Britons, Danes and Saxons, guaranteed full religious toleration. "This 'primitive common law' ", declared Carlile, "is no more than nonsense, and productive of nothing but common mischief". Parliaments were not a primitive institution, but were established in 1265 by the armed violence of Simon de Montfort; "and experience teaches that there is no other means of obtaining beneficial changes in the political state of our country". "What is called the constitution of England is a mere farce and by-word."[1] It is the first occasion which I have encountered of Saxon constitutionalism being denounced as diversionary. Henceforward, the radicals of the Painite tradition were increasingly to refer to the Norman Conquest merely as an example of the violent origin of class power, with little reference to the society that preceded it.

Carlile's point can be illustrated by the very popular poem which the Chartist Thomas Cooper wrote whilst imprisoned in Stafford jail for his political activities: *The Purgatory of Suicides* (1845), dedicated to Thomas Carlyle. The poet longed to see an England in which man should value love more than money, and should strive "to make the Poor's heart-smile thy sole delight". He expressed this dream in a

Norman Yoke does not seem to be important in the upsurge after 1815, and I have not found it as a vital part of the thought of any major radical or working-class reformer after 1800, except Cartwright; and his ideas had been formed far earlier. Thomas Evans was a secondary figure.

[1] *The Republican*, II, pp. 198–9, February 25, 1820. I have not looked at the following periodicals: *Alfred and Westminster Evening Gazette* (1810), continued as *Alfred* (December 1810–11); *London Alfred or the People's Recorder* (1819); *Alfred* (1831–3).

"Fond wish that, now a thousand years have rolled,
To Alfred's land it might, once more, befall
That sun of human glories to behold—
A monarch scorning blood-stained gawds and gold,
To build the throne in a blest People's love!
It may not be! Custom, soul-numbing, cold,
Her web hath round thee from thy cradle wove:
Can heart of a born thrall with pulse of Freedom move?"

The memory of Alfred suggested the possibility of a future in which murder and war shall be abolished "in Alfred's realm":[1] but it did not tell the poet how that future was to be won. Here we can see both the tenacity of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and its powerlessness to furnish a programme of action. In the 'forties established institutions and ideas still seemed to the Chartist poet too strong to overthrow, and the people of England too servile to make a revolution. There remained the old naïve illusion of the peasantry, a popular monarchy above classes.[2] Cooper ended up as a Methodist preacher.

Yet for the middle class the free Anglo-Saxons were not dead. Indeed, the years 1820–80 were in a sense their heyday. The bourgeois radical tradition, whose reformist thesis of the continuity of the constitution seemed to have been so triumphantly vindicated in 1832, became respectable in literary circles, and provided a real stimulus to historical research. *Ivanhoe* (1820) contains a rousing song against the Norman Yoke and some interesting linguistic speculations. Keats almost subscribed to Hare's views on the superiority of Anglo-Saxon elements in the English language.[3] Bulwer-Lytton's *Harold, Last of the Saxon Kings*, Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake* and Tennyson's *Harold* are only the most obvious examples in which the legend serves the *nationalist* purposes of the ruling class. Emerson called the Norman founders of the peerage "filthy thieves"; Borrow "hated and abominated the name of Norman".[4] The most popular of the Victorian poets reduced to a truism that revolutionary discovery of the early bourgeoisie:

" 'Tis only noble to be good.
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

[1] *The Purgatory of Suicides*, Book VII, stanzas xii–xiii, xxv.

[2] This illusion had wrecked many movements of popular revolt in England, from 1381 onwards. It has been shared by the peasantry of many countries.

[3] Scott, *Ivanhoe*, chapter 27; Tillyard, *The Miltonic Setting* (1947), pp. 107–16.

[4] *English Traits*, in Emerson's *Works* (1882), III, p. 50; *Wild Wales*, chapter 2.

In France the Revolution revived the corresponding French tradition, "back to the free Gauls". Thierry, the exponent of this view, also believed that the English civil war of the 17th century was waged between the descendants of Norman lords and the descendants of medieval villeins.[1] In England a whole school of liberal and radical historians turned to the Anglo-Saxon past to seek inspiration for the present—Kemble, Freeman, Stubbs, J. R. Green. The publication of the records of our early history, begun by the 17th-century antiquarians, was resumed under government patronage. In 1861, when Mr. Gladstone was accused of making a dangerously democratic constitutional innovation in asserting the financial supremacy of the House of Commons, he could retort with some confidence that he was merely "restoring that good old constitution which took its root in Saxon times".[2]

The Norman Yoke theory, then, was not only a stimulus to political action: it was also a stimulus to historical research. It is easy to decry the history written in the quest for the free Anglo-Saxons. The 17th-century antiquarians evolved the Whig legend which bedevilled our understanding of the past for two centuries. One sympathises today with the shrewd scepticism of a Filmer, a Hobbes, a Brady, or a Hume, all of whom were political conservatives. Professor Butterfield has suggested that the historical knowledge of the parliamentary reformers of the 1770s was at least 80 years out of date.[3] On merely historical grounds, Burke had a good case, and Paine was wise to shift the argument from historical to natural right. But it is too simple to dismiss the stimulus of the Norman Yoke as though it merely produced propagandist history. Alfred did not establish either bi-cameral parliaments or trial by jury as it existed in the 18th century. But there is objective reality underlying the idea of Saxon freedom, in the traditions of a more equal society, and the surviving communal and democratic institutions of rural England. The degeneracy of the whole unreformed system of government in the 18th century was also objective reality. The tendency to deny those facts, whether in the 17th or 20th century, was as unhistorical as the full-blooded theory of continuity.

[1] *La Conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands* (1825), III, p. 408.

[2] Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, CLXII, p. 2,249.

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 345. Granville Sharp had some realistic remarks about the "disgraceful and uncivilised customs" of the Saxons in *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery* (1769), p. 112; but that note dies out in radical literature after the publication of the *Historical Essay on the English Constitution* two years later. Adam Smith knew that feudalism as a social and political order, if not as a military system, existed in England before 1066. (*The Wealth of Nations*, World's Classics, I, pp. 457–8.)

Nor was it so obvious in the mid 18th century that Brady had been right. The greatest authority was Montesquieu: and he cited Tacitus to show that the English system of government had been "discovered in the woods".[1] As late as 1819 a respectable middle-class organ like the *Edinburgh Review* was aware that it was challenging Prynne and Brady, as well as the Tory Hallam, in asserting the pre-Conquest origins of the House of Commons. But it felt that the case was still open to argument, and it argued from the comparative history of the Germanic peoples in an entirely unemotional way, "protesting in due form against any inferences which may be drawn" by Major Cartwright or the Hampden Club in favour of annual parliaments and manhood suffrage.[2] The labours of the great Whig and radical historians of the 19th century were helped rather than hindered by the prepossessions with which they started, and which they all too slowly threw off. What would the splendid tradition of British historical writing be without the honoured names of Camden, Selden, Prynne, Stubbs, Green?

But by the time the Whig historians were getting seriously to work, the theory of the Norman Yoke had ceased to be of crucial significance for those who were challenging the existing order of society—Carlile, the Chartists and the working-class movement. Indeed, after 1832 (as after 1660) the theory of continuity became an anti-revolutionary theory: bourgeois freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent. The rural society which nurtured the backward-looking ideology of the Norman Yoke was shattered by economic developments; the last vestiges of communal organs of self-government were wiped out by the same process and by reforms of local government. Only when Saxon freedom had ceased to be a rallying cry for the discontented masses did it begin to be enthusiastically taught in the lecture-rooms of Oxford. And ultimately, in the racial form which was rarely hinted at by the earlier revolutionaries, but on which the 19th-century historians laid more stress, the conception of a unique Germanic and Anglo-Saxon heritage of freedom could be perverted to justify German or Anglo-Saxon world domination.

We may perhaps compare the part played in Russian history by Narodnik ideas. They sprang from a similar environment, from the village commune. They roused the peasants in opposition to the Tsarist régime and the power of landlords. They too stimulated an impressive school of historians, of whom Vinogradoff is the best known

[1] *De l'Esprit des Lois*, Book XI, chapter 6. The phrase was often quoted.
[2] *Edinburgh Review*, No. 63, pp. 25–7. Cf. Carlile's views quoted on p. 55 above.

in England. But in Russia too, by the time popular ideas had reached lecture-rooms and text-books, they had become tainted with Slav racialism, and had ceased to be progressive in internal politics. For their roots were in a society which had been left behind by economic development.

So we must not be too severe in our condemnation of 17th-century antiquarians, 18th-century radicals, or even 19th-century Whig historians. They tried, of course, to have it both ways. It is logically difficult to believe simultaneously in degeneration and progress, though Rousseau did his best. The assumption that "all states in the beginning are venerable",[1] and that the highest political task is to restore the original purity of the constitution, contradicts that other great progressive idea whose wide dissemination dates from the 17th century: the idea that the Moderns were as good as or better than the Ancients.[2] But bourgeois ideology has always contained contradictions of this sort, necessarily. *The Patriot* published translations from Rousseau side by side with extracts from *An Historical Essay on the English Constitution.* The London Corresponding Society declared that "the natural and imprescriptible right of the people to universal suffrage is founded not only in justice and true policy, but in the ancient constitution of the country".[3] And many other examples could be quoted.

But on history the reformers could be challenged. Paeans in praise of the ancient constitution suited those who wished to preserve the *status quo.* Henry Yorke ended up, as Paine did not, a law-and-order man. But even Paine's brushing aside of history to rest his claims on natural right is no more satisfactory, no less bourgeois. For abstract rights of man, as conceived in bourgeois society, inevitably take the assumptions of that society for granted. Filmer, Burke and Hegel reasonably insisted that all political institutions are, and that all political thinking should be, rooted in history. But the fact that backward-looking political philosophers could pick holes in the doctrine of natural rights does not prove them more "right" than the bourgeois revolutionaries. Both sets of ideas represent the *Weltanschauung* of an exploiting class, and we are taking the "Tory" critique at its strongest point. Neither Burke nor Paine will do, and if we must choose most of us would prefer Paine.

But in the long run the Paine-Godwin line of thought was inadequate

[1] *Vox Plebis* (1646), p. 1 (opening sentence).

[2] Bacon started it, and down to Swift's *Battle of the Books* most of the leading figures in English literature were involved in the controversy between the Ancients and the Moderns.

[3] *Narrative of the Proceedings at the General Meeting, July 31, 1797,* p. 19.

for the labour movement. Its extreme anti-authoritarian individualism led to anarchism: serious historical analysis was necessary before the working class could become conscious of itself *as a class* with a specific function to perform. Here perhaps the body of ideas associated with the Norman Yoke contributed something important by focusing attention on the relation between force, property and the origin of the state. The ultimate answer was that towards which Winstanley and the Spenceans were groping: a conception of history which sees society as a whole, with institutions and ideologies themselves related to the social structure, and so (as long as society remains divided into classes) of only relative value.[1] Marxism, by combining Burke's sense of history with Paine's sense of justice, gives us an approach both to the study of the past and to political action immeasurably superior to any which preceded it. Previous constitutions proclaimed the rights of man, *ad nauseum*; the Soviet constitution however guaranteed them.

X. CONCLUSION

We have traced one version of the theory from the London burgher's *Mirror of Justices* to Gladstone—from the first timid protest from "the underworld of largely-unrecorded thinking", to the full triumph of the English liberal bourgeoisie. The life of this version coincides with the rise and expansion of capitalism. It originated to criticise the institutions of feudal society. It was a rallying cry in the bourgeois revolution. The compromises of 1660 and 1688 carried over elements of feudalism into bourgeois society, and when these were again challenged the theory of the Norman Yoke revived in the fight for reform of Parliament. It declined when no significant section of the bourgeoisie any longer wished to fight against feudal survivals: when the Third Estate was no longer united.

We have seen the other, the revolutionary-democratic, version of the theory in the Levellers and Diggers and again in Paine and the Spenceans. Its long life, I have suggested, is linked with the slowly disintegrating village community: its persistence into the labour movement is a consequence of the centuries-long process by which, as capitalism developed, the producers were divorced—gradually and slowly or

[1] The nearest that the 18th century got to this conception was in John Millar's *An Historical View of the English Government* (1787). Millar showed how the Saxon Witanagemot had been transformed into the Tudor Parliament in consequence of great "revolutions of property". (Millar's work is analysed by R. Pascal's "Property and Society" in *The Modern Quarterly*, March 1938; and see also below, pp. 90ff.)

violently and suddenly—from the means of production in land and industry. "True freedom", Winstanley had said, "lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation."[1] As the peasants were driven from the land, as the ruined artisans were herded into the factories, they looked back nostalgically to the days when they had some control over the forces which shaped their lives: to a lost freedom. But it was centuries before the worker was so deprived of every other resource that he could be forced to give the whole of his time and the whole of his labour to the capitalist: it was centuries before the backward look was replaced by that consciousness of their strength *as a class* which enabled the workers to look forward to a future, their future.[2] The rude shock of the betrayal of 1832 cured the working-class movement of the dreams of constitutional reform which the bourgeois-radical Norman Yoke theory had fostered. The re-thinking which it produced led to Chartism and socialism.

Nevertheless there was an epilogue, and it confirms, I believe, my general thesis. The theory continued to be used by some radicals, and even by some Chartists: but it was restricted to one point of attack: the landed aristocracy, political oligarchy, social privilege. "Landlords, then, and landlords only, are the oppressors of the people," declared Thomas Evans.[3] In the year of the first Reform Bill a poem in Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian* contrasted the great days of good King Alfred with those of William IV, and described the aristocracy as

> "—A most tremendous host
> Of locusts from the Norman coast;
> A beggarly, destructive breed,
> Sprung from the BASTARD'S spurious seed."[4]

Cobbett was one of the many who referred the origins of English landownership to the Norman Conquest;[5] and the preface to the 1838 edition of Ogilvie's *Essay on the Right of Property in Land* said that "the present reprint is submitted to the public at a time when the demands of

[1] *Selected Works* (ed. Hamilton), pp. 122–3.

[2] Like every historical statement, this over-simplifies. The idea of progress was held by some bourgeois thinkers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and the ideas of Bacon, Locke and Bentham influenced the radical petty-bourgeoisie no less than did backward-looking theories. There is interaction between the idea of progress and the idea of decay in all revolutionary thought before Marxism; the contradictions reflected those of historical reality and could not be resolved within the framework of bourgeois thought.

[3] Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[4] No. 55, p. 445, and No. 59, p. 479. Cf. No. 76, p. 615.

[5] *Legacy to Labourers*, 1834, Letter II. Cf. *The Opinions of William Cobbett* (ed. G. D. H. and M. Cole), p. 55.

the labouring classes are beginning to be heard from the deep degradation to which they have been submitted ever since the Norman Conquest".[1]

In Harney's *Democratic Review*, in 1849, it was argued that

> "this huge monopoly, this intolerable usurpation of the soil, had its foundation in force and fraud. . . . From the hour of the Norman Conquest . . . the whole history of the ancestors of the present usurpers of the soil is a crusade of confiscation, plunder, rapine and devastation. . . . The present aristocracy are the descendants of freebooters."[2]

The most vigorous invective is to be found in *The Aristocracy of England* published by "John Hampden Junior" in 1846.

> "It is difficult to say which are the most revolting subjects of contemplation, the bastard king who led the way, the ready tools who deluged a whole land with innocent blood at his command, or the reptile swarms who, in the following age, stole in after them to deeds and usurpations equally detestable. Let the English people, when they hear of high blood, recollect the innocent blood of their fathers on which it fattened, and the spawn of miscellaneous, nameless and lawless adventurers, from whom it really flows."[3]

After the decline of Chartism the theory of the Norman Yoke persisted among advanced radical working men, free-thinkers and land reformers. But for them it was little more than an illustrative flourish. It was given a last lease of life by the revival of republicanism and the land reform agitation of the eighteen-seventies. "The workers", declared Boon, who had been secretary and president of the Land and Labour League, "are nothing but white wage slaves to the same classes who have always been licensed by the land robbers to rob and plunder their forefathers from the time of the Norman Conquest."[4] "William the Conqueror is the landlords' god, and the people of England are their slaves," said the republican William Harrison Riley, who was associated with the First International; "William the Conqueror's landlords will

[1] Ogilvie's *Essay*, which contains no reference to the theory of the Norman Yoke, was first published in 1781.

[2] July 1849, p. 46: Alfred A. Walton, "To the Trades of Great Britain and Ireland". Cf. Harney's *The Friend of the People*, No. 28, June 21, 1851, p. 240.

[3] p. 21. There are 336 pages in this vein, all highly quotable.

[4] M. J. Boon, *A Protest Against the Present Emigrationists* (1869), quoted by R. Harrison in "The Land and Labour League", *Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History*, Amsterdam, 1953, p. 176.

find that they must give way to god's landlords, the whole people."[1] It was to a meeting called by J. S. Mill's Land Tenure Reform Association in 1873 that Thorold Rogers declared "The custom of primogeniture... was introduced into this country by William the Norman". It "is the symbol of the nation's slavery to the foreign conqueror, just as it is at the present time the means by which the owners of the great landed estates appropriate to themselves all, or nearly all, the forces of government".[2]

Our Old Nobility, written by Howard Evans in 1879, in interesting contrast to *The Aristocracy of England* a generation earlier, contains only one passing reference to the Norman Conquest. This, however, strikes a significant new note since it equates the conquered Saxons with "mere Afghans and Zulus, who, by the divine right of triumphant scoundrelism, calling itself superior civilization, had to put their necks beneath the yoke".[3] Robert Blatchford, in *Britain for the British*, argued that titles to land-ownership must be based on the Norman Conquest, or on theft by enclosure of common land: in either case "he who has taken land by force has a title to it only so long as he can hold it by force.... The law was made by the same gentlemen who appropriated and held the land".[4] The last semi-serious use I have found of the theory occurs, significantly enough, during the crisis of 1911. The anti-landlord budget of 1909 provoked a last flicker of resistance to a bourgeois government from the House of Lords. A pamphlet produced on this occasion, entitled *Who shall rule, Briton or Norman?* argued from a series of maps that south-eastern England, the area of Tory dominance, is also Norman England. In that area 570 livings are in the gift of peers, "and every one of these clergymen is more or less a political agent of the patron who placed him there. This is the rampart behind which Normanism lies entrenched."[5]

[1] *British Slavery, a tract dedicated to all working men* (1870), a penny pamphlet.

[2] *Report of the Public Meeting held at the Exeter Hall, London, 18 March 1873.* Cf. also F. Rogers, *How to Redress the Wrongs of the People* (? late 1860s), C. C. Cattell, *The Abolition of the House of Lords*, and *On Monarchy* (1872); C. Watts, *The Government and the People* (c. 1872); W. Maccall, *The Land and the People* (1873–4).

[3] "Noblesse Oblige" (Howard Evans), *Our Old Nobility* (second edition, 1879), p. 252. See p. 64, n. 1 below.

[4] *Britain for the British* (1902), pp. 52–4. Blatchford took this point from Henry George, for whom see p. 65 below.

[5] pp. 27–8, 40–2. The author used the pseudonym Cynicus, a name that in itself testifies to the decadence of the theory.

A separate essay might be written on the Church and the Norman Yoke. *The Mirror* was anti-clerical. Protestant reformers equated the Yoke with Popery. The first encroachment of the Pope on the liberties of the English Church was made under William the Conqueror, said Sir John Davies, a member of the Society of Antiquaries (Fuller, *Church History of Britain*, 1842, I, p. 266). Later the charge of Normanism was transferred

The peers and the parsons are still there: but they are no longer denounced as agents of Normanism. The rise of imperialism and of the labour movement have produced new emphases. The bearers of the White Man's Burden would have to lay it down if the Noble Savage were really Noble.[1] Bourgeois historians no longer wish to emphasise the original equality and freedom of primitive man: and more exact scholarship has shown that in any event the Anglo-Saxons in 1066 were by no means living in a state of primitive equality. Few Liberals today recall the promise to abolish the House of Lords made in the preamble to the Parliament Act: the advance of socialism has caused a closing of the ranks of the propertied classes similar to that which we saw after 1660. The aristocracy has been assimilated to the bourgeoisie, and the singling out of the peerage for attack is no longer safe for bourgeois radicals (the Lloyd George of the Limehouse speeches had no successor) or important for the labour movement. Once the main enemy became manifestly capitalism, the labour movement had to transcend the theory of the Norman Yoke. "The reformation that England now is to endeavour," Winstanley grasped in a fumbling way, "is not to remove the Norman Yoke only.... No, that is not it."[2]

Yet the theory did not die: it was subsumed by theories of socialism. Paine and Spence, who used the Bastard and his banditti to re-emphasise that naked power lay behind the constitution, are the connecting links. They ridicule the pretensions to sacredness of any institutions which perpetuate the rule of a propertied class. We can see the fruits of this

to bishops: in 1641 both Archbishop Williams and Sir Simonds D'Ewes attributed the creation of bishops' baronies to the Norman kings, aiming only at their own financial and political advantage (Hacket, *Scrinia Reserata*, II, p. 173; ed. Coates, *Journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*, p. 31). After the revolution, clerics like Stillingfleet and White Kennett blamed the Norman nobility and bishops for the impoverishment of the lesser (Anglo-Saxon) clergy, despoiled to enrich Norman monasteries (E. Stillingfleet, *Ecclesiastical Causes relating to the Duties and Rights of the Parochial Clergy*, 1698, I, p. xi; Kennett, *The Case of Impropriations*, 1704, p. 23). Kennett used the familiar phrase "a badge of the Norman Conquest" to describe appropriations. For Winstanley, as for Cynicus, the clergy themselves are a rampart of Normanism; whilst the *Historical Essay on the English Constitution* stated that the Saxon mode of government was destroyed by a combination of the clergy with the Bastard. The clergy had had no place in Saxon Parliaments (Coke would have disagreed here), and therefore favoured William, who owed to them his title "the Conqueror". "The lives, liberty and property of the people of England were surrendered into the hands of the Normans by the baneful influence of the clergy" (pp. 34, 43).

[1] In the late eighteen-sixties one W. Trapnell Deverell thought the Norman Conquest had been "a great boon to this country" because it welded together a race "whose manifest destiny it is, under one form or another, to subjugate and civilise the habitable globe". (*The Norman Conquest*, n.d., p. 20).

[2] *Selected Works* (ed. Hamilton), p. 60. Winstanley was writing at a time when monarchy and house of lords had been abolished, the church disestablished.

approach when Bronterre O'Brien tells us how "our own ruling classes . . . wrung their *magna carta* from King John".[1]

The free Anglo-Saxons became irrelevant to the working class as soon as it was conscious of itself as a class. The name of good King Alfred was called upon in the campaign for shorter hours, since he was believed to have said that eight hours each day should be spent on work, eight on play, and eight in sleep.[2] But once theories of socialism had been grasped, men shook themselves free of the past. "Demands for the restoration of Saxon rights" were ridiculed by the Chartist *Cleave's Penny Gazette* in 1841.[3] They play no significant part in the thought of Hetherington, Bronterre O'Brien or Harney. Ernest Jones's *Notes to the People* passed lightly over "the Norman land-robbery" because "the people" had become "repossessed of the land in the civil wars"; but he recalled Hereward the Wake as "the last defender of England".[4] Henry George, who inspired the English labour movement to believe that poverty could be abolished, laid little stress on the theory, although he assumed that landed property in England went back to the Norman Conquest.[5] With William Morris we are already in the new world of Marxism. He understood that feudalism was arising in Saxon England, and so was disinclined to regard the social effects of the Conquest as catastrophic.[6] But he was profoundly interested in pre-feudal times, and in *The House of the Wolfings* and *The Roots of the Mountains* we have a Marxist imagination re-interpreting the age-old dream expressed in the idea of "Anglo-Saxon liberties".

The theory of the Norman Yoke, like other backward-looking theories of lost rights, had its roots in the fact that an early stage of primitive equality and communism was superseded by the establishment of private property and the state. Scientific anthropology came to confirm the fundamental truth of such legends just when they were

[1] *Bronterre's National Reformer*, I, No. 3, January 21, 1837, p. 22. Cf. Hare, pp. 27–8 above.

[2] S. Webb and H. Cox, *The Eight Hours Day* (1891), p. 4; J. Rae, *Eight Hours for Work* (1894), p. 9. Round about 1900, the millennary, Alfred's name was in continual use. The Lord's Day Observance Society quoted him as the founder of the English Sunday.

[3] November 6, 1841. [4] 1851, I, pp. 104, 435–6; cf. 173–4.

[5] *Progress and Poverty* (edition of 1883), pp. 307, 325–6, 337, 345; *Social Problems* (1883), pp. 65–6. J. Morrison Davidson in *The Annals of Toil* used the violence and greed of the Norman invaders as a stick to beat the modern aristocracy with, but also went to some pains to explode the myth of the free and noble Saxons (Bellamy Library, n.d., esp. I, pp. 46–51). Davidson was an extreme radical republican who had contacts with the advocates of land nationalisation. He was present at the formation of the Democratic Federation, and helped to make Winstanley's works known to the working-class movement.

[6] *Collected Works*, XVIII, p. xviii.

being discarded by the working-class movement. Their place was taken not by a new myth, but by a scientific theory of socialism, nourished by a historical understanding of humanity's centuries of struggle, and of the part played by myths in that struggle. Marxism has subsumed what is valuable in the Norman Yoke theory—its recognition of the class basis of politics, its deep sense of the *Englishness* of the common people, of the proud continuity of their lives, institutions and struggles with those of their forefathers, its insistence that a propertied ruling class is from the nature of its position fundamentally alien to the interests of the mass of the people. "They are not the nation, but the masters of the nation." The working class must stand forth as "the defender of England".

But communist society is no longer envisaged as a return to the Spartan virtues of primitive society. The achievements of civilisation have at last made possible the realisation of that other dream of the oppressed people, the land of Cokaygne, an economy of abundance.[1] Once the rôle of the working-class movement in modern industrial society has been grasped, nostalgic yearnings for an idealized past give place to a scientific programme of action for building the future out of the present. But even a scientific programme can be sterile if it is not infused with an imaginative spirit like that which saw the enemy as "the French Bastard and his banditti".

[1] See A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, chapter I and Appendix.

2

FROM HIERARCHY TO EVOLUTION IN THE THEORY OF BIOLOGY

S. F. MASON

FROM late antiquity until modern times the biological sciences, and indeed the physical, were dominated by the concept of hierarchy. Throughout the middle ages it was generally accepted that the universe was composed of a graded chain of entities, stretching down from the Deity in the empyrean heaven at the periphery of the world, through the hierarchies of angelic beings propelling the celestial spheres, to the ordered ranks of mankind, animals, plants, and minerals of the lowly terrestial sphere at the centre of the cosmic system. This world and all of its inhabitants were thought to be the product, not of an evolutionary process, but of a divine creative act, and it was supposed that each species remained fixed in its original form for all time. In this way the cosmic order was sustained, for the government of the universe was deemed to be such that a given being had dominion over those below it in the scale of creatures and served those above it in the scale, and thus any evolution of the species would have thrown into disarray the whole process of cosmic rule.

Such a corporate, hierarchical view of the universe had been elaborated by the scholars of late-ancient, and medieval society, for the hierarchical institutions of which it served as a sanction and a rationale. Thus pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite of the 5th century, who arranged the angelic beings mentioned in the Scriptures into a hierarchy, justified the hierarchy of Church government on earth by means of his arrangement.[1] Consequently when feudal institutions were attacked in early modern times the hierarchical view of the world came up for criticism. Thus Calvin during the 16th century questioned the existence of a hierarchy of celestial beings in his polemic against the hierarchical government of the Catholic Church,[2] and in a similar vein of thought Voltaire, some two centuries later, threw doubts upon

[1] Dionysius, *Works*, trans. J. Parker, 2 vols. (1897), II, p. 22 and *passim*.

[2] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge, 2 vols., (1949), I, p. 144; II, p. 330 and p. 360.

the whole idea that the universe was composed of a graded chain of beings.

> "The gradation of beings, rising from the lowest to the Great Supreme—the scale of infinity—is an idea that fills us with admiration; but when steadily regarded, this phantom disappears, as apparitions were wont to vanish at the crowing of the cock. The imagination is pleased with the imperceptible transition from brute matter to organised matter—from plants to zoophytes—from zoophytes to animals—from animals to men—from men to genii—from these genii clad in a light aerial body, to immaterial substances of a thousand different orders, rising from beauty to perfection, up to God himself. This hierarchy is very pleasing to young men, who look upon it as the pope and cardinals, followed by the archbishops and bishops, after whom are the vicars, curates and priests, the deacons and subdeacons, then come the monks, and the capuchins bring up the rear."[1]

In criticising the idea that the entities of the world composed a hierarchical scale, Voltaire noted that there appeared to be no gradations whatsoever between the heavenly bodies. Here he was indebted to the work of the men who engineered the scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries, for it was they who had made the initial attack upon the medieval concept of hierarchy, and had done away with the idea as it had applied to the celestial sphere.[2] The Reformers and the contemporary natural philosophers had denied to the angelic beings a position of any importance in the cosmic scheme, and they had assumed that the heavenly bodies were of the same status and nature as the earth, obeying the same mechanical laws. In the biological sciences, however, the concept of hierarchy lived on, for it was here that the idea had its greatest plausibility, finding a seemingly empirical verification in the obvious gradations between the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms, and between the individual species within each kingdom. The concept was enshrined in the "artifical" method of classifying animals and plants, following which organisms were ordered into a linear scale according to the indications given by a single, or a few characteristics, such as the nature of their reproductive organs. The "artificial"

[1] Article "Chain of Created Beings", in Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, English trans. (c. 1850), p. 255.

[2] S. F. Mason, *Past and Present*, 1953, pp. 3, 28; *Annals of Science*, 1953, pp. 9, 64.

method, and the concept of hierarchy which it embodied, did not pass unchallenged, for it was opposed by the "natural" method, according to which organisms were classified into natural families on the basis of as many characteristics as could be found. During the 16th and 17th centuries Protestant naturalists, such as Caspar Bauhin, 1560–1634, Lobelius, 1538–1616, and John Ray, 1627–1705, tended to follow the "natural" method, whilst Catholic naturalists, such as Andrea Cesalpino, 1524–1603, and Marcello Malpighi, 1628–94, tended to follow the "artificial". During the 18th century such divisions were less clear cut, and they were to some degree reversed, for the savants of Catholic France inclined towards atheism and the anti-hierarchical mechanical philosophy, whilst the Lutheran branch of Protestantism had become conservative and more hierarchical in outlook. Thus the French naturalist, Georges Buffon, 1707–88, adopted the "natural" system, while the most influential classifier of the 18th century, the Swede, Carl Linnaeus, 1707–78, used the "artificial" method to draw up a most comprehensive scale of organic nature.

Gradually, with the progress of natural history, and the development of bourgeois society, it came to be appreciated, even by its protagonists, that the hierarchical view of the organic world was no longer in accord with the existing state of scientific knowledge nor with the current ideology. The Swiss naturalist, Charles Bonnet, 1720–93, noted in 1764 that the traditional ascending hierarchy of the fish, the birds, and the quadrupeds, connected by the flying fish and the bat respectively, was a little dubious in view of the fact that the fish were connected directly to the quadrupeds by the seal.[1] On the ideological side of the question, it was felt by the Scotch naturalist, William Smellie, 1740–95, that the hierarchical view of the organic kingdom was associated with social institutions that no longer obtained in the Britain of the late 18th century.

> "In the chain of animals, man is unquestionably the chief or capital link, and from him all the other links descend by almost imperceptible gradations. . . . All of them possess degrees of perfection or of excellence proportional to their station in the universe. Even among mankind, which is a particular species, the scale of intellect is very extensive. What a difference between an enlightened philosopher and a brutal Hottentot? . . . The Gentoos, from certain political and religious institutions, have formed their people into different casts or

[1] C. Bonnet, *Contemplation de la Nature* (Amsterdam, 1764), Part III, chapter xxvi.

ranks, out of which their posterity can never emerge. To us, such institutions appear to be tyrannical, and restraints on the natural liberty of man. In some respects they are so: but they seem to have been originally results of wisdom and observation; for, independently of all political institutions, Nature herself has formed the human species into casts or ranks."[1]

During the course of its development, bourgeois society had engendered concepts of egalitarianism, progress, and individualism which stood in opposition to the hierarchical, static, and corporate, world view of medieval times, and in the 18th century these concepts began to shape the theory of natural history, which had remained the last resting place of the medieval world view in natural philosophy. At the same time empirical evidence was accumulated to show that the various animal and plant species could not be arranged naturally into the traditional linear scale of creatures, as the characteristics of the organic orders, genera, and species were such that they formed so many branches of a great tree of animate nature.[2] Ultimately the fusion of the two lines of development resulted in the evolutionary trees of organic descent drawn up by the 19th-century Darwinists, though these were preceded by other schemes of organic evolution and by other attacks upon the concept of hierarchy in biology.

The most important ideological strand in the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries had been the mechanical philosophy, which, with its insistence upon the mechanical status of all natural entities, had eliminated the concept of hierarchy from the physical sciences, notably from astronomy. Attempts were made in the 17th century, and more especially in the 18th, to deny the traditional gradations of the organic world by suggesting that plants, animals, and even man were merely mechanical contrivances, of greater or lesser complexity, but of the same qualitative nature. Descartes, 1596–1650, with whom the mechanical philosophy had first found a generalised expression, separated man from animals and plants by assigning to him a soul which guided the machinery of his body, but Lamettrie, 1709–51, denied the distinction, and regarded all organisms as mechanical contrivances.[3] However, even such a throughgoing mechanical materialist as Lamettrie found himself unable to surmount the view that animate

[1] William Smellie, *The Philosophy of Natural History*, 2 vols., (1799), II, p. 521.
[2] H. Daudin, *Les méthodes de la classification et l'idée de série en botanique et en zoologie de Linne à Lamarck* (1926), pp. 159 ff.
[3] J. de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (1750), pp. 17, 23, 35, 41, 79 and 82.

creatures formed a hierarchical scale of beings,[1] for their mechanisms were graded in complexity.

Within the confines of the mechanical world view of the late 17th and early 18th centuries it was not possible to effect a decisive break with the concept of hierarchy in biology, as the idea of progress, through which the break was made, only came to maturity with the agrarian, industrial, and political revolutions later in the 18th century. Neither Descartes nor Newton had thought of the universe as a system in progressive evolution. Descartes supposed that, in the beginning, giant cosmic whirlpools of matter had fashioned the primordial material of the universe by friction and attrition, according to the eternal laws of mechanics, until it had assumed the final arrangement of sidereal and solar systems which we observe today. In such a way any possible kind of primordial material would necessarily assume the present pattern of our world, so that our present world was the predetermined and stable end of any cosmic system. Newton thought of the universe as an evolutionary system even less than Descartes. For Newton, God had created the world in the form in which it is found at present, and had ordained the laws of mechanics which sustained the cosmic machine. Similarly it was thought that all living creatures had been constructed in their present forms at the beginning of time, together with all future generations of their kind, for animals and plants might be merely machines, but they were undoubtedly complex machines, requiring for their construction the skill of a Great Artificer as well as matter and motion. As the London physician, George Cheyne, put it in 1715:

> "If Animals and Vegetables cannot be produced from these [Matter and Motion], and I have clearly proved that they cannot, they must of necessity have existed from all eternity: and consequently that all the Animals and Vegetables that have existed, or shall exist, have actually been included in the first of every species."[2]

In this mechanical world of the early 18th century nothing had developed historically. Even human society was postulated to be the product of a single creative act— the agreement to the social contract— with little or no subsequent development. Hume averred in 1748:

> "Mankind are so much the same in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new in this particular. Its chief use is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature."[3]

[1] Offray de La Mettrie, *L'Homme-Plante* (ed. F. L. Rougier, 1936), preface.
[2] G. Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1715), p. 167.
[3] Quoted from C. L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the 18th Century Philosophers*, (1932).

In the same way the events which marked the turning point in the transition from feudal to bourgeois society were regarded as acts which, once accomplished, were finished for all time. The Protestant Reformation was proclaimed to be the restoration of the original Christianity, freed from its medieval accretions, whilst the new natural philosophy was announced to be a closed and final system of thought, like the system of Aristotle it was designed to replace. Francis Bacon suggested that he could construct this new system of natural philosophy,[1] given the necessary facts upon which to base it, whilst Descartes was of the view that he himself had in fact worked out such a system. "There is no phenomenon of nature whose explanation has been omitted in this treatise," Descartes wrote in his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644).[2] He also regarded his rules as the final statement of scientific method, stating that he did not think "the human intellect could ever discover better ones".[3] Bacon did not regard his rules as the definitive method of science. "I merely claim that my rules will make the process quicker and more reliable," he wrote, "I do not mean to say that they cannot be improved upon."[4]

Neither Bacon nor Descartes had the conception, which was to develop during the 18th century, that science was an ever expanding body of knowledge with practial applications progressively stemming from it. Bacon was a little nearer than Descartes to this idea of scientific progress as he envisaged a considerable advancement of the crafts through the application of scientific principles, and a development in the method of discovering such principles. The idea of technological progress, as propounded by Bacon, was influential in Britain during the Commonwealth, and early Restoration period, but by the end of the 17th century it had become somewhat attenuated and it did not become prominent again until the industrial revolution was under way.

Meanwhile the idea of progress in Britain was spiritualised, and solace was sought in the reflection that whilst man may achieve little on earth, his soul after death may progress indefinitely towards the highest perfection. Addison, who claimed to have originated the idea, wrote in 1711:

> "There is not, in my Opinion, a more pleasing and triumphant Consideration in Religion than this of the perpetual Progress which

[1] B. Farrington, *Francis Bacon*, (1951), p. 152.
[2] R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method etc.*, (Everyman ed., 1946), p. 221.
[3] Quoted by J. Rosenthal, *J. History of Ideas*, 1943, IV.
[4] Quoted by Farrington, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

> the Soul makes towards the Perfection of its Nature, without ever arriving at a Period in it. . . . Methinks this single Consideration, of the Progress of a finite Spirit to Perfection, will be sufficient to extinguish all Envy in inferior Natures, and all Contempt in superior. That Cherubim which now appears as a god to a human Soul, knows very well that the Period will come about in Eternity, when the Human Soul shall be as perfect as he himself now is. . . It is true, the higher Nature still advances, and by that means preserves his Distance and Superiority in the Scale of Being: but he knows how high soever the Station is of which he stands possessed at present, the inferior Nature will at length mount up to it, and shine forth in the same Degree of Glory."[1]

It was in this form that the sense of progress towards an egalitarian society, albeit in another world, was expressed in early 18th century England, and with it came one of the first suggestions towards the view that the great chain of beings was not a static hierarchy but an evolving scale. Addison himself did not apply this conception to the animal and plant kingdoms, though he was much concerned with natural history, calling upon the Royal Society to compile a study of animals based particularly upon "their peculiar aptitudes for the State of Being in which Providence has placed them."[2] Richard Bradley of Cambridge responded to Addison's demand in 1721 with his *Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature*, dealing with minerals, plants, and animals as links in the great chain of beings. Bradley, whilst adhering to the creation hypothesis, spoke of the gradation in nature as a gradual movement, and he paid particular attention to natural transformations, such as that of a caterpillar into a butterfly. These transformations, in Bradley's view, tended to level out the hierarchy of nature. Dealing with the development of the fish-like tadpole into the quadruped frog, he remarked: "May we look upon this as an extraordinary Perfection, and even more that Man himself can boast of, that Gift of Power in tasting life successively in different States and in different Elements?"[3] Unlike Smellie at the end of the century, Bradley thought that men the world over were much the same: "if it was possible they could be all born of the same Parents and have the same Education, they would vary no more in Understanding than Children of the same House".[4]

[1] *The Spectator*, No. 111, Everyman ed., I, p. 108.
[2] *The Spectator*, No. 121, Everyman ed., I, p. 145.
[3] R. Bradley, *A Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature*, (1721), p. 105.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Bradley's work was not widely known, but it had some influence, together with Addison's *Spectator*, upon Charles Bonnet at Geneva.[1] Bonnet, as we have seen, had doubts on empirical grounds as to the linearity of the chain of beings, but he supposed that such apparent defects were due to the imperfections of our sense organs, and that animals and plants in reality did compose a linear and continuous scale of creatures. Extending Addison's view, Bonnet thought that animals and plants, like man, possessed souls which were susceptible to increasing degrees of perfection. Moreover, he supposed that the terrestial bodies of living organisms underwent a progressive mutation from time to time in such a way that they all moved up the hierarchy of the chain of beings. Periodically, Bonnet thought, the world was engulfed by a major catastrophe, the last one being the Mosaic Flood. The bodies of all organisms were destroyed by these catastrophes, but the germs of their future generations lived on to undergo resurrection after each catastrophe had subsided in new and progressively higher forms.

The idea of ennoblement by the process of death and resurrection, which stretches back through alchemy and theology to the earliest and most primitive stage of human thought, was particularly prominent in the German natural philosophy of the 18th century by which Bonnet was influenced through Leibniz. The German natural philosophers attacked the medieval world view in ways which differed from those adopted by the British and the French, and such differences were particularly marked in the sphere of biological theory.[2] The Germans developed especially the bourgeois view of the autonomy of the individual which was opposed to the corporate element in the older view of the world. Thus the universe of Leibniz was composed of monads which were graded in perfection so that they formed a great chain of beings, but each monad was autonomous, having no relations with other monards, unlike the entities composing the medieval scale of nature which were connected by relations of domination and servitude. Freed from all external relationships, the monads moved themselves from within, and they were saved from anarchy by their Creator who had pre-established the harmony of their activities.

Subsequent German thinkers amplified the system of Leibniz, and they showed in particular how a scale of autonomous creatures could have come into being, employing the concepts of change and development elaborated by the mystic and alchemist, Jacob Boehme, 1575–1624.

[1] R. Savioz, *La Philosophie de Charles Bonnet de Geneve* (1948), p. 3. A Thienemann, *Zoologische Annalen*, III (1910), p. 185.

[2] S. F. Mason, *Annals of Science*, IX (1953), p. 154.

The movement culminated at the turn of the 18th century with the German school of nature-philosophy, composed of Schelling, Hegel, and particularly Oken, who had a considerable influence upon the biological sciences. Oken supposed that the Deity, or the Absolute, had undergone a process of intellectual self-development in a dialectical fashion, and that each stage of this development had found an externalised manifestation as an individual entity of the natural world. Thus a scale of creatures was brought into being, each one representing a stage in the development of the divine self-consciousness, until the head of the scale was reached in man, who was a complete manifestation of the Deity. In this scheme each organism was an autonomous production, connected with no other creatures. In particular, no one animal had evolved from another, for there was an evolution only in the Absolute itself. Indeed the death and decay of one creature was necessary for the generation of a new and higher organism.

> "Organisms change, because they are numbers, thoughts of God. The process of change in organic individuals is that of their destruction. Death is only a transition to another life, not unto death. If new individuals originate, they could not therefore originate from others, but they must be redissolved into mucus. Every generation is a new creation. Physically regarded, every individual originates only from the Absolute, but no one out of the other."[1]

German natural philosophy, with its idealistic and individualistic viewpoint, did not lead to a fruitful theory of organic evolution, and it was left to the British and the French to develop theories of greater importance. In 18th-century France a conception of political progress, or rather two such conceptions, were derived from the static mechanical world view of the times. Fontenelle at the beginning of the century argued that if nature and mankind had been much the same at all times and places, then humanity must have progressed through the sheer accumulation of knowledge throughout the ages. The modern scientists were more enlightened than the ancient philosophers, for at least, "We are under obligation to the ancients for having exhausted all the false theories that could be formed."[2] Voltaire, after Fontenelle, called for an active effort to advance mankind through the criticism of traditional beliefs and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Most

[1] L. Oken, *The Elements of Physio-philosophy*, trans. A. Tulk, VII of the publications of the Ray Society (London, 1847), §§ 916, 917, 923, 925, 949.

[2] Quoted by J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (1920), p. 104.

of the *philosophes* of the mid-18th century joined in this movement for the progress of mankind through the spread of enlightened opinion, contributing articles to the most important publication of the movement, the great *Encyclopédie* (33 vols., 1751–77). The *Encyclopédie* and the other works of the movement were immensely effective, the *avocat général*, Séguier, confessing in 1770 that "the philosophers have shaken the throne and upset the altars through changing public opinion".[1] Such a confession, the *philosophes* thought, illustrated their contention that "Opinion governs the world".

The *philosophes* also upheld the opposite view that the world governs opinion or, more specifically, that legal and educational institutions determine opinion, deriving the view from the mechanistic psychology which was part of their world outlook. Locke had affirmed that the mind of man at birth is like a blank sheet of paper upon which sensations from the external world write all the manifold variety of human experience. It seemed, therefore, that men were made what they were by the sum total of the impressions which they had received from their earliest years, human opinion being formed by external forces, notably education and laws. From this standpoint progress was possible through the reform of legal and educational institutions; indeed, some went so far as to declare that France would become a nation of Newtons and Shakespeares if the appropriate reforms were carried through. The conflict between the notions that the world governs opinion and that opinion governs the world was not resolved by the French philosophers of the 18th century, but the two ideas of progress deriving therefrom had an influence upon biology, leading to the first important theory of organic evolution.

The first notable use of the French idea of political progress to eliminate the concept of hierarchy from biology appeared in a work *On Nature* (1761–68) by Jean Baptiste Robinet, 1735–1820, a one-time Jesuit. Robinet thought that all creatures gradually ascended the scale of beings as they obtained "additions which they are able to give themselves by virtue of an internal energy, or to receive from the action of external objects upon them".[2] The first of the important evolutionists, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, 1744–1829, published a similar, but more developed theory in his *Zoological Philosophy* (1809). By this time the linearity of the traditional classification of animals and plants into a scale of beings had come to be questioned on empirical grounds, and

[1] Quoted by J. B. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
[2] Quoted by A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (1950), p. 237.

Lamarck denied from the start that there was any connection, classificatory or historical, between the animal and plant kingdoms. At first he believed the various animal species to form a linear scale representing the order in which they had evolved in time, but his own empirical work in the field of invertebrate zoology forced him to introduce more and more side branches into his evolutionary scale so that his final scheme, published 1816–22, was a genealogical tree of organic descent. Lamarck held that two forces were responsible for organic evolution. The more important was an energy internal to each organism, generating within it new needs and requirements which led in turn to new organs and structures. This internal energy was not a vital force: it was nothing other than the energy of heat and electricity. The second factor, and the one for which Lamarck is now mainly remembered, was the power of the environment to bring about adaptive changes in an organism which could be passed on to its offspring. These two modes of organic evolution, like those of Robinet, were analogous to the two rather contradictory routes of human progress which had been postulated by the earlier *philosophes*. The internal energy of electricity, in Lamarck's view, was responsible for the action and the development of the nerves and brain in animals and man, and for the operation and advance of the human intellect. Hence the same force that produced the evolution of the animals led to the progress of man through the advance of enlightened knowledge. Similarly animals adapted themselves to changed environmental conditions, just as men were reshaped by new social institutions.

Lamarck's theory of evolution was not widely accepted in his time, for it was associated with the views of the 18th-century materialists whose opinions became unfashionable in official circles in France, particularly after the restoration of the Bourbons in 1815. The ideas of Lamarck were strongly opposed by the biologist, Georges Cuvier, who stood high in French official circles. In 1830 Cuvier brought the matter up before the Paris Academy of Sciences, and, after a historic debate, he succeeded in extinguishing the idea of organic evolution in France until Darwinism made its impact late in the 19th century. The debate coincided with the second deposition of the Bourbons, Goethe indeed confused the two events,[1] and it seems that Cuvier associated the doctrine of the fixity of the species with that of the divine right of

[1] "Soret called upon Goethe [in 1830] who asked him what he thought 'of the great event'. Soret assumed that the Revolution was referred to; but it appeared that Goethe meant à contest between the two scientists, Cuvier and Saint-Hilaire". J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe* (Everyman ed. 1946), p. 371.

kings and the theory of organic evolution with the cause of political reform.

In Britain meanwhile events had taken a rather different course. During the industrial revolution Bacon's project for the progress of the crafts through the advance and the application of science appeared to be becoming a reality, and new scientific societies were set up in the industrial centres to further that project. The men of these societies revived and extended the Baconian idea of progress, and put forward evolutionary theories in their sciences. Joseph Priestley of the Birmingham Lunar Society indicated in 1771 that science did not constitute a closed and final natural philosophy, but an ever-expanding system of knowledge, bringing with it the progressive control of natural forces and the advance of human happiness and virtue. Adam Smith of the Edinburgh Philosophical Society wrote a history of the gradual economic advance of human society in his *Wealth of Nations*, and advocated the policy of *laissez-faire* in order to secure further economic progress. James Hutton, also of the Edinburgh Society, was the first to put forward, in 1785, the theory of geological evolution. Arguing in the same way as some of the French theorists of progress, Hutton suggested that if the laws of nature had been much the same throughout the ages, then the continuous action of the constant forces of nature must have produced a historical succession of rock strata. "We find no vestige of a beginning," wrote Hutton, "no prospect of an end." In 1794 Erasmus Darwin of the Lunar Society published a theory of organic evolution similar to that of Lamarck, though it was less well developed, and it contained an element which was characteristically British. Like Lamarck, the elder Darwin held that organisms had evolved by virtue of an inherent force and by the inheritance of adaptive modifications acquired under environmental influence. But he had one conception which Lamarck lacked, namely the idea that organisms had evolved by competing one with another, the more viable ones surviving. Like his grandson, Charles Darwin, he believed that cocks had developed their spurs, and stags their antlers, by competing with one another for the females of their species. Plants too, had changed by reason of their "perpetual contest for light and air above ground, and for food and moisture beneath the soil". Such a conception, with its flavour of economic *laissez-faire*, proved to be both popular and fruitful in mid-Victorian England when it was elaborated by the younger Darwin. In Britain the feudal relations between man and man of domination and servitude were eclipsed at an earlier date than elsewhere by the

bourgeois relationship of individualistic economic competition, and it is not surprising therefore that English natural philosophers were the first to postulate and develop the view that a similar relationship between organisms obtained in nature.

Neither the theory of Hutton nor that of the elder Darwin were widely accepted by their contemporaries, for the idea of evolution was associated with political liberalism which was then under strong attack in the British reaction to the French Revolution. The "Church and King" riots fomented at Birmingham in 1791 brought about the demise of the Lunar Society, and the corresponding Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester experienced some difficulties during similar riots there. In the ideological sphere Robert Malthus used what was coming to be the dominant conception of economic competition between individual beings in order to demonstrate that the progress of mankind was impossible. The life of mankind was of a piece with that of animals and plants, Malthus urged, population when unchecked increasing in a geometrical ratio, but subsistence increasing only in an arithmetical ratio.

> "Throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms, nature has scattered the seeds of life abroad with the most profuse and liberal hand. She has been comparatively sparing in the room and nourishment necessary to rear them. The race of plants and the race of animals shrink under this great restrictive law. And the race of man cannot by any effort of reason escape from it."[1]

It was this idea of economic competition, as expressed in its crudest and most biological form by Malthus, that provided Charles Darwin with his mechanism of organic evolution: organisms compete for restricted food supplies, and thus those with favourable variations survive and reproduce their kind. But Darwin inverted the conclusion of Malthus. Competition for livelihood was a progressive, not a conservative mechanism, for it led to the evolution of higher organisms more adapted to their environment. Darwin was convinced that organic evolution had occurred some time before he had this mechanism to explain it. He came to maturity in the 1830s when political liberalism and the idea of progress were becoming generally current in British middle-class opinion, and he began his scientific career with a study of geology, the subject in which the theory of evolution was first generally established. Hutton's theory was revived, and was enriched

[1] T. R. Malthus, *Essay on Population*, (Everyman ed., 1952), I, p. 6.

by the accumulated data of the intervening decades, by Charles Lyell in his *Principles of Geology* (1830), a work which Darwin took with him on his voyage of exploration (1831–36). By the end of the voyage he had become convinced that the organic species were not fixed, but had evolved one from the other by some natural means. Some two years later he discovered an explanation for this evolution, recording in his autobiography how the leading conception of natural selection came to him.

> "In October 1838," [wrote Darwin], "I happened to read for my amusement Malthus on Population, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long continued observations of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. Here then I had at last got a theory by which to work."[1]

Darwin spent the next twenty years collecting information to substantiate his theory. Meanwhile another British biologist, Alfred Russel Wallace, was working along the same lines, and in 1858 he independently discovered the theory of natural selection. Malthus, too, was his starting point. In February 1858, Wallace recorded in his autobiography:

> "Something brought to my recollection Malthus's *Principles of Population*, which I had read about twelve years before. I thought of his clear exposition of the positive checks to increase—disease, accidents, war, and famine—which keep down the population of savage races to so much lower an average than that of civilised peoples. It occurred to me that these causes or their equivalents are continually acting in the case of animals also. . . Then it suddenly flashed upon me that this self-acting process would necessarily *improve the race*, because in every generation the inferior would inevitably be killed off and the superior would remain—that is, *the fittest would survive*".[2]

Darwin and Wallace made known the theory of natural selection in 1858, and in the following year Darwin brought out his *Origin of the Species*. It is perhaps not surprising that both of the men who discovered the theory of organic evolution by natural selection should

[1] *Charles Darwin*, (ed. F. Darwin, 1892), p. 40.
[2] A. R. Wallace, *My Life* (1905), I, p. 36.

have taken the views of Malthus on population as their starting point, and should have inverted his pessimistic conclusion. They both belonged to the generation which was the most deeply imbued with the solid and substantial Victorian idea of man's material progress and with the liberal doctrine of economic competition, which Malthus had expressed in such an elementary form.

By now the idea of progress and evolution had undergone an important change. Darwin and others regarded organic evolution and human progress as exemplifications of an automatic law of cosmic development which operated independently of the desire and will of animals or man, whilst earlier evolutionists had regarded the inner wants and strivings of animals and man as at least one of the factors leading to their advance. In the closing paragraph of the *Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin wrote:

> "Man may be excused for feeling some pride at having risen, though not through his own exertions, to the very summit of the organic scale; and the fact of his having risen, instead of being placed there aboriginally, may give him hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future."[1]

In the same way, Herbert Spencer, the first social Darwinist, supposed that *laissez-faire* was an automatic law of human progress, the unfettered operation of economic competition mediating the survival of the ablest and most efficient *entrepreneur*.

Spencer was very much a mid-Victorian. Developments in the late Victorian period, the strife of nations as exemplified in the Boer War, filled him with distaste, for it was the peaceable and industrious competition of individual men that seemed to him the main factor in human progress. However, the new developments could be reconciled equally well with the conceptions of Darwinism, indeed they were anticipated to some degree by Walter Bagehot in his *Physics and Politics* (1872). In this work Bagehot suggested that "The strongest nation has always been conquering the weaker", and by these means "the best qualities wanted in elementary civilisation are propagated and preserved", for "the most warlike qualities tend principally to the good".[2]

The biologists themselves, generally speaking, were not given to such interpretations. Darwin in his *Descent of Man* saw in the evolution

[1] C. Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, (1888), p. 619.
[2] T. Cowles, "Malthus, Darwin, and Bagehot", *Isis*, XXVI (1936), p. 341.

and progress of mankind the growing dominance of the cooperative over the selfish instincts. "The more enduring social instincts conquer the less persistent instincts,"[1] wrote Darwin, a view which was developed in particular by the Russian biologists of the late pre-revolutionary period and by their Soviet successors. Wallace, the co-discoverer of the theory of natural selection, deduced the doctrines of the Christian Socialists from the theory. In the social struggle for existence, he held, none should have an unfair advantage in wealth or education, we must all start as equals to obtain the full progress of mankind.

> "The only mode of natural selection that can act alike on physical, mental, and moral qualities," [wrote Wallace] "will come into play under a social system which gives equal opportunities of culture, training, leisure, and happiness to every individual. This extension of the principle of natural selection as it acts in the animal world generally is, I believe, quite new, and is by far the most important of the new ideas I have given to the world."[2]

Thus in the end almost any policy for human progress could be deduced from the theory of natural selection, for Darwin, to some degree, had transcended the confined notions of his time and had incorporated into his scheme ideas which were susceptible to diverse, and indeed opposed interpretations. Amongst other things, Darwin had indicated that parasites and other degenerate creatures were as much a product of evolution as the higher animals: they were perfectly adapted to their somewhat restricted environments. This idea came in for a sociological interpretation towards the end of the 19th century when the easy optimism of the mid-Victorian period began to evaporate, and a mood of doubt concerning the progress of the human race set in, particularly after the Great Depression of the 1870s. Of more importance in biology and social theory at this time was the growing stress laid upon the stability and continuity of races and species as opposed to the earlier emphasis upon their mutability and change. This reorientation was originated in Germany, notably by August Weismann, who from the 1880s developed his theory of "the continuity of the germ plasm", the view that the characteristics of a race or species derived from an immortal germ plasm which was handed on from one generation to another. Such a reorientation gave an impulse to the development of racial doctrines in social theory, whilst in biology

[1] C. Darwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 97 ff. [2] A. R. Wallace, *op. cit.*, II, p. 389.

it focused attention upon the problem of heredity, leading to the development of Mendelian genetics in the present century.

Patrick Geddes in his book on *Evolution*, which he wrote together with Arthur Thomson, observed that each of the main theories of organic evolution were part of the general "social transformations of its age".

> "The generation of culminating political revolution in France, that of the culmination of the industrial revolution in England, have thus expressed themselves through Lamarck and Darwin more clearly than either thinkers ever dreamed, or than their respective exponents and disciples have realised. . . . Similarly in neo-Darwinian times . . . [there is] the striking parallelism of his [Weismann's] own theory of the germ-plasm with the thought of contemporary Germany: with the victories and hegemony of Prussia, with the renewed claims of its aristocracy also: and above all, with its doctrines of race, political and anthropological combined."[1]

Until recent years, systematic botany and zoology have found few practical applications, agriculture, medicine, and the related industries deriving their main progress from the sciences of chemistry, physiology, microbiology. In these circumstances biological investigations, where they have been at all directed, have received a greater impulse than researches in the physical sciences from ideological motivations. Thus a great deal of attention was focused upon "missing links", first in the great chain of beings in order to establish more firmly the view that organic nature was hierarchically ordered, and then in the genealogical trees of evolutionary descent so that the continuity of progress and the ubiquity of natural selection would become more assured. Again ideological controversy today is more marked in the biological sciences than in the physical. But today also the advance of agriculture and medicine is becoming more and more dependent upon the progress of biological theory, notably genetics, and practical success in these fields is emerging as an important criterion of the realism of biological theories, and indeed of the more general ideologies behind them.

[1] P. Geddes and J. A. Thomson, *Evolution*, London, (n.d.), pp. 213–15.

3

THE SCOTTISH CONTRIBUTION TO MARXIST SOCIOLOGY

RONALD L. MEEK

THE first necessity in any theory of history, wrote Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, is to accord its due importance to a certain fundamental fact—the fact that "men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history' ". The production of the means to satisfy the needs of life is "a fundamental condition of all history". The French and the English, said Marx and Engels,

> "even if they have conceived the relation of this fact with so-called history only in an extremely one-sided fashion, particularly as long as they remained in the toils of political ideology, have nevertheless made the first attempts to give the writing of history a materialistic basis by being the first to write histories of civil society, of commerce and industry."[1]

The present essay sets out to comment upon certain "attempts to give the writing of history a materialistic basis" which were made by a group of 18th-century Scottish writers—the so-called "Scottish Historical School"—of whom Professor Pascal reminded us in an important article in *The Modern Quarterly* in 1938.[2] My contention is, broadly, that the sociological work of these writers has been seriously underestimated. When it is valued at its proper worth, the British contribution (taken as a whole) to the making of Marxist sociology begins to appear greater in degree, and to some extent different in kind, from what has commonly been imagined.

The British contribution to Marxist thought is often virtually identified with what is called Classical political economy. Adam Smith and David Ricardo, it is sometimes said, laid the foundations of the labour theory of value, and the theory of distribution which was

[1] *The German Ideology* (English edition, 1938), p. 16.

[2] Roy Pascal, "Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century", *The Modern Quarterly*, 1, no. 2, March 1938. My own considerable debt to this article will be apparent from what follows.

associated with it, and Marx continued and completed their work. This is true enough so far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough. For Classical political economy grew up in close association with a more general system of ideas about society which we can perhaps call Classical sociology. And it is the contention of this article that in the latter half of the 18th century the Scottish Historical School developed this Classical sociology to a stage where it was becoming remarkably similar, at least in its broad outlines, to Marxist sociology.

The main members of the Scottish Historical School were four University professors. First, there was Professor Adam Smith, of Glasgow. It is now almost exactly 200 years since Adam Smith was appointed to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, and during that time the moral philosopher and sociologist in Smith have tended to become somewhat obscured. The more narrowly economic views of *The Wealth of Nations* have usually been emphasised at the expense of the general sociological system of which they were essentially a part. The elements of that sociological system can, indeed, be easily enough detected in *The Wealth of Nations*—just as the elements of Marx's sociological system can be easily enough detected in *Capital* —but for a more complete outline of it we have to go back to Smith's lectures at Glasgow on "Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms",[1] and to his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In other words, we have to try and reconstruct the elements of that great sociological treatise on the development of law and government which Smith always intended to write but never managed to finish.[2] Second, there was Professor Adam Ferguson, of Edinburgh, whose remarkable *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, his chief claim to fame, first appeared in 1767.[3] Ferguson's views do not have to be reconstructed: they are quite clearly expressed in this book, and, in a rather more milk-and-watery version,

[1] A student's notes of these lectures were discovered in 1895 by Edwin Cannan, who published them in 1896 under the title *Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms*.

[2] At the end of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith said: "I shall in another discourse endeavour to give an account of the general principles of law and government, and of the different revolutions they have undergone in the different ages and periods of society, not only in what concerns justice, but in what concerns police, revenue, and arms, and whatever else is the object of law" (*Works*, Dugald Stewart's edition of 1812, I, pp. 610–11). And in a letter of 1785, published in *The Athenaeum*, December 28, 1895, Smith said: "I have likewise two other great works upon the anvil; the one is a sort of Philosophical History of all the different branches of Literature, of Philosophy, Poetry and Eloquence; the other is a sort of theory and History of Law and Government. The materials of both are in a great measure collected, and some Part of both is put into tollerable good order. But the indolence of old age, tho' I struggle violently against it, I feel coming fast upon me, and whether I shall ever be able to finish either is extremely uncertain".

[3] The quotations below are from the sixth edition of 1793.

in two later works.[1] Third, there was Professor William Robertson, the Principal of Edinburgh University, and one of the foremost historians of the day. Robertson's general approach is discernible in all his historical studies, but particularly in his history of Scotland[2] and in the introductory volumes of his histories of America[3] and the reign of Charles V.[4] Fourth, there was Professor John Millar, who occupied the Chair of Law at Glasgow University from 1761 to his death forty years later. It is the neglect of Millar's remarkable contribution which more than anything else has hindered general recognition of the true significance of the work of the School as a whole. Professor Pascal in this country, and Professor Lehmann[5] in the United States, seem to be the only modern investigators who have taken a really serious interest in Millar and his work. Finally, mention should be made of a number of other authors who, if they cannot properly be said to have been members of the School, at least worked on its fringes. These included Lord Kames and Gilbert Stuart (both comparative lawyers), Lord Monboddo, Hugh Blair and James Dunbar. The work of all these men, taken together, forms what is perhaps the most striking manifestation of that great cultural renaissance in 18th-century Scotland whose extent and significance are only now coming to be properly appreciated.

The Scottish Historical School, like all other such schools, had of course its predecessors. Among these, the greatest common influence was probably that of Montesquieu, with his insistence on the importance of the fact that "man is born in society, and there he remains",[6] and his central interest in the evolving relationships between law and environment.[7] All the members of the School regarded Montesquieu with the greatest admiration. For example, Smith's Glasgow lectures on justice, as Millar notes, "followed the plan that seems to be suggested by Montesquieu";[8] and Robertson speaks of Montesquieu's "usual discernment and accuracy".[9] Hume, with his interest in the origins and foundations of society, his rejection of speculative fictions such as

[1] *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769), and *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792).
[2] *The History of Scotland*, etc., (1759). [3] *The History of America*, (1777), I.
[4] *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, (1769), I.
[5] W. C. Lehmann, *Adam Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Sociology* (1930); and "John Millar, Historical Sociologist", in *The British Journal of Sociology*, III, no. I, March 1952. Professor Lehmann has prepared a biography of Millar, which he has kindly allowed me to see, and which it is hoped will soon be published.
[6] Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 27. [7] *De L'Esprit des Lois*, (1748).
[8] See Dugald Stewart's *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.* in his edition of Smith's *Works*, V, p. 414.
[9] *Charles V*, I, p. 223.

the social contract, and his realistic evolutionism, was another obvious influence, both personally and through his writings. Dugald Stewart, indeed, had no hesitation in linking Hume's name with those of Montesquieu, Smith, Kames and Millar as men with a common interest in a new study—that of the "natural history" of society.[1] Mandeville, to go a little farther back, should also probably be counted among the predecessors, although perhaps not so directly. There were few other men at that time who had so clear a perception as he had of the fact that "the Cement of civil Society" is simply that "every Body is obliged to eat and drink".[2] And, at least so far as Millar is concerned, Harrington must also be regarded as a very important predecessor. Harrington was certainly largely responsible for Millar's remarkable "economic" interpretation of the English civil war, and may have been partly responsible for his general sociological position.[3]

The main members of the School had two basic propositions in common, both derived from empirical observation of the course of social development in different countries and different ages. Robertson's statement of them, though not quite the clearest, is perhaps the most convenient. First, "in every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies, their laws and policy must be different."[4] (Compare this with the early statement by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: "The 'history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange," since "the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society.")[5] The second proposition is implied in the following statement, which is to be found in Robertson's survey of the history of feudalism: "Upon discovering in what state property was at any particular period, we may determine with precision what was the degree of power possessed by the King or by the nobility at that juncture".[6] The causal connection between property relationships and the form of government which is implied in this statement is constantly emphasised by all the members of the School. As Ferguson puts it in one place, in a slightly different way, "forms of government

[1] Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 447–55.
[2] *The Fable of the Bees* (ed. F. B. Kaye, 1924), II, p. 350.
[3] See, e.g., Millar's *An Historical View of the English Government*, III (1803), pp. 284–8.
[4] *History of America*, I, p. 324.
[5] *The German Ideology* (English edition), p. 18. In this context what Marx and Engels here call the "mode of co-operation" is specifically included in the category "productive forces".
[6] *Charles V*, I, p. 222.

take their rise, chiefly from the manner in which the members of a state have been originally classed".[1] These, then, were the two basic propositions which the School tried, with a greater or lesser degree of consistency, to apply to the study of man in society.

The two basic principles were applied within a common framework of general attitudes about which something should be said. In the first place, their approach (at least in intention) was "scientific" in the best sense of the word—as was implied in the description of their subject as the "natural history" of law, government, etc. They tried, with some success, to bring to the study of men's relations to one another in society the same scientific attitude which had recently been so brilliantly brought to the study of men's relations to nature. To call their work "*Theoretical or Conjectural History*", as Dugald Stewart did,[2] is really to miss one of the main points about it—that it tried consciously to base itself on the study of concrete historical facts, in opposition to the abstract speculation and conjecture (particularly with regard to the so-called "state of nature") which had so often been employed in the past. Second, they had in common a particular view of the manner of social development which to a large extent determined their method of attack. Society, they argued, develops blindly. The School consistently rejected any facile explanations of social development in terms of the activities of "great men". "Every step and every movement of the multitude", said Ferguson, "even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future; and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."[3] It was Millar's leading principle, said Jeffrey in an article in the *Edinburgh Review*, "that there was nothing produced by arbitrary or accidental causes; that no great change, institution, custom, or occurrence, could be ascribed to the character or exertions of an individual, to the temperament or disposition of a nation, to occasional policy, or peculiar wisdom or folly."[4] Some of the members of the School, Smith for example, tended to emphasise the gradual character of social development;[5] others, such as Ferguson, stressed the importance of social conflict and drew particular attention

[1] Ferguson, *Essay*, p. 226. Cf. Smith, *Lectures on Justice, etc.*, p. 8: "Property and civil government very much depend on one another".

[2] Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 450. [3] *op. cit.*, p. 205. Cf. p. 304.

[4] *Edinburgh Review*, October 1803, p. 157. Jeffrey was undoubtedly exaggerating here: Millar's basic approach, as we shall see later, was by no means as crudely mechanistic as this statement would seem to imply. But Jeffrey does at least give a fair idea of the types of approach to history which the School was mainly concerned to oppose.

[5] See, e.g., *Wealth of Nations* (Cannan's edition), I, pp. 389–90.

to revolutionary changes.[1] But to all of them development was essentially blind: as Engels was later to put it, "the conflict of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of history produces a state of affairs entirely analogous to that in the realm of unconscious nature."[2] Nevertheless, great social changes did occur, and uniformities and regularities were clearly observable in the development of different societies. How were these to be explained? What laws lay behind the development of society? This was the great problem to which the Scottish Historical School brought to bear the two basic materialist principles which I have just described. They did not, of course, pose the problem in precisely these terms: they could hardly have been expected, in the conditions of their time, to anticipate Engels to that extent—although Ferguson sometimes came very near to doing so. But there is little doubt that this kind of problem was always at the back of their minds.

To illustrate their method of approach to the problem, we may outline very briefly Adam Smith's views on the development of law and government as he presented them in the *Glasgow Lectures*. Smith's views can be taken as a fair sample of those of the School as a whole, although some members of it, notably Millar, went into much more detail. There were four main stages in social development, Smith argued—hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commerce,[3] which generally followed one another in that order.[4] Each of these stages, as will be seen, is defined in terms of what Robertson called the "mode of subsistence". In the first stage, hunting, there is properly speaking no government at all, because there is virtually no private property. "Till there be property", said Smith, "there can be no government, the very end of which is to secure wealth, and to defend the rich from the poor."[5] It was in the second stage of development, pasturage, that what Smith calls an "inequality of fortune" was first introduced, owing to the institution of private property in flocks and herds. It was only then that "regular government" came into being. But "property receives its greatest extension", says Smith, in the next stage—agriculture, since the land itself, which until then has been held more or less in common, now comes to be divided up among private individuals.[6] Therefore, in the agricultural stage government is further extended in scope, and altered in form. Then, eventually, as Smith puts it, "the age

[1] For a summary of Ferguson's views on the role of conflict in society see Lehmann, *Adam Ferguson*, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–106.

[2] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* (English edition), p. 58.

[3] *Lectures*, p. 107.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

of commerce naturally succeeds that of agriculture. As men could now confine themselves to one species of labour, they would naturally exchange the surplus of their own commodity for that of another of which they stood in need."[1] And once again law and government undergo corresponding changes. Throughout all these successive stages, broadly speaking, the way in which people get their living is conceived to determine the broad lines along which they think and behave;[2] and superior wealth more than any other quality "contributes to confer authority."[3] Smith was by no means consistent in his adoption of this kind of approach, of course; few pioneers can afford the luxury of consistency. Almost as often as not, he explained society in terms of the individual rather than the individual in terms of society,[4] and he seems to have had little idea of the nature of the dialectical relationship which in fact exists between the two. But even if we cannot properly ascribe *the* materialist conception of history to Smith, we may certainly ascribe to him *a* materialist conception of history which was not without considerable influence on later writers.

But it is in the work of John Millar, more than in that of any other member of the School, that we find this new way of looking at society most explicitly formulated and most expertly applied. There is all the difference in the world between using a philosophy of history unconsciously and using it consciously; and Millar was always perfectly well aware of what he was doing. Consider the following passage, which occurs in the introduction to his book on the *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. How does it come about, he asks, that there is such an "amazing diversity to be found in the laws of different countries, and even of the same country at different periods?" How have mankind "been led to embrace such different rules of conduct"? "In searching for the causes of those peculiar systems of law and government which have appeared in the world," he answers,

> "we must undoubtedly resort, first of all, to the differences of situation, which have suggested different views and motives of action to the inhabitants of particular countries. Of this kind, are the fertility or barrenness of the soil, the nature of its productions, the species of labour requisite for procuring subsistence, the number of individuals collected together in one community, their proficiency in arts, the

[1] *Lectures*, p. 108.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 159–61. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[4] Cf. Glenn R. Morrow, "Adam Smith: Moralist and Philosopher", in *Adam Smith, 1776–1926* (1928), p. 172.

advantages which they enjoy for entering into mutual transactions, and for maintaining an intimate correspondence. The variety that frequently occurs in these, and such other particulars, must have a prodigious influence upon the great body of a people; as, by giving a peculiar direction to their inclinations and pursuits, it must be productive of correspondent habits, dispositions, and ways of thinking.

"... There is ... in man a disposition and capacity for improving his conditions, by the exertion of which, he is carried on from one degree of advancement to another; and the similarity of his wants, as well as of the faculties by which those wants are supplied, has everywhere produced a remarkable uniformity in the several steps of his progression.... By such gradual advances in rendering their situation more comfortable, the most important alterations are produced in the state and condition of a people: their numbers are increased; the connections of society are extended; and men, being less oppressed with their own wants, are more at liberty to cultivate the feelings of humanity: property, the great source of distinction among individuals, is established; and the various rights of mankind, arising from their multiplied connections, are recognised and protected: the laws of a country are thereby rendered numerous; and a more complex form of government becomes necessary, for distributing justice, and for preventing the disorders which proceed from the jarring interests and passions of a large and opulent community. It is evident, at the same time, that these, and such other effects of improvement, which have so great a tendency to vary the state of mankind, and their manner of life, will be productive of suitable variations in their taste and sentiments, and in their general system of behaviour.

"There is thus, in human society, a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude to civilized manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs."[1]

This, then, was the master-principle which Millar believed would enable him to penetrate, as he put it (much in the manner of Marx), "beneath that common surface of events which occupies the details of the vulgar historian."[2] But the principle must not be interpreted too dogmatically. As Millar went on to make clear, immediately following the last statement quoted above,

[1] *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, 4th. edition (1806), pp. 1–4.
[2] *An Historical View of the English Government*, IV, p. 101.

> "Various accidental causes, indeed, have contributed to accelerate, or to retard this advancement in different countries. It has even happened that nations, being placed in such unfavourable circumstances as to render them long stationary at a particular period, have been so habituated to the peculiar manners of that age, as to retain a strong tincture of those peculiarities, through every subsequent revolution. This appears to have occasioned some of the chief varieties which take place in the maxims and customs of nations equally civilized."[1]

And although Millar strongly attacked the "great man" approach to history, insisting that the "greater part of the political system of any country [is] derived from the combined influence of the whole people", he was quite prepared to admit that "a variety of peculiar institutions will sometimes take their origin from the casual interposition of particular persons, who happen to be placed at the head of a community, and to be possessed of singular abilities, and views of policy."[2]

In his book on the *Origin of Ranks*, Millar uses this principle to explain the changes which occur in certain important types of power-relations as society develops. He is here concerned in particular with the relations between husband and wife, father and child, sovereign and subject, and master and servant. In general he assumes throughout that the most important way in which the basic economic factors influence these power-relations is per medium of induced changes in property relations. In his later book, *An Historical View of the English Government*, he uses the principle to explain the evolution of the English constitution; and in a posthumous volume of the same work he uses it to explain the changes which occur in manners, morals, literature, art and science as society develops. No one before Millar had ever used a materialist conception of history so consistently to illuminate the development of such a wide range of social phenomena.

Many of Millar's individual themes deserve elaboration in some detail, but a brief summary of a few of them will have to suffice here. For example, there are his attempts to delineate what might be called the "techno-economic bases" for certain great social changes which he considers, such as the institution of private property,[3] the rise of commodity production and trade,[4] and the institution[5] and abolition of slavery. On the abolition of slavery he has this to say:

[1] *Origin of Ranks*, pp. 4–5. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 5. [3] *Origin of Ranks*, pp. 157 ff.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 247–8.

"A slave, who receives no wages in return for his labour, can never be supposed to exert much vigour or activity in the exercise of any employment. He obtains a livelihood at any rate; and by his utmost assiduity he is able to procure no more. As he works merely in consequence of the terror in which he is held, it may be imagined that he will be idle as often as he can with impunity. This circumstance may easily be overlooked in a country where the inhabitants are strangers to improvement. But when the arts begins to flourish, when the wonderful effects of industry and skill in cheapening commodities, and in bringing them to perfection, become more and more conspicuous, it must be evident that little profit can be drawn from the labour of a slave, who has neither been encouraged to acquire that dexterity, nor those habits of application, which are essentially requisite in the finer and more difficult branches of manufacture."[1]

Then again, there is that fascinating section in the *Origin of Ranks* dealing with group marriage and matriarchy in primitive society,[2] which J. F. MacLennan said almost anticipated Bachofen,[3] and which Sombart rather less cautiously said *did* anticipate Engels.[4] Then there are the interesting passages in which Millar discusses the differences in the national characteristics of the English and the Scots, tracing them in part to differences in the degree of development of the division of labour in these countries.[5] Then again, historians of economic thought may be interested to note the passages in which Millar quite clearly and unambiguously anticipates the "productivity" theory of profit which is nowadays often associated with the name of Lord Lauderdale.[6] Millar was in fact a close friend of Lauderdale's, and it seems likely that they worked the theory out jointly.[7] And finally, in the field of historiography, a rather impressive paragraph may be quoted showing Millar's keen perception of the economic forces underlying the English civil war of 1640:

"The adherents of the king were chiefly composed of the nobility and higher gentry, men who, by their wealth and station, had much to lose; and who, in the annihilation of monarchy, and in the anarchy

[1] *Origin of Ranks*, pp. 250–1. [2] Chapter 1, section 2.
[3] J. F. MacLennan, *Studies in Ancient History* (1876), p. 420, footnote.
[4] Quoted by Lehmann, "John Millar, Historical Sociologist", *loc. cit.*, p. 32.
[5] *Historical View*, III, pp. 89–96.
[6] Cf. Millar, *Historical View*, IV, pp. 118–22, with Lauderdale, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth* (1804), pp. 158 ff.
[7] See the remarks by John Craig, Millar's biographer, on p. xc of the 1806 edition of the *Origin of Ranks*.

> that was likely to follow, foresaw the ruin of their fortunes, and the extinction of their consideration and influence. The middling and inferior gentry, together with the inhabitants of towns; those who entertained a jealousy of the nobles, and of the king, or who, by the changes in the state of society, had lately been raised to independence, became, on the other hand, the great supporters of parliament."[1]

Those who had "lately been raised to independence" by "the changes in the state of society", as Millar's earlier analysis makes clear, were the "tradesmen, manufacturers, and merchants".[2] It is certainly true that Millar, in common with most of his contemporaries, usually tended to exaggerate the importance of 1688 at the expense of that of 1640. Nevertheless, he did see the civil war quite clearly as a class war, and as an important stage in a great historical process in which "the progress of commerce and manufactures" was gradually transforming what he called "the manners and political state of the inhabitants".[3]

Of course, there is still a very deep gulf between Millar, even at his best, and Marx. Millar's statement of his master-principle in the introduction to his *Origin of Ranks* was remarkable enough for his time, but we have only to compare it with Marx's famous summary of his in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy* to appreciate the distance which still remained to be travelled. In Marx's conception of history, there is a richness of content, a precision of definition, and above all a feeling for the dialectic of social change which were conspicuously lacking in Millar's. And, most important of all, there was no trace in Millar's work of that essentially new line of thought which Marx himself regarded as his own most distinctive contribution. "No credit is due to me", said Marx in his well-known letter to Weydemeyer, of March 1852,

> "for discovering the existence of classes in modern society nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: (1) that the *existence of classes* is only bound up with *particular, historic phases in the development of production*; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*".[4]

[1] *Historical View*, III, p. 295. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 103. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[4] Marx and Engels, *Correspondence 1846–95, A Selection* . . . (1934), p. 57.

Millar was certainly well aware of "the existence of classes in modern society", and his work in describing the historical development of the struggle between them in terms of their "economic anatomy" was in advance of that of most of his contemporaries. He was often perceptive, too, in his treatment of "the discrepancies that frequently occur between rank-position and individual merit,"[1] and in his attacks on the abuses of class power. But there is no suggestion that he ever regarded the existence of "ranks" *as such* as anything other than a natural and inescapable feature of all modern societies. Indeed, as his biographer correctly emphasises, his proposals for reform were always made within the framework of "those established distinctions of Rank which it is often unjust, and always hazardous, to abolish."[2] For example, even though he was a strong supporter of the French Revolution he could not be brought "to excuse the Assembly for rashly and presumptuously abolishing all those distinctions of ranks to which the people had been habituated, and by the influence of which they might have been restrained from many excesses".[3]

Millar's weakness is particularly apparent in his analysis of the economic relationship between the labourer and the capitalist. Following Smith, Millar recognised that "the whole property of [a commercial] country, and the subsistence of all the inhabitants, may . . . be derived from three different sources; from the rent of land or water; from the profits of stock or capital; and from the wages of labour: and, in conformity to this arrangement, the inhabitants may be divided into landlords, capitalists, and labourers". He recognised, too, that the labourers, "having little or no property, and earning a bare subsistence by their daily labour . . . are placed in a state of inferiority", and that the advance of trade and manufactures, by bringing together "large bands of labourers or artificers" into the towns and cities, had greatly increased both their opportunity and their desire to combine in their own interests.[4] But he refused to regard the relationship between the labourer and the capitalist as essentially an exploitative one. On the contrary, by adopting the "productivity" theory of profit mentioned above, Millar effectively disguised the exploitative basis of the relationship, moving in this respect a step backwards from Smith. "The profit arising from every branch of mercantile stock," he wrote, "whether permanent or circulating, is derived from its enabling the merchant, or

[1] Lehmann, "John Millar, Historical Sociologist", *loc. cit.*, p. 41.
[2] *Origin of Ranks* (1806 edition), pp. lv–vi.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. cxiii.
[4] *Historical View*, IV, pp. 115 and 134–5.

manufacturer, to produce the same effect with less labour, and consequently with less expence than would otherwise have been required."[1] And feeling himself obliged, apparently, to comment upon the traditional view of profit as a surplus produced by the labourer and appropriated by the capitalist, he added the following revealing footnote:

> "Perhaps part of the profit of a manufacturer may also be drawn from the workman, who, however, will have a full equivalent for what he thus resigns. By working to a master he is sure of constant employment, is saved the trouble of seeking out those who may have occasion for his labour, and avoids the anxiety arising from the danger of being thrown occasionally idle. In return for these advantages, he willingly relinquishes to his master some part of what he can earn while employed."[2]

It has to be remembered, of course, that Millar lived at a time when, as he put it himself, "every man who is industrious may entertain the hope of gaining a fortune", and when it appeared to many that wealth, and therefore political power, would probably soon be "in some measure diffused over all the members of the community".[3] The change from feudalism to capitalism did not appear to Millar, as it was later to appear to Marx, as being essentially the substitution of a new ruling class, with a new method of exploitation, for an old one, but rather as the emergence of a state of economic and political *independence*. What impressed Millar was not so much the subordination of the labourer to the capitalist, as the capacity of the labourer to become a little capitalist himself. Nevertheless, Millar was by no means happy about the economic and political conditions of his time—a fact which revealed itself both in his writings and in his political activities. In his writings, for example, he constantly emphasised the dangers of the rapidly increasing influence which the Crown had exercised since 1688, and gave a very interesting account of the economic and social basis of this influence.[4] He warned, too, that the extension of the division of labour, by stripping the worker of his mental powers and converting him into "the mere instrument of labour",[5] was making it possible for the common people to become "the dupes of their superiors".[6] And he emphasised even more strongly than Ferguson

[1] *Historical View*, IV, p. 122.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 120. Cf. Steuart, *Principles of Political Œconomy*, in *Works* (1805 edition), I, p. 421.
[3] *Origin of Ranks*, p. 235.
[4] *Historical View*, IV, chapter 2, and *passim*.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 152.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

that in modern society "the pursuit of riches becomes a scramble, in which the hand of every man is against every other".[1] And in his political life his immense concern with the problem of liberty revealed itself just as forcefully. He was a rather unorthodox left-wing whig with republican sympathies, who in every political crisis ranged himself on the side of the angels of history. He supported the Americans in their war of independence—a highly unpopular attitude in Glasgow at that time; he took an active part in the struggle to abolish slavery, both at home and abroad; he defended the French Revolution, even in its later stages; he became a zealous member of the Society of Friends of the People when it was formed in the early '90s; and he campaigned against the French wars with all the means at his disposal.[2] In view of the fierceness of the contemporary witch-hunt, which exiled Millar's eldest son and destroyed Thomas Muir, one of Millar's greatest pupils, these were by no means easy attitudes for a professor at a university to take up and maintain.

As an example of the sort of thing which people in Millar's position had to put up with at this time, the following extract from an anonymous attack against him which appeared in a Glasgow newspaper in 1793 may perhaps be usefully cited. Millar is not mentioned by name in it, but it is clear from the context that it is he (and possibly one or two of his colleagues at Glasgow University) who is being referred to. The writer is one "Asmodeus", and the attack occurs in the course of a series of letters entitled "Strictures on the Glasgow Democrats". It reflects the authentic—and only too familiar—atmosphere of the witch-hunt:[3]

> "Every man of common sense must acknowledge the force of early impressions; and in this age of *attempts* at the establishment of detestable, impracticable theories, their baneful effects should be guarded against with the utmost caution.—Beings of my order, Mr. Editor, are incapable of procreating flesh and blood; but were I a mortal and a father, I would certainly prefer finishing my son's education at a brothel, to a school where his political principles were likely to be contaminated: In the former, he would only run the risk of his nose—in the latter, of his neck.—These observations proceed

[1] *Historical View*, IV, p. 249.

[2] See the biography by John Craig with which the 1806 edition of the *Origin of Ranks* is prefaced. Special mention should be made of his anonymous *Letters of Crito*, an attack on the French wars.

[3] It also illustrates the change which has taken place since Millar's day in our ideas concerning decency in public writing—a change which Millar would have loved to analyse.

from having observed, that, in some instances, the teachers in the public seminaries of this kingdom profess themselves Republicans; though, at the same time, I must admit, that nine times in ten their dislike of Monarchy arises, not from principle, but from interested motives only. Men of that description should either relinquish their tenets or their places; for, is there not a gross inconsistency in their eating the King's bread, and at the same time vilifying his Government?

"The mildness of the British Constitution is strongly exemplified, in the security in which these pests of society vomit forth their opinions. Were the like freedoms taken with the executive government in their beloved land of *Liberty and Equality*, the lamp-iron or the scaffold would soon terminate their career. But although the British Lion indignantly pisseth upon these snarling curs, is it fitting that they should continue their practices with impunity?"[1]

Let me turn now to another important question. What was there about Scotland in the latter half of the 18th century which made it capable of producing Millar and the other members of the Historical School? Why was it that such a large proportion of the great sociologists of the time—to say nothing of the great political economists—were Scotsmen? There is no easy answer to this question, of course, and all that can be done here is to suggest what might be *one* fruitful line of enquiry. Social thinking of this type, which lays primary emphasis on the development of economic techniques and economic relationships, is not simply a function of economic advance as such. If it were, England rather than Scotland would surely have been the cradle of sociology and political economy in the 18th century. Rather, such thinking seems to be a function, first of the rapidity of economic advance, and, second, of the facility with which a contrast can be observed between areas which are economically advancing and areas which are in different stages of development. In Scottish cities like Glasgow in the '50s and '60s, owing largely to the progress of the tobacco trade with the American plantations, economic development was extremely rapid. Great changes in economic techniques and basic economic relationships were taking place, and visibly transforming the whole social life of the community. And the new forms of economic organisation which were emerging could be fairly easily contrasted

[1] This quotation will be found on pp. 2–3 of a pamphlet entitled *Asmodeus: or, Strictures on the Glasgow Democrats* (1793), in which the original letters were collected and reprinted.

with the forms of organisation which still existed, say, in the Scottish Highlands, or in feudal France, or among the Indian tribes in North America. Interest in different forms of social organisation was bound to be fairly widespread in Scotland at this time, and it was no accident that attempts were made to trace the causal nexus in history to "the mode of subsistence". In the form in which it is stated here this answer to the question is, of course, far too crudely mechanistic, and any serious enquiry would also have to take account of a number of other important factors—for example, the special situation of the Scottish schools and universities at the time. But I do suggest that the key to the problem may well be found in the place which I have indicated.

Finally, something should be said about the manner in which the ideas of the Scottish Historical School were transmitted to the 19th century, and in particular to Marx and Engels. A direct connection existed, of course, in the case of Adam Smith, upon whose work Marx wrote a number of extended commentaries (without, however, having the *Glasgow Lectures* available to him); and also in the case of Ferguson, from whom Marx quotes several times (mainly in connection with the division of labour) in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *Capital*. But in the case of Millar there does not seem to have been any direct connection. Although Marx and Engels acknowledged in general terms their indebtedness to the British and French sociologists of the 18th century,[1] and to "all the English historians up to 1850",[2] I have not found any specific reference to Millar in their writings. This is hardly surprising, in view of the swift decline in the influence of Millar's work in the years following his death. The French Revolution and the accompanying disturbances at home, the wars against France, and, most important of all, the gradual development of organised struggle between labourers and capitalists, made it very difficult for these dangerous ideas to survive, at least in the middle-class milieu which had originally given birth to them.[3] There is no doubt, however, that Millar's work played an important part in the creation of that climate of opinion in

[1] See, e.g., the quotation from *The German Ideology* at the beginning of this essay.

[2] Marx and Engels, *Correspondence*, *op. cit.*, p. 518. cf. *ibid.*, p. 56.

[3] Cf. Lehmann, "John Millar, Historical Sociologist", *loc. cit.*, p. 45: "The tide of the time was running strongly against the acceptance of ideas like Millar's. Not only did the directly political elements in his teaching meet with strong opposition from the more reactionary of his contemporaries; but even more, even the most 'non-political' elements in his work, his historical, analytical, functional approach to the problems of law, government and society, contained a threat to the established order of things that was clearly recognised by men of insight. And those responsible for the education of future leaders did their best to provide them with another diet.... Under such conditions writings like Millar's would be read only by courageous men of strong convictions."

which the work of men like the "Ricardian socialists" and the early Chartists was able to flourish.

If Millar's ideas did continue for a while to exercise a limited amount of direct influence, notwithstanding these unfavourable circumstances, this was probably due in the main to James Mill, whose admiration for Millar's work—and for that of the School as a whole—was very considerable. By the time Mill left Scotland for England in 1802, at the age of twenty-nine, he had studied the main works of the leading members of the School, and in the subsequent years seems to have made some attempt to popularise their views in England.[1] His high opinion of Millar was expressed, for example, in a review in the *Literary Journal* of June 1806,[2] and Millar's influence is particularly apparent in some sections of his *History of British India*. In 1817, shortly before the *History of British India* was published, Ricardo asked Mill for advice regarding reading, and Mill recommended him to embark upon "the study of civil society in general", commencing with (*inter alia*) Millar's *Historical View*. This book, said Mill, "was very instructive to me; but I rather think you told me, you had not a copy of it."[3] A little over a year later Ricardo reported that he had "read Millar with great pleasure", although it is not certain whether he was referring to Millar's *Historical View*, or to his *Origin of Ranks*, a copy of which was in Ricardo's library at Gatcombe.[4] And Mill apparently also managed to pass on some of his own enthusiasm for Millar to his son John Stuart.[5]

Classical sociology also influenced Marxist sociology in another way —per medium of Classical political economy. The basic doctrines of Classical political economy, which formed the starting-point of the economic researches of Marx and Engels, in a sense embodied the materialist approach to "civil society" which was characteristic of Classical sociology. The development of the materialist approach in the 18th century was very closely associated with the development of political economy. A concept of civil society which lays primary emphasis on the material conditions of life will naturally be accompanied by the belief that, as Marx put it, "the anatomy of that civil society is to be sought in political economy".[6] And to a large extent

[1] See Alexander Bain, *James Mill* (1882), pp. 18–19, 34–5 and 51.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 56–8.
[3] Ricardo, *Works* (Sraffa's edition, 1952), VII, pp. 195–7.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 382 and 197, footnote.
[5] See, e.g., *Lettres Inédites de John Stuart Mill à Auguste Comte* (1899), p. 357; and cf. p. 162.
[6] *Critique of Political Economy* (Kerr edition, 1904), p. 11.

this general view of society will tend to determine the form and method of the political economy which is produced. In particular, it will tend to determine the nature of the theory of value with which the system of political economy begins. This may require a few words of explanation.

Every self-respecting system of political economy must centre around a theory of value—that is, a theory which explains how the exchange-ratios of commodities in the market are determined. And the problem of choosing an appropriate theory of value is by no means as easy as some economists have imagined. It is not simply a matter of choosing that theory of value which "fits the facts" best. That is a pathetic fallacy which has bedevilled controversy about theories of value ever since theories of value were first thought of. You cannot "prove" that the labour theory of value is "better" than, say, the marginal utility theory, or vice versa, merely by subjecting them both to a crude empirical test. It is true, of course, that they must pass some sort of empirical test—but there is much more to it than that. The point is that a commodity is a very complicated thing, and the process whereby it is exchanged and valued can be looked at from a number of different angles. And the particular angle from which you decide to look at it when you are framing your theory of value causation is likely to be determined, consciously or unconsciously, by your general theory of social causation. Suppose, for example, that you accept the particular theory of social causation which was more or less common to the members of the Scottish Historical School. You will then be accustomed to visualise the relations between men in production as the "basis", in some significant sense of that word, of all their other social relations. Thus, when you come on to consider the relations which exist between men as exchangers of commodities, you are likely to suspect that behind these relations are lurking other more basic relations between men as producers of commodities. And a little thought will soon show you that the process of commodity exchange and valuation can in fact be usefully looked at from this angle. Commodities have to be produced before they are exchanged, and the fact that men exchange commodities with one another and put values on them is a reflection of the fact that in effect they *work for one another* in producing these commodities. They are mutually dependent upon one another. What they are doing, in essence, is mutually to exchange their activities, their labour. Thus the exchange of commodities may begin to appear as the exchange of the respective quantities of labour

which have been employed to produce the commodities. And, once this idea becomes popular, some sort of labour theory of value begins to develop, and the basis of Classical political economy is laid. Upon this basis the Classical economists erected a theory of distribution which gave primary emphasis to the class relations between men of production, the distribution of income being in effect explained in terms of the new capitalist relations of production.

In the 18th century, the writer in whose work Classical political economy and Classical sociology were most closely associated was, of course, Adam Smith. Smith, like Marx, was a whole man, who tried to combine a theory of history, a system of moral philosophy, and a theory of political economy into one great general theoretical system. After Smith, Classical sociology was developed by Millar, who was not a very good economist, and Classical political economy was developed by Ricardo, who was not a very good sociologist. After Ricardo's death, a few rather hesitant attempts to re-unite political economy and sociology in a new synthesis were made by radical writers like Bray, Proudhon and Rodbertus. But it was not until 1844–5, when Marx and Engels sketched the main outlines of their general theory, that the two disciplines were really united again and the whole Classical system lifted to a much higher plane and transformed into a weapon in the struggle of the working class for socialism. And Marx's study of Classical political economy in 1844 was, I think, the decisive factor which led him forward from Feuerbachian materialism to the materialist conception of history. But however this may be, there is no doubt that Marx can properly be said to be the heir of the basic ideas of the Scottish Historical School. Marx saw the connections which had been forgotten, and restored the unity which had been destroyed.

4

THE LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY

HENRY COLLINS

1. INTRODUCTION

IN 1789 Revolution broke out in France and brought the old régime tumbling to the ground. The Bastille, in Paris, was stormed, and the Royal Family brought forcibly back to Paris, where they were kept as virtual prisoners. Thousands of French nobles, their authority and feudal privileges destroyed by the Revolution, crossed into Austria and Prussia, and begged assistance from the sovereigns of those still feudal states to restore what the people of France had destroyed. What caused alarm and despondency among the ruling classes of Europe was not so much the reforms initiated by the revolutionary régime in France (sovereigns had played with reform at various periods during the preceding decades) as the fact that a revolutionary people in arms was implementing them and forcing the pace on an often unwilling legislature.

In 1791 the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia published the "Declaration of Pilnitz", calling for a crusade of sovereigns to restore the power and authority of the King of France. In the following year the French Convention—the revolutionary authority in Paris—issued the Edict of Fraternity, offering help to all peoples struggling for their freedom. Soon war broke out that was to last for a generation, in the course of which large parts of Europe were occupied by France. Where the French armies marched, in the early years, they destroyed the feudal system in such a way that—particularly in Western Europe—it could never be restored. In January, 1793, the King of France was brought to the scaffold and in the following month Great Britain, for a mixture of political, commercial and strategic reasons, joined the counter-revolutionary forces of Europe in a futile attempt to stifle revolution and restore what could be restored of the "ancien régime".

We are concerned in this essay with the way in which the people of

England reacted to these momentous events, and in particular with the way one particular body of men, the London Corresponding Society, called on the people of England to take their destiny into their own hands, so beginning a struggle for democratic rights and popular power that is still going on.

Before discussing these events, however, it is necessary to look briefly at the stage of development reached in England by the beginning of the 1790s. The 18th century, especially in its second half, had seen, with the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, an unprecedentedly rapid change in productive technique, in economic conditions, and in the concentration of large masses into towns at a time when Britain was ceasing to be able to feed herself from her own resources. For the first sixty years or so of the century food prices had stayed relatively stable. In the 1760s, however, with the rapid growth of population and its growing concentration in towns, the price of food began to rise, and increased steeply, though with considerable fluctuations, throughout the rest of the 18th and until well into the 19th century. The rise became especially steep with the outbreak of war in 1793. England had always known periods when food was short and dear but she had never had, until this period, a large and growing part of her population cut off from the countryside; shortage now meant hunger experienced by masses of people increasingly herded into towns where the possibility of combined action was much greater than in the countryside.

Of equal significance was the fact that food prices tended to rise much more rapidly than the prices of manufactured articles. To maintain his standard of living a small manufacturer now had to produce and sell much greater quantities of his relatively cheaper products. This was possible for those manufacturers of, for example, textiles, who were beginning to employ the new power-driven machines of the early Industrial Revolution. Small handicraft producers, especially numerous in the towns, could not readily increase their output unless they owned capital enough to buy machines or employ more workers. So that for hatters, breeches makers, shoemakers, cutlers, silversmiths and shopkeepers in a small way of business these years were particularly hard and it is not surprising that the more advanced of them turned, with increasing interest, to proposals for radical reform. The American and French Revolutions, occurring within thirteen years of each other, had in any case pre-disposed men to look to political change as a means of alleviating their lot. The advances in science and the application of

scientific knowledge to agriculture and industry had also given birth to the idea that human society, too, was subject to change, could be studied scientifically and the results applied to better the conditions of men's lives.

While conditions, therefore, favoured the spread of the ideas of democratic reform, they were in other respects unfavourable to the early success of these ideas. The radical petty bourgeoisie of the towns, whose economic difficulties we have referred to already, were not in themselves strong or stable enough to win the battle for political democracy unless allies could be found in other classes, and it was precisely here that the weakness of the movement lay. Whereas by 1815 the industrial elements in English society were coming to predominate, in 1792 (the year in which the London Corresponding Society was founded) the country was still largely agrarian with poorly developed communications which made combined political action on a national scale exceedingly difficult. Though increasing numbers of wage earners were coming to be employed in agriculture and industry, a factory proletariat as yet hardly existed, and where it did it consisted largely of landless countrymen and ruined small masters with a very large admixture of women and children. The proletariat, therefore, was either scattered over the countryside or uprooted in the towns under conditions favouring apathy and demoralisation. Manchester, in 1791, had doubled its population in the previous thirty years, and the population of Birmingham had grown by at least fifty per cent, but the propertyless masses who had come crowding into the towns during those three decades were prone to riot indiscriminately, and could easily be persuaded that employers and magistrates were their friends, dissenters and radicals their enemies. Even where the factory system had made most progress—in Manchester, for instance—there was still no uniform factory population; in and around Manchester, in particular, cotton spun in factories was woven on hand looms in cottages, and there had actually been a growth of domestic weaving as an adjunct to factory spinning. An anonymous pamphlet written about the Birmingham riots (in which the house of Dr. Priestley—radical, dissenter and famous scientist—had been destroyed), published in 1791, pointed out that conditions of employment were such that workers "were taught to act, and not to think".[1]

[1] Quoted in Witt Bowden, *Industrial Society in England towards the end of the 18th Century* (1925), p. 274.

Those centres in which the democratic movement gives the impression of greatest stability and strength are not the factory towns of Lancashire, Birmingham, the Black Country or the Potteries, but London itself—as yet hardly touched by the new industrial developments—and such provincial centres as Sheffield, Norwich, and the Medway Towns where also the Industrial Revolution had hardly begun to penetrate.

If there was not yet an adequate basis for a labour movement among the working class, neither was there the possibility of effective allies from other classes, of a kind whose importance was later to be stressed by Francis Place. The manufacturerers were, on the whole, uninterested in reform; the dominant landed interest, while it scarcely liked industrial manufacturers, did not see in them as yet a threat to its own monopoly of political power. Manufacturers' petitions were treated with respect and often influenced legislation—notably in the case of the Commercial Treaty with France in 1786.

A factor causing some confusion in the ranks of the democratic reformers of the 1790s, and leading them often to over-estimate their chances of success, was the memory that at various periods between 1760 and 1782 sections of the ruling class itself had taken up the cause of parliamentary reform for a variety of reasons. A number of Whig politicians in the 1760s, resenting the increased political activity of the Crown under George III, had sought allies outside their own ranks—and even, through Wilkes, among the mass of the people—in an effort to strengthen Parliament by extending the franchise and limiting corruption. Sections of the Yorkshire gentry, resenting their exclusion from political power and the unnecessary expenses of a corrupt and incompetent administration, had joined the reform movement in the late 1770s, and, with the Crown discredited by the victory of the American Revolution, a measure of "Economical Reform" which temporarily reduced the numbers of pensioners and placemen maintained at public expense, had been passed in 1782. This measure was enough to satisfy the squires and freeholders from various counties who had provided the mass basis for the "Yorkshire Reform" movement, and though William Pitt fought the Election of 1783 as a partisan of reform he dropped the cause on attaining office. From then onwards little was heard of reform until the outbreak of the French Revolution; then, however, for reasons we have examined, the response came mainly from the lower middle class, from the old (pre-Wesleyan) circles of religious dissenters who preserved cherished memories of the

revolutionary role of dissent in the time of Cromwell and who suffered many legal disabilities on account of their religion, and from a small section of the Whigs, led by Charles James Fox. Substantial property owners—landlords, manufacturers, merchants—were terrified, almost to a man, by the revolutionary events across the Channel; the Whig party was broken and the men of property rallied solidly to Pitt at the head of a revived Tory party.

Among the first to respond with enthusiasm to the news of the Revolution in France were the members of the London Revolution Society, an exceedingly un-revolutionary body which cherished, however, the principles of civil liberty and constitutional government that Englishmen had successfully contended for in the previous century. The Revolution Society, which had met on November 4th, 1788, to celebrate the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, met on the next anniversary in 1789 to welcome the developments in France. The meeting sent a Congratulatory Address to the French National Assembly in which it looked forward to a fruitful collaboration between England and France, "the two first kingdoms in the world" as well as the two freest, to promote the common cause of freedom throughout the world. The Society heard an address by Dr. Richard Price, a leading Nonconformist divine, who had been prominent in defending the cause of American Independence thirteen years earlier. The address, which was published under the title *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, advocated as necessary guarantees of freedom: "First; the right to liberty of conscience in religious matters. Secondly; the right to resist power when abused. And thirdly, the right to choose our own governors; to cashier them for misconduct; and to frame a government for ourselves." This was mild enough, though it was to earn the immoderate denunciation of Edmund Burke when he began, in the following year, a vicious and sustained attack on every expression of a desire for reform.

More robust and popular than the pronouncements of the Revolution Society was the movement aroused by the writings of Thomas Paine, whose *Rights of Man* appeared in two parts in the years 1790 and 1791. Paine, like Price, and like many others who welcomed the Revolution in France, had first come into political prominence in support of the American revolutionaries of 1776. Paine's part in this struggle had been extremely active. He had fought in the revolutionary armies; his *Common Sense* and *Crisis* papers had rallied the flagging spirits of the colonists during the worst years of the war, and

he had served for a time as Foreign Secretary to the Continental Congress which was the supreme authority over the thirteen allied North American states. In Part I of the *Rights of Man* Paine joined issue with Burke who had argued, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, that governments were the mystical embodiment of the accumulated wisdom of the human race and that no one generation had the right to tear down institutions and defy traditions that were the outcome of the work of innumerable preceding generations. Paine called this, bluntly, "the vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave"[1] and concluded that each generation was perfectly free to overthrow or re-mould governments as it saw fit, since "Man has no property in man, neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow." In Part II of the *Rights of Man*, published in the following year, Paine went much further than any of his contemporaries in providing the beginnings of a social programme for the radical movement. This programme, a most remarkable achievement for the 18th century, provided for public works as a palliative for unemployment, as well as for a host of social benefits, including children's allowances and old age pensions. Though the *Rights of Man* was soon banned by the Government and booksellers were prosecuted for selling the work, while Paine himself fled to France (on the advice of William Blake) to avoid prosecution, the work was circulated and read on a massive scale and profoundly influenced working and lower middle class opinion during the 1790s.

Before he was compelled to leave the country Paine had joined a democratic organisation—the Society for Constitutional Information —which had been founded in 1780 but had been inactive for many years until, on the inspiration of the French Revolution and through the initiative of Major Cartwright, its founder, it was revived in March 1791. During the early 1780s it circulated tracts in favour of manhood suffrage, notably *Take Your Choice*, which had been written by Cartwright himself and published as early as 1776. While Paine in his writings justified democracy on the simple, "utilitarian" grounds that it was the only rational way of organising society, and the way most calculated to make men happy, and while he appealed to men to reject tradition and organise their lives on lines dictated by reason, the Constitutional Society had based its earlier appeals on the myth that Saxon society had been democratic and that the ruling class had perverted the earlier form of the constitution. The tendency to look back

[1] *Rights of Man*, Pt. I (1937 ed.), p. 4.

to an earlier utopia and to claim to be "restorers" rather than "innovators" is characteristic of pre-industrial and pre-scientific popular movements and was beginning to be effectively challenged from within the democratic movement in the course of the 1790s.[1] The Constitutional Society included in its ranks such figures as Horne Tooke, who had been a leading collaborator with Wilkes in the late 1760s, and John Frost who, with a number of others, helped to found the much more plebeian and vigorous "London Corresponding Society" in January 1792. Relations between the two bodies were nearly always cordial, and many democratic societies in the provinces were formed on the model of one or other of the two London societies, corresponding with one and sometimes with both.

II. THE FOUNDATION OF THE LONDON CORRESPONDING SOCIETY

The London Corresponding Society, which came into being in the political atmosphere described above, is important as the first political association in England which consisted largely of working people and which directed its efforts to the emancipation of the people by their own exertions. In a sense its members can be said to have started the Labour Movement in Britain. The Society was founded by Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker from Stirlingshire, who formed it, with eight members, on January 25, 1792, when he himself was nearing forty. According to his own testimony, his political interests were first aroused by two factors, one economic, the other political. Though he worked hard he did not prosper owing, he believed, to "the heavy pressure of the daily accumulating taxes, and the consequent rise in the prices of all the necessaries of life".[2] As a result of the immense agricultural and industrial changes of the late 18th century men were coming to be impressed by the power of technique to increase the production of wealth, and they were readier than any previous generation to ascribe poverty to social and political, rather than to natural causes. As Hardy wrote of himself: "He knew the country to be productive, and its inhabitants to be industrious and ingenious; therefore, the distress which he saw everywhere around him could not arise from the fault of the soil, or of those who occupied it, and the cause must be sought for somewhere else."[3] The American War of Independence had already set him thinking along political lines, and

[1] See the essay on "The Norman Yoke" in this volume, esp. pp. 42–54

[2] *Memoirs of Thomas Hardy* (1832), p. 10.

[3] *ibid.*

he was strongly influenced by Dr. Price's *Treatise on Civil Liberty*. He had also read a number of pamphlets published by the Constitutional Society during the early '80s, and by 1789 he was ready to respond in a positive way to the challenge of the French Revolution.

As a society for discussing and disseminating political ideas and information the London Corresponding Society was nothing new. What was completely new, however, was the subscription of 1*d.* a week, with 1*s.* entrance fee,[1] while the avowedly genteel "Society of Friends of the People", founded in London a few months after the L.C.S., charged 2½ guineas entrance fee and 2½ guineas a year subscription. The Constitutional Society—middle class and un-aristocratic—charged 5 guineas a year with a guinea entrance fee. The Corresponding Society was organised in divisions throughout London, each division sending two delegates to the General Committee, which met weekly. This General Committee elected a smaller Executive Committee and a Secretary (who also functioned as Treasurer) and a President. The Executive Committee met weekly, like the General Committee, but on a different day. It consisted of six members plus the Secretary and President. Two members of the E.C. retired each month.[2]

The Society's divisions—or branches—met weekly. Each division was expected to recruit up to a maximum of thirty members; when the membership exceeded thirty, new recruits were to be entered in a supernumerary book, and when sixteen had been enrolled in this way, a new division was to be formed. Thus, a division could contain between sixteen and forty-five members.

Such was the machinery of the Society and, on the whole, it worked. The law forbade societies in different towns to coalesce, so there could be no divisions outside London—hence the emphasis on "correspondence" as the means by which nation-wide unity of opinion and action was to be secured. Robert Birley, in a far from sympathetic survey of the democratic movement of the 1790s, has conceded that "it was a definite step forward in the rise of the political consciousness of the masses when they no longer felt that they were engaged in an isolated effort."[3] The London Corresponding Society corresponded with similar societies in Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Derby, Leicester, Coventry, Newcastle and Norwich—all towns which had been affected to some degree at least, by the agrarian and industrial changes of the

[1] *London Corresponding Society: Addresses and Regulations, May 24, 1792.*
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 5. [3] *The English Jacobins*, (1924), p. 13.

18th century. In agricultural areas there were societies in Rochester, Tewkesbury, Hertford, Bath and, possibly, Sherborne. Apart from the ill-fated Edinburgh Convention of 1793 there was little co-operation with Scotland, though Glasgow is specifically mentioned as corresponding with London.

The class from which the London Corresponding Society, from its inception, recruited, was described by Hardy, in a letter to a Rev. Bryant of Sheffield, written less than six weeks after the Society had been formed, as consisting of "tradesmen, mechanics and shopkeepers".[1] Hardy deliberately appealed to the lower middle and working classes because he felt that the aristocracy would be compelled, through self-interest, to obstruct reform. He wrote that "Perhaps there has never been a cordial union betwixt the aristocracy and democracy of this country—their interests being so opposite."[2] This recognition of the antagonism of class interests was expressed even more forcibly in a letter sent to Hardy from the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information. Here the cause of poverty is directly attributed to "the avariciousness and extortion of that voluptuous and haughty class of Beings who would have us possess no more knowledge than to believe all things were created only for the use of that small group of worthless Individuals with these sentiments".[3]

The London Corresponding Society came into existence, as has been said, on January 25, 1792. During February it was, presumably, recruiting in London and organising its recruits into sections, and in March it undertook its first public activity. This was the circulation of a manifesto signed by Hardy, though written by Maurice Margarot (who became the first President) announcing to the nation at large the aims of the new Society. This manifesto led directly to the formation of new societies in the provinces; according to Francis Place—who joined the Society in June, 1794—it was the reason why Burke, "in one of his mad rants in the House of Commons", described the London Corresponding Society as "the Mother of all Mischief".[4]

As the new movement began to spread, however, the authorities lost little time in attempting to check its growth. Although Britain was not yet at war with revolutionary France, the political situation was now quite different from what it had been in 1782 and 1783, when reform had been a perfectly respectable plaything for politicians in opposition. Burke's *Reflections* and Paine's *Rights of Man* had, each in its own way,

[1] *Memoirs of Thomas Hardy*, p. 15.
[2] Quoted in Birley, *The English Jacobins*, p. 8. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[4] G. S. Veitch, *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform* (1913), p. 206.

frightened the men of property, and conditioned them to accept the necessity of repression. On April 28, 1792, the Rev. Christopher Wyvill, a Yorkshire landowner, and himself the leader of the Yorkshire Reform movement of the early '80s, wrote to James Martin, an M.P. and a member of the Constitutional Society: "If Mr. Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes, 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."[1] (April, 28 1792.)

Three weeks later (May 21), His Majesty issued a Proclamation, warning the people against seditious meetings and political "Libels". Two days afterwards Pallain, the French representative in London, wrote in a dispatch: "In vain have the friends of reform protested their attachment to the Constitution; in vain have they said they ask for nothing more" than parliamentary reform, "nor to obtain it by other than legal means; they are persistently disbelieved", for "Paine only is seen in their every action". The Whig element that remained faithful to the cause of reform was well aware of the dangers of its position. The Society of Friends of the People (Grey—whose Government in 1832 was to pass the first Reform Bill—Lauderdale, Erskine, etc.) had been formed in the previous month, partly to counteract the effects of the "extreme" party which advocated universal suffrage. The Constitutional Society issued a reply to the Royal Proclamation, disavowing any intentions other than the peaceful advocacy of parliamentary reform, and the London Corresponding Society sought to allay the panic in ruling class circles by issuing, on May 24, its *Addresses and Regulations*, which give us a good picture of the Society faced with its baptism of fire.

The document begins by detailing the constitution of the Society, which has already been outlined. The political programme was simple and was indicated in the address to be read to every delegate (to the General Committee) on his election, which also contained a much needed warning against the activities of Government agents. "As we have associated to obtain UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE and ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS, we desire you to use every legal and constitutional Endeavour to accomplish our Wishes; and we enjoin you to guard against every snare that may be laid to interrupt you in your Constitutional Pursuits, as well as every Attempt to delude you beyond Constitutional Bounds."[2]

[1] Veitch, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
[2] *London Corresponding Society: Addresses and Regulations, May 24, 1792*, pp. 7, 8.

A similar precaution was taken in the address to be read by the President of the Section to each new member on enrolment.

There followed, in this document, the legend common to most reforming bodies in the 17th and 18th centuries—that England had enjoyed a democratic constitution under the Saxons, more especially in Alfred's reign, and the successive stages by which the original democratic rights had been allegedly wittled down were then enumerated.[1] After that came the usual indictment of corrupt boroughs, especially the Cornish boroughs, long the mainstay of the ministerial party. There was also the customary protest at non-representation of the new manufacturing centres, particularly "Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Wolverhampton, &c."

So far there was nothing in the document remotely seditious or subversive of the social order. Certainly, in demanding manhood suffrage and annual Parliaments the London Corresponding Society placed itself on the most advanced wing of the reform movement, but even so it was saying nothing that had not been said sixteen years before by Major Cartwright and more than once by the Duke of Richmond.

The benefits expected to follow from manhood suffrage are referred to, but in very general terms; the "HONEST PARLIAMENT" being expected to dispense cheaper government and to simplify the laws, and so reduce the cost of obtaining justice from the courts.[2] The main reference to economic benefits to be anticipated is the statement that commons alienated by Acts of Enclosure will be restored by "The People's Parliament". Since smallholders and small farmers were the chief sufferers from the extensive Enclosures of the late Eighteenth Century, this demand would naturally be popular among the class to which the Corresponding Society appealed. There is, throughout the document, no suggestion of either republicanism or of a wish to attack property rights.

The fate of the reformers was not, however, destined to be decided by the merits of the programme they put forward. Domestic politics were overhung, throughout the second half of the year, by developments in the international sphere. On July 25 the Duke of Brunswick issued his manifesto, undertaking to restore forcibly the King of France to his former powers. Following this, and spectacular military developments, the Convention was established in Paris in August, and the

[1] See above, "The Norman Yoke", esp. pp. 17 ff.

[2] *London Corresponding Society: Addresses and Regulations, May 24, 1792*, p. 15.

French Republic proclaimed. England was not, at the time, involved in war with France, and there seemed, so far as anyone could tell, no reason to suppose she would become so. On September 27 the Corresponding Society drew up a *Congratulatory Address to the National Convention of France* which declared the solidarity of English reformers with the French revolutionary government, fighting to liberate France from foreign armies of intervention. The Address was signed for the Society by Margarot and Thomas Hardy, who claimed to speak on behalf of the Society's 5,000 members. It was welcomed by the National Convention, which distributed it throughout the departments of France. Similar addresses were sent from the Revolution Society and the Constitutional Society, the latter address containing two sentences that came later to be used against the Reformers. "After the example given by France", it said, "Revolutions will become easy. Reason is about to make a rapid progress, and it would not be extraordinary if in a much less space of time than can be imagined the French should send addresses of congratulation to a national convention of England."[1]

III. THE BEGINNING OF REPRESSION

Addresses such as these, delivered to a country with which England was not yet at war, contained nothing illegal and nothing which belied the Reformers' contention that their object was the advancement of peaceful reform by methods of persuasion. The Corresponding Society's Address had been issued in September, and in the following month the French Convention issued the Edict of Fraternity, promising aid to all peoples in overthrowing their rulers, and there is little doubt that the October Edict secured for the September Address a measure of retrospective disrepute. It was now easy for the enemies of reform to present the Address, in the light of the Edict, as seeking French aid to overthrow the Monarchy in England and set up a republic.

Unfortunately, in November 1792, increasing numbers of people were beginning to organise in "loyal associations" (the best known that of John Reeves for "Protecting Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers") who were not interested in drawing fine distinctions or in having a scrupulous regard for chronology when it came to selecting sticks with which to beat the reformers. In face of particularly

[1] G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, *British Working Class Movements. Select Documents 1789–1875* (1951), p. 53.

vehement attacks from Reeves's Association, the Society issued a new *Address of the London Corresponding Society to the Other Societies of Great Britain united for Obtaining a Reform in Parliament.* This was written by Felix Vaughan, a barrister and an early member of the Society. Among other things, the *Address* expressed its regret at the excesses of the French Revolution—in particular the panic massacre of royalist prisoners in Paris in September which had aroused opinion in England against the reforming societies—but attributed responsibility, tenably enough, to "a Bloody and tyrannous Manifesto" (that of the Duke of Brunswick in July, referred to above). The address went on to outline the views of the Society on private property, since these had been called in question by Reeves's Association. The Society's members, wrote Vaughan, recognised that "differences of strength, of talents, and of industry do and ought to afford proportional distinctions of property, which, when acquired and confirmed by the laws, is sacred and inviolable".[1] This attitude to private property is maintained steadily throughout the history of the Society, and is fully consistent with its class basis. The Society went on to attribute the French reign of terror to the greater political backwardness of France, which, unlike England, had not overthrown its absolute monarchy in the 17th century. "As we have never yet been cast so low at the foot of despotism, so it is not requisite that we should appeal to the same awful tribunal with our brethren on the continent."

A billsticker was sentenced to six months imprisonment for pasting up the address, the Government being by now thoroughly alarmed, ready to convince itself that a revolutionary conspiracy existed and prepared to drive a coach and horses through the liberties of the people in order to deal with it. With "loyal associations" in London and the provinces actively persecuting anyone suspected of even mildly reforming tendencies, with magistrates—often themselves members of "loyal associations"—threatening to deprive of their licences publicans on whose premises democratic meetings were held, a regular witch hunt, with the usual revolting trappings of hysteria and denunciation, was unleashed. Another Royal Proclamation, in November 1792, was energetically responded to, especially by the gentry in the counties. P. A. Brown instances in Northamptonshire a house to house canvas of opinion in the villages, under the patronage of the landowners, while the friendly societies were also tested for loyalty.[2] The schoolmaster of

[1] *Memoirs of Thomas Hardy*, p. 26.
[2] P. A. Brown, *The French Revolution in English History* (1918), p. 86.

a Wiltshire village is reported as losing his occupation on account of "traitorous expressions", but was saved from further pains by the Marquess of Bath, who wished him to be let off "as the fellow declared that he was in liquor and did not know the evil tendency of the language he had used". The witch hunt was, as yet, in its earliest stage. The next stage was to follow the outbreak of war with France in February, 1793.

At first the corresponding societies in England and Scotland seem to have gone calmly about their work, unaffected by the war with France. In Scotland a Society of Friends of the People was active and during April and May was in correspondence with societies in Sheffield and Leeds, as well as with the London Corresponding Society.[1] The activity in England seems to have centred around the collection of signatures to petitions for Parliamentary reform—about thirty were presented to the House of Commons during May.

On July 8, the Society convened a general meeting at the Crown and Anchor, in the Strand. The scale of the Society's operations can be gauged from the fact that twenty thousand copies of the resolutions adopted at the meeting, together with an address to the nation "on the subject of a Thorough Parliamentary Reform" were ordered to be printed and distributed gratis. A new feature of the address is the specific appeal directed to the manufacturers and merchants, with the assertion that were those interests represented in Parliament, the war with France would already have been brought to an end: "for had they that weight in Parliament, which the spirit of the Constitution evidently intended, and which was confirmed by the Revolution in 1688, we doubt not their open declaration against a war so hostile to their interests, and to the cause of Humanity, would ere now have refuted the fictitious idea of its being popular, necessary or just."[2]

This seems to have been wishful thinking. There is little evidence that manufacturers and traders in general were any more concerned at their lack of representation in 1793 than they had been ten years before, when Powys in the Commons and North in the Lords had twitted Pitt and his supporters with the "horrid sound of silence" from Manchester and Birmingham in response to the reform bill of that year. Certainly the Manchester Constitutional Society (as its leader, the manufacturer, Thomas Walker, related) had appealed, on the eve of the war: "Inhabitants of Manchester! . . . pause awhile on behalf of

[1] R. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, pp. 137–8.
[2] *Address to the Nation*, London Corresponding Society, (July 1793), pp. 5, 6.

your own interests, and consider what class of ye can be benefitted by war", but it is doubtful whether many manufacturers sympathised with the Manchester Society. The appeal just quoted seems to be addressed rather to the poor whose conditions are said to be bad enough as it is, and sure to be worsened still further by war, while the grievances complained of in the document are hardly manufacturers' grievances—the game laws, combination laws, and the press gang. (Thomas Walker, in his attachment to political Whiggery and his hatred of Pitt, seems to have been relatively isolated, even from his fellow fustian manufacturers.)[1]

Gradually, as the year wore on, anticipations of violence and the reality of persecution became apparent. In a letter to the Norwich society on July 25, 1793, the London Corresponding Society alluded to the danger of "foreign mercenaries" being landed to oppress the people, and pledged itself to resist such attempts. In August, Muir, and in September, Palmer, were sentenced in Scotland to transportation for sedition, after farcical trials. At some time during the autumn the Lambeth Loyal Association began its career of seedy melodrama, which was to give the prosecution something to point to at the trial of Hardy in the following year. But in England the weather was still quite mild. There was little talk of violence among the members of the Society—apart from those in government pay—and no preparation for it. The reformers went on quietly propagating their ideas and, in one notable case, developing them further. Joseph Gerrald, a lawyer who, like Sheridan, had once been a pupil of the famous Dr. Samuel Parr, and who had recently returned to England from the West Indies, joined both the Constitutional and the Corresponding Societies. In his pamphlet written at this time, *A Convention the Only Means of Saving us from Ruin*, he presented with unusual clarity and vigour the case of the reformers, and carried it a good deal further.

He defended, to begin with, the societies which had sent addresses to the Paris Convention, before the outbreak of war, and said that if England really enjoyed the freedom of which she boasted she could have nothing to fear from such addresses to nations which, like the French, were struggling to be free. The main accusations levelled at reformers at this time were, of course, those alleging disloyalty on the strength of correspondence with France, and irreligion, because of the growth of deism in that country. (Tom Paine had not yet published *The Age of Reason* to give a further handle to the charge.) Having dealt

[1] Bowden, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

with the charge of disloyalty, Gerrald discusses the charge of atheism. He strongly denies that the Convention was atheist and doubtless felt on strong ground in affirming that the boot was rather on the other foot. "Before the revolution Atheism was avowedly the creed of the Court; and while Atheism was professed, even worse than Atheism was practised."[1] Going on to discuss the grievances under which the people of Britain laboured, Gerrald specifies the game laws and the administration of justice in the countryside. "The lordly peer may trample down, with impunity, the corn of the husbandman; but if the peasant kills a hare to give food to his family, he is sentenced to pay the sum of three pounds, which he has no means of obtaining, and if he cannot perform an impossibility, is sent, by the decree of *justice*, to perish in a gaol."

There is a Benthamite note in Gerrald's plan for reforming the penal code by humanising punishment, as there is about his criticism of the doctrine of "virtual representation"—by which contemporary Tories sought to justify the undemocratic constitution. Men were said, he pointed out, to be "virtually represented" when they had no vote, but when it came to being punished, they got the real thing—no "virtual punishment" for the virtually represented. He dealt, finally, with a very frequent topic of discussion in the societies, especially after the middle of 1793—what happens if Parliament, petitioned by a large majority of the nation to reform itself, refuses? For answer he turns to a document on petitions signed, *inter alios*, by Lord Camden. Temple, and the Duke of Richmond, in which it says: "And if it be asked, what farther is to be done, if these petitions are rejected? The best answer is, that the case cannot be supposed . . ." for then Parliament would lose its moral authority, as representative of the nation. An unsatisfactory answer, many must have thought, but to press the enquiry beyond that point under those conditions would probably have been imprudent.

The story of the British Convention, which was broken up forcibly by the authorities at Edinburgh in December, does not concern us here, except in so far as it impinges on the story of the London Corresponding Society. On October 17, 1793, the Society elected "Citizens Margarot and Gerrald" to represent it at the Convention which was to meet in Edinburgh in November to formulate a plan for a nation-wide campaign in favour of reform. There were three other English delegates—Sinclair and Yorke from the Constitutional Society

[1] Joseph Gerrald, *A Convention the only Means of Saving us from Ruin*, (1793), p. 67.

and Brown from the Sheffield Constitutional Society. Gerrald was instructed to press, at the Convention, for "the obtaining of annual parliaments and universal suffrage by lawful and rational means" but also to say "that it is the duty of the people to resist any Act of Parliament repugnant to the original principles of the Constitution", then considered a sound constitutional doctrine for which Blackstone himself, the safest of constitutional authorities, could be cited, and which was to be emphatically enunciated by Fox in 1795 in the debates on the Treason and Sedition Acts. The proceedings at Edinburgh were certainly restrained, and the Convention addressed the British people in a statement issued on November 19 (before the arrival of the English delegates) in tones of singular piety: "He who is the parent of light, and fountain of knowledge, will impart it to all who diligently seek it."[1]—as if to belie the charges of atheism that were being diligently bandied about. The Convention dispersed before the arrival of the English delegates, but reassembled at the end of November, and was broken up forcibly on December 5. The prosecution at the subsequent trials in Edinburgh and London made what it could of the hurried arrangements to carry on the work of the Convention in secret, after the arrests, but there was little to go on. Nevertheless in Scotland the authorities struck hard.

The savage sentences imposed on Gerrald and Margarot (who were transported in the following year together with the Scotsmen, Muir, Palmer and Skirving) aroused indignation in England, and mobilised the remnant of the Parliamentary Whig party in an unsuccessful attempt to have the sentences quashed. In England, despite the war, the rights of free speech were relatively unimpaired and civil liberties were still held in respect by London juries. The proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* were prosecuted for re-printing a political resolution passed by a Derby Society calling for reformed representation, but a London jury acquitted them.

The political picture, as it appeared to the London reformers at the end of the year, is best summarised in the issue of *Politics for the People*, appearing on December 21, 1793. The journal was published by D. I. Eaton, a member of the Corresponding Society who also published some of its material. There are two significant features in the issue quoted—one, from an article called "Reflexions of a True Briton", contains a remarkably penetrating analysis of the rôle of extreme parties in bourgeois-democratic revolutions.

[1] *The Address of the British Convention*, (1793), p. 22.

"In revolutions, the sage Mably remarks, Enthusiasts are necessary, who in transgressing all bounds, may enable the wise and temperate to attain their ends. Had it not been for the Puritans, whose aim was equally to destroy both Episcopacy and Royalty, the English would never have attained that position of civil and religious liberty which they enjoy."

The other feature is a summary, by "Old Hubert", of how things stood in the world of politics, for the benefit of imprisoned reformers.

"Lord Howe—Making nothing of it, but his emoluments; Lord Thurlow—Either swearing or praying; The Lord Chancellor—Planning Campaigns; Admiral Lord Hood—Proposing forms of Government to other Nations; The King of Prussia—Fighting and crying; The Emperor—Fighting and begging; John Bull—Fighting and Paying; the Heads of the City—Eating; The Heads of the Ministry—Drinking; John Wilkes, esq.[1]—Preaching against licentiousness; Bishops—Feasting; Curates—Starving; Mr. Windham—Syllogising; Mr. Burke—Raving; Shopkeepers—Breaking; Manufacturers—Enlisting; Sinecure Placemen—Sneering; Unfortunate Debtors—Rotting; Mr. Muir—Dying; His Judges—Living; The Association of Spies and Informers[2]—Doing everything; The Constitutional Society—Doing nothing; Credit—Declining; Liberty—Sinking; The French—Regenerating; the English—Degenerating."

IV. THE TRIAL OF THOMAS HARDY

An issue of the same journal a week later gives evidence that a general fall in the standard of living was already beginning to be felt, as the effects of the war on the cost of living became apparent. The article described what it considered to be a moderate standard of life for a working man: "to have a meal of plain meat four or five times a week, and clean coarse clothing not quite in rags"—and said that to live at this level at prevailing wages required a working day of sixteen to eighteen hours.

In face of accumulating discontent the Government was meanwhile accumulating such evidence as its spies could collect or manufacture. It frustrated the efforts of the Whigs in Parliament to get the Scottish verdicts reviewed and was careful to ensure that the transport carrying

[1] Wilkes had long ceased to be connected with the progressive movement and was a follower of Pitt.

[2] Reeve's Association for Protecting Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers.

the victims to exile left before Palmer's petition could come before the Commons—an act of characteristic meanness that evoked protests in the House.[1] The Government was less successful in its prosecutions of Daniel Eaton on a charge of criminal libel, for having published, in *Politics for the People*, an unsigned sketch (by Thelwall) that could be taken to reflect on the character of His Majesty. The counsel for the prosecution undoubtedly represented the view of the Government and of a large part of the propertied class of the day when he said, commenting on the paper's title: "Politics—circumstances of public agitation submitted to the consideration of the lowest class of society."[2] The evidence against Eaton was, at any rate, not negligible, but the jury did not choose to convict.

Against the growing threat of repression the Corresponding Society called, jointly with the Constitutional Society, a mass meeting at Chalk Farm on April 14, 1794. The meeting protested, of course, against the war with France, and congratulated the Earl of Stanhope on his motion in the Lords (on April 4) "To prevent His Majesty's Ministers from interfering with the Internal Government of France." Of more significance, in the eyes of a watchful Government, was the unanimous resolution:

> "That any attempt to violate those yet remaining laws, which were intended for the Security of Englishmen against the Tyranny of Courts and Ministers, and the Corruption of dependent judges ought to be considered as dissolving entirely the social compact between the English Nation and their Governors; and driving them to that incontrovertible maxim of eternal Justice, that the safety of the people is the supreme, and in cases of necessity the only law."

This could be defended as sound constitutional doctrine. Furthermore, under prevailing conditions, it was inevitable that the reformers should give time to considering what happened when (as seemed increasingly likely) the Government either resorted to forcible repression or ignored the requests of a majority of the population. Gerrald had seemed content to quote that "the case cannot be supposed", but Gerrald was on his way to Botany Bay, and it seemed probable that the Government would not stop at that. Under the circumstances it is surprising that the Government was able to collect such pitifully inadequate evidence that violence was contemplated—it is a tribute to

[1] *Annual Register*, 1794, p. 264. [2] *Trial of D. I. Eaton* (edition of 1797), p. 13.

the political maturity of the reformers that the fullest use had to be made of *provocateurs* to get even the semblance of a case.

It was in April of that year that Frederick Pollydore Nodder ("Botanic painter to His Majesty") visited the room of the Lambeth Loyal Association, where he seems to have seen evidence that half-hearted drilling was sometimes practised, but no one, at the subsequent trial of Thomas Hardy, could ever remember more than seven men appearing at the same time on parade. Such an organisation cannot seriously have intended to overthrow the state. There was the letter ordering pikes, written by the Sheffield Society, April 24, 1794, produced at the trial, but the letter said that "the barefaced aristocracy of the present administration has made it necessary that we should be prepared to act on the defensive, against any attack they may command their newly armed minions to make upon us."[1] The reformers in Sheffield, as in Birmingham and Manchester where they had been freely assaulted with the connivance of the magistrates, had every reason to believe that they might have to defend themselves against "Church and King" mobs. And the modest number of orders for pikes (130) received by Mr. Hill of Sheffield, seems to indicate a defensive rather than an offensive motive.

On May 2 there took place the dinner party which seems to have decided the Government that it was time to strike. The dinner was provided by the Constitutional Society, and tickets cost 7*s.* 6*d.*, though members of the Corresponding Society were admitted free. Two hundred and sixty people attended. Horne Tooke made a speech in which he said that Pitt and his supporters had betrayed "that poor man the King" and the hereditary aristocracy. There would soon, the way things were going, be no constitution for the Constitutional Society to defend. That, and some toasts with a republican flavour, were all the Government had to go on. But it was enough. On May 12 Hardy was arrested and his property requisitioned. On May 15 a Secret Committee of both houses of Parliament was elected. On May 23, Habeas Corpus was suspended.

Early in June there occurred the attack by a drunken crowd of Tory patriots on Hardy's home, which resulted in the tragic death of his wife in childbirth. Hardy, Tooke, Thelwall and eight or nine others were kept in confinement in conditions which the Government, despite promises, took no steps to alleviate, and which were bad enough to

[1] Student of the Inner Temple, *Report of the Trial of Members of the London Corresponding Society*, p. 196.

undermine the morale of anyone not endowed with a good deal of stamina. The initial effect of the arrests was, according to Francis Place, to frighten away many of the members and numbers fell off considerably.[1] There was a reaction in June, however, when Place himself joined, as did many other "men of decided character, sober thinking men, not likely to be easily put from their purpose". There was, throughout the country, a lot of sympathy for the arrested men among those who did not sympathise with their politics. The Government had chosen its plotters badly—the imprisoned men did not look like fanatics or criminals. Many must have shared Fox's view when, moving an amendment to Pitt's Loyal Address in June, 1794, he said that "they appeared to be men who might co-operate in a revolution, but would never produce one".

The Privy Council, meanwhile, was sparing no pains to compel the arrested men to incriminate themselves, and to admit their participation in the vast criminal conspiracy which the Government had persuaded itself existed. Adams, the Secretary of the Constitutional Society, swore an information "authenticating the books of the Society for Constitutional Information, and by way of recompense he was released on bail and was never brought to trial". This was symptomatic of the Constitutional Society which, like the lesser reforming societies in London seemed "to represent the enthusiasm of comfortable citizens who imitated the aristocratic 'Friends of the People' in their title, but not in their discretion, and were frightened out of existence when the times began to try men's souls".[2] Even Horne Tooke, whom nothing could frighten, was too discouraged to resume regular political activity after his acquittal, and while Major Cartwright plodded on as doggedly as ever, he did so almost alone. The ignominious collapse of the Constitutional Society—the greatest of the lesser London societies—after the first serious test, underlines all the more the achievement of the London Corresponding Society, with its plebeian membership which, less than six months after the end of the trials, was back into action, apparently stronger than ever.

When the trial came on, the Attorney General made a speech lasting nine hours, but little was left of his case or his witnesses after Erskine's cross examinations and reply for the defence. Sheffield was the prosecution's best card, and it was not very good. The pikes have already been discussed. A paper seized in Sheffield contained the remark, apropos the House of Commons: "We shall trouble them no more. We must

[1] Place. B.M. Add Mss. 35143. [2] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

proceed as we have done, to enlighten the people, until a complete revolution, in popular sentiment, bursts forth like the thunder from Mount Sinai, too terrible to be longer withstood."[1] But no one could show that it was a physical rather than a moral terror which the reformers had in mind. The attempt to implicate Hardy in Watt's conspiracy at Edinburgh broke down, as was admitted in the Lord Chief Justice's summing up.

The reaction to Hardy's acquittal, followed by the acquittal of Tooke and Thelwall, and the dropping of the charges against the other accused, was one of immense and widespread relief. The *Annual Register* for 1794 writes that the public satisfaction on Hardy's acquittal was "great and expressed without restraint".[2] Even many supporters of the Ministry showed relief,[3] and it seems that convictions, had they been secured, would have increased the sense of insecurity in circles far removed from the reformers.

While the trials were pending, the activities of the reformers seem to have been suspended. They were resumed with vigour after the acquittals in November, by the London Corresponding Society in London and by sundry bodies in the provinces. The London Corresponding Society, however, continued without its founder. Though stunned by the death of his wife, more especially by the circumstances in which she had died, Hardy began to rebuild his life, but his struggle to keep alive as a shoemaker seems to have absorbed all his energy.

In the month of the acquittals the London Corresponding Society issued (November 28, 1794), *A Seasonable Caution from the L.C.S.*, signed by Anthony Beck, as President. He said that the Society was on the one hand accused by its opponents of fomenting violence and on the other was being reproached by some of its friends who were "imputing our zealous care to preserve the public peace to a pusillanimous neglect of our persecuted Associates". (At Hardy's trial a letter had been read from Stockport, chiding the Society for its unworthy moderation.) Beck warned his readers against being ensnared by *agents provocateurs*, giving examples of some of their activities.

A Vindication of the L.C.S, also appearing towards the end of 1794, replied to the allegations made during the trials, and widely diffused throughout the country. It dealt with allegations by Watt, the government agent who became over-fond of manufacturing conspiracies, manufactured one too many and was hanged for his pains. Watt

[1] *Report of the Trial of Members of the London Corresponding Society, op. cit.*, p. 91.
[2] p. 279. [3] p. 280.

claimed "that he had orders for 4,000 pikes from Perth". The allegation had been denied by James Wylie, of the Perth Friends of the People (September 8, 1794), who reported that Watt had tried to get the Perth Friends of the People to order the pikes, and that the Society "not only rejected the proposal, but from the manner in which it was urged, have ever since suspected what has now been discovered". The pamphlet referred to the Manchester trial, in which Walker and his friends were acquitted, and a government agent called Dunn had been awarded two years for perjury. Dunn stated, at the trial, that he had been bribed to give false evidence against Walker, but refused for some reason to name his employer.[1]

On the back of this pamphlet there are advertisements for other publications, the most interesting of which was entitled *Revolution Without Bloodshed, or Reform preferable to Revolt*, and which included a number of economic demands, among others the abolition of the game laws, of imprisonment for debt and of the laws against trade unions and the enactment of social security legislation; demands for peace being coupled with suggestions for abolishing compulsory recruitment for the services through such horrors as the press gang. There is also an announcement of the forthcoming appearance of a journal, the organ of the London Corresponding Society, to be called *The Politician*. The first number of this publication appeared on December 13, 1794. The journal did not prove successful and was abandoned early in the following year.

Among the more significant developments in the radical movement during 1795 was the series of lectures given by John Thelwall, a professional lecturer who had entered politics some years earlier as a member of the Coachmakers' Hall Debating Society, one of the numerous clubs formed to discuss public affairs. Thelwall had been tried and acquitted with Hardy in the previous year, and of all the London Corresponding Society's leading figures he was most alive to economic distress and to the relation between such distress and political action. His lectures were delivered at Beaufort Buildings, in the Strand, which

[1] Thomas Walker was a leading Nonconformist, manufacturer and radical in Manchester. An interesting sidelight on the Government's attitude to violence at this time is given in Archibald Prentice's *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester*, (1851). When Fox, in the Commons, called attention to the violent attack on Walker's house, and to the strong evidence of the connivance of the magistrates, Mr. Windham, later the Minister at War, replied: "The indignation excited against Mr. Walker was more fairly imputable to his political opinions than to his being a dissenter. It was natural, and even justifiable, for men to feel indignation against those who promulgated doctrines threatening all that was valuable and dear in society; and if there were not means of redress by law, *even violence would be justifiable*." (pp. 10–11).

had been secured for his use by a number of wealthy radical sympathisers. Many of these lectures were subsequently reprinted in volume form as *The Tribune*. They contain a great deal about the suffering caused to the mass of the people through the rapid rise in the cost of living. In other lectures Thelwall denounced the practice of crimping and pressing for the services—both practices violated the Rights of Man and so stood condemned. The Rights of Man had been the banner under which the French Revolution had stormed the citadels of Bourbon power—"These are principles that I admit, and that cause me, notwithstanding all its excesses, to exult in the French Revolution,". He defended the principle of private property but protested against both "land monopoly" and the "accumulation of capital".[1] Echoing Sir Thomas More, he denounced the farmer who "like a true agricultural cannibal, devoured eight or ten small farms". Anticipating John Stuart Mill he thought that the accumulation of industrial capital, "was necessary for increased production, for the introduction of machinery, for the furthering of inventions, experiments, &c". On the other hand, "production was a mockery, if it was not accompanied with just distribution". He also protested that working hours were too long for human welfare. Echoing Milton he wrote that ". . . a small quantity of labour would be sufficient to supply necessaries and comforts, if property was well distributed". And anticipating, significantly, the conclusions of Marx he wrote that "The hideous accumulation of capital in a few hands, like all diseases not absolutely mortal, carries in its own enormity the seeds of cure." Man was naturally social and communicative, and "Whatever presses men together, therefore, 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." To have been aware of the Industrial Revolution in 1794 and to have seriously considered its implications for society marks Thelwall out from his contemporaries, and gives an inkling of the intellectual qualities that earned him the respect of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

A collection of the Society's correspondence published in 1795 gives a picture of the state of things at this time—a picture of a nation-wide movement on a modest scale that has survived a crisis in its affairs and is slowly making headway. After the arrests in May of the previous year membership had fallen off and the financial embarrassments due to this

[1] Charles Cestre, *John Thelwall*, p. 185.

and to the expense of maintaining the prisoners and their dependants (work in which Place assisted to very great effect) had proved serious. By January, 1795, the movement stood at a low ebb; then it slowly began to revive. From seventeen divisions in March the number mounted to between seventy and eighty by the beginning of October. A general meeting had been called in June at St. George's Fields and had been tremendously successful, though there had been doubts about the wisdom of calling it, in view of the Government's suspension of Habeas Corpus, and the consequent danger of arrest and imprisonment without trial. There had been a vigorous correspondence with the provinces and new societies were appearing in many parts of the country.[1] An interesting feature of the correspondence is a suggestion from Portsmouth which, after outlining the way in which a democratic parliament should be elected, went on to recommend that: "The aforesaid deputies so chosen are subject to be recalled by their respective constituents, on acting contrary to their wishes, or forfeiting their confidence." The "Conclusory Address" appearing at the end of the collection refers with pride to "Your last General Meeting at Copenhagen House" (October 26) and to the order prevailing there. It claims that this shows conclusively that a "multitude uniform in sentiment . . . notwithstanding they may appear in the habiliments of Cobblers, Coalheavers, Butchers, Tinkers, etc.," can still meet in a seemly and decorous manner. Outside accounts of this meeting vary from 40,000 from a hostile source (Anstruther in the House of Commons) to Thelwall's estimate of 150,000. This meeting probably represents the peak of the Society's influence.

V. THE TWO ACTS AND THE NAVAL MUTINIES

By October, 1795 hunger had become a major factor in politics, and three days after the Copenhagen Fields meeting the King's Coach was attacked as he was on his way to open the session of Parliament. The Ministry, already alarmed by the state of feeling, was only too happy to find a pretext for strengthening its already considerable powers of repression. Two bills were almost immediately introduced in Parliament strengthening the powers of the magistrates and banning all unlicensed meetings of more than fifty persons. Duly alarmed, the L.C.S. issued a circular letter *To all the Patriotic Societies of Great Britain* on November 7, protesting against the acts and propounding the familiar view that the Constitution was "a mixture of Saxon Liberty and Norman

[1] *The Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society* (1795), pp. 15 ff.

Slavery". It was the second element which ought to be removed, but it seemed likely to be strengthened instead, and by a Government "whose measures have avowedly brought you to the brink of famine". A considerable agitation throughout the country roused numbers of people to the dangers to civil liberties inherent in the Government's plans. The protest movement stretched from Fox and his followers in Parliament to the Corresponding Society, and petitions from all over the country showered upon the House of Commons, including one from "a numerous United Meeting of the journeymen of the respective branches of cordwainers, taylors, hatters, curriers, weavers, carpenters, stationers, smiths, bookbinders, printers, &c., of the cities of London, Westminster, and the Borough of Southwark". It was to no avail. On December 18 the Two Acts received the Royal Assent, and the London Corresponding Society received a blow from which it was eventually to succumb.

The London Corresponding Society survived the passing of the Two Acts by more than two years, but there is evidence that the beginning of its decline coincided with the passing of the Acts. Their general effect, quite apart from their detailed provisions, was to discourage and intimidate potential supporters of the societies while encouraging magistrates to take repressive measures. Almost immediately after the Acts were passed Thelwall's lectures at Beaufort Buildings came to an end and the premises had to be abandoned, after which Thelwall, full of hope, prepared to go on the propaganda tour that was to take him to Norwich, Lynn, Wisbech, Westminster, Yarmouth, Derby and Stockport in the course of 1796. In February of the same year John Gale Jones set out on a *Political Tour through Rochester, Chatham, Maidstone, Gravesend, &c.* and published an account of it. These were, however, dying kicks, and there is every evidence that the movement was steadily declining in vigour and support.

The Society was about to enter its last crisis. Its Executive Committee made gallant attempts to keep and extend its contacts—even in Scotland. But the response was disappointing. It was no doubt a symptom of the increasing difficulty of practical political work that many members turned their attention to free-thought. In the earlier publications and pronouncements of the Society there were occasional references to the determination of its members to avoid being drawn into controversies concerning religion, but in 1796, at a low ebb in the Society's fortunes, Place, with the assistance of many of its members, took a hand in the publication of Paine's anti-clerical *Age of Reason*. William Hamilton

Reid, a one-time reformer turned defender of the faith, states that the decision to publish a cheap edition of *The Age of Reason* was "not agreed to in the London Corresponding Society without considerable opposition, especially in the general committee. . . ."[1] Volney's *Ruins of Empire* and other products of the French Enlightenment were read and circulated by the members and stocked by sympathetic booksellers. Reid goes so far as to claim that "the London Corresponding Society, by adding Deism to its politics, engendered the seeds of its own destruction" and there were certainly a schism in the Society and some resignations on the issue of free-thought.

At some time during the crisis of 1796 Ashley was replaced by Evans as secretary of the Society. Opinions about Evans varied sharply. Hone described him as an honest, manly and plain spoken Englishman. Place called him "a sort of absurd fanatic", but Place, once his views had crystallised, was not predisposed to approve of anyone who criticised the institution of private property. No more was Bamford, who called Evans "wordy and intemperate".[2] Evans earned his living as a colourer of prints, and later as a patent brace maker. He was slightly involved with O'Quigley and a small underground organisation known as the United Englishmen, in a plan for an armed uprising in 1798. He later founded the "Society of Spencean Philanthropists"—the first organisation in Britain to advocate public ownership of land—having fallen strongly under Spence's influence.[3] This latter society, during its brief existence (it was founded in October, 1814 immediately after Spence's death) tried to model its structure on that of the Corresponding Society, being divided into four sections—but there were no societies in the provinces with which it could correspond.

The disintegration of the Corresponding Society was hastened by its decision—undeterred by the urgent advice of Place—to publish a magazine, which lasted long enough to increase the Society's debt and absorb the defence fund that had been collected to help political prisoners and their dependants. Place began to drop out of the Society. He refused to be elected again as a delegate from the General to the Executive Committee, and, though remaining on the former Committee, refused any longer to preside.[4]

By the summer of 1797 the Government had been frightened

[1] W. H. Reid, *Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies* (1800), p. 5.
[2] O. D. Rudkin, *Thomas Spence and his Connections*, pp. 97–8.
[4] For Evans and the Spenceans, see above, pp. 51–4.
[3] Place. Add. Mss. 35413.

out of its remaining wits by the mutineers at Spithead and the Nore. The Government found no evidence implicating the London Corresponding Society, and it was not for want of trying. Even in the case of the Nore, where revolutionary influence was most strongly suspected, nothing was found. Two London barristers sent to prosecute the Nore mutineers, reported that they did not "believe that the men were moved by any such external influence as that of a club; the mutiny was altogether too wild and unorganised to have been fomented from without; it was a spontaneous outbreak of aggrieved sailors, and it was nothing more".[1] All of which made less than no difference to the fate of the societies. Alarmed by the twin threats of famine and foreign invasion and with the knowledge that something ominous was brewing in Ireland, the Government, the magistrates and their numerous supporters among the public were not looking for evidence but for something vulnerable at which to strike. The societies and their adherents admirably filled the bill. They could be presented as enemy agents, and there was by this time enough of a lunatic fringe in and around them to give some plausibility to the suggestion.

Meanwhile one of the most stalwart and indefatigable of the reformers, discouraged by diminishing support and mounting hysteria, was about to give up the struggle. Thelwall had completed the political tour on which he embarked when deprived of his platform in Beaufort Buildings. In the course of it he had met with some support and a great deal more hostility, some of it violent. The sort of people with whom he stayed are described as "artisans, shopkeepers, dissenting ministers, schoolmasters"[2]. Even his optimism could not hold out against his experience on this trip, and in July he abandoned hope, unable to endure indefinitely the heartbreak of what he called:

> "Storms and persecutions, of the pangs
> Of disappointed hope and keen regrets,
> Wrung from the bosom by a sordid world
> That kindness pays with hatred . . .
> . . . ah! most sick
> Of the vain effort to redeem a race
> Enslaved because degenerate; lost to hope,
> Because to virtue lost. . . ."

With the suppression of the Nore mutiny, and especially since the Government got wind, in the summer of 1797, of active preparations

[1] Veitch, *op. cit.*, p. 331. [2] Cestre, *op. cit.*, p. 159n.

by Lord Edward Fitzgerald and others to facilitate a French invasion of Ireland, agents had been set to watch for attempts to subvert the troops—such attempts were certainly being made, though not on a large scale. Despite their best endeavours, however, the Government failed to trace these attempts to any of the established political societies. The nearest they got was the discovery among the papers of John Bone, an arrested member of the Corresponding Society, of a letter from Henry Fellows, at Maidstone. Fellows had been arrested while distributing copies of a handbill to troops at Maidstone during 1797. The style of the bill, like much of the literature directed to the forces at the time, suggests that its writer had army experience. Among its most telling passages appears this: "Comrades, are we not men? Are we any where respected as men? And why are we not? Is there a man among us who does not wish to defend his country, and who would not willingly do it without being subject to the insolence and cruelty of effeminate puppies?" There is an oblique reference to the Spithead Mutiny, and to "wrong notions of discipline" that help to keep serving men in harsh and sometimes inhuman conditions.[1]

Such activity among the troops combined with the naval mutinies convinced the Government that it would be dangerous to allow the free activity of political opponents, and at a public meeting of the Corresponding Society on July 31, the entire platform was arrested by order of the Middlesex magistrates. After this, according to Place's account "membership declined rapidly, and by the end of the year was in a very low state"[2].

By January, 1798, the organisation was on its last legs. "What remained of it", says Place, "was its refuse, with the exception of a few who, from what they considered conscientious motives, still adhered to it." Two of its leading members, Evans the Secretary, and John Binns, became involved on the fringe of the United Irish movement, and there was some attempt to form an insurrectionary body, "The United Englishmen", though there are no recorded activities of this body, and it appears to have been stillborn.[3]

An account of the last three meetings of the General Committee of the London Corresponding Society is given by R. Hodgson, from Newgate Prison.[4] The meetings took place on April 5, 12, and 19. At the first of these meetings a motion was considered from Divisions 3

[1] *Report from Committee of Secrecy of House of Lords in Ireland* (1798). App. 5 and 6.
[2] Graham Wallas, *Life of Francis Place* (1898), pp. 26–7.
[3] *Report from Committee of Secrecy of House of Lords in Ireland* (1798), pp. 30 ff.
[4] *Proceedings of the General Committee of the London Corresponding Society* (April 1798).

and 7 asking for discussion on the Society's policy in the event of a French invasion. Evans, as secretary, showed no uncritical admiration for France which, after the fall of the Jacobins in 1794, had passed under the rule of the most corrupt sections of the bourgeoisie and was about to hand over its destinies to the control of Napoleon Buonaparte. According to Evans, the French Government had suppressed civil liberties at home and pursued aggressive policies abroad; it seemed to be "more desirous of establishing an extensive military despotism, than of propagating republican principles". He proposed that the Society should offer its services in repelling invasion and offer "to form themselves into a military corps." A heated discussion followed, but no decision was ever reached. The President, speaking at the final meeting of the Committee, opposed the suggestion saying that, while they must agree with the strictures passed on the French Government, it could not be the Society's policy to defend the bad against the worse and the present ministry was not to be trusted, especially in view of its record of brutality in Ireland. At the end of this meeting the entire Committee was arrested by the Bow Street runners. According to Place, who did invaluable work in organising aid for the dependants of the arrested men, no attempt was afterwards made by the members to meet, even in divisions.[1] More than a year later the London Corresponding Society, among a number of other bodies, was suppressed by name in an Act of July 12, 1799, while the Combination Act simultaneously suppressed trade unions. The working-class movement continued to function illegally in the form of trade unions, strikes were organised and repressed with vindictive brutality, but the movement was never quelled. After the death of Pitt in 1806 the political movement began to revive and, under the leadership of Francis Place and William Cobbett, a recent convert from Toryism, considerable advances were made in the direction of political democracy, including a measure of freedom for working-class organisations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The London Corresponding Society was a heroic attempt to achieve democracy by the efforts of working people, organising themselves as what we should call a political party, independent of the aristocracy and the middle class. As such it was without precedent in the history of England. Wilkes in the 1760s and 1770s had, it is true, mobilised working class activity and support in his struggle for civil liberty but

[1] Place. Add. Mss. 35143.

he had done it spasmodically, and the masses who supported him in no way acted as an independent force, distinct from the merchants and opposition politicians who led the movement. The London Corresponding Society and its allies threw up ideas—payment of M.P.s (c. 1796);[1] and the rights of the people to recall their elected representatives (Portsmouth)[2]—which have been taken up and implemented by other men in other conditions. Through members such as Francis Place and Thomas Evans the movement has personal links with the democratic and early socialist movements of the 19th century.

The limitations and failures of the 18th century reform movement derived from the historical conditions which gave it birth. The undeveloped state of the economy which was still largely agrarian in character, the poor communications, the resulting numerical weakness and political immaturity of the factory proletariat and the fact that the industrial bourgeoisie was not yet—for reasons already discussed—ready to act as an independent force, all limited what could be achieved in the way of democratic reform. The effective support for the movement came from small masters and from journeymen working for small masters. With the peasantry largely destroyed by the Enclosures—a situation peculiar to England—there was as yet no possibility of winning effective alliances in other classes. History has no example of a successful movement of the petty bourgeoisie acting without leadership from a bourgeoisie or a proletariat, and the absence of a revolutionary peasantry weakened the movement in comparison with the situation in France to which the democratic reformers looked for inspiration. The petty bourgeois character of the movement is apparent in its attitude to property, in its over-emphasis on political as compared with economic demands and in its organisational weakness. There were organisations of wage earners ante-dating the Industrial Revolution; friendly societies often functioning as trade unions existed among printers, hatters, London tailors, West of England wool workers, gold beaters, stocking-frame workers, Sheffield cutlers, Liverpool shipwrights, Spitalfields silk-weavers, Newcastle keel-men, but the democratic societies never attempted to build on these organisations or to draw them, as such, into their campaigns. Francis Place has described the trade union and strike struggles of the journeymen breeches makers in which he took part and which constituted his

[1] *Report from Committee of Secrecy of House of Commons* (edition of 1799), p. 38.

[2] See the interesting letters from Portsmouth, printed in *The Correspondence of the London Corresponding Society* (1795).

introduction to politics. Many other active members of the Corresponding Societies must have learned their early lessons in organisation from such activities, and many must have remained active members of their trade clubs and friendly societies. But they never sought to link the industrial and political sides of the movement; they concentrated on abstract political propaganda and largely neglected concrete economic grievances. Hence the doctrinaire character of much of their writings, which could only appeal to men above a certain educational level. With all its weaknesses and immaturities, however, the achievement of the London Corresponding Society and its allies was a great and proud one. It laid the foundations of the working-class movement in England and managed to maintain in existence a stable and functioning organisation that stood up against a rising wind for six hard and heartbreaking years.

5

THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS OF 1848

JOHN SAVILLE

"Owing to their historical position, it became the vocation of the aristocracies of France and England to write pamphlets against modern bourgeois society . . . In order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy was obliged to lose sight, apparently, of its own interests, and to formulate its indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interest of the working class alone. Thus the aristocracy took their revenge by singing lampoons on their new master, and whispering in his ears sinister prophecies of coming catastrophe.

In this way arose feudal socialism: half lamentation, half lampoon; half echo of the past, half menace of the future; at times, by its bitter, witty and incisive criticism, striking the bourgeoisie to the very heart's core, but always ludicrous in its effect, through total incapacity to comprehend the march of modern history . . . As the parson has ever gone hand in hand with the landlord, so has Clerical Socialism with Feudal Socialism.

Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heartburnings of the aristocrat."

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848).

"Leaving aside Owen and the early pioneers, I think that the first place in the influences that built up the Socialist movement must be given to religion . . . It is significant that the gap between the end of Owenism and the birth of the Social Democratic Federation is filled by the Christian Socialist movement of Kingsley and Maurice. Here one sees a feature which distinguishes the British movement from most of those abroad. In no other country has Christianity become converted to Socialism to such an extent as in Britain. In no other Socialist movement has Christian thought had such a powerful leavening effect."

C. R. Attlee, *The Labour Party in Perspective* (1937).

THE Christian Socialist movement arose as a response to the events of April 10, 1848 when the third and last Chartist petition was presented to the House of Commons after a demonstration on Kennington Common; it was an attempt to provide an alternative policy to the 'misguided' and 'evil' class politics of Chartism. Like their middle-class contemporaries, Frederick Denison Maurice and those around him were shocked and startled at the exhibition of latent power that resided in the masses of the people. The expectation of the rising which was prophesied for the day of the Kennington Common meeting had made public opinion, as *The Times* wrote two days later, "*meteoric*, unsteady, open to strange impressions and diffident of its own most habitual

belief". The Christian Socialists were not immune from the hysteria of middle-class London and they were ready to do their duty against the Chartist demonstrators[1] but unlike most of their contemporaries, they were also prepared to recognise the facts of misery and poverty which had bred Chartism. Despite differences of philosophical assumptions, they would broadly have agreed with the statement of purpose which Charles Dickens made in a letter to Miss Burdett-Coutts.

> "The people will not bear for any length of time what they bear now. I see it clearly written in every truthful indication that I am capable of discerning anywhere. And I want to interpose something between them and their wrath. For this reason solely, I am a Reformer heart and soul. I have nothing to gain—everything to lose (for public quiet is my bread)—but I am in desperate earnest, because I know it is a desperate case."[2]

"To interpose something between them and their wrath"—such words fit well enough the aims of the Christian Socialists. In the beginning their policy was the negative one of criticising Chartist ideas and Chartist methods. Only as the months went by did they appreciate the need for developing an alternative to Chartism which they wholly rejected and to industrial capitalism the competitive principle of which they abhorred.

Their starting point was the philosophical conservatism of Coleridge, and the Christian Socialists, in their ideas as well as in their practical politics, found themselves on the side of the landed aristocracy at a time of bitter conflict with the industrial bourgeoisie. From the last two decades of the 18th century the rapid development of industrial capitalism had been both changing the face of the countryside and profoundly altering the balance of forces within society. There had grown up a class of manufacturers and industrialists whose wealth and self confidence expanded as every year passed but who found themselves increasingly frustrated by the concentration of political and social power in the hands of the aristocracy.[3] Slowly but irresistibly, as

[1] Maurice volunteered for duty as a special constable but was refused as clergymen were not accepted. *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice chiefly told in his own letters*, ed. by Frederick Maurice, (1884), I, p. 472.

[2] May 11, 1855. *Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 1844–65. Selected and edited* . . . by Edgar Johnson (1953), p. 298.

[3] F. E. Gillespie, *Labor and Politics in England 1850–1867* (Duke University Press, 1927). Chapter 2; for an excellent account of the views and policies of a moderate among the middle class reformers, see J. E. Thorold Rogers, *Cobden and Modern Political Opinion*, (1873).

Britain's 'great industry' developed, the bourgeoisie ousted the landed interests from the central position within the ruling class. In the long run, the economic power of the industrial capitalists could not be withstood, but the landlords fought a vigorous rearguard action against those powerful upstarts. The conflict between these two propertied groups was never more bitter than during the twenty years which followed the Reform Bill of 1832, and it was during this period that the Christian Socialists passed their youth and early manhood.[1] This hostility between landlord and manufacturer found expression in many different forms and reached out to every corner of English society. In opposition to the struggle for Free Trade, centred upon the demand for the abolition of the Corn Laws, the landed classes, or sections among them, gave their support to the agitation against the New Poor Law and to the fight for Factory Reform.[2] Against the "pig philosophy"[3] of *laissez-faire* and utilitarianism the conservative philosophers developed a body of ideas which rejected the "cash nexus" and which laid emphasis upon the connection between status, especially that founded upon landed property, and obligation in society.[4] Like F. D. Maurice who followed them, the starting point for Coleridge and Southey, the outstanding thinkers of the conservative school, was their concern with the social effects of unrestrained competition. Human beings, by the workings of the competitive principle were being reduced to the level of things that were bought and sold on the market. "Men" [Coleridge had written] "ought to be weighed not counted. Their worth ought to be the final estimate of their value"; and upon this rejection of a central principle of bourgeois society the philosophical conservatives developed a powerful critique of their contemporary world. They vigorously denounced the degradation and poverty of the mass of the people and demanded the end of the policy of "let well alone".[5] Their criticisms were however

[1] F. D. Maurice (1805–72); Charles Kingsley (1819–75); J. M. F. Ludlow (1821–1911).

[2] Cf. John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (1906 edition), p. 301. "The factory question from this time [during the 1840s] down to the passing of the Ten Hours Act, was part of the wider struggle between the country gentlemen and the manufacturers. The Tories were taunted with the condition of the labourers in the fields, and they retorted by tales of the condition of the operatives in the factories. The manufacturers rejoined by asking, if they were so anxious to benefit the workman, why they did not, by repealing the Corn Law, cheapen his bread. The landowners and millowners each reproached the other with exercising the virtues of humanity at other people's expense."

[3] The phrase is Carlyle's.

[4] Cf. J. S. Mill's Essay on Coleridge in *Dissertations and Discussions* (1867), I, p. 455. "Perhaps, however, the greatest service which Coleridge has rendered to politics in his capacity of a conservative philosopher, though its fruits are mostly yet to come, is in reviving the idea of a *trust* inherent in landed property."

[5] Cf. S. T. Coleridge, *A Lay Sermon addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes on the Existing Distresses and Discontents* (1817). "We suppose the negative ends of a State

necessarily limited by the fundamental premises which lay beneath their ideas. For Coleridge and Southey, and for all who followed in their path, religion and property remained the essential foundations on which a stable society could alone be built. The counterpart of their criticisms of bourgeois theories and practices was a belief in the traditional past as the fount of social and political wisdom. They desired a society nearer to the feudal order; an hierarchic community in which every man knew his social status; one in which those in high places both recognised and practised the duties and obligations which they owed to their fellow men. "All" wrote Southey, would be "taught to fear God and honour the King, to know their duty toward their fellow-creatures and their Creator." When, however, it became necessary to translate the postulates of theory into the politics of everyday life there was, as always with philosophical conservatives, a confusion of the ideal and the real, and an acceptance of the "here and now" as the realisation of God's will in society. In practice, this meant support for the Tory party, whatever theoretical criticisms individual thinkers might have (and Coleridge had many) of the social deficiencies of the landlord class. Among the Christian Socialists, Charles Kingsley, who often expressed in naïve and vehement language what was to be found in more guarded phrasing elsewhere in their publications, wrote of his political programme as "the Church, the gentlemen and the workmen, against the shopkeepers and the Manchester school".[1]

The expression of these ideas among the politicians took shape with the emergence of Disraeli's Young England group during Peel's administration in the 1840s.[2] The political life of the group was a short one, but their ideas remain vividly recorded in the novels which Disraeli wrote at this time. His first work *Coningsby* (1844) expressed the dissatisfaction of these young Tories with the corruption of politics and politicians—"A Crown robbed of its prerogatives; a Church controlled by a commission; and an aristocracy that does not lead"—and against this picture of a degenerate society was set the vision and romantic ideal of Young England.

already attained, namely, its own safety by means of its own strength, and the protection of person and property for all its members; there will then remain its positive ends: 1. To make the means of subsistence more easy to each individual: 2. To secure to each of its members the hope of bettering his own condition or that of his children: 3. The development of those faculties which are essential to his humanity, that is, to his rational and moral being."

[1] Quoted by Thomas Hughes in *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet, An Autobiography: by Charles Kingsley, with a Prefatory Memoir by Thomas Hughes, Esq., Q.C.*, (1881), I, p. 52.

[2] W. F. Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli* (1912), II, chapters 6–10; C. Whibley, *Lord John Manners and his Friends* (1925), I, chapter 4.

"What we want" [said the hero of the novel] "is not to fashion new dukes and furbish up old baronies, but to establish great principles which may maintain the realm and secure the happiness of the people. Let me see authority once more honored; a solemn reverence again the habit of our lives; let me see property acknowledging, as in the old days of faith, that labour is his twin brother, and that the essence of all tenure is the performance of duty."

In *Sybil or The Two Nations*, which followed a year later in 1845, Disraeli described the demoralisation of the working people and exposed their working and living conditions. Once again it is the hero of the piece, Egremont, the *beau idéal* of Young England, who sympathising with, though not agreeing with the people's aspirations, pointed the way to a new alliance between the people and the aristocracy against the manufacturers and commercial interests. In a retrospective survey nearly three decades later, Disraeli summarised the general ideas of Young England:

"To change back the oligarchy into a generous aristocracy round a real throne; to infuse life and vigour into the Church, as the trainer of a nation . . . to emancipate the political constituency of 1832 from its sectarian bondage and contracted sympathies; to elevate the physical as well as the moral condition of the people, by establishing that labour required regulation as much as property; and all this rather by the use of ancient forms and the restoration of the past than by political revolutions founded on abstract ideas."[1]

These were the general principles out of which the Christian Socialists developed their particular version of feudal socialism. Maurice, the intellectual leader of the Christian Socialists, provided a convenient summary of his own political ideas in a lecture delivered at the opening of a Working Tailors Association in Southampton.[2] His main thesis was an attack upon the principles of what Tawney later called the Acquisitive Society. Maurice denounced the profit motive and personal aggrandisement as an anti-social principle which "undermines the society of the rich as well as the poor".

[1] General Preface to the Novels, 1870; quoted in Monypenny, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–2.

[2] *On the Reformation of Society, and how all Classes may contribute to it. A lecture delivered in the Town Hall of Southampton on the opening of the Working Tailors Association, 18 Bernard St., on Monday, March 31, 1851. By the Rev. Prof. Maurice M.A., President of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations.* (1851.)

"It starts from the assumption that the possession of material things is the end for which men, the mass of men at all events, must be striving. Then it takes notice of the fact that these possessions are limited, consequently that each cannot have of them as much as he desires. It goes on to affirm that since this is the case men who wish for these possessions must strive against one another for them. . . . It says that this struggle to get for oneself, and to prevent anyone else from getting, is the primary fact of our existence, to which all others must be referred. It says that all companies, communities, fellowships, societies have this origin and no other."[1]

This is the "selfish" principle which if allowed to continue unchecked will corrupt men and corrode society. Following Coleridge, from whom he learnt to stand upon the facts of history, Maurice appealed to the "experience of past days" to illustrate the workings of the competitive principle and he discussed in historical terms the origins of the three great classes in society—the aristocracy, the trading classes and the working classes. Each has become, in some degree, infected with the accursed selfish principle, and each must learn, if it is to be true to itself, how to labour for its own reformation. Since society is a moral unit and an organic whole, there are mutual obligations and relations between all individuals, and each class, by striving to reform itself, will work for the regeneration of the whole. In this way men will become, as they must become in a society founded on God's will, "fellow-workers instead of rivals".

Maurice then discussed the aristocracy which for him, and his fellow Christian Socialists, represented the natural leaders of society.[2] The aristocracy, "who stand rather upon birth and inheritance than upon the goods or the position which they have purchased by their own exertions",[3] have to provide moral guidance and leadership in society. Upon them falls the special obligation to develop the common interest in society, in an endeavour to unite all classes upon principles other than those which set each man at the throat of his fellows. No other class save the aristocracy can fulfil this rôle for they alone have the leisure, the education and the vision necessary for its realisation. The trading

[1] *On the Reformation of Society, op. cit.*, p. 13.

[2] Cf. Thomas Hughes writing of Charles Kingsley: "For he was by nature and education an aristocrat in the best sense of the word, believed that a landed aristocracy was a blessing to the country, and that no country would gain the highest liberty without such a class, holding its own position firmly, but in sympathy with the people." *Alton Locke . . . with a Prefatory Memoir by Thomas Hughes, op. cit.*, I, p. 23.

[3] *On the Reformation of Society, op. cit.*, p. 32.

classes have become dominated by the "selfish, domineering, exclusive principle" and have turned their backs upon their early days of association and brotherhood. As for the workers, "the masses", the "mightiest of all" classes, the problem of reformation was an urgent one. In contemporary England, Maurice argued, they form "a rude chaos, scarcely a part of organised society", from which state they must be recovered or society will suffer grievously. To those who would keep the masses of the people in poverty and outside the boundaries of political rights, Maurice replied in terms that were both urgent and illuminating.

> "There are some who would wish them [the working people] to remain in this state, who think they are safer in it, who dread the thought of their uniting lest they should become formidable. I cannot conceive a notion more selfish and wicked, and at the same time more utterly foolish than this. A wild floating mass of atoms is the most perilous of all things to exist near a society which has any order. They must combine in some way. Be sure if they do not combine without having any principle to hold them together, it must be for purposes of destruction. I would say to the upper and middle classes, for their own sake, for yours, encourage them to unite, to organise themselves. Tell them they are meant to work together and that they can work together. Tell them that they are not a set of separate creatures striving one against the other. Claim them as living portions of a living and united society. I say, do this for your own sake. All hope for the reformation of the other portions of English society lies now in the reformation of this one."[1]

This political morality founded upon an appreciation of the evil consequences of a society whose economic laws were those of the jungle, and an awareness of the dangers to society which threatened from below is illustrative of the dualism which finds expression in all the writings of the Christian Socialists. At no time did they lose sight of their main enemy. The ideas and movements of Chartism, Communism and Red Republicanism must be opposed and defeated as the first step towards the Christian-Conservative solution of the problems of contemporary society.[2] This on the one hand, and on the other an

[1] *On the Reformation of Society, op. cit.*, pp. 36–7.

[2] Cf. F. D. Maurice in a letter to the Principal of Kings College dated December 20, 1851. "Our object has been to separate, in what seemed to us the most effectual way, that socialism which Mr. Southey and other eminent conservatives believed to be the best solution of the practical difficulties of England, from communism, Red Republicanism, or any anarchical opinion whatsoever." *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, op. cit.*, II, p. 92.

attack upon the whole body of the Manchester School which led them into a radical denunciation of the grim facts of working class existence. It was an onslaught which both confused those who heard it as to their ultimate purpose, and at the same time contributed materially to the acceptance by sections of the working men.[1]

The practical deductions which the Christian Socialists argued from their conservative philosophy were especially concerned with denying the importance of the political factor as an agent of reform and social improvement. During the early months of the movement, in the late spring and summer of 1848, their main interest was in criticism of the political fallacies and errors of Chartism. Their writings in *Politics for the People*[2] were especially directed against the demand for Universal Suffrage and towards emphasising the fallacy of political reform. The Charter would remain "a poor, bald, constitution-mongering cry"[3] because it neglected the fundamental truth that men's hearts cannot be changed by Acts of Parliament. Chartism, moreover, was using the immoral methods of mass demonstrations and meetings in an attempt to achieve its aims and objectives; methods which were characterised by Ludlow as "blackmail" and "practical atheism".[4] Let the working men realise that only when they had become "responsible", aware of their obligations to their fellow men and to other classes would they be entitled to demand the suffrage as a right, and until then it would "be wrong to allow those wicked and foolish men [read chartists] to control men better and wiser than themselves".[5]

It is important to appreciate fully what was involved in the demand for the Six Points of the Charter. The acceptance of Universal Suffrage, the central political issue of the Chartist movement, meant an extension of democracy which, in the conditions of the first half of the 19th century, had near revolutionary implications. As Engels wrote at the time: "These Six Points . . . harmless as they seem, are sufficient to overthrow the whole English constitution".[6] Democracy in the 1840s had not the emasculated meaning that it has in western society today;

[1] For a good example of the radical language used by the Christian Socialists, see E. V. Neale, *Labour and Capital: A lecture delivered by request of the Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations at the Marylebone Literary and Scientific Institution, on the 29th March* (1852). Neale here used a modified version of the labour theory of value.

[2] No. 1, May 6, 1848—No. 17, Second Supplement for July 1848.

[3] "Parson Lot" (Charles Kingsley). Letters to the Chartists No. 1. *Politics for the People*, No. 2, May 13, 1848.

[4] Article entitled "Monster Meetings", *Politics for the People* No. 2, May 13, 1848.

[5] Article entitled "The Suffrage" by John Townsend (J. M. Ludlow) *Politics for the People*, No. 1, May 6, 1848.

[6] *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (1892 edition), p. 228.

in the first half of the 19th century, in Europe as a whole, Democracy had a definite class meaning and content.[1] It stood for what the 19th century understood by Jacobinism, for heretical ideas upon property, for the interests of the masses against their rulers; it had an all embracing usage which conjured up in ruling class minds the meaning their successors have given to the word Bolshevism in the 20th century. When the working classes referred to themselves it was as The Democracy; used by the ruling classes it involved the prejudices of Burke's "swinish multitude". It is the failure to understand the implications of the political programme of the Charter that has led many commentators to underestimate how subversive of existing society were the Six Points. The Suffrage was a levelling demand, a demand that equality as well as liberty should be woven into the structure of society. When Stephens called the Charter a knife and fork question,[2] his hearers appreciated that acceptance of the demands of the Charter would lead to a radical change in the balance of forces in society. Those who supported the Six Points expected economic as well as political justice through their implementation. When, after 1848, there was written into the Charter a programme of economic and social reform allied to the political demands (The Charter and Something More)[3] it was a development that only made explicit what had long been implicit in the movement. The attack, therefore, upon Universal Suffrage as a right belonging to every member of the body politic, was made with the full understanding of what was involved. The Christian Socialists, in opposing the political demands of the Charter, were not being sensible men who agreed with the principle but who thought it advisable to wait for a few years. They were attacking a whole way of life and at the same time vindicating the foundations of a society based upon private property. Only Ludlow, on one occasion, formally agreed to an extension of the suffrage[4] and his reasons for doing so indicate his fundamental agreement with this colleagues. He believed that because the Kennington Common meeting had been a failure, the working men could perhaps be trusted to be as sober and judicious in the exercise of the vote as they had shown

[1] Cf. E. H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World* (1950), p. 8, "before 1848 nobody had doubted that *political democracy* (one man, one vote) carried with it *social democracy* (equality or the levelling of classes), and that the progressive middle class which wanted universal suffrage was therefore fighting the cause of the masses". See also the essays in *Democracy in a World of Tensions*, (Unesco, 1951), and the authorities there cited.

[2] Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

[3] See below, pp. 152 ff.

[4] Article entitled "The Suffrage," *Politics for the People* No. 2. May 13, 1848.

themselves on the day of April 10. But had there been "200,000 law breakers on Kennington Common" (instead of "barely 10,000") it would have been proof of the unsuitability of the working men of the extension to them of the rights enjoyed by other classes. It is an argument which hardly qualifies Ludlow for the judgment of a "thorough democrat" which the historian of Christian Socialism has passed upon him.[1]

Nor had Ludlow, or any other of the Christian Socialists, any faith in the capacity of the people to better themselves or to raise themselves up from their condition of ignorance and poverty. By themselves, without the guidance of those who in turn derived their spiritual sustenance from God, the people were helpless. This belief that the working men were incapable of accomplishing their spiritual and social salvation by their own efforts was an essential part of the thinking of the Christian Socialists. Ludlow on one occasion referred to the working classes as "like children; children always hope for more than they can get".[2] The moral of *Alton Locke*, wrote Kingsley soon after its publication, "is that the working man who tries to get on, to desert his class and rise above it, enters into a lie, and leaves God's path for his own—with consequences".[3] Only the Church and the Aristocracy could supply the effective leadership for which the working men, after 1848, were ready and waiting. The false idols of the suffrage and the Charter had been tried and found wanting, and an audience was now prepared to receive the principles which Maurice was preaching.[4] In the translation of these principles into a positive policy the influence of J. M. Ludlow was decisive. He had lived for many years in Paris and was familiar with the reform movements there. It was Ludlow's letter to Maurice from Paris in early 1848 which was the true starting point of the Christian Socialist movement.[5] During the summer of 1849 Ludlow had returned to Paris and was greatly impressed by Louis Blanc's *Ateliers Nationaux* and by the ideas of Buchez which inspired

[1] C. E. Raven, *Christian Socialism 1848–54*, (1920), p. 62.

[2] *Select Committee on Investments for the Savings of the Middle and the Working Classes*, 1850, XIX, Q. III. See below, p. 150. Cf. the following passage from Disraeli's *Sybil*. Egremont, the hero is speaking to Sybil, the daughter of a Chartist leader. "The People are not strong; the People can never be strong. Their attempts at self-vindication will end only in their suffering and confusion. It is civilisation that has effected, that is effecting, this change. It is that increased knowledge of themselves that teaches the educated their social duties. The new generation of the aristocracy of England are not tyrants, not oppressors, Sybil, as you persist in believing . . . They are the natural leaders of the People, Sybil; believe me, they are the only ones."

[3] Letter dated January 13, 1851; *Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of his Life edited by His Wife*, (1877), I, p. 247.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

[5] Raven, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

them.[1] He made a personal study of several of the associations and their workshops and returned to London full of ideas for their application to the English scene. Here the ground was already being prepared. The Christian Socialists had begun meetings with groups of working men as early as late April 1848, and among those with whom they made contact were some Owenite Socialists. Ludlow himself was friendly with John Minter Morgan, a middle-class Owenite[2] and with a group of working-class Owenites including Lloyd Jones, Walter Cooper and Gerald Massey. While the Christian Socialists, through Ludlow, appear to have derived most of their ideas concerning co-operative production from France, they cannot, because of these working-class contacts, have been completely ignorant of the long tradition of the movement in Britain. The fact that they called themselves socialist is itself proof that they knew the meaning of the word, for in the 1840s socialism in Britain meant Owenism and to acknowledge oneself an Owenite was to declare oneself, *inter alia*, as an advocate of co-operative ideas.[3] It was a tradition of immense importance in working-class history before 1850 although its influence was already declining by the 1840s. As with all utopian ideology, Owenite theories of the supersession of capitalism by producers co-operatives on a national scale endeavoured dogmatically to determine the reality of future society at the same time as it expressed the widespread but still unformed desire for a general reconstruction of society. Despite the "fantastic pictures of future society"[4] involved in Owenite socialism, the practical possibilities of co-operative production appeared much greater before 1850 than at any time since. The economic and social conditions of the small master economy, when large masses of capital had not yet interposed themselves between the worker and the final product of his labour, encouraged hopes of an economic independence which experience has shown to be wholly unreal. The continuation of such ideas among building workers—not finally ended until the Building Guilds movement of 1917–21[5] is intimately connected

[1] Raven, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–3; *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 13. Ludlow summarised the results of his investigations in No. 4 of the Tracts on Christian Socialism: *The Working Associations of Paris* (by J. T.) (n. d. ?1850), p. 22.

[2] John Minter Morgan (1782–54). One of the earliest adherents of Robert Owen and one of his most effective popularisers. His *Revolt of the Bees*, published in 1826 had a wide circulation. M. Beer, *History of British Socialism* (1919), I, pp. 228–30; Una Pope-Hennessy, *Canon Charles Kingsley* (1948), p. 74.

[3] E. R. A. Seligman, "Owen and the Christian Socialists", *Political Science Quarterly*, I, 1886, pp. 206–49.

[4] *The Communist Manifesto*, III.

[5] There is a useful summary of the movement in G. D. H. Cole, *A Century of Co-operation*, (1945), chapter XVII.

with the slow change in the technology of the building industry and the relative absence of mass production techniques until the second quarter of the 20th century. During the decades after 1815, when the ideas of producers co-operatives exercised a profound and imaginative hold over the minds of the working men, there developed among the Owenites a vigorous critique of bourgeois society that contributed materially to the political education of the masses. While their practical proposals were based upon an unreal diagnosis of capitalism, they saw the social problem in round terms, making a general denunciation of the society which they were endeavouring to replace at all points. Owenism in the 1820s and the 1830s looked for the downfall of the old Immoral Order and for the inauguration of the New, and in the writings of such men as J. E. Smith and James Morrison[1] the evidence is unmistakable of a growth in political understanding that contributed notably to the greater maturity of the Chartist movement that was just beginning.

The context in which the ideas of the Christian Socialists developed was crucially different. The difference is that between the feudal socialism and the critical utopian socialism analysed so trenchantly by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. Contemporaries of the Christian Socialists appreciated the contrast. Thus W. R. Greg could write in 1851 that while socialism was confined

> "to the turbulent, the wild and the disreputable and was associated with tenets which made it at once disgusting and contemptible, perhaps the wisest plan was to pass it over in silence, and to suffer it to die of its own inherent weakness.'[2]

But now, continued Greg, socialism (and he was referring specifically to Christian Socialism) has been "purified from much of its evil intermixtures" and deserves to be, indeed must be considered seriously. Gone were the ideas of the regeneration of the whole of society and the dream of a New Moral Order. Socialism was now freed from its association with irreligion, immorality and the vulgar desires of the populace. Henceforth there was to be no tampering with the foundations of society, no wild adventures to which the respectable citizen could object. The wealthy must understand that there was no thought of "spoliation" or the "plunder of existing property",[3] and their

[1] Editors respectively of *The Crisis* (1832–4) and *The Pioneer* (1833–4).
[2] "English Socialism and Communistic Associations", *Edinburgh Review*, January 1851.
[3] E. V. Neale, *May I not do what I will with my Own? Considerations on the present Contest between the Operative Engineers and their Employers*, (1852), p. 61.

co-operation was welcomed, nay vital, in fulfilment of their obligations to their less fortunate neighbours. The associations of working men were to be imposed upon society as it was, to become islands of Christian brotherhood within the competitive ocean of industrial capitalism.

It is important to appreciate fully the shift in emphasis and the change in approach from the Owenite ideal of the 1830s to that proposed by the Christian Socialists. In place of the New World there was now an individualist theory of co-operative production.[1] The vision is immeasurably narrower and the generous idealism of 1834 has given way to a stuffy parochialism. For the Christian Socialist what remained after the denunciation of the evils of competitive capitalism were ill-judged and petty schemes for establishing small groups of working men as independent producing units. Should they fail, as indeed they were bound to fail, the Christian Socialists could then be sure that their insistence upon the need for individual regeneration as the necessary prerequisite for social change had been abundantly proved. They had done what their consciences had demanded of them in the stirring days of 1848, and they could not seriously reproach themselves, if, rather tempestuously, they had tried to do what it had become clear was the work of several generations.[2] How limited were their objectives, and how well they understood these limitations, is made clear in an essay by E. Vansittart Neale published in 1852. Discussing the objects and aims of the associations, he wrote:

> "It is the object of the Working Association to secure to the workmen the control over his own work, under such conditions as the state of the particular business in which he is engaged renders possible. The Association is essentially a group of workmen engaged in the same occupation, or in such occupations as, though divers, make up, like the trades of carpenters and bricklayers in the building business, part of one general occupation, who obtain the capital required to commence their operations either from their own savings or from persons who will invest their capital with them by way of

[1] Beatrice Potter (Mrs. Sidney Webb), *The Cooperative Movement in Great Britain*, (1920), chapter 5, esp. pp. 153 ff. For a penetrating analysis of the weakness of cooperative production by a hostile contemporary, see W. R. Greg, "Progress and Hopes of Socialism, *Essays in Political and Social Science* (1853), 1, esp. pp. 505–14. For a criticism of Mrs. Webb and the similar approach in the text, see Raven, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 317 ff.

[2] Cf. Kingsley's letter to J. Nichols, March 28, 1856, *Charles Kingsley, op. cit.*, 1, p. 474, "it will require two generations of previous training, both in morality and in *drill*, to make the workmen capable of it."

loan or otherwise, at some agreed rate of interest or for some stipulated share of profit, leaving the management of the business in the hands of the workers, or of such as are selected out of the general body as the fittest to conduct it. It is therefore a form of social union which departs as little from the customary forms of our social life as is possible, in order to set out on the new course. Herein lies its strength—herein lies also the ground of the objections which may be made to it. It promises no fairy land. It does not undertake, at the present time, to place the underpaid slop worker on a level with the workman whose customary earnings still remain inadequate to his comfortable support. It promises to no one, more than what can be obtained for his work in the ordinary markets. It does not engage to deliver any one from the hard struggle with a fierce competition to which all are now everywhere else exposed. It is therefore open to the accusation of doing very little for the working class. But herein lies its strength. It undertakes so little of what is new, that in that which it does undertake it may hope to succeed. It does not disturb the ordinary routine of men's lives. It does not require them to engage in what they have not been used to do, and do not understand. It does not require any fusion of distinct trades, nor even any such combination of those engaged in the same trade, as shall fetter the individual energy of the different groups of associated workmen. It does not necessarily call for any greater amount of self-denial than a willingness to obey, in the workshop, and for purposes of the common business, an authority appointed by those who are to obey it, though as we shall hereafter see, it encourages and naturally leads to a far higher exercise of this great human excellence. But it makes the beginning of a new relation between labour and capital."[1]

There was another, perhaps more cogent reason, why the propertied classes should realise that working men's associations for co-operative production were worthy of support and encouragement. Public opinion since the troublesome days of 1848 had become increasingly aware of the condition of England question. Middle-class publicists well appreciated that the existence of living conditions described by Mayhew in his famous articles in the *Morning Chronicle*[2] were such as to feed continuously the bitterness of the working people. How to

[1] E. V. Neale, *Labour and Capital*, *op. cit.*, pp. 20–21.

[2] Published in the summer of 1849 and later incorporated into *London Labour and the London Poor*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1851.

bring the labouring population to a realisation of the charitable intentions of the men of property was a major theme of public discussion in the years which followed the Kennington Common meeting. Opinion in the early 1850s was excited by any plan or suggestion which claimed to help bridge the gap between employer and employed. Hence the attention given to examples of industrial benevolence such as Prices Candle Factory[1] and hence too, the sympathy with which the ideas of the Christian Socialists were received. Only a small minority outside the Christian Socialists themselves were prepared to agree that associations were likely to succeed, but there was little opposition to the idea that they should be allowed a fair field. At worst they would introduce the worker to the difficulties and problems of the capitalist and would educate him to a better understanding of the essential and necessary unity of master and men. Moreover, since the workers were so passionately determined to try the experiment of producer's co-operatives, nothing must be put in their way, or the obstacles to the realisation of their hopes would exacerbate their present bitterness. Such were the arguments of journals and newspapers whose politics were often markedly different from each other. Their unanimity is interesting, and while few believed in the practical possibilities of associations, most recognised that through failure would come a greater realism that would dispel millenial ideas and help reconcile the former idealists to economic and social realities.[2] No doubt that is why even some opponents of the extension of limited liability as a general principle were in favour of making a special exception in the case of producers' associations,[3] and the debate around the need for a change in company law itself provides many illuminating examples of the contemporary social mind.

The discussion concerning the desirability or otherwise of the principle of limited liability was not a new one in 1850, but in the particular form it assumed in the early 1850s, it was in fact largely inspired by Christian Socialist propaganda. The Christian Socialists advocated producers associations in which individuals from the upper classes should participate both in the general direction of management and also as shareholders. If capital was to be forthcoming from working men and their richer allies, the privilege of limited liability, as well as

[1] Perhaps the best known of all the industrial "experiments" in the 1850s. There is a good account, based on the Directors' Reports, in the *Quarterly Review*, December 1852.

[2] See the references under p. 150, n. 2 below.

[3] Cf. the evidence given by H. Bellenden Kerr to the *S.C. on Investments* . . . 1850, XIX, esp. paras. 740–41.

certain other changes in the law, must be extended to cover the activities of their associations. The debate was initiated by the 1850 *Select Committee on Investments for the Savings of the Middle and Working Classes* presided over by R. A. Slaney, and it was followed by the *Select Committee on the Law of Partnership* in 1851, the chairman of which was also Slaney. In evidence to both these Committees and especially to the first, the Christian Socialists played a prominent part and public discussion took its cue from the arguments there presented. Many of those who argued the matter, as noted above, were sceptical concerning the success of producers associations, but none failed to appreciate what *Chambers's Journal* called the "social polarisation"[1] of English society. There was an urgent need to combat the fallacy, as the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce phrased it, "that there is a necessary antagonism between capital and labour".[2] The *Economist*, in 1850[3], noted the "rooted dissatisfaction" of the working men with the remuneration of their labour, and urged that only experience would disabuse the "artisan mind" of the erroneous idea that the capitalist class appropriated too large a share of the produce of labour. Such experience, continued the *Economist*, would be provided were the workmen to be made aware of the uncertainties and risks of manufacturing and trade. Association provided a means whereby the interests of the working classes could be linked with those of the capitalist class, and since the working men were convinced that producers co-operation did provide a workable alternative to their present condition, all legal obstacles to its realisation must be removed. This, for the *Economist* was the chief reason for extending the right of limited liability at this particular time. In all the contemporary discussion which favoured producers co-operation no argument was more common than that co-operation would provide "channels into which the tendencies which lead to socialism may find outlets, not only safe, but eminently beneficial".[4] The Christian Socialists were fully agreed as to the part which they thought producers' co-operation could play in bridging

[1] May 6, 1854.

[2] *Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. Report of the Special Committee of the Council on the Subject of the Law of Partnership* (1854), p. 5.

[3] May 18, 1850. The attitude of the *Economist* towards producers co-operation "hardened" after 1852 as economic conditions improved. For other comments of these years, in which a varying degree of scepticism is combined with the expressed desire to see working men's associations given a fair trial, see: *Chambers's Journal*, November 23, 1850, January 18, 1851, April 17, 1852, May 28, 1853; *Household Words*, 11 October, 1851; *The Times*, August 5, 1852; *Edinburgh Review*, April 1852; *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, October 1853. There is, in addition, a considerable pamphlet literature for the years 1850–56.

[4] James Lalor, *Money and Morals: A Book for the Times*, (1852), p. 199.

the gap between the propertied classes and the proletarians, and they were well aware of the value of the argument that association would help to inculcate ideas and practices of industrial peace. In their writings they stressed the dangers of class warfare and the need to regulate more "harmoniously" the relations between labour and capital. They had the support of the most eminent economist of the day for their schemes,[1] a support which they used to great effect in their propaganda, and they won a surprising response from many of their contemporaries. At the same time, the Christian Socialists, with the important exception of Maurice, used a radical phraseology which often misled their middle-class hearers. It was in answer to one particularly vigorous attack in *Frasers Magazine* that Charles Kingsley wrote his pamphlet *Who are the Friends of Order?* The title is significant. Kingsley is here replying to those who were accusing the Christian Socialists of disseminating subversive ideas, and the pamphlet contains an admirable summary of the social aims and political objectives of the Christian Socialists:

> ". . . We tell people simply to do their duty in that state of life to which God has called them. . . [the results of our work have been] to make ardent and discontented spirits among the working classes more patient and contented; more respectful to those institutions of which they have never been taught the value, and of which they have too little experienced the benefit; to turn their minds from those frantic and suicidal dreams of revolution, which have been the stock-in-trade of such men as Feargus O'Connor, to deliberate and orderly self-improvement, and the pursuit of an honourable independence; to make them aware, many of them, alas! for the first time in their lives, that there were numbers, far greater than they had ever fancied, among what are called "the upper classes of society" who cared for them, trusted them, respected them, were willing to help them to the uttermost, and yet required of them no degrading counter-payment of adulation or dependence. That this has been the moral effect, and the only moral effect of our labours, I distinctly assert. Your gently implied fear that we have helped to spread destructive doctrines, is, I assure you, unfounded. Those doctrines, both French and others, were at their height among the working classes several years before we intermeddled. It was the fact of their circulation which aroused us to try if we could not supply an antidote to the poison, a true coin instead of the counterfeit; there has been a perceptible and rapidly

[1] John Stuart Mill. See his evidence before the *S.C. on Investments* (1850).

> increasing improvement in the tone of the working-class publications of late; and men who have the very best opportunities of judging, are kind enough to attribute some of that improvement to us. As for the general effect of the Associate principle, which we advocate, in calming and civilising the minds of the working men, the pamphlet by M. Cochut on the state of the numerous and thriving associations of various trades, comprising in all two thousand members, who now form the most moral, orderly, and anti-revolutionary class of the Parisian workmen, will sufficiently prove."[1]

The Christian Socialist movement lasted for a few years only. It was one phase of the year of revolutions, a response to the events in Britain and on the Continent during which the working class emerged as the decisive challenger to bourgeois society. In part, it was the product of a humanitarianism that in men like Kingsley quickly receded into complacency once the crisis was over. Kingsley became a sporting parson with a passion for sanitary reform, Maurice in his social work turned to education, and Hughes, Ludlow and Neale concentrated most of their paternalistic efforts in the narrower field of consumers co-operation. The significance of the movement is not that it provided an easy alibi for the Church of later generations, although that is by no means unimportant, but that it played some part in the general weakening of Chartist ideas. In the years after 1848 the objective conditions never again existed for a mass movement on the scale of the 1840s but the easy slide into a radicalism that led to the liberal-labourism of the 1870s was by no means historically inevitable. It is understandable that the defeats of 1848 should bite deeply into the minds of the working men and that their attention could fairly easily be deflected to panaceas which promised a less difficult path to their emancipation than the hard road of political struggle. But Chartism was still a powerful influence and as a movement it commanded the loyalty and affection of many thousands. After 1848 the Chartist leaders saw their tasks as those of renewing the confidence of the workers in themselves and of rebuilding their organisations. The attempt to achieve these objectives was undertaken, rightly, upon a policy that summed up the experience of the past years and which was calculated to receive the widest possible support. Thus was elaborated the detailed programme summarised in the phrase, "The Charter and Something More", a fusing of the political and social demands of

[1] Charles Kingsley. *Who are the Friends of Order? A reply to certain observations in a late number of Fraser's Magazine on the so-called "Christian Socialists"* (1852), p. 16. The pamphlet referred to by Kingsley was *Les Associations Ouvrières* by Andre Cochut.

the previous twenty years that represents the most advanced theoretical statement of the working-class movement until the 20th century. Ernest Jones, soon after his release from prison in July 1850, stated the new policy in clear and precise terms:

> "I believe it to be necessary that the practical and social results of the Charter should be laid before the public. I believe that the less enlightened portions of the working classes feel little sympathy with political rights, unless they can be made to see the result in social benefits; I believe they do not yet fully understand *the connecting link between* POLITICAL POWER AND SOCIAL REFORM; I believe there is little use in holding before them the cap of Liberty, unless you hold the BIG LOAF by the side of it—it is, therefore, as I conceive, the duty of all advocates of Chartism and Democracy to point to the *social benefits* which will result from the Charter—to show them what are the laws and institutions that need altering and abrogating, why they are injurious, why they must be removed, before the sufferers can be prosperous and happy, what are the materials out of which to construct such prosperity and happiness, and how the Charter will enable them to make that change. . . .
>
> "Above all, I would have them to understand, what the experience of eighteen centuries has taught us, that political power must be obtained before social amelioration can be enjoyed; that co-operation, however salutary and successful, that abstinence, morality and toil, that all the efforts of united industry and intelligence are ineffectual to remove the dead weight of misery, so long as the sharp sword of monopoly power is wielded by one dominating class."[1]

Against these attempts to re-build an independent movement on the principles of the Democratic and Social Republic, in which "Political Power is the means—the reign of Equality, Liberty, Fraternity is the end"[2]—there were many opposing currents of opinion and practice. The radicals among the middle-class reformers were dangling the carrot of the "Little Charter"[3]; the trade unions were offering to the upper strata of the working men a sober policy which concentrated upon basic economic interests and which, except for limited ends, excluded political action; republicanism, secularism, teetotalism—all had their

[1] *Northern Star*, August 10, 1850; quoted in John Saville, *Ernest Jones, Chartist* (1953) pp. 111–12.

[2] Howard Morton, "The Democratic and Social Republic", *Red Republican*, No. 17, October 12, 1850.

[3] Gillespie, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 ff.

advocates and supporters and each in their turn contributed to the political confusion of these years. There was, further, the minor boom in co-operative production, largely, but not entirely, inspired by the Christian Socialists. It was not difficult to demonstrate theoretically the weaknesses of the producers' associations, as Ernest Jones was able to do in the famous debates with Lloyd Jones,[1] nor to win widespread support for his criticisms, but the tradition was a deeply rooted one and apparently impossible to eradicate except by the practical experience of failure. The publicity enjoyed by the Christian Socialists, in their own journals and in the national press, as well as the considerable financial support of individuals like E. V. Neale, gave to the movement a prestige and an influence which for the few years of its existence was not easy to counter. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the ideas of the Christian Socialists exercised a somewhat greater influence upon the working men than has usually been allowed. Their most spectacular success was with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers after the famous lock-out of 1852 had ended in a defeat for the Union. At the same meeting of the Executive of the A.S.E. that brought the lock-out to an end, a unanimous resolution was passed which declared "that all our future operations should be directed to promoting the system of self-employment in associative workshops as the best means of effectually regulating the conditions of labour".[2] Nearly a year earlier than the passing of this resolution, William Newton had asked at a public meeting in Glasgow "why working men should not be capitalists *as well* as the masters. It was an old saying, that the pence of the thousands were as valuable as the pounds of the few and by union, energy and co-operation, the operatives of Great Britain might elevate themselves and attain that *power*, without which they will always continue slaves."[3] These were sentiments which according to the report in *The Operative* were received with "Great Applause", and millennial ideas of this kind continued to exert their fascination despite the failure of the particular workshops in which the engineers were directly interested as well as of the associations in general. As late as 1856 a majority in the A.S.E voted for the investment of £10,000 in a co-operative enterprise

[1] Held at Padiham. The fullest accounts in the national press are in *The Christian Socialist*, December 20, 1851. Ernest Jones attacked producers co-operation in the form advocated by the Christian Socialist on the following grounds: (1) that co-operation as practised involved "profit-mongering", (2) that individual units would be crushed beneath the force of capitalist competition (3) co-operation deflected men from the central question of political power. There was a second debate at Halifax on January 26 and 28, 1852.

[2] Quoted in J. B. Jefferys, *The Story of the Engineers*, (1946), p. 42.

[3] *The Operative*, March 8, 1851.

although the minority against the scheme proved to be too large in numbers and too vocal in their opposition for the scheme to be proceeded with.[1] Nor were the Engineers alone in the early 1850s in finding the Associative Principle an attractive one. Ludlow's tour in the northern manufacturing counties in the summer of 1851, recorded in the second volume of the *Christian Socialist*, showed how favourable was much of working-class opinion to the principles of "active co-operation".[2] Even among the left wing of the Chartist movement, strong differences of opinion were beginning to appear. Hitherto, the Chartist left had accepted the view that to work for co-operative production before political power had been won was a dispersion of energies and a fallacy to be combatted. In the early 1850s, when the crucial political problem was the re-building of a mass Chartist party, the arguments and propaganda of the Christian Socialists drew a line of confusion across the discussion of working-class tactics and strategy, and a number of hitherto left-wing Chartists were won over to a support of the associative principle. The fact that Ernest Jones had to devote so much attention to co-operative ideas is one further indication of the way in which these ideas were assisting in the disruption of a united movement. Of considerable importance in this context was the quarrel between Jones and Harney. There were many factors involved in the political break between the two most prominent leaders of the Chartist left, but one was the changed attitude of Harney towards co-operative production. When Harney restarted his *Friend of the People* on February 7, 1852 it was with the help and assistance of Gerald Massey, who for some years had been associating with the Christian Socialists. Massey wrote a good deal in the new *Friend of the People*, demonstrating "the immediate necessity of Co-operative Associations"[3] and when Harney bought the *Northern Star* and changed it into the *Star of Freedom*, Massey conducted the co-operative column which now received editorial support. The purchase of the *Northern Star* by Harney was the occasion of the final break between him and Ernest Jones, since the latter was also competing for its ownership.[4] Had it been possible for these two Chartist leaders to have remained in political partnership the difficulties

[1] "We have found" wrote the Executive of the Engineers in their annual report of 1855 "that when a few of our own members have commenced business hitherto they have abandoned the society, and conducted the workshops even worse than other employers"—quoted in S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (1894 edition), p. 207.

[2] A summary of Ludlow's reports is given in Cole, G. D. H., *A Century of Co-operation*, pp. 104 ff.

[3] February 7, 1852.

[4] The story of Harney's acquisition of the *Northern Star* is briefly told in Saville, *op. cit.*, pp. 45–49.

that Jones in isolation was to experience in the 1850s, while still formidable, might have been less overwhelming in the long run. The possibilities of the revival of the Chartist movement after 1848 were not wholly unfavourable. At the very least, there was no inevitability about the disappearance of an independent working-class movement of any size from the middle of the 1850s until the formation of the Reform League in 1864. There were many reasons for the disintegration of the mass movement but among them must be put the quarrel between Harney and Jones. They divided a much diminished Chartist party between themselves, and Ernest Jones, now almost alone, carried on the movement until the end of the decade.[1] Acceptance of the associative principle by Harney was not the most important of the causes of the break with Jones, but it was one more way in which the influences of the Christian Socialists was added to those forces that were destroying the only movement in which the political hopes of the working class could legitimately reside.

With the decline of the independent working-class movement in the early 1850s, there was a turn away from the class politics of the Chartist period. The influence of Chartism lasted longer than has often been allowed, but the growth of reformist ideas and practices was unmistakable. The political vacuum caused by the disintegration of Chartism began to be filled by the ideas and the policies of industrial peace and the hopes of improving conditions of work and living. Among the organised working men, in place of the radical-revolutionary programme of the Six Points, there began to be substituted the demand for an equal status within the now accepted boundaries of bourgeois society. The expression of this accommodation to bourgeois society by sections of the working men took many forms. One was the weakening of the ideas of class solidarity and of class struggle by the assimilation of middle-class views concerning the relationship of the individual to society. In all middle-class writing on social problems there was an emphasis upon individual rather than social reliance and an insistence upon self-help as the only durable foundation for individual betterment. This, within a religious context, was the starting point for the Christian Socialists, although they went further than most of their contemporaries in that they set out deliberately to win a working-class audience. Their partial success was not least the result of the use of a radical, in some cases an ultra-radical phraseology, and an acceptance of the associative principle. Their most considerable literary achievement, and the only one with a

[1] Saville, *op. cit.*, pp. 50–76.

lasting popular influence, was Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, and *Alton Locke* was a propagandist essay upon the themes of the fallacy of political struggle and the primacy of spiritual regeneration. Kingsley wrote *Alton Locke* with the object of combating Chartist ideas and of substituting in their place the teachings of a middle-class Christianity. It is the literary version of what the middle class called the "lesson" of 1848. Most students of the novel have failed to appreciate how politically biased it is and how inaccurate and distorted are the details that it gives of the Chartist movement. Kingsley's version of the demonstration of April 10, 1848, for example, is a gross travesty of what really happened, but it has become part of the standard account in the text books.[1] The novel ends with the conversion of Alton Locke from Chartism to Christian Socialism. In the last chapters of the book Lady Eleanor Ellerton (Kingsley's choice of an aristocrat being deliberate and in keeping with his often expressed views on the social and political importance of a landed aristocracy) explains at length the fallacies of any movement centred on political reform and the inevitability of defeat for any such movement. In the extract which follows, Lady Ellerton is talking to Alton Locke and John Crossthwaite, another former Chartist militant.

> "Claim, if you will, annual Parliaments, as a means of enforcing the responsibility of rulers to the Christian community, of which they are to be, not the lords, but the ministers—the servants of all. But claim these, and all else for which you long, not from man, but from God, the King of men. And therefore, before you attempt to obtain them, make yourselves worthy of them—perhaps by that process you will find some of them have become less needful. At all events, do not ask, do not hope, that He will give them to you, before you are able to profit by them. Believe that He has kept them from you hitherto, because they would have been curses, and not blessings. Oh! look back, look back, at the history of English Radicalism for the last half century, and judge by your own deeds, your own words, were you fit for these privileges which you so frantically demanded? Do not answer me, that those who had them were equally unfit; but thank God, if the case be indeed so, that your incapacity was not added to theirs, to make confusion worse confounded."[2]

[1] For a middle class view of the influence of *Alton Locke*, see the essay by Frederic Harrison on Charles Kingsley in *Studies in Early Victorian Literature* (1895). G. J. Holyoake, *Bygones Worth Remembering* (1905), I, chapter 8 is one of the few writers who have appreciated the political inaccuracies and the bias of *Alton Locke*.

[2] Everyman edition, pp. 346–7.

"For my part," said Alton Locke, discussing his acceptance of Christianity in an earlier part of the novel, "I seem to have learnt that the only thing to regenerate the world is not more of any system, good or bad, but simply more of the Spirit of God."[1] Clearly bourgeois society had nothing to fear from this conversion of Alton Locke.

That the Christian Socialists around Frederick Denison Maurice were wholly sincere in the tasks they had set themselves is not in question. They incurred the hostility of many of their generation and they met with a dignified forebearance the often wild misrepresentations with which they were favoured.[2] It is not their individual high purpose which is in doubt but the practical results of their teaching upon the working-class movement of their time. The Christian Socialists could describe and denounce the horrors of working-class existence but beyond description they could not go. They recognised that the acquisitive motive was an immoral principle upon which to build social relationships but their alternative was a spiritually regenerated toryism. In practical politics they were thus confined to advocating an unselfish benevolence on the part of the propertied classses which, with Maurice and his colleagues, took the particular form of producers associations. The solutions which they offered to correct the worst abuses of contemporary society in no way threatened the structure of property relationships; indeed, as they themselves made explicit, at all points their proposals were designed to stabilise and strengthen, not to destroy.[3] Nor was their influence limited to propaganda for the associative principle. There was in all their writings a vigorous denial of the importance of the political factor and an insistence upon spiritual regeneration before social improvement could be expected. It is this attack by the Christian Socialists upon the central assumptions of the Chartist movement that constitutes their main political significance in the history of the working-class movement. The matter must not be

[1] Everyman edition, p. 116.

[2] The most vicious literary attack was by J. W. Croker in the *Quarterly Review* of September 1851 under the heading "Revolutionary Literature". Part of his article reads (p. 524) "Incredible as it may appear, there is, it seems, a clique of educated and clever but wayward-minded men—the most prominent among them *two clergymen of the Church of England*—who, from, as it seems, a morbid craving for notoriety or a crazy straining after paradox—have taken up the unnatural and unhallowed task of preaching, in the press and from the pulpit, not indeed such open, undisguised *Jacobinism* and *Jacquerie* as we have just been quoting, but—under the name of "*Christian Socialism*"—the same doctrines in a form not the less dangerous for being less honest." See also the hostile reviews of *Alton Locke* in *The Times*, October 18, 1850, *Blackwood's Magazine*, November 1850 and the *Edinburgh Review*, January 1851.

[3] See the quotation above (p. 151) from the pamphlet by Charles Kingsley, *Who are the Friends of Order?*; also the letters from F. D. Maurice to Dr. Jelf, Principal of King's College, in *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 81 ff.

overstated. Christian Socialism was a minor rather than a major factor in the withdrawal by the working men from the class politics of Chartism, but to win any acceptance for the ideas of Christian Socialism involved a frontal attack upon the Chartist belief that "political power must be obtained before social amelioration can be enjoyed".[1] It was precisely this recognition that "political power was the means" that constituted the crucial advance in working-class understanding during the Chartist period, and it was upon this major postulate that Chartist strategy was built. How abundantly correct the Chartists were needs no emphasis after a further century's history and those who opposed them, in the name of working-class betterment, have damned themselves in theory and in practice. Nor must the verdict be understood in bloodless academic terms. Apart from those sections of the workers who built their trade unions after 1850, the majority of the British working class lived in conditions of semi-literacy and material poverty and insecurity for many decades to come. Their one hope was "by organisation (to) make power for themselves"[2] and those who helped to destroy their belief in independent political action were guilty, in objective terms, of prolonging and extending the poverty of the labouring millions.

[1] Ernest Jones, quoted above, p. 153.
[2] William Newton in *The Englishman*, February 11, 1854.

6

MASTER AND SERVANT

DAPHNE SIMON

IT is a special characteristic of capitalist society in contrast to all earlier class societies that the position of the ruling class is not supported by a privileged legal status. In slave society the slaveowners are plainly the masters of the slaves because the slaves are their chattels, beings without legal rights; and in feudal society the feudal lords are plainly the rulers over the serfs because the serfs are legally unfree and forced to labour part of the time for the lords without reward. In capitalist society, however, the capitalist *as such* has no rights which the wage-earner does not have, and their relation to each other is not determined by their having a different status but by the contract which they both enter into. Hence the law regulating their relation forms part of the law of contract.

Yet in Britain as late as 1875 the very heart of this law of master and servant, that part regulating breach of contract between the two parties, contained statutory provisions which treated the employer and the workman as entirely unequal. Whereas the master who broke his contract was only liable in a civil action for damages or wages owing, the servant who broke his contract was punished as a criminal with imprisonment and hard labour up to three months. And this law was far from being a dead letter, for in the eighteen years (1858–75) for which statistics are available there were on an average 10,000 prosecutions of workmen each year in England and Wales alone. It was one of the major grievances of the trade unions at that time, and they undertook a great campaign to get the law altered.

It is proposed in this essay to examine, first, the operation of the law in its last phase (*c.* 1860–75); second, the character of the struggle for its reform; third, the reasons for such an anomalous law at this period.

I. THE OPERATION OF THE LAW (1860s)

The law recognised virtually only three forms of breach of contract by a master against his workman: cruelty; dismissal of the servant before the end of his term or with inadequate notice; and failure to pay wages due or their payment in truck.

By the 1860s it was the last two forms which were the important ones. Cruelty was really only relevant to domestic or quasi-domestic servants—the farm labourer, for example, hired by the year and living in with the farmer. Cruelty entitled a servant to leave his master forthwith; more prudently, he could summon him before a Justice and get a formal discharge from his service.[1] An Act of 1823, 4 Geo. IV c. 34, also enabled him at the same time to claim any wages which were owing (s. 5).

In cases where no cruelty was involved, however, the servant could only claim wages through a magistrate where the amount involved was £10 or less (*ibid.*, s. 4). Otherwise he had to go to the County Court.[2] He also had to go to the County Court if he wanted to claim damages for wrongful dismissal.[3] That was not in itself a very expensive or difficult procedure—though many, perhaps most, workmen must have been quite unaware that such a course was open to them—but it *was* difficult for the workman either to prove breach of contract by his master or to recover any substantial damages.

Suppose first a case where the workman was asserting that he had been dismissed before the end of his term or with inadequate notice. The court would have to decide how long in fact the servant had undertaken to serve for, and the master to hire for; and secondly, what notice the two parties were bound to give each other.

There would seldom be any written contract to appeal to: the law did not require it,[4] and many servants (and not a few masters also) were illiterate. Sometimes, therefore, the master simply denied that there was a contract at all; and the servant, unable to produce any evidence to the contrary, had his case dismissed.[5] Even where workmen in a factory etc., could produce "the rules of the work as posted up" there were some

[1] Under 20 Geo. II c. 19 (1747) s. 2, which explains cruelty more particularly as "refusal of necessary provision, cruelty or other ill-treatment".

[2] If the master did not pay within an appointed time, the money was to be levied by distress and sale of his goods. But if that did not yield a sufficient amount the master was not therefore to be imprisoned as for a debt; see Richard Burn, *Justice of the Peace & Parish Officer*, 28th edition, J. & T. Chitty, 1837, v, p. 542.

[3] In Scotland, to the local Sheriff's Court. Before the County Courts Act of 1846 the English servant in either of these circumstances could only bring an action in the High Court.

[4] Unless the contract was for longer than a year (Statute of Frauds, 1679, s. 4) or was for a year and was to commence at a future date (Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 487); and yearly hirings were dying out in the 1860s. Even where, as in some agricultural districts, yearly hirings were still customary the operation of the old Settlement Laws had accustomed farmers to avoid a legal year by hiring for 364 days or 51 weeks—leaving the remaining week for the annual holiday-making and for attendance at a hiring fair and engagement under a fresh contract.

[5] E.g. a Birmingham building worker, unsuccessfully claiming wages in lieu of notice before the County Court: *Beehive*, June 1, 1867.

remarkable unsuccessful actions. One of the Glasgow trade union leaders mentioned one such notorious case which arose in 1863 at Nelson's iron foundry at Hyde Park when several men, hired by the fortnight to work twelve hours a day casting the bottom plate of a Cunard mail steamer, were turned off by the foreman after one day because they refused to comply with the master's request that they should "continue at work night and day without any stoppage (the job requiring four or five weeks to complete) and take just snatches of rest at intervals as they could leave their work". After an action in the Sheriff's Court of Glasgow lasting nearly two years these men finally got wages for the time they had actually worked, but they got nothing in lieu of the requisite fortnight's notice.[1]

Where there was nothing in writing to refer to the court had to determine the length of the hiring by such evidences as the form of the verbal agreement for payment of wages: whether the servant was hired at the rate of so much an hour, so much a day, so much a week or so much a month. What counted was the period used to determine the wage rate, not the interval at which wages were actually paid; thus a workman engaged at (say) eight shillings a day but paid weekly was considered to be hired by the day.[2] This did not necessarily mean that only a day's notice was necessary for dismissing him. That depended (unless there was some special individual bargain made) on the custom of the trade. Unfortunately many workers—building workers, for example—could not refer to the kind of settled and universal trade custom which would satisfy the court;[3] and then it was for the court to decide what was "reasonable" notice in the particular given case, taking into account mainly the character of the employment and the amount of the remuneration; and the general view of the courts was that if the employment was that of a labourer or artisan and the remuneration modest, then the notice could reasonably be short.[4] And even if the court was satisfied that the workman had indeed not been given the

[1] Evidence of Alexander Campbell, chairman of the Glasgow Trades Council, before the *Select Committee appointed to inquire into the State of the Law as regards Contracts of Service between Master and Servant* . . ., P.P. (H. of C.) 1865, VIII (370) and 1866, XIII (449); 1866, XIII, Q. 298–300.

[2] Thus a Doncaster building worker hired on this basis who left his master on a Tuesday recovered two days' wages from him: *Beehive*, September 17, 1864. But the magistrates often gave decisions which apparently contradicted this rule; thus a Birmingham carpenter in the same circumstances (who left because of a strike) recovered nothing; *ibid.*, December 24, 1864. On these rules see A. S. Diamond: *The Law of Master and Servant* (2nd. edition, 1946), pp. 174–5.

[3] The custom had to be "uniform, certain, of reasonable antiquity and so notorious that persons would contract on the basis of its existence": Diamond, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[4] See the comments of Lord Best in *Beeston v. Collyer* (1827), 4 Bingham 309.

proper notice, nevertheless he would usually be awarded only slight damages on the ground that he could meanwhile be getting employment elsewhere. Sometimes a man would only get four or five shillings therefore.[1]

It may seem that if the servant was bringing an action not in connection with a dispute over dismissal, but simply to recover wages owing for work done, he would be in a stronger position; yet in fact he was usually in greater difficulties. His best hope of success was where the employer had made some kind of collective agreement with all his employees simultaneously, so that one of their number could call the rest as witnesses. In that way some London carpenters successfully sued their master in the Marylebone County Court when he had agreed to raise their wages and then gone back on his word.[2]

True, generally speaking the existence of a contract of service implied that there must be some kind of reward or remuneration due: in a written agreement "consideration and a sufficient mutuality must appear on the face" of it; and in a verbal contract the "retainer will be presumed to be in consideration of wages unless the contrary appear".[3] But while the courts readily assumed that wages were due, they also assumed that the wages had been paid unless the servant could show otherwise.[4] The onus of proof rested with the servant—and usually he had no such proof: it was just his word against his master's.

Secondly, a claim for wages often failed even where the master agreed that they were unpaid because he was able to point to some disobedience or neglect of service on the servant's part which amounted to a breach of contract. "The servant . . . impliedly contracts to obey

[1] W. P. Roberts (Chartist and trade union solicitor) in evidence before the Select Committee of 1866; 1866, XIII, Q. 1778–9, 2220. "Supposing a man was engaged for six months at £1 a week and was turned off at the end of three months, there being still thirteen weeks to run; would you claim for £13, or what?—I should claim for £13 and the county court judge would probably give me £8"; Q. 1779.

[2] *Beehive*, March 2, 1867.

[3] Burn, *op. cit.*, pp. 487, 491. As an interesting example of the contrary appearing, see *Alfred v. Marquis of Fitzjames* (1799): a West Indian slave brought over to England does not thereby become entitled to wages—an important corollary to the famous Somersett's case (1772) in which Lord Mansfield had ruled that since English law does not recognise slavery, a slave when brought into this country is entitled to go free.

[4] E.g. in a case quoted by Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 492, "a case tried some time back at the Guildhall which was an action by a workman at a sugar refiner's; a witness proved that the plaintiff had worked there for more than two years, but Lord Abbott said that he should direct the jury to presume that men employed in that way were regularly paid every Saturday night unless some evidence was given on the part of the plaintiff to satisfy the jury that the plaintiff had in point of fact never been paid; and as no such evidence was produced the plaintiff was nonsuited". (Burn takes this case from 4 C. & P., p. 8, where it is mentioned, without the names of the parties, in a footnote to *Sellon v. Norman*, 1829.)

the lawful and reasonable orders of his master within the scope of the services contracted for."[1] The full meaning of that rule had been explained authoritatively by Lord Ellenborough in *Spain v. Arnott* (1817). An agricultural servant Spain brought an action to recover wages from Michaelmas (when he had been hired as a yearly servant by the farmer Arnott) until July, when he had been dismissed without any payment. Spain

> "usually breakfasted at five o'clock in the morning and dined at two. One day the master ordered the servant to go with the horses to the marsh which was a mile off before dinner, dinner being then ready. The plaintiff said that he had done his due and would not go till he had had his dinner; the defendant told him to go about his business, and the plaintiff went accordingly without offering any submission . . ."

Lord Ellenborough said, in giving judgment for Arnott:

> "If the contract be for a year's service the year must be completed before the servant is entitled to be paid. If the plaintiff persisted in refusing to obey his master's orders I think he was warranted in turning him away. . . . It may be hard upon the servant, but it would be exceedingly inconvenient if the servant were to be permitted to set himself up to control his master in his domestic regulations such as the time of dinner. . . . The question really comes to this, whether the master or the servant is to have the superior authority."[2]

Such a wide view of disobedience did not apply only to quasi-domestic servants. Mr. Justice Bayley had maintained in *R. v. St. John, Devizes*, (1830), which concerned a Chippenham silk weaver, Prudence Abrahams, who worked in a factory, that although "generally speaking the ordinary working hours in a manufactory are twelve hours per day, it does not therefore follow that the master may not on extraordinary occasions require his servant to work at other hours"—even though her contract contained the clause that she was to "obey the regulations of the factory with regard to the hours of attendance", because (as Mr. Justice Parke explained) obeying the factory regulations simply meant: obeying the master.[3] This principle was enunciated, it is true, before

[1] Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 489. [2] 2 Stark, pp. 256–8. [3] 9 B. & C., pp. 896–901.

the date of the first effective Factory Act; but the Hyde Park iron foundry case mentioned above (p. 162) shows the same principle still being applied in 1863. By that date, however, the commonest cause of loss of wages for "disobedience" was probably adherence to trade union rules of working: refusal to speed, refusal to encroach on a job proper to another trade and so forth.[1]

Most commonly, of course, when a workman found that he could not get his wages he did not try to bring an action against his employer; he simply left him and looked for another job. He was quite entitled to do that in theory; in practice it was apt to lay him open to a prosecution for absenting himself from his service.[2]

What was the procedure for a master wishing to prosecute a servant for breach of contract?

Almost all prosecutions of workmen for breach of contract were made under the statute of 1823 already mentioned, the 4 Geo. IV c. 34.[3] Breach of contract by the servant is defined in s.3 in wide terms. It was made to include not only failure to enter upon the service (where the contract was a written and signed one) and any absence from the service before it was completed, but also any "neglect to fulfill the same" and "any other Misconduct or Misdemeanour in the execution thereof or otherwise respecting the same". In any such case the master (or his manager, etc.) might complain upon oath to a Justice of the Peace, and the Justice was then to issue a warrant for the servant's arrest and to examine into the complaint; and if he found it justified he could punish the servant either by imprisonment with hard labour "for a reasonable time not exceeding three months", or else by an abatement of wages in whole or in part. Alternatively, he could discharge the servant from his service.

If the servant was imprisoned he naturally lost his wages for the time he was in prison (s. 3); and when he came out the master was not bound to have him back, so he might also lose his job. On the other hand (in the words of Lord Ellenborough) "it would be clearly against the policy of the law if the servant by his own act of delinquency

[1] E.g. a Leicester ironfounder, dismissed without notice or wages paid, lost his case when he sued for wages before the Leicester County Court because he had restrained an apprentice from doing ten hours' work in nine: *Beehive*, March 2, 1867.

[2] Thus two Devon farmworkers, reported from the *North Devon Journal* in the *Glasgow Sentinel*, October 6, 1866.

[3] Witnesses before the Select Committee of 1865–6 also named two 18th century statutes as still operative: the 20 Geo. II c. 19 (1747) and the 6 Geo. III c. 25 (1766); but they agreed that the 1823 Act was much the most important: 1865, VIII, Q. 5, 10, 11; 1866, XIII, Q. 11, 12, 273.

should have the power of dissolving the contract. . . . The imprisonment of the servant was so far from being a cessation of the service that perhaps his labour might have been required of him by the master even while he was in prison," and the master could certainly require his return.[1] If the servant went off without permission after serving his sentence, that constituted a further act of disobedience, and so "the man might be committed over and over again . . . there was, in fact, no end to the power of commitment".[2]

In addition to prosecution under the 4 Geo. IV c. 34 pieceworkers, especially outworkers, were liable to prosecution under Acts of 1843 (6 & 7 Vict. c. 40) and 1777 (17 Geo. III c. 56). The 1843 Act covered workers in textiles (wool, cotton, linen, silk, etc.); the Act of 1777 applied chiefly to workers in leather and iron.[3] The purpose of these Acts was to punish failure to finish work on time and failure to return all the materials given out.[4] Thus in the Act of 1843 (s. 7) any workman who failed to finish and return his work within seven days of the appointed date—or who failed to work it up properly or did any damage to it or neglected it or left it or otherwise broke his contract —was to be punished with a fine up to £2, besides making good the damage and paying costs; or, if he failed to pay, with imprisonment up to two months. S. 3 of the same Act laid down that a workman who failed to return on demand within fourteen days any material given out and not used up, or any tools, was to be punished as for embezzlement, viz., (s. 2), by forfeiture of the value of the goods and a fine up to £10 and costs; or, if he failed to pay, by imprisonment up to three months.

Clearly, under the conditions of the putting-out system, the distinction between these two offences—retaining material because you had not found time to work it up, and retaining material because you intended to steal it—could easily become blurred. In the Act of 1777 the association of the two offences was very close indeed: anyone neglecting work taken in for more than eight days to be imprisoned up to three months (s. 8); anyone failing to return material upon demand within eight days to be punished as for embezzlement with imprisonment up to a possible six months (ss. 7 & 1). George Odger

[1] *R. v. Barton-upon-Irwell* (1814), 2 M. & Sel., pp. 329–33.

[2] 1866, XIII, Q. 1667–72; evidence of W. P. Roberts.

[3] Also fustian, hemp, fur, hats and dyeing. (This Act also contained provisions relating to textiles, but in that respect it had been repealed and superseded by the Act of 1843.)

[4] In the words of the preamble to the Act of 1843, they were designed "for the Prevention of Frauds and Abuses" by the workmen and "for the further securing the Property of the Manufacturers".

explained from his own experience how frightening this 1777 Act was to shoemakers, and how it could be used to *drive* a workman:

> "Any decent man . . . when he has had work out by him eight days is apt to be terrified with the thought that his employer would feel disposed to have him before a magistrate for this breach of contract. . . . I have heard the threat made; I think it would be about two months ago . . . I went over the time, the first time I ever did in my life; [my employer] called at my house when I was out and threatened that if he had not the work in a given time he would proceed against me in the ordinary way for breach of contract. I went home and then went to the workshop and worked nearly all night to get the work to time the next day, which embarrassed me a good deal because I had been at work all the day before. I do not know whether he would have carried out his threat or not, but I was within his clutches if I did not make the boots."[1]

It was the procedure and penalties outlined above—the arrest of the servant[2] and his punishment by imprisonment or by loss of wages, in other words, his treatment as a *criminal* while his master was open only to a civil action—which the workmen saw as the worst and most flagrant injustice. No less oppressive and one-sided, however, was the ease with which the master could succeed in a prosecution because the courts gave to the servant's "absence" and "neglect" such a wide interpretation.

Thus three miners at Dewsbury were prosecuted for "absenting themselves" from work and given fourteen days' hard labour for refusing to go into a pit made dangerous by firedamp.[3] The same charge was successfully brought against a journeyman potter of Glasgow because he refused to change over to a lower-paid job: "having wrought at a description of work which was moderately remunerative, [he] was ordered suddenly to go to another class of work which had been usually given to apprentice boys", and which he calculated would reduce his earnings by half. He continued to attend the works "day by day, and offered his services in the capacity in

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 1813. Cf. a case reported in the *Beehive*, November 4, 1865: a Birmingham gun-finisher was prosecuted for leaving work unfinished; the case was adjourned, with the warning that he would be prosecuted again if the work was not immediately completed.

[2] Since the passing of Jervis's Act, 1848 (11 & 12 Vict., c. 43), the magistrates in England and Wales had had the option of issuing a summons, and often they did; but in Scotland the servant was always arrested.

[3] *Beehive*, November 10, 1866.

which he had previously served"; but the master would not accept that and finally had him arrested and sent to prison.[1]

The meaning of "neglect" is illustrated by the case of Eli Swift, an ironworker at the Phoenix Ironworks, Rotherham, who "refused to teach a labourer the work which he, Eli Swift, was engaged to perform", "the instruction being as he considered a part of his capital". Consequently "he was dragged from his bed about midnight by a police officer and placed in the cells under the court house"—"although his residence was perfectly known and there was no necessity for it". The next morning at nine o'clock he was taken for trial to the private house of one of the local magistrates. "By this time the friends of the man got to know of the matter . . . and three of them asked to be admitted to give evidence, but they were refused." Swift was sentenced to a month's imprisonment in Wakefield Gaol.[2]

Even inability to work because of illness was sometimes punished as "neglect". William Evans, a careful reporter of master and servant cases in the Potteries, instanced as not untypical of the potting trade—notorious for the prevalence of lung disease—the case of a potter who in 1866 was imprisoned for two weeks for neglect of work although he produced a doctor's certificate testifying that he was too ill to go to the potting shed.[3]

Besides the inequality of the law itself, the workers had two other grievances about its operation: the prejudiced and sometimes ignorant conduct of cases by the Justices of the Peace; and the use of the law by the masters as an instrument for weakening trade union organisation and breaking strikes.

The miners' solicitor W. P. Roberts was emphatic in his evidence before the Select Committee on the law of master and servant (1866) that the Justices were often guilty of irregular convictions. He instanced the case of some Stockton shipbuilding workers who were locked out

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 90–1; (evidence of Geo. Newton). This was obviously a specially vindictive employer: the Justice wished only to order the man to return to work and work out a month's notice; but his master now refused to have him back and "demanded that the man should be punished". So he was given seven days' hard labour.

[2] From the *Glasgow Sentinel*, February 4, 1865 and the evidence of W. P. Roberts, 1866, XIII, Q. 1662–5. Swift's fellow-workmen got Roberts to send a statement of the case to J. A. Roebuck, Radical M.P. for Sheffield, and he interceded on Swift's behalf with the Home Secretary; but "in due time there came the ordinary lithogram, expressing great regret that nothing could be done". Roberts commented on this case that "there was as gross a failure of justice as could be; I do not believe that such a failure of justice could have occurred in any other country than this". (Q. 1664.)

[3] 1866, XIII, Q. 1383. Evans was then editor of the trade union journal the *Potteries Examiner*, and formerly a working potter—a gilder.

by the masters for three or four weeks in an attempt to enforce certain workings hours which the men objected to and who were consequently obliged to seek work elsewhere, nine of whom were prosecuted when the lock-out was over for not returning to their first place of work:

> "Q. 2238. . . . the magistrates held that they were bound to return, notwithstanding the stoppage of the contract by the notices which the employers had put up.
>
> "Q. 2240. Had not the masters the power of stopping the work according to the contract and then going on again?—No; it was one of those cases in which a county court judge would have decided exactly the reverse.
>
> "Q. 2241. Was there not an appeal against that decision?—No; there is no appeal."

Other witnesses gave other instances of wrong decisions, e.g. William Evans who cited the case of a potter working under an annual contract,

> "[who] when he came to proceed with his work found there was a condition that was not laid down in his contract, namely, for the milling of his clay, which was charged upon him as a workman and deducted from his wages. He objected to that and left his employer. He was then taken before a magistrate who was connected with the trade in the district and he was imprisoned for a fortnight for leaving his employ, the workman believing himself justified in doing so from the master having broken his contract. That has caused great dissatisfaction to the trade."[1]

The Scottish trade union journal, the *Glasgow Sentinel*, was constantly reporting similar cases which support the complaints made to the Select Committee. For example, in October 1865 eighteen Middlesbrough puddlers were prosecuted for leaving their work when they staged a one day strike in protest against their wages not being paid. The solicitor who appeared for the masters admitted under skilful cross-examination by the workmen that: "In all the cases except one there is more than £1 owing. . . . In some cases there are large amounts due." Nevertheless the magistrates fined each man twenty shillings and costs.[2]

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 1382.

[2] *Glasgow Sentinel*, October 28, 1865. Sixteen men agreed to pay and return to work, but two "after lengthy consideration" refused, so they got two months' hard labour.

Again, in March 1866, during the ironworkers' strike on the north-east coast to secure the nine-hour day, four riveters and a plater were brought before the Stockton magistrates and each sentenced to a month's hard labour in Durham gaol although their solicitor proved with witnesses that these men had all given the customary seven days' notice.[1] It is noteworthy that in another comparable case, again concerning ironworkers, where the men gave notice of appeal to the High Court, the masters immediately exerted themselves to prevent the case going further by interceding for the men's release and taking them back into their employment.[2]

Sometimes the magistrates exposed their prejudice by the bullying language in which they addressed the workmen. This was especially true in agricultural districts. A Devon farm labourer, brought before the Justices at Barnstaple for absenting himself in the harvest, justified himself by saying that he had never received any wages. "Do you think, sir," replied the chairman, the Rev. Francis Mole, "that the magistrates will tolerate such conduct as that, sir? I will make an example of such blackguards as you are, sir. If the rest of the magistrates encourage such a set, I won't, sir. You shall have fourteen days' hard labour, and see if that will cure you and all your kith and kin."[3]

The *Beehive* gives as "a specimen of the conduct of country magistrates of the employing class" the case of a young coach-builder, James Mason, brought up before the Wrexham magistrates for deserting his employment. His case was heard by the Mayor and a certain Captain M'Coy:

> "DEFENDANT: I left under peculiar circumstances. The shop has been blacked.
>
> "THE MAYOR: Then it is coming to that, is it? That a lot of working men, fellows like you, are to dictate to masters who shall work for them. That may do in France in time of a revolution. You have united yourself with an illegal society, therefore you must take the consequence. You seem to say there was no contract. Were you paid your wages weekly?

[1] *Glasgow Sentinel*, March 17, 1866.

[2] *Ibid.*, January 28, 1865. A Scottish case heard at Airdrie. The employer had broken an agreement about payment for spoilt blooms.

[3] *Ibid.*, October 6, 1866, quoting from the *North Devon Journal*. Cf. a similar case in Sussex where a labourer was given six weeks' imprisonment, his master acting as one of the magistrates: *Glasgow Sentinel*, May 4, 1867.

"DEFENDANT: Yes.

"THE MAYOR: Very well. That is a contract all the world over. If such a state of things as this is not to be stopped, I would no longer sit here as a magistrate. It is worse than the disunited States of America.

"CAPTAIN M'COY: It is worse than slavery. It makes the servant master."[1]

This Wrexham case was perhaps an extreme example. But such bullying must have been greatly encouraged by the practice, very common in the country, of cases being heard by a single magistrate sitting alone in his private house.[2] That was a constant complaint of the workmen, as was also the refusal of the magistrates to adjourn cases so that the workmen might secure legal aid. William Dronfield, secretary of the Sheffield Trades Council, gave an example of two stove-grate fitters of Masborough (Yorkshire) who were arrested in bed between four and five in the morning and tried and convicted by noon the same day and given a month's hard labour before their friends could even discover where they had disappeared to; and this was not an isolated case.[3]

What of the masters' use of the law to weaken trade union organisation and break strikes? There is ample evidence that it was constantly used in this way—that this was a considerable part of its value in the masters' eyes. They coupled it with what remained of the anti-combination laws as an instrument for checking "intimidation".[4] In all trades there were numerous individual prosecutions in which the workman had "departed before the end of his term" out of loyalty to trade union principles: refusing to work with non-unionists or refusing to act as a blackleg. Such a workman often paid for his loyalty with the maximum prison sentence.[5] In small strikes it was a common practice

[1] *Beehive*, June 25, 1864. Mason was sent to prison for a month. Three weeks later three other men were prosecuted by the same employer, but they got a solicitor and when the Mayor heard this he prudently stopped the case and hurried out of court; *ibid.*, July 16, 1864.

[2] E.g. the case of Eli Swift, described above p. 168, and many others.

[3] 1866, XIII, Q. 819–28. Cf. (e.g.) a coal-miner's case described by John Normansell, Secretary of the South Yorkshire Miners' Association, *ibid.*, Q. 896–900.

[4] *Ibid.*, Burns, a spokesman of the mineowners in Q. 2336, and Mault, a master-builder, in Q. 2576; and cf. the corroborating evidence of one of the workmen in Q. 1068.

[5] E.g. a Cornish miner, enticed by an advertisement to take work at a distant colliery, and leaving when he found there was a strike on, was sentenced to three months' hard labour: *Beehive*, January 13, 1866. And a similar sentence was imposed on a Yorkshire ironmoulder, George Wild, who called out some of his fellow workers when non-unionists were taken on: *Glasgow Sentinel*, August 11, 1866. (Wild had already antagonised his

to have all the strikers arrested and then to confront them with the stark choice: either return to work at once on the employer's terms or go to prison. The Justices readily collaborated in this abuse of the law:

> "Frequently the course is pursued which was pursued in this case, which was this: the master said: 'I can send you to prison for three months with hard labour; will you go back to your work?' So it is, as it were, that exemption from punishment is sold to the men. . . . [This] case came before the Queen's Bench. A criminal information was moved for against the magistrate; but inasmuch as we could not prove that he was corrupt, or that he was paid for doing this, our application failed, though the judges severely censured the whole practice."[1]

In bigger strikes, where the arrest of all the strikers was impracticable, the law was used to behead the strike by imprisoning the leaders. No group of employers had a worse record in that respect than the mine-owners. It was an old weapon. Ness Edwards has described the decisive part which it played in South Wales in the 1840s, in the first revival of trade unionism since the days of Owen's Grand National: the employers managed to extinguish the miners' organisation for ten years.[2] In the 1860s the mineowners were no longer so successful, but they were equally persistent. The *Beehive* records a steady stream of master and servant prosecutions during miners' strikes. They come from every coal-field, but especially from the small and backward pits of Staffordshire and from Durham, where the system of the "yearly bond" inevitably made every strike a breach of contract.[3] It is not surprising that the

employer six weeks before by organising a successful strike for an advance in wages; his employer now retaliated by requesting the magistrates to impose the maximum sentence "as an example to others".) Sometimes these prosecutions achieved their object of frightening men into returning to work, e.g. four Huddersfield joiners agreed to re-enter a black shop: *Beehive*, July 30 and August 6, 1864.

[1] Some building workers at Barnard Castle (1861) instanced by W. P. Roberts; 1866, XIII, Q. 1659, 1665. The men were arrested at night and tried at 7 a.m., not in the public court-house but in "the magistrate's clerk's office"; an adjournment to allow them to secure legal aid was refused. Roberts dubbed this "the use of the law in its torturing process".

[2] N. Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners* (1926), pp. 33–5, quoting from the *Monmouthshire Merlin*. The miners struck against a reduction of wages (December 1842) and in every village the men suspected of leadership were systematically arrested and imprisoned for two or three months for breach of contract. The *Merlin* gave special praise to the magistrates "for the pains they took to bring [these cases] to a desirable termination . . . Thus has the confederacy among the Monmouthshire colliers . . . been, it is hoped, entirely broken."

[3] See, for instance, the cases arising from strikes at West Bromwich and Sedley (*Beehive*, December 24, 1864) and at Monkwearmouth (April 2, 1864). And for Durham, see also

miners were foremost in the battle to get the master and servant laws repealed.

II. THE STRUGGLE FOR REFORM

The movement for the reform of the law of master and servant began in 1863. It originated amongst the trade unionists of Glasgow. A contemporary Scottish lawyer explained this by the fact that in Scotland the workmen were necessarily arrested on warrant and so suffered more from the law than did the English. Equally important probably was the fact that some of the most affected industries—iron-works and potteries particularly—were concentrated in Glasgow.

The leaders of the agitation were Alexander Campbell and George Newton, the chairman and secretary of the Glasgow Trades Council. Campbell had been apprenticed in the Glasgow building trade "as a joiner, house-carpenter and cabinet-maker" and for a while had been secretary of his local carpenters' union; later he became a master-builder. Consequently he was able to claim that he had experience of the working of the law from both sides. Campbell also had a life-long practical interest in journalism and in 1863 he was editing the *Glasgow Sentinel*, a weekly newspaper founded in 1850 with trade union funds to act both as a general newspaper of radical politics and as a special organ of "trades intelligence", giving detailed reports of all trade union activities and struggles between employers and employed—including prosecutions under the master and servant laws.[1]

George Newton was a potter, put to work while still a child and educated entirely by study after working hours at night and Sunday schools. Always in bad health, he nevertheless exerted himself to the utmost in working-class struggles, especially at anything involving slogging patience and a steady grind. In the 1860s he carried the burden of three secretaryships: of the Trades Council, of the committee for reform of the master and servant laws, and of the Glasgow Reform Union fighting for manhood suffrage. Worn out by these labours—and by the effort of also earning enough at his trade to support a wife and six

the full accounts given in R. Fynes, *Miners of Northumberland and Durham*, pp. 38–49 (1843); pp. 180–3 (1859); p. 225 et seq. (1863). The most vivid description of what this use of the master and servant laws meant for the individual miner and his family is given in Thomas Burt's *Autobiography*, pp. 128–34. (Northumberland.)

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 283–7, 301. (Campbell's evidence.) Campbell declared that the *Sentinel* was the only newspaper in Scotland acknowledged by the working-class as representing their views fairly. He also claimed that it had "a very large circulation" but did not say what it was. It ran until 1877.

children—he died in January 1867 at the age of thirty-six and so did not live to see his causes victorious.[1]

Campbell and Newton began their campaign in February by enlisting the help of a friendly Glasgow lawyer, John Strachan, who had frequently been employed by the trade unions to defend their members in master and servant prosecutions. Strachan drew up a simple Memorial of Information on the law with suggestions for its amendment, and this was printed and circulated by Campbell amongst the leading trade unionists of the city. In April the issue was taken up by the Trades Council and the delegates eventually agreed on three demands as the essential minimum reform: First, that all cases should be tried before sheriffs in Scotland and County Courts in England and not before Justices of the Peace, who belonged to the "employing or master class". Second, that the only procedure should be through a civil action (with the consequence that the servant like the master would be brought to court by a summons and not by arrest). Third, that the only 'penalty' imposed should be damages.

It is noteworthy that it took the Trades Council three months of heated argument to reach agreement on these modest demands and to decide on the next steps in the campaign. Their discussions reveal very poignantly the limitations of the working-class movement at that date —its narrow craft basis and restricting liberalist outlook, fundamentally the same as that of its opponents. The feelings of the delegates were all against the law: they called it a cruel relic of feudal barbarism, burned with indignation at its discrimination against their class, and longed for complete equality. But their ideas made them hesitant about demanding that equality and doubtful of being able to win it. They were uncomfortably conscious of the plausibility of the masters' favourite argument that the workman must be imprisoned because he would so seldom have the resources to pay damages. So they added an amendment to their resolution on damages providing for imprisonment up to three months if damages were not paid within three days; and they expressly explained this amendment on their opponents' ground that it would "prevent workmen breaking their contracts with impunity". In their anxiety to sound objective, they echoed their masters' voice.

This effort at impartiality was prompted by the calculation that "unless some of the present strict measures against the workman for a violation of contract was retained, they would meet great opposition in effecting any improvement" (Newton); if they moderated their

[1] Obituary notice in the *Glasgow Sentinel*, January 12, 1867.

demands on the other hand, an influential part of ruling class opinion would be sympathetic and legislation would be got without much difficulty or delay.[1]

They were confirmed in this approach when they found themselves being given a polite hearing by Lord Brougham and his National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Campbell read a paper (prepared by Newton) at the Association's seventh annual congress held at Edinburgh in October. The lawyers present agreed that the law needed some amendment and the Jurisprudence Department made this a recommendation to the Association.[2]

Thus encouraged, the Glasgow Trades Council decided that they could—after only one exchange of correspondence with trade union leaders in other centres—write immediately to the Home Secretary and ask for legislation, and that he would readily agree to their proposals.[3]

They were sharply disillusioned. Sir George Grey's answer was on classic lines: "Whilst the subject appears to him well deserving consideration, he cannot at present give any assurance on the part of the Government as to the introduction of a bill for the amendment of the law in that respect." He would only say that "If any member of the House of Commons should move for the appointment of a committee to enquire into the operation of the law" he would not oppose that, "if sufficient ground should be laid for it."

[1] A minority, led by Lang, a baker, advocated "l'audace et encore l'audace", but at this stage they were voted down on most issues. These debates were all conscientiously minuted by Newton, and the minutes reprinted in the *Sentinel*, which is the source for all the details of the reform struggle of 1863–7 unless otherwise stated. (The original minutes were lost in a fire.)

[2] But the Association took no action. Only one member was really interested in the question, Andrew Edgar, a barrister, who sincerely disliked the inequalities of the law and was shrewd enough to understand that "it would be impossible to maintain the present system in the face of the rising intelligence and advancing social condition of the working-classes". Encouraged by him, Newton prepared two further papers which were read at the Congresses of 1864 and 1865; but the Association did not include them in its published *Transactions*. This was understood as a snub to the trade union movement—a resolution condemning the Association for its indifference was passed at the famous Sheffield Conference on Lock-outs in 1866—and the Glasgow leadership thenceforth ignored the Association entirely. Edgar maintained his stand: in 1867 he spoke very strongly against the recommendations of the Select Committee (below p. 185) and suggested a number of alternative amendments to the law much more favourable to the working-class; but no one else in the Association supported him. For Edgar, see the Association's *Transactions*, 1859, pp. 687–90, and *Social Science*, 1866–7, pp. 97–108.

[3] In July they had printed two hundred copies of a Manifesto containing their proposals for reform and calling for the lobbying of M.P.s, etc., and had circulated it to all Trades Councils and leading unions. The Trades Councils of London, Edinburgh, Nottingham, Sheffield, and Newcastle & Gateshead all expressed support as did several individual unions and union branches. The London Trades Council with whom Glasgow had communicated once before in March took up the question with special enthusiasm and sent in detailed amendments—in favour of the workman; they thought Glasgow were too conciliatory: First Minute Book of the London Trades Council, pp. 127–8, 130.

This rebuff from their rulers was the beginning of new things. Campbell summed up the lesson to be learnt in a leading article in the *Sentinel:*

> "The master is rich—the workman is poor; so the rich master is dealt with as a gentleman while the poor workman is treated as a felon . . . But still, although this is so plain, workmen are not to take it for granted that on a representation to the Home Office the Home Secretary will be induced to introduce a bill to have this special piece of class legislature [*sic*] repealed. We have no hope that an alteration of the law is to be effected through such a channel. It is to the workmen themselves we look as the power through whose influence our object is to be gained."[1]

To build up a powerful mass movement which the government would not dare to ignore: that was the task to which Campbell and Newton now devoted themselves.

The first necessary step was to make their own Glasgow Trades Council more representative and democratic. There is little doubt that the fundamental reason why Campbell and Newton had tried first of all to find some short cut to victory by manœuvring amongst the liberal middle class was that they and the other members of the Council had lost touch with the majority of Glasgow trade unionists; they had become a little discussion group without mass support. "The Trades Council was now but a mere skeleton of what it once was," Campbell complained in the spring of 1864; "Two-thirds of the trades once represented had withdrawn, and those the most numerous, powerful and influential, such as the flint glass makers, iron-moulders, masons, shipwrights, joiners, amalgamated engineers and others." No one from any of these trades had taken part in the discussions of 1863. The only representative of the whole metal and engineering trades had been a tinplate worker; no one had come from the building trades except Campbell; Newton had been the only potter. The chief speakers had been the cotton spinners and the gilders, together with one vocal delegate from the bakers and one from the blacksmiths.

All this had to be changed completely, and it took a good five months after the receipt of Sir George Grey's letter to summon a really representative meeting of the Glasgow unions on the master and servant

[1] Cf. the comment of the London Trades Council, criticising Glasgow for approaching the government all on their own: "In order to make ourselves strong there must be united action, and that could only be obtained by knowing each other's opinions and letting the majority rule". First Minute Book of the London Trades Council, pp. 132–3.

question, but when such a meeting was got together (in March 1864) it revolutionised the situation.[1] The enthusiasm of the different trades varied a lot, according to the amount of oppression they felt they suffered. But from now on the master and servant issue was a truly common cause, with funds contributed by all unions except the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and a specially elected executive committee speaking for all the organised workers of the city.[2] When Newton and Campbell went to the famous national conference in London two months later they could claim to represent nineteen trades: irondressers, iron-moulders, puddlers, tinplate workers and brassfounders; potters and gilders; flint glass makers; masons, carpenters, joiners and plasterers; cotton-spinners and power-loom tenters; blacksmiths; coopers; corkcutters; bakers; and shoemakers. And soon after McDonald began to attend on behalf of the miners and Swan for the boilermakers and ironshipbuilders.

By contrast, the national conference held in London in May 1864 was not nationally representative. At a period when there were only some half-dozen Trades Councils and when only the biggest unions had national headquarters it would have taken many months to organise the election of delegates from even the principal trades from the bottom up. It was left to Odger to invite likely people and it is not surprising that eleven out of the twenty-one delegates were from London and that the only provincial towns to be represented were those with which he and Newton had had regular correspondence: Sheffield (representing cutlery and toolmakers), Newcastle (iron-workers), Nottingham (lacemakers), and Liverpool (building trades).[3]

[1] The agitation was developed through the distribution of a further thousand copies of the July Manifesto and through the pages of the *Sentinel*. Alexander McDonald gave vital assistance by calling on the miners to support the campaign, in accordance with a resolution passed at their national conference in Leeds in November 1863. McDonald also made a special appeal to "all workers in iron, whether as blast- or mid-furnacemen, puddlers, etc. etc.", because they were (he said) of all workers the most oppressed by these laws.

[2] The decision to set up a special Master and Servant Executive Committee was only carried by one vote; and it was agreed that though their funds should be separate, they should meet at the same time and place as the Trades Council. As the chairman, the secretary, and the treasurer (A. J. Hunter, Operative Bakers) were the same persons for both committees, the two were very closely linked. But it was not the Master and Servant Committee which took second place; on the contrary, for eighteen months it "absorbed nearly all their time and attention", and in October 1865 a special rule had to be made that the Trades Council "must take precedence of the Master and Workman Committee at every alternate meeting". However, it was precisely the master and servant issue which re-vivified the Trades Council.

[3] These towns were not all the most affected by master and servant prosecutions, but they all had Trades Councils: they were drawn into activity not because of unusually keen grievances but because of unusually good organisation. There were also letters of support from Leeds, Edinburgh, Bristol and Sunderland.

The importance of the meeting was that it brought together most of the great national leaders of the trade unions: Applegarth, Coulson, Odger, Dunning, Guile, Potter, Dronfield, Campbell and McDonald.[1] Consequently when this meeting elected the existing Glasgow committee, with the important addition of McDonald for the miners, as a national executive committee "with power to control and direct the movement" they invested it with the greatest authority and influence possible.

They also had sufficient weight to command some attention from Parliament and the government: they did some successful lobbying and in an interview with Milner Gibson, President of the Board of Trade, they extracted an admission that the law needed amendment and a promise to communicate with the Lord Chancellor on the subject. Their proudest triumph was that they found in J. M. Cobbett, M.P. for Oldham, a barrister and like his great father a staunch Radical, someone who was willing to introduce a private member's bill incorporating their demands for reform.[2] Cobbett was true to his word. As the parliamentary year was so far advanced, he could only secure a formal first reading for his bill (July 21) and then withdraw it (July 26); but he promised to re-introduce it next session, and meanwhile the Glasgow committee could use the long recess (from August till February) in organizing support for it.[3]

The London conference had instructed the Glasgow committee that their chief duty was to establish local master and servant committees as quickly as they could in all the "chief seats of industry", which should "aid the executive by their advice and assistance", collect signatures to a petition to Parliament and raise funds "either by levies on trades or voluntary contributions, as equitably as possible". This aim was largely achieved by the spring of 1865. At least twenty-five local committees were established, frequently initiated by a personal

[1] Consequently G. D. H. Cole has suggested that this conference "has a fair claim to be regarded as the real beginning of the Trades Union Congress"; G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson: *British Working Class Movements, Select Documents 1789–1875* (1951), p. 552. And cf. the earlier comment of the Webbs in their *History of Trade Unionism* (1920 edition, p. 252) on its epoch-making significance as the first national meeting called by the trade unions to discuss a political issue independently.

[2] *Report of Conference on the Law of Master and Workmen under their Contract of Service*, 1864. Their demands for reform as amended at the Conference were similar to those originally suggested by Glasgow except that they now proposed that the judge, instead of simply awarding damages, should have power either to cancel the contract or to direct it to be fulfilled, and damages were to follow only if the court's order was disobeyed—such damages to be recovered if necessary by distress and sale; but in no circumstances was there to be any imprisonment.

[3] Strachan helped to draft the bill. It was seconded by William Cox, Liberal member for Finsbury.

visit from Newton, who toured the country tirelessly besides writing innumerable letters. The cause was taken up with enthusiasm;[1] it is striking that although the unions were told to limit their contributions to sixpence a head the Glasgow Committee only complained once in its whole four years of being short of money, although its expenditure was considerable.[2]

The great organiser of the movement in the provinces was undoubtedly the *Sentinel*. Distributed each week with the help of the trade unions in hundreds of copies and carrying regular reports of every meeting of the executive committee, of the correspondence received (sometimes printing the letters *in extenso*) and of each subscription sent in, the *Sentinel* enabled each local committee to know what was happening at the centre and in other towns and so to be spurred on to further activity by the assurance that thousands of others were carrying on the same agitation.[3]

When Parliament re-assembled in the spring of 1865 Sir George Grey could not refuse to receive a deputation on the master and servant question. It consisted of over a dozen leading trade unionists and fourteen Members of Parliament, deliberately drawn from all parties. However, to the great disappointment of the workmen, Cobbett alone of the M.P.s asked Grey to consider immediate legislation; all the others—even nominal Radicals like the Glasgow member Dalglish, who had publicly pledged himself a few weeks before to try to get Cobbett's bill re-introduced—followed the lead of Lord Elcho in asking Grey to appoint a Select Committee on the question; and Grey, of course, fell in with that suggestion.

The Select Committee was appointed in May 1865, with Cobbett as chairman.[4] It had heard the evidence of only two witnesses, however—Strachan and one of the sheriffs substitute of Perthshire—when its activities were automatically ended by the dissolution of Parliament.

Meanwhile the employers had at last begun to organise some opposition to the workmen's campaign. The lead came from the

[1] See e.g. the comment of Wolverhampton trade unions that it evoked "one of the most lively and animated meetings lately holden in this town, proving how widely antagonism against the obnoxious measures under consideration is entertained".

[2] They paid £100 to Strachan as their law agent, and were lavish in printing petitions, draft bills, reports and so forth.

[3] For evidence that the Glasgow Committee viewed the *Sentinel* in this way as their chief organiser, see the issue of December 17, 1864; and for appreciation by the provinces of its value see e.g. the letter from Nottingham, February 11, 1865.

[4] The Committee's terms of reference were "to inquire into the state of the Law as regards Contracts of Service between Master and Servant and as to the expediency of amending the same".

Mining Association. They decided that the best way to preserve the essentials of the existing law would be to propose one slight alteration, namely, giving the magistrates the option of punishing a convicted workman by fine instead of imprisonment. In the spring of 1866 they put that suggestion to Sir George Grey. "He thought it met the case very fairly", and suggested that the mineowners might usefully "ascertain what was the feeling or impression among other employers of labour". Thereupon by means of circulars and personal visits from their law agents the various district mining associations got in touch "with such gentlemen as shipbuilders, engineers, bottle-makers, glass-makers, potters and others" and with the various Chambers of Commerce. They were gratified to meet with "a universal acquiescence" in their proposed line of defence.[1]

When the Glasgow Committee first learned of the employers' counter-organisation they responded sharply by printing a stirring Address to the Operatives of Great Britain:

> "The accumulations of the profits of honest industry are organized to trample on the just claims of the industrious orders to equality in the eye of the law. In these circumstances the path of duty on the part of the Working Classes is clear. Let the force of combined Capital be met by the force of combined Labour. Let the thousands of pounds of the employers be met by the tens of thousands of pence of the workmen; and notwithstanding their exclusion from representation in the councils of the nation . . . justice shall yet be obtained."

As delay and opposition mounted, however, the Committee became much discouraged. They gave up trying to organise any mass agitation and simply sat waiting on Parliament, discussing how to present their evidence. The only practical decision they took was to ask Lord Elcho, when Parliament re-assembled, to take the place of Cobbet as their spokesman in the Commons, Cobbett having lost his seat in the general election.

Hitherto they had relied for parliamentary leadership on a keen radical; they now turned with equal hopefulness to a strict conservative.[2] Lord Elcho, member for Haddingtonshire, was the eldest son of the ninth Earl of Wemyss and heir to extensive landed estates and

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 1432, 2388.

[2] From 1846, having supported Peel over the repeal of the corn laws, Elcho styled himself an "Independent"; but he had first entered Parliament (1841) as a conservative and in the broader non-party sense always remained so.

coal mines in central Scotland. He was (not surprisingly) against all democracy. Trade unions were only tolerable in his view if they provided funds for sickness and unemployment and so served as "the means for keeping men off the poor rates". Strikes were always wrong. All parliamentary reform was undesirable; and as for manhood suffrage that would be disastrous: true liberty would be extinguished.[1]

In 1865, however, the Scottish working-class knew Elcho not as the enemy of democracy and industrial action but as an ally of Alexander McDonald's in the fight for the Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1860; hence their appeal to him on the master and servant question. Unwittingly, however, they now entrusted the furtherance of the agitation —and later, by consequence, the promotion of the Bill—to an astute champion of the masters' viewpoint.

When the Select Committee was re-appointed in May 1866, Lord Elcho (who had sat on the 1865 Committee) became its chairman. There were six other Conservative members—five landowners, and one, Gathorne Hardy, the proprietor of a Staffordshire ironworks; and there were eight Liberal and Whig members, the most advanced being Professor Fawcett.[2]

Of the nine witnesses who supported the masters' viewpoint, no fewer than seven spoke in one capacity or another—as owner, manager or legal adviser—on behalf of the coal and iron interests.[3] The masters'

[1] For these opinions see the pamphlet *Lord Elcho and the Miners; Employers and Employed:* 1867. An enthusiast for efficient militarism, Elcho devoted his main energies to opposing all democratisation of the army from Cardwell's reforms in 1870 to Haldane's in 1907. Finally in the 1880s he founded the "Liberty and Property Defence League" to combat socialism, and remained its chairman until his death in 1914 at the age of 96. See in general the Dictionary of National Biography (20th century, 1912–21) s.t. Wemyss.

[2] The complete list of members was: on the Conservative side—Lord Elcho; A. F. Egerton (S. Lancashire); Col. Wilson Patten (N. Lancashire; he did not attend the Committee at all); Sir James Fergusson (Ayrshire); Peter McLagan (Linlithgowshire); John George, Q.C. (Co. Wexford); and Gathorne Hardy, Q.C. (Oxford University). On the Whig side—Earl Grosvenor (Chester); William Jackson, J.P. (N. Derbyshire; merchant and shipping interest); Robert Dalglish (Glasgow; cotton interest); Edmund Potter, J.P. (Carlisle; cotton interest, President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce); Sir David Salomons (Greenwich; banking); Prof. Henry Fawcett (Brighton); George Clive, Q.C. and County Court judge (Hereford); and Sir R. P. Collier, Q.C., Solicitor-General (Plymouth).

[3] The Mining Association of Great Britain sent three witnesses: their president, William Mathews, J.P., owner of coal and iron works in South Staffordshire; their vice-president, John Lancaster, J.P., owner of coal and iron works in Lancashire; and William Burns, a member of their executive committee who was a Glasgow solicitor and the secretary and law agent of the Association of Mineowners of Scotland. The others were Archibald Hood, Midlothian mineowner (who also owned some brick and tile works); J. W. Ormiston, Scottish colliery manager; T. E. Forster, English colliery manager; and Thomas Part, Clerk to the Justices of Wigan. The other two witnesses were Alfred Mault, a prominent master builder from Birmingham; and J. E. Davis a stipendiary magistrate from the Potteries (who submitted written evidence).

defence of the law rested on two propositions. First, that its harshness had been much exaggerated. Except in very bad cases, they said, both magistrates and masters always tried to modify the action of the statute;[1] and the workmen they themselves were acquainted with never voiced objections to the law or to its administration by the Justices.[2] Burns (principal legal adviser to the Scottish mine-owners) therefore drew the time-honoured conclusion that such discontent as had been expressed must have been stirred up by outside agents.[3]

Second, the masters maintained that nevertheless the law had to be fairly severe or it would be useless; in particular, it was essential to be able to imprison the servant. The damages which a servant could pay would never be adequate; and moreover, as Burns explained:

> "the object of such a law is not so much . . . the recovery of loss or damage that may have been sustained by the master *post facto*, but . . . it is intended as a precaution against breaches of contract and thereby the preservation of the necessary subordination and discipline. . . . There must always be . . . a certain punitive element."[4]

Mault (master-builder) made a similar point when he said that such a punitive law was necessary to offset the power of the trade unions.[5]

It was also essential in the masters' view that the servants should continue to be brought before the Justices and not before the County Courts. The County Courts were too slow. As for the idea that any class bias influenced the Justices' decisions, that was absurd. Lord Elcho suggested that it might be reasonable to have a statutory prohibition against Justices sitting in cases arising in their own trades; but the masters were at once up in arms: "It would be casting a sort of imputation, however distant, upon gentlemen that they were supposed to be capable of doing an injustice."[6]

The only modifications in procedure which the masters were prepared to suggest were: making it compulsory to have more than one Justice present and to hold the court publicly;[7] modifying the law of evidence so as to permit the servant to be examined as a witness;[8] granting the magistrate power to award costs to the servant if acquitted,[9]

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 2536. This answer, of course, carried (unconsciously perhaps) the implication that the law was too severe and required modification.
[2] Q. 1490 (Lancaster); Q. 2101 (Ormiston).
[3] Q. 2354–5. [4] Q. 2311. [5] Q. 2585–8. [6] Q. 2438–41 (Mathews).
[7] Q. 1571–2 (Forster); Q. 2407–8 (Part); Q. 2447–53 (Mathews).
[8] Q. 2305 (Burns); Q. 2493–4 (Mathews).
[9] Q. 2309 (Burns).

and (possibly) allowing the servant some right of appeal either to the High Court or to Quarter Sessions.[1] They agreed that cases might usually be begun by a summons, but they all wished to leave the magistrates with a large discretion to issue warrants simply on the strength of a sworn statement from the master that circumstances required it.

What of the penalty to be imposed on a convicted servant? Most of the witnesses were willing to make it a fine and to restrict imprisonment to so-called "aggravated" cases. Yet this concession—at first sight a large one—amounted in the end to very little. For what was an aggravated case? A minority thought the term applicable only to a breach of contract which endangered human life;[2] but the majority used the term more widely, to cover any case involving serious damage to property or an extensive stoppage of work;[3] and since they were emphatic that these "aggravated" cases should not be defined by statute but that the distinction should be made by the magistrates at their discretion,[4] the field for imprisonment would obviously still be a large even though uncertain one.

Some members of the Committee suggested that the workmen's demand for equality might be satisfied, if not by making things milder for the servant then by making them more severe for the master; but here again the masters would not agree to any fundamental change. They were prepared for their cases to come before the Justices instead of the County Court;[5] and they were prepared for masters who did not pay their damages to be imprisoned as debtors;[6] but as for imprisonment as a *punishment* for "aggravated" breach of contract—they simply could not admit that such a case would ever arise. Professor Fawcett suggested to Mathews (President of the Mining Association) that a master might be guilty of an aggravated breach of contract by wilfully neglecting to ventilate his mine adequately: "I do not think it is possible to produce such a case," Mathews answered.[7]

Eleven witnesses appeared on behalf of the workmen, ten of them trade unionists headed by Newton and Campbell, and the eleventh

[1] Q. 2292–8 (Burns); Q. 2400–1 (Part).

[2] They could produce no real instance of this and had to rely on impressing the Committee with such imaginary horrors as a workman at the pithead abandoning the lift "at the moment the windlass was descending": Forster, Q. 1594–1603.

[3] Q. 1454 (Lancaster); Q. 2455 (Mathews).

[4] Q. 2379 (Burns); Q. 2458 (Mathews).

[5] Q. 1469 (Lancaster).

[6] Q. 2359; 2370–1 (Burns).

[7] Q. 2505–12.

and most outstanding the great Chartist and trade union solicitor, W. P. Roberts.[1]

It was not difficult for them to show the harshness of the existing law to the workmen, or the partiality and ignorance of many Justices.[2] But when the Committee cross-examined them on their proposals for reform, and put the masters' view before them,[3] they wavered over their demand for complete equality.

Thus there was nothing they felt more bitterly about than the partiality of the Justices, and all said that they wanted cases to go in future to the County Courts. But confusion appeared when they were closely questioned on this. Those who said they objected because the Justices were manufacturers or employers of labour were led to say that they supposed "gentlemen" or stipendiaries would be all right; those who declared that gentlemen Justices would be no better unless working men were amongst those appointed had it pointed out to them that County Court judges were not working men either; those who put their objection on general class grounds were told that the objection was a theoretical one.[4] Eventually Odger (the last to be examined) felt obliged to say that even the mere barring from adjudication of Justices in the same trade as the prosecuting master "would be much better than at present".[5]

Similarly, the workmen's main demand for damages instead of imprisonment was fatally weakened by some of their later witnesses agreeing that there might be a place for a class of "aggravated" cases. Roberts showed the true position: that such a thing as endangering life was already covered by other legislation; he therefore argued that

[1] The other trade unionists were: Alexander McDonald and John Normansell for the miners; Colin Steele for the Scottish iron moulders; William Evans for the potters of the Five Towns; George Odger for the London Trades Council and for the shoemakers; Charles Williams for the Liverpool Trades Council and for the building trades; William Dronfield for the Sheffield Trades Council; and Thomas Winters, manager of a Working Man's Benefit Society in the Black Country.

[2] None spoke more emphatically on these points than Roberts who added with characteristic sharpness that: "If such an administration existed in other countries, it would have been published in this country as showing the superior liberty enjoyed by Englishmen." Q. 1709.

[3] Most of the workmen gave evidence before any of the masters; but when the masters' ideas were in fact presented they varied only slightly from the suggestions already made to the workmen by the Committee.

[4] Q. 1165 (Williams); Q. 155–6, 264–5 (Newton); Q. 319–22 (Campbell; he could not immediately give a concrete example).

[5] Q. 1921. Roberts, by contrast, when this suggestion was put to him with reference to mining cases answered: "That would not meet my objection. Everybody in South Wales and in Durham and Northumberland is more or less connected with mining. He is dependent upon it, or his relations and friends are . . . In nine cases out of ten the

there was no legal reason for treating workmen who broke contract differently from, say, lawyers.[1] But some of the trade unionists were willing to class as "aggravation" things as comprehensive as "intimidation" or any consequential unemployment.[2]

It is scarcely surprising that the Committee's Report (published in July 1866) recommended only slight changes in the law. The Report had a vague flavour of equality about it because it implied (though it nowhere expressly stated) that the same procedure should be applicable to both parties. But it did not recommend the fundamental equality which the workmen were asking for: an assimilation of the law of master and servant to the rest of the law of contract.[3] Instead it recommended a modified version of the existing criminal procedure used against the servant. Breach of contract in master and servant cases was still to be singled out as a crime involving "punishment", even though that punishment was now to be a fine, with imprisonment confined to "aggravated" cases "causing injury to person or property;" and master and servant cases were still to be heard before the Justices, even though they were to sit in public and at least two together.

It was these recommendations, with only slight alteration, which finally passed into law as the Master and Servant Act, 1867 (30 and 31 Vict. c. 141). The applicability of the new procedure to the master as well as to the servant was now made explicit;[4] and the Act was so worded as to give these cases in some respects the character of civil actions. Thus the Justices were given power to award damages instead of a fine (s. 9);[5] and the parties to the case were specifically enabled to act as witnesses on their own behalf (s. 16). But at the same time the anomalous punitive element was still preserved: in ordinary cases the Justices could abate wages or impose a fine up to £20, recoverable by

employer and the Justice live within two or three miles of each other, and in a vast number of cases in the North the magistrates are every one of them directly interested in the matter". Q. 1685, 1680.

[1] "A lawyer, for instance, by refusing or failing to prepare a marriage settlement at the time he was required to do so might create incalculable mischief [but] . . . you cannot send him to prison; Heaven forbid that you should have that power." Q. 1649–50.

[2] Dronfield, Q. 829; Winters, Q. 1220; and (more generally) Williams, Q. 1095.

[3] Except for the recommendation that master and servant cases should now be begun by summons, with a warrant issued only if the defendant failed to appear—but this was already becoming common practice in England.

[4] Though with a saving clause preserving the old form of action against the master through the County Courts as an alternative (s. 18).

[5] Or, alternatively, to assign *part* of a fine as damages to the injured party (s. 13). Under s. 9 they also had power to annul the contract (as under 4 Geo. IV, c. 34, s. 3) or to order it to be fulfilled—that last a new power statutorily, but one which nevertheless the Justices had in practice often exercised. (E.g. in the cases quoted above pp. 162 ff.)

distress and sale or (failing that) by imprisonment up to three months (s. 9); and in any cases which they considered "aggravated"—including in that not only the Select Committee's "injury to person or property" but also any aggravated "misconduct, misdemeanor or ill-treatment" —they could sentence the offender to imprisonment up to three months with hard labour (s. 14).[1]

The half-hearted character of the 1867 reform is revealed in the annual judicial statistics for England and Wales: the number of prison sentences fell by two-thirds, but the total number of proceedings and convictions hardly declined at all—by little more than a tenth.[2]

Why was it that after such an energetic and widespread campaign the Glasgow Committee achieved no greater success? Certainly, the Select Committee's Report had been a profound disappointment to them; their immediate reaction had been to publish a resolution completely dissenting from the Report and an angry editorial denouncing it as a "cruel and unjust recommendation. . . . We say advisedly: this is a fraud."[3] It had looked for a few weeks as if there might be a revival of the great mass movement of 1865 on the question; yet in the end the Bill had gone through with almost no protest.

Partly no doubt this was due to the growing preoccupation of the working-class movement with franchise reform, but also not a little to the energetic and subtle intervention of Lord Elcho which persuaded the Glasgow Committee—once things had reached the stage of a draft Bill—to confine their activities to interviews with friendly M.P.s and to abandon agitation out-of-doors. As soon as they had published their resolution of disapproval, Elcho had at once travelled up to Glasgow and had a long interview with them. The outcome was the publication (in November 1866) of an address to the Workmen of the United

[1] Convictions under this section could be appealed against to Quarter Sessions (s. 15.)

[2] These statistics begin in 1856, and master and servant cases (s.t. "Offences Relating to Masters, Servants and Apprentices") are first shown separately in 1857. (Except for one isolated return of imprisonments of servants for breach of contract for 1854 and 1855: P. P. (H. of C.), 1856, L.) There are no comparable statistics for Scotland. The statistics are arranged under police districts (boroughs and counties). For the eleven years 1857–67 the total number of proceedings in master and servant cases averaged (in round figures) 9,900 a year and the total number of convictions averaged 5,800. Equivalent figures for the four years 1868–71 were 8,800 and 5,100. Prison sentences in the first period averaged 1,240 of a month or less and 250 of more than a month; in the second period, 380 and 125. In the years of boom and militancy, 1872–5, immediately before full equality was finally granted the average number of proceedings and convictions considerably exceeded the average for the years before 1867. 1872 was the peak year with 17,100 prosecutions and 10,400 convictions.

[3] *Glasgow Sentinel*, September 29 and October 27, 1866.

Kingdom with their own alternative proposals already profoundly modified in the direction of those of the Select Committee. When Elcho replied to that by inviting them to sketch a draft Bill for him to show to the Home Secretary, "so that there should be agreement all round", with the promise that he would then try to see it through the House as a private member's Bill, they produced a draft which went even further to meet the views of their opponents.

They became anxious when the spring went by and the Bill was not yet introduced and still more anxious when they learned that the mine-owners were organising a stout opposition to it, and they sent their new Secretary, John Proudfoot,[1] to join with Alexander McDonald in London in "keep[ing] a careful watch that our Bill is not tampered with". Elcho now told them that they must meet the mineowners before the committee stage and agree on some compromises; he would act as umpire, he promised, and see that all was fair. This was agreed to, but with precise instructions to Proudfoot "not to deviate from the principles of the Bill" and only to agree to such modifications as would apply equally to masters and men.

In June came a series of letters from Proudfoot showing with an unhappy clarity how the workmen representatives were overwhelmed by a mixture of difficult technicalities, soft words from Lord Elcho and the fear that if they would not compromise the Bill would be thrown out altogether. The Bill has gone into Committee, writes Proudfoot:

> "with a great many proposed alterations and amendments . . . We must see the printed Bill before we can precisely understand their bearing . . . After very considerable discussion, both with his Lordship and some of the lawyers in the House, we felt obliged to give way. The matter [one special amendment] principally affects agricultural servants or domestic servants and can hardly in any case affect artizans . . . Otherwise the Bill might be endangered by opposition."[2]

The Glasgow Committee were acutely disappointed, but they decided that nothing could now be done to mend matters and that it would be ungracious to quarrel with Lord Elcho at the last. So after nine months' hesitation they concluded their activities by giving him a banquet—in spite of strong protests from London trade unionists who declared that

[1] Proudfoot was a building trade worker, active in promoting trade unionism since the middle '50s.

[2] *Glasgow Sentinel*, July 6, 1867.

his opposition to the Reform Bill proved him to be at bottom not an ally but an enemy of the working-class.

The Glasgow campaign is an illustration of the well-known thesis of the *Communist Manifesto* that "The real fruit of their [the workers'] battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers." Their campaign seemed to result in something of a failure; but it helped to break down the sort of sectionalism which at the start had caused the Edinburgh masons to refuse support because they did not think the law affected their own trade.[1] As "their strength grew and they felt that strength more" solidarity strikes in support of prosecuted members became increasingly common;[2] such strikes and the meetings on the law addressed by Newton, Campbell and others then paved the way for founding a new trade union (the Glass Blowers of Glasgow, for example)[3] or re-founding one that had fallen on bad days, such as the Durham Miners' Union which came to life in 1869 after a vigorous battle (led by W. P. Roberts) over the prosecution of four hewers for breach of contract in striking against a reduction of wages when their bonds were renewed.[4]

The master and servant question also helped to unite the different trades within a town—as at Preston where an early meeting drew together spinners and weavers, boilermakers and tinplate workers, printers, building workers, tailors and brushmakers.[5] As a meeting in the Potteries explained: "We are not here to advocate the interest only of a section of the working population . . . *All* trades should take part in these proceedings . . . The work is a *general* one." They therefore formed themselves into a permanent Trades Council, as did Leeds also in similar circumstances.[6]

It was this improved organisation which lay behind the final victory of the Employers and Workmen Act of 1875 (38 & 39 Vict., c. 90),

[1] *Beehive*, December 3, 1864. That such sectionalism was not ended by the master and servant campaign is of course evident from Proudfoot's comment on the (stile unorganised) agricultural labourers.

[2] As a good and typical example, see the report of a strike amongst Bilston puddlers, *Glasgow Sentinel*, July 1, 1865.

[3] *Ibid.*, April 29, 1865.

[4] John Wilson: *History of the Durham Miners' Association* (1907), p. 5. The trial led to a "solidifying of the whole of the workmen at Wearmouth" and to active support of the hewers by other sections—and later in the year to a county union.

[5] *Glasgow Sentinel*, May 13, 1865. And cf. Wolverhampton, *ibid.*, December 23, 1865.

[6] *Ibid.*, February 11, 1865, and Webb Collection (L. S. E. Library), E. A., IV (Trades Councils), p. 264, p. 148.

which at last conceded equality to the servant and left him like his master, liable if he broke contract only to a civil action for damages.

The boom of the opening '70s had seen a great upsurge of militant trade unionism and numerous strikes. But the active trade unionist now found himself facing greater legal perils than ever before, thanks to the passage by Gladstone's government in 1871 (alongside an Act giving better protection to trade union funds) of the notorious Criminal Law Amendment Act. This Act was, it is true, in the main only a restatement of various judicial decisions of the '50s and '60s. Nevertheless it gave a wider meaning than any previous statute had done since the days of the old Anti-Combination laws to the offences of coercion, molestation, etc.; and its effect was to make almost all the traditional forms of action necessary for a successful strike (such as peaceful picketing) a crime and, if done by several men in concert, a criminal conspiracy. The full danger of the law was brought vividly home to the trade unions after the great strike of Beckton gas-stokers (December 1872). In this case, while twenty-four of the men were given six weeks' hard labour for breach of contract, another six (the leaders) were found guilty of a criminal conspiracy, viz. conspiring to coerce their employers by preparing a simultaneous withdrawal of labour; and they were sent to prison for twelve months.

From the beginning of 1873, therefore, the workmen, led this time by the Parliamentary Committee of the new Trades Union Congress, waged a double struggle against the law, demanding not only the complete reform of the master and servant laws but also the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.[1] This campaign was very different from that of the 1860s: on the one hand the workmen virtually boycotted the Royal Commission set up to investigate the operation of the law (1874), declaring it to be a trick and excuse for delay, and concentrated their energies on demonstrations and other independent activities; and on the other hand, Disraeli's government really exerted itself to hurry the legislation through.[2] Such was the measure of the increased strength of the labour movement to which Newton and his associates had contributed so much.

[1] It was to counteract the agitation on this issue that the Employers' Federation was founded. See the circulars from the General Association of Master Engineers and the National Association of Factory Occupiers proposing such a federation (April 1873), and the Federation's Statement as to Formation and Objects (December 1873): Webb Collection, E. B., XXIII, Item 34.

[2] The Royal Commission, appointed in March 1874, made its first report (on master and servant) in July and its second and final report in February 1875. Bills incorporating its recommendations were introduced on June 10, 1875, and received the royal assent on August 13.

III. THE WEAPON OF THE SMALL MASTER

The battle over the Labour Laws in the 1870s was chiefly a battle over the law of conspiracy; the law of master and servant had become a secondary issue. When the whole future of effective trade union action and collective bargaining had been put in jeopardy, the inequality of a law which was chiefly concerned with the relation between the individual workman and his employer was a minor injustice. Moreover, there is evidence that many employers were no longer making the same use of the master and servant laws as hitherto.[1] This second factor is worth enlarging upon—not simply for its relevance to the law's repeal in 1875 but because it helps to explain the existence of such an anomalous law before that date.

Even in the 1860s a few industries made virtually no use of these laws: cotton was the outstanding example.[2] And there was another, and larger, class of industries where the number of prosecutions, though still considerable, was markedly declining. Contemporary witnesses adduced three reasons for this decline. First, there was the development of the craft unions. Their members (Odger explained) anxious to "go on smoothly with their employers" and to keep up their subscriptions to their sickness, accident and unemployment funds, did their best to avoid any breach of contract;[3] on the other hand, if they were prosecuted, many unions would pay their fines or engage a lawyer to appeal against a committal to prison and so the employers tended to feel that the law was now ineffective.[4]

The second reason given for a decline in prosecutions was the tendency to shorter contracts. Naturally where the old yearly hirings still survived, as they did very extensively in agriculture, prosecutions were apt to be frequent: "When the spring of the year came and labour bore a high price . . . a great number of agricultural labourers found

[1] Although the annual average of prosecutions was actually higher in the eight years after the partial reform of 1867 than in the eleven years before, this high average was largely due to the exceptional conditions created by the boom of 1872; in relation to the number of workmen employed, prosecutions declined.

[2] See Edmund Potter, opposing the introduction of a Master and Servant Bill in March 1867: Hansard, 3rd Series, CLXXXV, c. 1260.

[3] 1866, XIII, Q. 1841–51, 1874; 1944.

[4] *Ibid.*, Q. 2423. (Mathews, giving evidence on behalf of the coal owners and ironmasters.)

themselves in consequence the inmates of a gaol because they . . . attempted to break their contracts with their masters."[1] Most industrial workers, however, had by now established a practice of engagement by the week, fortnight or month. Some, indeed, had embraced the extreme system of the so-called "minute contract", under which wages were paid at least weekly and sometimes even daily and it was understood that the employer was free to dismiss a workman (and the workman to leave) "at a minute's notice"—in practice usually at the end of the day. This system had a great temporary vogue in Scotland in the '50s and '60s: at the time of the passage of the 1867 Act it covered almost all the main building trades—joiners, carpenters, masons, plasterers and plumbers—most of the ironmoulders, two-thirds of the miners and a large number of engineeers.[2] Where this form of contract had been introduced master and servant prosecutions naturally came to an end.

It is more important, however, that the adoption of ordinary short contracts—which was the permanent trend—did not necessarily make prosecutions a rarity. Here the pottery trade is significant. There yearly hirings had mostly died out in the 1830s; yet pottery was one of the worst affected trades. William Evans, editor of the *Potteries Examiner*, asked by the Select Committee of 1866 to explain this, made the most illuminating statement of the whole enquiry. These master and servant prosecutions were all the work of the small manufacturers, he said, employing from 50 to 200 men "practically living from hand to mouth themselves" with no margin for losses; Minton and Copeland, on the other hand, had never prosecuted any of their workpeople.[3]

Here was the third and surely the most fundamental reason for that relative decline in prosecutions which by 1875 had gone far enough to make the law no longer worth preserving to the most wealthy and influential sections of the capitalist class in face of militant opposition:

[1] Hansard, 3rd Series, CLXXXVII, c. 1607; Alderman Salomons in the debate on Elcho's Bill. Cf. the evidence of Sheriff Barclay in respect of Perthshire before the Select Committee of 1865 (1865, VIII, Q. 174–276); and of Joseph Arch, who wrote feelingly of the oppression of the master and servant laws in the countryside.

For the prevalence of yearly hirings in the 1860s, see the *Royal Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, 1867–70, *passim*. Such hirings were nearly universal in Scotland, Wales and all the more remote parts of England; and elsewhere they were still the usual mode of engaging the most skilled workers—"the shepherd, the carter, the stockman, the ploughboys, the dairymaid"—even though these workers might in some districts be outnumbered by "day labourers" (usually hired by the week) or by gangs.

[2] 1866, XIII, Q. 386; 703–4; 497; 383; 308.

[3] *Ibid.*, Q. 1379–81; 1408.

the law of master and servant was essentially the weapon of the small master, and the period of the "great depression" which saw so many small employers swallowed up by nascent big business also saw the abandonment of the small employers' antiquated weapon.

For what Evans said about the potteries was true also of other trades and areas. The Sheffield cutlery trades are an outstanding instance. G. J. H. Lloyd in his history of these trades presented a classic picture of technical backwardness, small employment, sub-contract and putting-out.[1] Although by the 1860s power had largely replaced the old water wheel in grinding there was almost no machinery in use. There were a few "large cutlery men" but most of them had "part of their work done out".[2] The industry was dominated by small masters, and the cutlery, saws, files and tools were produced in small workshops or at home. Such factories as did exist were mostly only premises where a number of masters congregated to hire the same source of power. Most masters hired power in this way; very few were independent capitalists, owning their own workshops, buying their own raw material and selling their products freely to several buyers. In other words, most of the cutlery employers, besides being small masters in the sense that they employed only a handful of men, were also to some degree sub-contractors—and some were themselves employees, receiving their material and returning their worked-up product to the same man for a *wage*. Consequently if one workman (or "master") broke contract by leaving his work or neglecting to fulfil it—or, as very commonly happened, getting into debt over payment of rent for his grinding trough, etc., and then absconding—this was liable to set off a train of other defaultings; and precisely because the cutlery master (even more than the pottery employer) was so insecure economically he was always looking for help from the law. So although hirings were not usually for more than a month, there were continual prosecutions. In the ten years 1858–67 Sheffield had more master and servant cases than any other borough in England and Wales except Wolverhampton, a total of 1,659; and most of these cases arose in the cutlery trades.[3] In general, any trade in which sub-contract was an important feature was liable to have a large number of cases. Brickmaking was

[1] G. J. H. Lloyd, *The Cutlery Trades* (1913), pp. 178–208, 214–226.

[2] J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, II (1932), p. 99, quoting from the *Fourth Report on Children's Employment* (1864).

[3] *Judicial Statistics* and Dronfield's evidence in 1866, XIII, Q. 778. The iron trades also gave rise to numerous cases; see below.

one such trade, and bricklaying another—and indeed the building trades as a whole.[1]

The "small master rule" had some exceptions, certainly. Printing was one conspicuous example.[2] Equally, on the other side, contemporaries agreed that glass works, although generally fairly big concerns, were one of the half-dozen most affected industries.[3] But looking at Britain's three basic industries—coal, iron and textiles—there emerges a striking pattern of coincidence between small and backward undertakings, and frequent prosecutions of the workmen for breach of contract.[4]

Thus, in the textile industry, while the cotton masters—pioneers of large-scale power production—had little use for the law, prosecutions of the hand-loom weavers in the Scottish flax mills were frequent.[5]

Coal-mining provided some of the sharpest contrasts. Here the great variations in length of contract obviously had a special influence: while Scotland's widespread "minute system" made prosecutions a rarity, Durham's yearly bond made them a daily occurrence.[6] In other parts of England, however, and in Wales contracts were all for a fortnight or month; and here the size of the undertaking appears as the decisive factor. Amongst the big coal companies and deep pits of Lancashire (and in some parts of Northumberland) master and servant cases were only occasional and most of the men did not feel the law to be much of a grievance.[7] On the other hand, whilst the miners in all

[1] 1866, XIII, Q. 1730–1 (evidence of W. P. Roberts). On the building trades generally cf. the evidence of Williams (plasterer) and Mault (master builder); Q. 1081–90; 2557–64: in these trades master and servant cases were actually on the increase, partly because of longer contracts (month instead of day) and partly because the agitation for reform had made the masters more fully aware of its usefulness (especially in strikes). It is noteworthy that in Leeds the local Master and Servant Committee at first consisted almost exclusively of building trade workers: Webb Coll. E. A., IV, p. 148.

[2] 1866, XIII, Q. 755 (Dronfield's evidence).

[3] *Ibid.*, Q. 1733 (Roberts), Q. 307 (Campbell, of the glass bottle trade) and 1865, VIII, Q. 105 (Strachan).

On the structure of the industry see Clapham, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 189–90. In glass, the very high degree of interdependence of the different workmen working together at the furnace mouth made a breach of contract by any one of them especially inconvenient; see the description by Marx in *Capital*, who adds that glass workers were sometimes prosecuted under these laws for refusing to work on Sunday. K. Marx, *Capital*, I, trans. Moore and Aveling, ed. Dona Torr (1938), pp. 339–40 and p. 250 n.

[4] Agriculture might perhaps be added to this trio. Prosecutions were certainly very common, and most farmers were small employers; but here it is not really possible to separate this factor from other factors with a similar influence, such as the long hirings.

[5] 1865, VIII, Q. 262 (Barclay's evidence). For the backwardness of the linen industry in the 1850s and 1860s see Clapham, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 28, 29, 84.

[6] Co. Durham in the ten years 1858–67 had an average of nearly 400 cases a year. (*Judicial Statistics.*)

[7] 1866, XIII, Q. 1449, 1490 (Lancaster's evidence); Q. 1513 (Forster); Q. 1725 (Roberts).

other areas felt the law to bear heavily upon them, this was especially true of the men employed in the small and shallow workings of South Staffordshire.[1]

In the iron industry there was no trade in which prosecutions were not fairly common. This was equally true of the various finishing branches—railway springs, for example, or stove-grates—and of the primary processes. It was true even in iron shipbuilding, which had more big firms and fewer petty businesses than any other side of the industry, for here the employers were very ready to use the master and servant laws to break strikes.[2] Hence the special appeal by Alexander McDonald to "all workers in iron, whether as blast- or mid-furnace-men, puddlers, etc. etc.," to join in the reform agitation.[3] True, Colin Steele, secretary of the Scottish Ironmoulders Union, told the Select Committee of 1866 that moulders were an exception and that owing to the "minute system" there had only been one Scottish moulder's case in the last twenty years (in 1862); but his statement was inaccurate, and the general feeling in his union was strong enough against the law to make the members give £55 to the Glasgow Reform Committee —one of the largest donations.[4] It was probably the case, however, that the puddlers suffered more; reports of puddlers' cases are particularly frequent.[5]

Yet although, as regards trades, master and servant cases in the iron industry were distributed very generally, one *area* dominated by iron certainly stands in a class by itself, namely, the Black Country and Birmingham districts. In this locality, where "the single blast-furnace firm and the small iron-mill"[6] were the most typical of their kind and which abounded in small hardware workshops and the even pokier dens of the nailers and rivetters, master and servant cases were twice as common as in any other part of England. In the ten years 1858–67

[1] 1866, XIII; (Mathews' evidence.) South Wales also had a lot of cases; *ibid.*, Q. 1722 (Roberts).

[2] As in the strike on the north-east coast for the nine hour day, above p. 170. And cf. the case of some Birkenhead shipwrights, reported in the *Glasgow Sentinel*, November 4, 1865.

The *Return of Factories and Workshops*, 1871, LXII, gave figures of 78 shipbuilding works in Great Britain with an average of 570–5 workmen at each, compared with 18,000 works and an average of 34·5 workpeople for the metal-working industries as a whole. But sub-contract was a factor here; Clapham, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 117, 129.

[3] *Glasgow Sentinel*, March 5, 1864. [4] *Ibid.*, May 20, 1865.

[5] Puddling, done by hand, was a very primitive process compared with the other techniques of the iron industry. At the same time the puddler was the key man in the basic process of iron-making; if he withdrew his labour everything was disrupted.

[6] Clapham, *op. cit.*, II, p. 116; and see in general the masterly survey given by G. C. Allen. *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country, 1860–1927* (1929).

Staffordshire had a total of over 10,000 prosecutions whereas no other county had more than about 5,000; and Wolverhampton came first of all boroughs (1,670). Similarly, in the eight years 1868–75 Birmingham led among boroughs (2,351; Wolverhampton now came third); while Staffordshire was still pre-eminent among the counties (some 10,000 compared with the West Riding's 7,000 and Lancashire's 5,700).[1] Not all these cases, of course, were iron cases; coal-mining, pottery and glass, all centred here, would also have contributed largely to the total. But whatever the exact distribution of these cases, the general conclusion remains: that in the part of Britain where small businesses were the most thickly congregated, there master and servant cases most often appeared.

IV. HISTORICAL ORIGINS

This conclusion invites the supposition that the law of master and servant was something appropriate to capitalism in its early stages which the big capitalists had, as it were, outgrown in 1875. An examination of its history confirms this. The law originated in the 14th century, when wage-labour made its first general appearance and the legislators were trying to find a way of fitting this new contractual relationship into the still prevalent pattern of unfree serf labour. The outcome was the Statute of Labourers of 1349 (23 Edw. III c. 1). This provided, first, that every able-bodied man or woman under sixty without income from property or merchandise should be compelled to work for whatever master required his services; second, that wages were not to exceed the amount customary before the Black Death; and third, that any servant departing before the end of his term without permission or reasonable cause should be imprisoned.

Thus breach of contract by a servant first appears on the scene as the crime of running away from compulsory labour; and so from the beginning the law of master and servant naturally "gave to the master remedies for breach of contract absolutely different from those available in the case of any other contract".[2] It may be noted that nothing is said in the statute of breach of contract by the master.

The law was elaborated in a succession of similar statutes throughout the later 14th and 15th centuries; then these were repealed and the whole law restated in the great Statute of Artificers of Elizabeth's reign (5 Eliz. c. 4, 1563). The relevant sections of this statute were not

[1] *Judicial Statistics.*
[2] W. S. Holdsworth, *A History of English Law*, II (3rd edition, 1923), p. 462.

formally repealed until 1875. In its details it had become obsolete long before that date, but all later enactments look back to it and some of its principles remained very much alive.

By 1563 the class of wage-labourers had become not only a numerous but also obviously a permanent class in society; hence the need for codification and adaptation of the medieval law. The essential features of the existing system remained unaltered however. Its basis was still legal compulsion to labour for those without property, either as duly apprenticed craftsmen in one of thirty-one enumerated trades or in husbandry. This new statute also carefully prescribed a sufficiently long working day: approximately twelve hours in summer and from sunrise to sunset in winter. Third, as before, wages were to be limited by law —at rates fixed annually by the Justices of each county. Fourth, no hirings were to be for less than a year, or to be terminated with less than a quarter's warning; and no servant was to leave his parish without a testimonial from his master that he was licensed to depart; otherwise he would be whipped and imprisoned and any master who engaged him would forfeit £5. These last provisions were designed to ensure a high degree of stability among the labouring population, to make them easier to regulate, and to control competition for their services in a period of severe labour shortage. Finally there came the clauses which formed the model for the statutes operative in the 19th century; no one was to dismiss a servant, and no servant was to leave before the end of his term, without sufficient cause shown before two Justices or the Mayor of a town (s. 5). Those servants engaged on some "piece of work taken in great, in task or in gross" might not leave before the work was finished without the master's express permission; nor were other servants to depart leaving work unfinished if the master wished to retain them and paid their wages or other dues (ss. 13 and 14). What were the penalties for disobeying these clauses? A master dismissing a servant before the end of his term, or without due warning, was to forfeit forty shillings; but he might escape this penalty if he could with the help of two witnesses show "reasonable and sufficient cause" to the Justices in Quarter Sessions or to the Mayor (s. 8). Any servant offending—i.e. departing before the end of his "term", leaving at the end without a quarter's warning given before two lawful witnesses,[1] refusing to serve when compellable to or refusing to serve for the wages limited—such servant (as under 23 Edw. III c. 1) was to be imprisoned until he yielded (s. 9). The punishment for leaving work unfinished was one month's

[1] Note that the evidence of independent witnesses was not required from the master.

imprisonment and £5 damages to the master (ss. 13 and 14). If a servant ran away he was to be captured and imprisoned until he consented to return to his master (s. 47). Any two Justices, or the Mayor of a corporate town, might try and convict servants.

This Act "fixed the main principles of the law of employer and workman for more than a century and a half".[1] By the earlier 18th century, however, it had become in many ways anachronistic. By then capitalist production in agriculture and manufacture was so well established that the prolongation of the working day and the control of wages by *law* was unnecessary:

> "The bourgeoisie, at its rise, wants and uses the power of the state to 'regulate' wages, i.e. to force them within the limits suitable for surplus-value making, to lengthen the working day and to keep the labourer himself in the normal degree of dependence. This is an essential element of the so-called primitive accumulation. . . ." But "The organization of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. The constant generation of a relative surplus-population keeps the law of supply and demand of labour and therefore keeps wages in a rut that corresponds with the wants of capital. The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally."[2]

Enactments fixing wages were, indeed, still made as late as the end of the 18th century—for example, with respect to weavers in 1773 and to Scottish miners in 1799. But it was notorious that such laws remained a dead letter, because the workers could now use them for their own protection. The anomaly was finally recognised in 1813, and a statute of that year repealed all wage-fixing laws.[3] Lee, editing the eighteenth edition of Blackstone in 1829, commented on this in words which anticipate Marx's explanation:

> "The condition of the labourer had been sufficiently deteriorated, by means which it is not necessary to mention in this place, to discourage the frequent interposition of a magistrate in respect of wages. That the labourer might bargain for what he could get, and that the

[1] Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, II, p. 464.
[2] K. Marx, *Capital*, I (1938 edition), pp. 761–2, 761.
[3] 53 Geo. III c. 40.

> market would always be supplied in proportion to the demand: that the question was best left to individual contract rather than maximums or minimums to be fixed by authority—were maxims beginning to gain ground. The enabling magistrates to interfere between man and man in these matters was seen to be as foolish as it was tyrannical."[1]

The "deterioration" which Lee remarks upon took place also with respect to hours of work as well as wages, so that by 1833 the former working day for full-grown men (twelve hours) was now specially conceded as a maximum for young persons only.[2]

Compulsory labour, meanwhile, had become the special province of the Poor Law. Only the able-bodied pauper was compelled by law to labour. Other persons were compelled by economic necessity merely, and their labour was therefore, legally speaking, freely expended. Erskine, Blackstone's Scottish contemporary, expressed the 18th-century viewpoint by classifying labourers as either "necessary" or "voluntary".

In the 18th century, therefore, it was once again necessary, as it had been in 1563, to restate the law and this was done in the series of statutes of which the chief were those already described of 1747, 1766, 1777 (pieceworkers) and finally the 4 Geo. IV. c. 34 of 1823.[3] But since the starting-point was the Act of 1563—only with limitation of wages, regulation of hours and general compulsion to labour (for the reasons explained) discarded—only one thing remained, namely, the punishment of the servant for leaving or neglecting his work; and that is what these Acts decree. Thus it is evident that these Acts were not, in origin, a part of the general law of contract but were the tail-end of the penal labour laws which were essential to the early growth of capitalism, but which became in due course a hindrance to its further development. As Lord Ellenborough explained, the master and servant Acts were never intended, like contract law proper, to secure "the adjustment of differences between parties of equal rank in trade"; they were meant to secure the disciplining and subordination of the wage-earner. They were the last remnant of extra-economic compulsion to labour, the last direct acknowledgement by the law of the inferiority of the exploited servant to the exploiting master. Thus what appeared to most people looking back from the liberal standpoint of the eighteen-sixties as highly

[1] Quoted by A. McDonald, *Handybook of the Law relative to Masters, Workmen and Apprentices*, Glasgow, 1868, p. 30.

[2] In textile factories, by the first effective Factory Act.

[3] Above, pp. 161–166.

anomalous, contrary to natural justice and as a sort of aberration from the general principles of contract law is seen, regarded historically, not to be "unnatural" at all and only anomalous in so far as it was now outgrown and outmoded.

Lord Elcho, the most realistic advocate of the employers' interests, put this historical perspective loosely in the debate on his Bill's second reading:

> "This harsh law was really a remnant of serfdom and dated from a time when it was not a harshness but a relaxation since it enabled men to enter into contracts respecting their labour, which before they had been unable to do. But what in the 18th century formed a relaxation might constitute a galling and grievous restriction in the present day." [1]

In demanding this law's reform Lord Elcho the employer was championing essentially the same cause with respect to labour-power as twenty years earlier Lord Elcho the landowner had supported with respect to corn: full free trade, for these commodities as for others; reliance for profit simply on the operation of the market unbolstered by special legal protection.

The most radical partisan of the workmen, W. P. Roberts, put the workmen's demand for equality on the same ground: "You would treat labour as you would any other commodity," he was asked, "merely as an article to buy and sell?" "Yes." [2] There was this difference between the two champions, however, that the radical Roberts, whose sympathies were with the law's working-class victims, demanded its total repeal; Lord Elcho on the other hand, attuned to the wishes of the employing class whom the law favoured, was not prepared to ask the House of Commons of 1867 to grant more than a half-hearted reform.

The House of Commons of 1875, however, changed by the second Reform Bill into an institution at once more thoroughly representative of big industrial capital and more sensitive to the demands of the now partially enfranchised workers—no longer felt much hesitation about repeal. There could be little objection on economic grounds to removing a law which was mainly propping up small and backward enterprises, and politically there was every reason for abandoning this particular anti-strike weapon—and even for going further and reforming the law of conspiracy—so as to try and satisfy the determined militancy of the new voters.

[1] Hansard, 3rd Series, CLXXXVII, c. 1611. [2] 1866, XIII, Q. 2229

For it was the angry pressure of the trade unions which was decisive in pushing the reform through. "It is to the workmen themselves we look as the power through whose influence our object is to be gained," Campbell had declared; and the reform of 1875 was that power's victory.

7

THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY IN 19TH CENTURY BRITAIN

E. J. HOBSBAWM

THE phrase "aristocracy of labour" seems to have been used from the middle of the 19th century at least to describe certain distinctive upper strata of the working class, better paid, better treated and generally regarded as more "respectable" and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat. This article is an attempt to survey what we know about the labour aristocrats in the 19th century. It falls into three parts: a general introduction, an attempt to estimate the size of the stratum in various periods, and a discussion of some special problems of it.

I. SOME GENERAL POINTS

The sub-divisions of the 19th century. The history of the century, and with it of the working class, falls into three fairly well defined periods, each of which consists of a phase of general business prosperity (1780s to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, 1840s to early 1870s, late 1890s to the First World War) succeeded by a phase of general business difficulties (1815–40s, the "Great Depression" of the 1870s–90s, the crisis between the wars). The first period (1780s–1840s), the classical age of the "Industrial Revolution" saw the birth of the modern working class. The second (1840s–90s) saw capitalism as erected on the earlier foundations, rule supreme. It may be regarded as the classical period of the 19th century labour aristocracy. With the third (1890s–1939) we enter the age of Imperialism and Monopoly Capitalism, and, technically speaking, of the development of mass production, and the great expansion of secondary and tertiary industries. We also enter the period of the permanent crisis of the British capitalist economy. However, the most striking changes occurred after 1914. The first half of the period has been included in this discussion, chiefly because the mass of statistical enquiries made between 1890 and 1914 cast an invaluable retrospective light on the 19th century.

What is a labour aristocracy?

There is no single, simple criterion of membership of a labour aristocracy. At least six different factors should, theoretically be considered. *First*, the level and regularity of a worker's earnings; *second*, his prospects of social security; *third*, his conditions of work, including the way he was treated by foremen and masters; *fourth*, his relations with the social strata above and below him; *fifth*, his general conditions of living; *lastly* his prospects of future advancement and those of his children. Of these the first is incomparably the most important, and also the only one about which we have anything like comprehensive information, however inadequate. We may therefore use it as our main criterion. Throughout the century the man who earned a good regular wage was also the man who put enough by to avoid the Poor Law, to live outside the worst slum areas, to be treated with some respect and dignity by employers and to have some freedom of choice in his job, to give his children a chance of a better education and so on. The regularity of the earnings is important. Workers who earned good, but irregular or fluctuating wages, were not normally regarded as labour aristocrats in the national sense—for instance gas-stokers, almost two-thirds of whom earned 35*s.* a week in 1906.[1] They did, however, in certain instances, regard themselves as aristocrats compared with the mass of their fellow-workers; as for instance, London stevedores did, compared with ordinary dock labourers.

The nature of the labour aristocracy

Socially speaking the best-paid stratum of the working class merged with what may be loosely called the "lower middle class". Indeed the term "lower middle class" was sometimes used to include the aristocracy of labour.[2] In the earlier part of the century this would mean mainly small shopkeepers, some independent masters, foremen and managers (who were generally promoted workers). Towards the end of the century it would also mean clerks and the like. Thus in Bolton in the 1890s it included "the best-paid clerks, book-keepers, managers and the better sort of working folk"[3] (as distinct from the "employers, clergymen, solicitors, physicians, tradesmen on a large scale".) In Salford, about the same time, it was reckoned to include "commercial

[1] All references to 1906 are to the relevant volumes of the *Earnings and Hours Enquiry* (Wage Census) unless otherwise stated.

[2] *Dep. Cttee on Pupil Teachers*, 1898, XXVI, *passim* and esp. 2692; cf. also *R. C. on Poor Law*, 1905–9, App. VIII, 86298, Sir B. Browne (shipbuilder).

[3] Allen Clarke, *Effects of the Factory System* (1899).

travellers . . . clerks, lithographic printers, joiners, cabinet makers, grocers assistants and down to colliers"[1] skilled labour aristocrats being, if anything, superior in social status to many white-collar workers. The most comprehensive picture of this composite stratum is given by the Departmental Committee on Pupil Teachers, since this occupation seems to have been mainly drawn from its children. In Birmingham they came from among children of workers (40 per cent) and managers of small works, clerks (15 per cent) and tradespeople. In Merthyr they came from among colliers (since practically nobody else lived there) "or a class slightly removed from it—that of overmen at collieries and gaffers as they call them." In Bradford they came from a "better-off class", in Manchester from among "labourers, mechanics or small shopkeepers", in Lambeth from "artisan class and tradesmen class", in Exeter from "clerks and a certain proportion of foremen or cashiers in shops". The entrants to a Chelsea training college were drawn from carpenters and joiners, clerks, gardeners, tailors and drapers, commercial travellers and agents, engineers, blacksmiths and wheelwrights, painters, machine-workers in mills, managers or sub-managers in mills, grocers, boot- and shoemakers, cabinet-makers, farmers, accountants and butlers (as well as orphans and schoolteachers).[2] However, we must remember that many 19th-century British communities consisted almost completely of manual workers,[3] so that the aristocracy of labour would be virtually unalloyed.

This shading-over of the aristocracy of labour into other strata is important, for it helps to explain its political attitudes. Thus its persistent liberal-radicalism in the 19th century is easily understood,[4] as also its failure to form an independent working-class party. Only when Imperialism began to cut off the aristocracy of labour (*a*) from the managerial and small-master class with whom it had merged and, (*b*) from the vastly expanded white-collared classes—a new, and politically conservative labour aristocracy—did a labour party attract them.

If the boundaries of the labour aristocracy were fluid on one side of

[1] *Interdep. Ctee on Physical Deterioration*, 1904, XXXII, 4422–4.

[2] *Pupil Teachers*, 2287–8, 8524, 4397, 5329, 11479–80, 3471.

[3] E.g. E. Potter, *Picture of a Manufacturing District* (1856), 22–3. Out of an estimated population of 21,000 the middle class are estimated at 500, the non-wage-earning lower middle class at 1,500, including families.

[4] Before the period of Imperialism, Conservative groups among the labour aristocracy occur, e.g. among cotton-spinners, but can normally be accounted for by special circumstances such as Liberal opposition to the Factory Acts, exceptional local weakness of the nonconformist sects, dependence on an aristocratic clientele, recent emergence from a conservative environment in country or small town, etc. On the whole they are exceptional.

its territory, they were precise on another. An "artisan" or "craftsman" was not under any circumstances to be confused with a "labourer". "The artisan creed with regard to the labourers is that the latter are an inferior class and that they should be made to know and kept in their place."[1] The secretary of the Boilermakers' Union was appalled at the thought of a labourer being allowed to do craftsman's work for "it would not be desirable for a man of one class to go to another class"; the secretary of the Operative Spinners was certain that his men differed from the piecers and the less skilled in general in their superior ability. "The employers have had a splendid selection and they select the giants . . . in working capacity."[2] Before the rise of the New Unions of 1889 the boundaries of the aristocracy and of trade unionism were normally —for the great waves of general and unskilled organisation were temporary—believed to coincide, insofar as these were any unions at all. "As his title of 'unskilled' implies", wrote A Working Man, "he has no handicraft and he has no union."[3] In fact it was commonly believed that unions did not make groups of workers strong so much as indicate that they were already strong.[4] There was truth in this identification of the labour aristocracy with the unionists: the trade union register of 1871 London shows how few, and how weak, the union branches were in the East End districts.[5] The frontier between labour aristocrats and others was often a geographical one.

Between the "labourers" and the labour aristocracy there lived workers who belonged to neither group, but shaded into each: better-off labourers, ordinary skilled workers and suchlike. No clear line divided the labour aristocracy from these, though the aristocrat would certainly regard himself as superior in kind to these "men who, while very honest and anxious to do well, yet from deficiency of education, and perhaps some lack of moral strength and courage . . . [are] not . . . equal to the first class of men"[6]. Indeed the superficial observer might

[1] Thomas Wright, *Our New Masters* (1873), p. 3, 6. Cf. the extraordinary chapter on "The Unskilled Labourer" in *Working Men and Women* by a Working Man (1879).

[2] *R. C. Labour*, 1893–4, XXXII, 2801–10, 1892, XXXV, 789–801.

[3] *Loc. cit.* Also G. Howell: *Conflicts of Capital and Labour* (1890), p. 175.

[4] Mayhew, *London Labour*, III, pp. 231–2. "The fact of belonging to some such society which invariably distinguishes the better class of workmen from the worse." W. B. Adams, *English Pleasure Carriages* (1837), p. 187, who for this reason does not believe unions to be dangerous. *Statistical Tables and Returns of Trade Unions* (1887); *R. C. Trade Unions* Applegarth's evidence (1867, XXXII, Q. 168).

[5] *Beehive*, March 25, 1871. Thus the combined Engineers, Bricklayers, Carpenters and Masons Unions had 10 branches with 881 members in the present East End boroughs, but 31 with 3,338 members south of the Thames.

[6] *R. C. on Aged Poor*, 1895, 16545–9, evidence of H. Allen, secretary of the Working Jewellers' Trade Society, Birmingham. See also W. B. Adams, *op. cit.* pp. 188–9 for the social hierarchy among various classes of skilled carriage-makers.

sometimes see the working-class merely as a complex of sectional groups and grades with their social superiority and inferiority, without observing the major divisions.

II. THE SIZE OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY

Up to the 1840s.

It is doubtful whether in this period we can speak of a labour aristocracy at all, though its elements already existed. It is even doubtful whether we can speak of a proletariat in the developed sense at all, for this class was still in the process of emerging from the mass of petty producers, small masters, countrymen, etc., of pre-industrial society, though in certain regions and industries it had already taken fairly definite shape.[1] This makes the process of analysis extremely difficult. In this period it is probably simpler to operate with the concept of the "working people" or "labouring poor" which was then much in use[2] —i.e. to include all those who were exploited and oppressed by industrial capitalism in one group: definite proletarians, semi-proletarian outworkers, small producers and traders in revolt against large capitalists, and the peculiar transitional and intermediate forms between them.[3] Nevertheless it may be useful from the point of view of analysis to isolate that section of the "labouring poor" which may be regarded as proletarian; i.e. which consisted substantially of wage-workers who possessed no significant means of production.

We have no general estimates of the proportion of the "labouring poor" which was proletarian, mainly because contemporary statisticians automatically classed skilled and specialised workers with masters and independent producers, distinguishing masters only in agriculture, though they habitually isolated "labourers"—i.e. the unskilled, the miners and similar groups as a separate class.[4] If we take that section of the country which was still pre-industrial, i.e. those employed "in retail trade and in handicrafts as masters or workers" in 1841, and

[1] Of course *in effect* most British workers already depended wholly on their wages for subsistence; but the *form* of these wages was still often—as among domestic outworkers, some types of miners, etc., that of a price for *commodities* sold (e.g. pieces of cloth) rather than *labour power* sold. The point where such payment ceases to be a price for goods and becomes a piece-rate wage is not always easy to determine in period of transition.

[2] G. Briefs, *The Proletariat* (1937) 6 for examples.

[3] Thus Mayhew, *op. cit.*, III, p. 311 classifies the "poor" under three headings: artisans, labourers and petty traders.

[4] HMSO: Guides to Official Sources 2. *Census Reports of Great Britain 1801–1931* (1951), pp. 27 ff.

compare it with the numbers described as (non-agricultural) labourers, we find that in the English agricultural counties the labourers formed between $\frac{1}{6}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the number of craft masters and workmen, and normally between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$. Their proportion in urbanised areas such as Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Edinburgh, York City was much the same, though perhaps a little higher.[1] That for the purely agricultural Scottish counties was much lower. Within the "masters and workmen" the proportion of each, and of independent petty commodity producers varied. In 1851 (the first Census which made—partial—returns distinguishing masters from workmen) about 80 per cent of master-tailors, about 71 per cent of master-shoemakers, almost 90 per cent of master-blacksmiths employed 0–2 men, though about 60 per cent of master-builders, just over 60 per cent of tanners, rather over 50 per cent brewers and rather under half of machine and enginemakers employed between 3 and 19 men. (The first three groups comprised 8 per cent of the non-agricultural male population of ten years and over, the second four somewhat more.)[2] We may therefore assume, as a rough guess, that in the unrevolutionised industries the wage-earners might average between 50 and 80 per cent of the occupied population, the non-labourers forming at least half of them, and probably very much more. (The building industry is exceptional among craft industries in the high proportion of labourers to craftsmen.) Two pieces of evidence bearing on the matter may be given for what they are worth. An investigation in Hull city in 1839, which distinguished employed from non-employed handicraftsmen, shows about 75 per cent of the occupied population to have been workers.[3] A single zealous enumerator in Newcastle did the same in 1851: about 80 per cent of those classified as neither masters nor labourers or watermen were thus enumerated as "journeymen", i.e. wage-earners.[4] A rather fuller sample of 12 enumeration districts in Newcastle shows the number of labourers to be about equal to the combined number of journeymen and other non-masters. A sample of five enumeration districts in Bristol gives a somewhat lower proportion

[1] Counties with a mining population have been omitted from this calculation. The most convenient source for the occupational figures of 1841 is W. F. Spackman, *An Analysis of the Occupations of the People* (1847).

[2] J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain*, II, p. 35 for most convenient summary of the returns. I follow Clapham in assuming—for these occupations—that masters failing to return the number of employees are mainly self-employed petty producers.

[3] *J. R. Stat. S.*, IV (1841), p. 164; but the 75 per cent include many transitional types.

[4] MS Returns of 1851 Census, P.R.O., H.O. 107. The enumerator reported on 552 4JD, enumer. dist. 17, p. 434 ff.

of labourers to journeymen, though the difference may not be significant.

In the factory industries—textiles, mining, iron and steel—the proportion of full-time wage earners was of course much higher, for the semi-proletarian outworkers—framework knitters, handloom weavers, etc.—must be reckoned among them. The proportion of unskilled was also notably higher, even where women and child labour was not prevalent. However, all but a few supervisory and specialist workers in these occupations were often still regarded as "labourers", though of a superior kind.

In general, therefore, it is best for this period not to separate the elements of a proletarian "aristocracy" from the rest of the "labouring poor". An enquiry in Bristol in 1838 established that 15·7 per cent of the heads of working-class families were depositors in savings banks, members of benefit societies or of trade clubs. That in Hull in 1839 shows between 10 and 13 per cent of workers to have possessed "amply furnished" dwellings, as against between 25 and 30 per cent of "ill-furnished" ones, which is perhaps a more accurate criterion.[1] This may serve as a rough guide to the size of the upper stratum of the "working population". Beyond this we can, of course, establish individual categories of workers who can be regarded as labour aristocrats, and who sometimes showed the typical conservatism and sectional exclusiveness of their type; notably among those craftsmen whose position was substantially unaffected, where it was not actually strengthened, by the industrial revolution: printers, metal-workers,[2] craft producers of luxury goods and the like. It is no accident that the Manchester compositors refused to celebrate the Reform Bill[3] while the iron-founders eschewed strikes and believed in peaceful negotiation, and the engineers failed to take part in the movement for General Union and remained neutral in 1842.[4] Indeed it is hard to think of a machine-builder or iron-founder who was prominent in the great movements of 1830–42, though plenty of other craftsmen were. However, the changes affecting even those who between 1780 and 1815

[1] B. Fripp, "Condition of the Working Class in Bristol", *J. R. Stat. S.*, II, p. 372; "Condition of the Working Class in Hull", *ibid.*, V, pp. 212 ff. The figures have been calculated by deducting the number of houses belonging to the "middle and higher ranks" (213). The higher figure is based only on the number of working-class dwellings whose furniture could be ascertained.

[2] K. Marx, *Capital*, I, cap. 24 for reasons for their increased strength.

[3] *Minutes of Manchester Typographical Society*, Webb. Coll. EA, XXX, p. 51 (L.S.E. Library).

[4] Webb, *Hist. T.U.* (1894), pp. 180–2; J. B. Jefferys, *Story of the Engineers* (1946), pp. 18, 22.

could have been regarded as labour aristocrats were so complex and far-reaching, that it is best not to attempt a general assessment.[1]

1840–90s.

In this period the problem of the intermediate and transitional strata becomes less troublesome. At any rate a proletariat in the strict sense is now easier to discern—though one working in small units of production. Nevertheless, a large though diminishing zone of petty workshop production still surrounded modern industry. If factory bootmaking and tailoring made progress, especially from the 1870s, in 1891 there was still in Scotland one master to every four wage-earning tailors, one to every two shoemakers. If lace, hosiery, wool, jute and the rest of textiles became factory trades, the numerous small metal industries of the Birmingham and Sheffield areas remained complexes of specialised workshop and out-work production. (Indeed in the Birmingham area as late as 1931 almost 10 per cent of those employed in foundry and secondary processes and "other metal industries", and 25 per cent of those employed in the jewellery and plate industry—and these industries comprised 120,000 persons—were employers or independent producers.[2] Nevertheless, though small-scale production renews itself at every stage of capitalist development to some extent, it does and did so on a decreasing scale and in increasing dependence on large-scale enterprise.

Some general estimates for the size of the labour aristocracy during this period may be made. The first is Dudley Baxter's estimate of that section of the working class which earned an average wage-rate of 28*s.* or more in 1867. This comprised 0·83 million men out of 7·8 million working-class men, women and children (including agricultural workers and domestic servants) or about 11 per cent. If we deduct agricultural labourers and female domestic servants the percentage is something under 15.[3] The second is based on the membership of the

[1] These calculations throw some light on the much-discussed problem of what happened to the working-class standard of living. The classical view that it declined in the period after 1815 has been queried by Clapham, Ashton and other economic historians. Their argument rests mainly on the contention that indices of real wages rose between 1815 and the 1840s. It has already been undermined by the doubts which have been thrown on the cost-of-living statistics on which it rests. Still, it can be shown that the real wages of *some* workers probably rose. But if, as I have here argued, the favoured strata of the working population were much less numerous than the rest, the optimistic view falls to the ground. However, this is not the place to pursue this important discussion.

[2] West Midland Group, *Conurbation* (1948), pp. 122–3.

[3] D. Baxter, *The National Income* (1868) App. IV.

trade unions before the 1889 expansion—i.e. of the characteristic "strong bargainers" of this period. The first reliable estimate of general trade union membership, that of the Webbs in 1892, puts it at about 20 per cent of the working class which is probably on the high side. If we halve this to allow for organised non-aristocratic (women cotton workers, many miners, unskilled unions of 1889 vintage, etc.) we shall not go far wrong.[1] It may be recalled that Mayhew estimated the percentage of society men in the average London craft at about 10.[2] These estimates are really based on more or less plausible guesses, and are here given only because they are not inconsistent with the better ones for the subsequent period.

An estimate, also based on Baxter, of the size of the lower stratum —those earning less than 20*s*.—may be given for the sake of completeness. It amounts to 3·3 millions or just over 40 per cent of the working class, exclusive of agricultural labourers, soldiers and pensioners and women domestic servants.[3] This percentage is also curiously like those revealed by subsequent social surveys.

For the actual composition of this aristocracy Baxter is an unreliable guide, since his estimates neglect irregularity of earnings altogether and average the very high and very low earners in each trade in the habitual fashion of Victorian investigators. The composition of the trade union movement in 1875 is a better guide. Somewhat more than half of it was made up of craftsmen in trades little affected (except in their materials and in the power applied to manual tools) by the industrial revolution: builders, engineers, shipbuilders and the like, and various older crafts (printers, cabinet makers, tailors, glass-bottle makers, bookbinders, coachmakers and the like). The rest was composed mainly of miners, iron and steel workers and skilled textile operatives of whom the last were the smallest, but numerically the most stable group. A list of the trades with the highest weekly wage-rates may supplement this:

[1] Trade union membership statistics before the expansion of 1871–3 are unrepresentative except for isolated crafts or towns. Those of the mid-seventies—after the subsidence of the influx of 1871–3 but before the contraction of the Great Depression—are vitiated by the uneven organisation of different "aristocratic" trades. Hence those of 1890–4, minus the "non-aristocrats" are the best guide.

[2] *Op. cit.*, III, p. 231.

[3] It has been arrived at as follows: Baxter's subdivisions V–VII (men earning less than 20 shillings) and *all* women and child workers; with the stated exceptions. Since prices were higher in the 1860s than at the end of the century, the limits chosen probably overestimate the size of the labour aristocracy. In 1858 a wage of 27 shillings (not counting losses for bad weather) was not reckoned to be enough to keep a Liverpool building worker's family of three children from "poverty"; cf. *Town Life* by the author of *Liverpool Life*, etc. (1858), pp. 65–6.

TABLE I

TRADES IN 1865 WITH WEEKLY WAGE-RATES OF 40 SHILLINGS AND ABOVE

Source: Leone Levi, *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes* (1867).

Dockyards: some shipwrights forgemen
Railways: some engine drivers
Bookbinding: pieceworkers
finishers
forwarders
Scientific instruments: most workers
[1]*Cutlery:* file-forgers strikers, grinders (esp. over 12 in.), sawmakers, many saw-grinders
Shipbuilding: some shipwrights foremen
Cabinet Makers: some
Hatters: many skilled hand-workers
Jewellery: many skilled men
Iron: some slingers; more forge-rollers; many blacksmiths and strikers
Textiles: calico printing; colour mixers, bleachers, dyers, machine printers, die cutters
Leather: London curriers
Glass: many skilled men
Printing: newspaper compositors, readers, some machine minders and engineers
Musical Instrument Makers: some
Lithographers: many
Woodcarvers: many
Watchmakers: many; some clockmakers
Hosiery: some factory overlookers
Bone and Ivory Turners: some
Pottery: clay modellers, many throwers, many biscuit firemen
Steel: most melters, forgemen and tilters, rollers

This table indicates the composition of the super-aristocracy rather than the run-of-the-mill of prosperous artisans and may be compared with that for the period 1890–1914 (Table V). We may note that a list compiled for the first half of the century would not have read very differently.

Can we track the labour aristocracy down more closely? Not to the point of making reliable numerical estimates.[2] Nevertheless, a general survey is possible. Three facts stand out: the decline of domestic work and the corresponding rise of the factory system; the relative decline of textiles and the old consumer-goods trades and the rise of the heavy and metal-working industries; the rise of woman labour. All three are connected. Thus the rise of woman labour is statistically masked by its

[1] Wages paid by skilled men to their labourers to be deducted. In the iron and steel trades allowance for this has been made.

[2] The figures of the Wage Census of 1886 are unreliable. They differ so substantially from the ranking-order of the Wage Census of 1906—and without obvious cause—that they are best neglected. Probably the difference is due to 1886 recording wage-rates and 1906 earnings.

decline in some domestic industries: while the percentage of occupied women did not increase significantly between 1851 and 1891, no less than 122,000 disappeared from such occupations as ribbon, lace, straw hat, shirt and glove manufacture and sewing.[1]

The decline in domestic work may or may not have increased the proportion of labour aristocrats, or improved the position of workers in the affected industries, but it made the aristocracy of labour more prominent and lowered the political temperature of the industries concerned. Domestic workers in the great putting-out industries tended to live in specialised villages or town districts (e.g. Spitalfields and Cradley Heath) and were easily and obviously formed into large agglomerations dependent on one or two masters. Instances of master-nailers controlling 1800–2000 workers are known.[2] Thus their decline in effect *decreased* the average size of unit. In the small factory or the labyrinthine complex of interlocking specialised workshops, such as we find in the hosiery industry, the Birmingham gun trade or some Sheffield trades the indispensable craftsman or specialised operative not only was more important but saw himself to be more important. Also cohesion was more difficult. The Cradley Heath out-workers made their ill-fated attempts at trade unionism while the Birmingham craftsmen barely knew even craft societies. (The terrorism of Sheffield was a defensive reaction against the rise of the machine and the factory and the depression of a special form of sub-contracting out-worker, and thus does not affect the argument. In any case it was not a sign of radicalism, but an alternative to it.[3])

The same is true of the increasing proportion of women (an index of the increasing proportion of unskilled labour) in various industries. Though this created the possibility of an organised female proletariat, which was not widely utilised before the 1880s, and then only in cotton, it tended to leave the skilled males more obviously prominent and dominant. Thus the percentage of male spinners in the total cotton factory labour force fell from 15 in 1835 to 5 in 1886,[4] while the proportion of women and adolescent girls rose from 48·1 in 1835 to 60·6 in

[1] T. A. Welton, "On Forty Years Industrial Changes in England and Wales", *Trans. Manchester Stat. Soc.* (1897–8), pp. 153 ff. gives the figures conveniently.

[2] G. C. Allen, *The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country* (1939), p. 126.

[3] The best account of their movements: National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, *Report on Trade Societies* (1860), pp. 521 ff, esp. 540–1; *R.C. on Trades Unions* (1876) *passim*. See also the memoirs of Dronfield and Uttley in *Notes and Queries*, 1948, pp. 145–8, 279–80.

[4] A. L. Bowley, *Wages in the 19th Century* (1900), p. 117.

1907, averaging about 55 in our decades.[1] In the worsted industry the proportion of adult males (outside weaving) halved between 1853 and 1886.[2] The same is true of that of male woollen weavers in Leeds and the heavy woollen district,[3] though the main decline appears to have occurred after the 1870s. In hosiery the proportion of men fell from three- to two-fifths of the total labour force between 1851 and 1891. Only in the lace industry did it rise in a declining labour-force, thanks to the decline of hand-working. Hence in those textile industries in which aristocracies of labour established themselves—cotton, hosiery, lace—they became more prominent, though the textile workers probably formed a diminishing percentage of the labour aristocracy of the whole country. (However, this may be offset by the decline of the prosperous out-workers and specialists—the woolcombers, hecklers, shearmen and the like, who had found something like an aristocracy in earlier periods.)

The same is true of other consumer-goods industries, with the exception of many small-scale workshop-metal trades. Where the factory system developed further, the situation of the labour aristocracy was similar to that in textiles, though its numbers may have been smaller and its position less assured the more "modern" the factory system was. Factory production, or analogous systems, only gave rise to a sizeable labour aristocracy in the 19th century where machinery was imperfect and dependent on some significant manual skill; the British cotton industry is the only one among European industries of this type which made spinners into such an aristocracy, being the earliest and technically the most primitive. However, in boot factories in the 1860s the aristocracy (30*s.* and over) seem to have amounted to more than 20 per cent,[4] Where expansion took the form of sub-contracting, putting-out and general sweating, labour aristocracies could maintain themselves—for instance by specialising on high-grade work—but in the midst of an increasing mass of out-workers or depressed craftsmen. The table on page 213, drawn from the 1906 Census, illustrates the situation of such craft industries undergoing transition, though these are not necessarily the trades affected in 1850–90.

On balance the labour aristocracy of such trades may have declined as a proportion of the total group.

(It may be observed that the rise of factories brought about a diminution of the lowest-paid groups and an increase of the less abysmally paid.

[1] G. H. Wood, *History of Wages in the Cotton Trade* (1910), p. 136.
[2] *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXV (1902), p. 109.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 125.
[4] *Miscell. Statistics*, 1866, LXXIV, p. 743.

TABLE II

SKILLED OCCUPATIONS 1906 WITH ABNORMALLY HIGH PERCENTAGE OF LOW-PAID MALE WORKERS

Source: Wage Census 1906

Occupation	% "*aristocrats*" *40s. and more*	% "*plebeians*" *25s. and less*
Saddlery, Harness, Whips	12·5	35·4
Portmanteau, Bag, Misc. Leather	19·6	31·9
Hatters	39·7	27·8
Coopers	18·9	27·3
Cabinet Making	19	22·7
Bespoke Tailoring	29·4	41·6
Bespoke and Repair, Boot and Shoe	5·1	40·8

However, since the concept of the "semi-skilled" was not yet familiar to either employers or workmen[1] they were regarded, by aristocrats and others, merely as labourers who worked machines.)

This decline was accentuated by the rise of almost wholly non-aristocratic industries such as transport and coal-mining, though the aristocracy in both probably increased during the period.[2] In 1851 miners, seamen, railwaymen, carters and the like formed about half a million; in 1881 over 1·3 millions. However, this rise is in fact largely a transfer of farm-labourers or other unskilled workers to somewhat better paid occupations, and thus disturbed the general working-class hierarchy less than one might think.

On the other hand the period saw an immense reinforcement of the labour aristocracy in the rise of the metal industries. Thus ironworkers trebled their numbers between 1851 and 1881, shipbuilders, engineers and the like more than trebled theirs. The percentage of skilled men in many of these industries was extremely high, perhaps as high as 70–75 in engineering,[3] and their relative position certainly improved. The rise of iron ship-building lowered the percentage of the aristocrats, which had been overwhelming on wooden ships, though not all

[1] I have no record of the modern use of the word "semi-skilled" before 1894 (*Gasworkers and General Labourers' Union* 1894 Conference, p. 77) though the N.E.D. does not report it before 1926. For an early recognition of them as a group, *Workers' Union Record*, September 1916, p. 11, referring to movements at B.S.A. Birmingham, 1904.

[2] P. W. Kingsford, *Railway Labour 1830–1870* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London Library), 1951, p. 6 shows the "skilled" rising from about 9 to about 12 per cent between 1847–50 and 1884; but managerial and supervisory grades declined from 6·7 per cent in 1850 to 3·7 per cent in 1884.

[3] J. and M. Jefferys, "The Wages, Hours and Trade Customs of the Skilled Engineer in 1861", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, XVII, 1 (1947), p. 30; *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXVIII (1905), p. 384.

equally prosperous,[1] and it probably stood at 50–60 per cent until the rise of automatic machines.[2] The number of printers—another industry with a high skilled percentage—also more than trebled. The case of the iron and steel industry is slightly different. The percentage of skilled men in iron was high—almost 44 in Levi's 1865 sample[3] and wages were high, but earnings were irregular and the actual amount of poverty among them appears to have been high, as was the general squalor and backwardness of their centres. Towns like Middlesbrough, Wolverhampton and Neath come near the top of any list of illiteracy or old-age pauperism.[4] Nevertheless, the abnormally high nominal wages and the universal prevalence of subcontracting made iron and steel a stronghold of the labour aristocracy.

The building trades also grew relatively, and as they retained their old structure, maintained the strength of the labour aristocracy.

The period therefore probably saw a transfer of the centre of gravity within the labour aristocracy from the old pre-industrial crafts to the new metal industries, and the emergence of some elements of a labour aristocracy in trades previously regarded (wrongly) as composed essentially of labourers. Its relative numerical strength may not, however, have increased.

From the 1890s to 1914

In this period genuinely useful statistics begin to appear. We emerge from obscurity into something like daylight. Above all, we possess reliable general estimates of the size of various working-class strata, semi-proletarian elements now being much less important than before.

Since most social surveys were more interested in isolating destitution from the rest than in separating exceptional comfort, we know more about the bottom stratum than about the top. The estimates are consistent with one another. In Booth's London the "poor", the "very poor" and the "lowest class" between them formed 30·7 per cent of the total population or 40 per cent of the working class. In Rowntree's York (1899) the equivalent classes formed 27·8 per cent of the

[1] *The Shipwrights' Journal* (Sunderland, 1858), pp. 20–1 for complaints.

[2] *R.C. on Trade Unions*, 1867, XXXII, 17167 (35 per cent of Thames Iron Works unskilled), 17363–4 (about 50 per cent of iron shipbuilders are labourers). *R.C. Labour*, 1892, XXXVI, p. iii, Grp. A, Reply to T.U. Questionnaires (pp. 274–87). (58 per cent in 8 English yards, 66 in 6 Scottish ones are skilled.)

[3] Levi (1865), *op. cit.*, p. 122. Half the "'slingers' with their helpers" have been assigned to each group.

[4] See *Registrar-General's Reports* for illiteracy; C. Booth, *The Aged Poor* (1894), Lady Bell, *At The Works* (1900), p. 84, for old age pauperism.

population and 43 per cent of the working wage earners.[1] A more impressionistic estimate for the Potteries (1900) gives much the same figure: three-eighths.[2] Forty per cent is therefore a good enough rough measure of the "submerged" section of the workers, of whom two-thirds would, at one time or another of their lives—mainly in old age—become actual paupers; the ultimate degradation.[3] It should be noted that this section is considerably larger than the number of those earning what was technically a "labourer's wage". Thus the families whose income was less than 21*s.* formed only 13·8 per cent of the York wage-earners, and the "primary poverty line" in Bowley and Burnett-Hurst's Five Towns survey of 1910–12 was drawn above 13 or 13·5 per cent of households or 16 per cent of workers.[4] (Rowntrees' percentage of those living in "primary poverty" was 12·7.)

Estimates for the top stratum are also fairly consistent with one another. Owen estimates it at one-eighth—say 13 per cent—in the Potteries in 1900. In Booth's sample of 75,000 London workers 17 per cent earned above 40*s.*, but he considered this somewhat too favourable. Class "F" in his East End investigations contained 14·9 per cent of workers.[5] However, the sample of 356,000 workers from 38 industries covered in the 1886 Wage Census included only 8·1 per cent with wages over 35*s.*[6] We may assume as a rough guide that the labour aristocracy included not more than 15 per cent of the working class, though it might be enlarged by the inclusion of "the best-paid clerks, book-keepers, managers", etc. All impressions agree that they formed a smallish minority.[7]

[1] B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty* (popular edition), pp. 150–1.

[2] H. Owen, *The Staffordshire Potter* (1900), pp. 346–7.

[3] Charles Booth in *R.C. on the Aged Poor* (1895), 10,860–2.

[4] A. L. Bowley and A. R. Burnett-Hurst, *Livelihood and Poverty* (1915). This survey neglects irregularities of earnings, except in the building trade.

[5] Booth, IX, p. 371; I, p. 35.

[6] *General Report on the Wages of the Manual Labour Classes in the U.K.*, 1893–4, LXXXIII.

[7] We do not quite know how these estimates would be affected by greater knowledge of family incomes as a whole. The pioneer figures of Bowley and Burnett-Hurst, *op. cit.*, suggest that in some areas family incomes may have been much increased by earnings other than father's. In their sample one worker supported on average himself and 1·3 others. Earlier figures suggest that in some industrial areas the same was true (e.g. W. Nield, "Income and Expenditure of the Working Classes in Manchester and Dukinfield in 1836 and 1841", *J.R. Stat. S.*, IV, p. 320 ff.) But in other areas—coalfields (Bowley and Burnett-Hurst), port towns (Condition of Working Class in Hull, *J.R. Stat. S.*, V, p. 213), etc., this was probably not so. A sample of MS Census returns for Newcastle in 1851 shows less than 5 per cent of wives working, in Bristol about 15 per cent. Booth's investigations into the family income of workers in twenty London trades—I, p. 381—show that among the higher-paid (38 shillings and above) the earnings of all other family members added only about 10 per cent to the standard weekly rate of the father. Indeed we may assume that the main function of extra earners in the family in such areas or industries was to bring the weekly income up to the normal level of the worker's grade,

The important point to note about this aristocracy of labour is that it did *not* include all workers who could be technically described as skilled or as craftsmen. While it is safe to say that practically no woman earned more than a labourer's wage, and almost as safe to say that few "labourers" earned enough to join the top 15 per cent, hardly any skilled occupation lacked a percentage of men who earned a low-grade income, quite apart from the hierarchy of more or less aristocratic crafts in generally "skilled" trades, carpenters and joiners among builders, paint-brush makers among brushmakers, newspaper comps in the printing trade, etc.[1] In stable crafts like building and engineering those earning 25*s.* or less in 1906 (not a bad year) formed about 10 per cent. However, other crafts might, as we have seen, carry a much longer "tail".

The actual size of the aristocracy varied greatly from one industry to another. We may conveniently divide the industries into three groups: those in which the aristocracy formed about 20 per cent of the total males in 1906, those in which it formed about 10 per cent and those in which it formed significantly less than 10 per cent:

TABLE III

INDUSTRIES WITH HIGH, MEDIUM AND LOW PROPORTION OF LABOUR ARISTOCRATS IN 1906

Source: Wage Census. (N.B. This did not include coal mining)

High *Male Workers earning*	*40s. and more*	*45s. and more*
Iron and Steel manufacture	26·8	19·6
Engineering, Boilermaking	21·2	11·3
Shipbuilding	22	14·9
"Various metal industries"	20	11·4
Cotton	18·6	10·1
Building	18·2	6·8
Cabinet Making, etc.	19·1	9·0
Printing	31·6	19·2
Hosiery	19·1	10·6

if the father's earnings should be insufficient to achieve this. Father's wage *was* the family income and men who could not maintain their families would rightly regard themselves as belonging to a far poorer class than the labour aristocracy and might well lose self-respect. The passionate rejection of the Means Test by workers between the wars—often declassed labour aristocrats—supports this view. However, extra family earnings may have increased the size of the labour aristocracy in some cases. On the other hand we do not know how far this was offset by the need to assist poor family members (mainly the old). The returns in Booth, *The Aged Poor* (column: Assistance from Relatives) do not provide sufficiently quantitative information, but suggest (a) that there was a lot of it, and (b) that at the very least the old people's rent was paid, "an indication of what is feared above all things" (p. 159).

[1] Booth, v, p. 74, IX, p. 210, VI, p. 230; *R.C. Labour*, Gp. C, 18,820–6, 18,860–1.

Medium *Male Workers earning*	*40s. and more*	*45s. and more*
Clothing	11·2	6·2
Pottery	11·3	6·1
Miscellaneous Trades*	10·3	5·4
Chemicals	9·3	4·6
Railways	8·7	5·6
Public Utilities	8·5	3·6
Low		
Food, Drink, Tobacco	7·8	3·7
Wool	5·7	3·0
Readymade boot and shoe	5·4	2·1
Brick and Tile manufacture	5·4	2·4
India Rubber	6·8	3·6
Silk	3·4	1·4
Jute	2·2	0·8
Linen	4·9	2·6

* Tanning, coachbuilding, brushmaking, seedcrushing, harbour, dock and canal service, carting, India rubber, linoleum, saddlery, etc., portmanteau making, etc., musical instruments, umbrellas, coopers, coal storing and carting, other miscellaneous.

However, the level of the labour aristocracy is not measured absolutely but also relatively. Hence it is important to distinguish those industries in which the aristocrats had below them an abnormally large amount of low-paid labour, and the others. The following table brings this out:

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE OF "PLEBEIANS" IN CERTAIN INDUSTRIES 1906
(Male workers earning 25 shillings and less)

	High Group		
Iron and Steel	31·4	Cotton	40·6
Shipbuilding	32·2	Building	25·4
Engineering and Boilermaking	29·7	Cabinet Making	22·7
Various Metals	31·1	Printing	16·0
		Hosiery	33·3
	Medium Group		
Clothing	36·2	Chemicals	40·3
Pottery	40·4	Railways	49·7
Miscellaneous Trades	42·4	Public Utilities	40·5
	Low Group		
Food, Drink, Tobacco	47·3	India Rubber	54·6
Wool	50	Silk	51·9
Readymade Boot and Shoe	39	Jute	69·8
Brick and Tile	50·2	Linen	66·9

It is clear that with a few exceptions—cotton, boot and shoe, railways, and perhaps clothing—the size of the low-paid section is, roughly, inversely proportionate to that of the aristocrats. We may therefore assume that the extreme conservatism of the cotton aristocrats sprang from the knowledge that they defended positions of privilege in an industry in which, under normal circumstances, they would have stood much lower; and the somewhat less extreme conservatism of the boot and shoe workers from the fact that they had carved out an abnormally large group of "middle incomes" from what would otherwise have been a much larger proportion of depressed ones. In fact we know that British cotton workers were the only ones of their kind in Western Europe to build permanent craft unions; boot and shoe workers the only group composed in part of mass-production factory workers to build permanent unions before the end of the 19th century.

Indeed, the political and economic positions of the labour aristocrats reflect one another with uncanny accuracy. The following table lists some of the best-paid occupations:

TABLE V

OCCUPATIONS IN WHICH MORE THAN 40% OF MALE WORKERS EARNED 40 SHILLINGS OR ABOVE IN 1906

Occupation	*40s. and more*	*45s. and more*
Platers (shipbuilding)	81·7	73·7
Caulkers (shipbuilding)	78·3	61·4
Cotton Spinners (80 counts and above)	77·6	52·6
Lace Makers (Lever branch)	77·4	67·0
Engine Drivers (railway)	71·7	54·9
Rivetters (shipbuilding)	70·5	60·5
Platers (engineering, piece-wage)	68·5	50·3
Cotton Spinners (40–80 counts)	67·9	48·3
Cogging and Rolling (steel, piece-wage)	61·5	52·1
Rivetters, Caulkers (engineering, piece)	56·7	38·0
Turners (engineering, piece)	48·8	30·4
Fitters (engineering, piece)	47·6	26·6
Cotton Spinners (below 40 counts)	44·9	20·4
Platers (engineering, time-wage)	44	16·4
Puddlers (iron and steel, piece)	39·7	27·2

Two things will strike the reader: *first*, the decisive shift of the "super-aristocracy" from the crafts to the metals, and to a lesser extent the cotton industry, since 1867 (compare Table I); *second*, the fact that all these super-aristocrats (with the exception of railway engine drivers

and one grade of engineers) belonged to trades in which piece-work was either prevalent or enforced by the unions.[1] The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, however, only tolerated it, though its highest-paid members were in fact on it. Piece-work proved to be the form of wage-payment most suited to capitalism in more ways than Marx foresaw.

With the partial exceptions of the engineers and the loco-men all the men in this list belonged to unions with an unbrokenly conservative record. The cotton-spinners invested their personal and trade union savings in the cotton mills.[2] The skilled shipyard workers in Jarrow and Newcastle did the same in their industry and the boilermakers sent their officials to become officials in their employers' associations.[3] The lace-makers were ultra-respectable. The steel-smelters were indeed among the earliest unions to support the Labour Representation Committee. This may be because they were, in a sense, a "new union" (formed in 1886). Steel was a peculiar industry in that it was more extensively recruited from upgraded labourers than any other aristocratic trade, and the union—probably for this reason—had industrial rather than craft tastes and was a strong supporter of the compulsory closed shop. However, its leader John Hodge was and remained a liberal and not a socialist. The older ironworkers' union refused to affiliate to the Labour Party as late as 1912.[4]

During this period, however, certain old-established members of the labour aristocracy began to feel the competition of machinery and the threat of down-grading. Once again this is reflected in their political attitudes. Not many unions affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee before the Taff Vale judgment. They were, with negligible exceptions, the chief "new" unions of the 1889 vintage and the following "old" unions: Brass-workers, London Bookbinders, N.U. Boot and Shoe Operatives, London Compositors, Painters, French Polishers, Ironfounders, Fancy Leather Workers, Shipwrights, Typographical Association. Of these the Bookbinders were in the midst of a fight against mechanisation and dilution, the Compositors busy meeting the

[1] Webb, *Industrial Democracy* (1897), pp. i, 286.

[2] Chapman and Marquis, "The recruiting of the employing classes from the wage-earners in the cotton industry", *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXXV (1912); P. de Rousiers, *The Labour Question in Britain* (1896), pp. 261 ff.; D. M. Good, *Economic and Political Origins of the Labour Party* (Thesis, L.S.E. Library, 1936), pp. 221–2.

[3] Booth, *The Aged Poor*, p. 113; D. C. Cummings, *History of the United Society of Boilermakers* (1905), pp. 103, 119; S. Pollard, *Economic History of British Shipbuilding* 1870–1914 (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London Library), 1950, p. 159.

[4] A. Pugh, *Men of Steel* (1951), p. 81; John Hodge, *From Workman's Cottage to Windsor Castle* (1931), pp. 61, 138–9.

challenge of linotype and monotype machines, the French Polishers and Fancy Leather Workers typical of the crafts beset by sub-division and sub-contracting, the Ironfounders threatened by the rise of machine-moulding and the Shipwrights fighting to maintain themselves against the rising crafts of metal-shipbuilders.[1] The painters can hardly be reckoned an aristocratic trade, being in majority semi-skilled and casual. The book and shoemakers had long been keen on government activity to secure better factory inspection and in trades disputes, and also had a long tradition of active political radicalism (though they were keener on Lib-Lab than on independent Labour representation); the establishment of permanent machinery for peaceful labour relations in 1895 did not affect this.[2] The brass-workers faced the decline of casting and the rise of the 'less skilled' stamping and pressing, far-reaching changes in demands and a heavy defeat in Arbitration in 1900 which greatly weakened the union.[3]

To sum up. In this period the aristocracy of labour remained substantially of the same type and composition as in the third quarter of the 19th century, though its centre of gravity shifted further towards the metal industries.

It is not easy to sum up this discussion of the size of the labour aristocracy. Did its relative size increase or decrease? We do not really know enough to say. At a guess, it was probably no larger in the 1860s and 1870s than the favoured strata had been before 1850 (if only because of the great transfer of non-aristocratic labour from agriculture, where it remained outside the "proletarian hierarchy", to the industrial areas). But its position as an aristocracy was much firmer. For instance, it was no longer true that slumps affected it more severely than non-aristocrats, as had once been argued.[4] From the 1870s to 1900 it probably

[1] Bookbinders: E. Howe and J. Child, *The London Society of Bookbinders* (1952), chap. xxi: "The Fight for Full Employment"; Printers: E. Howe and H. Waite, *The London Society of Compositors* (1940), pp. 202–6, S. Gillespie, *A Hundred Years of Progress* (1953), pp. 111 ff.; Ironfounders: see Reports for unemployment indices, also *Annual Report of Amal. Society of Plate and Machine Moulders* (Oldham), 1894, p. 5; Shipwrights: Pollard, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–9.

[2] D. M. Good, *op. cit.*, pp. 158 ff., p. 173; E. Brunner, "The Origins of Industrial Peace", *Oxford Econ. Papers*, N.S., I, pp. 2, 247–60; G. Chester in G. D. H. Cole, *British Trade Unionism* (1939), pp. 415 ff.

[3] G. C. Allen, *op. cit.*, pp. 228–31, 251–2; R. D. Best, *Brass Chandelier* (1940), chap. x, pp. 80–1; Cadbury, Matheson, Shann, *Women's Work and Wages* (1906), p. 263 and in general, W. A. Dalley, *The Life of W. J. Davis.*

[4] H. Ashworth, "Statistics of the present Depression of Trade at Bolton", *J.R. Stat. S.*, v (1842), p. 79. Hence the fear, expressed in Chartist times: "Only pull down the artisan class of this country to the level of the labourer and the Charter will have to be granted." *R.C. Trade Unions*, 1867, 8753. The radical and Chartist movements of the 1830s and 40s were so widespread largely because the artisans with some exceptions, were in fact being temporarily pulled down.

increased. In a period of falling prices and living-costs and a new range of cheaper consumer-goods it is easier for the upper marginal strata of the intermediate or average workers to enjoy the benefits of an aristocratic standard, though the "plebeians" probably got little out of it but a slightly less pinched subsistence. However, it is probably unsafe to conclude anything from our survey except that the labour aristocracy averaged between, say, 10 and 20 per cent of the total size of the working class, though in individual regions or industries it might be larger or smaller.

I have deliberately neglected regional variations in wage-levels. They were extremely large, though from the 1870s on signs of standardisation and a narrowing of the differential multiply. However, within each region the local aristocracy would occupy the same position relative to its "plebeians", other things being equal, even though its absolute level—as in Scotland—might be more modest than elsewhere.

III. THE PLACE OF THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY IN THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In this section I shall consider three problems: the "differential" between labour aristocrats and the rest, the distance between them and the petty-bourgeoisie and employers, and the problem of "co-exploitation".

The "differential"

The main reason why there is a large differential between skilled and unskilled, "aristocratic" and "plebeian" occupations under capitalism is, that the industrial reserve army of unemployed and under-employed, which determines the general movements of wages, affects different categories of workers differently. It operates in the first instance chiefly by keeping the wages of that kind of labour which is most easily expanded, low: that is, the least skilled. A specific reason for it in Britain was, that labour aristocrats generally enjoyed the power to make their labour artificially scarce, by restricting entry to the profession, or by other means. If they lost this—for instance by the uncontrollable rise of machines—they ceased, like the woolcombers, to be labour aristocrats. Hence in Victorian Britain there were always some groups of workers who lived virtually always under conditions of full employment, while a much larger mass lived virtually always in what was for employers a wonderful buyers' market. The development of

capitalism was to diminish this relative security of the labour aristocrats, and the two world wars were to remove the old pressure of the industrial reserve army on the unskilled. Hence there has been a marked narrowing of the differential since 1914. Before then, however, these forces were not yet strong.

However, in fact another force bound together the wages of different grades by rigid differentials in trades of an old-fashioned pattern: custom. The wage of the mason's labourer dangled from that of the journeyman mason, though it did so by a moderately elastic thread. In such industries employers who hired workers bore in mind the traditional wage-scales, and workers in turn determined what sort of wage they asked for by traditional considerations: what had always been considered a "fair" wage or an established differential; what other workers in a similar position (or in a position which seemed to be comparable) got.[1] We must therefore distinguish between two types of industry: the traditional crafts in which fixed differentials held good, and the new industries, in which capitalist considerations had swept away the older traditions, and the lower grades were consequently relatively worse off, the aristocrats relatively better off.[2] We should remember, however, that (*a*) the "labourer's" wage in all industries was, in origin or essence always a subsistence wage and (*b*) that traditional elements long remained effective in British capitalism and are not yet dead. The main result of this during the 19th century was to allow employers to hire even labour aristocrats at much less then they might have fetched, since they were slow to learn how to charge "what the traffic would bear" rather than what they thought a "fair" wage for a skilled man in comparison to other skilled men and to labourers. On the other hand, under this system the frontier between the labour aristocrat and the labourer was probably much more clear-cut and fixed.

Broadly speaking in traditional crafts the "labourer" or "helper" received about half the wage of the craftsman or somewhat more. Eden's *State of the Poor* estimated the wages of rural artisans in 1795 at 2*s.* 6*d.* to 3*s.*, those of farm-labourers at 1*s.* 6*d* a day. In Macclesfield in 1793 artisans earned 3*s.*, labourers 1*s.* 8*d.* Portsmouth shipwrights' wages between 1793 and 1823 averaged about double their labourers'.[3]

[1] J. W. F. Rowe, *Wages in Theory and Practice* (1929), pp. 156 ff: for a good discussion of this.

[2] Mayhew, *op. cit.*, III, makes this distinction very clearly.

[3] Eden, *passim*. Bowley, *Wages in the 19th Century*, p. 61; "A Statistical Account of the Parish of Madron, Cornwall", *J.R. Stat. S.*, II, p. 217.

In most urban occupations later in the 19th century (and perhaps even before) the differential seems to have been less—perhaps nearer 40 per cent—though we may doubt whether it would be much less if we took not the *average* earnings of craftsmen (which include, as we have seen, a majority earning a sub-aristocratic wage), but only those of the aristocrats. Thus in the building trades craftsmen appear to have earned more like 30 or 40 per cent above labourers.[1] As a general rule we may say that the differential would be the nearer 100 per cent, the stronger, more exclusive and "aristocratic" the craft; or alternatively the greater, the lower the "district" rate for unskilled labour (as for instance, in purely rural areas). Thus in Manchester the labourers' rate oscillated round about 50 per cent of the engineering fitters' between 1830 and 1871, while in Leeds, where the fitters' rate was lower, so also was the differential. In Londonderry labourers consistently earned less than half shipwrights' wages between 1821 and 1834.[2] On balance, 100 per cent is a sufficiently helpful guide to the difference between the highest and lowest, though not to the intermediate grades.

The situation is rather different in the new industries, except where the unskilled labourer's subsistence rate was the basis of the whole wage-structure.[3] There the differential was both larger and more elastic. Thus between 1823 and 1900 self-acting mule-spinners' wages were never less than 221 per cent of their big piecers' and only fell below 200 per cent of weavers' wages in four years. In the iron industry puddlers' wages ranged between 200 and 240 per cent of labourers' from 1850 to 1883. In bleaching the differential between (male) hand crofters and female bleaching machine minders from 1850–83 (the latter = 100), ranged between 230 and 393. Leading hands in the Nottingham lace trade in the 1860s earned three times the wage of dressers and menders, or more.[4]

These exceptionally large differentials were either due to exceptionally high wages for certain workers (especially in highly cyclical industries, in which the labour supply curve might actually slope backward in very busy times), or to exceptionally low wages for the unskilled; such as those of women and children, which could be safely depressed

[1] Postgate, *The Builders' History* (1923), A. L. Bowley, "Statistics of Wages in the U.K. in the last 100 years", VI–VII, *J. R. Stat. S.*, LXIII (1900), VIII, *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXIV (1901), Bowley, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[2] A. L. Bowley and G. Wood, "Statistics of Wages in the U.K. in the last 100 years", X–XI, *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXVIII (1905), pp. 137, 376–7, 380–1.

[3] Kingsford, *op. cit.*, p. 145 for railways, *Journal of Gas Lighting* 52 (1888), p. 286 for gas. Statistics of Trevethin (Pontypool), *J.R. Stat. S.*, III, p. 370 for navvies and colliers.

[4] Cotton: calculated from Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 131; iron and bleaching: Levi (1885), pp. 143, 126; lace: *Misc. Stats.* (1866), p. 274.

far below the subsistence minimum. This was specially important in trades with otherwise differentials and effective restriction of entry; hence the constant complaints in such trades as printing about the multiplication of apprentices and the introduction of women. However, there may have been a fixed differential even for these. At any rate Dudley Baxter believed that in most trades the average wages of a boy, woman and girl would add up to those of an adult man.[1]

What happened to these differentials during the 19th century? Our information about the first half is too defective to allow us to say much, but it is clear that between the 1840s and 1890 the differential widened, and that it did not substantially narrow (if indeed it did not continue to widen) between the 1890s and 1914. This conflicts with Marshall's statement that the wages of unskilled labour had risen faster than those of skilled, but Marshall's observations on the subject of skilled and unskilled labour are exceptionally unreliable (or perhaps wishful).[2]

The peculiarities in the British labour market made this period abnormally favourable to the development of high differentials. Thus Britain had throughout 1851–1911 about 108 women of working wage (15 to 49 years) to every 100 men; a very large surplus of the lowest-paid type of labour, not all of which was absorbed by the rising demand for domestic servants in the second half of the century. As we have seen, domestic industries which had part-employed many women declined catastrophically after 1851—e.g. lace, glove and straw hat making, and certain forms of female labour in mining and agriculture also disappeared.[3] Again, child labour remained surprisingly important in this country, showing no significant tendency to diminish in important industries until very late in the century. In 1881 it was still almost 5 per cent of the total occupied population, compared to under 3 per cent in Germany.[4] Inevitably this depressed the standards of many non-aristocrats.

There is plenty of evidence that the gap between the aristocrats and the lower strata widened in the middle decades of the century, quite apart from general statements to this effect.[5] This was certainly so in the London building trades though in this industry the differential is

[1] Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[2] *Principles*, 8th edition, p. 716. Also p. 3.

[3] How widespread these were in rural areas may be seen from the 1851 Census map reprinted in Clapham, *Econ. Hist. of Modern Britain*, II.

[4] K. Oldenberg, "Statistik der jugendlichen Fabrikarbeiter", *Schmoller's Jahrbuch*, XVIII, p. 969.

[5] J. D. Burn, *A glimpse at the Social Conditions of the Working Classes during the early part of the present century* (1860), p. 30.

probably more rigid than in many others. Between 1850 and 1870 the skilled rates rose more often, and sooner by an average of three years than unskilled. The different evolution of men's and women's wages—women being par excellence the lowest-paid and most easily replaceable category—point the same way. In the worsted industry the men's average wage increase between 1855 and 1866–8 (1850=100) was 66 per cent, the women's 6 per cent. In the cotton industry the average weekly earnings of self-actor spinners rose from 1850–71 by 8*s.* 3*d.*, of (women) weavers by 3*s.* Between 1856 and 1870 the index of the standard rate for patternmakers and fitters rose by six points, of engineering labourers by four; comparisons for the period 1834 to 1884 in Manchester give similar results. Indeed, a Manchester engineering works shows platers' helpers to have earned slightly less in 1874 than the average of 1851 while platers' wages had risen by 25 per cent. In the Lancashire coal mines wages of unskilled dischargers fell between 1850 and 1880, those of the semi-skilled carters rose, those of the colliers and engineers rose even more. In the shipyards the differential between platers and helpers was 85 per cent in 1863–5, 88 per cent in 1871–7 and 91 per cent in 1891–1900.[1] The absence of comparable series of earnings, or even wage-rates for skilled and unskilled workers—due to our ignorance of unskilled wages—makes such comparisons difficult. However, a general estimate for Lancashire 1839–59 confirms one's impression.[2]

Naturally we must not expect this differential to have widened smoothly and steadily. There were times when unskilled wages rose faster than skilled—e.g. in rapidly expanding areas and some booms. There were times—especially in slumps, when they fell faster. Since the normal wage of the unskilled was determined by a normal glut of the labour market, we should expect it to be rather more sensitive than the skilled wage, and hence to move much more jerkily. Thus, according to Pollard's index of earnings in the Sheffield heavy trades 1850–1914, the fluctuations of unskilled earnings were between three and four times as large as those of skilled foundrymen from 1850 to 1896, between two and three times as large as those of skilled engineers.

[1] Building: Bowley, *Wages in the 19th Century*, p. 90; G. T. Jones, *Increasing Return* (1933), pp. 258 ff.; *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXIV (1901). Worsted: *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXV, pp. 110–11. Cotton: G. H. Wood, *Wages in the Cotton Trade* (1910), p. 131. Engineering: *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXIX, pp. 158–9; *Tr. Manchester Stat. S.*, 1884–5, pp. 13, 30; Leone Levi, *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes* (1885), p. 102. Coal: Levi, *loc. cit.*, p. 136. Shipyards: *J.R. Stat. S.*, LXXII, pp. 174 ff.

[2] D. Chadwick, "On the rate of Wages in Manchester and Salford and the manufacturing districts of Lancashire 1839–59", *J.R. Stat. S.*, XXIII (1860).

The average earnings of engineers in the decade 1890–1900 were 39 points above those of 1851–60, those of the foundrymen were 31 points higher while those of the unskilled had only risen 18 points in spite of their much greater fluctuations. (1900=100).[1] It is possible that the belief in the tendency of unskilled wages to rise faster than those of the skilled is due to a misinterpretation of this greater tendency to fluctuate not unaffected by bias. It is easy to observe that unskilled wages in Sheffield rose 13 points between 1872 and 1873 (engineers rising 8 points, foundrymen's 5 points), or that they rose 24 points between 1880 and 1881 (against 13 and 6 respectively) or 20 points between 1888 and 1889 (against 3 and 4 points). It is easy to overlook the fact that they fell 14 points in 1874–5 (against a rise of 5 and a fall of 1 point), that they fell 24 points in 1883–4 (against a loss of 2 and 2 points), and 35 points in 1890–2 (against 14 and 10 points). Taken all in all, the general tendency for skilled wages to rise faster than unskilled over the long period is in little doubt.

Since the middle decades of the century were a period of rising prices, it follows that the aristocrats' standard of living improved relatively even more than their actual earnings. Once again, we know very little about this. There are few inventories of the possessions in a skilled worker's household.[2] Still, we know enough in general of the well-clothed and well-shod "artisan" with his gold watch, solid furniture and solid food to point the contrast with the miserable masses who borrowed a few shillings from the pawnbroker—60 per cent of all pledges in August 1855 were 5*s* or less in value, 27 per cent 2*s*. 6*d* or less[3]—and who lived on the margin of subsistence.[4]

It is practically certain that this trend continued until the First World War. Thus Rowe's calculations show the average percentage of unskilled workers in building, in the coal mines, the cotton industry, engineering and the railways falling between 1886 and 1913 from 60·2 to 58·6 of the skilled, in spite of a slight narrowing of the differential

[1] S. Pollard, "Wages and Earnings in the Sheffield Trades, 1851–1914" in *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, VI (1954), p. 62. Dr. Pollard gives an index of annual earnings for various trades, but not, unfortunately, much direct information on differentials. I have added up all the annual increases and decreases to get a rough measure of comparative wage fluctuations. It is worth pointing out that this paper is one of the more important additions to our knowledge of 19th century wages since the days of Bowley and Wood.

[2] Le Play: *Les Ouvriers des Deux Mondes*, 2 ser., III, p. 69: also P. de Rousiers, *op. cit.*, pp. 14 ff.

[3] *Tabular Returns on Pawnbroking* (Liverpool 1860), not paginated. (Goldsmiths' Library, pp. xix, 60 (2)).

[4] Jane Walsh, *Not Like This* (1953) for a picture of the margin of subsistence even in the 20th century; Mrs. P. Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913).

among builders. In cotton the matter is quite clear.[1] (It is, of course, entirely likely that there were areas and times in which this was not so.) The real problem of the period of early Imperialism is, how important the semi-skilled workers were, and what happened to their wages. In the period 1840s–70s they may have done slightly better than the labourers, but almost certainly—if Chadwick is any guide—their position did not improve significantly relative to the labour aristocrats. Between 1886 and 1913 they lost ground to the labour aristocracy, except—but the exception is important—in the metal industries which were undergoing the first stages of the mass-production revolution and in cotton. Their average rates in Rowe's five industries remained stable at about 77 per cent of the skilled.[2]

IV. ARISTOCRACY OF LABOUR AND HIGHER STRATA

The relation between the labour aristocracy and the higher strata almost certainly worsened during the later 19th century, and this began seriously to affect its status, though not its earnings. Here we are on badly surveyed territory, for little is known about such subjects as the prospects of promotion, of "rising out of the working class" and about similar subjects.

Though the best study of the subject has been made for a small Danish town[3] the general situation is clear. The working class has become progressively more separate from other classes and internally recruited, and the chances of its members (or their children) of setting up as masters or independent producers have become progressively worse since the early days of industrialism. Nevertheless, it is evident that until the late 19th century the possibilities of labour aristocrats setting up independently or joining the employing classes were by no means negligible. We must, of course, neglect a good many social changes which did not take them out of that "lower middle class" stratum to which, as we have seen, they were reckoned to belong socially.[4] Most of the 5 per cent of the members of the plumbers' union who set up independently every year in the 1860s[5] probably

[1] Rowe, *op. cit.*, p. 49. R. Gibson, *Cotton Textile Wages in the United States and Great Britain* 1860–1945 (N.Y. 1948), p. 56.

[2] The shift of low-paid labour to somewhat higher-paid occupations which took place throughout the period after the 1840s—e.g. from agriculture into mining and railways, from unskilled labouring to semi-skilled work or from domestic to factory work—does not in itself affect the social stratification.

[3] T. Geiger, *Soziale Umschichtungen in einer daenischen Mittelstadt* (Acta Jutlandica, 1951).

[4] See above pp. 202–3.

[5] Calculated from its Quarterly Reports.

did not leave it; nor did the trade union leaders who set up as publicans, or printers and newsagents.[1] (Conversely, a foreman compositor, son of an independent jeweller and watchmaker, grandson of a whitesmith and stovemaker, or an engineer at B.S.A., son of a small independent Birmingham engineer would not feel themselves to be declassed.)[2] However, there are plenty of examples of better-off workers rising into the middle ranks of the employing class, though few of their becoming very rich. The small scale of many industries and the universal prevalence of sub-contracting made this quite possible and indeed blurred the line between worker and master.[3] Moreover, even in those industries in which hardly any worker could hope to start a firm successfully the road to high managerial positions in the small plants lay wide open. Most cotton mill managers in the 1890s and early 1900s appear to have come from the ranks of spinners' union; just as the leading glass-bottle maker in Castleford had once been general secretary of the union. It is accepted that many iron and steel-worker managers were promoted foremen.[4]

However, it would be wrong to assume that the views of the labour aristocracy were greatly affected by the prospects—remote, in the best of cases—of leaving their stratum. What did affect them was the knowledge that they occupied a firm and accepted position just below the employers, but very far above the rest. In most Continental countries there were, even in the 1860s, plenty of rivals for this position. There were strong groups of the prosperous petty-bourgeoisie and rich peasantry; large and respected bodies of public officials, lesser priests, schoolmasters, or even office workers. There were systems of public, primary and secondary education which provided alternative means of rising in the social scale to the strength, manual dexterity, craft-training and experience of the labour aristocrat: the social difference between physical and mental labour was much more marked, even at the lowest levels. In England (the case of Scotland is somewhat different) none of these existed, except the priesthood or nonconformist ministry; and the former was largely recruited from the ruling class, while the latter often

[1] E.g. John Doherty (Webb, *Hist. T.U.*, p. 104), Martin Jude (Welbourne, *The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham*, 1923, p. 61), William Newton (Webb, p. 188 n.), T. Dunning the shoemaker (Dunning's Reminiscences, *Trans. Lancs. & Chesh. Antiq. Soc.*, LIX, 1947).

[2] T. A. Jackson, *Solo Trumpet* (1953), pp. 26–7, *Workers Union Record*, April 1922.

[3] Nat. Ass. for Prom. Soc. Sci.: *Report on Trade Societies* (1860), pp. 530, 534.

[4] Chapman and Marquis, *op. cit.*, *R.C. Labour*, Gp. C, 30, 069–81; D. L. Burn, *Economic History of Steelmaking 1867–1939* (1939), pp. 3–12. Research on social mobility in Nottingham, as yet unpublished, suggests that the chance of becoming an employer was surprisingly small, even in the 19th century.

served as a link between the labour aristocracy and the lesser ranks of the employing class. No system of general primary education existed until 1870, of secondary education until 1902. The white-collar and official strata were of negligible importance. (Thus in 1841 there were only 114,000 civil servants and "other educated persons"—which includes bankers, merchants, brokers and agents as well as clerks, shopmen, literary and scientific men—in England out of about 6½ million people of employable age.)

The imperialist era changed all this, substituting non-managing employers or shareholders for owner-managers, driving a wedge of white-collar workers, and to a lesser extent of technicians and independently recruited managers between the labour aristocrats and the "masters", reducing their relative social position, and limiting their chances of promotion, and creating an "alternative hierarchy" of civil and local government servants and teachers. By 1914 this process had certainly gone some way, though it would make itself more felt in the South and the port towns than in the purely manufacturing or mining communities of the North and the "Celtic fringe". Admittedly most of the new strata were, in one way or another, the children of the "lower middle class" (including sections of the labour aristocracy), but this did not alter their effect. At any rate it is safe to say that by the end of the Edwardian era the gap above the labour aristocracy had widened, though that below it had not yet significantly narrowed.[1]

"*Co-exploitation*"

Capitalism in its early stages expands, and to some extent operates, not so much by directly subordinating large bodies of workers to employers, but by subcontracting exploitation and management. The characteristic structure of an archaic industry such as that of Britain in the earlier 19th century is one in which all grades except the lowest labourers contain men or women who have some sort of "profit-incentive". Thus the engineering employer might subcontract the building of a locomotive to a "piece-master" who would employ and pay his own craftsmen out of the price; and these in turn would employ and pay their own labourers. The employer might also hire and pay foremen, who in turn would hire, and have a financial interest in paying, such labour as did not work on subcontract. Such a labyrinth

[1] See also Cannan and Bowley, *Amount and Distribution other than Wages below the income tax exemption limit in U.K.* (British Ass., 1910). No good figures are available for the decline in owner-management or the rise of a separate stratum of "technicians and managers".

of interlocking subcontracts had certain advantages. It enabled small-scale enterprise to expand operations without raising unmanageably-great masses of circulating capital, it provided "incentives" to all groups of workers worth humouring, and it enabled industry to meet sharp fluctuations in demand without having to carry a permanent burden of overhead expenditure. (For this reason varieties of subcontracting are still widely used in industries with great fluctuations of demand, such as the clothing trade, and in primitive industries undertaking rapid expansion, such as the house-building boom of the 1930s.) On the other hand it has disadvantages, which have caused developed large-scale capitalism to abandon it for direct management, direct employment of all grades, and the provision of "incentives" by various forms of payment by result. Historically it may be regarded as a transitional stage in the development of capitalist management, just as the buying and selling of civil service posts and the hiring of armies by subcontract in the 16th and 17th centuries may be regarded as a transitional stage in the development of modern bureaucracies and military forces. I propose to call this phenomenon "co-exploitation", insofar as it made many members of the labour aristocracy into co-employers of their mates, and their unskilled workers.[1]

How widespread was co-exploitation? What effect had it on the nature of the labour aristocracy? The second point is easier to discuss than the first.

It is easy to exaggerate the contribution of co-exploitation to the constitution of an aristocracy of labour. It was almost certainly most widespread in the first half of the century, when the aristocracy was not fully developed. Many aristocrats opposed it in the form of subcontract and subcontracting foremanship, or even in the form of payment by results, since they rightly felt that it was a device for sweating them. Thus such unquestioned labour aristocrats as the engineers were rigidly opposed to piecework (let alone subcontract), and perhaps succeeded in reducing payment by results, as they certainly succeeded in slowing down its expansion[2] until the period of imperialism; while shipwrights, though used to group-subcontracts, were overwhelmingly paid on time.[3] Trade union hostility to such systems of subcontract as "piece-mastering", "buttying", "charter-mastering",

[1] D. F. Schloss, *Methods of Industrial Remuneration* (1892) is the standard work. See also numerous Parliamentary Enquiries on Labour, Trade Unions, Master and Servant Acts, the Sweating System and similar subjects, and monographs of some sweated industries.

[2] J. and M. Jefferys, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[3] 84.5 per cent of the 1886 sample in wood shipbuilding were paid on time. The carpenters opposed it in shipyards from 1882, *R.C. Labour, A.*, 22,077.

etc. was fairly constant. Again, the widespread practice of skilled men paying their unskilled helpers could and did eventually harden into little more than the usual fixed differential. As such it survived in a vestigial form in cotton-spinning until 1949 and in the shipyards even later. Lastly, subcontract as a general system might well favour the emergence not so much of an aristocracy of labour as of a struggling, and often not particularly prosperous, mass of small masters and sweaters some of whom succeeded in rising clear into the employers stratum while others relapsed from time to time into wage-labour. The typical "sweated industries" in Britain and on the Continent were not necessarily those with a strong labour aristocracy. Thus we must consider co-exploitation as something which reinforced the position of an existing labour aristocracy rather than as something which in itself enabled it to come into existence. Probably its main result was to stress the feeling of qualitative superiority which its members had over the "plebeians" and the intermediate workers. The foremen and supervisors who formed 3–4 per cent of the labour force in many industries in the 1860s[1] and all of whom, throughout the 19th century, had an element of co-exploitation and subcontract attached to them[2] have always been so acutely conscious of this—if only in the form of the right to hire and sack—that they have generally been regarded by workers as "boss's men". The mere fact of paying a labourer's wage made the craftsman a superior kind of worker, not merely a better-paid one, even if he did not have an interest in actually sweating him. Moreover such relationships made it easier for labour aristocrats to maintain an exclusiveness and a restriction of numbers which might otherwise have been difficult to keep, e.g., in boilermaking and cotton.

How prevalent was co-exploitation? In the form of subcontracting it was widely prevalent in the iron and steel industry, iron shipbuilding a part of coal mining (notably the Midlands), all small-scale workshop or "sweated" trades, many transport trades such as dock-labour, in the period of rapid construction, in public works, railway and mine-construction and the like, and in several other trades. In the building and engineering industries it was certainly fighting a rear-guard action by the 1850–73 period and in printing, where it was not uncommon, its teeth had been drawn partly by trade unionism, partly by genuinely co-operative group-contracts (though these were declining rapidly).[3]

[1] Baxter, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[2] Schloss, *op. cit.*, chap. xii.

[3] *ibid.*, chap. xiii. For the localisation of complaints about subcontract in certain industries and areas, cf. *S.C. on Mines*, 1866, XIV, *S.C. on Master & Servant*, 1866, XIII, *R.C. Labour* (1891–3), *passim*.

In the more general form of skilled workers hiring or paying their unskilled, or skilled workers being paid by results while their helpers were paid on time, it was also prevalent in cotton, the potteries, the mines, and indeed in one form or another in most industries in which piece-work obtained. Straight subcontract was certainly declining fast from the 1870s (except for the industries and situations mentioned earlier). Comparatively little survived the First World War.[1] The same is true of skilled men co-employing the unskilled. These systems were increasingly replace by ordinary piece-work, or (from 1900) by more "scientific" methods of payment by results, which served to raise the earnings of many aristocrats of labour, but also served—as the event showed—to break down the barrier between them and the semi-skilled piece-workers. However, we may assume that co-exploitation coloured the relations of most labour aristocrats to the lesser grades until the last quarter of the 19th century; the major exceptions being the building trades, engineering and some old crafts.[2]

V. THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY UNDER MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

If this survey merely concluded in 1914 without a few words about the future development of the 19th-century labour aristocracy, it would give a misleading impression. For 1914 marks a deceptive "Indian summer" for this stratum, as it does for British capitalism as a whole. New tendencies, which were to undermine it had already come into being, though only some had yet made themselves felt. The period from 1914 on was to see a collapse of the old labour aristocracy comparable to the collapse of the old skilled handicrafts, and the specialized key workers attached to the domestic industries—woolcombers, shearmen, hecklers and the like—in the decades after the Napoleonic Wars, though probably more serious. We may briefly note the following factors. *First*, the regions of 19th-century "basic industries" (i.e. the strongholds of the then labour aristocracy) declined into the Depressed Areas of the inter-war years. *Second*, the change in systems of wage-payment caused the differential between "skilled" and "unskilled" to narrow steadily from 1914 until the 1950s, though in piece-working industries this was not necessarily reflected in an equivalent narrowing of earnings. *Third*, the rise of a large class of semi-skilled machine-operators mainly paid by results, and the relative diminution in

[1] G. D. H. Cole, *The Payment of Wages* (1918) summarises the position.

[2] Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, chap. v, for the best discussion of attitudes to time and piece-work.

numbers of the old unskilled "fetching and carrying" kind of labourer filled much of the great gap which had once separated the aristocrat from the plebeian; moreover, in some industries mechanization actually declassed labour aristocrats. *Fourth*, the continued growth in the white-collar, managerial and technical strata (the "office" as against the "workshop") lowered their social position still further, relatively and perhaps absolutely; for the new technicians and managers could by now be recruited not only from sons of labour aristocrats of the old type, but also from sons and daughters of the first-generation white-collar and technical strata.

This down-grading is to some extent reflected in the change in the policy of the unions of former labour aristocrats. It is no accident that some of the most conservative unions of the later 19th century—engineers, boilermakers, ironfounders, and several groups of mine-workers—have today become the unions in which left-wing leadership is most marked. However, one cannot speak of a *wholesale* down-grading of the labour aristocracy. Some sections (in old fashioned industries) maintained their differentials virtually intact—e.g. cotton, where unions have also remained very conservative. Some were protected by monopoly from the worst results of the slumps, as in iron and steel; some, like building, survived with very little major change from the 19th century; some like printing, had adjusted themselves to the new technological changes before 1914. Yet others benefited by the rise of new industries: cars, electrical work, light engineering, and the like. Even in 1953 there are a great many groups who belong to the best-paid workers as they would have belonged to the labour aristocracy in 1900. Nevertheless, there has been a change. Even the Birmingham area, which voted for Chamberlain, conservatism and imperialism from 1886 to 1945 is today (so far as one can see) permanently labour.

The analysis of the labour aristocracy under monopoly capitalism must therefore proceed somewhat differently from that of 19th century capitalism. I can merely conclude by suggesting some of the lines on which it might proceed; observing that it may no longer be possible to make it simply an analysis of the best-paid strata of the British working class.[1] *First*, it will have to note the survivals and adaptations of the 19th-century aristocracy; including the expansion of what was then a numerically and politically very small group, the permanent full time

[1] For a fuller discussion, see E. J. Hobsbawm, "Trends in the British Labour Movement," *Science and Society*, XIII (1949), p. 4.

officialdom of trade unions and the full time politicians among labour leaders. *Second*, it will have to stress the new labour aristocracy of salaried white collar, technical and similar workers which (so far with sectional or temporary exceptions) considers itself so "different" from the working class as to remain largely conservative in politics and unorganised, except in special associations. *Third*, it will have to deal with the emergence of a relatively contented stratum of "plebeians" promoted to semi-skilled factory work, to secure jobs in and about the vastly swollen apparatus of government and so on; of those groups largely organised by the two great General Unions which, though beginning as revolutionary and even Marxist organisations have increasingly become the main strongholds of right-wing trade union policy.[1] *Lastly*, it will have seriously to consider the implications of Engels' remark that "the English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie. For a nation which exploits the whole world this is of course to a certain extent justifiable."[2] To what extent, under the conditions of imperialism, monopoly and state-capitalism, do all—or a majority of—workers receive some benefit from the imperialist position of their country? To what extent is the whole of the British working class in the position of those North Italian strikers against whom in 1917—as Gramsci tells[3]—a brigade of soldiers from backward Sardinia was sent. "What have you come to Turin for?" the communists asked them. "We have come to put down the gentlefolk who are on strike." "But those aren't the gentlefolk who are striking; they are workers and they are poor." "These chaps are all gentlefolk: they all wear a collar and tie and earn 30 lire a day. I know the poor folk and what they are dressed like. In Sassari they are poor; and we earn 1 lire 50 a day." In the 19th century this problem barely arises, for such crumbs from the super profits as were thrown to the workers certainly went to the labour aristocracy and not to very many others. In the modern phase of British capitalism this may no longer be so. However, the analysis of working-class stratification, and of the political results of workers receiving sectional benefits, however small or unreal, may help us to understand the problems of the British working class in the mid-20th century, even if the actual

[1] E. J. Hobsbawm, "General Unions in Britain 1889–1913", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, N.S. 1, Nos. 2 and 3, 1949; G. D. H. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions* (1923), p. 205.

[2] Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (1934), pp. 115–16.

[3] A. Gramsci, *La Questione Meridionale* (Rome 1951), pp. 18–19.

divisions within it are no longer always those which were typical of the 19th century.

The concept of "labour aristocracy" plays a great part in the Marxist analysis of the evolution of labour movements. It has also been used by other observers—for instance J. A. Hobson. Anti-Marxists have tended to throw doubt upon it, as upon so many other parts of Marxist analysis. Thus a recent polemical work observes that "the theory of the labour aristocracy is as artificial as the theory of class struggle within the peasantry."[1] I hope that this essay has shown that, so far as the 19th century in Britain is concerned, it rests upon solid foundations of economic and political reality.

Appendix

Some possible ways of discovering the composition of the labour aristocracy. Wage-rates and, where available, earnings have been used as the main criterion of membership of the labour aristocracy. In view of the absence of data before the 1890s some supplementary methods of analysis may be suggested. They have the disadvantage that the facts are open to different interpretations, i.e. that one must know *a priori* which interpretation is to be preferred. That is why they have not been used in the text.

The first is based on the proportion of women and children in an industry. The argument is as follows. A high proportion of women and children always argues either a low general level of wages or a large "tail" of declassed craftsmen. However, it is not possible to determine from it whether the labour aristocracy in the industry is so small as to be negligible (as in Jute) or merely distinct from the mass (as in cotton). Moreover, certain occupations are intrinsically unsuitable for women and juveniles (e.g. gas-making). An abnormally high proportion of boys in these might argue either depressed wages for men or, more likely, an abnormal advantage for the men, and hence a greater potential labour aristocracy (as perhaps in some coal-fields).

The second is based on the proportion of aged workers. The argument here is as follows. An abnormally high proportion of men past say, sixty in an occupation indicates either that the work is very skilled and very light (as in watch-making) or that it is merely very light (as in gate-keeping) *or* that the occupation attracts the old and infirm and is thus likely to contain a high

[1] H. Seton-Watson, *The Pattern of Communist Revolution* (1953), p. 341.

proportion of non-aristocrats. If the work is specially hard a relatively high proportion may be absolutely quite low. We may thus conclude that "aged" occupations are either very aristocratic or very plebeian. However, we must bear in mind that in many professions it is physically impossible for old men to work at all, e.g. gas-stoking or iron-puddling.

In considering both these arguments we must remember that unskilled occupations must normally expect to contain a small percentage of the very young and very old.

The third is based on statistics of illiteracy. The argument here is a little more complicated. (*a*) It may be held that "aristocratic" areas will be less illiterate than "plebeian" ones. But it must be borne in mind that there is a general tendency for old economic occupations, well or badly paid, to be more literate than new ones—e.g. in the earlier 19th century (somewhat surprisingly) for agriculture to be more literate than industry. (*b*) It may be held that an abnormal disparity between the literacy of men and women indicates an abnormally depressed condition of women, and hence of unskilled and low-grade labour in general.

The fourth is based on statistics of pauperism, especially in old age. Here the assumption is that the less aristocratic areas will also contain more pauperism in old age. However, as against this there is (*a*) the fact that old age pauperism will generally be smaller in tight local communities where neighbourhood and family help is common (e.g. in villages and small towns) and (*b*) that certain regions show a notably greater propensity to save for old age then others.

The first two arguments enable us to track down the labour aristocracy sectionally, the second two regionally or locally. The statistics for them are available in the Censuses, the Registrar-Generals and Poor Law Reports.

To illustrate the first point. The following table shows the proportion of boys and females in various occupations in 1865 (Source : Levi):

Proportion of boys and females in occupations, 1865

Crafts with less than 30% boys, few women:

A *Light crafts*	B *Heavier crafts*	C *Heavy work*
*Musical instruments	*Engineering	Sugar Boiling
*Lithographers	*Sawyers, Coopers	Millers
*Scientific Instruments	*Shipbuilding	Quarrymen
?*Men's Tailoring	?*Building	Saltmakers
*Skinners, Tanners	?*Baking	Brewers
*Watch and Clock-making	Waterworks	Soap Boilers
*Coachmaking		Gasworkers
?*Harnessmaking		Brickmakers
*Combmaking		

D Crafts with less than 30% boys, more than 30% women:

*Bookbinding	*Woodcarving
Boot and Shoe	*Hatters
*Leather Case Makers	*Gold and Silver

Crafts with more than 30% of boys:

E *Light crafts*	F *Heavy or strenuous* (over 30% boys and women)
*Printing	Coalmining
?*Cabinet Making, Upholstery	?*Iron
?*Cutlery	Chemicals
?*Brushmakers	*Glass
?*Other woodwork	?*Metal, other than Iron

* known to be aristocratic, or to contain a high proportion of aristocrats.
?* containing an aristocracy, but also many depressed workers.

It would therefore seem that, in the absence of other information, the proportion of boys and females chiefly helps us to discover skilled trades with a large "tail" of depressed workers which might otherwise be overlooked. It would be a mistake to use the figures too much—e.g. to conclude that printers in 1865 contained a less strong or marked labour aristocracy than tailors.

The second point is equally inconclusive. Thus an analysis of the Scottish census of 1861 shows that men of 60 years and over formed more than 10 per cent of the labour force in numerous factory industries, chiefly textiles and the relics of domestic industry; and from 7 to 10 per cent—a very high proportion—in heavy labouring jobs such as coal-heaving, gasworks and quarries. But they also formed over 10 per cent in a number of crafts, such as the building trade, shoemakers, coopers and cutlers which we have no right to regard as specially depressed.

The third criterion gives more interesting results. We can divide the occupationally specialised areas of England and Wales into two groups, the "old" and the "new". Within the old areas there is a clear distinction between agricultural areas and the old craft towns. In the former—taking 1863 as our vantage-point—male illiteracy was fairly high—28 to 36 per cent, 29 per cent for soldiers, and female illiteracy consistently lower than the men's. (But this phenomenon had only developed in the 1850s.) In the latter generally illiteracy was much lower than the average, but women were worse educated than men—e.g. in Melksham (West Country textiles) the percentages were 23 and 26 respectively, in Stroud (West Country textiles) 21 and 24, in Bristol 19 and 26, in Rotherhithe (shipbuilding and riverside crafts) 16 and 23. Within the new areas three distinctions may be made. First, there are towns in which skilled labour was strong, with a consistently low illiteracy. These are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the old craft towns, but it is significant that

not only old shipbuilding centres, but new shipbuilding and repairing centres like Birkenhead (15 and 25 per cent) had low illiteracy. Second, there are the backward and illiterate centres of the mining and iron trade and the appallingly barbarised semi-domestic, semi-craft areas of the West Midlands. Here both men and women were ignorant, though the women somewhat more so. In 1863 the joint average exceeded 45 per cent—terrible figure—in such places as Merthyr (64), Dudley (59), Neath (52), Wolverhampton (47), Walsall (46), Monmouth (47) and indeed in Staffordshire and South Wales as a whole. Third, there are the textile areas in which the men were moderately, the women shockingly illiterate. Thus in all the main cotton towns twice as many women were illiterate as men, the men's average being between 25 and 30 per cent. The same is true of woollen towns, though average male illiteracy was much lower, perhaps because of the greater age of the industry. Women in hosiery and lace towns were strikingly better situated.

The progress of literacy between the first recording of statistics in 1838–9 and 1874–8 modifies the picture a little. In 1838–9 the farming areas were not yet so well placed. They may be divided into three parts: the far North (Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland) which were the most literate counties of all, bar London, perhaps because of the influence of their educated Scots neighbours; the southern and southwestern counties where male illiteracy was about as large as in 1864, though female illiteracy was still much higher, and the Eastern and East Midland counties as well as some of the Thames valley ones in which it was appalling (the joint average reaching or exceeding 50 per cent in Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire—60 per cent!—Essex and Wiltshire). Nevertheless, Lancashire had a higher male illiteracy rate than all but the nine worst agricultural counties). South Wales and the West Midlands were even then at the bottom of the list. Since the great expansion of coal-mining was yet to come, Durham had very low male and not much less than average female illiteracy (24 and 49 per cent). The expansion of mining was to turn it into a relatively very illiterate area, thus illustrating graphically the shocking effects of industrialisation on the condition of the people. Between 1841–5 and 1874–8 progress both among men and women was slowest in London, the Northeast, Yorkshire and Worcestershire. In the later 1870s the most illiterate of the industrial counties remained those of South Wales, Worcestershire and Staffordshire and the northern mining areas. The differential between men and women remained widest in Lancashire.

Detailed investigation confirms this picture. The highest percentages for men (over 20 per cent) now occurred in unskilled centres like Liverpool, in mining areas like Easington, Bishop Auckland, Barnsley, Houghton-le-Spring, in iron and steel centres like Middlesbrough, Warrington, Hunslet, but also in depressed woollen centres like Dewsbury. Female illiteracy double that of men occurs in towns like Keighley, Halifax, Bradford, Bolton, Bury, Salford, Manchester, Oldham, Preston, Blackburn, Burnley. In the nature of things the specific literacy of aristocratic workers is increasingly hard to discover because

centres of their trades (e.g. Swindon and York with their railway workshops) are often like those medium-sized towns surrounded by rural areas in which one would expect to find good education—e.g. Lancaster. Nevertheless, the difference between the railway town of Doncaster and the mining town of Barnsley is striking.

We may conclude that areas with consistently high illiteracy cannot normally be regarded as "aristocratic" in the 19th century sense, though they may contain highly-paid, if insecure workers. We should, other things being equal, expect to find a high degree of secondary poverty there. Areas with a wide differential between men and women, on the other hand, and those with consistently low illiteracy should be the main centres of labour aristocracy.

The analysis of aged poverty confirms this in part, though it shows coal-mining centres to be consistently better off in this respect than iron and steel centres (e.g. in 1894 in Glamorgan, Monmouth and Carmarthen out of eighteen unions 46 per cent or more of all people over sixty-five were paupers in six: Llanelly (36), Neath (37), Pontypool (38) Swansea (39), Bridgend (40), Bedwellty (42). In Northumberland, Durham and the North Riding Middlesbrough (46) was by far the worst centre of old-age pauperism.) Broadly speaking (aside from the pauperised villages) the worst centres were those of unskilled port-towns and similar centres—London, Liverpool, Bristol—the iron and steel centres, and the usual black spots of small scale Midland semi-domestic industry—Dudley, Kidderminster and the like.

The analysis of illiteracy and old-age pauperism therefore helps to give some depth to, and to some extent to modify, our picture of working-class stratification.

8

WORDSWORTH AND THE PEOPLE

V. G. KIERNAN

My heart was all
Given to the People, and my love was theirs.
(The Prelude, Book IX)

WORDSWORTH devoted the greater part of his life to the study of political and social questions, and Marx a great part of his to the study of poetry. For both men the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution were supreme facts; and of the other chief ingredients of Marxism the poetry of the Romantic age is at least as important as the German metaphysics. Marx himself was once a young romantic poet, and if later on he and his friends were notably silent about the nature of their ideals, it was because they took these for granted and could confine themselves rigorously to building the road across chaos to the new world that the poets had seen in the distance. Today it may be time for Marxism to defend not only the economists of that age against their erring successors, but its writers, as men of revolutionary hopes and therefore in bad odour now, though in good company, with Milton.[1]

That in modern society intellectual and artist are separated from any genuine contact with their fellow-men has come to be a matter of course. Only in epochs of great and volcanic energy is a high enough temperature generated to melt down this stony isolation, even partially. For the Romantics of Europe the fall of the Bastille was a wonderful event, above all because it made it seem possible for men like them to be brought back into the circle of humanity, as if returning to Eden. Of the English romantic poets Wordsworth was the only important one who saw the Revolution as it were face to face; he experienced longer and more urgently than any of the others the problem of the relation between artist and people, art and life, individual and mass. "Society

[1] "What Byron saw already—that Pope was a greater poet than Byron himself or any of his contemporaries—is now generally recognised. The Romantics are now under a cloud...." (S. Spender, *Shelley*, (1952), p. 44.)

has parted man from man":[1] he searched for a means of overcoming this morbid division, and his task was at bottom the same as that of finding a bridge between himself and the world of men. He failed; but if it is true that he has meant little to modern poets,[2] most of these have perhaps not even attempted what he failed in; and his work in the years round 1800 may still be, both for example and for warning, one of our chief starting-points for a new literature.[3]

In Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches*,[4] written in 1791–2 on the banks of the Loire, can be found a surprising number of what were to be the dominant themes of his later work. Prominent among them was that of Freedom, always to remain, though in diverse forms, one of his leading thoughts. Ages ago man was "entirely free, alone and wild", "none restraining, and by none restrained", unless by God. Even now, "traces of primeval Man", of a bygone society not divided into classes, could be found in remote valleys like those of Switzerland, or of Cumberland. There, the argument implied, men felt no need of any government and ran no risk of misgovernment; all they wanted was to be left alone. There was another side to the picture, however, in the cutting poverty of the free mountain-folk, poverty in which Wordsworth saw reflected "the general sorrows of the human race". His early pessimism was much more than a youthful pose; he was never to shake it off for very long. And this thought led directly to the conclusion of the poem, in which he saw the Revolution arming for battle against the leagued despots of Europe and prayed for the triumph of the good cause. He believed in the Revolution because he felt that it promised to bring Freedom down from the mountains, where she had been hiding like a timid chamois, on to the fertile plains. France had made the grand discovery that "Freedom spreads her power Beyond the cottage-hearth, the cottage-door".

Poverty could thus be abolished, for most of mankind were only poor

[1] *The Prelude*, II, 219. This and all later quotations from this poem are from the Text of 1805 edited by E. de Selincourt (1933). All references to the long poems are to the book and the line.

[2] D. Bush, in *Wordsworth Centenary Studies* (ed. G. T. Dunklin, 1951), p. 9.

[3] With this work Blake's *Songs* might of course be coupled, and the resemblances and contrasts between these two poets are highly instructive.

[4] Both the 1793 and the later versions are printed in the Oxford one-volume edition of Wordsworth (1904). All passages referred to here occur in the earlier text, if not in both. The earlier text is often the less polished; but Coleridge was to say of it: "Seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced." (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817, chapter IV); cf. De Quincey's appreciation, in *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets*, Everyman, pp. 129–30. G. M. Harper remarks that here already Wordsworth was describing common people with a novel freedom from condescension (*William Wordsworth, His Life, Works and Influence*, 1916, I, p. 95).

because they were enslaved. In Wordsworth's later account of these days in *The Prelude*, the most poignant moment is the one where his friend Beaupuy points to the starving country girl and exclaims "'Tis against *that* Which we are fighting."[1] Wordsworth was haunted all his life by the image of an outcast, suffering woman. It occurs first in the earliest of his poems that reached publication, *An Evening Walk* of his college days—a sick woman dragging herself along the Lakeland roads with her starving infants: a single painful episode in an idyllic poem.[2] It reappears in *Descriptive Sketches*, and in all the succeeding long poems, including *The Borderers*, as well as many short ones, down to 1800; it has other reincarnations after that, especially in *The White Doe*, and finally it dwindles away into those chocolate-box martyrs, the Russian Fugitive and the Egyptian Princess. In this figure we have a key to Wordsworth's social problem, that of poverty, as in the idea of Freedom we have a key to his political thinking. The Revolution brought the two together.

His politics in the period after his unpublished *Apology for the French Revolution* of 1793 can be seen most clearly in two letters to Matthews in 1794, when they were planning a political journal.[3] His views were very radical indeed: he thought, though reluctantly, that things might soon become so bad as to make even the terrible event of a revolution in England welcome; not agitation, but a villainous Government, was driving the country towards it. He was above all outraged by what in his eyes was the monstrous wickedness of the Government in going to war with France; war, indeed, seemed to him the characteristic crime of States. He was doubly isolated. He wanted France to win, as she did; he was revolted by the Terror, the Jacobin dictatorship of the crisis; at home those in power seemed to him eager to imitate so far as they could the crimes though not the virtues of the Revolution, and to degrade law into "A tool of Murder".[4] The middle-class progressive movement

[1] *Prelude*, IX, 509 ff. The French Revolution and Wordsworth's interpretations of it are among the relevant topics which there is only space to mention briefly in this essay. He was a sort of 'Girondin,' but his *Apology* of 1793 could be at least as well described as 'Jacobin' in temper. In general, he may be forgiven for not having fully understood an upheaval whose complex forces we are still trying to understand today, after a hundred and fifty years.

[2] The *Evening Walk* was a rewriting of the still earlier *Vale of Esthwaite*, and the picture of the forlorn woman was originally borrowed from a poem by Langhorne. (See H. Darbishire, *The Poet Wordsworth* (1950), p. 20; E. de Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and Other Studies* (1947), pp. 15 ff.)—For criticisms of the "psychoanalytical" view that this theme was inspired by nothing more than a guilty conscience in Wordsworth himself, see W. L. Sperry, *Wordsworth's Anti-Climax* (1935), p. 95; H. Sergeant, *The Cumberland Wordsworth* (1950), pp. 28 ff.

[3] *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 1787–1805* (ed. E. de Selincourt, 1938), pp. 114, 119.

[4] *Prelude*, X, 648.

towards Parliamentary reform was blocked; abstract radical theorising among Godwinian intellectuals was no substitute for healthy activity. Wordsworth, a practical countryman, always wanted to come to grips with something concrete. He was growing disgusted with his own sort of people, as well as with his country; he "Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come".[1]

Hence his turning away from the educated classes to the "common people", towards whom history was, as it were, forcing him all through his years as a great poet. The impulse had stirred in him earlier than this time. In his first vacation from Cambridge he had looked at his plain rustic neighbours with a new sense of "love and knowledge", a new "human-heartedness", and it was then that he had his nocturnal meeting with the old soldier whose "ghastly figure", "solemn and sublime" in its simplicity, was to throw a long shadow over his poetry.[2] In France he had loved "the People", but a foreign people, and in part a figment of political rhetoric. Now he wanted to know his fellow-beings as they really were.

How far he could get on this new road would depend on many things besides his own resources. He began, necessarily, with remnants of an older, pre-1789 way of looking at things, in which the philosopher or sage (or "intellectual", as we say) virtuously dedicated himself to the happiness of his less fortunate fellows. In phrases like "the labours of benevolence", "the labours of the sage", "Heroes of Truth",[3] we can see that attitude peeping out. From it to a real enrollment of the intellectual in a progressive mass movement was to be a very long-drawn historical process, far from completed a century and a half later. He found no organised movement to gravitate towards; and he was living near the end of the pre-Copernican epoch in political thought—with the Revolution, action had for the time left theory far behind—and had no serviceable analysis of classes or the State to help him. A radical error lurked in him from the beginning: he was turning to the common people, not so much in search of a force capable of carrying to success the lofty hopes fostered and disappointed since 1789, as in search of a consolation in the sight of humble virtue for the "Ambition, folly,

[1] *Prelude*, x, 275.—"Wordsworth, as the course of his life shows, had not a *real* confidence in himself. He was curiously compounded of timorousness and courage." (Harper, *op. cit.*, II, 323; he emphasises that Wordsworth was "the most political of all our great poets" except Milton; I, p. ix). This inner uncertainty in Wordsworth is to be connected with his isolation from any organised movement.

[2] *Prelude*, IV, 200 ff, 400 ff.

[3] *Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree* (*Lyrical Ballads*, I), and cancelled stanzas of *Guilt and Sorrow* (see Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–9).

madness" of the world's rulers. He wanted to satisfy himself that "real worth", "genuine knowledge", "true power of mind", could be found in the labouring poor, in spite of an unjust society, and that the basic human qualities could thus survive in an iron age in the common people who—he agreed with Robespierre—were free of the corruptions of their superiors.[1]

These ideas must have been growing in his mind for a considerable time before he came to systematise them in the *Preface* of 1800. In the *Prelude* he associated them with, for instance, his walk on Salisbury Plain in 1793, when he felt again a fresh stirring of his poetic energy.[2] This was the decisive moment in the moulding of his next long poem, *Guilt and Sorrow*.[3] It is a very impressive, though it may not be a dazzling poem. It moves firmly, with a strong cumulative effect; Wordsworth was never to achieve greater success along this line, or rather was never again to undertake anything quite like it. It owes its firmness of outline, and the solidity of its two chief characters, to the fact that the sufferings of these two homeless outcasts are rooted in the reality of social injustice. As before, Wordsworth keeps his two problems of government and poverty, close together, under the shadow of his prime evil, unjust war. In *An Evening Walk* the poor woman's husband was a soldier, far away "on Bunker's charnel hill". Here the man is a sailor, press-ganged and made to serve for years as "Death's minister", maddened by ill-usage, and so hurried into the crime of murder. His fellow-vagrant is the daughter of a poor man ruined by oppression, the widow of an artisan ruined by war and unemployment and driven by hunger into the army, where he perished. She too has been forced by misery into crime.[4]

Wordsworth comes closest here to reaching, but does not quite reach, a recognition of State and law as things not foreign and extrinsic

[1] *Prelude*, XII, 71, 98–9. Cf. Robespierre: "I bear witness . . . that in general there is no justice or goodness like that of the people . . . and that among the poor . . . are found honest and upright souls, and a good sense and energy that one might seek long and in vain among a class that looks down upon them." (Speech of August 22, 1791; see J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (1935), p. 168.)

[2] *Prelude*, XII, 312 ff.

[3] According to Wordsworth's Note on this poem (see *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. A. B. Grosart (1876), III, p. 10) the story of the *Female Vagrant*, forming the second part, was taken from life. The poem was begun in 1791, completed in 1794, and re-worked later; for instance in Germany in 1799 Wordsworth was thinking of inserting another improbable coincidence (*The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 223). It was not published as a whole till 1842. With its range of ideas may be compared that of the *Religious Musings* (1794) of Coleridge, whose development was in many ways parallel to Wordsworth's.

[4] This version of 1798, as the *Female Vagrant* stood in *Lyrical Ballads*, was later somewhat toned down.

to society, but integral parts of an unjust social order. His band of gipsies are happy because they have no chiefs or separate property among them, but they too stand outside society and can do nothing to remedy it—they are free men astray and soiled in a bad world. War is an unexplained evil; and in later years, when Wordsworth came to accept the war with France, he came to accept the British Government with it. At present, though this is a radical and 'progressive' poem, Wordsworth has not succeeded in making it a revolutionary one. Its atmosphere belongs to Dostoievsky rather than to Gorki, or even to Tolstoy. At the bottom of these forlorn creatures a fundamental goodness remains, a light glimmers in the darkness. They, unlike their rulers, have sinned involuntarily, and it is better, the sailor tells the brutal peasant, to suffer than to inflict injuries. Wordsworth feels overpoweringly the guilt of society, but he is not strengthened by any active movement towards setting it right. It seems irremediable; and because of this it transfers itself to its own victims, who become its scapegoats. The sailor's obsessive memory of his own crime is what the poem succeeds most vividly in presenting. Haunted and paralysed by this sense of guilt, the sufferers of the social order are powerless against what has ruined them. It ends in that turning away from earth to heaven, later to become the fatal habit of Wordsworth's thinking.

In September 1795 he went to live with his sister Dorothy at Racedown in Dorset; from there he moved in July 1797 to Alfoxden in Somerset, in September 1798 to Germany, and finally in December 1799 to Grasmere. This "healing time of his spirit"[1] has been much dwelt on by biographers, and he has been given much credit for shaking off his revolutionary nonsense and settling down sensibly like a middle-class poet to write middle-class poetry. This is misleading in several ways. He was not exactly retiring to the countryside, for he had already been spending nearly all his time there. In the region he was moving to in 1795 he would be likely to see a good deal more of the poverty and distress that beset his thoughts than he had been seeing in Penrith. "The peasants are miserably poor," wrote Dorothy in one of her first letters from Racedown.[2] The works he now set about writing

[1] J. C. Shairp, *Preface* to the 1874 edition of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Scottish Journal*, p. xvii.

[2] *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 148. The passage goes on: "their cottages are shapeless structures . . . indeed they are not at all beyond what might be expected in savage life."—In many parts of Dorset whole parishes were being engrossed into one or two hands, and this "fatal blow" was reducing the small farmer to a labourer, considered by the wealthy farmer as "a mere vassal". (J. Claridge, *General View of the Agriculture in the County of Dorset . . .*, 1793, pp. 22–3.)

(*The Borderers*, late 1795–6, and *The Ruined Cottage*, a slower growth) were still of an extremely gloomy cast, and continued the wrestling with his problems where *Guilt and Sorrow* had left off. He was not throwing down his shield and flying from the battlefield like Horace at Philippi; he was only turning away from a "fretful stir unprofitable", which included the uproar of war propaganda as well as vexation at his own unavailing efforts to find an active part to play. He still hated the Government and the condition of society, though it may be with less of urgency in his opposition as the war changed its character. The Revolution was over, France was out of danger after the Basle treaties of 1795, and on both sides the Anglo-French contest was falling back into its old rut, the quarrelling of two empires over markets and slave-plantations.

Wordsworth's opposition did, in the years 1796–1800, acquire more of a passive and negative character. In these five years he was to turn over many new leaves in English literature, and produce much work of high value. Other parts of his output were to be less good. He was losing as well as gaining, declining as well as advancing; and what he lost politically through being out of touch with any movement was of ill omen for his poetical future.

He began—simplifying his task for the moment and complicating it for the future—by separating his 'political' from his 'social' problem. *The Borderers* is an intellectual study of politics, based on Wordsworth's understanding (necessarily limited and fragmentary) of the French Revolution; more exactly, a study of the psychology of action, and particularly—in the character of Oswald—the psychology of terrorism. In it he moved towards a conviction that the troubles of mankind were insoluble by *action*, which was more likely than not to lead to worse than failure. "Action is transitory", its consequences incalculable. A tragic fatality seemed to overshadow even "the motion of a muscle this way or that", as it had overshadowed the sailor's crime in *Guilt and Sorrow*.[1] Here, growing upon Wordsworth's mind, was the mode of thinking of the isolated spectator of events, to whom the possibility seemed remote of any activity being both good and successful. "The world is poisoned at the heart."[2]

The Ruined Cottage is removed from the world of action altogether. A cottage-weaver, reduced to misery by unemployment following bad harvests and war, deserts his wife and infants and joins the army; she dies slowly of a broken heart and of want. Wordsworth tells this story,

[1] See the lines from *The Borderers* which Wordsworth later prefixed to *The White Doe*.
[2] *The Borderers*, 1036.

taking many of its touches from the life of the people around him, with profound sympathy, and the quality of the poetry is very high. It is so partly because Wordsworth takes a more limited canvas than in the woman's story in the earlier poem. His new heroine Margaret is a stationary figure, not a wanderer over the earth; she is a passive victim of misfortunes that squeeze her life out inch by inch. She has no contact with other victims, though it is a time of mass distress that the poem refers to; this is a step back from even the half-formed idea in *Descriptive Sketches*, that in "life's long deserts" it is better to be joined with others in the "mighty caravan of pain: Hope, strength and courage social suffering brings". The writer is now looking at his theme more from outside, as a fine painting of human grief. War is attributed to the will of Heaven, rather than to iniquity. Attention has moved from the social to the individual; and Wordsworth's inability to see any remedy for the ills he describes is taking shape in the philosophical narrator of the story, the old Pedlar. As the poem gradually grew and unfolded like a plant, this part of it expanded, until by March 1798 Dorothy could speak of the Pedlar having come to play the *largest* part in it.[1] This throws a long shadow forward; for the Pedlar of 1798 was to grow into the Wanderer of *The Excursion*, and he already embodied the negative, quietist tendency in Wordsworth's mind—much as Coleridge's later decrepit self was prefigured by the reformed churchgoer at the end of the *Ancient Mariner*. Through the Pedlar, Wordsworth was groping for moral instead of political solutions; he was trying to extract from "mournful thoughts" and sights "A power to virtue friendly", and coming closer to the quagmire of Resignation that was one day to swallow him up.

He was not satisfied; he went on for years and years tormenting himself over this poem, trying to cobble it into something more convincing. He had now written a good deal since 1793, but had got nothing into a shape for publication, which was a symptom of his frustrated condition. Now, in 1798, came the change marked by the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*. For him the short poem was a novelty, and always remained something of a condescension—a bagatelle; but it allowed him to express feelings as they arose, to strike sparks where he could not kindle a bonfire, and thus to recover himself now as a poet with something to say to the public. He had Coleridge to admire and stimulate him, and in some ways this was, as it has often been called, his springtime and

[1] *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, pp. 176 ff, containing a draft of the poem in the form described here.

rebirth. Spring was in his thoughts, his powers were expanding, he heard the "mighty sum of things" speaking to him in fresh tones. "Never did fifty things at once Appear so lovely, never, never."[1]

In preparation for the giant life-work now floating before his eyes, he felt again the need to learn more of himself (he was soon to begin *The Prelude*), and more of his fellows. These two studies were still closely related. He was going in search of the People again, not hiding from them; the voice of Nature included the voice of simple, natural man. But as before there was loss as well as gain. Neither Coleridge nor Dorothy, nor the "wise passiveness" they were helping to foster in him, could be an altogether reliable guide for such a man. In the Prologue to *Peter Bell* (summer 1798) it is possible to read a dual meaning into the poet's return from his imaginary voyaging among the stars to "the dear green Earth" where alone he could feel "I am a man", and his rejection of "the realm of Faery" in favour of the humdrum tale of a potter beating a donkey. He was banishing fantasy and choosing reality as the theme of his poetry; but fantasy was beginning to include the limbo of political strife and faction, as Wordsworth thought of it in those moods when he turned away too indiscriminately from "the sages' books" to the running brooks.[2] 'Reality' was thus in danger of impoverishment.

However lovely the face of Nature might seem, the subjects that attracted him were often far from lovely. Fewer than half of the 1798 *Ballads* leave a cheerful impression. Nearly half are concerned with Wordsworth's own feelings and interests—those of a young romantic suffering chronically from bad nerves, indigestion, headaches, fevers, insomnia, irregular hours; not of a sober, well-disciplined moralist. He was seeing himself anew, in new relations with his environment; but it is noteworthy that he succeeded much better in his more personal poems, with which six of the eight successful new poems of the volume[3] may be classed, than in the others. In these latter there was a distinct falling off, instead of an advance, in point of imaginative realism, and it corresponded with a loosening of the framework of ideas in which his pictures of humanity were set. Compared with the characters in *Guilt and Sorrow*, those of these *Ballads* tend to be flat and dull, or else melodramatic and unconvincing.[4] There is a practically complete absence of

[1] *Expostulation and Reply* (*Lyrical Ballads*, I); *Peter Bell*, Prologue.

[2] *The Idle Shepherd Boys* (*Lyrical Ballads*, II); cf. *A Poet's Epitaph* (*ibid.*).

[3] *Expostulation and Reply; The Tables Turned; Anecdote for Fathers; Lines written at a small distance. . . .; Lines written in early Spring; Tintern Abbey.*

[4] It is hard to agree that "the prevailing notes are exultant and happy" (Darbishire, *op. cit.*, p. 34). Wordsworth was soon finding fault with *The Female Vagrant* (see *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, pp. 268 ff); perhaps, though not ostensibly, for political reasons.

normal human beings; Wordsworth is alone with his sister in a circle of children, ancients, beggars, imbeciles. Only in these poems, not about himself, did he make much use of the new and soon famous style that may fairly be labelled the *idiot style*.

Prominent among their characters is a bevy of unfortunate females, whose hard lot wrings few tears from the reader: the deserted Red Indian woman; the mad mother (not too mad to assure us that she is legally married); the erring penitent of *The Thorn* (very little removed from the "super-tragic" mourners whom Wordsworth remembered with amusement in his juvenile efforts);[1] Goody Blake, the doddering old spinner; and the two unbearable gossips of *The Idiot Boy*. Then we have Simon Lee limping tediously on his swollen ankles in front of the final quatrain of a poem that has no need of him, and the old man of *Animal Tranquility and Decay*. It is a set of bad poems, offering an unappetising picture of the deserving poor. *The Thorn* was composed "with great rapidity", and *The Idiot Boy* "almost extempore"; what is more surprising is that the latter was written "with exceeding delight and pleasure", and its author continued to read it with the same complacency.[2] Evidently he believed himself to have accomplished something significant in enlarging the circle of poetry to include such waifs and strays, when he seemed to others to be making a caricature of life. Social injustice—as if he was now left bewildered and helpless by it—had descended to the farcical level of Goody Blake's tale where her oppressor, the grasping farmer, is punished, not by a combination of the labouring poor against him, but by an old woman's curse; a 'true' story told by Wordsworth in the manner of one relating an edifying though improbable anecdote to a Sunday-school class.[3]

Extravagance of subject in these poems is only exaggerated by ultra-literal diction. In *Guilt and Sorrow* and *The Ruined Cottage* the language had been quite simple enough; in *Michael* it was to be so in perfection. Wordsworth's theory of diction, a *democratic* one, grew out of his political radicalism.[4] But there was in the sectarian lengths to which he pushed it at this stage an element of compensation for what was missing

[1] *Prelude*, VIII, 531.

[2] See Notes to *Lyrical Ballads*, and *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

[3] In the Preface he tries to rationalise in psychological terms the effect of the curse.

[4] The assumptions he was working on belonged to the medley of progressive ideas, "mingled somewhat vaguely in the brain of the average English 'Jacobin'", that are described by C. Brinton in *The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists* (1926), p. 29 (cf. K. MacLean, *Agrarian Age: a Background for Wordsworth* (1950), pp. 100–1). Cf. Hazlitt on Wordsworth in *The Spirit of the Age* (Bohn's Standard Library (1904), p. 152): "the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments"; and Stopford Brooke, *Theology in the English Poets* (1874), pp. 166–7.

—any practical remedy or protest against "what man has made of man";[1] and with it a touch of self-mortification, as of one wilfully refusing to stand well with his public. Having discarded the 'artificial' life of the city in favour of the cottage, he was proposing to revive English poetry by ridding it of artificial conventions. But this was in any case a negative reform, and no reform of diction could take the place of a regeneration of the social order.

The theory which he fancied to be broad and liberating was in fact narrow and restrictive. He had been clinging to his trust "In what we may become";[2] but to limit poetry to the everyday language of ordinary men, and thereby to their everyday thoughts, would condemn him to see people and things as fixed and unchanging—as, ultimately, all existence was to seem to him. This was to fall into the same arid 'realism' that he complained of in Crabbe.[3] He was incurring this danger because he had turned away from the people in arms to the people in rags, squalor and helplessness, and now he was inclined to project into them his own sensations of gloom and defeat, blind to the power that was still in them of struggling against their fate. Tempted to seek the bedrock of his own experience in himself in solitary abstraction, he was looking for it in the poor also as detached individuals, the *disjecta membra* of humanity, and coming to seek in them a refuge instead of a source of energy. Contemplating a very old man, alive only by the faintest flicker, he was fascinated by the thought of an absolute immobility, a Nirvana, of thought. In the dim recesses of an idiot boy's mind, and the mother's near-animal affection, he could find an impregnable shelter from life at the very moment when he supposed himself to be grappling most closely with life—"Thou art the thing itself!" It was often in future to happen to Wordsworth to be furthest from "reality" at the point where he believed himself nearest.

There are other children in these and the later *Ballads*, seeming to symbolise new beginnings, though quite often it is the memory of dead children that he is thinking of. From these young minds he felt that he could and must learn; and so too from common humanity at large. But he was losing sight too completely of the People as a collective thing, and what he needed most was something that could not be learned—though many valuable smaller lessons could—from fragmentary talk with wayfarers on the roads of Somerset or Cumberland,[4]

[1] *Lines written in early Spring.* [2] *Prelude*, VIII, 806.

[3] *The Life of George Crabbe*, by his Son (World's Classics edition, 1932, p. 164), shows that Crabbe reciprocated the criticism.

[4] *Prelude*, XII, 161 ff.

any more than from the peasant-pilgrims Tolstoy talked with on the road to Kiev. It had to be learned with, not from, the people, and on the highroad of history. Failing to see that 'real life' must be rooted in a collective life, and one still in development, he fell into the error he denounced in mechanistic science: "we murder to dissect".[1] When he came to write his own history he missed much of what had gone to make him, because he lacked an understanding of the process of history in the wider sense; in the same way now he was failing to see how many of the qualities he admired in the poor were the outcome of an active, purposeful social existence and centuries of social conflict—which might be said also of their vocabulary. He was losing sight even of any close links between individuals, except those of the family, which he was coming to see as the only shelter in a bleak world.[2]

If previously Wordsworth had thought of an educated élite guiding an inert popular mass, he was now involved in the converse error of wanting to merge himself in the mass, at the cost of ceasing to be himself; whereas the true task for such a man was to find ways of contributing his own special resources to a common struggle in alliance with the people. His new notion meant living among the poor, and like the poor, in a somewhat mechanical fashion, and thinking and writing only such things as a humble neighbour might think or say. It would mean, if persisted in, a sacrifice not merely of Wordsworth's worldly prospects, but of his inmost self and business in life, of the talent which is death to hide. He could only make the effort spasmodically, and while he did so there was bound to be an element of pastoral masquerade in his work, of the intellectual awkwardly bringing himself down to the level of the people. He dabbled at times in verse meant to be read by the poor themselves,[3] but he was not finding much to say to them. When Cobbett wrote in the *Political Register* for his 'Chopsticks', the same south of England labourers Wordsworth was now living among, he wrote a language a good deal less simple than that of some of the *Ballads*, without ever puzzling his head about the matter, and they understood him. Wordsworth's still sad music was leading him astray, by leading

[1] *The Tables Turned.*

[2] Cf. *Guilt and Sorrow*, stanza LVII.

[3] See *Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 336. Literacy was widespread in Lakeland; and there was the example of Burns. L. Abercrombie (*The Art of Wordsworth* (1952), p. 78) recalls that *We are Seven* was sold in the countryside as a broadsheet. Engels (*The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, trans. by F. K. Wishnewetzky, 1892, pp. 239–40) believed that Shelley and Byron were read chiefly by the proletariat. Cf. Scott: "I am persuaded both children and the lower class of readers hate books which are written *down* to their capacity." (Sir H. Grierson, *Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1938), p. 272).

him towards those who suffered most, not those who had most to give to the future. An artist needs to hear drums as well as dirges. In the England of 1798 the drums of the future were indeed thickly muffled. The new factory proletariat was taking decades, even generations, to form out of the debris of an older society. It was still half a century before Marx and Engels would open the leaden casket of the industrial slums from which Wordsworth (and Cobbett not much less) recoiled in horror.

Usually Wordsworth was writing about the poor for his own class. There seems to have been floating in his mind the dream that was to visit Tolstoy and Gandhi of opening the eyes of the better-off classes and giving them a change of heart, so that they would stop despising and ill-treating the poor: they would become as little children, and society would be a happy family again as in the golden age gone by—if a poor and primitive family; humanity reduced to the ancient, indestructible core of its material.[1] In harmony with this was the concern for good-will in private relations as forming the "best portion of a good man's life".[2] But belief in such a programme could not come easily to a man of Wordsworth's native shrewdness, and the effort and strain involved may be seen as one cause of the 'extremism' of the *Ballads*.

What the idea must mean in practice was of course reconciliation of jarring classes within the prevailing order for the benefit of its rulers. In *Peter Bell* Wordsworth can be seen drifting towards the weir, though as yet the idea remained in an allegorical shape, not reasoned out as it was later. In this fable, moreover, he strained every nerve to keep within the limits of rational possibility—instead of throwing the responsibility on to Providence—a change of heart in a villain guilty of callously ill-treating women and animals: in effect, in the terms of Wordsworth's symbolism, an oppressor of mankind. Peter's consciousness of guilt is powerfully developed, as in *Guilt and Sorrow*; his conversion, with the aid of a donkey and a Methodist hymn, is ludicrously unconvincing—much more than if the means of grace were avowedly supernatural as in the parallel poem, *The Ancient Mariner*. Wordsworth had bowdlerised the problem of reform into a silly parable. He turned away at present from this path, only to come back to it later. *Peter Bell* was published in 1819, in the most reactionary period of Wordsworth's political life. In his respectable old age it was precisely with class harmony and

[1] *The Early Letters, op. cit.*, p. 295.
[2] *Tintern Abbey.*

conciliation that he came to be associated, as the Public Orator at Oxford did not fail to note when rewarding him with a degree.[1]

Wordsworth's quest for the people seemed to have petered out. There was, however, another 1798 poem, *The Old Cumberland Beggar* (published 1800) that pointed another way. Here, refreshed by a breeze from his native hills, he wrote with restraint and effect, at once realistically and—because he saw the old man's existence as interwoven with that of the society around him—imaginatively. In the "vast solitude" of extreme age, this beggar still seemed to him to play a useful part on the earth, through the charitable impulses he called forth in the cottagers, themselves poor enough, thus providing a moral cement for a rural community where he, like Scott's Bluegown, had a distinct place of his own, more as a pensioner than a vagrant.

Here was an image, death and life intertwined in a way characteristic of him, that Wordsworth could fasten on to. The social and moral disintegration of the English countryside, with its capitalistic agriculture and pauperised labourers, was equally disintegrating to his poetry, where it engendered the unreal or dying creatures of the *Ballads*. At Goslar in the winter of 1798–9, living with Dorothy in complete solitude, he was turning his eyes back towards Lakeland, as an oasis where a decent human existence still went on, and he was making sketches for the first two books of the *Prelude*, on his boyhood days. Among the other 'German' poems that were to appear in Volume 2 of the *Ballads* (1800), the Lucy poems, as well as *Lucy Gray* and *To a Sexton*, show him preoccupied with thoughts of death. In *Hart-Leap Well*, with its hill-country setting, he again gave an allegorical, but this time a much more sober, version of the world's cruelty, drawing a moral of non-violence, or brotherly love.

Writing at this period of the poisoned atmosphere of the times—"This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown", fear or apathy or defection on all sides—Wordsworth thanked "Nature" for his own ability to hold fast, with "more than Roman confidence", to his faith in humanity.[2] When in December 1799 he settled at Dove Cottage, to live henceforward close to the source of his inspiration, it was not a question of getting back merely to the hills, considered as rock and bracken: what he was seeking was the "natural" order of society that

[1] See G. H. Healey, *Wordsworth's Pocket Notebook* (1942), p. 65; cf. Lady Richardson's account of the celebration of his 74th birthday by all ranks (*Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 444). There is a heated condemnation of all ideas of class struggle in Coleridge's *The Friend*, Section I, Essay 5.

[2] *Prelude*, II, 248 ff; a passage suggested by a letter from Coleridge in 1799 (see note by Selincourt).

he associated with the hills, where he could see "Man free, man working for himself",[1] and breathe freely. His return, decided on with many heart-searchings and hesitations, as *The Recluse* (Book I, 1800) shows, was a quest, not an escape. The sentimental tourist's notion of "peace, rusticity, and happy poverty" in Grasmere[2] was not for Wordsworth, who was well aware that Lakeland poverty was not always happy. Dorothy's early Grasmere Journal is full of accounts of tramps and beggars on the roads, outsiders from Ireland or Manchester; misery could be found among the native peasantry too, as when the Wordsworths and Coleridge, basking in the summer beauty of the waterside, were suddenly broken in on by the sight of an old, infirm, hungry man trying to get something to eat out of "the dead unfeeling lake".[3] None the less, there was still a core of the old rural order left; and poverty did not usually appear as man-made (which later was to encourage Wordsworth to view it as made by Heaven). Here was little of a resident gentry; he had scarcely ever in youth seen a human being who claimed anything on the score of birth or rank;[4] social oppression was out of sight, and "no people in the world are more impatient under it", a contemporary wrote.[5] Labourers were few, and lived with the farmers' families. Wordsworth could feel that there was at least no "extreme penury", no suffering beyond what good neighbourship could relieve.[6] In Grasmere vale, with its forty or fifty scattered cottages, he and Dorothy found the old ways "little adulterated" and the people "kind-hearted frank and manly, prompt to serve without servility".[7] Unlike the pauperised masses of the south, a great many of them were still small independent farmers, rather hugging the chains of sentiment that bound them to a poor soil than hating their condition, and thus seeming to prove that for the spirit of man poverty—which Wordsworth was accepting for himself too—was not the worst, or an unbearable, evil.

[1] *Prelude*, VIII, 152. The Journal of the Scottish tour of 1803 shows much interest in society as well as scenery. The idea of retirement to cottage seclusion was an old one; cf. the *Evening Walk*, and a poem of 1794 to Mary Hutchinson (Selincourt, *Studies, op cit.*, pp. 21–3).

[2] Gray, quoted by W. Hutchinson, *History of the County of Cumberland* (1794), p. 223 n.

[3] *Poems on the Naming of Places*, IV (*Lyrical Ballads*, II). Two of the first individuals in Grasmere who fixed his attention were a crippled workman and a paralytic (see *The Recluse*, Appendix A in the edition of *The Excursion* by E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (1949), pp. 329–30. All references to *The Excursion* are to this edition.)

[4] *Prelude*, IX, 217 ff.

[5] J. Housman, *A Topographical Description of Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire. . . .* (1800), pp. 103–5.

[6] *The Recluse, op. cit.*, 324–5.

[7] *The Early Letters, op. cit.*, p. 236.

He loved the combination of individual pride and tenacious spirit of neighbourhood. It underlay his own conception of the combined independence and civic responsibility of the artist. These Lakeland smallholders, part farmer and part shepherd, had only of late years been emerging from a 'natural economy'. Each household was an almost self-sufficient unit, rooted in the thin soil like a gnarled tree—or like Wordsworth's genius—growing out of the rocks. Each household was drawn close about the spinning-wheel and loom that occupied all its free hours; the hum of the wheel had something sacred in Wordsworth's ear, which linked it with all the decencies of a stable family life.[1] Better than any other great poet he understood how the moral as well as the economic life of a free peasantry is bound up with the patrimonial acres that unite each individual with ancestors and descendants, form the repository of all his memories and emotions, and stand to him for history, art, and religion. Folk-art and popular imagination had been largely uprooted from the rest of England when the land was taken away from those who tilled it.

Like any other writer trying to overcome his isolation by finding a framework of living ideas wider than his own self, Wordsworth was identifying his outlook with that of a particular class, and supposing that he had achieved a "universal" viewpoint. With this class of smallholders, among whom he had spent his early years, he shared many qualities, for instance a sense of humour more hearty than subtle.[2] In particular the shepherd of the high moorlands was a man through whose eyes he felt he could look at life; they had in common days made up of toil, hope, danger, and the "majestic indolence" of freedom,[3] and perhaps he felt an analogy between shepherd and poet, as teacher of mankind. In the series of great years now opening before him he owed very much to the strength he drew from living side by side with a sturdy self-respecting race.[4] It gave him his rugged quality of endurance, as the Revolution had given him a soaring energy. He needed both, and under extreme adverse pressures his genius maintained itself for longer than that of most of the Romantic poets of Europe; because he was able, as *The Prelude* asserts over and over again, to maintain his faith in the common man and the qualities lurking in him.

The renewed integration of his mind found expression at once in the

[1] See, e.g. *Song for the Spinning-Wheel*, 1812.

[2] As, e.g. in *The Waggoner* (1805).

[3] *Prelude*, VIII, 388; see this whole passage on shepherd life, and the long cancelled passage of *The Excursion* (*op. cit.*, pp. 432 ff.).

[4] Even the woman begging on the road in *The Sailor's Mother* (1802)—drawn from life—had a bearing "like a Roman matron's".

remaining *Ballads* of the 1800 volume. Hardly anything of the 'idiot' style survives here. There is less of the crudely painful; less of death; less of old age and more of childhood (though still not very much in between). More of the successful poems are concerned with things outside the poet. In general the literary quality is a good deal higher.[1] If there is a hint once more of something lost as well as gained, in the practically complete absence now of any reference to social injustice, at present this does not stand out; for Wordsworth has got away from his helpless weaklings to real men, men like old Michael of the "stern and unbending mind". This means also that he is throwing off his recent musings about conciliation between the classes. Lakeland knows only a rudimentary division of classes, and the shepherd fights his battles with storm and mist knowing and caring nothing about what educated folk may think of the poor. Wordsworth is grasping at the idea of rescuing the old peasant proprietorship, as the solution of England's problem of pauperism.

This is the point of his letter of January 1801, with a copy of the *Ballads*, to Charles James Fox. He laments the "rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society", with the uprooting of the peasantry, and calls on the statesman to arrest this vicious process. (How, he does not explain; and it is a bad omen that he is calling on Fox to save the people, instead of on the people to save themselves.) He sends him the book exclusively on account of two poems, *The Brothers* and *Michael*, written "to shew that men who do not wear fine cloathes can feel deeply".[2] These two long "pastoral poems" are remarkable achievements, and the second in particular is Wordsworth's finest tribute to the old way of life. What is good in it, and what is painful, are realised with equal intensity, though it is the good that he wants to bring forward. He insists, as earlier in *Descriptive Sketches*, that these rude shepherds do acquire from long familiarity and force of association a genuine love, akin to his own, for the mountain scenery they live amidst. There is an austere simplicity, dignity, pathos in these beings, so different from the hysterical creatures of earlier *Ballads*. They live in a hard, bleak, masculine world where women and Heaven have little part to play. Michael's cottage has never been "gay", scarcely even "cheerful". When he inherited his acres they were mortgaged; until he was forty he had a hard struggle to free them of debt. Now, through a nephew's "unforeseen misfortunes", he is

[1] Of 41 poems altogether in volume II, 25 may be reckoned successful; but the improvement in quality is greater than this figure suggests.

[2] *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, pp. 259–63; cf. p. 266, to Poole.

crippled again, and the struggle must be faced anew. Such is the bitter inheritance he would hand on to his young son Luke, separated from him, as if symbolically, by so many years. Luke, infected and ruined by "the dissolute city", never returns to take it up. Toiling to the end, dying in extreme age, Michael has no one to follow him, the land passes to a stranger, the plough turns up its grass.

The Brothers—a dialogue in the churchyard that was to become within a dozen years Wordsworth's spiritual home—likewise concerns the breaking up of a family, one that has clung to its patch of land for generations until at last the load of debt grew too heavy to bear. Lakeland was now exposed to the rough airs of a commercial age, and we read in a 1794 account: "These small properties . . . can only be handed down, from father to son, by the utmost thrift, hard labour, and penurious living."[1] Many of the younger sort were sucked away by the attractive power of the new towns. To Wordsworth this was a desertion of the post of freedom for the lure of sordid comfort.[2] He himself, preparing to undergo "solitary and unremitting labour, a life of entire neglect perhaps",[3] for the sake of his creed, saw in the stern and unbending Michael a brother-spirit.

This lonely stoicism—this *surly virtue*—could not for long be a substitute for the "soul-animating strains" of an active movement of progress. Lakeland was, at best, on the defensive. Moreover, while each dalesman waged his desperate struggle against circumstances, they were not as a body carrying on any fight against anything so tangible as a body of landlords. Such a fight might have drawn Wordsworth in on the right side, and his pen could have contributed to it. The need was not lacking. Although in these dales there might be little visible

[1] J. Bailey and G. Culley, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland* (Board of Agriculture, 1794), p. 44. Cf. the story of Wordsworth's neighbours, the Greens (see the memoir by Dorothy, in E. de Selincourt, *Dorothy Wordsworth* (1933), pp. 227 ff.), or that of the old woman of 84 in Portenscale who lived by spinning, scorned charity, and kept two guineas locked up for her funeral (Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 158 n.). See also the Lakeland parish reports in Eden's *State of the Poor* (1797), and on the effects of the price fall here in the depression after 1815, *Agricultural State of the Kingdom* (Board of Agriculture, 1816), pp. 64–5.

[2] Cf. *Repentance*, a poem of 1804 on a family "frivolously" giving up its land: Wordsworth's Note (*Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 58) shows that much of it was "taken *verbatim* from the language" of the daleswoman concerned, Margaret Ashburner. Dorothy found it hard to get a servant, because "the country is drained by the cotton works and the manufactories, and by the large towns whither they are tempted to go for great wages", *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 1806–11*, ed. E. de Selincourt (1937), p. 26.)

[3] *Advice to the Young* (*Prose Works*, I, pp. 316–17); cf. in a letter of 1806: "a man of letters . . . ought to be severely frugal" (*Letters, 1806–11*, p. 60). Wordsworth may have thought of himself, as well as Milton, as "almost single, uttering odious truth" (*Prelude*, III, 285).

oppression, there were man-made evils which, as often in peasant regions, were hardly recognised as grievances because they were matters of immemorial use and wont. Neither in the 'pastoral poems' nor in the letter to Fox did he speak of the vices of an archaic tenurial law in this old Border country, still burdened with "numerous and strong remains of vassalage", covered with customary manors demanding heriots, boon services, and worst of all those arbitrary *fines* on succession which did as much as anything to make it hard for families to cling to their little holdings.[1] Yet the poet's father had been legal agent to one of the worst of the manorial lords, and himself a victim of his master's injustice.

Lingering decline rather than a galloping consumption was to befall Lakeland. Cobbett found many of the old patriarchal ways still alive in 1832.[2] But whatever survived here could be only an odd fragment of the national life. Peasantry and cottage industry were vanishing before capitalism and the machine. Wordsworth, whose long span of years coincided exactly with the long-drawn extinction of the independent craftsmen, was writing gloomily in 1819 on the passing of his beloved spinning-wheel, and again in 1827 on this "Venerable Art Torn from the Poor".[3] Only by transformation into a new pattern could something of the good of the old days be preserved. Sucked into factory towns the once independent craftsmen could contribute a militant element to the battle for reform. Wordsworth, refusing to follow them, was left with more and more of the husk and less and less of the spirit. Insensibly his mountain fortress turned into a snug summerhouse. His 'common man' grew all too uncommon, and he gradually came to attribute to bare hills, by a sort of imputed righteousness, the moral influences that he had known as the property of a simple social system; while

[1] Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 36–9; cf. Bailey and Culley, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 44 ff.; Housman, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–66; MacLean, *op. cit.*, p. 101, is one of the very few writers who have taken notice of this aspect of Lakeland. Elsewhere he points out the tendency of Wordsworth and the other "rustic" poets to "to neglect the part the landlords and improvers had in creating distress" in the counties affected by the Agricultural Revolution (p. 38; cf. p. 95). The tale of injustice at the beginning of *The Female Vagrant* had a Lakeland setting.

[2] "The land-owners are very numerous in Cumberland; the farms generally small . . . the people look very neat and clean." (Cobbett, *Tour in Scotland and in the Four Northern Counties of England* (1833), p. 245.)

[3] Sonnets: "Grief, thou hast lost . . ." (1819), and *To S.H.* (1827); the Note to the former (*Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 55) says "I could write a treatise of lamentation upon the changes brought about among the cottages of Westmorland by the silence of the spinning wheel". Wordsworth did not perhaps observe how immensely laborious the old cottage industry was. Wages in Kirkoswald parish, Cumberland, are "very inconsiderable", we read: "a woman must labour hard at her wheel 10 or 11 hours in the day, to earn 4d." (Eden, *op. cit.*, II, p. 84). In Cumwhitton parish none of the poor spent as much as 3d. on a day's food (*ibid.*, p. 74).

conversely he grew to hate in towns their smoke rather than their slavery.[1]

Settling in Grasmere, he was still blaming "an unjust state of society" for men's troubles,[2] but he was receding from the conception that had come to him in 1792 of expanding and organising freedom, and marrying freedom to plenty. Now as before the Revolution he felt that a life worthy of human beings could be lived only in secluded valleys. Because his idea of freedom came back to this negative, primitive level —similar to the Anarchism of Europe's surviving craftsmen-communities later in the century—he could have no idea of a State power taken over and used by the People, and he was unlikely to develop that of a constructive popular movement; which meant that in the end he must be drawn into a reactionary current. Such a phenomenon has been seen in various parts of Europe analogous to Wordsworth's. A democratic society is the last that will think of creating a democratic State.

It is to *The Excursion*, especially its later (1810–14) books, that we must look for the record of Wordsworth's decline. Hints of what was to come are thickly scattered over his work after 1800, when the initial recovery conferred by his return to Lakeland had worn off, and he was being left stranded between his two worlds, that of Michael and the hills and that of books, London, Napoleon. Michael was dead, and no other such towering, rock-hewn figure took his place. In 1802, once more oppressed with thoughts of decay and desertion "And mighty Poets in their misery dead", Wordsworth's imagination caught for comfort at a much lesser figure, the Leechgatherer, endowed with no more than a passive tenacity of life. (It was his imagination, grappling with reality, that created all his significant figures—not his pocket-book jottings from reality. There was no Leechgatherer, as there had been a Simon Lee.) To live long was to live wretched, he reflected at the graveside of Burns.[3] Every living thing's heart was an "impenetrable cell" of loneliness.[4] Death hung about his thoughts. The age he had been reserved to was a "degenerate" one.[5]

[1] Mountains, he had written earlier, "are good occasional society, but they will not do for constant companions" (*The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 128). As Bowra says, the consolation he now found in a new attitude to Nature could not solve his problems (C. M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (1950), pp. 100–2). Cf. C. Caudwell, *Illusion and Reality* (1937), p. 98: "Wordsworth's 'Nature' is of course a Nature freed of wild beasts and danger by aeons of human work, a Nature in which the poet . . . lives on the products of industrialism . . ."

[2] *The Early Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 306. But there is no "injustice" in volume II of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

[3] *At the Grave of Burns* (1803).

[4] *The Kitten and Falling Leaves* (1804).

[5] *Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 322.

From the renewal of war in 1803 until its end in 1815 his poetic moods were largely conditioned by the situation of Europe, since that of Lakeland was static. When he wrote of Toussaint, the black man born in slavery defying and morally defeating the master of Europe—or again in 1808–9 when all Spain rose against the tyrant and he wrote *The Convention of Cintra*—Wordsworth could identify himself with struggling people far away; but enthusiasm for freedom and justice abroad could not for long take the place of struggle for freedom and justice at home.[1]

In 1804–5, in a superb burst of energy, he completed *The Prelude*, ending it on a curiously mingled note of hope and pessimism. Free now to embark on his serious life-work, in 1806 he wrote, or put together, the first part of *The Excursion*, whose opening sections had been planned or sketched in 1804 and even earlier. It was not the poem he and Coleridge had dreamed of in 1798. Book I was the old *Ruined Cottage* of that year, in a new guise. This was followed in Book II and the beginning of Book III by the story of the Solitary, which as regards Wordsworth and the French Revolution is better autobiography than most of *The Prelude*. The Solitary was his old self, as the Wanderer (the former Pedlar, grown into a "venerable Sage") was his new—or rather they were moods still conflicting in him.[2] Thus he was throwing together the dual problems of his earlier years, of poverty and of freedom. They stand side by side in the Solitary's tremendous catalogue of evils—

> "Wrongs unredressed, or insults unavenged
> And unavengeable, defeated pride,
> Prosperity subverted, maddening want . . ."[3]

This disappointed revolutionary is a splendidly Byronic character: the finest ever invented, in fact—Byron could never make his heroes speak as this man does. But he is alone, frustrated, impotent; he can denounce oppression and misrule, but all he can *do* is to weep for an old pauper's death and console a child by telling him the old man is in Heaven.[4]

[1] Wordsworth's interest in the affairs of Napoleonic Europe, and his new concept of Nationalism, are not discussed here, for want of space, though they have great importance in his development.

[2] On Mr. Fawcett, the ostensible model for the Solitary, see Harper *op. cit.*, I, pp. 261–6. On the chronology of *The Excursion*, see *op. cit.*, pp. 369 ff.

[3] *Excursion*, III, 374–6. The passage originally belonged to *The Tuft of Primrose*, a lengthy sketch of 1808 (*op. cit.*, Appendix C).

[4] *Excursion*, II, 508–11; cf. III, pp. 983–6, on the futility of action. The Solitary began as a *political* figure only; his domestic misfortunes were a much later addition to Book III. (See Notes, *op. cit.*, pp. 418–19.)

What Wordsworth himself could do was dwindling to little more.

By 1806 he was rationalising the failure of the Revolution into one leading idea: the men of his generation had committed the sin of *hubris* by their "proud and most presumptuous confidence In the transcendent wisdom of the age", when really they were no better than their fathers, nor their age wiser than any before it.[1] The answer to Wordsworth's view is that men in his day had in fact gone beyond all their predecessors, and with the help of science and industry got on to higher ground from which more of the universe past, present and to come was discernable. Wordsworth would not have admitted this: for him the sky was still "unvoyageable",[2] when balloons had begun to rise into it. All he could see of that "new and unforeseen creation", machine industry, was the "vice, misery and disease" it produced.[3] He missed the good side because he had no faith in men's ability to control what they had created. He knew nothing of factory workers, and even when he had asserted most ardently the survival of virtue in the rustic poor, he had been thinking too much of passive resistance to life, too little of active control of circumstances. He saw industry turning more and more of the country into an arena of blind, brutish forces, men and machines almost equally inhuman, equally intractable to intelligence. Effort to remodel society seemed futile. The problems he was setting himself to wrestle with were more than ever insoluble. He could not even bring them really together. Margaret, the dead woman of Book I, and the embittered rebel of Book II, remained in separate worlds. Their troubles could not be cured separately; mass poverty and intellectual isolation could only be overcome with and through each other, in the process of social advance. The duality of Wordsworth's thinking ran through all his experience: self and mankind, people and law, soul and body, freedom and wealth, intuition and logic, Mary Hutchinson and Annette Vallon, the mountains of Cumberland and the Mountain of Paris: and from now on the dividing walls were to grow thicker and higher.[4]

[1] II, 235–6; IV, 278 ff, and 418 ff. Pride was the "false fruit" that had corrupted men (IV, 289–93).

[2] V, 342.

[3] VIII, 90; VII, 854. Cf. H. L'A. Fausset, *The Lost Leader* (1933), p. 205; By rejecting the Industrial Revolution altogether, "he turned his back upon the ideas and forces which for good and evil were to determine human development during the next hundred years . . ."

[4] Hazlitt noticed in Wordsworth "a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body" (*Lectures on the English Poets*, World's Classics edition, 1924, p. 203).

Wordsworth could not turn away and luxuriate in "world-excluding groves" and "voluptuous unconcern". Only now the idle hedonism he despised included any Utopian kind of poetry made up "to improve the scheme Of Man's existence, and recast the world."[1] His problems were really coming down to this: Life being what it was and must be, was it worth living, or should men give themselves up to despair? If fate could not be bent to their will, it must be a question of men bending to the will of fate. In Book IV (sketched, with a further part of Book III, in the same year 1806) he groped towards an answer in terms of a philosophy just at the point of hardening into a religion: belief in Providence was the one "adequate support",[2] since the world as seen and felt by man was inexplicable. With this answer the debate hung fire, and Wordsworth was for long at a standstill. He had conjured up spirits he could not exorcise. Meanwhile he went on sinking into deeper abstraction from life. How far he was drifting away from any sense of identity (not of sympathy) with the people can be seen in his essay on them, addressed to an Archdeacon, where he reviewed their educational needs with benevolent detachment.[3] Another essay was on epitaphs and immortality. In his poetry he reached the furthest degree of isolation, or mid-channel between his former and his later self, in *The White Doe* (winter 1807–8), in which his quietism hardened into what Harper calls an "almost oriental renunciation", and his poetry declined to what Jeffrey called, nearly as fairly, "a state of low and maudlin inbecility."[4]

From the North Pole all roads run south, and after his 1808 freezing-point (and the interlude of the Spanish war) Wordsworth could only begin sliding from despair of progress towards distrust of progress. For himself he was not only accepting his isolation but making a virtue of it; when he took up *The Excursion* again he was always pausing in the poem to congratulate himself on his cloistered seclusion from a world whose soil was "rank with all unkindness",[5] and he could indulge the thought that "in these disordered times" it might be well for a few men, "from faction sacred"—impartial philosophers—to resume the life the ancient anchorites once led.[6] Inevitably, he carried the poem on by deepening its religious side. He wanted to fill the gap he had left

[1] *Excursion*, III, 332 ff. [2] IV, 10 ff.

[3] *Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 335 ff. (June 1808). In *Excursion*, IX, 327 he was to appeal on behalf of the poor to "the State's parental ear"; cf. *Prose Works*, I, p. 275 (1835).

[4] Harper, *op. cit.*, II, p. 155; A. B. Comparetti, *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1940), pp. 253–4.

[5] VI, 635.

[6] V, 29–36; the same idea pervades *The Tuft of Primroses*.

between earth and Heaven, and he filled it chiefly with a collection of stories from the Grasmere churchyard. The germ of this theme of the graves can be found near the beginning of *The Brothers*, where the village pastor remarks that he could make a "strange round" of stories out of the graves he is looking at. Wordsworth had forgotten little in these years, but he had not learned enough. This second part of his poem bears some analogy with *Paradise Lost*, and its spiritual ascent and poetical descent from Hell to Heaven. If the first part stands like a sombre Sphinx staring out across the 19th century, the second is a sand-heap half burying it. Yet even now, in these last few years remaining to his inspiration, Wordsworth is not less than Archangel ruined; his "creeping" tale, to use his own simile, still catches every now and then "The colours of the sun".[1]

In its outward forms the poem he was writing was still of the people, democratic. Wordsworth did not shrink from proclaiming his belief in "the aristocracy of nature"[2] by confronting the polite world with a philosophical poem (costing two guineas) whose Socrates was a retired Scots pedlar, like his creator an "advocate of humble life".[3] Yet the choice of "nature's unambitious underwood"[4] for his main theme was bringing him round by a back door to reaction. Contenting himself with the kind of ideas that could be supposed intelligible to humble virtue, fatigued with the toil of searching for undiscoverable truth, he was coming to acquiesce in the necessity of ignorance. From here it was only a step to the obscurantist notion that "the lowly class" whose station exempted them from doubts or questionings, as they pursued "The narrow avenue of daily toil", were really the luckiest.[5] The 'lowly class' would have enough troubles without those of the intellect; such troubles as befell Margaret. On her fate Wordsworth had pondered for years, and it preyed on his mind the more morbidly because he could find no practical answer to it. Religious history is full of examples of

[1] IV, 1122–26. Lamb called *The Excursion* "a vast and magnificent poem" (letter to Southey, October 20, 1814, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. G. Pocock, Everyman revised edition 1945, I, p. 347.)); Keats thought it one of the three wonders of the age (letter to Haydon, January 10, 1818, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman, 4th ed. 1952, p. 78)). Byron saw much talent wasted in it, like rain on rocks or sand (letter to Hunt, September–October 1815, *The Letters of George Gordon, 6th Lord Byron*, ed. R. G. Howarth, 1933, p. 134), and Hazlitt compared it neatly to Crusoe's canoe: "noble materials thrown away" (*Lectures on the English Poets*, *op. cit.*, pp. 240–1).

[2] Wordsworth's Note on I, p. 341.

[3] II, 628. As Coleridge pointed out (*Biographia Literaria*, chapter XXII), this Socrates was a pedlar only in name. The 'democratic' character was becoming merely formal.

[4] VI, 653.

[5] V, 593–601. (The Solitary makes a trenchant rejoinder to this rigmarole.) In the same vein is Wordsworth's Note (*Prose Works*, III, pp. 153–4) to *In the Firth of Clyde* (1833).

how simply feeling sorry for the poor breeds reactionary attitudes. It was only "natural wisdom", Wordsworth concluded, not to let the mind dwell too long on irremediable calamity.[1] The only remedy, and the only lesson a sage could teach, was resignation.

Margaret's cottage stood by itself on an "open moorland",[2] out of sight of either landlord and merchant to oppress or fellow-workers to defend. Wordsworth had not forgotten that there was "misrule" on the earth, whose nations groaned under their "unthinking masters".[3] But by now these rulers had receded into an indistinct distance. Every breath of social conflict had been hermetically excluded. There was only Heaven above, misery below, philosophy looking on. Wordsworth laid great store by

> "the line of comfort that divides
> Calamity, the chastisement of Heaven,
> From the injustice of our brother men;"[4]

his Wanderer, journeying from village to village, had been wont to point out this line to poor men chafing under their misfortunes, and thus help to allay social discontents. From this it was easy to drop little by little into the habit of thinking of all human ills as due to Providence, and losing sight of what was wrong with society. In order to cherish this comfort Wordsworth had to remove the towns from his field of vision (though by another contradiction he saw their wealth as necessary for beating Napoleon and keeping England great and free), and in effect most of the countryside too, because there also, as the Solitary insisted, conditions were deplorable. The "old domestic morals" were "Fled utterly! or only to be found In a few fortunate retreats like this".[5] In Lakeland poverty could still be thought of as "wholesome", because it kept temptation away and made men more sensible of their need of help from above,[6] while the "true equality" of virtue was accessible to all; the rustic benefited from his few and simple wants also in learning from them "patience and sublime content".[7] This is a point of view congenial to landlords and bishops. There is a *facilis descensus* from praise of the poor to praise of poverty. But Lakeland's 'fortunate

[1] I, 602. [2] I, 26. [3] I, 379–81.

[4] II, 72–4. The same distinction had been drawn in the *Apology* of 1793 (*Prose Works*, I, p. 8), but there the stress was on repelling human injustice.

[5] VIII, 142–7; 236, 253–4. [6] I, 306; IV, 786–9.

[7] IX, 248; IV, 818. Yet in practice Wordsworth saw that there were woeful differences between man and man, and vaguely attributed them to "injustice" (IX, 253–4).—Mary Lamb, reading *The Excursion*, felt "it was doubtful whether a Liver in towns had a Soul to be Saved". (Charles Lamb, *loc cit.*, p. 339: letter to Wordsworth, August 9, 1814.)

retreat' was itself shrinking and decaying. Wordsworth turned instinctively now, for its soul and centre, to the graveyard, an inmost sanctuary where history could not penetrate. Here were true peace, equality, fraternity, with no tombstone or monument to make one man different from another, and the justice of Heaven. All that Wordsworth had once hoped for on earth now stood in his mind as "the sublime attractions of the grave."[1]

Hence the long collection of churchyard anecdotes. Like those of the old pauper in Book II, and of the lonely couple in the mountain cottage in Book V, they are mostly, as the Fenwick notes show, true stories. Some of them had been written years earlier, in the same Lyrical Ballad mood whose errors were now magnified into a system; the seeds of this melancholy harvest had long been sprouting in Wordsworth's mind.

In his case-book, as in the graveyard itself, the dead lie indiscriminately, but they can be arranged to illustrate four propositions.

First and foremost, a quiet country life is the best for moulding character. Half a dozen of the fifteen cases fall under this heading. The restless clergyman (Wordsworth's old crony, Mr. Simpson) had resented his banishment to a small country cure, but it had preserved him from frivolity or vice. It shows how much the family bond had replaced all others for Wordsworth that he counts it to Providence for righteousness, instead of complaining of the state of medical science, that this clergyman and his whole family all died within a few months, and thus were not separated for long. Then we have a model rustic, a fine sturdy intelligent young fellow, leader of the local volunteers. He was buried amid the patriotic regrets of the whole valley, which seems to make Wordsworth view the tale as a striking vindication of his main argument: for him now, little but death could bring men's hearts together in such a flow of feeling. Equally characteristic of him, though less edifying, is the case of the mining prospector, a rugged individualist who succeeded by years of lonely persistence, and then drank himself to death. A neighbour still alive, but soon to join the happy band, is a poor, aged, cheerful labourer, so close to Nature as to be barely distinguishable from the animal kingdom—just rational enough to attend church.[2]

Secondly, with Heaven's grace the worst trials can be borne without

[1] *Excursion*, IV, 238; cf. III, pp. 220–4, and *George and Sarah Green* (1808), where the grave is seen to represent, in Wordsworth's instinctive thinking, escape from trouble into annihilation.

[2] Of the four cases referred to here, the third belongs to Book VI, and the others to Book VII.

repining. A man deaf from infancy, and a blind man, are the examples. Wordsworth has the archaic thought of God sending blindness as a parable to teach sublime truths.[1]

Thirdly, time and patience soften misfortunes, such as the loss of wife or child, or disppointment in love.[2]

Lastly, sin can be atoned for by suffering and repentance. We hear of a talented, strong-minded girl who, cramped and thwarted by her narrow rut, grew into a hard and avaricious woman. Wordsworth dwells, not on a pathetic waste of human promise, but on resignation achieved before death under stress of illness and unhappiness. A story —the longest of all —of a poor village Gretchen he tells with sympathy, tolerance, and delicacy; but it is all in the mode of a bygone age: the girl is to forgive her betrayer, turn her thoughts upward, lose her infant, and die of a broken heart. The whole affair is an instance of Heaven's kindness—a good specimen of the sort of heart-rending cheerfulness that Wordsworth is working himself up to.[3]

Wordsworth was trying to answer great public questions from the data of private experience. He offered his stories as "solid facts", "plain pictures" of real human beings.[4] These beings were indeed too, too solid, with none of the "visionary" character of such a figure as the Leechgatherer; Wordsworth's imagination breathed little life into them. He was seeing the People as a collection of halt, lame, or senile individuals, each creeping on his separate way and groaning in his separate key; victims of spiritual or physical infirmity who seem to stand in place of the social disorders that Wordsworth no longer wanted to think of—but that broke in on him again in the final Book in spite of himself. Compared with the eccentrics of the 1798 *Ballads* they are flesh and blood folk; compared with the Michael of 1800 they are feeble, ailing creatures.

Wordsworth keeps them as far apart as possible, like a careful nurse separating children so that they can do one another no harm.[5] Deafness, blindness, old age reinforce his barriers. The prospector digs alone; the

[1] *Excursion*, VII, 395–515. Cf. *Prelude*, XI, p. 375, where God "corrected" a fit of boyish impatience in him by killing his father—an idea revealing the streak of peasant superstition in Wordsworth. With these two cases compare the subjects of *The Matron of Jedborough and her Husband*, and *The Blind Highland Boy* (1803).

[2] Here may be placed the unhappy lover (VI. 95 ff), the old Jacobite and whig (VI. 392 ff,) and the bereaved family (VII, p. 632 ff).

[3] Also in Book VI are the prodigal son returning to die in his parents' arms, and the husband who dies of remorse after going astray under pressure of bad luck.

[4] V, 637–8.

[5] The treatment of the old man in Book II, and of Ellen in Book VI, brings about the death of both, but the cause is no more than a little rustic ill-nature.

quarryman is never heard of at work with his fellows, but only in the inaccessible nook where his old wife spends her eventless days with her peaceful pious thoughts.[1] Wordsworth's rustics have become as solitary as himself, or the sole-sitting lady of the lake, or the shepherd whom his fancy calls up whenever he thinks of Greece, alone in the hills with his meditations and concocting Greek mythology out of them.[2] The one positive quality left in these characters is a dumb, tenacious, peasant endurance: even this, since the class as a whole is beginning to disintegrate, requires in its members more of a religious substitute for the old cement. They all die without any resentment against their fate; the reader, contemplating their patience, is to learn to feel ashamed of his own discontents.[3] Religious consolation for hopeless suffering had been one more of the ideas floating loose in the *Descriptive Sketches* twenty years before.[4]

Wordsworth had not turned into a 'reactionary', but as a discouraged 'progressive' he had come near the brink, and would in fact tumble over before long. An artist who does not feel the People as a force positively on his side may soon come to feel them as something against him. The People need allies, not patrons; to gain allies they need strength. Wordsworth was too little conscious of their collective strength, too much of their individual weakness. The weakness, not the strength, of the People frightens an artist in such a position as his, by conjuring up in his fears a blind, anarchical monster incapable of rational purpose. Wordsworth in 1812 was in fear of a social war breaking out in the towns.[5] Near the close of *The Excursion* he advocated universal education, as a universal right, but also as a means of counteracting the "ignorance" that was breeding discontent:[6] a highly illiberal notion, exactly opposite to the principle of learning 'from the People'. Growing

[1] *Excursion*, v, 670 ff.; with this idyllic picture may be compared another that has survived of the same Betty, beating her drunken husband home from the Black Bull. (A. C. Gibson, quoted in G. S. Sandilands, *The Lakes, an Anthology of Lakeland Life and Landscape* (1947), p. 144.)

[2] IV, 846–87. [3] VII, 1051–7.

[4] Religion to Wordsworth was a "natural" consolation. As Hale White points out, there is no *theology* in *The Excursion* (*An Examination of the Charge of Apostasy against Wordsworth* (1898), pp. 36 ff.).

[5] Harper, *op. cit.*, II, p. 201, quoting Crabb Robinson. Southey was talking of "the imminent danger in which our throats are at this moment from the Luddites" (letter to Capt. Southey, June 17, 1812, *Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. M. H. Fitzgerald (1912), p. 202). So far as this goes, there is some point in the contention that Wordsworth's anti-popular attitude of 1818 was spontaneous (E. C. Batho, *The Later Wordsworth* (1933), pp. 59–60). But his need of patronage from the Lowthers (Harper, II, p. 204) was helping him along the same road, towards his place in *The Black Book: or, Corruption Unmasked* of 1820 (I, p. 89).

[6] IX, 293–335, 346.

away from them, he was growing closer—there being no third direction in politics—to their masters.

As always, excessive concentration on the individual self had bred in him its counterpart, a morbid sense of the helpless frailty of the individual amid the "deserts infinite" of time and space.[1] Deserts, an old image with him, were taking on a more sinister quality, as of barbarism menacing the little oasis of civilisation. He saw them within the soul as well as all round it. A favourite adjective of his—*dread*—came to him instinctively now when he peered into the "dark foundations" of man's nature, embedded in a gulf "Fearfully low";[2] as low, we might add for him, as memories of guilty love, or the depths of the Faubourg St. Antoine. In 1818 he would be waking the echoes of Keswick with warnings of the approach of "A FEROCIOUS REVOLUTION".[3] By then he only wanted the People to lie peacefully in the graveyard where he had taken leave of them, while he, hiding behind his mountains like a King of Prussia behind his bodyguard of giants, continued to play the part of Poet of Nature.

At the end of *The Excursion* Wordsworth dodged all the problems he had raised, culminating in the final Book in the passionate denunciation of industrial society (for which we may read capitalism), by going out on the lake for a picnic with the charming clergyman and his family; not a bad forecast of how the rest of his life was to be spent. He never continued the poem, as he had intended: it had been too much for him. As an essay in consolation it is laborious taskwork; as a monument to the pessimism of modern man it is incomparable. It is also the funeral monument of Wordsworth's genius, to which by now "Night is than day more acceptable", sleep than waking, death than sleep.[4] Its greatest passage of all has a frozen majesty as of Fate answering the Revolution—

> Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills,
> The generations are prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs, are ready; the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.[5]

Settling in Grasmere, Wordsworth had still been hopeful of a "milder day" to come.[6] But he settled down to look at life through the eyes of a moribund class and a decaying order, and his mind shared in their

[1] *Excursion*, v, 1107; cf. 500–14. [2] IV, 970; V, 296.
[3] *Prose Works*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 255. [4] III, 275–81. [5] VI, 553–7.
[6] *Hartleap Well* (*Lyrical Ballads*, II). The same phrase recurs in an allusion to this poem in a cancelled passage from *The Recluse*. (See notes on p. 319 of Selincourt and Darbishire's *The Excursion*.)

decline; he came to resemble the sentinels in his poem, set "between two armies" in the chill night with nothing better than "their own thoughts to comfort them".[1] He no longer saw life in the Revolutionary crucible, all its elements melting, running, re-combining, and he no longer felt as if poetry were an active part in an apocalyptic transformation of the world. Things cooled down into separate, inert blocks, fundamentally because he came to see the structure of society as a rigid hierarchy of classes. Human nature, having no warmth of action to transform it, was unalterable; duty abstract and changeless; suffering irremediable.[2] No room was left for imagination as an active, working force. It came down to merely laying a varnish of verse over a worm-eaten surface. After 1814 scarcely anything but the deaths of those he had loved could rouse his imagination again, because only death could knock holes in the walls round him and let him see out.

It was not that he was turning into a bad man. In 1815 Haydon found him a man he could "worship as a purified spirit".[3] At Rydal Mount bread and cheese were kept ready for all who knocked. Nor was he habitually, after this date, the frightened reactionary of 1818 and 1831; he mellowed into a cheerful, loquacious, amiable, humane and reasonable householder, not averse to cautious reforms. But the bread-and-cheese of charity was no diet for the Muses, nor timid reformism breath for the trumpets that sing to battle. Wordsworth suffered for intellectual, not moral, errors. An artist has to understand as much as to feel.

Though Wordsworth's finest work still lay ahead of him when he came to Grasmere, nearly all of it was to be about his own or the social past. Before long he was troubled with fears that the lease on which he held his poetic gift was running out, like a peasant's lease of his farm. He began writing a lament on the vanishing of something from his world: rainbow and rose came and went, but the "celestial light" that had touched common things like a dream shone no more.[4] As so often

[1] *Excursion*, VI, 535–8. Both the absence of *action* from Wordsworth's philosophy, and the tendency of much of his best poetry towards a bare, grim, wintry austerity (noticed e.g. by G. W. Knight, *The Starlit Dome* (1941), pp. 4–5), are connected with the fact of his drawing his nourishment from a dying social order.

[2] IV, 71–6, 205–14.

[3] B. R. Haydon, *Autobiography*, April 13, 1815 (World's Classics edition, 1927, p. 278); cf. Southey: "in every relation of life, and every point of view, he is a truly exemplary and admirable man" (letter to B. Barton, December 19, 1814, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 235). It was Wordsworth as a public man that Hazlitt attacked with savage irony in his article of December 1816 (*Collected Works*, ed. A. R. Waller and A. Glover, III, 1902, pp. 157 ff.), and that Shelley called "a beastly and pitiful wretch" (Harper, II, p. 295).

[4] Cf. Abercrombie, *op. cit.*, p. 25: "Perhaps the great Immortality Ode, the climax of his art, marks the turning-point in his psychological history." It was begun in 1802 and finished in 1806.

happened with him, he stopped for several years—he could not find out what it was that he had lost. Then in 1806 in his deepening isolation he added the famous stanzas on childhood and a life before birth. Caught in the "prison-house" of life he clung to half-imaginary memories of his earliest years, and saw them fading like a lost inheritance; he looked further back still, into an earlier existence, and credited to it the sensations that can only belong to man in an elaborated society. That he was weaving private myth out of public reality he might have guessed by recalling those lines in *Descriptive Sketches* on the tradition, still handed down in the Alps from father to son, of an ancient golden age free from labour and hardship. His prison-house was a divided society, the "fen of stagnant waters"[1] that was his England; his poem achieved its immense power through its tragic sense of the loss and laying waste of human value by this captivity. His infancy, about which Heaven lay, was the infancy of mankind, of which a relic lingered in the primitive democracy and fraternity of Grasmere. Not the individual child playing with its toys, but the human race grappling with its tasks, could claim those lofty and inextinguishable gifts, those "truths" of an early unbroken social bond that men in later ages must "toil" painfully to rediscover, and could hear the "mighty waters" of history.

A poem that should have been a hymn to humanity and a splendid memorial of the Revolution turned into an enigma, almost a splendid absurdity, because Wordsworth could now only think of the mind's contact with other minds in social life as cramping and strangling, instead of moulding and fertilising; because he could see no road forward out of a dismal present, but only a road receding into the mists of a bygone age. It was left to Shelley and Marx to rebuild his "imperial palace" on new foundations, in the future instead of in the past.

Since Marx, the problems that baffled Wordsworth have begun to be, in principle, soluble. Any poetry that neglects to try and solve them will go wrong, not so much by being untrue, as by being irrelevant, and therefore in danger of being ridiculous. There will not be another great poet who has not learned much from Marx. Marxism also has much to learn, that it has not yet learned, from poetry.

[1] Sonnet: *London*, 1802.

INDEX

Y