RESPECTABILITY AND WORKING-CLASS RADICALISM
IN VICTORIAN LONDON:
1850-1890
A Contribution to the Debate
by
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Australian National University
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This thesis is my own work.

JANET McCALMAN
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I thank all these people - the shortcomings of this thesis are nobody's fault but my own.
ILLUSTRATIONS

OUTCAST LONDON

Irish settlers in the yard of Market Court, off High Street, Kensington, about 1865.

ONE MODE OF ENTRY INTO RESPECTABILITY

London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Personnel, 1881

THOMAS COOPER, GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE AND GEORGE HOWELL

SHAFTESBURY PARK, BATTERSEA, 1972

STREET EVENTS NEAR SHAFTESBURY PARK

Top: Derby Day along the Clapham Road in the 1890s.
Bottom: A Sunday School Procession in Wandsworth Road near the turn of the century.

RESPECTABLE PEOPLE READY FOR AN EAST END OUTING AROUND 1890

MAPS

STREET MAP OF SHAFTESBURY PARK: INSIDE BACK
THE SOCIAL WORLD OF SHAFTESBURY PARK: COVER
INTRODUCTION

The most repulsive thing here is the bourgeois 'respectability' bred into the bones of the workers. The social division of society into innumerable gradations, each recognised without question, each with its own pride but also its inborn respect for its 'betters' and 'superiors', is so old and firmly established that the bourgeois still find it pretty easy to get their bait accepted.¹

Throughout his acquaintance with Britain Engels was worried by the growth of respectability in the working classes.² His concern provided the starting point of the debate over the meaning and significance of respectability in working-class life and politics. From such perceptions Marxist thinkers developed the theory of the Labour Aristocracy - a theory which still underwrites much Marxist and non-Marxist historical inquiry. The values encapsulated in the notion of respectability were equated with the values of bourgeois capitalism. Roughly, the theory maintained that the leadership of the working class - the skilled worker and trade union élite - capitulated to bourgeois values and developed false consciousness. This false consciousness largely explained the failure of the British working class to reach Marxist revolutionary class consciousness.

E.J. Hobsbawm gave the theory new life in his essay on the Labour Aristocracy, first published in 1954.³ Recently Trygve Tholfsen, from a non-Marxist stance, has detected the origins of mid-Victorian stability in the similarity of the ideals of respectability between the upper working class and the middle class. He argues that the working-class elite were almost unwittingly co-opted into

²Ibid., pp.28-33, 204-5, 522.
bourgeois values, thereby vitiating their radical critique of society.¹

A different line in the debate over respectability has been taken by G.M. Young and Geoffrey Best. In 1946 Young, in one of his characteristic asides, postulated that 'the great dividing line in 1860 is not rich and poor, but the respectable and the others. You may be rich, but if you are not respectable you will not pass muster in the eyes of society...On the other hand, you may be poor, but if you are respectable, the world will think well of you.'² Geoffrey Best has pursued this idea with more depth and subtlety. He believed that respectability constituted a more significant social divider than did feelings largely economic in source; that respectability provided the social cement of Victorian society and that it contained dissent. He asks as many questions as he answers: how many who could afford to practise respectability refused to do so, and did such a refusal 'ipso facto mean hostility to the hierarchical system?'³ For marxist and non-marxist alike, working-class respectability has largely been linked with working-class political behaviour - the debate over these social ideals is also a debate about politics. Respectability has been assigned the explanatory role of significantly hindering working-class political rebellion.⁴

This study is equally concerned with the relationship between respectability and working-class radicalism and it is addressed to two general questions: what did respectability mean and how did it affect working-class political behaviour?


²G.M. Young, broadcast on 'The Happy Family', reprinted in Victorian Essays, (O.U.P., 1962), p.120.


⁴See the Bibliographical Essay for a summary of other historians' interest in respectability.
It is necessary to commence by outlining the focus of the study and its methods and limitations, and by providing definitions of some of its terms. The respectable working-class are the most elusive people in Victorian England. Social history of the lower orders is hard enough without choosing to concentrate on a group of people who rarely broke the law, were spared the attentions of social reformers and did not need the workhouse. Richard Cobb, working in the comparative bureaucratic richness of revolutionary France, has demonstrated in his latest book some of the difficulties of this form of social history. He has looked for the people who lived 'la vie en marge'—those untouched by the great social and political issues of their times. Probably the majority of respectable working-class people lived 'la vie en marge' and concentrated on the business of existence. Consequently the social historian is largely limited to evidence left behind by those who did something out of the ordinary, or were uncommonly egotistical, or were active in politics and trade unionism. The connection between respectability and politics is in some ways artificially created by the extant source material. The exceptional men often have to speak for the unexceptional and almost invariably men have to speak for women. The historian has to be wary of the certainties, intolerance and self-delusion of self-made men who took to print. On the other hand, middle and upper-class commentators had plenty to say about the working classes, but here their prejudices, ignorance and fears often predominated over the accuracy of their observation. The authentic working-class voice can be found, but it is a small voice amidst the clamour of working-class and moneyed-class ideologues, moralisers and egotists.

Partly because of the scarcity of evidence I have chosen to concentrate on London from 1850 to 1890, using the two great studies of working-class life and labour by

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Mayhew and Booth as the boundaries of the study. There is also a happy political coincidence in this choice with the chronological span from the decline of Chartism to the rise of the 'new unionism' and the belated impact of marxian socialism on British radicalism. It can be justly argued that London is not the best place to study working-class respectability, as compared to the Midlands and those areas of England and Wales touched by Methodism. London was notorious for its indifference to religion, even among the respectable working class, as Booth was to lament in the 1890s. Nevertheless, despite its cultural differences and unique economy, the social changes and political debates in Victorian London had much in common with the rest of the country and can illumine many general trends in the provinces.

Some definitions of terms: 'Respectability' itself is the hardest. Generally the Victorians and historians since have known what it meant and avoided analysing its constituent parts or conceptualising its meaning. One can make a catalogue of values to sum up the parts of respectability such as regularity of income, economy, cleanliness, sobriety, chastity, independence, self-help, manliness, peaceableness and so on. But such a definition is not very useful. Many notions overlap and it is impossible to separate the parts of the whole and show how they changed in significance over time: for instance that cleanliness was more important in 1884 than manliness, or that chastity was more important in 1862 than it was in 1877. Also not all people who considered themselves respectable believed in the same things at the same time. A moderate drinker could have been just as respectable as an ardent teetotaller and there is evidence of at least one pious

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dissenter who fathered his first child out of wedlock. ¹ 'Respectability' is a nebulous notion: it can be called a code, a style of living, an ideal, but never an ideology or a concept.

Leaving sexual puritanism aside, largely what the Victorians meant by respectability were habits of cleanliness, punctuality, forethought, sobriety at work and the control of personal violence which we now take for granted in modern industrial society. If an unsubstantiated assertion may be permitted at this stage, respectability constituted the general civilising force of the age: within its ambit came a variety of social habits which made everyday life healthier and safer for people of all classes. This transition from the ruder pre-industrial world began well before 1850, and the clearest exposition of the civilising effect of respectability was made by Francis Place. In his autobiography he constructed a social history of his class in the Strand, and writing in 1824, feared that now people would accuse him of caricaturing 'the ignorance, the immorality, the grossness, the obscenity, the drunkenness, the dirtiness, and depravity of the middling and even of the better sort of tradesmen, the artisans, and the journeymen tradesmen of his youth'. ² 'Respectability' then is best left at this stage as a set of values which governed behaviour - it can be conceptualised as a personal discipline.

The second problem of definition involves 'class' and 'class consciousness'. These terms are now fraught with difficulties for all but the most scrupulous Marxist scholars. While owing much to Marx, this study is not written by a Marxist, therefore to avoid confusion and false claims the term 'class' will be used only as meaning social stratum. 'Working-class' will mean 'the lower orders', those who work, the labouring poor. I prefer to use 'working class' because it has widest currency and it lacks the offensiveness of 'the lower orders'. Social stratification is defined by


contemporary perceptions of status, hence while some of the poorest shopkeepers were working-class, low-paid clerks definitely were not.¹

Similarly 'class consciousness' will be avoided. Rather I will discuss political behaviour as perceptions of the locus of authority in society and of the relationship of the individual to fellow members of his class (stratum) and to the other classes (strata). The question of false consciousness, while a proper question for the strict Marxist historian and theorist, is not one I am asking of the Victorian working classes. I am interested in whether, how and why people became political people, hence even though my private convictions make me consider a working-class Tory misguided, as an historian I acknowledge his political engagement, or political consciousness.

Finally the structure of the study requires a brief explanation. It commences with three chapters which combine analysis and narrative to demonstrate and explain the themes of the argument. They are followed by three long chapters which illustrate the argument and interpretation of the meaning and significance of respectability in working-class life and radical politics. The first of these chapters is on the role respectability played in politics between 1850 and 1890 and the second is a biographical case study of four respectable radicals who rose to the status of brainworkers. The final chapter is a case study of a housing estate in Battersea between 1872 and 1892. It is intended to act as the finale to the study, showing how respectable people lived by the end of the period and telling the story of their political activities. This study, while informed by reading in sociology, is a piece of social history which does not pretend to generalise beyond its chronological and geographical scope. Readers may draw such further conclusions from it as they wish.

The complexities of this subject and the range of evidence available for it dictate that the treatment hover

between narrative and analysis. Biography is also very important. There is not much of a story in 'respectability' but there are plenty of stories in what respectable people did and believed. The analysis helps to explain the narrative, as the narrative helps to give the analysis chronological shape and enhances the evidence for the historical explanations and interpretations. The analysis and the narrative complement each other - one without the other is at best thin, at worst unintelligible.

This thesis is a restructured version of an earlier work. The task of revision has further impressed me with the foolishness of my ambition to tackle such a subject - it is enormous, hence significant parts may be glossed over, even omitted. I offer no more than an interpretation of the evidence available in the time I have had to research and write. 'Respectability and Working-class Radicalism' could be studied for a life-time, therefore this is but a tiro historian's contribution to a continuing debate.
OUTCAST LONDON

Irish settlers in the yard of Market Court, off High Street, Kensington, about 1865.
CHAPTER I

THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL DISCIPLINE

I ANXIETY AND THE GREAT WEN: THE NEED FOR RESPECTABILITY

The ideals embodied in respectability were not Victorian inventions. They had a long history and owed much of their origin and survival to the Puritans and their descendants. Yet the Victorians almost managed to make them their own, for the prescriptions respectability offered for personal conduct and social discipline became increasingly functional in industrial urban society. Respectability was found to have a number of uses in adjusting to the new social and economic order of the nineteenth century and it affected people of all classes. Both overtly and covertly respectability and industrial urban society aided and abetted each other.

To illustrate this causal relationship it is best to examine briefly the changes and problems which occurred in Victorian London. London was both unique and in many ways representative of the dislocations and new social and economic needs that the Industrial Revolution created throughout Britain. Its inhabitants suffered perhaps even more than their counterparts in the provinces the dislocation of life and work and the aggravation of social ills produced by rapid urban growth. By 1850 London had just under doubled its population in thirty years. It was to do the same by the end of the century. But more than just grow, London became the hub of a vast movement of population: in the decade 1841–51, immigrants accounted for 17 per cent of the 1841 population, and in the same era, half the number of immigrants was offset by those who left.

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maintains that the transformation of central London into a commercial district involved a greater displacement of population than the rebuilding of Paris under Haussmann. In a mere sixty years the whole physiognomy of central London changed beyond recognition.¹

The growth of population had more than the obvious effects of straining the housing and employment resources of the city: it magnified in visibility as much as in absolute numbers the social consequences of poverty. Victorian London's essential crisis was the inability of its unique economy to match the growth of population in the availability of regular employment, housing, sanitation and, significantly, social control.

In 1850 many members of the moneyed classes felt endangered by the lower orders. London had not witnessed the most violent outbursts of Chartism, but as the political capital it had received the big petitions. The moneyed classes had controlled April tenth 1848 successfully, but the mere presence of a vast poverty-stricken working class offered a believed political threat. But the threat was also social - maybe even more so. Destitution, violent crime, alcohol abuse, prostitution on a scale unmatched by any city in Europe - all were rendered more visible and aggravated by the impact of urbanisation. These fears impelled concerned people to perceive problems in the system and in social behaviour which had previously been taken to be part of the natural order of things. As Victorians began to see new problems, they often faltered in finding solutions, but questions about the right ordering of society and about personal life shaped one of the central debates of the age. Nevertheless, philanthropic social reform, the mission to civilize the lower orders and the slow, piecemeal reactions of national and local government were necessarily accompanied by anxiety and confusion.

The new economic order and the great migration from country to city and from the homeland to the colonies and America offered wider opportunities for material and social

¹Stedman Jones, op.cit., p.159, see pp.159-78.
improvement. The ideal of respectability assisted upward social mobility by providing social aspirants with a code of behaviour and a new identity. As we shall see, once achieved, respectability could be used as a weapon in a bid for social significance and political power. Hence it became interwoven with the personal lives of many Victorian people in a way unique to the nineteenth century. Although respectability is not the key to understanding the Victorian frame of mind, it was one of the most important keys and its manifestations touched on many of the other social, political and economic issues of the age. The magnified, if not new, problems of Victorian London and the disturbances to the social order created by the new opportunities for personal advancement coalesced into a general concern of the age—the pursuit of a new form of social discipline. A discipline to replace the face to face relationships of rural life and one which could contain the urban working classes morally, socially and politically. Also it needed to be sufficiently attractive to appeal to working people and the moneyed classes alike. This was the context which made respectability one of the great issues and shibboleths of the Victorian age.

Socially the new industrial nation needed two things—disciplined citizens and disciplined workers. Urbanisation had broken irrecoverably the community discipline of rural life. Industrialisation demanded a work-force which was docile, punctual, sober and sufficiently educated to operate machines and means of transport with regularity, efficiency and safety. The new rich, burdening themselves with 'the paraphenalia of gentility' required an ever-increasing army of trustworthy servants to guard their children and possessions. To perform many of the new functions of industrial urban life working-class people had to be civilized and integrated into the essential moral frame of mind of the moneyed classes. Much of this 'civilization' came under the ideal of respectability. Hence, whether they liked it or not, the working classes were to have

respectability thrust upon them. Both consciously and unconsciously, the hope was that if the working classes could be turned into miniature bourgeois people, then not only would they support the social and economic system with their willing and efficient labour, but also they would assist to preserve it with their loyalty. What the moneyed classes were not to realise often enough was that their weapon for self-protection was a two-edged sword - but that is for later.

It is easiest to start with a particular example of this process of using respectability to meet the new requirements of the industrial urban state. As the Railways epitomised so much that was new about the age, so they were also in the vanguard of practising the new social discipline. The Railways needed a respectable and industrially docile labour force. The Companies were able to over-ride a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1839 and obtained legislative backing to impose gaol sentences and fines. By the 1840s the agricultural and general labourers, discharged soldiers and sailors and domestic servants who flocked to railway work as a 'way out', had come to accept strict discipline as an essential piece of the fabric of their lives, and drunkenness and absence from duty lost their predominance over other offences.¹

To ensure industrial docility, the companies adopted a policy of 'divide and rule' so that the multitude of grades reported on each other for breaches of discipline or seditious talk. Militants were split off from the others by paying gratuities to pacifists and bringing men from a distance, ignorant of a dispute, to break strikes.² Secondly, they forced their employees to become respectable. The Railway Times proposed a scheme in 1840 to house single


²Kingsford, op.cit., pp.77-8.
men in large barracks and to reward good conduct with country cottages in the hope of creating 'a kind of local militia devoted to peace and order and opposed to the Chartists in the realization that their own welfare depended on the security of railway property'. Of course if a man became 'demoralised' he could not be housed by the Company, as the London and North Western drivers realised to their cost in 1871 when they were evicted from their houses in Camden Town for striking. Railwaymen had to sign agreements to quit Company houses at seven days' notice and were liable to dismissal if regulations for cleanliness and tidiness were not observed. In the new railway towns like Swindon and Wolverton, the Companies were able to create an organic railway society, free from outside contamination. The company schools made little distinction between spiritual instruction and education. Churches were built, and allowing for the difficulty of reconciling Sunday work with Sunday observance, Rule 26 of the Taff Vale Railway 1855 Rule Book made the intentions clear:

It is urgently required that every person... on Sundays and other Holy Days, when he is not required on duty, will attend a place of worship, as it will be the means of promotion when vacancies arise.

At Wolverton, the policy had most success. As the chairman of the London and Birmingham Company assured the shareholders in 1844: 'You will reap the benefit of this, for I am sure that there is not a single person attached to that establishment who would not willingly and gladly come forward and perform extra service, in order to meet an occasional emergency.' And in 1848 the Wolverton mechanics helped the Company during an enginemens' strike.

As a result the Railway companies had little difficulty with the Chartists in 1848. In March and April large numbers of railwaymen all over the country were sworn in as

1 Ibid., pp.122, 125.
2 Ibid., pp.73-4.
3 Ibid., p.76.
4 Ibid., p.81.
special constables or made to sign a declaration of their willingness to serve. Only in the Watford workshops, where the ununiformed artisans were reported to be 'confirmed Chartists', was it necessary to bind them merely to the protection of their own line - their bread and butter. It took forty years for trade unionism to take hold in the industry.¹

The strategy of the railway companies was overt, even brutal. For society at large, the evils were more complex and more difficult to assault. We need to look in greater detail at the new problems of morals and of social and political control, and at the fears of the moneyed classes to fill out the setting for the pursuit of social discipline through respectability.

A vital break with the pre-industrial age was the realisation that Drink was a problem. Unquestioned alcohol abuse had been part of the fabric of social life until the nineteenth century.² The Temperance and Teetotal movements were expressions of both a realisation that alcohol abuse, such as in the artisan traditions of footings and Saint Monday, were incompatible with efficient capitalism, and that uncontrolled drinking, unregulated drinking places and adulteration caused much misery.³ Pragmatism, compassion, idealism and the chance of a stage to play out ambition - all combined to make the anti-drink movement an ambivalent, but nonetheless genuinely civilizing force of the age. Its excesses and intolerance reflected the magnitude of the problem.

This new awareness that Drink was a problem came from below as well as from above. Being forced to wait in public houses for jobs and the custom of paying wages late on Saturday night in public houses led to intemperance and to

¹Ibid., pp.85-6, 82.
hostility from sensitive and self-respecting working-
people. In 1850 a teetotal bookbinder from Leamington Spa
lamented the moral and physical hazards which befell a
respectable artisan 'on tramp' - the shortage of respectable
and safe accommodation and of being denied the services of
his Trade Society because 'water drinkers' were persecuted.
As Brian Harrison has pointed out, a working man paid
dearly for giving up the drink. He cut himself off from
the society of his fellows, he frequently jeopardised his
opportunities for finding work and he ran the risk of
illness from contaminated water.

But mixed with the
moralising cant of the moneyed classes demanding temperance
and sabbath observance, were the pleas of working men who
realised that these movements could measurably improve the
quality of their lives.

The Victorians were not the first to see sex as a
problem. But we can detect an increased sexual anxiety in
the pruriency of middle-class sexual respectability, in the
seventy-year resistance to the repeal of the law preventing
marriage to a deceased wife's sister, and in the agitations
over the Contagious Diseases' Acts and the age of consent.
The problem was visible in the streets in the shape of
prostitution. One estimate of the extent of prostitution
in mid-century London was of around 80,000 full-time
prostitutes in a population of two million people. With
the addition of the 'half-and-half women' of which My Secret
Life and Mayhew provide abundant evidence, the figure rises
to between 100,000 and 150,000 in 'Walter's' day.

1 The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., pp.193-4; Mayhew, op.cit.,

2 The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor, The
Literature of Working Men: Being the Supplementary Numbers
of 'The Working Man's Friend' (1850-1), cited from now on
as The Working Man's Friend; 'On Tramping', A.R., bookbinder,

3 Brian Harrison, op.cit., p.50.

4 Eric Trudgill, 'Prostitution and Paterfamilias' in H.J.
Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds, The Victorian City (London,
Walter: The English Casanova. A Presentation of His Unique
respectable was as hard, if not harder for many working-class girls, than becoming respectable. Decent people were shocked and felt threatened. Hence rational assessments of the problem were rare, such as an 1871 Feminist report which admitted that it was not only moral ignorance, but equally 'ignorance of physical facts' which contributed to the massive illegitimacy rate. More commonly the hysteria was thinly veiled: 'We have done all in our power to induce girls, when out of employment, to go into domestic service;...[But they] are all over London, shy of restraint, ignorant, self-willed, and fond of liberty.'

We still know little about Victorian attitudes to sex. Peter T. Cominos and Stephen Marcus have argued, largely from the writings of Dr Acton, that the Victorian middle-class developed an ideology of sexual respectability which perceived a nexus between the economy of money and the economy of semen. The mission of middle-class England was to harness the sexual instinct to the power of reason and the pursuit of wealth. R.S. Neale has criticised their argument for being too narrow. It does not admit a minority movement, in the 'uneasy class' which believed that sexual passion was natural in men and women and with contraception should be fully enjoyed in marriage. Secondly, he argues, they regarded the object of economic activity as growth not economy.

1 Committee for Amending the Law in Points wherein it is Injurious to Women, Infant Mortality: Its Causes and Remedies (Manchester, 1871), p.12.


As with the Drink problem, the moralising mission met with support from below and was informed by the ideas and needs of respectable working men. Nineteenth-century working-class people delighted in the sexual irregularities of the ruling classes. Sexual politics became a social weapon in the bid for recognition of middle-class, middling-class and working-class social aspirants and was played with increasing sophistication. By 1885 Justice admitted in an editorial that 'Every speaker in the Social Democratic Party can testify that nothing ever stirs a crowd of workers so much, particularly the women present, as the statement (with proof of it), that the labour of which they are robbed in the workhouse and the factory is used as wealth by the upper and middle classes to make prostitutes of their daughters.'

Sexual exploitation was often a more effective inspirer of class tension than economic exploitation. But as Victorian prudery grew, inhibiting public debate, a minority alliance of respectable and radical working-men—Lovett, the Holyoake brothers, and middling men—Charles Bradlaugh, the publisher Truelove and Dr Charles Drysdale, preserved the ideas of the 1820s when Richard Carlile wrote *Every Woman's Book*. Carlile argued that the equality of the sexes was intrinsic to the equality of mankind and that birth control could increase human happiness. The notion of economy was important to his argument—it was a waste of

1 Justice: The Organ of Social Democracy, 22 August 1885, p.4.

resources to bring children into a world which could not nurture them, and it was a waste of human health and love to inflict constant pregnancies on women or to practise abstinence. But as Victorian England began to confront the social consequences of the industrial revolution, anxiety led to prudery and the ideas generated by the Enlightenment were buried so that their radicalism still seems anachronistic.¹

But in the streets of London danger and contamination abounded. In some areas it was unsafe for a gentleman to walk in broad daylight.² By 1850 London had the best police force in England. But it also had the largest and most diverse underworld to control, which had refuges in places like the Holy Land of the St Giles rookery, ideally situated for rapid forays into 'respectable' London.³ When Booth made his map of poverty in the late 1880s of Central London, the rich and respectable still lived a street away in many parts from his 'black' and 'black-blue' streets: Mecklenburgh Square, Bloomsbury, was then and to some extent still is, an island of gentility, backing to the north and to the south on to pockets of poverty and crime.⁴ There was also the visibility of public nuisances: My Secret Life abounds in incidents where the streets were used for excretion and copulation. The spread of street lamps and an educative campaign supported by the increasing provision of public lavatories and better housing gradually cleaned up the streets and conferred on the poor more dignity.⁵

¹In 1841 William Lovett was joint publisher with John Cleave of The Educational Circular and Communist Apostle (Kashnor: very rare item, only copy believed to be extant). Advocating a 'communistic' world of harmony between the sexes and the classes, held together by a gentle anarchism, the paper was the organ of a group of London Chartists and 'middling men' like Goodwyn Barmby 'Esq.' and Professor J.C. Blumenfeld.


³Ibid., pp.107-8, and Francis Sheppard, op.cit., pp.35-40.

⁴Booth, op.cit.; Maps for Poverty Series, North-Western Sheet.

⁵Brian Harrison, 'Underneath the Victorians', op.cit., p.258.
The rich and respectable sought to protect themselves against social dangers by moving out into new suburbs in the West and South. The geographical isolation of the classes made the cultural gulfs between them more unbridgeable. Much of the indifference of the upper classes towards the condition of the poor sprang as much from ignorance as from callousness. But one contamination they could not escape was epidemic disease. As The Times acidly commented after the cholera epidemic of 1848-9, 'The cholera is the best of all sanitary reformers....' The 1837-8 typhus epidemic resulted in Dr Southwood Smith's report on Bethnal Green and Whitechapel. When Lord Normanby, a member of the government read the report, his incredulity prompted him to visit Bethnal Green with Dr Southwood Smith after which he admitted that 'so far from any exaggeration having crept into the descriptions which had been given, they had not conveyed to my mind an adequate idea of the truth'.

It was the 1848-9 cholera epidemic which sent Henry Mayhew into the world of the London poor. Mayhew's article in September 1849 on 'Jacob's Island', the most severely ravaged part of London suggested, either to Mayhew or to the editors of the Morning Chronicle, the idea of a series on 'Labour and the Poor'. The project expanded far beyond the original scheme and Mayhew resigned from the Chronicle a year later, writing a new body of pamphlets which were published in four volumes in 1861-2. Gertrude Himmelfarb has perceived an 'atmosphere of anxiety and crisis, of psychic and social dislocation' pervading Mayhew's work, as though the 'miasma of noxious vapours which contemporaries held responsible for the epidemic...have infected the very pages

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2 Quoted in ibid., p.270.

3 Ibid., p.253.

of his book'. Whether the initial horror of Jacob's Island permanently affected Mayhew's vision of the poor and determined his selectivity, or whether the impulse was literary, he nonetheless depicted a society which was 'in a visible state of dissolution, the people in a morbid pathological condition that was critical if not fatal'. She criticises Mayhew for creating an image of the poor as a 'race apart, uncivilized, unsocialized and less than human'.

We have little chance to verify whether this is unjustified, for as Dr Himmelfarb herself points out the Blue Books of 'the decade of reform' concentrated on the Residuum, creating an image of poverty which no intervention could really ameliorate. What Dr Himmelfarb has not acknowledged is that Mayhew discovered and rejoiced in another 'London Poor' - the respectables - which E.P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo have disinterred and, moreover, that the atmosphere of anxiety and crisis arose in part from the trauma of urbanisation.

It would be foolish to maintain that all members of the moneyed classes shared the same anxieties about the condition of England: it is equally possible to write a history of Victorian society as the Age of Optimism or the Age of Equipoise. But the received periodical press is a useful guide to the perceptions of the educated classes of those below them and 1850 is an interesting year. Mayhew it seems pulled off a journalistic coup in making the condition of the working classes a popular topic. For instance, Archibald Alison, the Tory historian, opened 1850 for Blackwood's with a celebratory review of 'The Year of Reaction'.

1848, the 'year of revolution', had threatened the health and prosperity of society throughout Europe. '[But] the English Revolutionists were morally slaughtered in London on the tenth of April....' From the safety of his country home near Glasgow, he averred that from the year of reaction 'the patriot will derive consolation and hope...and

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1Ibid., pp.319-20.

from its checkered scenes the virtuous and upright will
draw the conclusion that there are limits to human
wickedness even in this scene of trial; and that the safest,
not less than the honourable course, for all classes, from
the throne to the cottage, in periods of danger, is to be
found in the fearless discharge of DUTY'.

But if Blackwood's opened 1850 with confidence, by November it was
swallowing its words as the daily and periodical press
reeled under Mayhew's revelations. Reviewing Alton Locke
the Edinburgh poet and Professor of Rhetoric, W.E. Aytoun,
conceded that Disraeli's _Sybil_, once believed to be
exaggerated was now credible after the flood of Blue Books
and accounts like Mayhew's: 'No man with a human heart in
his bosom...can be indifferent to the welfare of the
working classes.' In March 1851 Archibald Alison in a leading
article attack on Blackwood's 'Manchester School' opponent,
the _Edinburgh Review_, was forced to concur with the _Review_
'that it was never intended by Providence that things in
this country should be as they now are....'

If Mayhew over-dramatised and misrepresented the
condition of the London working classes, he did shake the
complacency of the educated classes more effectively than any
Blue Book. By May 1850 the _British Quarterly Review_ admitted
that 'Socialism' would have remained a theoretical question
'had not a wonderful series of revelations suddenly
disclosed in our own country, existing as it were under our
own very feet, a mass of social woe and putridity that France
itself could not parallel....' _Fraser's Magazine_ in
January was so appalled by Mayhew's tales of destitution and
of women prostituting themselves for bread, that it declared:

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1Ibid., p.14.

2W.E. Aytoun, Review article of _Alton Locke_ by Charles
Kingsley; _Blackwood's Magazine_, November 1850, pp.596-7, 594.

3Archibald Alison, 'The Dangers of Our Country (Number 11).
Our Internal Dangers', ibid., March 1851, p.257, referring to
the article by W.R. Greg, 'English Socialism and Communistic

4'Recent Aspects of Socialism', _The British Quarterly Review_,
May 1850, p.491.
'We must learn that all property, all talent, all strength, all learning, all labour, is but a trust for the benefit of all; ay learn that all of these are gifts of God, and not one of them only, does that startling axiom of Proudhon - "Property is a theft" - become very truth, when each is enjoyed for self alone, without sense of duty to God or to our neighbour.' But the writer's most significant perception was that in comparison to the villages and the factory districts, 'London seems emphatically the city of unsocialized labour'.

Unsocialised labour and unsocialised people - the concerned drew the same conclusion from Mayhew as has J.F.C. Harrison, that 'despite all the evangelical effort that was poured out, decade after decade, considerable sections of the labouring poor, especially in large cities, were culturally resistant to the dominant values of respectable Victorian society'. More than culturally resistant, many were culturally isolated, such as the thirty year old man who told Mayhew: 'O yes, I've heard of God; he made heaven and earth; I've never heard of his making the sea; that's another thing and you can best learn about that at Billingsgate (He seemed to think that the sea was an appurtenance of Billingsgate.)

When Horace Mann's report of the 1851 Religious Census was published in 1854 it more than confirmed the worst fears of those churchmen and laymen who had realised that the churches were failing in the new cities, especially in London. Here was another form of social discipline which had disintegrated. Halévy considered Evangelicalism to have been the social cement of Victorian England, but in London

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3Mayhew, op.cit., Vol.I, p.22. Billingsgate was a fish market.
organized religion was powerless in the face of the collapse of community life. Equally it was powerless in the face of the realities of working-class life - as a coster girl explained to Mayhew: 'If we cheats in the streets, I know we shan't go to Heaven, but it's very hard upon us, for if we didn't cheat, we couldn't live, profits is so bad.' As religion failed, so did other forms of community organization which could 'civilize' the poor. Looking at the spread of choral singing, Fraser's Magazine despaired of London: 'London life is, for the most part, a splendid solitude where each man passes an isolated existence, and forms but a very inadequate idea of the moral influence diffused through the practice of choral music in the country. In remote districts, however, the objects and business of life are circumscribed, music becomes the cement of society....' 

One of the spate of books and articles purporting to reveal the inner lives of the working classes inspired by the concern over the condition of England in the 1840s and 1850s was Our National Sinews, published in 1854 by Stephen Shirley, a working-class temperance reformer and founder of the United Kingdom Band of Hope Union. He despaired at both the poverty and depravity of the working classes but he saw that depravity resulted in part from poverty. He compared favourably the clerk and the shopman with those below them for being 'pretty well paid, in person...gentlemanly, and [they] shine in life with a lustre that would eclipse many more in a higher sphere'.

Yet all the condemnations of working-class moral viciousness carried a caveat that there was a minority of sober, industrious, disciplined men. Stephen Shirley rejoiced:

2'Progress of the English Choir', Fraser's Magazine, December 1851, p.610.
3E.g. also G. Simmons, The Working Classes, their Moral, Social and Intellectual Condition, with Practical Suggestion for their Improvement (London, 1849).
4Stephen Shirley, Our National Sinews; or A Word on, to, and for the Working Classes... (London, c.1854), Kashnor, pp.32-5, 24-5, 26.
...when amidst such a mass of wretchedness, one here and there stands out, an example to his fellows: his home a little heaven below; his family on Sunday meeting in the house of God to hear words whereby they may be saved....Such men exert a mighty influence over their godless companions. Their cleanly attire is a constant reproach to the negligent, their calm and happy disposition ever inviting to a trial of heaven born principles, which under all circumstances, produce such dignified and happy results.¹

But the saccharine prose is a warning - Shirley was writing about his self-image. What also began to disturb the concerned moneyed classes was that the superior working men were, in a more sophisticated way than the Residuum, rejecting the received values of Christian civilization. The Methodist London Quarterly Review in 1853 attacked Secularism as 'the brand of infidelity which appeals more especially to our artisans'. It was nothing more than the old Owenite opposition to property: 'decrepit Socialism dressed up in swaddling clothes and rechristened Secularism'. Holyoake was seeking 'to prejudice the working classes against the Bible by representing it as the enemy of all social and political reform'.² Blackwood's was more vicious in 1859: 'Should Secularism be made to feed the starving or clothe the hungry [?]....No, there is a grander object still: it should be made to establish Mr Holyoake in business.'³ Poor Holyoake - there was some truth in this, but the real threat was not his 'Socialism', but his espousal of an inner-directed morality to replace Christianity.

The Chartists may have been 'morally slaughtered' at Kennington Common, but this did not mean that Property felt secure. The Residuum was frightening enough without the prospect of an alliance between the 'superior men' and the depraved. The London Quarterly Review in 1858 viewed with

¹Ibid., pp.20-1.


alarm a new form of depravity overtaking the 'N.C.O.s' of
the working classes:

The crowds who attend public meetings and who
applaud the popular orator when he utters
clap-trap commonplaces about Britain's
liberties and glories, contain, as a rule,
very few of those to whom we now refer. The
public house, the low theatre and places
worse than these, are their customary haunts.
While in the classes above them sobriety,
intelligence and right principle are gaining
ground, there is reason to fear that among
these, ignorance no less dense, and depravity
far more intense and energetic, prevail, than
has been the case with any equal proportion
of Britain's sons of toil in former ages. Here
is stored up fuel for sedition to ignite. Here
is Britain's weakness and canker. Here is the
intestinal disease, threatening the vitals of
the body politic.1

Out of this panic-ridden article emerge the two great
problems which bedevilled the ruling classes in the mid-
century: how to bring the undermass within the pale of
civilized society, yet how to prevent them, once civilized,
from resisting the influences of Secularists, or Chartists
or clap-trap orators. On their own, the poor could be
relied upon to be politically apathetic,2 provided they had
no contact with 'the few of their own class who have a large
gift of rambling eloquence'3 and opportunists like George
Jacob Holyoake. The image of the political character of the
'mob' and the public role of a man like Holyoake were to
change fundamentally in the next forty years.

Pessimists believed the age to be disintegrating -
socially and morally. The Westminster Review in 1852 saw
the most dangerous tendency of the age to be the growing
impossibility of social intercourse between the classes.
The old mercantile guilds, however mischievous economically,
had, it argued, blended 'the different ranks of producers,
and in its place we have unions of workmen against masters,
and of masters against workmen. To the workman a spurious
patriotism has arisen out of this: his club demands and

1The London Quarterly Review, Vol.II, No.21, October 1858, p.3.
2W.E. Aytoun, 'The New Reform Bill', Blackwood's Magazine,
April 1859, pp.506-7.
3G. Simmons, op.cit., p.35.
receives from him a loyal self-devotion. To its opinion he is more sensitive than to that of the general community. His honour and his sentiment are wrapt up in it, as that of peers in their order; and both the one and the other are worse citizens to their country on that account.¹ William Acton saw a relationship between the social and the moral disintegration of the age in the utility of prostitution to the bourgeois marriage: '...we are apt in this utilitarian and self-seeking age to forget that incidental, as well as direct, duties attend the different social relationships'.²

But it seems that the more the moneyed classes found out about the Residuum, the more they appeared to have rejected the received values of civilization. Many realised that it was poverty that bred vice and that population growth was exacerbating urban poverty.³ The Labourer's Friend reprinted with gratitude in 1853, a recent letter from Lord Shaftesbury to The Times in which he argued that respectable people, especially rural immigrants, were easily depraved in London by the 'sinks of nastiness' they were forced to inhabit and by the economic uncertainty of London life.⁴ But it was easier on the intellect and the purse to turn Lord Shaftesbury's argument on its head: that if the poor were more respectable then they would not be so poor, for lack of 'manliness' meant idleness and improvidence. The prescription became thus:

The plain truth cannot be too boldly spoken... the working classes, and they only...can raise their own condition...pronounce, that for them to be as well off in their station as their employers are in theirs - as well provided against the evil day of depression and reverse - as comfortable, according to their standard of comfort in their daily life - as respectable in their domestic circumstances - little more is necessary than that they should emulate their

³The London Quarterly Review, January 1858, p.466.
⁴The Labourer's Friend: Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, 1853, p.187.
employers instead of envying them: that they should imitate their prudence and worldly wisdom, their unresting diligence, their unflagging energy, their resolute and steady economy. It is not higher wages, nor more unvarying employment that our artisans need. As it is, they are more highly paid than many clerks, many schoolmasters, many curates. But with their present habits, twice their present earnings would not mend their position.1

Arrogant and ignorant as such prescriptions sound, they were not made necessarily in bad faith and there was just enough foundation of them in reality to make people of all classes take them seriously. As a slopworker told Mayhew: 'My husband is a seafaring man, or I don't know what I should do. He is a particularly steady man, a teetotaller, and so indeed are the whole family, or else we could not live.'2 The important implication of Cominos' argument, is that the nexus between emotional economy and financial economy was not the motive ideal of an upwardly socially mobile group, but rather the expression of the horror of slipping down into the undermass. The most powerful twin fears of respectable Victorians, which pervade the novels of George Eliot, were of the loss of financial security and social respectability - and the fears were interdependent. Cardinal Newman's dying Gerontius suffered the quintessential Victorian nightmare:

1W.R. Greg, Essays on Political and Social Science, 2vv. (London, 1853), pp.368-9. From essay 'Mary Barton' which first appeared in The Edinburgh Review, April 1849, pp.402-35. It was again reprinted in 1876 in Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideals of the Artisan Class. William Rathbone Greg (1809-1881) was an industrialist and prolific essayist. The D.N.B. made this assessment of him: 'In Greg, ardent philanthropy and disinterested love of truth were curiously allied to an almost epicurean fastidiousness, which made him unduly distrustful of the popular element in politics.' This essay was so compelling that J. Ward, perhaps unconsciously lifted whole sentences for his Workman and Wages at Home and Abroad (London, 1868), e.g. p.223. See also Henry Booth, Master and Man: A Dialogue in which are discussed some of the important questions affecting the social conditions of the Industrious Classes (London, 1853).

2The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter VI, p.122.
I can no more; for now it comes again,
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,
That masterful negation and collapse
Of all that makes me man. And, crueler still,
A fierce and restless fright begins to fill
The mansion of my soul. And, worse and worse,
Some bodily form of ill
Floats on the wind, with many a loathsome curse
Tainting the hallowed air, and laughs and flaps
Its hideous wings,
And makes me wild with horror and dismay.¹

The fear of losing grip was most real to those just above the Residuum - the regularly employed, respectable working class: 'respectability' had an economic meaning - it had to be earned - and fundamental to the doctrine of material improvement through moral improvement was the notion of 'misexpenditure'. 'It is humiliating that it should be said, as it often is with too much truth, that high wages do more harm than good among the working classes, by tending to their demoralization rather than their independence', wrote W.S. Chambers in the 1850s.² 'Self help' became the catch word of the age. Holyoake claimed to have invented it, but Samuel Smiles was its populariser and was celebrated in his own time as the greatest 'public benefactor' the Victorian literary world had produced.³ Smiles preached what Victorians wanted to hear - they wanted 'self help' elevated as the highest of the social virtues, because, rich or poor, there was little other 'help' in Victorian society. At bottom, life possessed a brutal loneliness when ruin came close and the obsession with self help expressed fear as much as individualism.

¹ Text for Elgar's setting of 'The Dream of Gerontius'; see also Best, op.cit., p.75.
² W.S. Chambers, Misexpenditure (Edinburgh, 185-), p.6.
The old order of things had gone for ever, and as the realisation of this fundamental transformation of social relationships began to dawn on intelligent Victorians, so the time-honoured longing for an organic society was revived. But it would have to be a new form of organic society - one based on common social values. If everyone were 'respectable' then perhaps not only property, but the nation at large would be more secure. The Great Exhibition suddenly offered in 1851 visible testimony that an organic society founded on common respectability could work. Many responsible people feared disorder from Chartists or foreigners and demanded that the opening ceremony be private. Once the Crystal Palace was open, however, these fears dissipated as the working people who flocked from all over the country on 1/- days conducted themselves with becoming decorum. It became fashionable for adventurous members of the upper classes to go on 1/- days as well to enjoy, as Geoffrey Best reminds us, the unaccustomed, even, in an urban context, unprecedented sensation of mingling with 'the people' on a ground of common interest.¹

The response of the concerned members of the moneyed classes to their anxieties was positive, if at times coercive. Many problems might be solved if the working classes were civilized through respectability. The devotion and zeal of those who took on this task can be seen as nothing else but missionary. The mission began before 1850 and changed in character over the next forty years. It even compelled some wealthy missionaries to question their own morality. But a mission it was - to teach and coerce the working classes into accepting the ideals of respectability.

How much notice working-class people took of the civilizing mission is an open question. The residuum were indifferent; accepting tracts from city missionaries and pretending to read them if there was hope of material charity. Not a few working class respectables, while

¹Best, op.cit., p.231.
adhering to similar ideals, viewed the civilizing mission with cynicism and contempt - seeing, as did William Newton of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1859, only hypocrisy and patronage in wealthy people's homilies on self-betterment. But the volume of paper expended on civilizing the working classes was enormous. In 1859 the Religious Tract Society alone claimed a circulation of 42,000,000 by October.

The Newspaper Stamp Tax question jolted the periodical press into worrying about what the working classes read. Blackwood's Magazine made its own investigations in 1852 and was appalled by the results. Respectable, 'apolitical' papers were the exception rather than the rule. All the political papers were radical, 'and sometimes even more than that, they are Republican...The Peerage and the Established Church are the institutions which they assail with the most undisguised ferocity.' The fiction was 'all depraved', and the subject matter had undergone a frightening change. Gone were 'the mysterious monk, the misanthropic count, or the persecuted damsel'. Now the stories found their subject matter in present-day England - the 'nobleman of these fictions, whether he be old or young, is invariably a profligate and a seducer', and his victim a 'daughter of the people'. Set in the underworld, the aristocracy were shown squandering the earnings of the poor in gambling dens and brothels. Biographies of working-class political heroes, especially Feargus O'Connor, were distressingly popular. The only thing which comforted and impressed Blackwood's was the high quality of the woodcuts in most magazines and books.

W.H. Smith, the largest newspaper agent in London, testified to the Select Committee of Inquiry into the

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1 Amalgamated Society of Engineers...Speech of Mr William Newton...in Reply to the Lecture of Adam Black Esq., M.P. on 'Wages, Trades' Unions and Strikes (London, 1859), pp. 8 and 16, see below Chapter V, part i.

2 The London Quarterly Review, October 1859, p. 2.


4 Loc. cit.
Newspaper Stamps in 1851, that the best-selling paper in London was the *Family Herald*. Costing a penny, it reached 200,000, and was followed by the more expensive and beautifully engraved *Illustrated London News* on 66,673. *Bell's Life* in London at 6d, universally popular in bar parlours and taprooms, had been steadily falling since 1845 to 24,721. By comparison, the *Spectator's* London circulation in 1851 was 2,932. Of the received political press, only one Tory paper had a circulation over 4,000, and two had over 3,000, but there were eighteen Liberal papers in London with a circulation over 3,000, including nine with 5,000, six with more than 6,000 and one exceeded 11,000 a week.\(^1\) By 1859 the *Family Herald* had two competitors - *Reynolds's Miscellany* and *The London Journal*. None of these penny weeklies met the standards of the Pure Literature Society, which had just completed a survey of what the British working classes read by making 1,912 visits to Coffee Houses and 1,119 visits to homes. The 'objectionable periodicals' were largely read by young people and domestic servants, but the Society was happy to report that of their dubiously representative sample, adult men preferred the approved *Leisure Hour*, *The British Workman* and *The Band of Hope*.\(^2\)

The Select Committee of 1851 had been more realistic and admitted that improving literature like *Chambers' Journal* and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's *The Penny Magazine*, brought out at a cheap rate to benefit the working classes, had 'missed their aim' and were read by the middle classes.\(^3\) The improving press did achieve some popularity after the 1850s, generally by the lavish use of illustrations. T.B. Smithies and John Cassell had the first real success in the 1850s with their *Working Man's Friend* and *British Workman* - the latter becoming a triumph of Victorian colour engraving. The vast temperance press

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3 *The London Quarterly Review*, October 1859, p.16.
succeeded more in providing moral support and a sense of community for the converted in a drink sodden society than in making new converts. But many of the proprietors of the most impressive civilizing papers and periodicals must have sacrificed all hope of profitability to produce a paper which not only the working classes might like but also could afford.

An example of more explicit propaganda was the series *Household Tracts* in the 1870s, selling at 2d each and 'Designed as Gifts from Parents to their Children - Teachers to their Scholars - Mistresses to their Servants - and Masters to their Workpeople'. These ran to many editions, probably because they were brought by just these people. The tracts displayed middle-class anxiety about the city as a reservoir of disease, depravity and dissent. In *Daughters Away from Home*, the Aston girls reared in the country and feeling themselves a cut above service, go to London to work as milliners. Overworked during the week and kept awake at their work benches by readings from the *Family Herald* and the *London Journal*, their passions are running high on Sundays. Church is put aside for flirtations and soon both girls, their heads turned by the sophistication of the city, see the chance of wealth and prestige from gentlemen friends. Their mother, disturbed by their failure to write home, comes to London to check on them and meets their landlady, Mrs Hart, the wife of a railway porter. Mrs Hart, with her over-furnished parlour and her glass of porter, exudes humanity and commonsense - rather than send any daughter of hers out

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1Brian Harrison, op.cit., pp.116, 151. The United Kingdom Alliance's publication *Melliora*, which continued to make a small loss into the 1860s, was a relatively sophisticated attempt at combining teetotal propaganda with the political aspirations of the working classes. See especially the series 'Leaves for the Lives and Opinions of Working Men' in 1852. W. & R. Chambers, *Chambers's Repository of Instructive & Amusing Tracts* (Edinburgh, 1850s).

2I have dated these from the typefaces. Titles included *The Young Men of the Great City*, advising young men of the dangers of the theatre, financial dishonesty, sexual seduction, strong drink and gambling. In *Cottage Homes* a country couple are shown moving into a poor city tenement, where they set an example of Christianity and respectability to their slovenly and depraved neighbours.
to earn a living in shops and workrooms, 'I would see them hoeing potatoes in the fields or even maids of all work'. 'It may seem proud of me to say so,' replies Mrs Aston, 'but my girls are too good for potato weeding and maids of all work. They have had some education. Mary served her time in Dorking as an apprentice, and it would be hard, after all our savings that they should come to that now.' But Mrs Hart and respectability have the last word: '...I dare say you have got the notion that the "millinery" is genteeler than the nursery or the kitchen. Well there's no accounting for taste, but for my part I think respectability the best gentility; at all events it is the safest.'

Domestic service was believed to hold great opportunities for moralising the lower orders. The middle-class ideal of the feminine civilizing mission could be brought into the homes of the working classes by women who had been improved by the discipline and teaching of a respectable middle-class home. As Mrs M.E. Benson wrote in 1890:

"...though cleanliness, politeness and refinement may be in themselves surface virtues, they are symbols of much more - of a discipline of life which is one of the most necessary aids to the building up of a worthy character. To teach a man or woman to discipline themselves in these matters is to give them the tool necessary for the foundation of their own character and career - self control. A man - especially of the upper classes - may smile and smile and be a villain; but it is not often that a woman - especially of the working classes - will be clean and polite and refined, and at the same time low or wicked or degraded. If she has learnt to employ self-control in things indifferent, she will be far on the way to employ it in matters she knows to be vital."  

Anxiety about the lack of respectability led reformers to over-estimate their effectiveness and overlook the fact that the working classes could think for themselves. Samuel Smiles believed that domestic servants had absorbed the lessons of respectability better than had artisans because

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1Daughters Away from Home, pp.9-10.

2Mrs M.E. Benson, 'A Defence of Domestic Service', Nineteenth Century, October 1890, p.662.
they put more money into savings banks. He forgot that
domestic servants did not have to keep themselves out of
their wages and that a nest-egg was many a servant's only
hope of marriage.\textsuperscript{1} G. Simmons was more realistic, and
admitted that the former domestic servant carried into her
married life dissatisfaction with her material poverty,
but all the influences of childhood, community and marriage
were stronger than the spiritual influences of service.\textsuperscript{2}

The mission to teach respectability to the working
classes arose from a complex of fear, guilt and humanity.
The fears about the urban poor as a reservoir of contagious
vice, disease and crime, aggravated by the geographical
isolation of the classes in London, led to anxiety to
preserve suburban purity. The garden suburb of Hampstead had
just succeeded in having a fever hospital removed when it
was announced at the height of the agitation to repeal the
Contagious Diseases Acts that new military barracks were to
be built. Panic overtook the 'respectable and religious'
people of Hampstead at the prospect of having 'these moral
pest-houses planted in the midst of them....'\textsuperscript{3} W.G. Cooper,
was moved to write to the press from the safety of
South Dulwich in 1874, calling for more working men's clubs, which
when extended all over the country, 'working men would
improve, and then perhaps we should not be so appalled by
reading so many trials for murder, making our blood run
cold'.\textsuperscript{4} The fears had a political dimension. The Social
Democratic Federation's demonstration on 8 February 1886
provoked an incipient 'grande peur' in South London. Despite
the Sunday Trading Riots of 1855, and the Reform
Demonstrations, the \textit{South London Press}, a responsible Liberal
paper, declared that London had not been so threatened since
1848. It went on to report that a nervous commercial

\textsuperscript{1}Samuel Smiles, 'Workmen's Earnings and Savings', \textit{Quarterly Review}, July 1860, p.93.
\textsuperscript{2}G. Simmons, \textit{The Working Classes}, op.cit., p.16.
\textsuperscript{3}The New District Barracks (London, 187-), p.1 and \textit{The New Military Centres} (London, 1872).
\textsuperscript{4}\textit{South London Press}, 17 January 1874.
traveller, while passing through Deptford Broadway, had taken fright at the groups of unemployed men who hung about the place. He ran to his employers crying that a mob of more than 10,000 was marching on London. The police were notified, panicked, and failed to check the accuracy of the report. Shops and factories, especially in the more unsavoury parts of South London like Kennington Causeway, were ordered to close and put up their shutters. In a sickening dense fog, general alarm took hold: '...the most ridiculous accounts were circulated of the terrible ravages committed by this imaginary army; and the revenue of the Post Office must have made large gains from sixpenny telegrams, sent by the ladies in the outskirts to their male friends in the City, entreating them to come home with all possible expedition for their common safety.'¹ The suburban moneyed classes considered themselves to have the right to protection from even the most harmless of working-class rowdyism and would call in the police to quell fairs and Sunday outings, even when they were patronised by the respectable working classes who could afford a family train ticket to Dulwich.²

Many moneyed-class respectables hoped that the moralising mission could stave off revolution by creating the organic society held together by common respectability. A Sabbatarian pamphlet of 1850 argued: '...if, in fine, intelligence among the poor, which always form the bulk of the population, is the best guarantee of social order, national tranquillity, constitutional independence, and regal safety, preserve by all means the Sabbath to the working man.'³ The mission was also a satisfying way of coping with the appalling presence of poverty, and nowhere was this so commonly exemplified as in the Temperance movement. The poor had no-one to blame but themselves; if only they were

¹Ibid., 13 December 1886.

²Ibid., 24 June 1876.

respectable, then poverty would disappear. If the Temperance movement was a genuinely civilizing force of the age, it also provided a salve for troubled consciences like that of Mrs Bayly:

Dear friends, we are often hearing very hard things said about you; and as our sympathies are with you far more than with any other class of the community, it has often troubled us very much that we cannot always honestly and truthfully stand up in your defence. Your trades' unions, your strikes, your drinking habits, your improvidence, have lowered you in the eyes of both thinking and unthinking persons....¹

W.C. Amery was cruder than Mrs Bayly - he estimated in 1886 that 75 to 99 per cent of paupers had been brought down by drink.² But even this callow self-righteousness was contributing to a frame of mind which saw poverty as a problem, if not a moral evil. The Early Closing Association exemplified a growing sophistication in the concern for working-men's problems by attacking two practices which exacerbated their difficulties - the late closing of work places forcing Sunday trading, and the payment of wages in public houses on Saturday nights when the temptation to drink was strongest.³ Early closing of work places, the gradual reform of the quality of alcoholic beverages and of drinking places and the increasing availability of cheap tea and coffee were all practical contributions of the Temperance movement to the respectability of the working classes.⁴

It was when the middle-class mission turned moralising into practical action that it commanded most respect and support from the working-class respectables. Building and

¹Mrs Bayly, Workmen and their Difficulties (London, 1861), p.78.
²W.C. Amery, Christmas Beer at Workhouses (Birmingham, 1886), p.1.
³E.g. Early Closing Association, Practical Testimonies to the Benefits Attending the Early Payment of Wages (London, 1858); John Dennis, The Pioneer of Progress or the Early Closing Movement... (Prize Essay, London, n.d., c.1860).
⁴All the Year Round, 30 April 1859, p.14; Charles Graham, 'Beer and the Temperance Problem', Contemporary Review, June 1887, p.81.
Friendly Societies, Co-operative societies and mutual improvement societies found moral and financial support from wealthy people to the extent that they were in danger of being swamped with patronage and enthusiasm. Generally such support was limited to organizations which refrained from overt political radicalism, but it became a popular topic of the age to expound the moral benefits of Co-operative societies and the like in the hope that they would have the twofold effect of diminishing poverty and reconciling the working classes to capitalism. W.S. Chambers lauded Building Societies for enabling the working man to purchase the firmest guarantee of respectability - a house and a mortgage: 'Old indulgences are relinquished, economic habits are formed, and devoting every spare sixpence to the liquidation of the debt on his property, he looks with absolute derision on the weakness of consuming even so much as a quart of beer in the public house.' Chambers was less happy with the state of the Co-operative movement in the 1850s, but provided that it 'in no shape [resembled] the whimsical schemes of Owen and Fourier', it would elevate the working classes by making each man a capitalist.

Apart from the Rescue societies, the tract distributing societies, the great movements for Temperance and against the Contagious Diseases Acts, well-meaning individuals came up with all sorts of schemes. Philanthropy frequently faltered under the authoritarian personalities of individual reformers, especially when the reformer was a woman. Octavia Hill, anxious to secure the respectability of her colony of reconditioned houses in Barrett's Court, Marylebone, established teetotal social club which the tenants must have found almost impossible to evade joining. After failing to buy the local public house she used her political influence to block the renewal of its licence.

1Alfred Hill, 'Co-operative Societies', Quarterly Review, October 1863, pp.418-48; All the Year Round, 29 February 1868, pp.274-6; W.S. Chambers, Co-operation in its Different Branches (Edinburgh, 1860); T.E. Bowkett, Bane and Antidote or Bad and Good Associations (London, 1850).

2W.S. Chambers, Building Societies, op.cit., p.18.
She even tried to prohibit the teetotal dances after one went on till half past twelve.¹

Octavia Hill's career as a social reformer marked a significant shift in the middle-class civilizing mission after the Second Reform Bill crisis which enabled the working-class respectables to regard wealthy respectables with diminished cynicism. The scattered examples of the civilizing mission so far discussed are intended to reveal something of the motivations and aspirations of social reformers. The civilizing mission was not really taken seriously by working-class respectables until it could acknowledge the rights to autonomy of the working classes and learn from the working classes themselves. Beatrice Webb believed that her generation was afflicted with a sense of sin which caused sensitive members of the ruling classes to question whether poverty was part of the natural order and whether poverty was the inevitable consequence of unrespectability. But the sense of sin had been evolving over the century - the Evangelical conscience was real, and Christians like H. Dunckley in 1850 had argued that it was a sacred duty of the upper classes to elevate the working classes.²

Some of the most perceptive criticism of the moralising mission came from Tory intellectuals. John Eagles in 1853 saw the 'besetting sin' of the Temperance and Teetotal societies as 'their utter deficiency of that greatest of the virtues, 'charity'.³ And the Reverend G.C. Swayne depicted

¹John Taylor, *From Self-Help to Glamour: The Working Man's Club, 1860-1972* (Ruskin College History Workshop Pamphlet, 1972), pp.7-9. See also: *Ashburton Prizes for the Teaching of Common Things* (London, 1854). Lord Ashburton promoted a private scheme for the training of elementary schoolteachers. Question four of the schoolmasters' examination paper asked: 'What are the principal conditions of industrial success among the labouring classes, and what kind of training in early life is most likely to lead to it?' p.35.


in Blackwood's in 1856 'How Respectability would have the labouring man live':

He must rise at four or six, according to the season. He must work till mid-day, and come home to a dinner which respectability has chosen not to show his poor wife how to cook; it is consequently indigestible. He drinks water with it, a liquid which in very few parts of the country can be obtained genuine. He works again until nightfall. Then he comes home to bread and cheese, and the same water, and respectability allows him a pipe, in consideration of his belonging to the lower classes, and with his pipe a tract which it has left at his cottage in the morning. Perhaps his fatigue has been refreshed by some falsified tea and adulterated sugar, for respectability sells these things, and therefore attaches no penalty to its own gain.  

The hypocritical paternalism such Tory critics rejoiced in discerning in the mission had to be mitigated by self-criticism and self-doubt on the part of the reformers before working-class respectables could take them seriously. Octavia Hill was still paternalistic, but she was an interventionist who did more than preach the virtues of the respectable life. The Rev. Henry Solly, the founder of the Working Men's Clubs movement, although out-maneuved by the working men themselves, similarly realised that he not only had to do something practical, but also that he had to display more sensitivity to working-class ways of living.  

The 1870s saw an element of doubt, a loss of confidence and a certain humility enter the middle-class debate on the civilization of the lower orders. A number of intellectuals, politicians and capitalists began to examine the right ordering of society in the light of the very principles of probity, Christian duty and decency that had been thrust before the working classes. There were some people, who, without cynical self-interest or fear of revolution, were appalled at the condition of England. The conflict between Capital and Labour came to occupy a central position in the

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intellectual life of the age. The political parties were not interested in paying more than lip-service to such concerns, but individual politicians did take them seriously. There was a flowering of economic thought - Thornton, Cliffe Leslie, Jevons, Marshall, Leone Levi, Fawcett. Interest in co-operative production and profit-sharing began to mount. It suddenly seemed necessary to hold dialogues with working men on their economic problems - a movement which was to culminate in the massive and disastrous Industrial Remuneration Conference of 1885.¹ And underlying this sudden doubt and anxiety was 'the spectre of Communism' - not provoked by Marx's writings, but by the Paris Commune.² Even Blackwood's was not immune to this sense of sin and quickened anxiety, confessing in 1875 that '...this subject of the labourer and his hire is one that cannot be left outside the church, nor set down at the house of feasting, nor bolted out of the secret chamber. Like care behind the horseman, it follows a man everywhere.'³

Some public men began experimenting with ideas to civilize laissez-faire capitalism. They began questioning the morality of men of business and doubting their right to pursue maximum profits at the expense of the health and happiness of their employees. Samuel Smiles had called on both masters and men to treat each other in a spirit of humane conciliatoriness: 'Were there more trust and greater sympathy between classes there would be less disposition to turn out on the part of men and a more accommodating spirit on the part of masters.'⁴ But it was the great industrialist Sir Thomas Brassey who best articulated the sense of moral duty of the employing class which animated the radical side of the mission: 'The excess of luxury, the growing

¹See Chapter V, part ii.
extravagance in the houses, the dress and the tables of the wealthy, has set a pernicious example before the mass of the people whose duty it is to live not meanly, but with simplicity.\(^1\) He told the working classes that they held their future in their own hands, if only they could practise self-control and thrift. And if the employing class equally reformed itself, then society would evolve into a harmonious, co-operative community, cemented by common respectability.\(^2\) Brassey, apart from his political career, threw himself into the co-production movement and improved housing schemes, becoming one of the most conspicuous patrons of the years of dialogue between Capital and Labour.\(^3\) He believed in a morally organic society, a moral capitalist society, which would by definition have less poverty, less vice and less class conflict. Gladstone, who above all believed in a Liberal free society and remained indifferent to these great questions of political economy, nevertheless shared this sense of personal social responsibility and maintained that all comfortably situated people should annually part with some of their income for the general welfare of the community.\(^4\) Such sentiments were not confined to the Liberal party, nor were they even common in the Liberal party. Rather a significant number of people began to make their mark in public life by debating these problems and ideals, so that a minority movement in the ruling classes created an issue of the age and provided a leadership for an alliance with the working-class respectables. Lesser figures were affected — solitary idealists attempted to introduce profit-sharing, only to find their businesses boycotted. Some spent more time in their local Temperance organizations and philanthropic ventures than they did in their factories. Isolated clergymen faced social ostracism


\(^2\) Ibid., p.344.

\(^3\) E.g. Thomas Brassey, *Co-operative Production: Address to the Annual Conference of the Co-operative Societies Held at Halifax* (London, 1874).

for their attempts to help the agricultural labourers in their parishes.\(^1\) The reformers were few, but their anguish compelling. A 'man of business' was driven in the 1880s to these strong words: 'Where is the Christianity in the competition that drives men to make a study of gulling the public, and reaping a fortune on misrepresentation?... Nineteenth century Christianity is a genteel one.\(^2\) As Jerrold's Magazine commented in its first issue in January 1845:

Simply we believe, that the Spirit of the age, conscious of the unprecedented magnitude of the evils that afflict and weigh down those ordinary processes of renovation that are quietly going on, is, without troubling himself about niceties or appearances, turning society into one grand workshop, and there with unabating activity and unflinching purpose, examining and pulling to pieces whatever has ceased to be useful or suitable to the work he has in hand - that of accumulating materials for a new, more harmonious and infinitely nobler state.

A quiet social revolution was already in progress.

Broadly, this was the setting in Victorian London between 1850 and 1890 for the playing out of the role of respectability in working-class life. There is no question that many both ill- and well-intentioned members of the moneyed classes were determined that the working-class begin to practise respectability. More than persuaded, in many occupations working people were coerced into adopting


\(^2\)Unregulated Competition and Distribution by a Man of Business (London, 188-), p.34. See H.J. Perkin, 'Land Reform and Class Conflict in Victorian Britain'; J. Butt and I.P. Clarke (eds), The Victorians and Social Protest (Devon, 1973), for a stimulating essay on the class hostility behind the Land Reform movement in the Liberal party and the way this middle-class moral mission contributed to the decline of the Liberal party. pp.177-217.

bourgeois values. But there were also working-class respectables who devoted their energy both to the personal achievement of respectability and to its advocacy. Working-class respectables actively co-operated in the civilization of the lower orders, but this civilization could be a two-edged sword and its effects and consequences were not always intended to coincide with the ideological intentions of the ruling classes. Therefore we must look more closely at what 'respectability' meant in working-class life, at its personal and social effects and at the way working-class people themselves thought about it.
CHAPTER II

EARNING RESPECTABILITY

Respectability needed money. Elderly working-class Londoners give this first definition of respectability without hesitation: 'once a man had a regular job he could begin to call himself respectable'.

Regular employment was the essential pre-condition of respectability and governed its second economic manifestation — attitudes towards expenditure. This is the hard definition of respectability. It is the only way we have of estimating how many working-class people were in a position to practise the cultural elements of respectability and whether the London working classes became more respectable between 1850 and 1890. Of course not all people who could afford to be respectable chose to practise all or any of its disciplines and ideals, but at least to keep their job they had to appear respectable in attire and in behaviour at work. Not all people who were economically respectable were in regular employment for their entire working life. Nevertheless there was an economic minimum to being able to call oneself respectable for the great divide in the London working classes was between regular and casual labour — the respectable and the rough. But there was an acute shortage of regular work for both men and women in Victorian London and this was the economic context which gave respectability such force in working-class life.

Gareth Stedman Jones' study of the casual poor in Victorian London confirms this primary definition of respectability. Casuality of employment condemned the poor.

1This definition of respectability was derived not only from reading, but also from interviews undertaken in Battersea for Chapter VII. Living for a year in London I took every chance to discuss my work with people and picked up confirmation of the economic meaning of respectability from casual conversation. The response was always the same.

to an erratic and insecure rhythm of life. The casual poor were not only the most frequently destitute and the most vulnerable to the seasonality of production, trade depressions and the weather, but also the least psychologically equipped of all working-class people. Stable family life, education, self-discipline - all fell victim to the hour-to-hour, more than day-to-day struggle to survive. Alcohol abuse, crime and prostitution were often the results of casualty. The poverty trap was two sided: to be 'regular' a person had to be 'respectable' and if that person lost regular employment it was difficult, if not impossible over time to maintain the appearance of respectability; if a person started off as unrespectable then regular work was a vain hope and once fully casualised that person was lost for life. The two sides of the London working-class economy were self-perpetuating systems.

To earn respectability a working-class person needed two things: a skill that was in demand and a character. The skill could range from a trade learnt by apprenticeship to merely physical strength and exceptional health. A character was not confined to the references that gained entry to domestic service, the police force and railway employment - it encompassed the recognition by the community in which a person sought work of his or her reliability and honesty. London's unique economy determined the importance of these two saleable commodities. London remained a pre-industrial city throughout the Victorian era and its pre-industrial characteristics were more marked at the end of the century. As the major port of the country and the centre of government and Society, London declined as a primary manufacturing centre in the second half of the nineteenth century and became essentially a 'service' economy with the largest consumer market in the United Kingdom.¹

High land rents in the centre militated against the building of large-scale manufacturing units within travelling distance of the populous working-class districts.

¹See also P.G. Hall, The Industries of London since 1861 (London, 1962), passim.
To compete with the factory production in the North and the Midlands of engineering goods, clothing and footwear, London industry had to become more labour intensive and minimise overhead costs by increasing outwork and 'de-skilling' processes. Most London trades were forced to degenerate into slop trades. This provided more jobs, particularly for semi-skilled men, and women and children, but it reduced skilled workers' control over prices and security of employment. The degeneration of the trades was aggravated by the growth of population and the growing need in working-class families for women and children to work to supplement irregular and reduced earnings by the head of the family. It was a vicious circle creating a bottomless pool of labour which had to work at any time and at any price. Competition from the factory districts and from abroad increased production by changing the nature of consumer demand to a growing market for cheap and second-rate goods. The traditional London trades became uneconomic for they supplied too few goods at too high a price. Hence well-paid skilled work for craftsmen declined and industries from engineering to book printing moved out of London, using the city as a finishing, distribution and repair centre instead for primary manufacturing.

The seasonality of the London economy was also fundamental to the division between the casual and the regular. As a 'service' economy, production followed the demands of the metropolis, reaching its peak to meet the London 'Season'. Yet the 'Season' reverberated down the social scale for being the time of maximum employment, it was also the maximum time of spending by all classes as the poor stocked up on clothing and furniture which were often pawned during the off-season. Coalwhippers and lightermen were out of work in summer so they often turned to dock labour, thereby aggravating the already acute surplus of casual labour on the docks. In the more severe winters that London suffered last century than now, all outside labour and the docks stopped and the applications for poor relief rose as the temperature dropped. Hop-picking was a welcome relief for East Enders, but in uprooting the casual poor
they lost lodgings and the local contacts on which they depended to be taken on for a job.¹

Having a skill that remained in demand and a character were the only defences London working-class people had against the seasonality of production. An exceptional craftsman in furniture, bespoke tailoring, fine instrument making and jewellery, if he worked for the right firm could obtain work for nearly all the year. More significantly, in all seasonal trades, including dock work, a core of workers were kept on during the slack. Sometimes skill determined who became a permanent hand, but most commonly a worker earned regularity by his character. When the young Beatrice Potter investigated the permanent men on the docks for Booth, she found them to be social isolates and in one of her finest pieces of social description, she keenly perceived the economic meaning of respectability:

...the universal dislocation of the social life of East London manifests itself in the docks, not only by the absence of all ties between employer and employed, foreman and men, but in the severance of the different grades of labour, and, among the more respectable of the working class, in the isolation of the individual family. The 'permanent' man of the docks ranks in the social scale below the skilled mechanic or artisan. With a wage usually from 20 to 25 shillings a week, and an average family, he exists above the line of poverty, though in times of domestic trouble, he frequently sinks below it. He is perforce respectable and his life must needs be monotonous. His work requires little skill or intelligence - the one absolute condition is regular and constant attendance all the year through. He has even a vested interest in regularity - the dock company acting as a benefit society in sickness and death - an interest he forfeits if he is discharged for neglect of work. By the irregular hands the permanent man is looked upon as an inferior foreman and is disliked as such, or despised as a drudge. He, in turn, resents the popular characterization of dock labourers as the 'scum of the earth'.

As a rule the permanent men do not live in the immediate neighbourhood of the docks. They are scattered far and wide, in Forest Gate,

Hackney, Upton and other outlying districts; the regularity of their wages enabling them to live in a small house rented at the same figure as one room in Central London. And if the temptation of cheap food, and employment for the wife and children, induces a permanent man to inhabit St-Georges-in-the-East or Limehouse, he will be found in a 'Peabody', or some strictly regulated model dwelling. He will tell you: 'I make a point of not mixing with anyone' and perhaps he will sorrowfully complain 'when the women gets thick together, there's always a row.' It is the direful results of the wholesale desertion of these districts by the better classes that respectability means social isolation, with its enfeebling and disheartening effect. In common with all other working men with a moderate but regular income, the permanent dock labourer is made by his wife. If she be a tidy woman and a good manager, decently versed in the rare arts of cooking and sewing, the family life is independent, even comfortable, and the children may follow in the father's footsteps or rise to better things. If she be a gossip and a bungler - worse still a drunkard - the family will sink to the low level of the East London street; and the children are probably added to those who gain their livelihood by irregular work and irregular means.¹

From the casual labourers of the East End to West End craftsmen - all working people depended on being known to find work. Foremen were powerful people and a reputation for steadiness was a worker's greatest asset. The exclusiveness of the Trades Societies was an economic necessity. Their benefit societies enabled a man to survive a period 'out of collar', which otherwise could take years to recover from.² The society kept a man within the call of prospective employers and his membership of the society guaranteed to an employer his skill and his character. Hence if the society could create scarcity of these two commodities by stringent apprenticeship regulations, it could maintain more regularity of employment for its members and hold the trade prices.

Character had a more complex role than this, however, in the working-class economy. Character was more important

¹Booth, op.cit., Vol.IV, pp.24-5.
²All the Year Round, 13 July 1867, pp.55-60.
than skill in service occupations, especially for women, where working-class people were entrusted with responsibility for money, possessions and children. A 'character' was the working girl's entrance to the regularity and security of domestic service, and despite the long hours, the tyranny of selfish employers and the loss of freedom, domestic service flourished as a highly desired and respectable occupation until the First World War. The prospective shop assistant needed a good character and frequently endured a discipline harsher than in much domestic service. Until the demand for labour exceeded the supply in the 1870s, patronage with references from a clergyman and a housekeeper of 'undoubted respectability' remained the main system of labour recruitment in the railways.1

The appearance, at least, of respectability, governed the selling of goods and services, as a prostitute complained of her procuress, '[she] goes out dressed respectable and pawns any stolen property, or sells it at public houses'.2 Mayhew found street musicians who were of the 'better class' and refused to play with a man who taught his wife music 'that she might play in the streets and be exposed to every insult and every temptation if she's young and pretty'. These musicians were moderate drinkers and Mayhew considered them to be very honest.3

Keeping clean and tidy was a sign of work potential and probity in Victorian society.4 Mayhew interviewed a

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2Reynolds's *Political Instructor*, 23 February 1849, p.122.


4'It [George Gissing's] *A Life's Morning* an honest and gifted man meets with ruin and death because it is impossible to walk about a big town with no hat on. His hat is blown out of the window when he is travelling in a train, and as he has not enough money to buy another, he misappropriates some money belonging to his employer, which sets going a series of disasters. This is an interesting example of the changes in outlook that can suddenly make an all-powerful taboo seem ridiculous. Today, if you had

Footnote continued on following page...
tailor who finding himself out of work for two-thirds of the year, was forced by debt to work for a sweater in the 'dishonourable trade': 'I went on for four years secretly working for the sweaters during vacation, and after that I got so reduced in circumstances that I could not appear respectable and so get work amongst the honourable trade.'¹ For women, respectability of dress could give them some protection against sexual harassment. However, for a determined seducer like 'Walter' any incongruity in an otherwise respectable appearance aroused his curiosity, like with the young girl he followed after she had run away from home. 'I noticed that her dress was neat and very respectable for a girl of her class. But I also noticed that it was rumpled and that her bonnet had been flattened and put somewhat into shape again.'² At the other end of the social scale a fashionably dressed woman who appeared in the streets unaccompanied was offering an immediate invitation to men, as Ann Veronica discovered when she had her first day of freedom in Central London.³ But as 'Robert Tressell' bitterly recorded in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists, the respectable working class were rarely considered to be 'deserving cases' by charity workers, and behind the lace curtains of a respectable man's home often lay a parlour bereft of furniture as all 'non-essentials' to the outward appearances of respectability were pawned to

Footnote continued from previous page:
somehow contrived to lose your trousers, you would probably embezzle money rather than walk about in your underpants. In the eighties the necessity would have seemed equally strong in the case of a hat. Even thirty or forty years ago, indeed, bareheaded men were booted in the streets. Then, for no very clear reason, hatlessness became respectable, and today the particular tragedy described by Gissing - entirely plausible in its context - would be quite impossible.' George Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters...1945-1950, Vol.IV (Penguin, 1970), pp.487-8. See also photograph of Sunday School Procession in Wandsworth Road.

¹The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter 18, pp.219-20.
see a family through illness or unemployment.¹ Lace curtain
gentility has become something of a joke, but once it was a
symbol of self-respect and the refusal to lose grip.

The force of these judgements about a person's
respectability was that casualty did have severely
demoralising effects on the poor. Mayhew reiterated it again
and again: '...the necessary consequence of all uncertain
labour is to produce intemperate habits....'² He sympathised
with those who had lost grip, but also with those who built
fortresses of caste distinction and trade exclusiveness to
keep out contamination from below. But he entered the
world of the respectable and regular with relief:

I have found that operative tailors, and
especially those who have regular employment,
enlightened, provident and sober to a degree
that I certainly did not anticipate. Indeed
the change from the squalor, feotor and
wretchedness of the homes of the poor people
that I had lately visited, to the comfort,
cleanliness and cheerfulness of the dwellings
of the operative tailors, has been as refreshing
to my feelings as the general sagacity has been
to the lightening of my labours.³

But even the highly skilled could be demoralised by the
seasonality of their work. Milliners went into prostitution
out of all proportion to their numbers in the working
population, as did female shoemakers. Laundry work was
another common source of prostitution, but it drew on a
lower class of women. Milliners even exceeded the domestic
servants, who through choice, or most commonly having 'lost
their character', had no alternative but the streets.⁴

The people who struggled to 'keep respectable' in the
Residuum are hard to find. They emerge now and then in
Mayhew and Booth, but they are the most anonymous people in

¹ Robert Tressell, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists
² The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter 16, p.192.
³ Ibid., p.193.
⁴ See Appendix I, table 1, for occupations of arrested
prostitutes, 1850-60.
To find the respectable working class as a definable group it is necessary to see where regular work lay - to start with the economic potential for respectability. It is difficult to estimate accurately the number of people who were respectable and to find how much, if at all, they proportionately increased in the working classes between 1850 and 1890. Gareth Stedman Jones could not count the casual poor, for although the Censuses broadly indicate the changing pattern of employment in Victorian London, they cannot reveal the regularity of work. But we can make a rough estimate of the number of people who earned respectability, even if they did little else about it.

E.J. Hobsbawm's essay on the concept of the Labour Aristocracy was based on just such an attempt to quantify the respectable working class. He started with Mayhew's very dubious estimate of 10 per cent in the trade societies and ended with a figure of 15 per cent to cover trade union membership at the turn of the century. The counting is loose and the assumption that these labour aristocrats behaved politically and industrially as a tightly-knit sub-class is too bland. Paul Thompson has been carrying out an oral history project on the Edwardian working class and has reported that he has had difficulty in finding any people who fit Hobsbawm's model. But contemporary observers, as this study will show throughout, had no doubt that a respectable elite did exist in the Victorian working classes. The problem is that we have to know more about the life-long standards of living of the working classes before even rough estimates of the relative stability of sub-classes can be made, and until Friendly and Benefit society books and Trade Union out-of-work records have been subjected to

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2 Stedman Jones, op.cit., pp.52-6, 171-2.

3 Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.279.

computer analysis we can say very little about life-long standards of living in the nineteenth century. The significance of Paul Thompson's results is that people who 'objectively' were labour aristocrats do not remember their childhood and parents' situation as secure and comfortable. In my interviews in Battersea with elderly people who were born into eminently respectable families in good housing, the period before the First War was something they preferred to forget. To some extent the comparisons they make with their adult experience of the twentieth century colour their childhood memories, but the fact is, in the absolute sense they were more insecure and less well off.

A fully paid-up account in a Benefit Society was still meagre protection against long-term illness and unemployment or the premature death of the male breadwinner. A tradesman with a large young family could be ruined for life by a trade depression which he would have ridden if his children were older and able to earn. Wages declined in most trades with increasing age and probably the way most respectable people kept out of the workhouse was by working until they died. To remain a labour aristocrat all his life a man needed, I suspect, exceptional health, a small family, to have been plain lucky at times of trade depressions and to have died by sixty. The only group who fit Hobsbawm's model were the foremen in each trade - like Crass and Hunter in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists - who identified their interests with the firm and experienced the chronic insecurity of the deferential personality. Booth found foremen to be very different in their attitudes from

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2 Interview with Miss Beattie Baker conducted at 67 Grayshott Road, London, SW1 1 on 24 July 1972.

3 Tressell, op.cit., passim. 'A Working Man', Working Men and Women (London, 1879). 'The Job-for-life Man': 'The rights of property is to him no mere phrase. He feels that those rights are his rights, and anything that practically concerns them at once comes home to his business and bosom. He is quick to scent and prompt to oppose Communism whether avowed or disguised....' p.42.
the artisans under them, who were as respectable but who
did identify with other working people. One must take care
in estimating the number of working-class people who
qualified for respectability when we know so little about
the life-long standard of living of even the best-equipped
and most skilled.

It was not only the cholera that sent Mayhew into the
London slums, but also an increasing concern about working-
class unemployment. The Irish famine, the cessation of much
work in railway building and finally a long trade
depression from 1848 to 1851 forced concerned people to ask
more questions about how the working classes were making
their livings. But Mayhew uncovered a much longer-term
crisis than this. For male workers in Mayhew's London,
respectability could be achieved if they were in a skilled
trade and belonged to a trade society. But the London
trades, in particular, furniture, clothing and footwear,
were losing control over their crafts. London has been
described as a city mid-way between Dublin, which maintained
the most control over its crafts, and Manchester, which
became a factory city. This was an invidious position for
no large-scale form of regular employment arose to take the
place of the traditional crafts. The increase in consumer
demand was so immense in Victorian London and with the
traditional crafts being unable to meet it, the ever-swelling
population made 'sweating' possible, if not profitable.
A master explained to Mayhew some of the causes of this
disintegration. In business for fifteen years, he had been
forced to reduce his prices by 20 per cent to compete with
the slop trade, for he now had customers who bargained with
him, knowing they could buy a similar garment elsewhere.
He had tried to maintain the level of his men's wages, 'so
that my profits are considerably reduced, while my


2'Labour Wages and Food', The British Quarterly Review, May
1852, p.329.

3Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late
exertions...to keep together a "connection", which may yield fair prices and a fair remuneration, have to be more strenuous than ever'.

The trades were divided, significantly, into 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' - between those, say in tailoring, who had garments made on their own premises at the Society rate of 6d an hour and those who gave out the work directly to journeymen, who may, in turn, have 'sweated' it out to women and boys. The point is that there was money to be made in the dishonourable trades and it was not only dishonourable masters, but also journeymen who deserted the restrictions of the trade societies to work on their own account. The garret masters of the furniture trade were often not very skilled. Mayhew believed them to be insecure on the whole, but for a second-rate workman it was the best way to survive. In tailoring Mayhew estimated that there were 21,000 working tailors in London, of whom 3,000 were honourable, whereas in 1821 the membership of the 'Union' had been 5,000 to 6,000. Mayhew's evidence is problematic: we have no idea how many people did better out of the rise of the slop trades. He investigated those who aroused his sympathy and admiration and his letters on the London trades tell us more about respectables losing their economic respectability than about the condition of the London trades as a whole. We do know that the ultimate 'losers' were the women and boys, and the operatives who lost their place in the honourable trade and thereby had no control over their prices and hours. But the slop trades did provide more work for many unskilled people which must have been better than nothing.

The security and status of the operative tradesmen was further undermined by the change from day to piece rates. Scamped work and sweating were the inevitable outcome of piece rates and Mayhew's description of this process in the carpentering and joinery trade illuminates what was

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1 The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter 17, p.211.
3 The Unknown Mayhew, Letter 16, p.182.
happening in other occupations:¹

There it is to be found that all the regulations which are observed to ensure skilled labour are utterly disregarded; the work is scamped and the operative is underpaid, and he not only loses thereby his self-respect and self-reliance, but sinks into drunkenness and demoralization. The workman, moreover, made the means of carrying out the system which results in his own degradation. The houses of 'building lawyers' or 'speculating builders' are let to go to a general contractor; he in turn sublets the work, mostly by piece, to others, who are usually journeymen; and these sub-contracting journeymen sublet again to others even lower than themselves. By this process men gradually become mere machines, and lose all the moral and intellectual characteristics which distinguish the skilled artisan.²

Of course this form of sub-contracting and competition from machinery³ were not new and the British Quarterly Review took Mayhew to task in 1852 for giving the impression that it was. The article quoted a meeting held in London in August 1831 of 12,000 unemployed carpenters and joiners in which the introduction of new machines and cast iron and 'the baneful system of competition in contracting for building' were blamed for the current crisis.⁴ But although it criticised Mayhew's statistics and economic theories, the Review agreed with his general observations that in almost every trade in London there were too many hands and wages were being reduced, forcing people to work even harder to make up for the reductions, thereby only adding to the 'evil' by leaving less work for the unemployed.⁵

Ernest Jones in his Notes to the People of 1851-2 argued that the wages and job-security were under attack at all levels of working-class life. In 1852 the London coal

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¹Ibid., Letter 17, p.200.


³The impact of machinery on different trades is problematical. The sewing machine was probably rarely used by sweaters as the supply of labour was virtually limitless, but in other occupations, machines created work, especially in engineering at this period.

⁴'Labour Wages and Food', op.cit., p.332.

⁵Ibid., p.331.
whippers were told they could be done without when they tried to resist reductions in their wages. He maintained that this occupation, like others such as comb-making and block printing, were perishing. Then there was the letter from the London tallow chandler. Ununionised, the trade was helpless in the face of gas-lighting and labour saving machinery. Half the trade were out of work in the summer, but it was one occupation which benefited from exceedingly cold winters, for when the temperature was between 45 and 60 degrees it could take up to eighteen hours for the candles to solidify. 'I have been six months and not had half an hour spare time', he wrote, 'but have merely changed from the factory to bed, and from bed to the factory.'

Ernest Jones was even more pessimistic than Mayhew:

Section after section of the better paid trades are being swept into the gulf of destitution. More and more we are approaching to a UNIFORM LEVEL OF WAGES, measured by the lowest standard. Entire trades are being swept away...making one set of men do the work of two sets. Of course, the encroachments are made very slily and quietly - by indirect reductions and innovations, and by swamping the more obscure portions of the working orders.

But the following half century was believed by many then and since to have been the 'Age of Improvement' - that the rise in national income did filter down to the working classes. Contemporary with Mayhew and Ernest Jones, the British Quarterly Review argued that the real losers in the gradual industrial revolution were the unskilled: 'Skill, with the machinery it has created, enables one man to do the work of hundreds; and in the fierce competition which arises from the limited amount of work to be done, the least skilled are inevitably beaten and reduced to the lowest condition.'

But 'skill' is not really the right word - 'equipment' is

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2Ibid., Vol.I, 1851, p.402.
3Ibid., Vol.II, 1852, p.558.
4'Thoughts on the Labour Question', The British Quarterly Review, November 1851, p.69.
better, meaning both skill and the psychological capacity to survive. In London the working classes were subjected to all the dislocations of the industrial revolution, yet were denied most of the benefits to compensate. Therefore 'equipment' mattered in London more than anywhere else in the country. 'Equipment' was the vital component in the equations of progress which the contemporary statisticians - G.R. Porter, Dudley Baxter, Robert Giffen - tended to leave out. Only Leone Levi faintly grasped the significance of 'equipment'. In 1885 a trade depression forced him to revise his *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes* after it had been published for only a year. He calculated that the depression had brought about a 15 per cent reduction in average wages. But he also observed that: 'All through the long range of labourers' wages, more or less advance is noticeable, if not in rates, certainly in the capacity of earning; any difference in the same industry being more generally, the results of comparative skilfulness, perseverance in labour and quickness of movement.' Such words chilled the heart of the aging, the tubercular - the less equipped.

Bowley showed that to a certain extent after 1861 the rich were becoming richer and the poor poorer. But although a modern economic historian like Checkland is prepared to argue tentatively that in the middle and later 1860s there is evidence of rising real wages, such calculations are of little use when we know so little about the life-long standard of living and about people's expectations of

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security and prosperity. Nevertheless some historians have been beguiled by the image of the 'Age of Improvement' into making generalisations like this one of Royden Harrison in *Before the Socialists*: 'Just as the working class as a whole was raising its standard of life, but at the same time securing a decreasing share of the national income, so within the working class itself, the absolute improvement in the standards of the masses took place at the same time as there was a relative worsening of their position *vis-a-vis* the labour aristocracy.'

We probably can never know what people ate, despite John Burnett's attempts — again there are too many variables from the good diet enjoyed by Miss Florence Jewson's family in Battersea because her father was a pork butcher at the Army and Navy Stores to the 'food illiterates' remembered by Robert Roberts, who were incapable of adjusting to new forms of cheap food. One depressing generalisation which is probably accurate is that the only time the British people have been adequately fed was during wartime rationing. Again, good diet depended both on income and 'equipment'.

As E.P. Thompson has argued, what statistics there are broadly indicate a rise in the standard of living over the whole century, but they cannot show that individuals were better off and that they felt themselves to be so. However

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3 John Burnett, *Plenty and Want* (London, 1966); *A History of the Cost of Living* (London, 1969). Interview with Miss Florence Jewson conducted at St John's Hospital, London, SW11 on 17 July 1972. Robert Roberts, op.cit., p.90. 'The food illiterate, when odd occasion took him to dine away from home — often on a fare more varied and far better than his usual diet — would sit through a meal, eating little or nothing. Though he was the extreme, one would have been hard put to find any working-class household free from ignorant prejudices of all kinds about food and cooking.'

4 From conversation with the sometime Labour shadow under-secretary for Agriculture and Fisheries, Mr D.G. Clark. Less beef was eaten per capita in 1973 than during rationing.
with the Censuses and Booth's investigations it is possible to make a general estimate of the increase or decrease of occupations demanding respectability between 1850 and 1890. The Census analysis has to start with the 1861 Census as it was the first to have a breakdown of occupations which could be compared with later Censuses. Nevertheless with a combination of hard and soft evidence we can measure the economic opportunities for respectability and how some occupations changed over the forty years. Stedman Jones has shown that the problems Mayhew found in the London trades in the City and in the East End worsened over the second half of the century. But no such analysis has been made of the rest of London. Therefore it is beyond the scope of this study to do little more than make a brief review of the economic potential for respectability in London from 1850 to 1890.

Stedman Jones' analysis of the 1861 and 1891 London Censuses reveals that over the thirty years the skilled artisan's position declined in relation to the semi-skilled and the lower middle class. He has adopted the 1951 Registrar General's five stage classification of social class, with the one modification of including clerks in Class II - the social distinction between clerk and artisan being vast in the nineteenth century. Class I, the gentlemanly class of large employers, merchants, bankers, higher officials in shipping and insurance, property owners and the liberal professions, declined from 7.20 per cent of the population to 6.45 per cent. Class II, small employers and dealers, wholesalers, retailers, caterers, local government officials, teachers, entertainers, musicians, subordinate officers in insurance and the church, and clerical occupations, increased from 16.30 per cent to 19.14 per cent. Class III - artisans, skilled labour (mostly in construction and manufacture), lower class traders and higher class domestic service, were the most obvious possessors of respectability in the London working classes.

1 See Appendix I. Notes of Sources of Tables and Tables II, III and IV.
Their decline was considerable: from comprising 31.66 per cent of the working male population they dropped to 24.95 per cent in three decades. Class IV, consisting of the semi-skilled or intermediate workers mainly in transport, agriculture, wood, metals and textiles, soldiers, sailors, subordinate government and local government service and police, did contain respectables, but respectability was earned here by character above all. Class IV slightly increased from 11.30 per cent to 12.66 per cent. Finally there was Class V where respectability was rare - the class of general unskilled labourers, unskilled work in land and water, service and manufacture, municipal labour and street traders. The proportion increased only from 20.12 per cent to 21.60 per cent, but the increase in absolute numbers was considerable - from 196,713 to 329,321. By contrast, the proportional decrease in Class III meant an increase in the absolute numbers from 309,451 to 378,068, weakening the relative position of the skilled respectable working class. In fact in 1861 Class III possessed a numerical supremacy over Classes IV and V to the order of 309,451 to 307,179, but by 1891 it had slipped to be dominated by the non-artisan working classes - 378,068 to 419,251.

Yet despite the decline in the relative position of the artisan class, the figures can be read to suggest a new balance of forces in working-class respectability. First, some people were moving up out of the working classes. Booth observed that clerks and high class shop assistants and even elementary school teachers were being recruited from the sons and sometimes the daughters of his Class F - the most highly paid artisans and the foreman. More significantly, as skill became less important in the London economy, character became more so, with the increase in Class IV of railway servants and police, and the greater upward social mobility of the children of high class artisans. Social mobility is something else we know little about, but there does seem to have been an increase in the number of 'black-coated' occupations to make for some upward movement.

In the total working population, including women, the least skilled, such as messengers and inn servants, miscellaneous unskilled trades, dock labourers, cabmen, coachmen, coalheavers, carmen, general labourers, costers, gasworkers, brickmakers, hawkers, navvies, rail labour, platelayers and brewers - all declined proportionately in all age groups, except over 75. The most marked decline was in juvenile labour. But significantly, there was a firm trend of increased economic potential for respectability, derived more from character than from skill over the whole population as the proportion of the residuum declined.

For some male workers their potential for respectability was reinforced by the gradual regularisation of their occupation. This occurred in two ways; first with the growth of effective trade unionism; second, after an initial dislocation, declining trades often settled into a more rationalised form with a core of people remaining in the trade while others ceased to seek employment in it. In some cases these two processes occurred concurrently in the same trade.

In London the ability of the old trades societies, the 'new model' unions and the 'new' unions to control their labour force, wages and security against seasonality was limited and complex. The smaller and more specialised the craft, the more easily the old trade society could survive by restricting apprenticeship, often to the sons of members. Fine instrument making, jewellery, watch and clock making finally adjusted to the declining market and ensured some security and status for those who remained.1 Of greater importance were the changes which occurred in footwear, clothing and furniture making. The story was similar in all these trades: the West End craftsmen still had a market for their special skills and their trade societies continued in an essentially traditional form, retaining their pre-industrial characteristics of exclusiveness, intense pride in craftsmanship, reverence for learning and a lively radicalism. In the East End the trades collapsed into

1Booth, op.cit., Vol.VI, pp.4-29.
sweated occupations, outside the reach of trade unionism politically apathetic.¹

Booth found the West End shoemakers to be either 'making' at home or in co-operative workshops organized by the men, not the employer. The men clubbed together, paying 1/- a week to rent a large room which generally accommodated 12 to 15 workmen, but there were workshops of 40 or 50 men. He estimated that 150 to 200 men were so accommodated in the district, which had 600 members of the trade society. Only society men could work in the workshops which were run by a committee with a secretary who received a small remuneration. The weekly subscription paid for fires, newspapers and rent and any surplus was divided up from time to time. These shops were respectable and quiet and a premium was placed on good workmanship. If a man was too fast or too slow for his fellows, he would be pushed out and 'some discretion' was used in admitting new members. Their hours remained irregular, but their wages were sufficiently high to enable many to live away from the immediate neighbourhood. 'Political feeling runs deep rather than high', observed Booth, 'for there is not much difference of opinion - almost all are Radicals, only some go further than others towards Republicanism or Socialism.'²

But changes had occurred in social habits: the West End 'honourable trade', so proud of its respectability in Mayhew's time, had, in fact, become even more respectable in the face of economic pressures. The workshop traditions of 'footings' declined as tension in bespoke tailoring increased in the Season, permitting no time for fun, whereas in the slack, there was no money for such 'foolery'. Gambling persisted as an inevitable result of irregularity, but the time had passed when a tailor out of collar could afford to tipple in his society's house of call in a public house while waiting for new work.³ Francis Place was at pains in his autobiography to show how in his life-time,

²Ibid., pp.141-2.
³Ibid., p.144.
tailors in particular had become more respectable, but by 1890 those who survived in the West End trade had need of character as much as skill. It was the ability to save against unemployment in the slack and to cope psychologically with seasonality which kept them 'honourable'. Barbara Drake found in 1912 that the aristocrats of the London tailoring trade were a modified form of the old bespoke tailors, who even if they did not cut the garment, did make it by hand throughout. They had something of the unique quality of an artist, and as such could never be quite replaced.

To some extent he makes his own terms with his employer; and, in the frantic rush of the summer season, he alone among his fellows stands firm, and point blank refuses to turn night into day at the beck and call of either shop or customer. He is probably an Englishman, possibly a Swede or a German — rarely a Jew; and he forms the large majority of the 2000 trade unionists of the West End district.

The tailoring trade had attempted to form an amalgamated union based on the 'new model'. The London Association of the Amalgamated Society held its first meeting in November 1866, but its history until after the Great War was one of constant failure to have made any industrial impact on the trade. There were fewer members in 1900 than in 1875 and membership declined even further in the next decade. The unionists of the trade were the old craftsmen, as Barbara Drake found, and it was by their unique skills rather than through combination, that they were able to protect their position.

Booth considered the East End furniture trade to have lost its artisan traditions completely. There were too many small masters and it was too easy for a journeyman to set up on his own account for combination to have any chance to survive. The existing societies were weak remnants of the

1 Thale, op.cit., pp.xviii, 40-70.
pre-Victorian trade. In 1888 there were around 15,000 men and 800 women in the East End trade, but the four societies accounted for only 866 male workers. Booth considered them to be among the best representatives of their trade — good craftsmen and keen to extend the principles of association — but their industrial power was negligible. 1

The industrial weakness of the old trades which had managed to maintain unions and modernise their structure and approach to industrial relations was underlined by the unique economic character of London. In many trades a fragile margin of profitability was only maintained by intense competition. When the boot and shoe unions in the non-sweated part of the trade forced employers to outlaw homework in the early 1890s, the result was an exodus of the larger firms to Northampton and Leicester. 2 An analogous situation existed in some sections of the printing trade. National newspapers and some commercial printing needed a central location, and the ambition of a provincial compositor like W.E. Adams, was to get a good position as a 'case' on a London newspaper to ensure his security. 3 But book and periodical publishers found that the high wages maintained in London by its strong unions encouraged those of them faced with provincial competition to move beyond the London trade union district. By the end of the century most of the major book printers had left London. 4

Of the occupations affected by the 'New Model' unionism, only building in London seems to have benefited. Engineering did not enjoy the protection and security from


<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
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<td>130</td>
<td>c. 130</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. 190</td>
<td>c. 200</td>
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2Stedman Jones, op. cit., p. 25.


4Stedman Jones, loc. cit.
the Amalgamated Society of Engineers it ostensibly should have. First the London engineering trade degenerated into a repair trade by the 1880s and where this was not so, the locations for manufacture were highly idiosyncratic. As Jesse Argyle commented: 'either the work is required in a great hurry, or for some other reason must be made on the spot, or else the firm holds a particular patent, or commands, by reason of its long standing and superior work, a practical monopoly in some exceptional class of goods'.

Hence London's specialties were torpedoes, gas meters and specialised printing machines. The same was largely true of metal manufacture: what iron founding there was in London, was designed only to meet the needs of the building industry. The bulk of the production of brass, copper, tinplate and pewter work was carried on in Birmingham and Sheffield. London work was confined either to repair or fine finishing work like brass sanitary fittings, pewter pots or bar decorations.

But London engineers not only had to contend with static, if not declining job opportunities and some seasonality, but also with the exclusiveness of the London Patternmakers' Society. Formed in 1865, its members were chiefly employed round the Thames area in the great, but now defunct firms of Penns, Maudsleys and Humphrey and Tennant. As their own historian described them, 'they were a very exclusive and conservative body, and they prided themselves upon including the cream of the trade in their organization, about half of the membership consisting of foreman, chargemen and men firmly established in their jobs'.

Their power was such that the wage rates for members in 1880 were 39/- for a 54 hour week, the next highest being Manchester with 34/-, Sheffield and Birmingham patternmakers.

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1 Booth, op.cit., Vol.v, p.294.
2 Stedman Jones, op.cit., p.21.
4 Loc.cit.
commanded 32/- and 30/- respectively, and in Dundee they slumped to 24/-.

A.S.E. patternmakers found it impossible to get work in London where the Patternmakers' Society men were foremen, so they formed a mutual aid society. Only after a long strike in 1879 when the A.S.E. men got first to the vacant jobs, did the Society start to decay.

It was in the building industry that the most improvement took place between 1850 and 1890. Mayhew found the industry swamped by country immigrants coming to London in the belief that wages were higher, only to find them cut to two-thirds of the old rate. But Booth found the skilled sections of the building industry, if not regularised, at least organized. 10 per cent were earning less than 25/-, 29 1/2 per cent were on 25/- to 30/-, and the remainder reached the relative affluence of 35/- to 40/- a week. The distinctions between skills were being made more rigid by the unions, as the gradual introduction of machine tools made the semi-skilled more of a threat to the skilled. Even the labourers were becoming slowly organized and the formation of the Builders' Labourers trades unions and their affiliation with the Building Trades Federation was tightening the structure of the industry. Building in London had become dominated by large firms where workmen were required to specialise further, such as becoming staircase hands, whereas provincial artisans developed a variety of skills. The carpenters and joiners, as the best organized section of the trade and the least vulnerable to bad weather were still the 'aristocrats'. But their monopoly of foremen's positions was diminishing and 'the carpenter by no means monopolises the symbolic "top hat" of intelligence

1 Ibid., pp.56-7.
2 Ibid., p.18.
3 The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter 60, p.336.
5 Ibid., pp.57, 60-1.
and respectability'. The power of foremen was formidable. They hired and dismissed both skilled and unskilled labour and were still followed from job to job by men they trusted or liked. When an unknown man was taken on, the first few hours were the time of testing, ending in instant dismissal if he was below standard.2

But seasonality was still the terror of the trade. Not only bad weather, but also depressions in trade had long-term effects. Building was generally one of the last industries to feel a depression as contracts had to be completed, but recovery was always very slow due to caution in investment after a slump.3 Seasonal unemployment was still severe, but at least tradesmen had the society behind them more than in the past.4

There were men who stood outside their unions - some for personal reasons, some for being out of work for a long time. Booth's interview schedule for building trades workers revealed that all the non-unionists were plumbers, apart from one slater who had dropped out because he was out of work. The three remaining non-unionists were interesting. One was a 28 year old London-born painter who belonged to no union or friendly society, was an ardent teetotaller and blamed the drink for any distress among painters. The next was a 62 year old painter, also a teetotaller, who had dropped out of his union, Teetotal society and Friendly society the previous winter. With these economies and being the occupier of a six-roomed house he rented for 10/- a week, he was living comfortably by sub-letting rooms. The third

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1 Ibid., p.72.
3 Ibid., p.323.
4 OUT OF WORK ON UNION BOOKS, ibid., p.350.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Good Year</th>
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<td>34.0</td>
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was a scaffolder of 49, a teetotaller for 27 years, who announced his intention of joining the General Builders' Labourers' Union.¹ Painters and scaffolders, because of the ease with which semi-skilled men could enter the trades and the uncertainty of their work due to the weather, were on the margin of respectability. Yet these three men were respectables and two of them, social isolates.²

Booth believed that there had been a marked moral improvement in the building trade. Temperance was gaining ground among younger men, but with better wages, gambling was flourishing. However it was more common for men to go straight home after being paid rather than to the public house, and Booth noted with approval the manner in which the carpenters and joiners had managed to survive a six-month strike in 1891 without slipping from 'respectability'.³

Of the trades which 'rationalised' after initial dislocation and became more respectable, the coopers were a good example. Their trade society remained strong and strict apprenticeship rules had protected them from excess labour. Their notorious hard drinking was on the decline. The younger generation had endured the Board Schools and were 'altogether more disciplined', and the Customs authorities had also helped by insisting that old casks be cleaned of 'every suspicion of spirit' before leaving the bonded vaults.⁴ The Cigar Makers' Mutual Association was an old, but strong and progressive union founded in 1835. Keenly internationalist in politics, it admitted foreign workmen and in the 1880s gave financial aid to striking cigar makers in Amsterdam. With 850 members, it had maintained labour control and reasonably good wages - from 35/- in large factories to 25/- in small ones.⁵
For working-class women, a significant change was the decline in the proportion at work - from 35.7 per cent in 1861 to 32.81 per cent in 1891. The Census is even more inadequate as a measurement of women at work than it is for men, for women working at home were never properly accounted for. When it was so important to the appearance of respectability that wives did not need to work, those women who worked to see the family through a bad time could not afford psychologically to call themselves working women. The capacity to support a wife fully was used as a standard for fixing wages by those trades which were powerful enough to do so:

In the more highly paid branches of the [printing] trade, the wife seldom works unless the husband is unemployed, or other misfortune has befallen the family. The leaders of the men see that the standard of life is not higher in trades where husband and wife work than in those where only the man works, and they consequently oppose it as 'not worth while'.

Among the families investigated by Mayhew where a sudden decline in prosperity had occurred, the most deeply felt shame was often that the wife now had to work. With large families, a non-working wife added to the domestic stability of the respectable man's life, and as real and regular wages gradually rose for workingmen, more women became full-time housewives. After the Great War, with the substantial rise in working-class real income, and the better pensions available for war widows, the desertion of married women from the workforce accelerated. The status value of having a non-working wife, even when families were restricted and labour-saving devices reduced housework, was rooted in the nineteenth century working-class yearning for respectability. This was yet another dimension of the middle-class character of feminism.

1Appendix I, Table II.
3The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., e.g. Letter II, pp.104-15.
4McCalman, op.cit., pp.18-29.
The most important female occupation was personal service, and although it declined by 2.02 per cent in occupational distribution in the thirty years, it still registered a percentage increase of 36.23 per cent. There was a marked, but slow, penetration of women into manufacturing industries and transport and storage. The clothing trade showed a percentage increase of 20.16 per cent and boots and shoes a percentage decline of 18.18 per cent. But in absolute numbers these were still second in importance to personal service. The printing trade, on the other hand, had a percentage increase of 252.06 per cent. There was a gradual increase in the range of choice for working-class women of regularised work making respectability more within their reach. And respectability for the self-supporting woman and girl was even more important than it was for men.¹ Women moved into manufacture at the expense of men as processes were de-skilled by technological innovation - a trend to be further aggravated by the Great War.²

In the factory the respectable girl was under threat unless she asserted her caste status and grouped together with similar girls. Teetotallers had a hard time and many respectable young girls sought moral safety by working under a woman sweater or endured the restrictions of domestic service to escape contamination from 'common' types. Booth observed of the girls in the box and envelope factories in London:

> Although all, or nearly all, belong to working class families, social distinctions are clearly marked amongst them, pointing to the character of the homes from which they come. Between factory and factory the differences may be great as shown in both dress and demeanour. Even under the same roof, in factories where all kinds of girls work together, the cleavage between the neatly dressed, quietly behaved artisan's daughter, and the common type of factory girl, with feathers and fringe, is distinct; and if they are allowed to do so, the girls spontaneously sort themselves and form

¹Appendix I, table IVb.
²McCalman, loc.cit.
little coteries. The manager of a factory where this peculiarity was noticeable said the work went better so and he encouraged it. ¹

When 'common' was synonymous for 'immoral', such caste distinctions were a necessity. Again it took the Great War to make factory work generally respectable for women.

Stedman Jones has shown how the inner East End became less respectable and its problems grew during the second half of the century. The respectable working class began to move out. In Clerkenwell, for instance, once a centre of watch and clock making, gold beating, diamond cutting and jewellery, the trades were no longer carried on in private houses with a shop on the ground floor. The trades had suffered from foreign competition and the area was socially under pressure from the growing demand for inner city accommodation from the casual poor, so Clerkenwell lost its character as a high class artisan community. The artisans who worked there lived elsewhere in more respectable areas, and policemen, postmen and warehousemen had replaced them as the social élite of the suburb with casual labourers at the bottom. ² Respectable workers were becoming commuters if their work remained in the inner city - commuters more on foot, though, as the workmen's trains were still too expensive and the service too limited to be of much use. ³ Others were moving out into the new suburbs to 'service' them or to work in small manufacturing industries taking advantage of lower rents. In Battersea, small factories sprang up along the river front - chemical works, Morgans' crucible factory, a vinegar factory - supplementing the supply of regular work for the growing working-class population drawn by the railway workshops at Nine Elms. Battersea was within walking distance of the West End, so that some of Booth's high-class shoemakers lived there. ⁴ As the working-class population of the City and the inner East End declined, outer suburbs like Battersea were

¹Booth, op.cit., Vol.IV, p.284.
⁴Booth, op.cit., Vol.IV, p.142.
developing at an enormous rate - 175 per cent in the decade 1861-71, when the population jumped from 19,600 to 54,016.\(^1\) Such growth provided work for building tradesmen as well as all forms of service occupations.

Much work remains to be done on the growth of the London suburbs. The social composition and industrial development of East and West Ham deserve closer study for instance, as West Ham in particular still carries the stigma of an East End Dock community when in fact its social composition is more varied.\(^2\) Dyos' pioneering study on Camberwell throws light on the new chances for respectability offered by the growth of the suburbs. His analysis of migration to South London reveals that as in North London, country immigrants never accounted for more than 12 to 16 per cent of the total population in any one decade between 1841 and 1881.\(^3\) There was considerable street to street migration to 'get a bit decent', but Londoners made up the bulk of the suburban immigrants. The respectables in Camberwell were absorbed into decentralised small unit industries and by the end of the century Camberwell contained a significant proportion of London's hatmakers, printing trade employees and the largest number of clerks anywhere in London - 12 per cent of the total population.\(^4\) As outdoor relief was given, Camberwell attracted the casual poor as well, but the respectables did well, three quarters of them not needing to travel daily to work. The building trade absorbed many workers, and living close to their work and away from many of the temptations of the City and inner East End, domestic stability became easier. As Dyos has observed, the new suburbs detached the rich from the poor, 'a geographical insularity [which] was often a symbol of

\(^1\) Sheppard, op.cit., p.8 and Appendix I, table V.

\(^2\) From discussion with the Canning Town Community Development Project research team.


\(^4\) Ibid., p.62. There were 22,000 clerks in 1901, which constituted 12 per cent of the population.
more fundamental social and political separation', but they also detached the respectable working class from the unrespectable.

D.A. Reeder has analysed the development of West London, where by 1901, the old colonies of pig-keepers, labourers, laundry workers and railwaymen of the mid-century had provided the nuclei of working-class districts comprising building workers, general labourers and metal workers. The proportion of occupied males over ten engaged in these industries ranged from as little as 27 per cent in Kensington, 38 per cent in Paddington and 34 per cent in Ealing, to as much as 40 to 50 per cent in Hammersmith and Acton. Fulham was 60 to 70 per cent working-class, even in 1861 when it included many gardeners. But by 1901 it had more building workers than any other borough: 53.1 per thousand. Hammersmith had 50.8 per thousand. It seems that not that many took advantage of the Metropolitan and District Railway and were able to work near home.

Booth believed the new working-class communities in South London lacked the spontaneous vitality of the East End: 'At every turn there is a lack of life.' But he was forced to add a footnote to the effect that nowhere else in London were there so many 'respectable dancing saloons as in Southwark and Bermondsey, and that balls and concerts are got up spontaneously by the working classes in their districts'. But to Booth 'the very public houses do not seem to exhal so genial a spirit as elsewhere. There are fewer signs in their windows of Harmonic meetings and Friendly leads, of Goose clubs or even sick and burial societies. Their doors do not so frequently emit that cheerful buzz of talk within, which surely is, of all sounds known to man, the most attractive.' Even among the casual poor Booth found a greater domestic respectability in South London:

1Ibid., p.25.
2Reeder, op.cit., pp.259-60.
4Loc.cit.
Here in South London, there is said to be a love of home not often found; an almost romantic attraction of the respectable poor to their little courts, not easily to be reproduced. The old evils they were accustomed to, the old ties of habit were strong, but they find nothing to bind them to the new quarters, where their earnings are perhaps even less regular and less secure than they may have been before. Hence they moved much and as soon as they 'got a bit decent' they could be expected to move to a better area. Attachment to an area was broken as attachment to home replaced it. The loss of colourful street life was the price to be paid for respectability.

Over the forty years from the 'new model' unions to the rise of the 'new unionism' which sought to bring the casual poor within the pale of the respectable and regular working class, of the two saleable commodities - skill and character - character advanced in importance in the working-class economy. As the artisan world shrank at the expense of technological innovation and competition from the provinces and abroad, the semi-skilled found greater opportunity for regular work, and for them, character was their greatest asset. The craftsman had greater need of character than ever before if he was to hold his position in the honourable trade. For those with the advantages of literacy and character, new opportunities for social advancement were there in clerical work, shops and elementary school teaching. Thomas Wright, the journeyman engineer turned writer, wrote from experience in 1886 that the neat and clean workman was always kept on in preference to a slovenly man. 'Out of the workshop,' he continued, 'in what stands to the working classes as society, the well-paid artisan who did not dress better than, and differently from the poorly-paid unskilled labourer, would lose caste. Not only his fellow craftsmen, but the labourers also would despise him.'

1Ibid., p.263.
2Thomas Wright, 'Our Craftsmen', Nineteenth Century, October 1886, pp.541-2.
Before a man could call himself 'respectable' he had to have a regular income: therefore the first criterion and definition of respectability was economic. Consequently Geoffrey Best is wrong to argue that social divisions which were not based on feelings largely economic in source, such as respectability, were the most significant divisions in Victorian society. Respectability had first to be earned and with economic changes became more available to working-class people in London in the second half of the nineteenth century. Notions of respectability derived their force in social life from the economic realities underpinning them. But their consequences on people's status, personality and politics extended far beyond the daily makings of livings.
ONE MODE OF ENTRY INTO RESPECTABILITY

London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Personnel, 1881

Top, Left to Right: Ticket Collector, Ticket Inspector, Station Superintendent, Station Inspector, Guard, Policeman.
Bottom, Left to Right: Luggage Labeller, Lampman, Signalman, Telegraph Clerk, Station Messenger, Telegraph Messenger.
CHAPTER III

THE CULTURE OF RESPECTABILITY

While working-class Londoners found respectability being forced upon them by its economic advantages, its attractions were reinforced by a culture of ideals and aspirations disseminated by working-class and middle-class evangelists for respectability and a host of organizations from political groups to trade unions, friendly and benefit societies, temperance societies, co-operative societies and churches.

This culture was of critical importance to Victorian working-class radicalism. While it espoused many values which were similar to middle-class respectability, this did not necessarily mean, as Trygve Tholsen has argued,\(^1\) that most respectable workers became increasingly deferential to middle-class domination and assimilated into 'bourgeois society'. However successfully working-class respectables emulated middle-class behaviour and beliefs, they remained prisoners of their economic and social position in society. The very qualities of intelligence and moral independence which made for respectability could set up psychological strains in the ambitious individual. The increased self-discipline and respect for literacy and learning acquired by many working-class respectables opened their eyes to a wider and better world. But the gap between aspiration and achievement remained and some working-class respectables found that while respectability had improved their material existence, it could create new psychological and social problems.

The culture of respectability also assisted the growth of conscious common identity and interests among working-class people who, especially in London, were divided by craft cultures, geographical isolation and their direct economic competition with each other in the market place.

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1 Tholfsen, op.cit., passim.
economy. By its insistence on independence, self help and dignity, respectability contributed towards an increased working-class pride and gave many individual activists an added confidence in their dealings with their masters. Hence while the non-political groups and organizations espousing the culture of respectability were important in encouraging the general practice of respectability, it is the political and trade union spokesmen for respectability as well as its individual advocates who are of most significance in understanding the connection between working-class radicalism and respectability.

J.F.C. Harrison has identified 'a regard for knowledge and print as the hallmark of artisan respectability' in early Victorian society. ¹ It was certainly one hallmark. It is the most conspicuous for the historian as literates left behind them the most evidence and a reverence for learning was common in nineteenth century artisan radicalism. It was part of the general increase in respectability that Francis Place observed in his lifetime: 'I can remember the time when to be able to read and to indulge in reading, would if known to a master tradesman, have been so serious an objection to a journeyman, that he would scarcely have expected to obtain employment.' ² But observers tended to project their self-images on what comprised respectability. For instance Edward G. Salmon in 1886 defined working-class respectability at the beginning of the Victorian era as the possession of a Bible and Pilgrim's Progress. ³ Nevertheless from the memoirs of workingmen we have story after story of painstaking self-education for self-improvement; courses in self-instruction which in the cases of Holyoake and


²Thale, op.cit., p.16.

Thomas Cooper were so exacting that they precipitated nervous breakdowns. Of lesser men, there were some whose love of learning was the sustaining joy of their lives. J.H. Powell, a young member of the A.S.E., prefaced his slim volume of forgettable poems with this testimony: '...it must suffice the reader to know that since [the first publication of my poems in 1852] I have experienced difficulties attendant on the destinies of most working men who have to struggle with the competitive selfishness of the age; but amidst the anxiety and almost constant worry of my life I have realised the most felicitous pleasure from the struggle of poetry, and am conscious of possessing more enlightened and liberal views from its aid.' A street bookseller told Mayhew that he found mechanics to be 'capital customers' and less inclined to haggle over prices than gentlemen. The literate working man, 'the scolard' had an honoured position, even among the street people - supplying information, giving advice, writing and reading letters, drawing up petitions. But as one writer testified from experience, when a 'scolard' began getting into print he found it best to keep quiet, for 'Though not distinctly formulated, it is an article of belief with workingmen generally that the man who writes for print must be more or less of a natural curiosity, and their lionisation, upon this score, of one of their own class could scarcely be pleasant to him, however well-meant it might be'.

There were occupational groups who were obvious working-class intellectuals like the compositors. One extraordinary example of the educational benefits of working in the printing trade was a casual prostitute interviewed by one of Mayhew's helpers. She had been a typographer for seven years on a London morning newspaper. Beligerantly she

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1 See Chapter VI, 'Four Respectable Radicals'.
5 Ibid., pp.277-8.
defended her right to go on the streets when money was short and she hankered after better food. Astounded at her intelligence and articulateness, the interviewer asked how she had learnt to speak so well and she flung back at him: 'you must remember what a lot has passed through my hands for the last seven years and what a lot of copy I've set up. There's very little I don't know, I can tell you. It's what old Robert Owen would call the spread of education.'

It was not simply a regard for knowledge and print, but often an excessive reverence for the received culture, especially the classics. Frustrated working-class intellectuals felt they had to acquire all the accoutrements of a gentleman. Thomas Cooper drove himself insane twice trying to master Latin, Greek and Hebrew. In his Cooper's Journal he presented a wide range of classical English writing for his working-class readers. In an issue of the Building Societies' Gazette of 1870, one writer managed to squeeze into an article on 'How to Save Money' allusions to Napoleon, Diogenes and Alexander the Great. The fondness for prolixity and displays of erudition of much working-class writing was one consequence of the sense of inferiority imposed on the respectable, but only working-class.

In the Working Man's Friend the value of self-cultivation for self-improvement was the most popular topic. Joseph Raymond, a Somerset glover, preached that 'Mental cultivation is necessary...to enable you to discharge the duties, social and moral, which are incumbent upon you, and to assist you to occupy your proper station in life'.

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1 Mayhew, op. cit., Vol.IV, pp.256.

2 Cooper's Journal: or, Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom and Progress, 5 January 1850 to 26 October 1850. These included: Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, Dr Johnson, Walter Savage Landor, Emerson, William Godwin, Ben Jonson, Shelly, Locke, Hume, Bentham, Milton and Edmund Burke.

3 'How to Save Money', The Building Societies' Gazette, 1 September 1870, p.137.

hopes J.C.O., Gardener, held out for education were even more idealistic:

Oh that every working man who now idles away his time at the taproom or the club, could but be brought to feel the happiness which he might derive by leaving off this course of life, and over his own fireside enjoying the sweets of literature and imparting the rudiments of knowledge to his family! How happy and cheerful would become the countenance of his wife; how soon would cleanliness and furniture give to his cottage an air of comfort which it never possessed! Then would it be necessary to issue many 'Working Men's Friends' from the press; then would the lights of the gin palace go out, and the light of truth, the light of reason, and the light of Divine Revelation shine forth in all their pristine lustre.¹

Others were more hard-headed in their demands for education. Benjamin Taylor wrote from Leeds to The Operative, in 1851, to argue that part of the A.S.E.'s function was to reduce working hours so that members could have time and strength for self-education. The current difficulty of this led to 'the ignorance which pervades the Iron Trade, and its social and moral depravity'.² A couple of articles slipped past the editor of the Working Man's Friend which were more explicit about some of the benefits of self-improvement through mental cultivation. The most ingenious came from 'a working man's son' in Northumberland. After outlining the moral and mental improvement gained from the study of botany, he concluded: 'When, moreover, [the working man] perfectly understands all the branches of this wonderful study it quickens in his mind another feeling - namely the desire to be free and untrammelled by arbitrary power.'³

David Wright, shoemaker and Post Office messenger from Aberdeen, recommended the study of history for it 'shows how completely the interests of the great mass of mankind have been made subservient to the selfish purposes of the few who


²The Operative, 7 June 1851, p.365.

possessed sufficient knowledge to overcome and direct their fellow creatures for their own aggrandizement.\(^1\) Henry James, a Sheffield cutler, after reading the *Working Man's Friend*, was deeply impressed by the 'dignity of feeling [that] pervades the soul of the educated artisan', and wrote to reveal how the English education system totally failed to cater for the working classes. Even the Mechanics' Institutes had become moribund or dominated by gentlemen elected to the committees 'because it looks respectable'. The working classes had to be their own teachers: 'let them abandon their beer-barrel propensities and other vicious habits; and they will soon possess the means to render themselves intelligent, dignified and free.'\(^2\)

The sad irony for those who preached that education would lead to respectability and from there to recognition and significance, was that their hopes were ill-founded. These romantics were blinded by their optimism - their prescriptions were too exiguous and the rewards negligible. When John Woods, a waggon builder from Wednesbury, argued that since violent political action had failed, the most prominent demand of the age was for education, in realising that this would bring a 'corresponding increase in duty and responsibility', he was admitting the limits of education for the working man.\(^3\) The literates were opening themselves to frustration as much as improvement. Ambitious respectable men had no one to help them but themselves, and once embarked on the road to self-improvement they were vulnerable to bitter disillusionment when their exertions gained them so little. Thomas Cooper, who was probably the most remarkable autodictat of the age, never ceased to teach others the way to self-betterment. But he had no illusions in 1850 about the necessity for self-help: 'Workingmen ought

\(^1\)Ibid., 'On the Intellectual Elevation of the Working Classes', by David Wright, Shoemaker and Post Office Messenger, Aberdeen, April 1850, p.10.

\(^2\)Ibid., 'The Educational Apparatus for Working Men', Henry James, Cutler, Sheffield, May 1850, pp.1 and 7.

\(^3\)Ibid., 'Demands of the Age Upon the Working Classes', John Woods, Waggon-building, Wednesbury, April 1850, p.12.
clearly and fully to look the truth in the face - that if they do no set about helping themselves they can only expect to toil on and die.¹

The self-help for mental and moral improvement and the self-help of a politically excluded class became interwoven precisely because they were interdependent. Literacy led to a regard for critically acquired knowledge and a growing enthusiasm for the received culture. This could equip the reading respectable man for political activity. He began to participate vicariously in a social world in which he had no part and which did not recognise his existence. Yet he was gaining the language, the information, the analytical skills and the powers of rational argument which fitted him to be part of that world as well as the frock-coated gentleman he saw accosting working girls in the street. He may have begun to feel himself better fitted, for in the true sense, he was more respectable than a philandering aristocrat. In mid-century London if 'respectable' meant 'regular', it also often meant 'political'. Of the costermongers who rose to the respectability of being greengrocers and dealers, Mayhew was told, 'They rises to be voters and they all vote liberal'.²

For all the propaganda from above advocating self-help as a panacea for social evils which property was loath to remove, there was as much from below. The romantics preached it as a secularised moral earnestness. The realists argued that improvement for improvement's sake was not sufficient when it gained them so little. Some mitigated the anxiety and tedium of their lives by convincing themselves that self-help and respectability were ends in themselves. But there were others who found that practising respectability only made their lives more intolerable. For clever provincial artisans the Chapel was often their first experience of possibilities for self-expression apart from using their hands. Village Methodism provided many blocked

¹'The Only Help for Workingmen', Cooper's Journal, 18 May 1850, p.305. See also The Investigator: A Journal of Secularism edited by Robert Cooper, 1 April 1854, p.2.
men with their first chance of leadership and training in organization, public speaking and critical reading. But many of the blocked provincials who finally headed for London lost interest in religion and took to politics. Their moral earnestness did have Dissenting and Evangelical components, but it seems that many, like the four respectable radicals studied below, were morally earnest before they became religious. Religion had been often the only social institution open to them in the provinces as working-class people. But there were broader social causes for the growth of ideals about moral earnestness and respectability than Methodism and the Evangelical revival. In a rapidly changing society there was an increasing number of working men who glimpsed the possibilities of a different and better life. However they were still locked in a social structure which denied them freedom of talent. Religious life could be an aid, at times a solace for thwarted people, but it was not the sole impulse to find their 'proper station in life'.

Self-improvement through self-help demanded of the working man discipline, self-denial and self-direction. Hence these notions were interdependent on two more central Victorian social ideals - manliness and independence. Independence came easily to many metropolitan artisans. Living mostly apart from the rest of society, working on their own account or for masters little above them socially and in workshops with their own traditions and camaraderie, artisans were protected from intimate contact with the moneyed classes and from the necessity for deference. For the rural poor, such 'independence' was almost impossible, as Joseph Arch recalled of his childhood: 'With bowed head and bended knee the poor learned to receive from the rich what was only their due, had they known it. Years of poverty had ground the spirit of independence right out of them;...and the spirit of servitude was bred in their very bones.'

Arch, who was to form the first General Union of Agricultural

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1Joseph Arch, The Story of His Life told by Himself, edited with a preface by the Countess of Warwick (London, 1898), p.18.
Labourers, was protected from such demoralisation by his highly intelligent and strong-willed mother. His father was a freeholder, which gave the family some self-respect and his mother was fired with pride at her ancestors who had fought in Cromwell's army. She was the only villager to resist the rector's wife who oversaw all the minutiae of village life.\(^1\) Arch became a staunch Liberal as the 'Tory barley bread I had to feed on got into my bones' and developed a curious personal sense of classlessness - a social independence. Recalling his loss of religious faith, he emphasised that: 'I did not believe either in ordering myself "lowly and reverently to all my betters" because they were never able to tell me who my betters were.'\(^2\) Arch dealt with the stress to his personality of being a thwarted man by replacing the aristocracy of birth and wealth with the aristocracy of moral rectitude. Independence was both a psychological defence and a social weapon.

John Vincent has argued that manliness was the great moral idea of Gladstonian Liberalism. Manliness meant the rejection of patronage and dependence. For nineteenth century man the mark of being fully human was being able to support his own family, have his own religion and politics and call no man master. He maintains that it is as a mode of entry into this full humanity that Gladstonian Liberalism most claims our respect.\(^3\) But manliness was not the prerogative of the Liberal party. George Croly, the divine, used the ideal of manliness in an article in *Blackwood's* in 1851 to explain why England could resist the dangers of revolution which beset the Continent: '[I]t preserves England from revolutions; as manly exercise preserves the human frame from disease; and from those violent struggles with which Nature from time to time, throws off the excess

\(^1\) Ibid., pp.3-4, 44-5, 51-2.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp.48 and 49.

of disease.'\(^1\) Croly was adumbrating the concept of social and spiritual health founded on manly self-restraint. Peter Cominos narrows the notion of manliness down to the restraint of sexual passions.\(^2\) One prevailing meaning of manliness was employed as a particularly English and Protestant social ideal of racial superiority over the moral depravity of the French and the Celts, especially the Irish. A pamphlet for the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts argued that France had been defeated at Metz 'because Frenchmen have lost all sense of duty, all power of self-control and self-denial; because they have learnt to believe that the instinct of self-gratification is a human, nay, a Divine law, against which it is vain to struggle'.\(^3\)

In the general notion of manliness the sexual component was not very important. The underlying concept was one of a high frustration threshold: the psychological capacity to have patience and self-control, to practise thrift and sobriety and to work carefully and intelligently towards rationally perceived ends. George Eliot, Blackwood's 'secret weapon' in the Second Reform Bill crisis, provided the best definition of 'manliness':

> Not all the evils of our condition are such as we can justly blame others for; and, I repeat, many of them are such as no change of institutions can quickly remedy. To discern between the evils that patience must bear, makes the difference between manliness and childishness, between good sense and folly. And more than that, without such discernment, seeing that we have grave duties towards our

\(^1\)George Croly, 'The Italian Revolution', Blackwood's Magazine, October 1851, p.431.

\(^2\)Peter T. Cominos, 'Late-Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System', op.cit., passim.

own body and the country at large, we can hardly escape the acts of fatal rashness and injustice.¹

G.J. Holyoake delighted in calling himself a 'Felix Holt'.²

If we put 'Felix Holt' against W.J. Linton's idealisation of James Watson as 'the ideal of what an English workman ought to be', the appeal of the notion of manliness to thwarted working men becomes clearer. Linton described Watson in ordinary conversation as in manner, generally serious and earnest; his subject manner weighty and sincere, and his tone of voice, pleasant, his words correct and well-spoken. 'On the platform his bearing was simple, dignified, earnest and impressive, and without gestures; his speech unhesitating but deliberate, well-chosen words clearly enunciated and sound argument.'³ The respectable workingman was to be a proper respectable English gentleman: self-contained, controlled and calm. He should be everything the volatile Latins were not, and more important, everything the Residuum patently were not. He was to behave in such a way that he could not fail to be respected. Samuel Smiles believed the essence of respectability to be manliness.⁴ In the search for working-class dignity and class pride, the ideal of manliness was a compelling component of the culture of respectability.

If the Working Man's Friend was a testimony to the 'dignity of feeling' that pervaded the soul of the educated artisan in its time, today it is more a testimony to the loneliness of the intelligent respectable workingman. The homilies on social rising by men who were to remain dyers and printers all their lives reveals the vulnerability of


these people to 'Smilesan' propaganda. There was precious little help apart from self-help. There was no alternative to self-denial if they were to eat. If they could practise the prescriptions of the respectable moneyed classes in their deportment, perhaps then they might be treated like human beings. They were literally making virtues out of necessities. And so The Co-operator opened its first issue in June 1860 with a poem - 'Invitation to self-culture and self-reliance by the Factory boy':

Advance right on the path of knowledge,
Equip thyself in strong completeness,
What tho' the toil be long and rugged?
'Twill fill thy wond'ring soul with greatness. 2

In 1869 The Building Societies' Gazette published this concise statement of the ideal of respectability and the admixture of virtues and rewards it preached:

To know the value of a shilling you must earn it, and a feeling of manliness and self-respect will enter into the breast of him, who has the power, while surrounded with temptation, solicited by base appetites and jeered by frivolous comrades, to apply himself steadily to work, and to put by every penny which there is no good cause for spending. The two grand producing agencies to which success is commonly due are the plain virtues of industry and saving. Through these a man of ordinary faculties is, generally speaking, able to secure himself all that is essential to his welfare. 3

This is precisely what Francis Place did and retired on £3,000 a year. But there was no joy in it. When working as a journeyman in the one room he shared with his family, he sometimes was so overcome by depression and nervous fatigue that he would run out towards Hampstead or Norwood until he had cleared his head and could return 'to his vomit'. 4

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3The Building Societies' Gazette, 1 January 1869, p.8.

4Thale, op.cit., p.xxii.
The ideals expressed by the *Building Societies' Gazette* do echo the Smilesian doctrine of social betterment through the practice of respectability. Smiles held out to the working classes the promise of greater happiness if they behaved: 'If the labouring classes would gain a firmer footing in the world they must exercise economy, self-denial and forethought, the basis of all manly and independent character.' He went on to remind his readers in this article that it was the provident workman who was the last to be discharged in bad times and the first to regain employment.¹ What Tholfsen has failed to emphasise is that in the day-to-day experience of respectable working-class people these prescriptions were appallingly true. The Smilesian doctrine did attempt to stave off individual discontent which could have threatened capitalism. But the question remains why so many intelligent working men who were suspicious of capital and loathed the moneyed classes subscribed to a code of respectability which ran so dangerously close to the bourgeois capitalist ethic.

Many radicals, especially from the mid-century until the early 1880s, believed it because they saw a connection between political citizenship and respectability. The Secularist Robert Cooper argued in 1853 that 'Emancipation from error, oppression, crime and misery, must be self-emancipation'.² Many Chartists made exalted claims for the moral benefits of the mere fact of enfranchisement because they believed that without citizenship men would continue to evade the responsibilities of adulthood. As Joseph Sturje put it in 1842: 'Treat men as slaves and they will soon betake themselves to the vices of slavery - would you fit them for freedom, then you must make them free.'³ The horror many ordinary people had of charity sprang from the same realisation. A cabman refused 'free tea' on Sundays

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²Robert Cooper, *Lectures to the Working Classes on Christianity and Secularism* (London, 1853), Lecture III, p.44.

for: 'While I'm able to do my work and pay my way, I don't want anything given to me. I ain't a child.'

If middle-class propagandists saw respectability as the solvent of social tension, many working-class propagandists saw it as a means to political freedom and making the world safe for ambition. Joseph Barker talked of 'Independence' this way to his small readership of earnest working men:

If you would be independent, you must be either very rich or very economical....Most men can get a little by honest work, and if they can make that little supply their wants, why should they fear to speak their minds or do their duty? Franklin lived on bread and water, and could, in consequence, afford to keep a conscience. Another man takes snuff, and smokes and drinks, and keeps bad company, and cannot therefore afford to keep a conscience, even if he had one. There is wisdom in the advice of the old philosophers to learn to live on a little, that you may not be beholden to those who would limit your liberty....If you can live on a little, you are comparatively independent, and can have the luxury of a conscience and the pleasure of keeping it pure.

But the working class evangelists for respectability did not slavishly follow the bourgeois code. One of the interesting, although minority deviations from middle-class respectability, was the wider sexual tolerance of some respectable radicals and their support for the rights of women. Lovett and Holyoake believed in the enfranchisement of women and universal suffrage would have been included in the charter had it not seemed even more impracticable than manhood suffrage. But it was not the only artisan intellectuals who mixed socially with middling class bohemians who believed in freedom for women. In 1851 the A.S.E.'s magazine *The Operative* advocated the emancipation

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1 *All the Year Round*, Vol.II, 25 February 1860, p.416. W.S. Chambers criticised charitable organizations for 'the tendency...to take away all manly feeling and sense of independence from the objects of their solicitude'. *Building Societies* (Edinburgh, c.1850), p.2.

2 *Barker's Review*, 14 September 1861, p.27.

3 From F.B. Smith.
of women by enlarging their work opportunities so that they could have economic independence. Also it called for the adoption of a rational system of divorce, for '...it would put a happy period to many a legal prostitution, nicknamed marriage; it would render a measure of justice to the now helpless married woman and make her exacting load more rational and forbearing'.  

An even more unsuspected place for such sentiments was the Tottington Industrial Co-operative Almanack for 1874 which included this poem entitled 'Woman':

The rights of women - says a female pen -
Are to do everything as well as men,
And since the sex at length have been inclined
To cultivate that useful part, the mind.
Since they have learnt to read, to write, to spell,
Since some of them have wit, and use it well,
Let us not force them back, with brow severe,
Within the pale of ignorance and fear,
Confined entirely to the domestic arts,
Producing only children, pies and tarts.
Upon my life, the men are such odd fellows,
They're even grown of female learning jealous;
These mighty lords came all so learn'd from college,
They'd grudge poor us our little share of knowledge,
Ladies, since things are thus, take this advice,
Be in your choice of men, extremely nice.  

There were, of course, radical spokesmen who echoed more conventional morality. Reynolds's Political Instructor argued in 1849 that women were being corrupted and prevented from carrying out their civilizing mission by the pittance wages they earned and the conditions they endured. John Best, a painter from Cornwall, was moved to write for the Working Man's Friend by his disgust at the 'all-prevalent crime of the majority' of indulging in the 'debasin practice of impure conversation'. G.J. Holyoake disliked impure conversation too and found Joseph Barker vulgar and crude, but Barker was far more intolerant of sexual impurity than

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1 The Operative, 24 May 1851, p.327.
2 The Tottington Industrial Co-operative Almanack. 1874 (Manchester, 1874).
3 Reynolds's Political Instructor, 1 December 1849, p.30.
Holyoake. He attacked Drysdale's *Elements of Social Science* for placing 'the sensual appetites above the intellectual and moral faculties' and lamented the prevalence of sexual licentiousness among freethinkers which was alienating Christians.¹ A freethinker of thirty years' standing wrote to *Barker's Review* deploiring the moral laxity among young Secularists. He blamed Richard Carlile for this baneful influence and claimed that many of his old freethinking acquaintances had taken refuge in the Church where at least men were pure even if theologically misguided.² Barker opposed birth control and recommended abstinence 'as the great secret of health and power, both of body and mind'.³

Joseph Barker's motives for this extreme position may have been dubious, if we are to believe Holyoake. But a number of respectable working-class radicals deliberately eschewed the prudery of middle-class respectability.⁴ After Place's frank autobiography a curtain descends on the memoirs of successful working men when their private lives come to be mentioned. William Lovett however, in the sparkling beginning to this otherwise disappointing autobiography revealed the normality of life amongst even the ultra-religious. His mother's fanaticism deterred him from ever joining her in the Methodist persuasion, but he did for a short time become converted to the Bryanites by the presence of two pretty young female evangelists. He left as soon as he heard that they had been turned out of the body, '...having fallen from their saintly position by being with child'.⁵ Yet despite the reticence and egocentricity of many memoirs, happy and genuinely companionable marriages were far from uncommon among leading radicals: G.J. Holyoake,

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¹ *Barker's Review*, 7 September 1861, p.11.
² Ibid., 16 November 1861, pp.170-1.
³ Ibid., 28 September and 2 November 1861.
Julian Harney, Henry Vincent and W.J. Linton's second de facto marriage to the sister of his first wife. George Howell was an exception. His extreme and intolerant respectability aggravated the death of his marriage. And Joseph Arch was one who admitted that he outgrew his wife. When he wrote his memoirs under the dubious influence of the promiscuous Countess of Warwick he confessed to marital unhappiness as his wife had no interest in his political ideas. But Place was again remarkable for the honesty with which he recorded his married life. He admitted that he was driven to mistreat his wife when he was unemployed for eight months and the two of them were confined to a single room with a dying baby. It is difficult to reconcile Cominos' picture of middle-class sexual respectability with the private lives of at least many outstanding respectable working-class leaders. But if respectable working-class people had extra-martial sexual relationships, the consequences were more difficult to escape than they were for the wealthy. One pious and forbearing Baptist confectioner, William Swan, fathered an illegitimate daughter when he was twenty-one and married her mother three years later when he was better able to support them: 'We became too familiar... ah, this brought built into my conscience indeed, and my companion was, by our folly, brought into trouble.' The wider sexual tolerance of these respectable working-class people came partly from the tradition of rights for women enunciated in the 1820s and earlier, and partly from ordinary sensitive men's awareness that working-class life fell even harder on women.

1See G.J. Holyoake, op.cit., passim; Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol.I. Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, ed., for Henry Vincent; and F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan: William James Linton 1812-97 (Manchester University Press, 1973), passim; for George Howell see Chapter VI.

2Joseph Arch, op.cit., p.47.

3Thale, op.cit., pp.104-22.

4Guida Swan, op.cit., p.49.

In religion too, the respectable London working class deviated from the middle-class code of respectability. London was remarkable for its irreligion. Non-conformity was less important as a stamp of respectability for working-class people than it was in the provinces, and although Dissenters continued to practise their religion, active Christians among the working-class leadership are hard to find. In London people with a religious sensibility were more likely to have been Infidels and Secularists. Infidelism had been an outlet for radical men before 1850 at the times when political action was difficult, and it provided the continuity of radical endeavour during the 1820s and 1830s.¹ As F.B. Smith has pointed out, to be an atheist, a man needs to have been religious first.² The prototypical London freethinker was a provincial immigrant, trained in Non-conformity, who had abandoned religion for Secularism and radical politics once he found a footing in the metropolis.

Holyoake invented the term 'Secularism' to encompass a new ethical system to underpin working-class radical politics. But afflicted with an unexciting public manner and propounding high-minded sweet reasonableness, he was upstaged by Charles Bradlaugh. Secularist writings and meetings rarely transcended an obsession to expose the inconsistencies and indecencies of the Christian evidences. The God of the provincial chapels still haunted the Secularist imagination. More important, working-class freethinkers found it gratifying to ridicule the fantastic notions believed by gentlemen educated at the great universities. But the difference between the artisan secularists and the 'unconscious secularists' in the Residuum is that they were acquainted with the Church.

The periodical press reflected the distress of middle-class Christians at the hostility towards Christianity of

those very working people with whom there was some common
ground. But as one perceptive writer realised, such men
found the mission to the poor an affront to their dignity
and their freedom from the Church was a gesture of
independence.\textsuperscript{1} Their opposition to religion was largely
political. \textit{Fraser's Magazine} organized a meeting at a
London tavern in 1869 to investigate the problem and
concluded sadly that such churchgoers as there were, were
generally Dissenters and 'usually sober, industrious,
domestic, thriving and in every way estimable. But they do
not constitute the intellectual portion of the skilled
artisan class, the eager politicians, the lecture-goers, the
supporters of mechanics' institutes, and the like....the
respectable, seek to save their souls...the intelligent,
strive to improve their minds, and naturally do not go to
church.'\textsuperscript{2} The artisans claimed that their objections to
organized religion were ethical more than doctrinal. They
found the clergy poor in intellect and wedded to the social
and political status quo.\textsuperscript{3} The Church of England was the
butt of the radical artisan critique, but all the churches
suffered from the disillusionment of intelligent working-
class people at their social hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{4}

So far the working-class code of respectability was
individualistic - stressing self-help and independence,
essentially self-containment. There was one final notion
which appealed to many working-class respectables - the
concept of a co-operative society. To them it was
'competition', not exploitation by an identifiable separate
and superior employer class which threatened economic
security: competition among masters; competition among
workmen destroying brotherly association and the chance of

\textsuperscript{1} 'The Religious Heresies of the Working Classes', \textit{Westminster
Review}, January 1862, p.66.
\textsuperscript{2} 'Why Skilled Workmen Don't go to Church', \textit{Fraser's Magazine},
July 1869, p.113.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., pp.115-7.
\textsuperscript{4} See \textit{The Book of the Poor Man's Church} (London, c.1850),
passim; 'Working Men and Religious Institutions', \textit{The
British Quarterly Review}, April 1867, pp.509-29.
class solidarity. The panacea for these economic ills and the consequent moral evils was therefore 'co-operation'.

The Chartist journal *The National Instructor* pleaded in 1851:

What the wealthy classes have done, the working classes must do, if ever they are to effect their own salvation. They must unite and co-operate for their mutual protection and aid — they must not only become the proprietors of their own energies, but the masters of the fruits of their energies. They must convert machinery from a competing devil in the hands of the idle, to a ministering angel on the side of the industrious, and then developing their own industrial power, the true weapon for Englishmen, they may elevate their physical condition, give themselves and their children education, even political power and emancipation. The time for all this, if not now, is fast approaching.

The Owenite influence is obvious, and perhaps too the pre-Marxist insights of Bronterre O'Brien. But in the second half of the nineteenth century the intellectual heritage of these ideas is not as important as the power the very words themselves had for ordinary people. Most who preached 'co-operation' used the concept loosely. It was more a moral ideal of human co-operation rather than an analysis of the economic system. Typical was the young A.S.E. poet J.H. Powell: 'Competition is the great instrument which increases the hours and decreases the wages of those who are powerless beneath its influence.... Co-operation is the remedy, not as an ultimatum, but as a means to the true advancement of civilisation....'

The *Co-operator*, as the national organ of the co-operative movement in the 1860s, attempted to elevate the economic practice of co-operation into an ethical ideology:

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3 Bronterre O'Brien seems to have been a great oral teacher, and his influence appears to have been far greater than his written works would indicate. Alfred Plummer's long-awaited *Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien, 1804-1864* (London, 1971) is disappointing on the extent of O'Brien's influence.

'What is wanted, is, - less selfishness, more of unadulterated sympathy and unpretending but genuine help.'\(^1\)

The notion appealed strongly to the 'New Model' unions. The Operative warned in 1851: 'We may toil and travail, but whilst we are only actuated by individual selfishness, the world would be morally a wilderness still, and those who are best calculated to enrich and adorn it will suffer most, as the bravest and foremost soldiers in the battle are the first to fall.'\(^2\)

The editor was acquainted with Continental socialist theory and quoted de Giradin: 'If we reproach Socialism with a Communism which excludes liberty, let us remember there is a Socialism called Liberalism which repulses Communism.'\(^3\)

And in May of that year The Operative ran a leader on 'The Associative Principle': '...modern civilisation...has developed two ideas of which the ancient world had but a limited and vague comprehension - that of the association of masses to defend their common rights through the instrumentality of representative governments; and the idea of association of independent nations for the purpose of commerce, of science, and of moral good'.\(^4\)

Considering the parlous situation of the A.S.E. at the time of this leader, the optimism and apocalyptic language demonstrate the religiosity of many co-operators.

The British Quarterly Review in 1850 attacked the 'Fourierist' notions of 'Association' as 'the cant-word, the shibboleth, the universal formula of all speculation, and all practical endeavour as to the organization of the future'.\(^5\)

But it was to become one of the most attractive working-class ideals to well-meaning men of property and was thereby debased. From 'co-operators' withdrawing from the immoral competitive world, working men were to become happy labouring capitalists. 'Respectability' could be used as a

\(^1\)The Co-operator, No.1, June 1860, p.1.

\(^2\)The Operative, 7 June 1851, p.354.

\(^3\)Ibid., 12 July 1851, p.14.

\(^4\)Ibid., 24 May 1851, p.321.

\(^5\)The British Quarterly Review, May 1850, p.473.
way of facing social and political exclusion, but when it confronted the economic system it was at best idealistic, at worst, pointless.¹ But at the mid-century the revolutionary hopes of the power of co-operation were still innocent. Joseph Barker moved from advocating co-operation in 1853 as a form of socialism which left human individuality untouched, to arguing in 1861 that Co-operation would teach the working classes self-government, providence and political maturity.² The concept was to be profoundly unsettled by subsequent economic and political shocks. But many ordinary men like W.P. Hemm of the Independent Order of Engineers and Machinists absorbed it as a simple and comforting moral tenet in which he had a mystified faith:

He himself was a co-operator - he had been one almost from a boy, and he believed he should continue to be one until he had passed to his last home. Co-operation, he considered, was the principle which would settle all these disputes [between Capital and Labour], and it only wanted carrying properly into effect. At present it was partially carried out, but only partially. Yet it could be done, and with a proper amount of interest to capital, which should be fairly dealt with.³

Mr Hemm, in his gentlemanly fairness towards capital, his moral uprightness, his reasonableness, his decency and his manly independence, was the middle-class ideal of the working man citizen of 1874. Here was a man the moneyed classes could engage in civilized, if one-sided dialogues over the conflict between capital and labour. But even Mr Hemm, despite his muddle-headedness, had absorbed values from the culture of respectability which had given him a firmer image of himself as a working man in Victorian society. His class identity had been enriched by a life-time

¹See Trygve R. Tholfsen, op.cit., pp.64-5.


³Reported speech in W.G. Ward, Capital & Labour: Also Seven Nights' Discussion thereon between Capitalists, Trades' Unionists, Representative Workmen and Others (Nottingham, 1874), p.120.
of exposure to the culture of respectability, and if he found deference easier, there were others who could not abide it.

The culture of respectability contained ideals of self-reliance and self-respect which were an explosive mixture when practised by intelligent and ambitious working men. Although there were many Mr Hemms in Victorian England, there were many others who did explode when they found that the promises of respectability and the Smilesean doctrine were hollow indeed.
CHAPTER IV

RESPECTABILITY, CLASS AND PERSONALITY

The temptation if not the necessity to become respectable was powerful indeed for working-class people presented with its economic rewards and bombarded with the blandishments of its advocates. Once achieved, respectability sometimes had a variety of effects on the personalities and perceptions of its practitioners which were unforeseen by those advocates who saw respectability as a salve to class tension and political dissent. It is these personal consequences on the individual which are critical to unravelling the connection between respectability and working-class radicalism.

This chapter attempts to bring together the preceding chapters and act as the conceptual and explanatory bridge between the exploration of the meaning of respectability and the examination of the practice and effects of respectability in politics and in the lives of radical respectable people. Having outlined the pressures from outside on working-class people to become respectable, the study now concentrates on the perceptions of respectable people of their relationship to the other classes in society and the role respectability played in radical politics.

It is necessary to commence with a reminder that the term 'class' will be used as meaning social stratum and that the conceptual structure of the explanations of political behaviour does not accord with strict marxist concepts of class and class consciousness. Rather I am concerned with people's perceptions of the locus of authority in society and of the formation of conflict groups. This approach derives in large part from the social theorist Ralf Dahrendorf and the historian R.S. Neale. Their work makes more sense for understanding the character of British radicalism in the nineteenth century than does the work of other social theorists and historians, including marxists.

The problems of explaining the formation of political beliefs are formidable. It is frequently impossible to explain why one person becomes radical, another conservative, another politically indifferent. Few politically active people who leave personal records either possess or chose to display sufficient self-awareness to explain the cause of their beliefs. Francis Place, for instance, was far more interested in the growth of respectability and in his own pursuit of it, than in what made him a radical. It was almost as though his radicalism was instinctual, whereas the attainment of respectability demanded conscious choice and effort. Yet his is one of the frankest autobiographies of a nineteenth century radical. The ultimate explanation of political behaviour lies in the realm of individual psychology or internal facts, yet the historian even more than the sociologist is confronted by a dearth of direct personal explanation which renders generalization very difficult.

There are, however, a number of external facts which point to a means of generalization. Such a fact is that the vast majority of working-class radical activists were economically and socially members of the respectable working class. Maybe there is more than coincidence in this apparent connection between respectability and radicalism.

In the absence of direct personal evidence, the best the historian can do is to concentrate on the external facts and set the stage on which these people played out their lives: to describe and analyse the social, economic and personal ambience within which certain reactions were likely to occur. The evidence for the environment and culture of a class is abundant and easy to assemble. But the evidence of individual responses to that environment is both scant and dominated by the memoirs of exceptional and talented people. Hence the social historian is forced to set the stage and to deduce from both the stage and the perceptions and actions of the exceptional men what people were likely to think. The logic of such explanations is incomplete and easily submerged by the certainties of the articulate minority, but nevertheless the exercise is far from futile.
and offers many possibilities rather than probabilities for the understanding of political behaviour and class psychology. Before moving on to the effect of respectability on working-class people's perceptions of their relationships to authority and to the other classes in society, it must be emphasised that the most important scenery in the stage of their lives were economic, social and political. I am merely adding respectability to this major scenery to assess its historical significance.¹

R.S. Neale has persuasively applied Ralf Dahrendorf's model of conflict with authority to the study of nineteenth century English radicalism. He maintains that the explanation of conflict in society requires a model of class relationships which combines economic and social status with the potential for conflict with authority. Neale is as rigorous as a strict Marxist ² is his use of the concept of 'class'. As soon as a significant number of members, say of the middling class, cease to manifest the behaviour of a conflict group or become deferential, then by definition they no longer constitute a political class and become merely a social stratum. His model does, however, have wider relevance than this strict sense of class in that it can be used to provide a conceptual framework for the explanation of more general responses to authority and social frustration in Victorian society, provided one allows for 'deviant' responses such as deference and apathy as belonging to the realm of more complex individual psychological explanation.³

Neale's five-class model is quite different from Stedman Jones' model of social stratification used in Chapter II and is made up as follows:

³Berkhofer, op.cit., pp.43, 46-63.
I Upper Class, aristocratic, landholding, authoritarian, exclusive.

II Middle Class, industrial and commercial property owners, senior military and professional men, aspiring to acceptance by the upper class. Deferential towards the upper class because of this and because of concern for property and achieved position, but individuated or privatized.

III Middling Class, petit bourgeois, aspiring professional men, other literates and artisans. Individuated or privatized like the middle class, but collectively less deferential and more concerned to remove the privileges and authority of the upper class in which, without radical changes, they cannot realistically hope to share.

IV Working Class A, industrial proletariat in factory areas, workers in domestic industries, collectivist and non-deferential and wanting government intervention to protect rather than to liberate them.

V Working Class B, agricultural labourers, other low-paid non-factory urban labourers, domestic servants, urban poor, most working-class women whether from working-class A or B households, deferential and dependent.

In Neale's model the Upper Class and Middle Class are rendered distinct, and the Middling Class is added to divide more clearly the aspiring black-coated worker from his more established colleagues. Finally the working classes are divided into two instead of three groups.

The strength of Neale's model is the way it reveals the potential for frustration - both political and social - in Victorian society. The most important component of the model is the Middling Class - the group Edward Gibbon Wakefield called the 'uneasy class'.

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1 Neale, op.cit., p.30.

2 Quoted in ibid., p.23. 'Distress is not confined to those small capitalists who employ a material capital. The learning, skill and reputation, united, of a professional man may be called his capital. Great professional capitalists, those who possess all at once great skill, great learning and a high reputation still make large incomes: but none of those, whose learning or skill or reputation is small, make enough to live upon... Two thirds, therefore, at the very least, of professional men may be reckoned amongst.

Footnote continued on following page...
the most systematic and successful political ideology to which the Middling Class subscribed was Philosophical Radicalism, even though they were not always united or unanimous.\(^1\) Certainly his isolation of a middling class helps our understanding of the sympathy which often existed between respectable working men and radical black-coated men and the subsequent conservatism of radical middling men who finally achieved full social recognition like J.A. Roebuck.\(^2\) Neale considers the Middling Class to have been the central and most unstable class in Victorian society and he emphasises its exposed position in the social and political system.\(^3\) But the nature of the middling class and its problems can illumine the problems of the respectable working class, if the model is refined to account for the changes in London's social and economic character after 1850.

Neale includes high class artisans in the Middling class, but admits that after the mid-century artisans became 'proletarianized' and slipped down into working class A.\(^4\) But one of his most conspicuous middling men of the early nineteenth century - Francis Place - felt the taint of having been a mere tailor all his life. Place imposed a severe discipline on his personality to survive the daily demoralisation of his trade. So at thirty years of age he lived by three principles:

Footnote continued from previous page:

the uneasy class....The general rule with daughters of men of small income, whether fixed or not is a choice between celibacy and marriage with one of the uneasy class. Now a great proportion of young men in the uneasy class dread marriage, unless there be a fortune in the case, as the surest means of increasing their embarrassment. This is one of the most important features in the social state of England.' From Edward Gibbon Wakefield, England and America (London, 1833), pp.94-5.

\(^1\)Neale, op.cit., p.24.
\(^2\)Ibid., pp.41-61.
\(^3\)Ibid., p.32.
\(^4\)Ibid., p.34.
The first and by far the most important was to get money, and yet to avoid entertaining a mercenary money getting spirit, to get money as a means to an end and not for its own sake. The second was to take care that the contumelious treatment I had to endure should not make me a sneaking wretch from principle to those above me, a tyrant to those below me. The third was, to beware of presumption, that I did not become arrogant. I had no doubt of success and therefore felt most strongly, the necessity of watching and guarding myself, in the hope that when I had realized as much money as I deemed requisite to a state of independence, my habits and manners should not be such as would exclude me from what is called good society, if at that time I should desire such society, should occasionally be cast into it, or should exclude me from the acquaintance and even friendship of the better sort of men of genius and talent.¹

But the third of Place's resolutions was to little avail. He found his trade 'a mark not easily to be obliterated' - only the possession of a country house 'might on some occasions be endurable and he might almost be forgotton as "the tailoring creature"'.²

Place dealt with his ambivalent social position by avoiding all social contact with men of superior status apart from business and political activities. He saved himself from being patronised by insisting that gentlemen call on him at certain hours if they wished to seek his advice and help. There was one exception in his wide circle of acquaintance: 'My good old friend and master Mr Bentham is almost the only man among my genteel acquaintance who has never shewn this feeling. He is however too good a judge of others not to have perceived it, and he has frequently mentioned it and sometimes ridiculed it, he used to annoy some of his friends by praising Place the tailor.'³ The difficulty of Francis Place's position was that he had once worked with his hands and that inhibited his upward social mobility.

¹Mary Thale, op.cit., pp.216-7.
²Ibid., pp.246-7.
³Ibid., p.250.
A century later the Webbs shrewdly observed the pressure on a different type of upwardly socially mobile working man - the salaried trade union official. With his members he 'had to pick his way with considerable care between the dangers attendant on the role of boon companion and those inseparable from the more reputable but more hated character of the superior person'. He needed to retain a sturdy contempt for the luxury and 'gentility' of the classes to which his new position in society exposed him, yet combine loyalty to the class from which he had sprung with sufficient dignity of manner and independence to gain a respectful hearing from the representatives of capital. The personal price he paid for his talent was to become a man alone, thereby déclassé.\(^1\) Hence if an artisan moved into the uneasy class, he enjoyed the uneasiest position. Even in Francis Place's time the taint of manual work took immense wealth and not a little deference to remove. An artisan who became a successful master, or who through political, trade union or educational work, became a full-time brainworker, could be said to have become a middling man, but his class status remained ambiguous in an already ambiguous class.

The second refinement necessary for Neale's model is to replace Working Classes A and B with the Respectable and the Non-respectable working classes. Within the respectable working class there were marked gradations of status - a West End tailor was a superior person to a permanent man on the docks - but the increasing importance of character as the determinant of respectability in place of skill, makes such a general grouping feasible. Therefore a line should be drawn between the two broad groupings of the working classes - a potential for respectability barrier. Needless to say, people with the economic potential for respectability may have scorned its social prescriptions, but once these people crossed the economic barrier to respectability, we can call them a class in the sense of a social stratum.

Thirdly, another barrier needs to be placed between the middle class and the middling class. To some extent it could be called a gentility barrier, but the concept of gentility is problematic. 'Gentility' became debased in the nineteenth century from the status derived from the ability to own a good horse, to a purchasable commodity.\(^1\) One way to determine gentlemanly status was the ability to use a cheque account - hence stockbrokers were not gentlemen as they dealt in cash. But some of Dickens' clerks gained a meagre gentility by being paid annually by cheque. Middling men with no taint of 'working classness' in their background could make some claim to gentility, and if their fortunes improved, purchase the 'paraphernalia of gentility'. But the upwardly socially mobile working man was further disadvantaged. The barrier between the middle class and the middling class was one of social recognition - the people below this barrier - middling and working-class - were blocked people.

The concept of social and political blocking is useful to our understanding of the meaning of consequences of respectability in Victorian London. Respectable people of all classes had something to lose - by definition they were in this sense uneasy. The non-respectable had nothing to lose, for at least their status was certain being non-existent. Ambitious respectable people who were denied adequate social recognition and access to authority were marginal people and vulnerable to stress. Certainly every one below the upper class did not enjoy ultimate social recognition, but at least the middle class had wealth to compensate. People who did not have the protection of wealth were in an invidious position - the precariousness of their situation was obvious, the respect and power they craved and felt they deserved, eluded them. They were blocked because the status accorded them by society was beneath their expectations - they suffered from a form of

\(^1\)J.A. and Olive Banks, op.cit., especially pp.86-102 on 'The Paraphernalia of Gentility'.

status incongruence. Working-class respectables who were literate, talented, proud and independent, were even more vulnerable to stress than middling men. They felt themselves to be fully equipped to participate in the public world, but between them and full citizenship lay their lack of wealth and the taint of being manual workers. No wonder they often seethed 'with barely suppressed hostility to all authority'.

But Neale has overlooked the possibilities for deference amongst uneasy people. Francis Place could have retired from business later and bought his country house. He could have prattled on throughout his autobiography about how gratified he was that Lord 'This' and Mr 'That' had condescended to visit him and wrote letters requesting his advice. Place, however, was the epitome of psychological independence. There were people who found deference easier than independence - people who could be said to lack full possession of their personalities and self-esteem. Deference is bred by fear and psychological insecurity, but often the deference of the very poor was an economic necessity. However, there were other deferential people who felt they gained gentility by association - that their proximity to genteel people raised their own status and nowhere was this so common as in high-class domestic service. Neale has strained his model in some particulars, but it remains the best explanation offered as yet of the sources of stress which created social conflict in Victorian England.

The industrial revolution brought economic change and social dislocation - as some people suffered, others found new opportunities for upward social mobility. We still know little about how much social mobility occurred in the nineteenth century and some historians have argued that the very process of industrialisation militated against social mobility by expanding the number of sub-literate jobs and

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1 See M. Jeanne Petersen, 'The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society' in Victorian Studies, Vol.XIV, No.1, September 1970, for the application of this concept to women of the uneasy class.

2 Neale, op.cit., p.9.
reducing literacy.\textsuperscript{1} Such arguments must remain tendentious as we do not know what is a realistic literacy base-line. Illiterates made fortunes,\textsuperscript{2} being able to sign a marriage register is no evidence of real literacy, and even if schools were unable to cope with the rising urban population, many poor people learnt to read at home. We can say with certainty that industrialisation created new expectations of change in social status and such expectations created anxiety when they were not fulfilled. Respectable working-class people could become subject to certain beliefs about their status and place in society - beliefs which were in many ways exaggerations of reality, but nonetheless truthful expressions of status anxiety and frustration. Therefore they felt pressured from above and below.

The pressure from above was that they felt excluded - excluded from sharing the received culture and from political decision making. That is excluded from social citizenship as much as from political citizenship. They were not as excluded from political citizenship as they in fact felt, for the first comprehensive and accurate analysis of the English electorate made in 1866 revealed that 26 per cent of the registered voters in the parliamentary boroughs were workingmen as technically defined. They constituted the majority of the electorate in eight boroughs - Coventry, Stafford, Maldon, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Pembroke, Beverley, Greenwich (London) and St Ives. In Coventry they comprised 70 per cent of the total.\textsuperscript{3} But Fraser's Magazine accurately noted their sense of exclusion in 1867: 'The great mass of the artisans in England are...profoundly disaffected at


\textsuperscript{2}The Shaftesbury Park Estate studied in Chapter VII was the brainchild of an illiterate former navvy, William Austin, who made a fortune out of building after giving up the drink at the age of 47.

their political position; feel they have no true home in their native land..."  

Thomas Dunning of the Bookbinders' Society, when he published his influential pamphlet *Trades Unions and Strikes* in 1860, knew that 'the public' did not include the working classes: 'By the "nation at large" we suppose is meant what is termed "the public".'

The high-mindedness and quietism ascribed to the Lancashire operatives during the Cotton Famine impressed and reassured politicians grappling with the believed dangers of extending the franchise in the 1860s. But *The London Quarterly Review* was so uninterested in working-class ideas that it reviewed R. Arthur Arnold's *History of the Cotton Famine* in 1865 without one mention of the radical opposition to slavery he so emphasised.  

*Blackwood's Magazine* saw no necessity to turn its attention to working-class politics for seventeen years. It redressed the omission in January 1867 with an aptly titled essay by G.R. Glieg, the Chaplain General of the Forces: 'Who are the Reformers and What do They Want?' The following month, Charles Mackay was moved to open his dissertation with: 'There is a great cry just now about the working classes. May we not be permitted to inquire who are the working classes, and what the cry means.'

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The social distance between the included and the excluded was aggravated by urban living. When hack journalists occasionally ventured into the 'other London', their naivety could be beguiling. After visiting a working-class market, a writer for *All The Year Round* was pleased to note that: 'Social reformers say that English workingmen's wives hardly manage the family dinners quite as well as they might; whether this be so or not, the wives are wonderfully clean and tidy.'\(^1\) But there was one incident which dramatically reveals the practical difficulties of social intercourse between the classes. J.M. Ludlow, Charles Kingsley and F.D. Maurice had been working on their plans for improving the condition of the people without any consultation with the people. In early 1849, Ludlow's friend and scripture reader, Self, began circulating a few copies of *Politics for the People* among one or two Chartists known to be interested in religious questions. As long as the journal prospered, most Chartists were deeply suspicious of its backers and intentions. Distressed by this, the publisher ceased publication. Ludlow saw this as a blessing in disguise and at the beginning of July felt the time was ripe to make contact with his first flesh and blood working-class Chartist. He visited Walter Cooper, a tailor who lectured for the Secularists on Strauss' *Life of Jesus* and was 'soon in a downright democratic way sitting on his counter and arguing theology'.\(^2\)

When men of goodwill like the Christian Socialists found bridging the class barrier so difficult, the ignorance

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\(^1\) *All The Year Round*, 16 April 1870, p.476.

\(^2\) N.C. Masterman, *John Malcolm Ludlow* (Cambridge, 1963), p.82. Isaac Williams in his autobiography recalled staying in the country with Keble, and under Keble's influence for the first time in his life learnt that the poor were human beings. 'At Harrow, as at other public schools, the poor were never spoken of but by some contemptuous term - looked upon as hateful boors, to be fought with or cajoled for political object; but for them to be looked upon with tender regard and friendship more than the rich, and in some cases even referred to as instructors of the wisdom that God teaches - this was a new world to me.' Quoted in W.G. Peck, *The Social Implications of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1933), pp.62-3.
and insensitivity of many included people towards the excluded is scarcely surprising. W.S. Chambers devoted much energy throughout his life to writing about the working classes, but he could make quite unrealistic assessments of their problems. Rejoicing in what he believed to have been a general rise in wages between 1820 and 1850 of up to 30 per cent, he castigated those workmen, who with the aid of their families, realised an annual income of £130 to £140, for they had no right to earn more than those who sustained a 'higher standard of living' and paid taxation.¹ In 1853 The British Quarterly Review found 'exceedingly absurd' this argument from the protectionist Standard: 'A numerous population renders labour abundant, and therefore comparatively cheap; and whether it is desired to make labour minister to enjoyment or to profit, the more numerous the population, the greater the facility for the one or the other.'²

But the periodical press is a misleading guide as to how the ordinary members of society above the gentility line regarded their social inferiors. The Victorian treatment of those members of the working classes nearest them, their personal servants, is the most vivid evidence of what it meant to be working class. That is, if one was working class, one did not exist. Ronald Blythe has extracted these memories of service in a large country house from a gardener who followed his father into the service of one of the last of the great 'Victorian' aristocratic households:

We must never be seen from the house; it was forbidden. And if people were sitting on the terrace or on the lawn, and you had a great barrow-load of weeds, you might have to push it as much as a mile away to keep out of view. If you were seen you were always told about it and warned, and as you walked away Ladyship would call after you, 'Swing your arms!' It was terrible. You felt like somebody with a disease....Ladyship drove about the grounds in a motor-chair and would have run us over rather than have to say, 'get out of the way'. We must

¹W.S. Chambers, op.cit., p.3.
²The British Quarterly Review, August 1853, p.197.
never look at her and she never looked at us. It was the same in the house. If a maid was in a passage and Lordship or Ladyship happened to come along, she would have to face the wall and stand perfectly still until they had passed. I wouldn't think that they felt anything about their servants. We were just there because we were necessary, like water from the tap. We had to listen for voices. If we heard them in a certain walk, we had to make a detour, if not it was, 'But why weren't you listening?' and 'Be alert, boy!' and when you had been dismissed, 'Swing your arms!' 1

If 'class' is a relationship, then the treatment of servants, as J.F.C. Harrison has suggested, is one important way of defining it. 2 With the dislocation of the old society by industrialisation, new forms of social status had to be created: the obsession with domestic management and etiquette and the increasing dependence on severely disciplined domestic servants were part of what Kitson Clark has called 'the consolidation of the caste'. 3 The anxiety about the uppishness of servants was both an expression of

1 Ronald Blythe, Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village (London, 1969), pp.118-9. These memories were of 1942, but the management of the household had not changed in a century. The gardener was the fourth generation of his family to work for the family. The only people he remembered having conversed with normally in the garden were the present Queen Mother and the Princess Royal - the family being intimate with the Royal Family. '...Members of Parliament always imitated Lordship and Ladyship and treated us like fittings. I was amazed by the Royalty. I imagined a bigger kind of Ladyship, but definitely not.' (p.121). Miss Winifred Sinclair testified to similar experiences. She went into service as a tweenie in Royal Crescent, Bath in 1914 and left after the war to go to Woolworths, where she worked for the rest of her life. Woolworths, in her opinion, was not much better than service, but at least she had all of Sunday free. (From personal conversation.)


status uncertainty and necessary to the process of fixing the status of those below the gentility line. Hence industrialisation brought both new opportunities for working-class men and women to improve their lives and at the same time made social recognition more difficult to achieve. It is no accident that the now omitted verse of All Things Bright and Beautiful was a Victorian creation:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
GOD made them, high or lowly,
And order'd their estate.

There were sensitive middle class critics who were appalled by the denial of personality of working people implicit in genteel manners. An American, Henry Tuckley, lamented the tyranny of caste in England by 1893, for:

...in this contest for the maintenance of social dignity, the working man was nowhere, and had no chance of getting anywhere. To be sure he is a man for all that; but it can hardly be compatible with a sense of manly independence to be made to see and feel all the time that his lines are cast among people who hold him to be their natural servant, and whose invariable attitude towards him - excepting when they want a favour at his hands - is that of undisguised contempt.

For the intelligent, self-respecting working man, the Victorian social system could be a constant affront to his dignity. He scarcely read about himself in the intellectual press, he was denied easy access to institutions which his tastes desired - he was made to feel wanted only for his labour. As Blackwood's Magazine sneered in 1888 at the increasing number of working-class readers in the British

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1Written by Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895) and first published either in Verses for the Holy Seasons (1846) or in Hymns for Little Children (1848). From the Anglo-Irish gentry, she, with an aristocratic lady friend came under the influence of the Oxford Movement, interestingly in 1844. After her death, her husband was appointed Archbishop of Armagh.


Museum, 'They are the dead flies that spoil the ointment....'\(^1\)

Most frustrating of all was the difficulty in making himself heard. As far as I can tell, not one of the major periodicals carried an article about working-class politics and life by a writer of working-class origin before the Second Reform Bill. Ernest Jones was noticed by *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1867, even though he was a far more 'dangerous' man than George Howell or Robert Applegarth of the Reform League, precisely because he was a gentleman by birth.\(^2\) The publisher Cassell decided in 1849 to run a monthly supplement devoted to 'the publication of articles by members of the operative class'. Contributions poured in from all over the British Isles and a Charles Paisley, Weaver from Paisley, wrote a sad piece on 'The Difficulties of Appearing in Print'.\(^3\) The supplements are a testimony to the isolation and frustration of the intelligent, respectable working-class. The prize was a book, but the real prize was to have a voice. To their surprise, Cassells received a letter from a woman who wanted to contribute an essay on the education of working girls: '...we did not expect', admitted the editor, 'to receive any communications from working women. We shall not, however, object to inserting occasional articles from female pens.'\(^4\) As ordinary people found it difficult to be heard, so did a professional lecturer and writer like George Jacob Holyoake. Holyoake rated a tiny paragraph review in the *Athenaeum* for his life of Richard Carlile who was sufficiently respectable by 1850 to earn praise for his 'good service in the cause of a free press and free discussion'. But of Holyoake, the *Athenaeum* gratuitously declared: 'We have no sympathies with the writer, or with his views; but as forming a link in the progress of discussion and in the history of popular opinion

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\(^2\)Charles Mackay, 'Blackie and Jones - democracy in America', *ibid.*, February 1867, pp.230-40.

\(^3\) *The Working Man's Friend*, op.cit., April 1850, pp.24-6.

in this country, the subjects of his pen will perhaps continue to excite the interests of thinkers who travel in search of illustrations out of the more beaten tracks of literature.¹ Twelve years later the Westminster Review was kinder: 'Mr Holyoake is scarcely now one of the working classes, in the sense in which throughout this article we understand the phrase; but we can learn his state of mind when he was one, from his various published writings.'² Holyoake had been a brainworker since 1839 and well into the 'uneasy class'. Certainly he laboured under the disadvantage of being a Secularist, and at this stage of his career his writing was often awkward. But the stigma of his working-class birth was not easily erased. He was still a 'representative man', a 'type', rather than a person and thinker in his own right. However, Holyoake's genius for survival was to capitalise on that role for the rest of his life.

Excluded, insulted and patronised by the classes above, many a respectable working man nevertheless had more in common with his social superiors than with the residuum below him. The presence of the unrespectable working class was a constant reminder of the precariousness of respectability: again a source of stress and status anxiety. Feelings of economic and social insecurity and frustration at being denied appropriate social recognition were reinforced by the conflict within the working classes between the rough and the respectable. The radical engraver, W. J. Linton wrote in his short biography of James Watson:

In '33 he was with his friend and fellow offender Hetherington in Clerkenwell prison: six months each for the Poor Man's Guardian. This, what we call his second prison service, had much aggravation of punishment as is disclosed by his Petition to the 'Commons'; the deprivation of that which is most cared for by decent men: some privacy, some mental solace and respectable society. Subjected to

¹The Athenaeum, 27 April 1850, p.446.
the companionship of the vilest and most brutal criminals, a compelled listener to 'the most horrid swearing and grossest licentiousness', refused even occasional withdrawal to the retirement of the solitary cell:...and this suffering, this moral torture, dread of vermin and disease superadded, was inflicted on them illegally, under the summary jurisdiction of police-magistrates, for selling a paper which afterwards, upon trial before a Jury, was declared to be a publication strictly according to law.1

Joseph Barker, the sometime radical, Secularist and Baptist, warned a correspondent in his Barker's Review in 1862: 'It is very natural for the more intelligent and better disposed of the working classes to suppose that all their fellow workers are as worthy and as fit to be trusted with power as themselves. But they are mistaken. Experience will teach them better.'2 Linton and Barker were both exceptional men living in the uneasy world of radical politics, socially between the respectable working class and the middling class.3 But a real working man, John Mathias, as a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers wrote to The Operative in sterner tones in 1851: 'Although I can appreciate the benefits of donation, yet I can see evil in paying unwilling idlers, and the vice which such idleness engenders - instead of rewarding willing industry, and elevating the social and moral condition of our members, which a proper investment of our funds could bring about, if well and judiciously managed.'4

The tension between the respectable and the rough was social and economic, and the cultural gulf was the widest in Victorian society. One cause for the failure of the early Workingmen's Institutes was the fear of respectable mechanics of contamination from mixing with the casual poor.

1W.J. Linton, op.cit., pp.73-4.


4The Operative, 7 June 1851, p.364.
In the country these distinctions were less marked. But in the towns and cities, where economic competition was more visible and intense, such social fusing had become impossible.\(^1\) Between the respectable and the non-respectable lay barriers of sexual mores, alcohol abuse, the use of physical violence, literacy and language. The undomesticated, chaotic and violent lives of the costermongers and the navvies was a world away from the respectable artisans in Mayhew's London.\(^2\) The costermongers were not merely unrespectable, they were consciously anti-respectable. They placed barriers between their world and the rest of society by inventing slang with words inverted so that they sounded obscene. Some costers would converse in it by the hour, but interestingly, coster women rarely used it.\(^3\) The possession of two separate 'languages' by working-class children is still common in Britain. Charlotte Yonge testified to the inquiry into *...the State of Popular Education in England* in 1861 that the teaching of grammar and spelling was wasted on girls, for in the working classes 'correctness of speech would be treated as an affectation'.\(^4\) When Thomas Cooper taught himself correct English, his fellow villagers were disgusted at his pretentiousness and presumption.\(^5\) Language was an immense social divider within working class life and a further impediment to self improvement.

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\(^1\) Benjamin Shaw, 'Institutes for Working men', *Quarterly Review*, January 1863, p.38.

\(^2\) Mayhew, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.11-22. Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies* (London, 1965): 'As late as the 1860's it was not the navvy custom to marry, and when the missionaries got organised twenty years later and went round preaching holy matrimony, the chief result was a few consciences made miserable, and a lot of bigamous marriages.' p.168.

\(^3\) Mayhew, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.11 and 23.


Below the respectability line, the poor were social and cultural isolates. Costermongers created a vibrant sub-culture, but below them again there was the truly alienated poor. One of the most moving pieces of description by Mayhew was of these people - the Mudlarks:

The Mudlarks themselves, however, know only those who reside near them, and whom they are accustomed to meet in their daily pursuits; indeed with but few exceptions, these people are dull and apparently stupid; this is observable particularly among the boys and girls, who, when engaged in searching the mud, hold but little converse one with another. The men and women may be passed and re-passed, but they notice no-one; they never speak, but with a stolid look of wretchedness they splash their way through the mire, their bodies bent down while they peer anxiously about and stoop to pick up some paltry treasure that falls their way.1

Excluded from above and threatened from below, the respectable working class were potentially the most exposed and stress-ridden section of Victorian society. William Farr, one of those great but neglected social thinkers of the age, as Assistant Registrar General, uncovered something of the social consequences of being blocked people.2 In 1838 he found artisans who worked indoors to be the greatest suicides. Artisans were twice as likely to suicide as labourers. Tailors, shoemakers and bakers had the tendency to suicide at 7.43 in 10,000, whereas the figure was 1.33 in 10,000 for masons, carpenters and butchers. Of the class of 'capitalists, bankers, professional and other educated men' the tendency was 4.9 in 10,000, or very near the average. Servants and coachmen were very high at 6.7 in 10,000. Farr was puzzled. He could find no direct relationship between

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2See Victor L. Hilts, 'William Farr (1807-1883) and the "Human Unit"', in Victorian Studies, Vol.XIV, No.2, December 1970. '[Farr was] one of the first social thinkers in England to turn his attention from environmental reform to biological reform. He anticipated discussions about the possible degeneration of the race under sanitary improvement; he was a eugenicist before Francis Galton; he advocated the testing of intelligence before the beginning of individual difference psychology.' (p.149).
economic security and suicide, so he blamed lack of ventilation and outdoor exercise. But his later studies of occupational mortality in 1861-2 and 1871 revealed that shoemakers for one did not lead such an unhealthy life and had an occupational mortality below the average. The tailors were above average, but the trade was worse affected by the growth of slop work than was shoemaking. Butchers, the very low suiciders in 1838, joined publicans and fishmongers in having the highest occupational mortality of all. Predictably, tool, file and saw makers, especially grinders, had a high mortality, but so did the rising class of commercial clerks.

Other less scientific observers than Farr began arguing that the confined nature of the workplaces in tailoring and millinery were increasing the incidence of consumption and psychological distress. 'Our medical authorities have proved incontestibly that over-work and bad air produce madness, consumption, general debility, and all other ills to which our flesh is liable,' declared one writer in the 1860s. Contemporaries rightly blamed work environment for much of this suffering, but the fact remains that in many ways the indoor artisan was better off than the outdoor casual labourer.

But if suicide statistics are dubious, the tendency for respectable working-class people to migrate - within the British Isles and overseas is certain. Internal migration was an acceleration of the traditional artisan custom of going 'on tramp'. London was a magnet for rural people anxious to find work and for blocked provincials seeking adventure and the opportunity to use their talents. The observable preponderance of country immigrants in certain trades - especially building, gas works, breweries,

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2 Ibid., pp.309-403.

cab and omnibus driving and special retail trades - led some late Victorian observers to evolve a Theory of Urban Degeneration.\textsuperscript{1} Stedman Jones has shown that provincial immigrants were absorbed into occupations where their special skills were in demand, or where their believed greater reliability was prized by employers frightened of trade unionism. The impact of rural immigration on the crisis of the declining crafts and the inner East End was negligible and the fears about the influx of rural immigration in the wake of the great agricultural depression by the 1880s were unfounded.\textsuperscript{2} There was, however, considerable social significance in these fears for, although country immigrants were not as numerous as believed, they were more visible in positions of responsibility and social leadership. Countrymen were conspicuous as foremen in building and preferred fellow provincials for jobs over the London-born.\textsuperscript{3} Of the London police, 70 per cent were countrymen - chosen by both the Metropolitan and City forces for their 'strength and steadiness'.\textsuperscript{4} What is more difficult to prove is the believed preponderance of countrymen in the leadership of London working-class organisations. The officials Booth interviewed as a rule had no definite information about the origins of their members, but there was 'a general consensus of opinion that countrymen preponderate on the committees of such organisations, showing (if the opinion be true) that they supply the better or more energetic element'.\textsuperscript{5} These were not 'steady' men full of country-bred deference, but men of talent expressing their need for activism. It is

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1}E.g. J.P. Freeman-Williams, The Effect of Town Life on the General Health (London, 1890), passim.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Stedman Jones, op.cit., pp.127-51.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Booth, op.cit., Vol.V, p.57. Booth found that Northerners had come to replace the London born on the Tower Bridge project and that the contractors believed 'that a man from London does not stick to his work so well as a man from Sheffield or the Tyne, and roughly may be said to be one third less productive'. Vol.III, p.99.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., Vol.III, p.86.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., Vol.III, p.87.
\end{enumerate}
neither coincidence nor deliberate choice that each of the four respectable radicals selected as case studies in Chapter VI was a provincial drawn at some time in his life to London as the political and cultural capital of the country.

The most adventurous were drawn to new lands where unfettered by caste, ambition and self-respect could have a free stage. But the English artisans who went to America were often disillusioned - they were not the docile intimidated workers American capitalists wanted. Captain William R. Jones, the superintendent of Carnegie's Edgar Thompson Steelworks at Braddock Pennsylvania, outlined the labour policy for the new works in 1875:

We must be careful of what class of men we collect. We must steer clear of the West where men are accustomed to infernal high wages. We must steer clear as far as we can of Englishmen who are great sticklers for high wages, small production and strikes. My experience has shown that Germans and Irish, Swedes and what I denominate 'Buckwheats' - young American country boys, judiciously mixed, make the most effective and tractable force you can find. Scotsmen do very well, are honest and faithfull. Welsh can be used in limited numbers. But mark me, Englishmen have been the worst class of men I have had anything to do with....

The English had the highest rate of return to their native land of all immigrants to America in the second half of the nineteenth century.

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1David Adams, ed., The Letters of Rachel Henning (Sydney, 1966), p.267. Writing to her sister in England, Rachel lamented the problems of the 'upper ten' in Wollongong in 1874. 'It is curious that in these republican countries where "Jack is as good as his master" and much better in his own estimation, there is a much wider gap between class and class than there is in England. There, at least in the old times, you would go and see your poor neighbours and rather enjoy a talk with them, especially in the country. Here, if you did anything of the kind, they would return your call and bring their children to tea.'


3Erickson, op.cit., pp.49, 60.
But if they came to Australia they found little organized capitalism to replace the social discipline they had escaped. Australian history in the second half of the nineteenth century is studded with British immigrants of humble origins who made good. Some made fortunes, but not a few lived modestly and achieved the quiet social recognition they desired. The Australian experiment in democracy of the 1850s - manhood suffrage, the eight-hour day - has been ascribed to the realisation of the dreams of the English Chartists who fled to the new land. However the character of the Government Assisted Immigrants and Bounty Immigrants between 1837 and 1850 who were chosen for their rural skills, suggests that the radicalism of these people may have been exaggerated. The men who came to Australia after 1870 were the conspicuous radicals by the end of the century, dominating the infant Labor party and displaying an unpatriotic distrust of British motives in the Boer War.  


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Most who came to Australia slipped into obscurity and some who stayed in the bush found respectability even harder to practise than in Britain. A Sydney Mail reporter noted in 1865 that poor settlers' wives often hid their children at the approach of strangers as they were 'not fit to be seen'. 'Some remains of decency begotten in days of former civilisation still lingered in the maternal breast, gradually to be effaced, I am afraid, by the savagery of the life she is leading.' ¹

But there were outstanding success stories and the paradigm of the blocked man who realised all his ambitions without needing great wealth was Sir Henry Parkes. Parkes sailed with his wife for Australia in March 1839 as bounty immigrants, their ears 'incessantly assailed by the coarse expressions and blasphemies of other steerage passengers'. But he did not leave without publishing a poem in Hetherington's Charter indignantly condemning a society through whose injustices 'men like this are compelled to seek the means of existence in a foreign wilderness'. Despite his bankruptcies and marital scandals, he could return to England in 1881 with The Times announcing him as 'the most commanding figure in Australian politics', so that he became one of the social lions of the Season and was noticed by Royalty.² Parkes had become friendly with George Jacob Holyoake in their youth at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute and in old age, the one who had attempted to conquer London wrote to the bounty immigrant:

   My dear Sir Henry,

   Your great friend Lord Tennyson has died in moonlight glory, in picturesque calmness befitting his great career. [Tennyson years before had returned Holyoake's letters by the hand of his secretary, requesting Mr Holyoake to refrain from attempting to correspond with him.]

   ...As we near 'the bar' over which our noble Poet has passed, how precious grow in our eyes & affection the few left to us of our

¹Sydney Mail, 19 August 1865, p.8a, I am indebted to Dr John Merritt for this reference.

earlier days! You name Charles Pemberton whom no lecturer has excelled. You, I, Hornblower and Dr. Hollick of New York still live, who were entranced by his fervour. Of all the Birmingham men of my time you have attained the highest distinction....

Being respectable but blocked assisted the making of radicalism for many. But if politics failed to offer an opportunity for self-expression, the Temperance movement, or lay preaching or Secularism could absorb the energy, frustration and craving for recognition of the ambitious respectables. The teetotal movement was a dynamic and attractive 'way out' for the blocked man. Taking the pledge was a mode of entry for the non-respectable into respectability, and for the ambitious, the beginning of a public career. Thomas Whittaker considered the teetotal platform 'one of the best schools for training any one ambitious of public life this country offered'.

The pressures on the respectable working class forced them to assume a defensive posture. Thomas Wright, the journeyman engineer, defined and defended his order in Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes, first published in book form in 1867. He confessed that the 'intelligent artisan' was an exception and insisted that the popular belief during the Second Reform debate that there was a large and well-defined section of the working classes who were genuinely intelligent and respectable was 'utterly erroneous and misleading'. Thomas Wright's 'intelligent artisan' possessed a tolerably sound education, was moderately well read in the popular and standard literature. He was capable of forming his own opinions in politics and industrial questions, and able to express those opinions in plain and proper language. Both his reason and his passions must be appealed to before he would consent to any plan of action pointed out by others.

1 George Jacob Holyoake to Sir Henry Parkes, 10 October 1892. (Parkes Correspondence, Mitchell Library, Vol.53, A923, pp.427-8.)


3 (Thomas Wright), Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes by a Journeyman Engineer (London, 1867), pp.3-5.
Thomas Wright's intelligent artisan was eminently fitted for social citizenship, yet he was denied it. If he associated and worked with men of a similar cast of mind, he would be more likely to identify with his own 'order' and become a political man. But for some respectables, their respectability cut them off from other working-class people. William Marcroft, as a sanctimonious teetotaller, found himself identifying with his employers, the Oldham engineering firm Platts, rather than with his workmates. Subjected to constant harrassment for being a 'water drinker', he retaliated by despising them for their 'dishonesty and laziness'.

By the time he wrote his memoirs in 1889, covering a working life of over forty years, he had nothing but hostility for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers he had once actively supported and insisted that 'Patience, self-interest and necessity are three arbitrators that may generally be trusted to bring about a just settlement'. When the senior Platt died, Marcroft wrote this funeral song:

Oh that will be a glorious day
When the sons of labour pull one way
And every man is fairly paid
And he is a partner of his trade.
No tyrants then shall rule mankind
But common sense direct the mind
Discord then no place shall find
To split asunder a trade combined.

Chorus:

Sons of labour clear the way
Platts and Co. they do all say
Is a shop for ready pay
With a golden check on Friday. (bonus)

Marcroft's youthful radicalism withered under the strain of keeping respectable and the vision of the co-operative utopia where all would be well when all were respectable——

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1 William Marcroft, Ups and Downs: Life in a Machine-Making Works (Oldham, 1889), pp.20 and 26. Marcroft related the story of a friend, John Robinson, who was beaten up by his workmates in a machine shop in Liverpool, because he refused to pay 'footings' and because he sounded like a 'Methodist preacher'. pp.6-8.

2 Ibid., p.45.

3 Ibid., p.90. To the tune of 'Teddy the Tyler'.
master and man alike - was the consequence of finding himself culturally allied with his employers rather than with his fellow workers.

The personal consequences of respectability depended greatly on the social ambience a person was forced to inhabit. Deference and false gentility were other responses of blocked respectables to the social and economic stress in their daily lives. Women whose work brought them into contact with the genteel classes - domestic servants, milliners, high-class dressmakers - did ape their masters and mistresses. 'Servantgalism' did exist. Mayhew found domestic servants to be notorious for their 'scarlet fever' - their love of uniformed men. Soldiers were the most popular prospective husbands and assignations were made in the London parks while the nursemaids took their charges out for some fresh air. Policemen were also highly desirable.¹ Soldiers' wives frequently had a very difficult time, having to earn their own living and live with other army wives until their husbands were 'on the strength'. But such rigours rarely deterred the girl ambitious to 'get her soldier'.² These matrimonial advertisements from the London Journal of 1881 reveal the private world of working-class gentility:

D.C.E. (London), 21, a mechanic, would like to receive the carte de visite of a young woman, not over 20; a domestic servant preferred.

Emma (Derby) wishes to correspond with and receive the carte de visite of a respectable tradesman of gentlemanly appearance. She is 22, passable and domestic.

Maud and May, sisters, wish to correspond with two steady officers in the army - friends preferred. Maud is 19 and of medium height. May is 17, tall and fair. Both are domestics, and have nothing but loving hearts to offer.³

The struggle to move up in a caste-ridden society is reflected in the high resignation rate in the railways. For


²All The Year Round, 7 September 1867, pp.246-7.

a man with no specific skills but with the right character, the railways offered security, a uniform and the opportunity for advancement on the basis of experience and loyalty. But the people who sought railway work as a 'way out', were restless and impatient for social betterment. Enginemen stayed on, but in the 1870s on the Great Western Railway around 25 per cent of the workforce resigned after less than a year's service - most of them being semi- and unskilled. In 1869, out of 286 resignations of police and porters on the Great Western, 127 explicitly stated that they wanted to find a 'better place', 33 were 'dissatisfied', 11 went to take up business and 13 wished to emigrate.¹

To conclude, what explanatory force can respectability have for the understanding of working-class political behaviour, especially radicalism? It could cause or characterise quite opposing responses - either radical dissent or deference and contentment. But there is more evidence of respectable working-class people who became radical, which is in part a comment on the nature of radical activity and the evidence it leaves behind. Economic, social and political grievances are not to be underestimated in the making of a respectable radical, but respectability may not have been such a deterrent to radicalism as has been previously believed.

But rather than looking for a direct causal relationship between the pressures and rewards of practising respectability and working-class radicalism, it is more accurate to see a conjunction. When respectability is added to the stage of working-class existence, it seems that it assisted the development of political awareness, more often than not, a radical one. There were other parts of the stage scenery, such as the cultural isolation brought on William Marcroft by his respectability and teetotalism which encouraged deference. There were many respectable working-class people whose occupations demanded deference as well

¹Kingsford, op.cit., pp.53, 144-7.
as respectability. But there were others for whom respectability aggravated their discontent at their economic, political, cultural and social exclusion. Respectability helped to equip them to diagnose the ills of their society and intensified their ambition. James Burn wrote as a blocked respectable man:

Although I was an atom in the world of life, I was never without an individuality; in all my miserable littleness, I possessed a mind far above my position; and although I wandered in the gloomy valley, bordering on despair, the lamp of hope never ceased to burn and light me on my way. My great struggle in the battle of life was to find my proper position in society.¹

While a causal connection is difficult to prove, a conjunction between respectability and the formation of radical anger is easy to observe. This now will be further illustrated by a chapter on the role of respectability in radical politics from 1850 to 1890 and by two case studies - one of four respectable radicals who rose to the status of brainworkers, and one on a respectable housing estate in Battersea.

While 'respectability' may not have changed much over the forty years, as its fluidity as a set of values makes such a defined analysis impossible, the story of what respectable radicals did and believed over that time and its growing pervasiveness can give a sense of the progression and development of its disciplines, culture and effects.

A strong boot man told Mayhew:

There is, I consider, no class so adapted for co-operation as our class of strong boot men. We could appeal to the sympathies of the great body of labouring men. We have nothing to do with gentlemen's work, and don't want. France doesn't interfere with our trade, neither does Northampton; we are all in among ourselves. The great impediment to our getting on has been our poverty, and the ignorance it carries along with it. As for what things tend to in the future, I'll tell you. I hate physical force and revolutions, but I went to Kennington Common on the 10th of April, knowing or caring nothing what might happen.¹

Here was a respectable, independent, moral force Chartist driven to contemplate physical force by the sudden distress in his trade and by his political frustration. But if he gave in to physical force at Kennington Common, he was also beginning to practise new forms of defence against the competitive and exclusive society - experimenting with co-operative production and seeking to create an alternative economic and moral world for his order.²

Kennington Common signaled the futility of direct political confrontation. Many Chartist leaders anticipated the debacle. The anti-O'Connorites - the old respectables, James Watson, Hetherington, Lovett, Thomas Cooper, and W.J. Linton in unison with Bronterre O'Brien and his

¹The Unknown Mayhew, op.cit., Letter 34, p.254. The strong boot trade made working men's boots, and was particularly arduous: another strong boot man told Mayhew that the threads used were 'thick enough to frighten a West-end bootman' (p.253).

²Ibid., pp.253-4. The strong boot man organising the co-production venture emphasised 'We are heartily sick of strikes, which, as they have been conducted generally, have been, and can be, of no permanent benefit to the men' (p.254).
followers - boycotted the Convention of April 3rd and the demonstration a week later. The absence of their leadership and moral courage may well have been a prime cause of the confusion and political sterility of April 10th. Chartism did not die at Kennington Common, but we know lamentably little of how and where it lived on in the ensuing twenty years. What we can say is that Moral Force re-achieved the ascendancy. But the language, the tactics and the areas for assault changed. The Moral Force of the Chartist Respectables evolved into the moral force of the politics of respectability and it was in the language of respectability that much working-class radical politics was conducted till 1867.

Ernest Jones was at Kennington Common with O'Connor, but by 1851 he was preaching a different doctrine. The working classes should let the system break its own neck. Their active interference would only delay the catastrophe. Instead the heaviest blow the working classes could deal against their enemies was by disseminating the Chartist principles: 'We must teach the middle class social knowledge.' And with unwarranted optimism, he declared that the middle classes were now saying: 'We were deceived in the Chartists! We thought them visionary levellers or physical destructives: we now find they are statesmen.' Kennington Common was more than a political rout - Blackwood's Magazine had been unwittingly right to see it as a 'moral slaughter'.

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1 F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan, op.cit., pp.75-6.

2 R.C. Gammage's History of the Chartist Movement: 1837-1854 (London, 1894, fascimile edition, Merlin Press, London, 1969) remains the best account of Chartism in the early 1850s. Alex Wilson has written a timely general review on 'Chartism' for Popular Movements: c.1830-1850, ed. J.T. Ward (London, 1970) and see pp.131-3 for his conclusion. The most exciting recent work is that of Stan Shipley, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London, see later, part ii, where he traces the Soho O'Brienites and reveals the continuity from some of the Chartist Left through to Marxism.

3 Ernest Jones, Notes to the People, op.cit., Vol.I, 1851, p.16.

The burden of Jones' new political strategy was that the working-class radical movement had been both destroyed and discredited - discredited to the point where it was now incumbent on the working class to prove its fitness for political inclusion. The Six Points represented more than political freedom for the respectables. Political citizenship was the symbol of the wider social citizenship they craved. The appeal to the fundamental and natural rights of man having failed, the respectable radicals were now forced back on to their respectability as the basis of their claim to political and social rights. The code of working-class respectability accorded more accurately with the blocked working man's frustration and sense of self, and for people without capital, it could perhaps prove to be an effective argument for inclusion in the body politic.

Benjamin Wilson was a 'rank and file' Chartist who has left one of the best records of what Chartism meant to ordinary men and of what happened to the movement after 1848. He was countryman from a radical village, Skircoat Green near Halifax. Wilson became a Liberal at the age of eight in 1832 when he was told that they were the friends of the poor: 'and the only reason I had for being yellow was that I was poor and they were my friends'. He never went to school and worked as a woollen weaver, a comber, and a railway navvy. But he was a clever and intelligent man. In 1843 at the age of nineteen he began his political life by attending the corrupt local vestry: 'I was the only workingman present - workingmen scarcely ever attended those meetings then; there being about twelve gentlemen present, comprised several of the largest ratepayers in the township. I felt uncomfortable and wished I was nicely out.' He became a Chartist and a Physical Forcer, purchasing a gun as he was a good shot. 'It might now be said we were fools, but I answer young people now have no idea of what we had to endure.' When he wrote his memoirs in 1887, time and

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1Benjamin Wilson, The Struggles of an Old Chartist (Halifax, 1887), p.1.
2Ibid., p.7.
wishful thinking had tempered the accuracy of his recollections, but his defence of Chartism reveals what hope it held for men who felt social frustration as well as their poverty:

The Chartists were called ugly names, the swinish multitude unwashed and levellers. I never knew levelling advocated amongst the Chartists, neither in public or private, for they did not believe in it, nor have I known a case of plunder in the town, though thousands have marched through its streets to meetings in various places. What they wanted was a voice in making the laws they were called upon to obey; they believed that taxation without representation was tyranny, and ought to be resisted; they took a leading part in agitating in favour of the ten hours question, the repeal of the taxes on knowledge, education, co-operation, civil and religious liberty and the land question, for they were the true pioneers of all the great movements of their time.¹

The battles and defeats of the 1840s left many of the respectables exhausted and disillusioned. Linton retired to the Lake District, and gave himself up to the first extended period of despair of his life.² The radical press struggled on, however, despite financial loss and a shrinking readership. Ernest Jones started Notes to the People in 1851 'at a time of peculiar political and social apathy' and noted with unusual realism: 'If the lull of agitation and the additional expenditure of the better paid portion of the working class in excursion trains and Exhibition trips is taken into account, it must be a matter of wonder that it has been possible to carry on these "Notes" at all, even at the heavy loss they have imposed.'³ Nevertheless he kept them going until the end of 1852 and the correspondents' column provided some relief for frustrated activists. 'Of all branches connected with the building trades', wrote one journeyman joiner, '...I do not think you will meet with any so opposed to the progress of democracy as the joiners.

¹Ibid., pp.13-14.
²F.B. Smith, op.cit., p.89.
³Notes to the People, Vol.I, 1851, pp.3-4.
And yet they suffer as much from the undue influence of capital over labour as any portion of the building trade.\(^1\)

A Greenwich shoemaker reduced to earning 8/- a week in the dishonourable trade was no less bitter: 'Political power alone can change this state of things - political power cannot be obtained without making some sacrifice - but the man who does obtain one pound per week is not willing to sacrifice one shilling to advance the condition of those who are obliged to live on ten shillings a week.'\(^2\)

But as Gammage noted, one effect of the 1848 Chartist revival was a flowering of the radical press.\(^3\) Eyes were turned more than ever before to Continental politics - an absorption in the fate of European radicalism, however honourably internationalist, which enabled English radicals to purge their frustration with impunity. The only outstanding commercial success was Reynolds's *Political Instructor*. The best of G.W.M. Reynolds's papers, which sold as a penny weekly and reached a circulation of 50,000.\(^4\)

The most politically significant periodical was W.J. Linton's *The English Republic* (1851-1855). Inspired by Lammenais, Mazzini and Ledru-Rollin, Linton brought European republicanism to England. F.B. Smith argues that the *English Republic* 'possibly had an importance in English radical history far beyond its intrinsic force' in that it supplied a social democratic programme, a focus for egalitarian fervour, and a commitment to parliamentary reform and class harmony that kept alive the 'moral force' Chartist

\(^{1}\)Ibid., Vol.II, 1852, p.541.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., Vol.II, 1852, p.600.

\(^{3}\)Gammage, op.cit., pp.345-6.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., p.346. Julian Harney's papers, *The Red Republican* and *The Democratic Review* are among the best Chartist press of these years. The *National Instructor*, designated in the Kashnor Collection as a major Chartist paper, but for which I can find no reference in Chartist historiography, combined a fascination with aristocratic unrespectability and foreign politics with articles on the necessity for parliamentary reform and a serial by Samuel M. Kydd on 'A Sketch of Factory Life'. The Kashnor run is from 4 January 1851 to 3 May 1851, and it appeared weekly.
ideology through the period of Chartist demoralisation. This permitted these ideals to be taken up by the parliamentary reform movements of the 1860s and the radicalism of the 1870s. He detects 'pure Linton' in the London Land and Labour League's emphasis upon 'soul' in politics. More interestingly, Linton's republicanism captivated Julian Harney, Thomas Mottershead and William Newton, thereby depriving Marx and Engels of three leading potential disciples and limiting the spread of his ideas among the English working class. Even Ernest Jones, Marx's chief follower in England, came over to parliamentarianism and social democracy by the late 1850s.²

In a less directly political way, the other press which shaped the transition from Chartism to the politics of respectability was the Secularist press. G.J. Holyoake's most consistent and successful journalistic venture, The Reasoner (1846-1861), spanned the entire period of the transition. Holyoake capitalised on the revived interest in Owenite Socialism after Kennington Common and remoulded it into a system of ethics which he hoped could underpin the radical cause. By 1852, his new form of free thought was renamed 'Secularism', the circulation of The Reasoner climbed to 5,000 and nearly forty local societies were reported in its pages in 1854. 'Secularism' became a topic of the day and a focus for middle-class anxiety over working-class

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²F.B. Smith, op.cit., pp.102-7, 107-8. This is the first study to reveal the continuity from moral force Chartism to the politics of respectability and Radical Liberalism. M. Townsend, Weaver from Yeadon wrote to the Working Man's Friend to contrast Physical Force with Moral Force, and interpreted Moral Force as reforming respectability, calling it the 'chief glory of the reform movements of the day, such as the Financial Reform movement, the Peace movement, the Temperance movement....YOUNG MEN! give a little attention to the study of this subject....Exert the power of knowledge, argument, truth, kindness and benevolence. Spurn lazy and vicious habits. Read, study, converse. Be virtuous, useful, happy. Observe the Sabbath; attend the Sanctuary; read the Bible.' May 1850, p.16. See also, Moral Force: a Reply to an Address entitled Physical Force (by George Bown) by a Working Man (Leicester, 1848), pp.1-15.
dissent. Edward Royle believes that the conscious membership of the Secularist movement did not exceed four thousand throughout England. But its influence on earnest working men was far more pervasive. The concern with social and personal morality absorbed the energies of frustrated radicals, reinforced their shattered morale and convinced them of their intrinsic righteousness. Thomas Cooper brought out two Secularist papers between 1849 and 1850, the more successful being Cooper's Journal which ran for thirty numbers from December 1849 to October of the following year. In this he published the immediately popular Letters to Young Men of the Working Classes, enjoining them to practise self-help, self-restraint and self-respect as the only means available to the poor of emancipation. Above all, the working classes must impress upon the ruling classes that they were respectable people more than fit to participate in full citizenship. The former Glasgow O'Connorite, Samuel M. Kydd wrote to testify to have profited by the perusal of the letters: 'they are helps to the anxious and inquiring mind'. He drew the conclusion that so many disillusioned Chartists echoed: 'It is above all necessary that our workmen should become thinkers, for it is clear that force, fraud, and gold cannot for ever rule.'

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2 These were reprinted in pamphlet form in 1850 and Cooper considered them still relevant in 1885 when he included them unaltered in his last major book Thoughts as Fourscore and Earlier (London, 1885). See Chapter VI for further discussion.

3 Cooper's Journal, 5 January 1850, pp.3-4. Samuel M. Kydd was a young Glasgow shoemaker, whose exuberance and intelligence brought him quickly to the forefront of the O'Connorite leadership. Chartism could be said to have liberated him from his class. He left his trade, became a professional agitator and began to study law. In 1848-9 he was the mainstay of the National Charter Association and the National Land Company. Later he became secretary to Richard Oastler, and under the pseudonym of 'Alfred', published A History of the Factory Movement in 1857. Several years later he realised his ambitions and was called to the bar. His articles appear in nearly every radical paper of the early 1850s and he wrote for Joseph Barker in Barker's Review in 1861 (Alex Wilson, 'Chartism in Glasgow' in Chartist Studies, Asa Briggs (ed.), (London, 1959, 1972 edition), p.273.
The Temperance movement and Urquartism were practising and teaching the politics of respectability, but it was Reynolds's Political Instructor, with its wide and varied audience, which began to teach that 'respectability' could be a political tactic. The initial step was the claim that the working classes were not only intrinsically respectable, but more respectable than the moneyed classes. In the second issue Reynolds's declared in the editorial '[Chartism] shall be preserved because the working classes love it and are proud of it: and inasmuch as the real intelligence of the country resides in the masses, those who were the first to appreciate the sublime truths of Chartism shall not be called upon to abandon one tittle of all they have learned to admire, to uphold, and to demand....' The paper launched an attack on the immorality of the ruling classes, running a series in 1849 on 'The Aristocracy: its Origins, Progress and Decay'. And in January 1850 it was delighted with a new novel by the wife of Bulwer Lytton which incidentally exposed the moral and educational training of the upper classes. 'Her picture is perfectly true', rejoiced Reynolds, 'but God help the state of society where such loathsomeness

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1 Reynolds's Political Instructor, 17 November 1849. G.W.M. Reynolds was a flamboyant and brilliant journalist, if not something of an opportunist. At the same time as he began the Instructor he helped Bronterre O'Brien to launch the National Reform League, and although they were not in complete agreement, O'Brien was one of his main contributors, publishing the series 'The Rise and Fall of Human Slavery', which, though uncompleted, was republished in book form after his death. (G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (London, 1941), p.261.) In May 1850 the Political Instructor was superseded by Reynolds's Weekly, selling at 4d, which was to survive until the end of the century despite the inevitable changes of such a life-time. To Linton in mid-1848, Reynolds was no respectable. 'The attempts to use the inspiration of the Revolution to build a London moderate Chartist movement had failed. He admitted that the isolation of the London respectables was now complete. The national Chartist movement was now dominated by braggarts like Jones and Reynolds, Irish brawlers, and muddleheaded revolutionaries like Cuffey, who allowed themselves to be trapped by agents provocateurs.' F.B. Smith, op.cit., p.82. Reynolds may have been a braggart, but he was also a better popular journalist than Linton and sensed the changing tide of popular enthusiasms.
is tolerated! Anything more calculated to shock the pureminded and unsophisticated working classes we cannot possibly fancy; but it is intolerable that such a vile set of profligates and miscreants should hold any influence over our social, moral, or political institutions.' Vice in high places was the poor man's pornography and obscenity a timeless political weapon. Mayhew noted in the 1850s that ordinary popular erotic literature was almost exclusively about the upper classes, the favourite plot celebrating the flight of the pretty and pure working girl from a predatory aristocrat. But if the politics of respectability was to be found in the broadsheets and chapbooks of the streets, the high-minded respectable radicals had no doubts as to its value as this compositor wrote to the Working Man's Friend:

Let them, the working men of England, come forward, and give the lie to those who dare to stigmatise them as being unfit for the exercise of the franchise - let each demonstrate in his own person, that intelligence, sobriety, providence and self-government, are to be found without the pale of rank and wealth. Let them avail themselves of the means within their power to become freeholders, and they may rest assured that, with an honest House of Commons, they will soon see abuses of all kinds dragged from their strongholds.

Thomas Wright believed that the working classes knew little of the aristocracy, and therefore had little cause to hate them. The real objects of their hostility were to be the 'Moneyocracy'. But the moneyocracy were not so easy to attack for lack of respectability. The Operative was gratified in May 1851 to find some evidence of middle class lack of probity when it discovered insurance companies to be frightened of dealing with a trade union. Nothing but

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1 Reynolds's Political Instructor, 10 November 1849, pp.5-6 and 5 January 1850, p.69.

2 Mayhew, op.cit., Vol.IV. 'The ruin of many girls is commenced by reading the low trashy wishy-washy cheap publications that the news-shops are now gorged with, and by devouring the hastily-written, immoral, stereotyped tales about the sensualities of the upper classes, the lust of the aristocracy....' p.250.

the low moral tone of the usual customers of insurance companies could account for this timidity averred The Operative, and it recommended that if the companies did business with respectable institutions like the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, then this dread of fraud would be extinguished.1 The tension in the Chartist movement aroused by the demands of some Chartists that the only course open was collaboration with sympathetic members of the middle class provoked declarations of distrust of middle-class motives and morality. In the first editorial of the Political Instructor Reynolds warned of the dangers of collaboration with a middle class for it appropriated all reforms for its own benefit.2 And Thomas Cooper castigated the M.P.s, Lord Nugent and Lord Dudley Stuart, sometime advocates of manhood suffrage, for now lending their support for the household suffrage movement. The Chartists, he advised, 'have dared to maintain their convictions to their detriment - some by loss of employ, and others by imprisonment; and they cannot comprehend the virtue of that cautious respectability, which marks so many middle class reformers, - nor the due consistency of men like yourself [Lord Nugent], in abetting the equivocal enterprise of these same hesitating patriots'.3

Such warnings were in vain. Confronted with the failure of Chartism there was no alternative but to return to the collaborationist politics of Francis Place. It was a difficult time for the small men of the Chartist movement like Benjamin Wilson. The cause of the Continental refugees siphoned off the energies of many frustrated radicals, and still by 1853, up to ten thousand Chartists could turn out for the funeral of the highly respected North Country Chartist, Benjamin Rushton. But as Wilson recalled of the nucleus of Chartists and Radicals meeting in the village Temperance hotel: 'The organization of the Radical movement

1 (Thomas Wright), Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes, op.cit., p.9.

2 Reynolds's Political Instructor, 10 November 1849, p.1.

3 Cooper's Journal, 12 January 1850, p.17 and 17 January 1850, pp.32-5.
in the country was at the lowest ebb that it had been for some time, for the people appeared to have lost all confidence in agitating for political reform.' He concluded his account with chilling simplicity: 'Our old friend, Mr. John Snowden, left the radical party and joined the middle class party.'

The uncertainties and frustrations of the decade drove some radicals to adopt strange postures. Holyoake gravely damaged his standing in the working-class movement by advocating an intelligence franchise as a possible expedient. Joseph Barker, for less pragmatic reasons, advanced the concept of manhood suffrage based on 'manliness'. He opened his first issue of the Review in September 1861 with the declaration that 'Our work is that of CONSERVATIVE REFORMERS':

Our object is not unsparing destruction or reckless, wholesale change, but sure and gradual reform. In England, wholesome change is neither desirable nor possible; and to clamour for it always unwise....Men have often failed to get anything in consequence of asking for too much.

He went on to make explicit what men like George Howell and Robert Applegarth in the Reform League and the Trade Unions now practised as the only alternative tactic to the politics of direct confrontation: '...by reforming yourselves, you will increase your power to reform the Government. The better your health, the greater your strength, the more respectable your character, the more abundant your means, the greater will be your influence.' And so the focus of working-class political and economic endeavour shifted. The respectables saw an opportunity of putting their respectability to effective use, and with a self-conscious eye over their shoulder watching for public reaction, set about demonstrating the respectability of the English

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1Benjamin Wilson, op.cit., pp.16, 22-3, 30.
2See Chapter VI.
4Ibid., p.2.
working man and woman. Hence *The Co-operator* was gratified with an article in the *Westminster Review* praising Co-operation as a means to social reform without revolution and reprinted it with self-congratulation.¹

But 'using respectability' forced the respectables into an apparent contradiction. A barrage of criticism against the ruling classes and competitive capitalism was accompanied by the celebration and self-righteous advocacy of the social values which underpinned bourgeois liberal capitalism. The respectables themselves, however, generally saw no such inconsistency. They were not opposed to property in itself. As Holyoake said, 'I have no antipathy to rich men, I wish we were all rich'.² They were not against social betterment and recognition - they all craved that. They wanted to be included in the good things of life and they sought to prove their fitness for entry and full participation.

Practical politics demanded some abandonment of principle. The working-class Reform Leaguers found themselves forced to accept household suffrage in the face of middle-class opinion.³ But they were not being duped, as this little known example of the reasoning behind the change in tactics reveals. It is a letter from the Secularist, Robert Cooper, in his capacity as president of the Manchester Working Men's Parliamentary Association, to Joseph Cowen, then president of the Northern Reform Union. In 1862 the two organizations were in conflict over tactics and Cooper sought to persuade Cowen to adopt a more pragmatic approach to the Reform Question. In its directness it is worth quoting at length:

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¹*The Co-operator*, October 1860, p.67. The Co-operative movement was to find admirers like the arch-conservative Charles Mackay, who declared that here the working classes were 'on firm ground'. 'They break no social or economic law; they exercise no tyranny over their fellows...'. *The Working Classes*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, February 1867, p.229.


...I will never rest till Manhood Suffrage is the law of the land. Nevertheless as a practical man, who has had some experience both amongst the Working and Middle class, I hold it to be perfectly legitimate to inquire, - how can we best accomplish that measure? There are only two modes, - by the working class, as hitherto, isolating themselves from all other classes, or by their seeking the co-operation of the liberals of the middle class. I believe the latter is the more feasible, since every government measure, political or social, has only been carried out by the joint action of the two classes. Experience has demonstrated that the middle class - whether justly or unjustly is not now the question - exercise, in the present political scale, a determining power in settling national concerns. If they and the aristocracy unite, they beat the people, - if they and the people combine they defeat the aristocracy -, and the latter are the natural enemies of popular power. Is it not worthwhile, therefore, to make some sacrifice to secure the help of that Class which would give the preponderance in the political scale in favour of popular interests? It may not be that the middle class would go for Manhood Suffrage - I know they would not as a class, but the more advanced portion, if we earnestly sought their support, would go just so far, that a liberal majority would be secured in every borough in the Kingdom. And would not such a House of Commons be likely, at the first favourable opportunity, to grant a further extension of the suffrage, until, by degrees, a House of Commons would be returned that would pass a Manhood Suffrage Bill? On the other hand, if we take a position at first so advanced as to repel the Middle Class, we at once strengthen the hands of the Common enemy - the aristocracy, who will concede nothing to the people unless sustained by the commercial community. By raising the standard of Manhood Suffrage now, we might rouse the people, get up monster meetings - in short, revive the agitation of 1839, '42 and '48. But what then? Why, the landed aristocracy, having at present the military power under their control, and knowing the middle class were not with us, our 'extreme' proceedings having converted the sympathy of the latter into distrust, if not opposition - the government would be instigated to put down our meetings, and, if need be, incarcerate our leaders, leaving the people once more prey to disappointment and suffering. The ultimate issue would be the complete cessation of popular agitation until a new generation arise. Why not then, at least, try the opposite plan? Let us work for an instalment until the whole is gained? There is no inconsistency in this, no abandonment of principle. This plan is clear, reasonable and practical. When it is seen that the first
instalment of the suffrage has only tended to elevate the people, to render them more peacable citizens, and therefore more industrious and skilful workpeople, strengthening the hands of their employers, and facilitating the extension of free trade in the new fields of commerce, rest assured that the fears and prejudices of those above the people, would be immensely diminished. The obstacles to further instalments would rapidly become less and less, till the final triumph of complete emancipation would crown our efforts.¹

There was no question now that the only practicable course was to gain entry to the body politic by the back door.

It was in the trade union movement that the politics of respectability were first used. A.E. Musson has recently published a timely critique of trade union and labour history, attacking many of the misapprehensions which have bedevilled Labour history since the British working classes failed to carry out their revolution. He stresses the continuity of the development of the trade unions and finds in the 'New Model' unionism of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers a strengthening of the 'Old Model' by reform, rather than a radical departure in the concept of a trade union. He is equally concerned to defend the unions against the charges of embourgeoisement and of capitulation to the capitalist system. He believes the trade unionism of the 1850s and 1860s displayed appropriate pragmatism and was steeped in liberal-radicalism. By 1875 their achievements were considerable. They had fought capitalist employers with sufficient skill to make inroads into profits; they had formed effective organizations with financial security; set up trades councils and the Trades Union Congress and secured their legal status along with other social reforms. Even if they were unrevolutionary, they were successful.² But it is not only the absence of revolutionary ardour which has repelled many historians, but also the proselytising

¹Robert Cooper to Joseph Cowen, 28 July 1862. (Cowen Collection, C 1738). I am indebted to Dr Edward Royle for this reference.

respectability of the A.S.E. at a time when the images and rhetoric of Chartism were scarcely dead.¹

The A.S.E. may not have been a 'new model' union, but it had a new style. The trade union movement was on even more uncertain ground than the political reform movement. The prospect of effectively organized working men demanding better wages and conditions was more disturbing to the moneyed classes than their demanding the vote. The Master and Servant Act and the prohibition on picketing were open to wide and arbitrary interpretation by hostile magistrates. No legislation protected and regulated union funds. Trade unions were effectively illegal in 1851 and unquestionably beyond the pale of 'respectability'. The A.S.E. argued that it had a right to combine to protect its 'order' as could other people such as doctors or lawyers. But Asa Briggs sees this as evidence of the decline in working-class political consciousness in the 1850s with such a return to the Tory language of ranks and orders.² But to blocked men demanding inclusion in the public world and to shrewd trade unionists, this was one of their few means of attack on the social and political structure after the failure of Chartism. Benjamin Taylor wrote to the A.S.E.'s The Operative in 1851:

Doctors, lawyers and parsons, each protect their various professions, and it is equally justifiable that honest workmen should do the same. It is necessary for the safety and well-being of our institution, in seeking to emancipate the trade from any unjustifiable aggression, that due caution should be used not to make too great advances at once. To be extravagant and imperative in our demands, is calculated to alienate the sympathies of capitalists from our order, and widen the breach of social communion.

While the Executive Council of the A.S.E. implored its members to care for their weaker brethren in industrial


³ The Operative, 28 May 1851, p.365.
disputes, the union was inexorably driven into exclusivism by the difficulty of its situation and the hostility of public opinion.¹ Due caution, moderation, demand only those rights which other people already enjoy, demonstrate the moral calibre of the order: all these were the only tactics available to the nascent A.S.E. As with so much of the political writing of the 1850s and 1860s, the psychic shock of Kennington Common pervades The Operative. These were men grown accustomed to defeat and disillusionment. The resilience of their optimism is more remarkable than their ultimate achievements.

William Newton gave an address in 1859 which revealed the A.S.E.'s realism in the face of public hostility and condescension. He spoke as a blocked man, yet was amused at the hypocrisy of those who tried to undermine working-class manliness by moralising at them. And in their fight with Capital, their respectability was one of their most effective weapons:

It has become the fashion of late for public men to stand upon public platforms and deliver lectures to the working people - (hear, hear,) ...but I think the working people are not, however, content to, see mere popinjays of men - (laughter and cheers) - who have not entitled themselves to stand upon any very high pedestal, to lecture at working men upon duties they know fully better than they can be told by such gentlemen....Those human qualities, the ability to labour, is what the working man has to sell, for labour when performed becomes capital, and subject to laws governing ordinary commodities. To reduce a human quality to the condition of corn and sugar, is to debase the moral constitution of man, and to lower his estimate of himself. (applause)....Did the merchant of capitalist ask the corn and sugar if it would agree to be raised? (laughter and applause).

Newton went on to defend their right to combine and press for higher wages, irrespective of employers' alleged capacity to pay. As for the A.S.E. and respectability: '...we inquire into the general tendency of [the intending member's] character and conduct, and reject him if we find that he

¹Ibid., 1 May 1852, p.394.
²Amalgamated Society of Engineers, op.cit., pp.8 and 16.
would in all likelihood bring a disgrace upon the society. We say to him "No, sir, you must mend your manners before you are admitted amongst us" (Great applause) We have surely a perfect right to say with whom we will associate, as well as those who move in a higher sphere of life. (Hear, hear). ¹

To use G.J. Holyoake's splendid phrase of twenty years later, the respectable working men wanted 'the liberties of gentlemen, in their humbler way'. ² In fact the judicious use of 'order' in place of 'class' had about it a quality of invective that Asa Briggs has overlooked:

I shall say, as an eminent writer has said before me, 'By Birth and life, I belong to the order of the people'. Like Lord Grey I am disposed to stand by my order - and for the same reason that Lord Grey was disposed to stand by his. It is because my order, - the order of industry, the working man's order, - is not represented in the councils of the nation! Every order but theirs is represented in Parliament. ³

The active trade unionists were arguing that they too were men of honour and respectable, therefore human and entitled by their respectability to fair-play and freedom. By implication, the argument often accused the employing class of being less honourable than the sons of toil. It was one means of shoring up, if not creating working-class pride and self-respect. The Operative, apart from running union news and long, often well-written letters from isolated members on union strategy and problems, set out to improve the hearts and minds of the members. There were 'Biographical Sketches of Earnest Men' like Martin Luther; a serial on 'The Devil in England', where in Chapter IX, a wicked linen-draper, Fitzbeelzebub, is defrauded by the lady-like wife of another linen-draper; and tales of sentiment such as 'The Broken Hearted' with this love scene:

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¹Ibid., p.14.
²See Chapter VI.
Snatching her to his bosom, he imprinted a fervent kiss upon her lips, and while she struggled to escape his grasp, pledged his life and his salvation that he would be a loving and domestic husband.1

By means both large and trivial, they hoped they might elicit the attention and sympathy of the moneyed classes. Central to T.J. Dunning's defence of Trade Unions was the assertion of their intrinsic respectability, which thereby earned them the right to a voice:

As the object of combinations is thus to correct the disadvantages of position as bargainers with their employers, and as the very element of their existence is public spirit, being held together only by a principle of honour to support each other for a perfectly legitimate purpose, they always comprise not only the best workmen, but the best workmen in a moral sense that are to be found in a trade. This is stated simply because it is a fact, which has been acknowledged by those who are inimical to trade combinations. As the social position of workmen depends entirely upon the wages they obtain, it is felt by the majority of them to be a sacred duty to adopt this means of protecting their wages.2

John Stuart Mill was deeply impressed by Dunning's arguments, as was the Committee of Trades Unions set up for the 1860 Congress of the National Social Science Association.3

The hostility and ignorance these respectable trade unionists had to counter was daunting. Fraser's Magazine fulminated at the A.S.E.'s first strike in 1851: 'If labour is free, so, too must be capital. But that which is sought by the Amalgamated Society is not to establish the right of labour to choose, but the right of labour to dictate....'4 Blackwood's could be relied upon to find fault where it could, and although forced to admit in 1856 that the unions had of late been 'Less envenomed in spirit', still 'the

1 The Operative, 24 May 1851, p.324. See also general contents of issue for 17 May 1851.

2 T.J. Dunning, Trades' Unions and Strikes, op.cit., p.6.

3 Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, op.cit., p.58.

tyranny which trades-unions exercise over members of the trade is as glaring as could be practised by Governments even the most despotic.¹ Spurious appeals to natural liberty were favourite weapons against the unions. W.S. Chambers conceded that they had the right to demand higher wages, but not to protect their job security with apprenticeship rules, work standards and opposition to labour-saving machinery.²

The Carpenters and Joiners' strike of 1859-60 precipitated the formation of the London Trades Council as a permanent body to co-ordinate activity and assistance among the London unions. Significantly it was also 'to counter the influence of propaganda hostile to trade unionism'. The strike had provoked a lockout by the employers and the union found itself faced with intense public antagonism led by The Times. Building societies all over the country stood behind the London building workers and the A.S.E. donated £3,000 to the strike fund. But the strike committee realised that better machinery was needed to promote the cause of trade unionism and in May 1860 called a conference to found the Trades Council. Tom Jones, secretary to the Tinplate Workers' Society was elected secretary, and of Tom Jones it was said that 'he was never seen out of doors without a tall silk hat'.³ The era of the top-hatted and frock-coated union official had begun: symbols of respectability which were to provide socialists in the 1880s with ammunition in their campaign against 'aristocratic' unionism, but which in 1860 was the working man's way of declaring his social equality and right to inclusion in the public world.

More than hostile public opinion, there was increasing anxiety about the legal status and security of the unions. After 1850 prosecutions of unionists under the Master and Servant Act began to increase. The law on picketing, with

¹R.H. Patterson, 'Public Lectures: Mr. Warren on Labour.', Blackwood's Magazine, February 1856, p.175.


³Pelling, op.cit., p.54.
its enormous discretionary powers, was similarly being applied arbitrarily by a magisterial bench which was increasingly representing the employers' interests. The bench was less ready to convict treasurers who absconded with union funds, aggravating the already parlous financial situation of many trade societies.¹ The story of the fight for the legal status of the unions is incidental to the significance of the tactics of respectability in the unions in the 1860s and 1870s. The legal victory was magnificent, and it was the ultra-respectable George Howell, as secretary to the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, who did most to achieve it.² What is more important in this study is the way the outstanding union leaders of the era used respectability and why they did. 'The Junta' has been the object of vilification and misunderstanding from the Left since the 1880s - their self-conscious respectability giving rise to suspicions of a vitiated class consciousness.³

Raymond Postgate's judgement of the Junta is worth examining at length for it reveals the difficulty the respectables had in being understood in their own time and since. His The Builders' History, written in 1923, has long since been superseded by the work of historians such as Pelling and Musson. Nonetheless it is valuable as an example of the prejudice respectability could provoke. Postgate was a member of the upper middle-class intelligentsia, a Marxist and of a family and generation in uneasy revolt against the nadir of Victorian bourgeois respectability. He called Robert Applegarth, George Howell, Edwin Coulson and Henry Broadhurst the 'servile generation', who re-directed the trade union movement towards conciliation and arbitration and acceptance of the capitalist system and away from the

³E.g. ibid., p.xiv.
old sentiments of class-warfare and strike action.\(^1\) As will be shown later, George Howell, the most anxiously respectable of all these men, felt class hatred all his life.\(^2\) Secondly, most working men before and after 1850 feared strikes, knowing that they could not sustain the loss of wages and probably of their job as well.\(^3\) Postgate wrote of Applegarth: 'Believing in the power of public opinion, the fundamental unity of the classes and the indefinite continuance of the capitalist system, he and his group removed every trace of the old unionism that seemed to reflect a class-war basis.'\(^4\) Postgate clearly preferred George Potter and his 'old style unionism; which was localized, loose and pub-centred. 'Pub-crawling was contemptuously said to be the basis of Potter's strength: it was true.'\(^5\) But the 'servile generation' preached the virtues of temperance, self-improvement and economy. Postgate saw them as victims of the middle-class campaign mounted after 1832 to educate and civilize the working classes according to bourgeois capitalist ideals. Mechanics' Institutes, periodicals like The Working Man and organizations such as Charles Knight's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge had permanently changed the values of these labour aristocrats. Postgate failed to see that pub-crawling had nothing to do with the class war, that localism and undisciplined and unco-ordinated strike action enfeebled the national cause, condemning trade societies to financial chaos and ineffectiveness. To Applegarth and Howell, intemperance meant wasting precious time and money when working men should be reading, thinking, holding meetings and agitating.\(^6\) Howell first made his mark in

\(^1\)Postgate, op.cit., pp.181-207.

\(^2\)See Chapter VI.

\(^3\)E.g. strong boot man quoted at beginning of chapter.

\(^4\)Postgate, op.cit., p.190.

\(^5\)Ibid., p.196.

London union politics as a raw provincial journeyman precisely because he did not drink and thereby being able to capture an audience at pub meetings. For the working man to become political he had to improve and equip himself. For an individual and a trade or political society alike, economy was essential to survival. These were not only social ideals, but also facts of life.

Moreover George Potter was politically rather than ideologically at odds with the Junta. His weekly Potter's Examiner, along with the Flint Glass Makers' Magazine, were part of a growing high quality trade union press. The Operative had set the example in 1851, but the increasing concern for self-improvement as the means to political and social improvement initiated other forms of educational activity. The Bookbinders and Compositors' Societies, the intellectuals of the working class, established libraries for their members and the habit spread to other unions such as the Scottish United Operative Masons. The Temperance movement found increasing sympathy from unionists and the practice of holding union meetings in public houses began to decline. Henry Pelling instances the Glasgow Coopers, a trade notorious for hard-drinking, as being not entirely untypical in their course of evolution in the 1850s. Fines and footings, previously extracted from strangers seeking work and from apprentices, were abolished and in their stead, annual soirées, pleasure excursions, vocal and instrumental concerts were introduced. Such respectable social pursuits enabled wives to be included. The cooper found himself being domesticated and the queue of wives outside the public houses on pay day began to diminish.

The respectables believed they should fight those social evils which hindered the working man from becoming his own master and which exposed him to contempt and ridicule from the genteel classes. As long as public opinion could depict the typical trade unionist as violent, drunken and

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1 Pelling, op.cit., p.57.
2 Loc.cit.
spendthrift, and therefore dismiss his demands for better wages and conditions, then the union leader had both to fight these evils and set an example of unimpeachable respectability. The unions had the added difficulty of the persistence of Outrages in strikes and the notorious tendency for union officials to embezzle funds. Howell was so sensitive to imputations against his propriety with money that he suffered delusions and nightmares when he was falsely accused in September 1867 of misappropriating the Reform League's funds.\(^1\) Coulson, secretary to the London Order of the Operative Bricklayers' Society, framed the 1871 rules of the society in these terms:

Capitalists tell us that the true interests of the workman be in saving money, in using every effort to desert their own class and become masters.\(...\) No, we have a nobler morality and a higher aim than this; a feeling of brotherhood is the principle on which we will act, and our end shall be the elevation of our fellows - not into another class, but in their actions, their thoughts and their feelings.\(^2\)

1867 saw the climax of the politics of using respectability. With the passing of the Reform Act and the successful defence of the trade union movement before the Royal Commission provoked by the Sheffield Outrages, respectability proved itself a subtle and effective weapon.

The final passage of the Reform Act was pure parliamentary politics,\(^3\) but a profound change had occurred in public opinion since Kennington Common which enabled many public men to view a partial enfranchisement of the working classes with diminished anxiety. The reformers succeeded in convincing the moneyed classes that there was a respectable élite in the working classes who posed little threat to order and property and who deserved inclusion in the body politic as a moral, rather than as a natural right. There had been a dramatic shift in the debate on the Reform Question in 1864 when Gladstone hit upon a formula for

\(^1\) Leventhal, op.cit., pp.96-8.

\(^2\) Quoted in Postgate, op.cit., p.220.

enfranchisement based on moral fitness rather than natural right. The formula accorded with the aspirations of the age and its popular appeal guaranteed the necessary enthusiasm to sustain the public agitation. It forced the opponents of reform to deny the moral fitness of the working-class élite, and as Robert Lowe learnt, such denials were disastrous. But above all Gladstone had produced a claim 'which made exact calculations irrelevant, and this flexibility, with its moral aura, helped the nation to acquiesce in an amendment of the constitution sufficient to accommodate a vast movement in society'.

The working-class respectables had been carrying out a moralising mission directed both at their fellows and at the classes above. As they moralised, a dangerous contradiction developed in their argument - a contradiction which enabled them to concede to a partial franchise with more alacrity than their avowed democratic principles should have permitted. As early as 1850 Reynolds's Political Instructor presented to its many readers this vision of the civilizing effects of co-operation: 'The manners of persons living in a state of community would naturally become polished and graceful...under the present system, manners are little cultivated; for by living in separate families, and being confined to a small circle, whom we may see every hour, there is no stimulus to prompt us to be careful of our carriage and appearance.' Reynolds's was promoting the ideal of gentlemanliness. Implicit in the ideal and in the moralising mission itself, was disdain for those who fell below standards of respectability. By definition, in claiming that respectable working men had the right to vote by virtue of their respectability, the respectables admitted that there were many working-class people who were currently unfit for political citizenship. The day-to-day tension between the respectable and the rough created an ambivalence over manhood suffrage. Even the Reform League qualified its...

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1 Ibid., p.27.
2 Reynolds's Political Instructor, 16 March 1850, p.148.
principle of manhood suffrage with a residence qualification and the exclusion of criminals and paupers as 'half-adults' who were incapable of exercising the vote independently and rationally.\(^1\) One reason for Holyoake's advocacy of the intelligence franchise was the disillusionment he shared with many other radicals after the peasants had elected Louis Napoleon as emperor. The cultural gulf between the respectable and the rough promoted distrust, a distrust founded on the bitter experience of finding the very poor, if they had any politics at all, to be natural conservatives.\(^2\)

Security for working-class institutions and rights required the 'civilisation of the lower orders' until the entire working class became responsible and independent men. This tension was to grow in the 1870s with the Tory victory of 1874, the Tichborne movement and the believed association between Toryism and 'gin and beer'.

Hence the London Workingmen's Association and the Reform League, while committed to manhood suffrage and the ballot, were both prepared to settle for less. The L.W.M.A.'s resolution of August 1866 was for 'any honest comprehensive measure of reform'. They wavered in their estimates of the immediate chances, but as Stephen Coltham has observed, what mattered in the last resort was that members of the 'labour aristocracy' should gain entry to the public world.\(^3\) However in such a retreat from the explicit democracy of Chartism lay an opportunity for ultimate success.

One of the most important pieces of propaganda for the Second Reform Act was Ludlow and Jones' *The Progress of the Working Classes*. J.M. Ludlow, the Christian Socialist, joined with Lloyd Jones, the working-class Co-operator, to demonstrate the transformation of the working classes since 1832 from a condition of helplessness and brutalism into a dignified, self-respecting and respectable class whom

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\(^{1}\) F.B. Smith, op.cit., p.26.


Parliament could no longer afford to exclude from political citizenship. Social and religious organizations, state legislation, and above all, self-help, had civilized the sons of toil. They cited the rise of Savings Banks, Friendly and Benefit Societies, Building Societies and the Co-operative movement as examples of working-class practical creativity and respectability.¹ Trade Societies were claimed to 'represent almost invariably the bulk of the able, industrious and provident workmen in each trade; therefore they are habitually well governed by men fairly elected by their members as the most trustworthy, respectable and intelligent amongst them'.² But more than this, their disenfranchisement notwithstanding, the working classes had come to exercise a powerful moralising influence on the body politic. The 'great awakening' after 1832 had been aided by 'numbers...of clever, strong-witted, self-taught men, who had by quiet thoughtfulness, patient inquiry, or keen discussion, found their way to at least a limited understanding of the duties men owe to each other in this world'.³ Ludlow and Jones argued that such men had quietly influenced the direction of all the progressive legislation of the period. Above all 'there is one crowning instance, fresh still in all our memories, in which the working classes may be said to have decided the policy of this country, when the voice of the people proved truly to be the voice of God....[When] the working men of Lancashire stood firm and fast to the holy principle of human freedom.'⁴

This contribution to the myth of working-class support of the North in the Civil War was essential to their claim that the working classes had shown themselves sufficiently disinterested and respectable to join the body politic. Ludlow and Jones more than hinted that the conscience of the

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² Ibid., p.215.
³ Ibid., p.86.
⁴ Ibid., pp.98-9.
country resided in the working classes, who now were more respectable than many of the best people in the land.¹

A mollification of class tension is detectable in the periodical press by the late 1850s. The quietism forced on the political reform movement by the Chartist debacle and the self-conscious respectability of the 'new model' unions did bring comfort to the moneyed classes. It also seems that the moneyed classes themselves were becoming more respectable and more receptive to moral enthusiasms. This disposed them to find common ground with working-class respectables and to sympathise with working-class problems couched in moral terms. It remains an unanswered question as to how much the apparent stability of the Age of Equipoise was as much due to an improvement in the social morality in the middle classes, rather than only to the apparent embourgeoisement of working-class radicalism.²

Nevertheless to the eyes of The London Quarterly Review in 1859 'better principles, sounder information, greater comfort, and a much more contented spirit, have during the last fifteen years, been extensively diffused among the upper sections of the working classes'.³ Garibaldi's triumphant visit to London in April 1864 aroused sympathies across class barriers and reminded the respectables on both sides of their common Protestantism. Randal Cremer's biographer noted that 'men then came together who never separated until they had won household suffrage in the borough constituencies. By all classes in this country Garibaldi was regarded with enthusiastic admiration - of course with the exception of the Roman Catholics....'⁴ R.A. Arnold's History of the Cotton Famine, published in 1864,

¹Ibid., pp.299-301.

²This is an important question, regrettably outside the scope of this study. Peter T. Cominos' work by implication, suggests that there was a significant increase in middle-class respectability, apart from sexual respectability, which made for a keener social conscience.

³The London Quarterly Review, October 1859, p.3.

extolling the Lancashire cotton workers for being 'firm in their hatred of slavery, and firm in their faith in democracy', further publicised the myth of heroism which had so moved Gladstone. Not everyone wished to draw these lessons from the Cotton Famine, but at least the periodical press wished to draw some. The British Quarterly Review believed that the 'bitter feelings cherished towards the "upper classes" before this calamity have been rebuked and softened by the tender sympathy, the considerate and benevolent attention received from them; a better apprehension of the identity of interests subsisting between master and workman has been established; habits of providence have been inculcated in the stern school of want, and are likely to abide; the workman has seen the value of the co-operative principle, which puts an end to struggles between capital and labour....' Despite his naivety, the writer was finding the British workman a more acceptable fellow.

The interest in working-class ideas and behaviour aroused by the Reform Question enabled Thomas Wright to publish his first book, albeit anonymously, and Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes by a Journeyman Engineer came out in 1867. John Moore Capes, the Roman Catholic convert, reviewed it for the Fortnightly Review and confessed to finding it difficult to believe that the author was a bona fide working man. Capes could find no evidence of the author's being self-educated, apart from the absence of a classical background, and considered Wright more conservative than he would have expected of a member of the working classes. Only the defence of trade societies in the book...


gave it the stamp of authenticity. The shock to Capes was that the working classes as Wright described them were not so very different from the upper classes: '...it is difficult thoroughly to realise the details of routine, the modes of thought, and the style of conversation of people among whom we have never lived as one of themselves.' Captivated by the descriptions of home life, Capes suggested that it would be a 'pleasant novelty' if the description of the artisan's Sunday Dinner were read to the House of Commons during the Reform debates. Capes was already a firm advocate of the politics of respectability before he read Thomas Wright. In the previous year he advised the working classes to argue: 'Show us that the vices, the crime, the bigotries, the extravagancies of the age are all our own, and that peers, gentlemen and shopkeepers are all pure, while we are vile: or else grant us that portion in the rule of our common country which we ask, and which will never rest till we obtain.' The Wykehamist clergyman who had chosen to become an outsider by seceding to Rome could feel for these born outsiders.

The Reform League's deliberate decorum and respectability found some admirers in the periodical press. Fraser's Magazine was moved by the Hyde Park demonstrations of 1866 to aver that the Reform League displayed more gentlemanliness than many of its enemies. The British Quarterly Review, while deploring the irreligion of the aristocracy of labour, began to romanticise their virtues

1 J.M. Capes, Review article of Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes by a Journeyman Engineer (London, 1867), in Fortnightly Review, 1 May 1867, p.638. Charles Dickens welcomed the book as an accurate guide to working-class life at a time when the public was taking a great interest in the working classes, without knowing very much about them. All the Year Round, 8 June 1867, pp.565-6.


4 'The Reform League and the Parks', Fraser's Magazine, September 1866, p.405. By contrast G.R. Gleig called the demonstration a 'disgraceful outrage' and the Reform League leadership demagogues, 'all of them, except Mr. Bright, poor both in talent and influence...'; Blackwood's Magazine, November 1866, p.645.
in a manner more reminiscent of the late 1960s:

Unaffected by the conventional motions and usages of those above them, their mode of life is less artificial and the domestic affections have freer play. It is notorious that in their social life the working classes are broader in their sympathies, and more disposed to make sacrifices for each other than those above them; and it is equally true that on all questions of humanity and political equity their instincts are invariably just and generous. In an age of luxury and declining public spirit, they retain, in the main, an unsophisticated attachment to the liberal and philanthropic, which has more than once turned the tide of popular feeling, and vindicated the traditional reputation of England for sympathy for the oppressed.¹

Charles Mackay in Blackwood's opposed Reform but was impressed with the respectability of the campaign. He feared the consequences of an organized working-class movement, but admitted that '...we think that the skilled mechanics of the country, are, as a body, very superior, if not in intelligence, most certainly in honesty, to the small retail dealers, who, by virtue of their stationary characters as householders, and the payment of a certain annual amount of rent, possess the privilege of voting for Members of Parliament'.²

The respectables seemed to have achieved a political and moral coup and then the Sheffield Outrages scandal broke.³ Robert Lowe leapt to the opportunity to regain his ground. He proposed in The Quarterly Review that there should be proper registration of Friendly Societies so that

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¹ 'Working Men and Religious Institutions', The British Quarterly Review, April 1867, p.508.

² Charles Mackay, 'The Working Classes', Blackwood's Magazine, February 1867, p.226. Mackay was still an opponent of Reform, but he was struggling for convincing arguments: 'We hear a great deal too much of the rights of the majority, and of the old fallacy, and false assertion, that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Christianity itself was long in a minority of one, and is yet in minority, if the population of the whole world be counted.' (p.225).

³ See Sidney Pollard's excellent introduction to the facsimile of the Sheffield inquiry for the background to the Royal Commission. The Sheffield Outrages (Bath, 1970).
this function of the unions would be separated from their industrial activities. With Union records open to investigation the common law could prosecute against the coercion of members. 'If it can be enforced, society will have freed itself from a great peril; dangers to our manufactures and commerce, the amount of which no man can measure, will have been arrested, and a demoralisation which threatens to lower the character of the English operative to the level of the Thug of India will have been stayed.' ¹

Charles Mackay relapsed into hysteria in his essay of the same month, 'Work and Murder', and attempted to explain the absence of outrages in London with a peroration on the lack of virility of the London operative. ² The Outrages provided a proof of working-class depravity that the opponents of reform had craved in order to counter the tactics of the Reform League. But Professor Beesly, as the unions' most skilful defender, pointed to the real motive for the rush of public hostility: it was not the violence which had so infuriated public opinion, but rather the 'steady march of orderly, sensible, methodical unionism during the last few years that drives them wild'. ³

The ensuing Royal Commission proved yet again the effectiveness of the politics of respectability and was a


² 'Whether it be that the men of the metropolis, being always in an overheated and impure atmosphere, are less hardy, robust and energetic than the men of the Midland Counties and the North - whether they, as a rule, are better educated - or whether men, like the tailors, who do what ought to be women's work, are rendered effeminate by their employment - are subjects that might not be unprofitably discussed, if time and space allowed. . . .' Charles Mackay, 'Work and Murder', Blackwood's Magazine, October 1867, p.489.

³ E. S. Beesly, The Sheffield Outrages and the Meeting at Exeter Hall (London, 1867), p.13. This pamphlet was a reprint of two letters in the Daily News (9 and 10 July) and a rejected letter from Applegarth to The Times, defending Beesly against the accusation of being too lenient on Broadhead at the great trade union meeting on 2 July. Beesly had tried to bring a sense of proportion back into the meeting as the unionists condemned the murders. See Pollard, op.cit., pp.xvi-xviii.
personal triumph for Robert Applegarth. The trade union movement found itself proclaiming its respectability at the expense of George Potter's ramshackle 'old unionism' and of the Sheffield unionists themselves. The Minority Report of Thomas Hughes, Frederick Harrison and Lichfield upheld the concept of trade union organization and character developed by the Amalgamated Societies and served as the basis for the union legislation of the Liberal Government in 1871. Potter had to be the scapegoat, and by 1868 he was in deep financial difficulties - in that year the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners passed the membership figures of his General Union for the first time.

If the Sheffield Outrages had promised to be a crushing setback, the Royal Commission demonstrated just how far the respectables had already succeeded. The Reform Act and the moral victory of the Royal Commission were outward expressions of the value of using respectability. The Majority Report notwithstanding, the Royal Commission marked the first time in English history that a working man, Applegarth as the union expert in attendance, had actively served on a Royal Commission. Even though the Reform Act only partially enfranchised the respectable working classes, these people were now included and presumably able to participate and speak for themselves in the public world.

Ludlow and Jones quoted this speech from an old Chartist prisoner, George Mantle, to the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer during the Reform League deputation of 2 April 1867. Perhaps even they did not appreciate its full significance:

In by-gone times...they have consigned some of us, myself among the number, to a prison. Today they bring us, through you, to the foot of the throne. We offer to the throne the

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2Postgate, op.cit., pp.284, 286.

3F.B. Smith, op.cit., pp.236-41.
homage of our loyalty; we offer to the Government those objections, those weapons, which those of us called agitators have used against you; we respectfully ask you to disarm us, and to leave us without the opportunity to rally the country against the Government. We have as keen an appreciation of our country's honour as any other class of men; we are as incapable of doing wrong to it as you are yourselves. The blood of working men, in times of trouble, has flowed as freely as that of the proudest peer of the realm. I have been twenty years engaged in the work and am weary of it; I wish it were settled. We come with the dignity which conscious right gives us, and ask you to do us justice.  

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1Ludlow and Jones, op.cit., pp.286-7.
After the successes of 1867, the respectables entered the most ambivalent phase of their career. Engels' famous complaint to Marx of 1858 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', has never been taken so seriously by historians as it has for the great years of Gladstonian Liberalism and the Lib-Lab alliance.¹

In Halifax, the teetotal Chartist Benjamin Wilson, committed himself to a common path in these years. There had been no real election since 1847, so Wilson and his fellow radicals leapt at the chance of winning the seat in the 1868 election. He campaigned for the co-operator E.O. Greening against the two Liberal candidates Edward Ackroyd and the brewer James Stansfeld. The Conservatives preferred to plump for the two Liberals rather than put up their own candidates, and in a bitter election Greening lost. Wilson was particularly dissatisfied with Ackroyd as a member, but became reconciled to Stansfeld, an eccentric patron of radical causes.² Nonetheless Wilson was pleased with Gladstone's victory - 'the most Radical [premier] that we had ever had in this country' - and soon the radicals amalgamated with the Halifax Liberal Electoral Association. Wilson found that he was able to work from the inside and had Ackroyd dropped from the Liberal ticket for the 1874 election. By 1879 he went on the Halifax Liberal Club's trip to Hawarden Castle and was delighted to receive a personal note of thanks from the Grand Old Man for an address

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¹Engels to Marx, 7 October 1858. Marx and Engels on Britain, op.cit., p.491.

²James Stansfeld was an intriguing character in Radical-Liberal politics: a Mazzinian, patron of George Howell and parliamentary campaigner for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. He deserves a good biography, as the Hammonds' biography is now outdated. See Ann Stafford, The Age of Consent (London, 1964), pp.64-70, for a short portrait.
he had presented to Gladstone's son at Hawarden.¹ Had Benjamin Wilson sold out? Not as far as he was concerned. Rather he lived to realise most of his ambitions – to witness by 1884 the near attainment of manhood suffrage and to become a respected political figure in his community. He remained alive to class discrimination and his achievement was to enter the world of sub-parliamentary political action as a normal participant. Wilson recalled of John Wainhouse, the chairman of the Skircoat Green vestry: 'On one occasion when I went to see him at his house one of his servants asked my name, and on returning invited me into Mr. Wainhouse's room, but, as he was dining, I said I would withdraw until he was at liberty; he, however, invited me to dine with him, – I told him I had only just had dinner, on which he said I must have a glass with him, but being a teetotaller I declined.'² Such courtesies were important to blocked men. Even Francis Place did not experience them. When 'respectable' meant being fully human, such acts of recognition of the humanity of a working man registered a social victory. Leaving policies and ideological principles aside, it was of enormous importance to the respectables that they should become full members of the Liberal party and join in public life in the same way as did gentlemen.

In Engels' bitter generalisation there was more than some truth. The period after the second Reform Act did see the development of an alliance of respectable men of all classes against unrespectability in both the aristocracy and the residuum. There were political decisions which informed this alliance, but it was more nebulous and wide-ranging than the Lib-Lab collaboration shaped by George Howell. It crossed party lines to include Tory philanthropists like the Ashley family and Liberals like Sir Thomas Brassey; it included a brewer like Stansfeld and teetotallers and encompassed Christians and freethinkers. It was essentially an alliance of sentiment and prejudice, a common frame of

¹Benjamin Wilson, op.cit., pp.33-8.
²Ibid., pp.37-8.
mind, which enabled earnest men of all classes to co-operate against the frivolous, the irrational, the immoral and the callous.

John Vincent's metaphor of politics as theatre is apt. With Gladstone and Disraeli as the leading actors, Victorian politics was a theatrical catharsis of the social, religious and political tensions of the era. Of course real political acts did occur. For the radicals, the gaining of the ballot, the regularisation of the legal status of trade unions and Friendly societies and the Education Act were vital steps in their programme for the emancipation of the working classes. Nevertheless there was an aura of theatricality, even unreality, about the issues and enthusiasms of political life, personified by Gladstone himself. As his admiring biographer, Philip Magnus, admits, Gladstone was not interested in bread and butter issues — he was only able to remain in politics because he found a series of high moral causes to serve. Gladstone was a pure man in an impure world. He excited the passions of other pure men who believed that the evil of poverty and the frustrations of social insignificance were largely caused by men's immorality and selfishness. Vincent argues that the working men who threw in their lot with the Gladstonian moral mission did not want government to intervene to ameliorate their condition. This is not entirely true. Many did, but often they doubted that governments could help them or were interested in helping them. Yet high moral causes, however removed from their real needs, were better than nothing, provided arenas for the playing out of ambition and frustration and sustained hopes that men were improvable and improving. Above all, there existed a predilection for politics of conscience and rectitude in both the respectable working class and the middle class which made for an alliance of sentiment, however


uneasy. This politics of conscience inspired respectable men of all classes to explore ideas about the right ordering of the private life and the public world which were in some ways incompatible with laissez-faire capitalism and an experiment in civilization.

Engels was inaccurate to condemn 'respectability' as bourgeois. The ideal of respectability had been to some extent an indigenous working-class ideal, rather than an uncritical capitulation to bourgeois values. Both classes contributed to it, both learnt from the other. Working-class respectability necessarily developed and existed in many ways independently of middle-class respectability because it was a response to the unique problems of working-class life in the nineteenth century city. It was both a mode of personal survival and a means of social assault on an exclusivist society, and if the working-class respectables were to succeed, they had to do so at the expense of the middling and middle classes. Nevertheless working-class respectables and middle-class respectables had much in common. Both believed in the virtues of thrift, sobriety, self-help and manly independence and pursued an ideal of a civilized society, shaped by respectability. The aristocracy and the residuum alike were largely indifferent to these ideals. Second, they had at least a common Protestant background, generally Non-conformist. Secularists and Non-conformists shared an opposition to Catholicism and High-Anglicanism. Thirdly, most accepted the market-place economy - an economic belief which exposed the working-class respectables to becoming co-opted into middle-class liberal capitalist ideology far more than their belief in improvement and the work ethic. Fourth, respectability was more an urban phenomenon - as was the Gladstonian Liberal party - and though respectables often felt ill at ease in the city, respectability was not as necessary in the country. Gentility was the rural reflection of the flux of class and caste. In the city, respectability not only measured status,
but also sought to protect people against the corruption of the Great Wen.¹

Notions of respectability flowed through the society, gathering new connotations and new strength. Because they were social ideas which assisted ambition and gave force and shape to personal and social identity, they were more contagious than intellectual ideas. Yet while they were used by social classes competing against each other for dominance, there were other values in the society which threatened and affronted the respectables of both classes and which forced them into alliance. Politically this uneasy alliance converged on the Liberal party. Brian Harrison has shown how the Temperance Movement, despite the existence of

¹Holyoake vividly depicted the cultural gulf that separated a man like himself from the rural poor in an account of a visit to the Owenite commune, Harmony Hall, Queenwood, in 1843, when he was forced to stay over night at the nearby village of Stockbridge. 'At last, regular Egyptian darkness - such as could be felt - set in, but where Stockbridge lay, whether near or far, on hill or in hollow, I knew not. At last, feeling my way with my umbrella, I ran against something that proved to be a ploughman, from whom I learned that I was on the verge of the village, that I must "turn by the Ship, ask for the Queen's Head, and tell Stone that I was one of the Zozialites", and I would be all right. There I found a pretty, kind creature of a landlady, and by half-past seven I was engaged with toast and tea, and listening to the song of one of those organized fungi which seem to vegetate about Stockbridge in the shape of farm labourers.

In those days there were no village reading rooms. Hetherington's Poor Man's Guardian had never been heard of in Stockbridge. The company I was in reached the highest point of their existence with a mug of beer and a song. There was no assembly in the Queen's Head of long pipes and village philosophers such as George Eliot has depicted in 'Silas Marner'. One of the Stockbridge zoophytes was singing, for the amusement of his companions, a song, of which the best applauded couplet was -

If I had a wife wot blowed me up, I'd get a gal and make her jalus.

Had these lines come upon them with the novelty of originality, the delight they caused could not have been more spontaneous....This was the high water mark of intellectuality to which the parson and the squire had brought the farm labourers of Stockbridge.' Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, Vol. I, pp.199-200.
teetotal Tories and Liberal brewers, moved into the ambience of the Liberal Party in the early 1870s.¹ This alliance, like that of the respectable working men, was not necessarily welcomed by the leaders of the party, and considering Disraeli's eye for a quick vote, perhaps not politically necessary. But draw together they did, in their own minds, to resist a metaphorical torrent of 'gin and beer'.

It is essential to emphasise that this is the story of the role of respectability in politics. It was a minor factor among those determining the issues and conflicts of the times. Nevertheless the deliberate use of respectability in the 1867 Reform agitation and in the establishment of the New Model unions did bring many working-class radicals closer to the moral world of at least those middle-class people inspired by the middle-class moralising mission.

To show the uneasiness of the alliance near the beginning, it is worth examining the range of opinions expressed at a conference on 'Capital and Labour' in Nottingham in 1874. W.G. Ward organized seven nights' discussion between 'Capitalists, Trades' Unionists, Representative Workmen, and others' for the local Liberal party. Here was the ideal of a dialogue between the respectables of all classes in which civilized men should be able to discuss their differences rationally and arrive at a compromise. Mr Hart, an employer, lauded the virtues and inevitable rewards of 'self-improvement, industry, perseverance and economy'. But Mr Richard Lamb of the Amalgamated Society of Operative Tailors expressed grave doubts about the moral worth of being a self-made man: 'For example, a man might possibly do it by cringing to those placed above him, though for his own part he would not like to secure personal advancement at the sacrifice of self-respect.'² A lacemaker was incensed by the assertion of Mr Hancock 'that a twisthand had admitted to him that five out of six men with whom he had worked were not worth their

¹Brian Harrison, op.cit., pp.279-96.
salt'. The lacemaker dismissed this as untrue of workingmen, and wondered whether it really should be applied to a large number of employers.\(^1\) The local president of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, Mr Chetwin, was not given to deference:

[The working man] had no chance of escaping from the iron heel of oppression, for what could he do singlehanded against a combination of employers? But the time was fast approaching when not only would he be able to demand a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, but would also have the means to obtain it. (Hear, Hear)\(^2\)

There were working men who saw no contradiction in the ideal of self-betterment for the working classes in a capitalist society. A Mr Woodhead was loudly applauded for his speech defending the policies of his two-year-old Independent Order of Engineers and Machinists. It admitted members of the same trade on grades of respectability and skill and provided inducements to self-improvement with rates of pay and union privileges according to the union's assessment of a member's respectability.\(^3\) Neither were many there hostile to property as such. Rather they directed their criticisms at the immoral use of capital. A former A.S.E. member, Mr William Stuart, stated that working men 'did not object to capital taking its share of the wealth, but objected to it taking all the wealth, whilst it left labour a bare existence'.\(^4\) Another non-unionist proclaimed the 'primary duty' of capital and labour was 'to frankly acknowledge the most perfect freedom of both. The men must be free, and the masters also; and the joint rights of both must be built on security and property. If the rights of either were violated, then production and distribution would be languishing or partially suspended.'\(^5\) This one conference reveals the confusion among respectable working men about

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\(^{1}\)Ibid., pp.104-5.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., p.53.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., p.96.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., p.25.

\(^{5}\)Ibid., p.41.
the conflict between Capital and Labour. There were working men who echoed the values of the bourgeois capitalist society, but there were others who saw an irreconcilable conflict between Capital and Labour and were hostile to both Capitalism and to many of the social values it celebrated.

It is not sufficient to claim as have both Trygve Tholfsen and J.F.C. Harrison that in the post-Reform era the respectable working-class leadership lost its earlier cultural resistance to the dominant values of bourgeois society.¹ The situation was more complex than this. The working-class respectables' rhetoric often closely resembled that of the middle-class values, but the intentions were not always the same. There was cultural resistance by not a few respectables, but the absence of Marxist ideology in the 1870s has led historians to under-estimate working men's hostility to Capital. It is a post factum judgement of history that they should have been Marxists, and an improper one. The fact was that there were few Marxists in the 1870s and Marx was unknown outside the circles of London radicalism of the International Working Men's Association and the movements to support Continental revolutionaries.² If they appeared to being living a contradiction by sustaining diatribes against capital in their trade unions and simultaneously promoting ideals of respectability, as Tholfsen suggests, then this is doing many trade union leaders an injustice.³ The point was that however hostile they were to Capital, they could see no way of confronting it other than through strong trade unions. Equally, believing in respectability and practising it had helped turn many of them into political men. By detaching the ideal of respectability from the possession of capital above a regular wage,

²Two excellent studies of the failure of Marxism to take hold in English working-class politics at this time are: Adam B. Ulam, The Unfinished Revolution (New York, 1960) and Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement (London, 1965).
³Tholfsen, op.cit., pp.70-1.
respectable radicals had made a step towards social equality. Moreover, believing in the work-ethic did not always imply support for the capitalist system.

As middle-class men of conscience spoke of the moral sickness of society, so did working-class writers with more conviction. An Artisan found Fraser's Magazine willing to publish an article in 1873 in which he argued that since the disintegration of the Feudal ties between master and man, class strife was inevitable and that trades unions were the working classes' only resource in this uneven combat. 'We contend, then, for the infusion of a moral element into business relations, into business science and philosophy.'

The Carpenters' and Joiners' Short Time movement threw down this ultimatum in 1872: 'If reason and kindly feelings exist on the part of employers instead of a haughty reserve, no disruption between capital and labour need take place, but in the absence of redress the workman cannot be expected to throw aside the only powerful weapon that combined capital and modern law have been unable to snatch from our hands.'

Holyoake, by no means a politically naive man, believed of the Co-operative movement that: 'Their main desire was not merely to improve their chances, but to improve the morality of industry.' Hence when working men talked of becoming 'labouring capitalists' they did not necessarily mean the same thing as did middle-class advocates of co-operation. The Hammersmith branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners declared in a broadside on co-operative production in 1879:

Capital in the hands of sordid, selfish and grasping individuals or companies, has no conscience and is often the instrument of injustice and despotism. But change the relations of Capital and Labour, and make working men labouring capitalists, and the

1 'Present Aspects of the Labour Question' by an Artisan, Fraser's Magazine, May 1873, p.604.


3 G.J. Holyoake, 'A Dead Movement which learned to live again', Contemporary Review, August 1876, p.452.
motives to action become wholly changed and transformed. Men finding their interest involved in the success of their own work become their own masters.\(^1\)

The working-class respectables' mission to moralise all the social and economic relations between men and women at times evinced religiosity. John Buckley, the carpenter, turned village politician and Anti-Corn Law activist, remembered of lonely radical days that: 'The poverty-stricken condition of the labourer, the ignorance and selfishness of his employer, the utter absence of all humanity or sympathy with his struggle for existence against what appeared to be hopeless conditions, supported me and comforted me with the belief that I was doing a religious work, as holy in the sight of God as any missionary.'\(^2\) So many respectable radicals had had their first experience of activism and idealism in the Chapel that it left them susceptible to romantic visions of a new moral world. Especially in London, contact with Continental revolutionaries exposed many of them to the influence of Mazzini. Linton and W.E. Adams were enthralled by Mazzini, his intense righteousness filling the vacuum created by political defeats and frustration.\(^3\) Mazzini reinforced the already high-flown sense of moral mission that animated so many radicals. The first address of the International Working Men's Association, when it was still the brainchild of the respectables - Cremer, Howell, Applegarth, Odger - contained notions that were pure Mazzini: 'No rights without duties, no duties without rights.'\(^4\) But others discerned the futility of Mazzinianism and warned his dazzled admirers against losing sight of their real aims. Joseph Barker considered him a 'very foolish man' who could

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\(^3\)F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan, pp.51-121.

\(^4\)1865 I.W.M.A.'s Address to the Workmen of Europe, quoted in H. Evans, Sir Randal Cremer, op.cit., p.32.
do great mischief. The ever-realistic Holyoake attacked Mazzini's proposition that Property had duties as well as rights for: 'Property has no intrinsic duties of charity. It is the poor who have duties, not the rich; and it is the first duty of the industrious poor not to be poor.'

Mazzini gave further force to Republicanism in London radical circles and assisted in detaching it from realpolitik. The impact of the Paris Commune seems to have fatally weakened English republicanism, but many radical working men still liked to call themselves 'republicans'. Thomas Wright caught the ideological confusion of the radicals in Our New Masters when he claimed that 'the creed of the political section of the working classes is at present republicanism, or ultra-liberalism broadening down towards republicanism'. Bradlaugh was lecturing to 2,000 people a week in 1872 in the new Hall of Science Club and Institute as a republican spokesman. 'Republican' was a vague label for people who were hostile to aristocratic privilege - that is most respectable working-class people and had been so since the 1790s. Sir Charles Dilke capitalised on this hostility in Chelsea and secured a loyal popular following by posing as a 'republican', which in the 1870s meant abolition of the Civil List and reform of the House of Lords. Thomas Wright believed that there were four schools of thought

1 Barker's Review, Reply to correspondent, 18 October 1862, p.97.
2 G.J. Holyoake, 'State Socialism', Nineteenth Century, June 1879, p.1115.
3 Thomas Wright, Our New Masters, op.cit., p.11.
4 Republicanism in London (Pamphlet reprint of article from the Scotsman, 9 February 1872, London, 1872), p.2. 'Let us take last night as an example. It is seven o'clock, and the hall which was full a quarter of an hour ago, is now getting packed. The audience is of a peculiarly mixed order. There are hundreds of the class known as working men, but there are still more whose appearance denotes them to be small-shopkeepers and warehouse employés, with a sprinkling of clerks of various kinds. Nor is the female sex altogether unrepresented.'
among radical working men: the first argued that until there was a republic, nothing could be achieved; the second saw Capital as their enemy; the third maintained that once there were workingmen in Parliament, reforms could be obtained; the fourth advocated the formation of an effective Internationale.¹

The concern for liberty, the penchant for viewing politics as a moral mission, the hostility towards traditional privilege - all combined to render the working-class respectables more sympathetic to the Liberal party than to the Tory party. For men with a moral vision, Gladstone was often a second-best to a Mazzini. For Holyoake, humane and realistic, the Liberal party under Gladstone was the only party which both upheld many of the values of the working-class radical cause and had the chance of power. Holyoake was probably the best spokesman of radical-liberalism of the 1870s and early 1880s and one of the best political journalists of the period. His working-class origin condemned him to being a marginal and little-heeded man in his own time, and his Liberalism has excluded him from the canon of Labour history.

In 1879 he published an attack on State Socialism in Nineteenth Century which was probably the finest, and certainly the wittiest, defence of radical liberalism of his time. He linked three movements - Marxism, Comtism and Toryism - as tending towards the same evil - the destruction of individuality and manly independence by the slavery of the masses to the despotism of the few. 'State Socialism is one of the diseases of despotism, whose policy is to encourage dependence. Only free men who intelligently understand freedom, are prepared to owe their prosperity to themselves and elect to do it, regard State dependence as the malady of subjection or incompetence.'² He despaired at the political naivety of the Gotha programme, warning the socialists that rulers like Louis Napoleon and Bismarck had

¹Thomas Wright, op.cit., pp.11-12.
²G.J. Holyoake, 'State Socialism', op.cit., p.1114.
no fear of Socialism when the people had no power.\(^1\) Holyoake was aware of the despotism of trade, but feared that socialist experiments which relied on state aid would become the prisoners of the state. He believed that the possession of political freedom and independent manliness, combined with a co-operative movement for both production and distribution independent of the state, was the only path to social equality.\(^2\) 'Intelligent artisans now understand that the two leading aims of the working classes should be independence and equality.'\(^3\) Toryism, he reminded his readers, sought 'to impress the people with the belief that they owe everything to their superiors'.\(^4\) But he was truly ahead of his time in the third form of despotism he attacked - the despotism of the meritocracy:

The Comtists are influential because they are on the side of despotic rulers. They are the secret force who work for Absolutism in the name of Humanity. They intend to rule well, but it is ruling which they intend; nor peradventure do they care much for the working class except as persons to be ruled. The number of persons in all parties willing to rule others is much greater than is supposed. The air of the State is always full of Political and Social Cuckoos, who lay the eggs of their self-importance in the nests of any party likely to hatch them.\(^5\)

Holyoake spoke as a blocked respectable man of his time. His exclusion from power had denied him the freedom to achieve the place in society his talents deserved. Hostility towards authority rather than anger at poverty had made him a radical. He believed that the masses were poor because they had no power in the community and no power over the direction of their own lives. But he under-estimated the power and tenacity of capitalism, and like most self-made men, over-estimated the capacity of others to help themselves.

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1 Ibid., p.1117.
2 Ibid., pp.1118-9.
3 Ibid., p.1118.
4 Ibid., p.1116.
5 Loc.cit.
He was more realistic than many of his fellow respectable radicals about the immediate possibilities of moral reform, but he lived to see his Co-operative dream fail both as an economic venture and as a reforming agency.

As the working-class and middle-class missions were finding a greater community of sentiment, more significantly the working-class respectables were beginning to participate in public life in the 1870s. Trade union leaders began to have access to parliamentarians and nurse hopes of parliamentary seats, and working-class writers began to appear in the received press. In the 1870s there was a sudden flowering of working-class writing. The appearance of more sympathetic periodicals like *The Contemporary Review* and *Nineteenth Century* helped working men to get into print, but apart from *Blackwood's*, all the periodicals began to run their articles. Thomas Wright published *Our New Masters* in 1873, using Robert Lowe's bitter catch-cry from the Reform crisis as the title. A collection of articles which had appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* and *The Contemporary Review*, he now could publish the book without a pseudonym. He set out to correct many of the misapprehensions about the working classes which had arisen out of the public interest in the poor aroused by the Reform Act.¹ Some Chartists were becoming almost 'respectable', especially men like Henry Vincent and Thomas Cooper.² Joseph Arch and Thomas Burt were lionised as respectable working-class heroes. One writer believed that Burt personified the respectability of his fellow miners in Northumberland, where Wesleyan Methodism had lifted them above the condition of their depraved


² William Dorling, *Henry Vincent: A Biographical Sketch with a preface by Mrs. Vincent* (London, 1879), passim. The *London Quarterly Review* called Thomas Cooper 'this thorough Englishman' in its review of his autobiography in July 1872 (p.452). 'In spite of the prejudice to which we have referred, and the pleasure we confess we should have felt in indulging it, - for we have always considered the typical Chartist as almost ferae naturnae, - a smile has mantled upon our stern, judicial face as we have read the book from the first page to the last.' (p.446).
brethren in other counties and brought them 'within the pale of human civilization'. But if some members of 'civilised society' believed that their mission to civilize the poor was bearing fruit, there were a few spokesmen who believed that the working-class respectables had begun to civilize the classes above them. Goldwin Smith was arguing by 1873 that the great gift of the Labour movement had been to create a middle-class social conscience so that 'the religion of privilege has lost its power to awe or control, and if society wishes to rest on a safe foundation, it must show that it is at least trying to be just'.

As the common frame of sentiment grew, despite the persistence of class tension, the shape of the politics between 1868 and 1880 helped draw the working-class respectables into uneasy alliance with the middle-class respectables. First the working-class respectables and the Liberal party needed each other. George Howell has been criticised for precipitating the Reform League into an alliance with the Liberal party without realising that the party needed the working-class movement as well. But the Reform League was in debt, the unions needed a party which would pass favourable legislation, and Howell, terrified of having to return to bricklaying, was out of a job. The subsequent indifference to Howell's schemes for a grass-roots party organization based on the Reform League, suggests that the official Liberals did not feel that they really needed the working men. They had their grudging loyalty anyway, as Thomas Wright pointed out.

But as the Temperance Movement by 1873 felt that the Gladstonian Liberal party was now safe for it to ally itself with, other moral causes became associated in the public mind with the temper of the Liberal party. The open alignment of

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4Thomas Wright, op.cit., p.10.
the forces of Temperance with Liberalism and the image of the Tory party as the Drink party, bribing working men with beer to vote, drew moral middle-class people and respectable working men into common horror at the spectacle of electoral corruption which destroyed independence. In the Contagious Diseases Acts agitation, working-class respectables provided the most loyal popular support for the Repealers, finding again common cause against aristocratic vice and the sexual exploitation of working-class women.\(^1\) Disraeli, despite his indifference to the Conservative Working Men's Association, was making as good a bid for the working man's vote in his policies, but policies were not the point.\(^2\) Toryism came to represent to the respectables all that which could undermine what they had by now precariously won: it meant deference, it was indifferent to respectability, it was war-mongering - above all, it appealed to the irrational, as yet unreformed side of the working-class voter.

The defeat of Gladstone in 1874 was a moment of deep despair, especially for the radicals who saw a Tory government returned in spite of the secret ballot. The Drink Question did not decide the election, but what is significant is the readiness to which the respectables sprang to believing that Gladstone had been brought down in a 'torrent of gin and beer'. The Liberal South London Press wrote after polling day: 'Colourless in tone as the election has been in the main, South London has been brightened up a little here and there. The public houses have broken out in a complete Conservative eruption....England has known a Republican Parliament: a Publican Parliament was the novelty

\[^1\]Ann Stafford, op.cit., passim; F.B. Smith, 'Ethics and Disease....', op.cit., passim; Glen Petrie, A Singular Iniquity (London, 1971), passim.

reserved for 1874. The Westminster Review equally
reflected this siege mentality, seeing the catastrophe as
'The Revolt of the Residuum'. Disillusioned and defensive,
the working-class respectables found themselves moving
closer to the middle-class respectables against the common
enemy of Tory mob politics. Thomas Wright underlined the
growing contempt of the political working men for those who
were 'less than dutiful and deserving members of their
general brotherhood'.

Looming in the background of parliamentary politics was
the Tichborne Cause. This was the true revolt of the
residuum - the revolt of unrespectable England against
respectable England. A 'paradigm of populism', it too
expressed inchoate hostility towards traditional authority -
the state, the aristocracy, medicine, the law, the
authority of reason. John Vincent is right to call the
nineteenth century a more political age than ours. Politics
was free public entertainment, and the Tichborne martyr with
his advocate Kenealy, was an utterly compelling performance.
It was Gothic melodrama, a story out of The Family Herald
come to life. But if the Tichborne mob was anti-authority,
respectable radicals wanted no part in it. Its irrationality
and utter futility appalled them. Their faith in the
rationality of man and the improvability of society compelled
them further into the ambience of middle-class respectability.
If many old Chartists and Radicals had doubted the political
loyalty and sensibilities of the residuum before, they
completely lost faith in them now. Anti-vaccinationists,
equally people concerned about individual freedom, were also
beyond the pale of respectable politics in their disregard

1 South London Press, 7 February 1874; H.J. Hanham, Elections
and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and

2 'The Revolt of the Residuum', Westminster Review, October
1874, pp.299-327.

3 Thomas Wright, op.cit., p.12.

4 O.M. Roe, Kenealy and the Tichborne Cause: A Study in
Mid-Victorian Populism (M.U.P., 1974), pp.47, 56, 91-2, and
passim.
for party politics and rational discussion. When a Liberal by-election meeting in Lambeth in 1878 was ruined by persistent heckling from Tichborne supporters and Anti-vaccinationists, the South London Press thundered 'there is still a residuum unworthy of voting'.¹ Holyoake was one who clearly saw what was happening and pleaded with the London radicals to abandon their 'captious radicalism' and impatience for immediate reform so that the Liberal party would have the support of all reasonable men against the forces of unreason and reaction.²

Gladstone, in a stroke of political genius, turned the tide of politics with the Bulgarian Horrors agitation. The Horrors agitation was near populism - a cause which had nothing to do with working men's needs and interests apart from the sophisticated radicals' hatred of foreign despotism. It was a grand moral cause, however, and it was theatrical. Gladstone managed to make conscience politics popular and drew some of the populist energy of the Tichborne movement back within the pale of legitimate party politics. As early as 1876 the South London Press believed that already the Anti-Vaccinationists had 'partaken of the general moral transformation'.³ The respectables sought somehow to make the Horrors relevant to the real problems of class tension and poverty in England. For instance in 1876 the Contemporary Review invited George Potter and George Howell to write articles on 'Working Men and the Eastern Question'. Potter was sharp enough to commence with a disclaimer that the Eastern Question was a working-class problem and went on to a general discussion of the debate. Howell was taken in and meandered through a muddled attempt to reveal the unique working-class interest in the Horrors. He concluded, with obvious relief, with a homily on the virtues of trade

¹South London Press, 12 January 1878.
³South London Press, 23 September 1876.
unionism. It was not a working-class question, but the Bulgarian agitation confirmed Gladstone's national prestige as a moral crusader.

It is significant the extent to which the Eastern Question still occupied the political stage in London during the 1880 election. The actual voting power of working men in London is dubious. In Bermondsey for example the failure of the vestry clerks to register new voters meant that only 8,887 men were enrolled in 1880 when there should have been 13,000. Working-class voters were still obstructed at polling booths and public houses over-liberal with their free beer. What was discernible was the increasing enthusiasm for party politics. In Southwark, where George Odger had used his following to split the Liberal-Radical vote in the past, his death now ensured the victory of the official Liberal Thorold Rogers. The Peabody Buildings in Blackfriars Road, which had scarcely a bill anywhere in 1874, were alive with Orange and Blue - the Liberals outnumbering the Tories two to one. Most of all, the new Liberal enthusiasm gave a much needed fillip to the growing working men's clubs movement. The clubs were generally radical, but at elections they decided to work for the Liberals. The co-operation between radical clubmen and middle-class Liberal Associations was the uneasy alliance at work. But the growth of the clubs also marked the beginning of the end of the alliance. The alliance was still there to return Gladstone in 1885, and the London radical working men did not desert him over Home Rule - the last of the great moral causes. But in metropolitan clubland new forms of organization were developing, new leaders were being trained

2 See Chapter VII, part ii.
3 South London Press, 20 March 1880.
4 Ibid., 7 February 1974, 27 October 1877, 13 March 1880.
5 Ibid., 3 April 1880.
6 See Chapters VII, part ii.
and new ideas were being discussed which were to give the respectable working men new political weapons. The alliance of sentiment and prejudice, strengthened by the common hostility of the working-class and middle-class respectables towards a Tory party which stood for the social status quo and the moral status quo, was destined to being temporary and the ensuing decade saw its demise.

In 1885 Benjamin Wilson closed his political career by organizing a dinner for his old Chartist comrades in Maude's Temperance Hotel Broad Street, Halifax. They joined together to thank Mr Gladstone for the Reform Act. The comrades celebrated having lived to see 'the realization of those things for which a comparatively weak and despised class they had struggled forty years ago; formerly persecuted and taunted as revolutionists and levellers, they were now freely acknowledged as law-abiding citizens not that they had changed their attitude but because the opinions for which they had suffered now prevailed'. The Halifax Courier was struck by the fact that 'Their humble origin nevertheless, the majority of those attending the meeting have become men of business and in some cases employers of labour, and a few by economy, industry, and temperance have secured a competency for their old age'.¹ But six months earlier at the Industrial Remuneration Conference in London a young respectable working man, John Burns, had set the acrimonious atmosphere of the Conference by leaping to his feet after the first paper given by Sir Thomas Brassey. Burns savaged Brassey: 'although he was a teetotaller, a Malthusian, an abstainer from tobacco and almost a vegetarian and a skilled artisan, he found it impossible to save money'. He was later sacked for attending the conference as a Social Democratic Federation delegate.²

¹Benjamin Wilson, op.cit., pp.39-40.
²Industrial Remuneration Conference: Report of the Proceedings and Papers: under the Presidency of Sir Charles Dilke, held at the Picadilly Hall, Picadilly, on the 28th, 29th and 30th January, 1885 (London, 1885); Justice, 7 February 1885, p.2.
If notions of respectability had been a defence against the demoralization of poverty and assisted survival and upward social mobility, they could not guarantee prosperity for the majority. This had always been the basic flaw in the ideal of working-class respectability. As a weapon against social and political exclusion and insignificance, it had been the first part of the radical armory to make its arguments felt by the ruling classes. But, while it had given individuals self-respect and assisted the working-class campaign for citizenship, it had not, and could not, improve the economic condition of the labouring poor. In the 1880s the ideal of improvement through respectability faltered in the face of continuing poverty and insecurity. The class hostilities, temporarily suppressed by the uneasy alliance, resurfaced. The public debate on the right ordering of society among respectables of all classes continued, but the ground had shifted. The quickened concern over the conflict between Capital and Labour of the 1870s grew more urgent. Middle-class reformers conceded more ground, and the self-doubt and anxiety of the decade over the condition of England promoted more adventurous experiments with co-operative production, profit-sharing and dialogue with working-class leaders. The fruition of the middle-class mission of the 1880s was a type of social conscience that drove Charles Booth to make his investigations of London life and labour. Among the working-class respectables, a new generation of leaders emerged. The old respectables, like Benjamin Wilson, felt satisfied with their life's work, and many of them, comfortable and successful, clung with the tenacity of old age and the self-righteousness of personal achievement to the ideals of their youth. But the young blocked men felt betrayed by the old respectables - Howell, Cremer, Burt, Holyoake. The new generation - Burns, Harry Quelch, Tom Mann, James Tims - by their acquaintance with Socialism broke the attachment of the radical respectables to the market-place economy, destroying the uneasy alliance and giving shape to a renewed and confident expression of working-class political anger.
The background to the debate on respectability and the working classes in the 1880s was the mounting anxiety of the moneyed classes at the presence of an equipped respectable working-class. This presence developed from the gradual incorporation of the respectable working class into the public world by the Reform Acts, the growth of effective trade unions given some measure of legal sanction and the confidence drawn from feeling respectable. Tories had been quick to take alarm at the uneasy alliance. L.J. Jennings castigated Gladstone for not hesitating 'to work skilfully upon the class jealousies and dislikes' of the working classes distressingly apparent in their papers and periodicals. But the trade unions provoked the greatest hostility. Army officer and journalist, W.G. Hamley fulminated in Blackwood's after the 1875 Act: 'By clever organization the associations of workmen have continued to outwit the law and to defy its general spirit, which undoubtedly intends that every man shall be at liberty to dispose of his own labour, if he chooses, irrespectively of the plans or interests of others.' While the trade unions proclaimed their respectability and moral benefit to the community at large, their antagonists accused them of the reverse - of undermining the old values of diligence and good workmanship and severing the bonds between master and man. R.H. Patterson expressed the greatest horror of all - trade unions were harming trade 'with their strikes, their shortened hours of labour, their diminished pride and conscientiousness in their work, and their want of education to see beyond immediate future profits and employment....' Hamley and Patterson, as two of the most prominent Tory writers of the day, perceived even


greater dangers in the 'steady advance of Democracy'.
Hamley regretted the passing of the old order when class
conflicts were resolved by force, for 'laws have been so
managed by this time, and uprisings have been so cunningly
ordered, that the country may be made to suffer cruelly for
the benefit of a particular class....'¹ Patterson in 1880
wrote of the enormous changes now visible after nearly a
century of industrialisation:

Thanks to the spread of education, the gulf
between our upper and lower classes is being
narrowed intellectually; but in some respects
the Chasm is growing much wider. Unavoidably
the working classes live more by themselves
than formerly. In the large towns they have
their own quarters, where they mingle only
with one another. At their work, too, as well
as in their homes, their isolation is
increasing. Industry is becoming more and more
concentrated in large establishments, where
the numbers of the operatives increase, while
the employers remain as units. Hence personal
contact and intercourse between employers and
work people is unavoidably lessened - in most
cases extinguished.²

As respectability had spread among the London working
classes, the 'intellectual gulf' had in some respects
narrowed between the upper and lower classes. But the
residuum were left further behind. The transformation of
central London into a business district and the decline of
the East End trades exacerbated the poverty and cultural
isolation of the casual poor. Andrew Mearns in The Bitter
Cry of Outcast London wrote: 'Whilst we have been building
our churches and solacing ourselves with our religion and
dreaming that the millenium is coming, the poor have been
growing poorer, the wretched more miserable, and the immoral
more corrupt; the gulf has been daily widening which
separated the lowest classes of the community from our
churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilization.'³

¹Hamley, op.cit., p.682.
²R.H. Patterson, 'The Two Nations and the Commonwealth',
The British Quarterly Review, July 1880, p.10.
³Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London (London,
1883), p.2; see also John Milson Rhodes, Pauperism, Past and
But Patterson was not the only Tory writer to see dangers lurking in the presence of the growing respectable working class. Common respectability created a bond between a carpenter in Camberwell, a railwayman in Camden Town and a ladies' shoemaker in Marylebone. Respectability celebrated independence, self-reliance and self-respect and equipped the respectable man for taking his destiny into his own hands. In 1873 Richard F. Littledale in 1872 anticipated a growing fear:

...there are vast tracts of sordid suburb about London, especially Kentish Town, Poplar and Camberwell, where thousands upon thousands of dull, hideous, unwholesome houses, in their dreary uniformity, typify the dull, dreary, unlovely and stifled lives led by people who, though poor, have not an actual struggle to keep the wolf from the door, and who might, under more favourable circumstances, have some enjoyment of existence. Nor are they unconscious of their hard lot. One of the most ominous growls of that coming earthquake of revolution, which I confess I apprehend, is that series of questions which thinking men amongst skilled artisans, shopmen and others of the same grade are beginning to ask themselves and others - 'Why should poverty bar me from every outlet?... Why do I have nothing better than the Workhouse to look forward to in my old age? Why are my children more likely to sink beneath my present level than to rise above it? Why do all the lovely and pleasant things find their way into the great sieve of the rich man, while not one becomes the capture of my single line?'

The growth of the city and the new industrial state aggravated anxiety at the loss of the face to face relationships between rich and poor which ensured deference and containment. The working classes may have been becoming more respectable, but they were believed to be also less respectful. J.M. Capes had lamented in 1871 the 'excessive development of individual self-assertion which is leading us on to social anarchy and democratic levelling'.

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2 J.M. Capes, 'Social Forces of the Hour', *ibid.*, December 1871, p.543.
perennial Victorian concern with the 'servant problem' reflected both status anxiety and social fear - for in the complaints about the cultural independence and want of deference of the new servant class, the moneyed classes expressed their fear of the working-class people they knew most about. The suppression of the human personality demanded by Victorian notions of domestic service meant that not a few servants fell short of the faceless deference expected of them.1 But it was W.G. Hamley who made one of the most explicit statements of middle-class status anxiety and unease at the emergence of a confident and equipped urban working class:

The British workman is before us in a new character today. He is no longer a subject for the pity or the assistance of people of the estate in which I was born - that is, the people of narrow fixed incomes. He has by his assertion of himself made persons such as my parents were, objects of pity, and put them to their shifts to pay their way at all in the times which he has created. He no longer wants Mr. Dickens or any other philanthropist to draw his merits into the daylight or to demand from other classes of the community a kind consideration of him. He can make himself heard and felt.2

In Hamley's exaggerations there was some truth. Even the periodical press was not safe by the 1880s from working-class writers demanding social justice. In 1884 James G. Hutchinson attacked Giffen and Porter's claims for the progress of the working classes in Nineteenth Century. After quoting food and clothing prices and rents in reply to a question on how the working classes survived, he asserted: 'The only mystery about the business is self-denial.'3 Undoubtedly a respectable man, Hutchinson wrote of his envy


2Hamley, op.cit., p.681.

3James G. Hutchinson, 'Progress and Wages', Nineteenth Century, October 1884, p.635.
of the rich - their security, comfort and above all, their books.¹ That same year, Newcomen Groves wrote in the Westminster Review of 'the many signs of discontent which have appeared of late years among the working classes throughout the world', and turned, as were some concerned moneyed people, to the idea of co-operation as the means of securing property and order while abolishing poverty.²

One of the most significant consequences of the mounting disquiet over the condition of England was the last experiment of the uneasy alliance - the co-production and profit-sharing movement. Humane employers like A.W. Robertson, found themselves drawn by their fear of growing working-class confidence to look to profit-sharing to diminish class conflict. At a conference on profit-sharing organised by F.W. Shorey, Robertson said: 'The gulf between master and man appears to me to be widening, and I fear it will continue to do so as long as trade unionism exists. I hope that, with our increased educational system men will become better educated and more enlightened, so that they will then see that it is to their advantage to work amicably with their employers. This will be the best and most speedy means of bringing about that time when Mr. Shorey's scheme will work.'³

The wealthy advocates of co-operation believed that they could recreate the organic society they feared had gone. Sedley Taylor, the Cambridge musicologist wrote in 1884: 'A good participating house is animated by a remarkable spirit of unity and industrial peace...The interests of the two great agents in industrial production - capital and labour - are practically fused together and made one.'⁴

¹Ibid., pp.635-6.
²Newcomen Groves, 'Co-operation or Spoliation', Westminster Review, April 1884, p.430.
³F.W. Shorey, Capital and Labour: Being a Paper read before the Session 1890-1 of the Institute of Marine Engineers.... (Including reports of discussions), (Stratford, 1891), pp.13-4.
political economists of the day were equally drawn to the concept of reconciling the conflict between capital and labour by co-operation. Jevons recommended co-operative enterprises on the grounds that the gradual accumulation of capital in the business mitigated the class hostility of the employees: 'Half the bitterness of trade union disputes arises from the anti-capitalist feelings of the workman who believes that by the nature of things he is cut off from the possession of capital, and even looks upon it as contrary to the esprit de corps of his order to own capital.'

Sensitive critics of their times believed that co-operation could moralise the relations between men. Henry R. Bailey, despite the failure of most non-retail co-operative ventures, claimed in 1894 that: 'It has diminished the corruption of commercial exigency. It has made more manifest the market value of common honesty. It has produced a basis of Christian conduct in the business concern of men.'

T.W. Bushill entreated employers in 1893 to set their workmen a good example by adopting a simple mode of living, by being more courteous and respectful to their employees, by taking a deep interest in industrial problems and by treating union officials with greater respect and trust.

R.H. Patterson even believed that if the spirit of association, which animated the trade unions, permeated all parts of society, then 'the Red Spectre that looms over Europe would disappear'.

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1 Quoted in A.H.D. Acland and Benjamin Jones, Working Men Co-operators: What they have done and what they are doing.... (London, 1884), p.15.


3 T.W. Bushill, Profit-Sharing and the Labour Question: with an Introduction by Sedley Taylor (London, 1893), pp.174-83. Bushill was testifying from his experiments in his firm at Coventry. He confessed that during 'the Dock strike in 1889, the fact that some of the strike leaders were, if not teetotallers, outspoken advocates of temperance, encouraged many others besides myself, who found the strike a big nuisance to our businesses, to send subscriptions to Mr. John Burns.' (p.168).

Typical of the Co-operation propaganda of the 1880s was *Working Men Co-operators*, into its sixth thousand edition by 1884. A piece of 'co-operation' itself, it was assembled by A.H.D. Acland, the Senior Bursar of Balliol, and Benjamin Jones, a working man who had risen to be a brainworker through the Co-operative movement. At this time he was honorary secretary to the Southern Section of the Central Co-operative Board.\(^1\) It was a well-organised little book, full of bold headings and written with deliberate simplicity. It taught that Co-operation dissolved class tension. Not only could it control prices, cut out middlemen and give hope to the working classes by gradually reducing inequalities of wealth, but also in its openness and willingness to enlist the aid of the wealthy, co-operation could mollify class antagonism as rich and poor worked side by side. It could train working men in self-government, self-reliance and self-control; teach them business and 'economical relations'; and by granting them capital, destroy the hostility towards capital mounting in the trade union movement. Labouring capitalists would not only be better off, but also better comprehend the interests and rights of big capitalists.\(^2\) In 1890 William Nuttall echoed these hopes, but looked more critically at the past record of co-operative ventures. He deplored the loss of idealism in the successful enterprises — especially the two


\(^2\)Acland and Jones, op.cit., pp.131-3.
large wholesale societies where the management excluded the members from policy-making and were mean with their profit sharing. He warned that co-operative enterprises in the future should be directed by the working-class shareholders and avoid competing against each other: 'We have already enough of classes, and ought not to create others.' But if co-operative ventures were to succeed financially they found no option but to lower themselves to the normal business practices of the competitive outside world. Often their idealism faltered in the face of individual ambition and the managers' desire for power.

Liberal men saw Co-operation as an antidote to Communism. Another Cambridge man, Brooke Foss Westcott, then Bishop of Durham, argued that Co-operation stimulated production and promoted thrift, whereas Communism substituted self-reliance for state-reliance and tyranny. 'Communism aims at converting the community into one gigantic workshop, which is at the same time one gigantic nursery.' The idealism of the Co-operative movement was as much a yearning for a society without class conflict and immoral competition between men, as it was a reaction against industrialisation itself. The 'one gigantic workshop' conveyed fears of the loss of identity and intimate human bonds of rural life. The co-production vision was of the small, face-to-face workplace where men's spontaneous sociability could flourish without the restraints of class and caste and the oppressions of unmanageable numbers. Many of the ideals of respectability had celebrated the liberation of the individual personality and co-operation was seen as the means of combating the immoral competitiveness of men while preserving individuality. Blocked working men, in a fluid,

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1 William Nuttall, Co-operation: Distributive and Productive (Melbourne, 1890), pp.13, 14.


3 Quoted in Co-operation or Spoliation by Newcomen Groves, a reprint of his article in the Westminster Review (London, 1884), pp.10-11.
co-operative, organic society could feel that ambition was safe, that character was more important than class and that decisions and actions were democratic. The co-operative ideal deeply appealed to men who felt that their frustration and poverty arose from the increasing social pluralism of English society created by the hardening of the barriers of class and caste. For concerned employers too, the hardening of class lines and the growing collective confidence of workers in their trade unions seemed to be undermining the function of the employer as a director and guide of men. If reactionaries longed for the organic society of ranks and orders held together by deference and dependence, some progressives hoped for a co-operative organic society which could reconcile the conflict between capital and labour and abolish poverty while preserving the connectedness between men which made for community and stability. The co-operative ideal was a compelling ideal

1 Hierarchies of caste were strictly observed in the Labour Association for Promoting Co-operative Production. The office bearers for 1889 were arranged in order of class origin in a happy model of the organic co-operative world. The men who had been working-class start with A.K. Connell, and their alphabetical descent is halted only by the presence of a statutory woman.

President
F. Maddison M.P.
Hon. Treasurer
Aneurin Williams

Hon. Legal Advisor
J.M. Ludlow C.B.
Hon. Secretary
Henry Vivian

Vice Presidents
The Duke of Westminster
Earl Grey
The Earl of Stamford
Lord Wantage
The Bishop of Durham
The Bishop of Ripon
The Hon. T.A. Brassey
F.A. Channing M.P.

Thomas Blandford
William Campbell
Hodgson Pratt
A.K. Connell
E.O. Greening
Joseph Greenwood
G.J. Holyoake
Miss H. Madden

and Professor Marshall
(From the cover of Henry Vivian, Partnership of Capital and Labour as a Solution of the Conflict Between Them (London, 1898).
in the reformers' mission to the working-class respectables, and the working-men who threw their hopes and energies into the co-operative movement could be said to have been in some respects co-opted into middle-class values. But the middle-class co-operators were themselves untypical of their class, and if they hoped to paralyse the Labour movement, they tried to do so with proposals which could harm capitalism. To make society safe for capital, they were prepared to sacrifice some profitability. The debate over co-production and profit-sharing was one of the great civilizing movements of the Victorian age, but their abysmal failure demonstrated the extent of their departure from the practicalities of business life.

The working-class side of the movement was more interested in removing inequalities than in reconciling the labour to the interests of capital. Its educational programmes stressed class solidarity as the necessary means to emancipation: 'When working men are isolated and alone, they are weak. Where they and their money are associated together, they are strong.' Beatrice Potter was asked to write a syllabus of lectures for the movement in 1891, and in Lesson VI, 'A State Within A State' captured the separatist and egalitarian mood of the working-class leaders. Her outline ran:

Success of the Store as a rough measure of capacity of population for representative self-government. Co-operative movement represents the working-class as consumers: the Trade Union as producers....Robert Owen's co-operative system of industry partially realised by democratic co-operation and Trades Unionism. Elimination of profit and substitution of the salaried official for the profit maker through the store and the wholesale societies. Remuneration of the brainworker levelled down by co-operation; the wages of manual workers levelled up to a

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1 Central Co-operative Board, Outline of Lessons on Co-operation.... (Manchester, 1885), p.3. The syllabus emphasised that it was for use only by storekeepers, and not teachers from 'outside'.
point of 'efficient citizenship' by the Trades Union. Only the beginning of the end. 1

But the co-operative movement discovered that it could not compete. In 1891 Scottish Section of the Co-operative Union found itself with a strike of tailors in the Paisley Co-operative Manufacturing Society. The management could not pay the Union log of 32/- a week while capitalist employers paid 25/-. The Bakers' Union also complained that the co-operative stores in Scotland, instead of being the first to help them, were the first to encroach on Union hours. 2 George Thompson, a woollen and worsted mill owner in Huddersfield wrote to Robert Giffen at the Board of Trade of his difficulties in introducing co-operative production. The firm was founded by his father who had disliked 'new fangled whims'. As soon as the old man died, George Thompson set about co-production in 1887. Boycotted by his father's customers, he turned to the Scottish Co-operatives where he was barely able to recoup his losses. He launched a propaganda campaign aimed at his fellow businessmen with an address by the Bishop of Ripon. On luxurious paper, heavily decorated, it is an impressive document and the introduction is at pains to stress that such schemes are designed to 'avoid the recurrence of those disastrous disputes which so frequently disturb our industries'. 3 Thompson was more candid in his letter to Giffen, and his idealism, touching: 'I know that we did not exhibit a brilliant success from the commercial point of view, but I can say that there has already been a marked increase of interest and self-respect amongst our workers - my own work is now a pleasure and would be an intense one if only we could get a maximum of business - then we could show the scoffers what could be


2 Scottish Section of the Co-operative Union, Report of Inquiry by the.... (Manchester, 1891?), pp.3-12.

done.¹ The Hebden Bridge Fustian Manufacturing Society, founded in 1870, brought out a frank history in 1888 recounting its struggle to maintain co-operative ideals and working-class values. After three years members were speculating on shares, and two years later the committee of management tried to strike out the rule for the sharing of profits among the employees. But, the 'Society was saved. It was destined to do still more for the workers.'²

One of the most interesting experiments in profit-sharing occurred in London at the South Metropolitan Gas Company. The management held a meeting with the workmen and published the proceedings. These proceedings give us some working men's reactions to their employers and such schemes. The share in the profits was to be good, but the workmen had to relinquish their right to join a trade union. The Chairman of Directors, George Livesey, was frank: 'We want to give [the workman] a share in the profits earned by the company in order to purchase his interest as well as his labour.'³ Replying to a question from Robert Adams about whether the stokers would lose their bonus if forced to down tools by the union, Livesey stated: 'A man cannot have two masters;...and a man undertakes to serve his Company, the Company has to protect him in his duty, and if he chooses to leave us in the lurch, he must take the consequences.'⁴ It was to be industrial feudalism.

The inaugural meeting threw up a variety of ordinary working men's opinions. There was that familiar figure among the respectables, the compulsive orator Austin, who

¹Letter from George Thompson to Robert Giffen Esq. Board of Trade, 28 July 1890 (Kashnor Collection), p.4.  
³South Metropolitan Gas Company, Report of the Proceedings at the Interview Between the Directors and Representatives of the Workmen of the...who have signed Agreements under the Profit-Sharing Proposal at the Old Kent Road Works, on Thursday, November 21, 1889 (London, 1889), p.4.  
⁴Ibid., p.27.
after being interrupted by one of the directors with some indulgent flattery designed to keep him quiet, went on with:

My lines have fallen in pleasant places. Am I not entitled to lighten my labour? Will it not sweeten your path to see that the workmen realise that there is a community of feeling between us. I trust that it may not only be a growing community, but a community of interests, in which we shall all properly share.¹

Still undeterred, he concluded his oration with a long poem to stupendous applause. Another worker, Champion, believed in union, but not in the trade union, 'for men to agitate and lead men almost to common suicide'. The 'union' he wanted was to be between master and man, for although he had been suspicious when he first read the Company's document, he had now been convinced that this was a sincere attempt to bring about that 'proper' union.² An old trade unionist, William Matheson, admitted that many of the men thought that the scheme was 'a sop on the part of the Company to do away with their liberty'. He had always been a firm advocate of Combination while detesting strikes, for in 1874, he lost £3.0.0 in three weeks only to find that some of the loudest agitators were already back at work. After this experience, he advised the men to sign the document.³ Despite the duress of the open meeting, there was some cynicism at the 'bosses talk':

Chairman: ...you all know Shirley, the coke-dealer - at least a good many of you do; he was a stoker at Kent Road, and having saved £20 he bought a horse and cart, and now he is doing a large business. I believe he has fifteen or more carts now.

A Voice: We have not all got the same privilege. He had the privilege to come in and, he started on the coke; but you do not give everyone that privilege.

¹Ibid., p.14.

²Ibid., pp.24-5. Champion asked whether the workmen should persuade their friends to use gas and the Chairman was delighted with the idea.

³Ibid., p.23.
Chairman: We have given the same privilege to Chown quite lately; he saved money and bought a horse and cart and we told Mr Larkin to give him orders too.

A Voice: Let everyone have the same privilege.

Chairman: It is not everyone who can save £20 (Laughter). That is the privilege you most want, and that is what we want to give you.1

In 1898 Henry Vivian reviewed these three experiments in partnership between capital and labour. The Hebden Bridge co-operative had continued to live up to its ideals. Wm. Thompson and Son Pty. Ltd were highly praised for the purity of their motives and the real benefits now enjoyed by the workmen. Happily, the company had begun to prosper. As for the South Metropolitan Gas Company, the directors had honoured their agreement to the men, but Vivian regretted that the ban on trade union membership still existed.2

The co-production and profit-sharing movement of the 1880s and 1890s was one example of the way in which the ground of the debate had shifted from the problems of social recognition and opportunity, to the conflict between capital and labour. The uneasy alliance had begun to falter as the working-class respectables articulated more loudly their dissatisfaction with their continuing poverty. The most dramatic attempt at dialogue, the Industrial Remuneration Conference held in London in late January 1885, dissolved into rancour and disillusionment as the working-class delegates tore into the platitudes and false optimism of the upper-class speakers. Everyone who was anyone in the labour movement and the moneyed-class reform movement was there - from Brassey and Alfred Marshall to Dr C.R. Drysdale, the Malthusian and John Burns of the S.D.F.

Justice claimed, with some smugness, that it was Burns who swung the working-class delegates round to open class antagonism.3 But Burns was only one among many of the trade unionists and co-operators who condemned the false picture

1Ibid., p.6.
2Henry Vivian, Partnership of Capital and Labour, op.cit., pp.5-11.
3Justice, 7 February 1885, p.2.
of working-class wages and standards of living promulgated by the economic statisticians, Dudley Baxter, Leone Levi, Giffen. On the first day the Ironfounders' Society delegate demanded that the Conference acknowledge that 'the capitalists had grasped, in a most selfish and unscrupulous manner, nearly everything they could lay their hands on'. He attacked the aristocracy and the established church until the Chairman, unable to take any more, called a point of order: 'I would...take this opportunity of asking Mr. Brevitt to avoid making anything that may look like attacks upon particular classes.' ¹ The collaborationist radical liberal, Benjamin Jones of the Co-operative Wholesale Society then followed. He promised to do his best to follow the chairman's point of order, but if he did say anything that could be construed as an attack on particular classes, he trusted that the conference would put this down to his lack of education. 'It was, however, only fair to say that [working men] were so much accustomed to have hard words said to them in their daily employment that the meaning and force of strong language seemed to be lost sight of; whereas men unaccustomed to hard works were apt to feel them with greater severity than workingmen who were so accustomed to language of that kind.' ² Benjamin Jones was commenting on a paper by the now seventy-three year old Lloyd Jones which had damagingly criticised Dudley Baxter's and Leone Levi's estimates of the average earnings of the working classes. Lloyd Jones testified from his experience as an industrial arbitrator in the coal trade that workmen took into account the fluctuations in their earnings over the whole year and the varying rates of pay of different men. The employers, however, confined their calculations to the higher earnings of the best workmen and assumed that they received these without variations over the year. The statisticians of progress perpetuated the same error. ³ Benjamin Jones agreed:

² Ibid., p.66.
³ Ibid., pp.35-6.
'He had himself had the curiosity to look at the Blue Books: of course, workingmen were not supposed to look into such things, but they were now getting into the habit of doing so.' Here were equipped, confident and self-respecting working men able to face the upper classes on their own terms in a massive conference. Respectability had helped to equip them and gain participation in the wider world. Now they were in a position of sufficient strength to make good that hard-won personal and class confidence.

The most important paper of the Conference and the one best received by the working-class delegates, was by Edith Simcox, the sad adorer of George Eliot. Her review of the rise in the standard of living and the changing style of life of the English working-classes over the nineteenth century was probably the most accurate contemporary assessment, and is still difficult to better:

In comparing the rate of progress in different sections of the working classes the revenue returns give us no assistance. But it will be admitted that the standard of comfort has risen among the well-to-do class of operatives. The élite of the mechanical trades - engineers, masons, carpenters, compositors, etc. - when all goes well, can and do provide for their households on a more liberal scale, as regards everything but houseroom than their prototypes at the beginning of the century. Given the great change to town from country life, perhaps it might be said that the home of the steady, skilled and fortunate artisan would bear comparison with that of the lamented yeoman of old times. Mutatis mutandis, the conscious wants are as about as well met, and there is therefore progress, as the mechanic of a hundred years ago was worse off than a yeoman. Unstinted food, clothes of the same pattern as the middle class, when house rent permits, a tidy parlour and stiff, cheap furniture, which is not itself luxurious or beautiful, is a symptom of the luxury of self-respect, and an earnest of better taste to come; a newspaper, a club, an occasional holiday, perhaps a musical instrument - these represent the nineteenth century equivalent to the yeoman's pony, shining

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1Ibid., p.67. See also Labour Association of London, Proceedings of the Co-operative Conference, Held in Aberdeen...April 1887 (Aberdeen, 1887), passim, for a similar collapse of a conference into open class hostilities.
shining pewter, bits of ancestral oak and homespun napery. The life is more alert, as yet less picturesque, but excluding none of the possibilities of real civilization. We may even go so far as to admit that the prosperous operative is better off in comparison with the unprosperous middle class man than ever before. But we cannot congratulate ourselves on this show of progress till we know to what proportion of the manual labour class this description applies.1

The open intransigence of so many of the working-class speakers at the Industrial Remuneration Conference in 1885 revealed the fundamental weakness of the uneasy alliance. A crucial shift had taken place in the debate about the right ordering of society and the class lines had hardened. Two things had brought this about - the growing interest in Socialism and the emergence, particularly in London, of an organized working-class political movement centered on the working men's clubs. These two new elements were partly the fruits of increasing working-class respectability and their development was the understory of the years of the uneasy alliance. Finally, they were in many respects, interdependent.

If the Social Democratic Federation touched a miniscule number of working-class people in London in the 1880s, its significance lay in the way it shaped the young men like John Burns, George Lansbury and Tom Mann, who were to emerge as brilliant working-class leaders.2 Marxism detached these respectable men from their acceptance of the market-place economy, and however much they had in common with the old respectables, they brought a new vigour and intransigence to working-class politics. The Socialists levelled a sustained critique at the ideal of respectability as the panacea of poverty while acknowledging its genuine civilizing function. The S.D.F. members were eminently the children of respectability and they recognised, as had the old respectables, that if the working-classes were to achieve

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2 See Chapter VII, part ii, for an account of the Battersea S.D.F.
social and economic equality, they had to equip themselves—spend money on books rather than beer; eschew unreasoned and ephemeral enthusiasms like the Tichborne Cause for a programme of political action derived from critically acquired knowledge; abandon deference for independence; regard their fellows in a spirit of co-operativeness instead of competitiveness. But they also saw the cant in the claim that all a working man needed to rise out of poverty and frustration was to become respectable. Many of the old respectables had known this too, but Marxism provided an intellectual weapon which they had lacked. It showed that Capital was limited, and therefore working men could not be emancipated by becoming labouring capitalists. The possessors of Capital and power were the natural enemies of those they employed, and as a class, incapable of being moralised. Marxism enabled them to turn the old respectables' argument on its head. As Harry Quelch wrote in 1888: 'Social Democracy aims at making higher morality possible, or no right thinking man would work for it, but what we wish to point out is that the low standard of modern ethics is due to capitalism, and not responsible for it.' But respectability and revolution needed each other:

...we are convinced that teetotal lectures are doing a good work, a work which will, whatever they themselves may wish, help on the Revolution. If they can induce working men to spend their few spare hours in attending reading and lecture rooms instead of the public house, and their few spare pence in the purchase of books instead of buying beer, they will help us make revolutionists, and for this we must thank them. Further, some of our best lecturers are teetotallers...and we sincerely believe that the Social Democratic Federation is the most sober body in the Kingdom, not excepting the temperance societies themselves.

The Social Democratic Federation was essentially part of metropolitan club-land, rather than the intellectual vanguard of the labour movement or a political party. In

1Harry Quelch, 'Social Democracy and Morals', Justice, 7 April 1888, p.2.

2Justice, 5 June 1886, p.1.
its day-to-day life, its style, atmosphere and social conviviality, it belonged to the social world of the working men's clubs, and the closer it kept to that original model, as in Battersea, the more likely it was to attract members and survive.¹ As Stan Shipley has shown, Marxism came to London through the clubs. In Soho, a small coterie of O'Brienites survived the demoralisations of the Chartist defeat, and in the 1870s formed the core of the Manhood Suffrage League. Adam Weiler and Frank Kitz, one German-born, the other, German-reading, expounded Marx for them from German editions in the later 1870s. O'Brienite ideas and Marxism fused, and the Murray brothers, who were to move into the S.D.F. in the 1880s, learnt their Socialism before Henry George's Poverty and Progress appeared in England and before Marx was translated into English.² O'Brienites probably continued to meet elsewhere in London, but perhaps they are lost forever to history. More commonly, they absorbed themselves in the Secular Societies, like Old Lond, the Battersea roadsweeper, who was to join the Battersea S.D.F.

The growth of the working men's clubs was one of the most important results and manifestations of working-class respectability. They were also agencies for the spreading of respectability. Even the purely social clubs enabled the respectable working man to mix with other respectable men. Smoking concerts and dances brought cheap, respectable entertainment into the lives of men and women fearful of the gin-palace and too poor to attend the decent theatre. The Mechanics' Institutes had failed because of an over-abundance of middle-class control and patronage, but by the time the Unitarian Henry Solly began his working-men's club movement in the 1860s, there were more working-class people who wanted clubs, but who were also more capable of wresting control of their club from middle-class patrons. Anglican

¹See Chapter VII, part ii.
²Stan Shipley, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London (History Workshop Pamphlet No.5, Ruskin College, Oxford, 1971), passim.
clergymen were responsible for starting many of the rural
Club and Institute Union ventures, but their civilizing
mission was doomed to failure, as depicted in this satirical
memoir in the C.I.U. Journal twenty years later: 'They used
to have some concerts, and the young ladies came to sing
hymns and tell stories about converted housemaids till we
felt so melancholy we had to slip away to the Brown Bear
and have a sup o' beer and a pipe o' baccy, and sometimes
got drunk.' If this account is accurate rather than a
reflection of the temper of the C.I.U. in 1891, the
remarkable thing about it is the poverty of entertainment for
the rural poor which made these men tolerate the club for
as long as the year the parson ran it.

The first step in emancipation for the clubs was to
sell beer - against the opposition of both middle-class
patrons and publicans fearful of losing custom. But by 1871,
most clubs provided beer, often of a superior quality to
that in beer shops and public houses. The 1870s saw a
mushrooming of clubs all over London, especially in new
working-class districts where entertainment was scant. The
class was primarily a meeting place, sometimes in the rooms
of a public house, but mostly with its own rooms, however
small and dingy. The club was a gathering place for people -
fulfilling many functions from the purely economic like coal
or blanket clubs, to the social, to being the 'artisan's
university'. For many people, their entire life outside
work and family duties existed in their club. Newspapers,
books, games, music and recitations, elocution classes and
the weekend social evenings when wives and girl friends
could be brought along - all offered the respectable man a
new and rich dimension to an otherwise circumscribed and
depressing life. The high-flown sentiments and bubbling
enthusiasm of the reports of club social activities, whether
they were in the pages of Justice or the Club and Institute
Journal, were more than the conventions of journalistic

1Quoted in John Taylor, From Self-Help to Glamour..., 
op.cit., p.7.

optimism of Victorian papers. They reveal by implication how little ordinary fun had been available to respectable people before the rise of the clubs:

Tuesday night the excitement ran high, when it became known that the great singing match between the secretary and the doorkeeper was to take place....The secretary opened by singing 'The Longshoreman', and was followed by the doorkeeper singing a very pathetic ballad, which brought the handkerchiefs out, being so touchingly rendered. The judges being unable to decide which was the winner, the referee, Mr. Sam Davis, ordered them to sing again. On the second attempt the secretary did not seem up to form, and G.C., selecting the 'Old Mulberry Tree', won easily, fairly taking the audience by storm in the wind-up, especially the 'top note', one of the judges nearly fainting with astonishment.1

Although he had sympathised with the Chartists, Solly was determined to keep the Club and Institute Union apolitical. But a club for debate and mutual education had been the natural forum of working-class radicals for a century, and with the growth of the clubs in the seventies, it was inevitable that the political men, with their talent for organization and leadership, should come to dominate their local clubs. The C.I.U. and the many clubs in London unaffiliated to it, wanted more than entertainment and mutual improvement, and Solly found himself out-maneuved by the working-class committeemen.2 Another of Solly's ventures, the Social and Political Education League, founded in 1876, went astray when he appointed Charles Murray as organiser at a salary of 10/- a week in 1880. Murray doubled the number of lectures in the first year, introduced for the first time working-class speakers to the platform and transformed the paternalistic association into a front organization for the Manhood Suffrage League and later the S.D.F.3 The increasing radicalism of the clubs was part of a wider impatience with tried formulas of agitation and old

1Club and Institute Journal, 6 August 1892.
2Taylor, op.cit., pp.44-56.
3Shipley, op.cit., pp.69-70.
causes. The London Secular Societies equally felt this impatience and many members were no longer content to expend their energies on pure scientific secularism rather than work within the framework of a definite political creed. It would be misleading to assume that all the working-men's clubs in London were radical or even political. The intense intellectuality of the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club, was probably exceptional, but most seem to have been reasonably consistent in maintaining Sunday lectures and debates on both cultural and political issues. The clubs survived and grew because they fulfilled a need for social intercourse and were able to make money by selling beer. Their political function was secondary, but their very prosperity and popularity enabled political leaders to capture a wider audience, and with weekly lectures and debates, make more impact on the members than they could in public demonstrations. For the first time, working-class politicians had the opportunity to preach to the unconverted in a stable and convivial group.

The Liberal revival with the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation and the 1880 election boosted the political activity in metropolitan club-land. Radical clubmen in many boroughs were eager to have a role in party politics, even though the official Liberal party fell short of their ideals. But with the improvement in public transport and the wide availability of the Club and Institute Journal in clubs all over London, it was becoming easier for radicals to communicate across the suburbs. The C.I.U. and the Journal enabled the clubs to adopt a common character, breaking down the unique and exclusivist atmosphere of the old craft-centred clubs like the Alliance Cabinet Makers' Association. Hence, when in the Federation of Metropolitan Radical Clubs (M.R.F.) was formed in 1886 it marked the

1Ibid., pp.39-40.

2See ibid., pp.41-5, for a description of the Stratford Dialectical and Radical Club.

3See Chapter VII, part ii, for the way this occurred in Battersea.
closest approach yet in the history of London to a popular political party. Twenty-nine organizations, including the Secularists, from all over the metropolitan police district (with a special dispensation for West Ham) joined under the chairmanship of Randal Cremer to agree to a uniform radical programme: (1) adult suffrage, (2) shorter residential suffrage qualification, (3) compulsory electoral registration for parliamentary and local elections by a publicly paid officer, (4) the second ballot, (5) payment of members and of official election expenses from public sources, (6) shorter parliaments, (7) compulsory, secular and free education, (8) the abolition of the hereditary principle in legislation, (9) thorough reform of the laws relating to land, (10) the separation of Church and State, (11) a comprehensive system of local government, including Home Rule for Ireland. The M.R.F. existed somewhat uneasily between the Liberal party with whom it collaborated in local and School Board elections, and the Socialists with whom it formed coalitions on Free Speech, Irish Coercion and education.

But the M.R.F. was to fail to fulfil its promise as a foundation for a mass working-class party. Unlike the Social Democratic Federation, it had the numbers, but along with the Socialists it did not have sufficient power or money to become a serious political rival to the official parties. Both the Liberal and Conservative parties came to realise the usefulness of political working men's clubs, and by the 1890s had succeeded in capturing them for the party machine. There was resistance in at least the C.I.U. to exploitation of the club movement by the Liberal and Conservative parties - the Home Rule crisis in 1886 provoking protests at the formation of bogus clubs by politicians in the hope of 'creating' working-class opinion.

1 Club and Institute Journal, 26 March 1886, pp.154-5.
3 Club and Institute Journal, 17 April 1886, p.181.
Socialists damaged their united front by factionalism: Justice was particularly unrelenting in its vilification of the Lib-Lab parliamentarians.¹

By the time of the formation of the M.R.F., the political clubs in London were already on the downward turn.² Club-life had lost some of its attraction and novelty and simple boredom perhaps accounted for some of the loss of vitality. The educational function of the clubs was gradually pre-empted by the Board Schools and the growth of night classes.³ As for entertainment, the spread of music halls, especially out into the suburbs, brought cheap entertainment into the lives of the urban working class. But one of the most important changes, as yet little researched, was the growth of spectator sport, especially professional football.⁴ Sport was to open up new ways of upward social mobility for working-class men and to alter profoundly modes of leisure and emotional commitment. John Burns had made himself into a local political leader in Battersea with his open-air meetings in Battersea Park on Sunday mornings, but the growth of spectator professional sport provided working men with different ways of passing their week-ends in place of walking in parks and commons to see what was on.

Finally, it was still impossible to form a mass working-class party in London in the 1880s. Stedman Jones

¹Justice, 16 May 1886, p.5; 24 December 1885, p.1; 12 June 1886, p.5.

²Taylor, op.cit., pp.53-6.

³Shipley, op.cit., p.26. The Finsbury Technical College, the first of its kind, was founded in 1883. It provided both day and night schooling for apprentices, journeymen and foremen. City and Guilds of London Institute, Technical Instruction (London, 1883), passim.

⁴W.F. Mandle, 'Games People Played: Cricket and Football in England and Victoria in the Late Nineteenth Century', Historical Studies, Vol.15, No.60, April 1973, pp.511-35. I am grateful to Mr Mandle for our discussions on the social history of sport. G.D.H. Cole in Studies in the Class Structure (London, 1955), blamed the improvement in recreational pursuits in the twentieth century for what he believed was a decline in the quality of working class leadership (pp.127-8).
has pointed to the 'rootless volatility' of the casual poor. It was still the respectables who joined clubs and went to meetings - either Radical, Socialist or Tory. In the inner East End, the clubs broke down the social isolation of respectable people, but it was in the respectable suburbs that the clubs took on best. At the end of the 1880s, the S.D.F. was weakest in the East End, and with the exception of Deptford and Bermondsey. Nearly all the strong branches were in newly-settled working-class districts - Battersea, Peckham, Wandsworth, Barking, Canning Town, Tottenham and Wood Green. Battersea and Wood Green were particularly significant, for they were districts transformed by the building of housing estates by the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company for the respectable artisan class. The Noel Park Estate in Wood Green was too far from central London to be immediately attractive to working-class people and was slow to grow, but the Shaftesbury Park Estate in Battersea was full to overflowing by 1874 and was the sort of place that a young engineer like John Burns and the radical printer J.C. Durant chose to live. Battersea, with a high concentration of respectable working-men and outstanding working-class politicians, saw the first successes in London of the politics of the respectable working class and served as a model of what might have been if London had enjoyed more economic homogeneity.

Even the S.D.F. could not bridge the gulf between the respectable and the rough. The Dock Strike succeeded because the workers accepted leaders like Burns and Mann in spite of their Socialism. And the S.D.F. were as vulnerable as had been the respectable radicals before them to disillusionment and disgust at the cussedness of the working classes. After nearly a decade of agitating and writing

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1 Stedman Jones, op.cit., p.343.
2 Paul Thompson, op.cit., p.115.
3 For this reason, the Shaftesbury Park Estate and the politics of Battersea have been chosen for a case study in Chapter VII.
for the S.D.F., the former compositor, A.P. Hazell reflected bitterly:

The stolidity and obstinacy of the British working man may be admirable in many respects, but the capitalist unfortunately reaps the advantage of any sturdy qualities he may possess. Dwarfting his intelligence by limiting his education, the capitalist fills his mind with jingoism, false sentiments, religious bigotry and prejudices against those who would better his position.¹

As their respectability had assisted their political consciousness, so it alienated the respectables from the residuum.

By the 1880s, there was, nevertheless, a working-class presence in London. Charles Booth found the respectables in his Classes E. and F., and of Class E. he realised:

Class E. contains those whose lot today is most aggravated by a raised ideal. It is in some ways a hopeful sign, but it is also a danger. Here, rather than in the ruffianism of Class A, or the starvation of Class B, or the wasted energy of Class C, or the bitter anxieties of Class D., do we find the springs of Socialism and Revolution. The stream that flows from these springs must not be dammed up, and therefore it is to this class, and its leaders in Class F. that I particularly appeal in favour of what I have called 'limited Socialism' - a socialism which will leave untouched the forces of individualism and the sources of wealth.²

Booth respected Class E. as the real backbone of the London working classes, and while regretting that they far from predominated in East London, hoped that in the metropolis as a whole, they constituted the characteristic and dominant class. He admired them for:

[they] take readily any gratuities which fall in their way, and all those who constitute it will mutually give or receive friendly help without sense of patronage or degradation; but against anything which could be called charity,

¹Justice, 14 February 1891, p.4.
their pride rises stiffly. This class is the recognised field of all forms of co-operation and combination, and I believe, and am glad to believe, that it holds its future in its own hands. No body of men deserves more consideration. 1

This was the triumph of the ideals of respectability. 'Respectability' had assisted 'making of the working class' by providing a common culture founded on the economic and psychological needs of ordinary people and was expressed in daily life. It had been an urban phenomenon, necessary to survival in the city of the industrial age, even though London remained economically a pre-industrial city. Respectability had assisted in the development of political class awareness, legitimised working-class social ambition and provided blocked people with a weapon of social and political assault against an exclusivist society. As an overt political weapon it had fulfilled its usefulness by the 1880s. Respectable working men still invoked it in the Age of Consent and Pall Mall Gazette scandal issues, but in this expression of sexual politics, respectables of all classes were united against vice. 2 If there was class hostility in these campaigns, they were no longer genuinely working-class issues. By using respectability, working men had become incorporated in many ways into the wider world with the vote, the security of the trade union movement and the grudging acceptance of 'representative working men' in public life and letters. But respectability could not abolish poverty and social inequality. Hence when Marxist socialism began to reach respectable working men, the struggle for social emancipation began with new vigour. When the Westminster Review wrote wildly in 1890 that Socialism is 'in the air', it was almost true. 3 But however much the Socialists of the end of the century deplored the 'top hats' of the old aristocracy of labour, they were their cultural descendants and enjoyed the fruits of their struggles.

1 Ibid., Vol.I, p.51.
2 Justice, 31 July 1886, p.2; 8 March 1890, p.2.
CHAPTER VI

FOUR RESPECTABLE RADICALS

Respectability provided working people with the norms of behaviour and techniques for upward social mobility. Only a small minority of the people who practised respectability in the hope that it would lead to material improvement succeeded in moving out of the working class, and of that minority, few amassed great wealth. At the middle of the century one of the means open to working-class people of upward social mobility was to become an intellectual. Many self-made men were forced to achieve social recognition without the protection and support of wealth. Victorian political, intellectual and religious life contained a significant number of highly talented men of working-class origin who moved uneasily between two social worlds. Being brainworkers for the major part of their adult lives, they were no longer strictly working-class at all. But despite a residual attachment to radical working-class ideals and movements, they became increasingly distanced from working-class life by their experiences, tastes and interests. Yet they were never able to become truly middle-class. Lacking not only breeding, but more importantly wealth and University education, they were vulnerable to being patronised, economically and socially. Acceptance was hard won, usually at the expense of some self-respect. The ambitious and talented working men who rose in Victorian England were uneasy men in the uneasy class.

Thomas Cooper, George Jacob Holyoake, W.E. Adams and George Howell were four respectable working men who rose to the status of brainworkers in the second half of the nineteenth century. They have been chosen as case studies for a number of reasons. They were exceptional men, and although in some ways unrepresentative of the mass of respectable working-class people, we can deduce from their lives and ideas many of the pressures and political perceptions of the less successful and talented. One practical reason for choosing them is that they left
testimonies behind of their lives - mostly biographies, but in the case of Howell, that rare phenomenon for a working-class activist - a diary. These case studies are intended to illustrate what respectability meant to these four exceptional individuals and to amplify at a personal level the role of respectability in radical politics.

All four were conspicuous practitioners and advocates of respectability. All were provincial artisans whose self-taught intellectual capabilities and strength of personality made the frustrations of decent poverty intolerable. Each was drawn at some time in his life to London as the political and cultural capital of the country. Blocked men in the provinces, a 'way out' psychologically and practically was radicalism and political agitation opened to them new careers as brainworkers. They all evinced a thirst for knowledge which led them to perceive the possibilities of a wider life for themselves and for other working-class people. Hence the practice of respectability aggravated their social and political discontent. All four were ambitious and sought a place in a wider world out of a need to expand their personalities. Yet it would be unjust not to acknowledge the sincerity of their radicalism. Nevertheless, their life experiences determined that the burden of their social critique was that society blocked talent and ambition. They wanted to make the world safe for ambition, not necessarily to change the means of production, distribution and exchange. As such they were typical mid-Victorian working-class radicals. For each, involvement in radical politics was the beginning of his move out of the working class and none of them ever entirely departed from the ideals of early manhood. In fact their radicalism served to make their situation as uneasy men, or outsiders, more tolerable and provided them with a role: that of representative working men, which enabled them to exert some influence in public life and to act as social brokers in a deeply divided society. They all lived to witness the rise of Socialism, but by then aged, relatively secure and full of the self-righteousness of self-made men, they were discarded as popular heroes and found themselves unwanted anachronisms in the Labour movement.
'Oh that I had been trained to music - or painting - or law - or medicine - or any profession in which mind is needed; or that I had been regularly educated so that I might have reached a University!' — I say, I often catch myself at these wishes still - even at sixty-six; but these are not so fervent as they were some years ago - for I remember that life here will soon end with me.¹

This was Thomas Cooper's personal tragedy. A better classical scholar than many who had been to university, a finer musician than many professional celebrities, he nevertheless lived to realise that the Smilesean doctrine was cant. Cooper preached self-help with all the conviction of the autodictat, but he did so because he knew that for the workingman there was precious little other help.

He was born in the Lincolnshire village of Gainsborough where his parents were dyers. Widowed when Cooper was four, his mother supported the two of them by making cardboard boxes and Cooper grew up under constant fear of the Workhouse. A woman of rare intelligence herself, his mother quickly recognised Cooper's near genius, and so that he could study, resisted her neighbours' pressure to send him out to work. But at fifteen he was apprenticed as a cobbler, a trade which he later recalled to be 'one of the lowliest callings' in the village social hierarchy.²

Cooper was consumed with ambition - but the ambition to achieve distinction and significance rather than wealth. He possessed a physical and mental energy which bordered on mania and combined with an outstanding intellect which he could not fully use, the psychological tension condemned him to life-long instability. He not only had to struggle against the disadvantages of his class origins, but also against incipient insanity. He was possibly a manic-depressive and his illness may well have been as important

²Ibid., p.56.
in his ultimate failure to realise his ambitions as were his class origins. In the peaceful periods of his life, his impulsiveness and vitality were engaging and won him loyal friends. Had he been born a gentleman, he may well have enjoyed the peace of mind to become an eccentric and lovable don.

Cooper's major inspiration in adolescence was the story of Samuel Lee, who had risen from being an illiterate workman to occupying the chair of Hebrew at Cambridge. But he responded to the challenge of Lee's success with characteristic extremism:

I said in my heart, if one man can teach himself a language, another can. But there seemed such a wealth of means of learning around me, that I felt as if I must accomplish a broader triumph of self-education than he accomplished. I must try if I could not combine the study of languages with that of mathematics; complete a full course of reading in ancient and modern history and get an accurate and ample acquaintance with the literature of the day....

At nineteen he started on this plan for self-education. He rose at three or four in the morning and read standing up, stamping his feet to keep warm as his mother was too poor to light a fire that early. He cobbled from seven in the morning until nine at night, reciting declensions and conjugations, Euclidian theorems and poetry while he worked. He returned to reading during his half-hour lunch break and read again at night until he fell asleep. In the spring of 1826 after nearly two years of study, he was sitting on Pringle Hill at 5 a.m. when he discovered that he could read the third book of De Bello Gallico almost entirely without a dictionary. Cooper later recalled that he said to himself: 'I have made a greater conquest, without the aid of a living teacher than the proudest warrior ever made - for I have conquered and entered into the possession of a new mind.'

But the effort was too much and in the summer of 1827 he physically and mentally broke down. As he recovered he

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1 Ibid., p.55.
2 Ibid., p.60.
attempted to return to cobbling, but whenever he touched his tools he was overcome with a nervous tremor. He was saved by his friends who raised enough money for him to set up as a schoolmaster and fifteen months after the beginning of his breakdown Cooper became a brainworker.¹

For a year he was an outstanding success as a schoolmaster - the fame of this 'remarkable youth' who was a 'prodigy of learning' having spread amongst the poor in Gainsborough.² But the very process of self-education had estranged Cooper from other working-class people. He had taught himself to speak good grammatical English and had eschewed dialect while still a cobbler, which aroused the disgust of the local gossips. They remonstrated with his mother, for: 'To hear a youth in mean clothing, sitting at a shoemaker's stall, pursuing one of the lowliest callings, speak in what seemed to some of them almost a foreign dialect, raised positive anger and scorn in some, amazement in others. Who was I that I should sit on a cobbler's stall and "talk fine".³ Innately refined all his life and admiring of genteel English manners, Cooper returned the scorn of the ignorant poor. Feeling disgust for 'the stupid listlessness of the parents of my pupils', he moved to Lincoln in 1833 and into a new life as a teacher and later as a journalist. Lecturing and writing were to sustain him for the rest of his life.

Cooper's respectability ran deeper than his reverence for learning. Obsessive, perfectionist and crushed by a sense of sin, he sought relief in 'causes' - religious and political. His obsessiveness (of which he was well aware)⁴ drove him to extremes of enthusiasm and commitment to beliefs and people, only to turn violently against them when they failed to reach his demands of perfection. He was unable to work co-operatively with his peers and W.E. Adams considered

¹Ibid., pp.67-72.
²Ibid., p.73.
³Ibid., p.56.
⁴Ibid., p.73.
him 'unfit for controversy'.\textsuperscript{1} His intensity and earnestness carried Cooper through his many conversions, and even though his Chartist days have most interested historians in the past,\textsuperscript{2} his religious beliefs are of more importance to the man.

All these respectable men came under some religious influence in their youth. For Cooper, Holyoake and Howell, it absorbed much of their frustration and the yearning for 'something more'. All of them abandoned religion for other areas of endeavour, but Cooper was the only one who regained his faith in later life. What is significant for these respectable men is that intense religious conviction fulfilled their psychological needs as intelligent and ambitious artisans cut off in the provinces from the richer social and intellectual life of London. Cooper's return to religious belief seems to have been a product of his mental instability.

Desperate for certainty and bedevilled by thwartedness all his life, his religious and political life was a series of conversions. His first was at the hands of the Primitive Methodists or 'Ranters', and the effects were devastating on the fourteen year old Cooper: 'I cannot describe my anguish and sorrow for sin....My grief continued for many weeks, until I could find no delight in my books, or drawing, or dulcimer, and could read nothing but the Bible, and was getting into secret places twenty times in a day, to pray for the pardon of my sins.'\textsuperscript{3} He never lost the sense of sin implanted by the Ranters, and it was exacerbated by his intellectual frustration which sought in religion and later politics a cause which could absorb his guilt and his discontent.

\textsuperscript{1}W.E. Adams, \textit{Memoirs of a Social Atom}, op.cit., p.215. 'Thomas Cooper had the "defect of his qualities". I have given one example of his irritability. Many others were known to his friends. Indeed he was quite unfit for controversy. This he came to acknowledge himself: so that all through his later career as a lecturer and preacher he systematically declined discussion.'


\textsuperscript{3}Cooper, op.cit., p.37.
His reconversion started in 1856 and took two years. The psychological trauma was even worse at the age of fifty-one. The occasion was dramatic. He was giving a Secularist lecture when he found himself unable to speak. Finally he confessed that he realised that he had erred. He was jeered at by the audience of hard-headed artisans and accused of being insane. He suffered six months of enforced silence and another year and a half of contemplation and spiritual flagellation:

My conviction of personal sin deepened to such a degree in the hours of reflection during the silent six months, that I dared not pray; and my wife said I never smiled for those six months. I told my dear friend Dr Jobson... that I believed God would shut me up in judicial darkness; that He would never suffer me to live in the 'light of His countenance' again, as a penalty for my great sin in deserting Him because I though men ill-used me.

His radical political career filled the gap in his life between these two pivotal religious conversions. His move to Chartism in Leicester in 1840 bore all the marks of another conversion and another attempt to fulfill his complex needs. In fact when Cooper first went to Leicester, where he worked as a journalist, he saw himself as apart from the common people - he was a brainworker and now on the rim of the middling class. As he said himself, in his old Lincolnshire days he had 'mingled with the poor' and seen a great deal of their sufferings. But he was accustomed to the close attachment between labourer and farmer, servant and master. In Leicester for the first time he witnessed the 'appalling fact' of 'fierce and open opposition in public meetings, of working men to employers, manifested in derisive cries, hissing and hooting and shouts of scorn'. His horror at this dissipated when he learnt of the destitution of the Leicester stocking weavers. His compassion was genuine, but his identification with the

1Ibid., pp.353-4.
2Ibid., p.371.
3Ibid., pp.143-4.
working-class was an act of imagination. He realised that here lay an opportunity to use his talents and save his soul, which he recorded with remarkable honesty in his autobiography. As a 'champion of the poor' he could achieve the fame and significance which eluded him as a scholar.¹

He held this new 'faith' with typical extremism, becoming a Physical Force man and 'O'Connor mad' - as Gammage perceived, his 'acts corresponded with his state of mind'.²

Cooper dominated Chartism in Leicester with his passion and organizational skills. Gammage gave a vivid picture of Cooper the demagogue:

On the release of his great idol [O'Connor], Cooper composed a song, to which he gave the title of 'the Lion of Freedom'; and at whatever meeting he appeared, the singing of this song was invariably the commencement of the proceedings. He always led the air himself - for music was one of his accomplishments - and his 'Brave Shakesperians' lustily joined with him. Over this starving multitude he exercised the power of a king; he had but to command, and they were sure to obey.³

Cooper was not, however, an opportunist. Sentenced in 1842 for two years for sedition, his sufferings in Stafford Gaol were intense and he would have driven himself insane studying Hebrew had a companion not confiscated his books.⁴

The prison chaplain tried to lure him away from politics with the offer of a chance to go to Cambridge - the greatest of all Cooper's youthful dreams, but he refused to renounce his beliefs.⁵

He emerged from gaol subdued, but still a firm Chartist. However, the blind faith in the 'Lion of Freedom' was displaced by an equally extreme opposition to O'Connor and his 'mad land scheme'. Cooper moved to moral force Chartism then the arena of liberal-radicalism and passive agitation. The spiritual gap in his life was then filled

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¹Ibid., pp.146-7.
³Loc.cit.
⁴Cooper, op.cit., p.253.
⁵Ibid., pp.256-7.
with his advocacy of religious scepticism and as a Chartist martyr, public lecturer on an enormous range of historical, literary and religious subjects, he toured the country for the next decade. He was never forgotten as Thomas Cooper, the author of the 'Purgatory of Suicides' and workingman intellectual. As the author of 'The Paradise of Martyrs' and Baptist preacher, he faded into respectable obscurity.

Despite his return to Christianity, Cooper retained in old age much of his radicalism and hostility towards the ruling classes. Prematurely writing his autobiography in 1872 (the most successful of all his books) he did not excuse his Chartist days but rather reserved his self-abasement for his religious scepticism. In 1885 he wrote:

> How strangely uneven our lot in life is cast!
> Forty years ago, I had to undergo two years imprisonment in Stafford Gaol for trying to get the franchise for working men. The attempt was called 'sedition and conspiracy' at that time of day. Now in this year of grace 1885, both Whigs and Tories have declared that working men ought to have the franchise, and have given it to all throughout the land who are householders!

That same year he had reprinted his *Eight Letters to Young Men of the Working Classes* of 1849 because he considered them still relevant. The *Eight Letters* brought together the essence of the ideal of emancipation through respectability. Outlining the appropriate course of study, giving advice on note-taking and public speaking, he counselled young working men to delay marriage because: 'Above all, you need

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1. E.g. Jocelyne Baty Goodman (ed.), *Victorian Cabinet Maker: The Memoirs of James Hopkinson, 1819-1894* (London, 1968), pp.79-80. Hopkinson was a Nottingham man, a strict chapel-goer and a Tory. He was so unmoved by the Chartist riots in 1842, that he took the opportunity of the depression in trade to go on a walking tour with a friend to explore England. He was passing through Stafford on the very day that Cooper was sentenced to gaol, but despite his lack of interest in politics, he absorbed enough folk knowledge to have a clear idea of Cooper's life and achievements.


3. Ibid., p.23.
years for the cultivation of your minds, to render yourself free and happy citizens of an enlightened country, such as I fervently hope every young English working man may become in a few years.¹ The desire to participate in the wider world of cultured, political England was the motive passion — 'to show we share the high feelings of England's heroes'. So he enjoined them to: '...strive, in spite of all difficulties and deprivations, and with the cheering faith that they for you are but temporary, to raise yourselves morally and intellectually — and so, shame those who say you are not fit for the franchise into the perception that you deserve it better, perhaps, than themselves, and that you must and will have it.'² He warned them to shun the 'Aristocratic vices' of 'filthy cards' and gambling³ and pleaded for a new democratic spirit of brotherhood among working men to end the 'repulsive aristocracy of trades' that divided the working class. They were to rise above the vices of their 'oppressors' and forge a new society of respectable honest working men.⁴

Despite his contact with, and patronage from middle-class intellectuals and politicians, Cooper never lost his class hatred.⁵ He wrote to his friend Thomas Chambers in 1873 of an imminent visit to Tunbridge Wells:

I am going to receive hospitality from a gentleman and not to be in lodgings: understand that, sir — and don't lift your knife to your mouth as I do, when I think I will do as I like, in spite of fine folk.⁶

²Ibid., p.166.
³Ibid., p.176.
⁴Ibid., p.166.
⁵Life..., op.cit., pp.263-6, 282-4 and 287-95.
⁶Thomas Cooper to Thomas Chambers, 1 October 1873 (Kashnor Collection).
At the age of eighty he could still write of the conspiracy of men in power to prevent the enlightenment of the people.¹

Like most radicals of his generation, he seems to have accepted the market-place economy. Not deeply concerned with the conflicts of capital and labour, he advised his young men of the working classes to inquire into socialist experiments, but their first duty was to prove to their masters that they were 'men of honour'.²

Reviewing his long life, he despaired at what he believed to have been a decline in the artisan reverence for learning and political consciousness. Visiting Lancashire in 1869 he was horrified to see working men absorbed in their co-operative and building societies, walking their dogs in their Sunday best, betting on pigeons, cursing, swearing - anything but teaching themselves Latin and Greek.³ He feared for England in 1885 because he believed that material comfort had vitiated working-class radicalism. His pessimism has been criticised for his indifference to the advance of Socialism.⁴ He was right, however, to argue that no-one had replaced the Chartists in their ability to educate the common people:

So long as the Chartist education lasted, even with all its faults, it seemed to indoctrinate the poor, starving toilers into the knowledge that they had political rights, as well as other people. But when Corn Law Repeal gave the toilers bread and something to spare - and Feargus O'Connor's mad land scheme disgraced the Chartist agitation - the workers, as I have already said, gave up politics, and for several years there was agitation for Disestablishment of the National Church, agitation for Atheism, agitation for anti-vaccination, agitation for the 'Claimant', agitation for teetotalism - agitations many, but there was no agitation for giving an increase of the franchise to the working man.⁵

¹Thoughts at Fourscore and Earlier, op.cit., p.29.
²Eight Letters..., op.cit., p.171.
³Life..., op.cit., p.393.
⁴E.g. ibid., introduction by John Saville, p.26.
⁵Thoughts at Fourscore and Earlier, op.cit., p.27.
Cooper himself had been politically educated by the Chartists and transformed into a humane democrat. His failure of vision was more that he did not appreciate the achievements of his fellow respectables and the growth of a working-class urban culture founded on respectability which was equipping more ordinary people to shape their own destiny and to perceive their class conflict with authority.
Holyoake was born in Birmingham, the son of a whitesmith. He was so young when he joined his father in the foundry that in later life he could not recall his exact age. Anxious for further education, at seventeen he enrolled as a student at the Old Mechanics' Institute and three years later became an assistant teacher there. Holyoake's political interests developed early and at the age of fourteen he joined the Birmingham Political Union. A year later he became a Radical Reformer and in 1837 attended meetings addressed by Robert Owen. In 1838 he delivered his first lecture on Socialism and Co-operation and enrolled himself in the Owenite 'Association of all Classes of all Nations'.

In 1839 he abandoned the life of a workman and became an Owenite lecturer. Having been brought up a strict Evangelical, his association with Owenism led him to question his religious beliefs and by 1841, as a co-editor with the atheist Charles Southwell of The Oracle of Reason, his faith collapsed under the close examination of the evidences of Christianity. In 1842 he gave a lecture on Home Colonisation while passing through Cheltenham on his way to visit Southwell in Bristol Gaol. In reply to a question about the place of God in a Socialist community, Holyoake's gift for witticisms took over: the people were too poor to have a God, unless like the soldiers after the late war, He were put on half-pay. Holyoake was charged with blasphemy and imprisoned in the notorious Gloucester gaol where he came close to suicide. His wife was left to live on erratic contributions from friends and their daughter died from malnutrition.

On his release from prison, Holyoake came to London. He opened a shop for the sale of advanced literature and continued his varied propaganda. He edited a number of journals, the most sustained of which was The Reasoner.

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1Edward Royle has just published a biography of Holyoake. Regrettably it appeared too late for this thesis.
(1846-61). He began to drift away from Owenism and from the anti-Christian propaganda of his early years and defined his developing Theism with the term 'Secularism'. He characterised Secularism as more positive and consciously ethical in intent than pure Atheism. Secularism was Holyoake's most original contribution to working-class radicalism and the Secular Sunday Schools and cheap editions of radical books he published enabled generations of intelligent working men to begin to question their society.¹

Holyoake's subsequent career is one of the richest and most varied lives in Victorian public life. He earned his living from bookselling, publishing, journalism, lecturing and support from wealthy sympathisers. There was scarcely a radical movement in the second half of the nineteenth century with which he was not connected in some characteristically original way. From moral force Chartism, he moved to radical republicanism and ended his political career as president of the Liberal Association in Brighton and confidante of Gladstone, advising the 'Grand Old Man' on working-class problems. By temperament a man of moderation and compromise and possessing an acute pragmatic political sense, he tended to favour and agitate for reforms which stood a chance of success. Having spent a life-time fighting the power of the state over blasphemy laws, restrictions of free speech by the newspaper stamp tax and in active support for Continental revolutionaries, he remained implacably opposed to state intervention and had little sympathy for state collectivism. In fact Holyoake proudly claimed authorship for the term 'self-help', and his socialism was limited to Co-partnership and profit-sharing.

An awareness of their own innate respectability was fundamental to these blocked artisans: 'Reverence for excellence I always had...' recalled Holyoake with typical vanity, '...no book of etiquette was needed to teach me how

to act towards those whom I had reason to regard.1 Holyoake was born into a respectable artisan family and while working in the foundry had perceived the demoralisation of his fellow workers. He remained appalled at working-class deference for the rest of his life.2 In 1842, while attending the Gloucester court during his own trial for blasphemy, he was horrified when a man transported for life to Australia for committing an offence which had arisen in ignorant and depraving circumstances, deferentially thanked the Bench for his punishment: 'Unable to distinguish a deadly sentence passed upon him from a service done to him, he had been taught to bow to his pastors and masters, and he bowed alike when cursed as when blessed.'3

Holyoake's quick mind and humane temperament were ill-fitted for the tedium of working-class life. Desperate for learning, he began studying every night after work. He would stay up one whole night a week until he too drove himself into a breakdown in 1838.4 The coiner of the phrase 'self-help'5 more than lived up to his own strictures. Through his contact with Owenism and freethinkers Holyoake was moulded by one of the most important traditions in respectable artisan life. There was a straight line from the rationalism of the Enlightenment to the Infidelism of the 1820s and 1830s,6 and Holyoake, himself intellectually

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1G.J. Holyoake, Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, 2vv. (London, 1892, 1906 edition), Vol.I, p.45. Holyoake's vanity was notorious and it made him an unreliable historian of his own life. J.M. Ludlow said of Holyoake: 'But his inaccuracy of statement is such that if he said he had dined off a mutton chop the chances would be ten to one that it was more probably a beefsteak.' Quoted by John Saville in the introduction to W.E. Adams' Memoirs of a Social Atom, op.cit., p.5.


3Ibid., p.163.


5Ibid., p.51.

6See F.B. Smith, op.cit., passim; Edward Royle, Radical Politics 1790-1900: Religion and Unbelief, op.cit., passim.
emancipated by that tradition, preserved it and carried it through into the post-Chartist era in the form of Secularism. This tradition provided Holyoake with a basic political creed - that political freedom constituted the essential precondition for the true civilization of manliness and progress. Respectability meant for Holyoake, self-respect and independence, and he held this belief consistently throughout his career as he moved from moral force Chartism, to Red Republicanism to apostolic Co-operation and finally to Gladstonian Liberalism. As he expressed it in his memoirs:

Mankind are prone to be enslaved, and are generally content so long as they are enslaved pleasantly. If a succession of good kings could be secured, paternal government would be eternal. The indolence of mankind would never attempt the honourable trouble of self-government. Therefore the good tyrants are seldom attacked. Yet they render manliness and progress impossible. Every man who seeks self-government himself, or seeks it for his countrymen, is a judge and adversary of him who renders it impossible. 1

The humane cynicism and aphoristic wit became the Holyoake style, befitting his self-designated role as the worldly-wise representative of common sense and social justice. But the self-assured tone of his mature writings hides the painfulness with which he established his repute and influence. The process of emancipation from workman to brainworker had been often at the cost of pretentiousness and obscurantism. This is a circular letter he sent in 1849 to his friends, begging for money to finance his way through London University. It is carefully inscribed in an ornate script:

As the highest power can operate infallibly only thro' the medium of the highest art (and lower degrees of intelligence are subject to a similar law) and as in Universities those arts are communicated in which ancient learning instructed her children, and which the genius of man has improved and extended from age to age - the scholastic training of such places is indispensable to all who would attain to the

greatest utility of action, and assist in conducting the popular improvements in unison with the highest forms of progression which, if not done, much of the assumed 'education of the people' proves little better than a development [sic] of obstructive antagonisms.¹

Holyoake's two liabilities in his attempt to secure the freedom to express his talents were his working class origin and his Atheism and radicalism. His assets were his ability to charm critics and his social betters and to suffer being patronised with complaisance. Compromise, moderation and sweet reasonableness came easily to him and enabled him to win the patronage of dissident middle-class intellectuals. His friendship with Thornton Hunt gave him his entry into the Bohemian intelligentsia and his name was deliberately included in the distinguished contributors' list to The Leader as proof of the paper's boldness. Both F.D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley took alarm at such a scandal and Holyoake estimated that publication of his name cost The Leader over £1,000.²

He carried this sweet reasonableness into the sphere of theological disputation and he was unique amongst militant freethinkers of his time in the number of cordial relationships he had with clergy and in the respectful terms many spoke of him.³ However, his adherence to the right of the individual to hold his own opinions was most genuinely revealed by his refusal to criticise his wife's life-long

¹Copy of letter facing page 38, Vol.I of C.W.F. Goss, A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of George Jacob Holyoake with a Brief Sketch of his Life (2vv, interleaf edition, printed for private circulation, London, 1908), Kashnor Collection. W.J. Linton and Holyoake were by this time 'locked in ill-concealed rivalry'. Linton wrote to Holyoake in 1849, secure in his own good French and moderate Latin, 'For what are you studying Latin and (I presume) Greek and attending College? For the social position of a degree? Be sure that LL D. will in no way serve you. "Dr Holyoake" will still be Holyoake the Atheist.' Quoted in F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan, op.cit., p.97.

²Holyoake, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.240-1. Holyoake's position on the Leader was as office manager, Thornton Hunt's errand boy and but an occasional contributor. Smith, op.cit., p.94.

³McCabe, op.cit., II, p.49.
attachment to Christianity and he attempted to obtain the services of her favourite churchman at her funeral.\textsuperscript{1}

In other respects, Holyoake's break out of his class necessitated the seeking of patronage. His association with middle-class radicals and intellectuals such as Leigh and Thornton Hunt, Ashurst and G.H. Lewes in the late forties and early fifties, reinforced his belief in the necessity of co-operation between working-class and middle-class reformers and confirmed his opinion of the falseness of the Chartist cry of 'war on the middle classes'.\textsuperscript{2} But those associations also laid traps for him with other working-class radicals. In 1858, out of awareness of the impossibility of persuading Parliament to grant manhood suffrage and sharing the fear many radicals held for the enfranchisement of the ignorant after the plebiscites confirming Louis Napoleon's claim to be Emperor, he began to advocate an 'intelligence franchise'. He gained considerable support from middle-class and aristocratic sympathisers, but was reviled by most working-class radicals. In May 1860, at a meeting of workers in the old St Martin's Hall Long Acre, he defended the honour of one of his supporters, Lord Elcho, but 'the bulk of the meeting only saw the spectacle of Holyoake defending a wealthy landowner and anti-democrat'.\textsuperscript{3}

Holyoake was not above thrusting himself on to those whose attention he needed or craved, and the extraordinarily wide circle of correspondence he enjoyed throughout his life sprang from the fact that he simply wrote to everyone. Desperate to play a role in public life, he tried to be in everything including asking Lord Elcho and John Stuart Mill to get him a seat on the Royal Commission into the Sheffield Outrages in early 1867, even though he knew little about trade unionism.\textsuperscript{4}

Yet leaving the ambition and the toadying aside, Holyoake possessed a rare generosity and kindness.

\textsuperscript{1}Holyoake, op.cit., I, p.80.
\textsuperscript{2}McCabe, op.cit., I, p.168.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., II, p.11.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., II, p.31.
Nevertheless he did not hesitate to record these qualities in his memoirs. He used his influence with W.E. Forster, A.J. Mundella and Gladstone to have a civil list pension destined for himself transferred to the ailing Thomas Cooper, for whom he felt deep affection and respect. Above all, his wit gave his judgements a balance and sharpness which elevated his writing beyond the tedious moralising of his time. And the wit was natural as his diary for the Hyde Park riots of 1867 shows:

Hyde Park Meeting.

May 7th: Constitution survived. Found alive this morning lying among the flowers of the Park. Both quite fresh.

Holyoake's commitment to the freedom of the individual and the conduct of social, political and economic life by reason, humanitarianism and co-operation led him to rejoice in the comparative freedom and civilization England had attained in his lifetime compared to Continental despotism. Even in 1900 he could write a defence of tyrannicide and claimed to have tested two bombs in 1856 at great personal risk, which unbeknown to him, were to be used in the Orsini plot. With other Republicans of the time, he passionately supported and assisted exiled continental revolutionaries. However, as he wrote in 1877, radical politics in England enjoyed sufficient freedom to eschew violence and extremism: 'Now that political warfare can happily be conducted with other weapons, because the times have changed and intelligence has spread, and facts are influences, and reason is in the ascendant, we need not step from death to intrigue.' In that same article, echoes of the

1Holyoake, op.cit., II, p.124.
2Quoted in McCabe, op.cit., II, pp.35-6.
5Ibid., I, pp.228-9.
6G.J. Holyoake, 'Impatience in Politics', Nineteenth Century, August 1877, p.41.
Enlightenment pervaded his definition of Radicalism: 'The rudimentary principles of Radicalism...are the free publicity of opinion, and the free discussion of it...and [it] seeks only such changes as are approved by common intelligence and accorded by common consent.'

Although not a deep or creative political thinker, Holyoake became one of the most perceptive and original political commentators of his day. He warned other radicals of the dangers of factionalism and of under-estimating the enemy. 

Implacable in his distrust of the Tory party, he nevertheless fully realised the electoral advantage they enjoyed over the earnest Liberals:

The Tory will take the smallpox at an election and hold his tongue....The battered, much brushed hat, the smooth, enterprising face, phlethoric, bar-parlour orators; hangers-on about the tap; men whom no public cause had ever known except when money or beer was flowing, now strode out with the fervour of patriotism, to save the nation from Liberal worrying. Liberalism, with its scrupulous ways, industrious turn, and economic tactics, was nothing like as demonstrative. They who trust to principles are nowhere at an election compared with those who trust to prejudice - unless they have the sense to care that the principle is represented by explanations of persons, fervid and omnipresent.

Thus more alive to the populist temper of the masses than most Radicals, he confessed to being quite unsurprised at the Tory victory of 'stupidity' in 1874 after the gaining of the Secret Ballot for which he had fought. More prophetically than even he probably realised, he wrote at the end of his life: 'The nature of a nation does not change all at once with power....Liberty does not take care of the people. It is intended to enable them to take care of themselves and it generally takes them a long time to learn how to do it.'

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1 Ibid., p.29.  
2 Ibid., p.39.  
4 G.J. Holyoake, Sixty Years..., op.cit., II, p.185.
Despite his belief in manliness and self-help, he saw the absurdity of taking it too far. Recalling John Stuart Mill's opposition to the Secret Ballot he said:

Like Mr Herbert Spencer, Mill was for individuality and self-help - not thinking that self-help has its limits. To help yourself as much as you can, and as far as you can, is a condition every man must fulfill before he has a claim for the aid of others when his own strength is insufficient. There is no sense in telling a man whose legs are broken he ought to walk unassisted. Under open voting none who depend upon others for employment can be independent without ruin, and it is not practical politics to expect from the people impracticable virtue. Liberals in my time were overwhelmed with the prestige of mad manliness and used to apologise for the Ballot by saying they 'wished the people were strong enough to do without it.¹

Holyoake never departed from liberal-radicalism to embrace State socialism. He held no hostility to property as such and believed that it was ultimately the right of profit which conferred dignity on labour.² His socialism remained rooted in the voluntary co-operative socialism of Owenism, and when his influence in the Secularist movement was overshadowed by Bradlaugh,³ he increasingly devoted his energies to the Co-operative movement. With his close friend E.O. Greening, he was on the left of the Co-operative movement in his advocacy of co-partnership and profit-sharing and roundly criticised the retail co-operative movement for departing from the ideals of the Rochdale Pioneers.⁴

But it was the Secularist movement which was his most original contribution to English radicalism. Using the term which W.J. Linton suggested to him, he sought to invest free-thought with more positive qualities. Joseph McCabe's assessment of his contribution was that his work led to 'the first organic body for the criticism of religious belief' in

¹Ibid., II, p.181.
²Ibid., I, p.192.
³McCabe, op.cit., I, p.334.
⁴Ibid., I, pp.349-51.
England. In a letter to the dying Gladstone he defined his 'Secularism':

Secularism was primarily designed for ethical inspiration where theology is inoperative. I hope there is a future life, and if so my not being sure of it will not prevent it coming to me. I know of no better way of deserving it than by conscious service of humanity. Belief in a Personal Providence is a great advantage. All conviction is strength. But one can give no offence to a God of Truth by not saying he knows what he does not know. The universe never impressed me with so much awe and wonder as when I found I could not account for it. I admit ignorance is a privation. But to submit not to know, where knowledge is withheld, seems but one of the sacrifices that reverence for truth imposes upon us.

As F.B. Smith has shown, the 'Atheist Mission' in Victorian England provided a vital outlet for the energies of sensitive intellectual artisans, but could never bridge the gap between its deep 'respectability and the brutishness of the men they were trying to save'. In particular, Holyoake's distaste for the obsession with analysing the inconsistencies and indecencies of the scriptures alienated him from the majority of 'conscious secularists' hungry for biblical scandal and evidence of the non-existence of the Deity which still haunted them. Out-manoeuvred by the more oratorical and dramatic Bradlaugh, he was forced to retire to the background of the movement and his vision of a new secular creed which would supply a spiritual foundation for the respectable radical working classes failed.

Holyoake's humanity and common sense tempered his respectability and his genuine liberalism led him to support most unrespectable causes. An early advocate of the rights of women, he was one of the first Parliamentary candidates to include Feminist principles in an election manifesto when he presented his address to the electors of

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1 Ibid., I, p.201.
2 Quoted in Ibid., II, p.174.
3 Smith, op.cit., p.223.
Tower Hamlets in 1857.¹ While abhorring any indelicacy in the discussion of sexual matters, he advocated birth-control and sold contraceptive devices in his bookshop.² He opposed capital punishment and his vivid articles on the horrors of public executions did much to assist their abolition in 1868.³ Holyoake recoiled at the humbug and dreariness of the extremes of respectability, describing the old temperance hotels as the 'penal settlements of teetotalism'.⁴ Despite his intimate association with the middle-class radical intelligentsia, he sensed their potential inhumanity:

Certain English gentlemen of great ability, learning at the feet of Auguste Comte, had preached with great eloquence and many courtesies to the English artisans the doctrines of worshipping their wives as sort of angelic dolls, and of intelligently choosing for themselves a permanent settlement in the political pen where the straw should be clean, the trough copious, the wash abundant, and where the Comtist priests would oft come and graciously pat their sleek backs, provided they did not squeal to get out.⁵

As his associations with the Liberal party grew, so did his influence and he became, as a 'representative of the lower orders', an intermediary between ordinary people and the government⁶ and a trusted adviser on the needs and desires of the working classes. His modus operandi was singular in its perception of how to translate the hopes of working men into a language which the holders of power could understand. In fact Holyoake attempted to manipulate Gladstone and played on his values and prejudices. For

²Smith, op.cit., p.219.
⁴Ibid., I, p.205.
⁵Holyoake, 'Impatience in Politics', op.cit., p.40.
⁶A typical case was that of a solicitor who wrote to Holyoake begging him to see the Attorney-General and to ask him if a remorseful client who had cheated the revenue would be undisturbed if he paid the money. Holyoake got the desired assurance. Quoted in McCabe, op.cit., II, pp.54-5.
instance he was invited to breakfast by Gladstone in 1876, the other guests being Morley, Knowles, Herbert (the artist), Bright and the Rev. W.N. Molesworth. Gladstone asked Holyoake 'how the public could be interested in a measure devised for their benefit' and Holyoake replied by letter a few days later:

The conditions of association among the people are only in a humbler degree the same as among gentlemen. In a club gentlemen have refreshments according to their taste, read what books they please, discuss what topics they choose. The working people want to do the same. Being crowded in their daily lives they have no sense of distinctions and deference to each other as gentlemen have. To allure them into associations and compass its pleasant perpetuity, it is only needed to concede them the liberties of gentlemen, in their humbler way, and to exact agreement from each other to be unimputative and void of offence towards the conviction of others.¹

And so in a sense Holyoake 'made it'. He numbered amongst his friends and acquaintances nearly all the important figures of Victorian public life, including John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, George Eliot, Joseph Chamberlain, Dilke, Woolner, Knowles, and, of course, he corresponded with everybody. To his Liberal contemporaries, George Jacob Holyoake was an exemplar of the civilized, respectable working-class leaders to whom they were profoundly grateful for saving England from revolution. To resounding 'hear hears', Professor Goldwin Smith publicly expressed the gratitude of respectable England to Holyoake at the Co-operative Congress of 1882:

[The Labour Movement] has been led by men like Holyoake - (applause) - who were not self-seekers, who were not demagogues, who had nothing at heart but the real interests of the working class and who, when conflicts arose between employers and employees, were not for interminable war to their own profit, but for peace with justice.²

But Holyoake, at bottom, was a self-seeker and although he never renounced the Secularist principles which barred him

¹Quoted in McCabe, II, p.164.
²Quoted in ibid., II, p.139.
from ultimate social acceptance and from entering Parliament, he craved recognition of his respectability, talent and importance. If he became an outstanding advocate of independence and manliness, it was because the temptations of deference beset him all his life.
W.E. Adams was born in Cheltenham into a family on the economic margin of respectability. His father was a plasterer, and although Adams in retrospect believed him to have been a good father and husband, the old man was a wild and pugnacious wanderer. As a result Adams' early life was spent in a household of women who supported themselves by laundering. All the family were Chartists and Adams' grandmother was careful to explain to him as a boy that Cobbett and Cobden were two different people - that Cobbett was the hero and Cobden nothing more than a middle-class reformer. His grandmother disliked the fact that their dog was called Rodney because she believed that since Admiral Rodney had been elevated to the peerage, he was hostile to the people.¹

Adams received most of his education at a small private school in Cheltenham which was attended by the sons of small tradesmen in the town. Since his grandmother was too poor to pay the fees of 6d to 8d a week, she and her daughters did an equivalent amount of laundry work for the school. Adams was discriminated against by the other boys because of his inferior social status and the master deliberately neglected to teach him arithmetic.² At great personal sacrifice his family paid for his apprenticeship as a compositor.

Adams became interested in politics very early. At seventeen he was chairing local Chartist meetings and was elected as president of the Republican Association a year later. Having completed his apprenticeship and finding Cheltenham too provincial he went to London. His ambition was to get a regular position on an established newspaper which would provide him with a secure income and leave him with sufficient free time to pursue his intellectual

²Ibid., pp.75-6.
interests. His passion was to write but for a long time he believed that intellectual work was too noble an endeavour to be done for mere money. However, his political activities having turned strongly in the direction of Mazzinian Republicanism and later to Secularism, he attracted the attention of Bradlaugh who offered him a job on the National Reformer. This marked the beginning of a brilliant journalistic career, crowned with the editorship of Joseph Cowen's Newcastle Weekly Chronicle.

Adams was not as ambitious as these other respectable radicals and emerges from his memoirs as the least complicated personality of the four. He tended to be always in the lower ranks of radical movements rather than a dominant personality. A strong romantic, his political philosophy was limited to moralising the relations between human beings at the economic, social and political levels.

We were poor but honest folks of Gloucestershire. It is necessary to make this statement because otherwise, being poor, it might be inferred that we were not honest...for the world at large seems incapable of associating poverty with even the negative virtues.¹

With this assertion of his claim to respectability, Adams opened his Memoirs of a Social Atom. He happily regarded himself as a 'Social Atom', acknowledged his insignificance and justified the egotism of writing his recollections with the plea that the history of the common man deserved as much attention as that of the great and powerful. Adopting the role of the spectator and the journalist, he recorded the many important historical events and radical movements with which he had been associated.² Yet Adams' life was far more significant than he claimed, for his story was one of a remarkable effort of emancipation from working-class life and of the impact of radical movements on one of the minor actors in the political stage.

His formative years in Cheltenham were spent under the influence of the small isolated band of skilled artisans who

¹Ibid., p.32.
²Ibid., Introduction, pp.xii-xix.
comprised the Chartist society and Republican association in that otherwise Tory town. These 'earnest and reputable people [were] much above the average in intelligence'.

He vividly recalled a crippled shoemaker called Larry who used to come on Sunday mornings with a still wet copy of the Northern Star. Larry worshipped Feargus O'Conner and William Cobbett. He cherished two small volumes of Cobbett's works 'preserved in wash leather cases, each made to fit so exactly and close so tightly that no spot or stain of any sort should reach the precious pages within'.

Adams absorbed this reverence for print and learning and began to find his life in the printing shop of the local Cheltenham newspaper unstimulating and narrow. In 1848 he despaired when the standard heading kept from 1830 was used for the announcement of the French Revolution. Adams took the traditional provincial artisan's path and went 'on tramp', finally obtaining a secure job in London in the printing office of the Illustrated Times. Here, as a compositor he participated in the best of artisan respectability. He found his fellow workers to be respectable and intelligent men, some of whom were authorities on music, art and literature. Conversation at work ranged over wide cultural interests and the shop formed a magazine club which purchased periodicals and distributed them among the members - Thackeray's Virginians and Dickens' Little Dorrit being among the serials Adams recalled.

Adams' romantic reverence for the life of the mind and the richness of social and intellectual life in the printing trades, in comparison to many other highly-skilled manual occupations, made him satisfied for a time to earn his living by his hands and fulfill his yearning to write in his spare time. His lack of ambition and romantic conception of the role of the writer, made him nearly reject Bradlaugh's

1 Ibid., pp.168-9.
2 Ibid., pp.164-5.
3 Ibid., p.89.
4 Ibid., pp.333-4.
offer of a job as a writer on the National Reformer. But despite this initial scrupulousness, Adams became one of the outstanding journalists of his time. After a year in London earning a precarious living writing for Bradlaugh, he was summoned to Newcastle by Joseph Cowen in the spring of 1863 and in June brought out his first issue of the renamed Newcastle Weekly Chronicle. In his thirty-six years as editor, Adams transformed it from a dull provincial paper into one with a national reputation, which by the 1880s was the most important provincial radical paper in Britain. Adams' mind remained closed to the changes in radical politics after the 1860s, but he was too good a journalist not to give the emerging socialist movement fair coverage. He was one of the first English editors to introduce a Ladies' Column and a Children's Corner, based on his Dicky Bird Club which had 300,000 members in the 1890s. 1

His reverence for learning provided Adams with the means of breaking out of the confines of working-class life. In 1855 he began to attend F.D. Maurice's Working Men's College whenever his irregular hours as a compositor permitted. The language of his Memoirs as he recalled the chambers of his tutor, Mr Furnivall, conveys the heady sense of release into a world of fine and beautiful things: 'Here we sat over biscuits and coffee till an advanced hour talking or listening to talk about poets and poetry, and languages and literature and having such a feast of reason and flow of soul as almost never was since Shakespeare had his bout with Ben Jonson at the Mermaid. 2

Moved by the lack of airs of the tutors at the College, he came to believe in the possibilities of co-operation between enlightened members of the middle class and intelligent workmen and he acknowledged the 'debt of gratitude [he felt] to these eminent and enthusiastic gentlemen who, placing their scholarship at the service of the artisans of London, helped to establish a real bond of

1Ibid., John Saville's introduction, pp.16-19.
2Ibid., pp.380-1.
union between the richer and poorer classes of the country'.

However, Adams' political activities had already begun to distance him from working-class life. Coming to London after the collapse of Chartism, his radicalism found expression in Republicanism. He joined W.J. Linton in Brantwood where he printed the English Republic. Their unconventional life and their seclusion alienated them from the villagers, who treated the small group of urban radicals with open hostility. Only the local school master and school mistress shared their cultural values sufficiently to become friendly with them.

Yet his developing intellectual capacities and literary competence began to confer on him a self-esteem which protected him from a sense of inferiority in the face of his social betters. Working on the Alliance News in the late 1850s he had to read correspondence from clergymen and was 'astonished at the loose, slovenly, and ungrammatical way in which educated men...expressed themselves. It occurred to me that these gentlemen had spent so much time in the study of Latin and Greek and Hebrew that they had forgotten to learn English.'

The decisive influence in his life was Joseph Mazzini. When he and his republican comrades read Mazzini's Duties of Man, the void left by religious scepticism and the failure of Chartism was dramatically filled.

Here was the 'something more' for which they had been yearning. Here, indeed, was a doctrine that deserved their devotion. Here, in a word, was the religion for which they were longing and pining and praying. Yes they were Republicans - these ardent youths - with a more definite notion of what the word implied than the mere rejection of monarchy. The Republic, as they understood it, was not so much a form of government as a system of morals, a law of life, a need, a faith, a new and benign gospel.

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1 Ibid., p.382.
2 Ibid., pp.282-3; F.B. Smith, Radical Artisan, op.cit., pp.113-4.
3 Ibid., p.388.
4 Ibid., p.266.
The moralism of Mazzinianism captivated many respectable intellectual and romantic artisans like Adams. Committed to the rights of the individual and despising despotism in all forms, Adams found in the Mazzinian vision of a harmonious society of free, civilized and moral men the crystallisation of his aspirations and ideals. He became passionately involved in the plight of the foreign refugees from European despotism. Coming to despise Louis Napoleon, he abandoned his usual cautiousness and wrote a pamphlet on the Orsini plot defending tyrannicide. He was charged with publishing a seditious article and was lucky to be acquitted.¹

To the end of his life Adams' political values were shot through with the influence of Mazzini. Mazzini's ideals gave a spiritually satisfying intellectual gloss for radical artisans like Adams, whose instincts came close to the middle-class code of respectability, and for whom Gladstonian Liberalism came to appear as 'second best'. The conclusion of Adams' memoirs reveals this spiritual alliance:

The influence and prospects of the British race can only be ruined by the vices and stupidities of the British race itself. The pursuit of narrow and sordid interests in preference to broad and patriotic interests - solicitude for the advantage of a class instead of the welfare of the nation at large - would sooner or later be fatal to us all. So also would be the sacrifice of the general prosperity to the gross indulgences of the individual. Thrift and industry, probity and sobriety, will ensure the prosperity of any race on earth. They will prove the salvation of ours. For the rest, there is the idea of obligation. Thomas Drummond laid down the doctrine that property has its duties as well as its rights. When we have learnt the still better lesson of Joseph Mazzini - that the duties of man are as divinely ordained as the rights of man - we may march on our way defiant and rejoicing.²

Adams' two overriding political principles - respect for the freedom of the individual and the necessity to moralise society - led him to adopt what appear to be naive attitudes

¹Ibid., pp.342-72.
²Ibid., p.650.
towards social and political problems. He opposed compulsory Trade Union membership on the grounds that the 'old unionism' of Thomas Burt, had fought against the tyranny of capital, not because it was capital but because it was tyranny. Now, the defenders of the rights of the individual had to fight against the new tyranny of labour.\(^1\) He rightly suspected compulsory state education of pauperising the poor rather than emancipating them, but could offer no better solution than a return to a limited system which would give the poor the tools of knowledge and let 'self-help' look after the rest.\(^2\)

His analysis of the cause of the conflict between capital and labour laid the blame at the feet of the captains of industry who had not 'behaved to the rank and file as men ought always to behave to men'. The industrial unrest of the 'nineties was their reward - 'Bad masters sowed the mind and good masters are now reaping the whirlwind'.\(^3\) But Labour had also fallen from grace. Extolling the work ethic - 'Work has redeemed the world. It is the salvation of man: for those who don't work die of meanness or debauchery',\(^4\) - he deplored the Trade Union movement's opposition to piece work or to the right to reward for effort and industry.\(^5\) From his Mazzinian and liberal principles he unwittingly deduced a quasi-Marxist insight: 'The Labour problem will never really be solved till means have been found to make every man feel an affection for his work and a desire to excel in it.'\(^6\)

Trapped in his vision of a respectable civilized harmonious society governed by reason and humanity, he rejoiced in the decline of the violent class conflict of the 1840s and the emergence of a new England, where 'Thanks to

\(^1\)Ibid., pp.555-6.
\(^2\)Ibid., pp.110-1.
\(^3\)Ibid., pp.383-4.
\(^4\)Ibid., pp.549-50.
\(^5\)Ibid., p.556.
\(^6\)Ibid., p.553.
the political earnestness, but still more to the political intrepidity, of later statesmen, working men, enfranchised by household suffrage, commenced for the first time to associate themselves closely and actively with the orthodox parties of the State'. ¹ He was in part blinded by the improvement in his own fortunes and in part by his cultural isolation from the ordinary working-class people, but he had no doubt that the second half of the nineteenth century had been an age of material improvement for the poor. ² His disillusion was reserved for what he believed had been a decline in the artisan respectability of his youth.

Like many romantic working-class autodictacts, he had over-estimated the impact of universal education on the working classes. For instead of seeing 'Paradise restored', 'Social and Political questions considered on their merits with every man having the 'liberty to think out all questions concerning his welfare without molestation' and 'ignorance disappear before the light of education' - modern education crammed the mind but left the sentiments uncultivated. ³ He was scandalised at the mass press and the immorality of modern writers like Zola: 'There is filth enough in real life which one cannot avoid seeing without going to books for it'. ⁴

Appalled at what he considered to be an increase in drunkenness, a tendency to shirk work, and the loss of self-reliance amongst the poor, he placed his hopes in the ultimate faith in humanity he had learned from Mazzini. ⁵ Of all these respectable radicals, Adams - the least ambitious - was the only one to achieve a quiet recognition and financial security. Significantly his political anger withered with the loss of his thwartedness as a respectable but working-class man.

¹Ibid., p.238.
²Ibid., pp.43-7.
³Ibid., pp.582-4.
⁴Ibid., p.588.
⁵Ibid., p.601.
George Howell was born at Wrington, Somerset, the son of a mason. The father fell into severe financial difficulties so at the age of ten Howell was taken away from his Church of England school and sent into the streets to pick up lumps of coal that dropped from passing carts. This early experience of the precariousness of artisan life in the 'hungry 'forties' affected him for the rest of his life as he recalled in old age: 'I seemed to have grown into manhood all at once, for care and suffering developed a self-reliance which was abnormal in one so young. I had a brother to care for, and that burthen caused me to forget any privation and troubles of my own.'

In 1847 at fourteen years of age he joined a Chartist Society and was one of the first members of the Y.M.C.A. Already by this age he was an avid if undisciplined reader. At twenty he went to Bristol where he worked as a bricklayer and in 1854 took off for London where he lived for the rest of his life. Howell soon became involved in politics, finding his then teetotalism a distinct advantage as a speaker in pub political debates. This political apprenticeship marked the beginning of a distinguished career in Trade Unionism and radical-liberal politics.

Howell became a member of the 'Junta' and was secretary to the London Trades Council from 1861 to 1862. His life as a bricklayer ended when he became secretary to the Reform League in 1866. He resigned to attempt to enter parliament in 1869. In 1865 he was a founding member of the council of the International Working Men's Association and was a leading spirit in the Garibaldi and Polish agitations among the London workmen. But it was as a lobbyist during his secretarship to the parliamentary committee of the Trade Union Congress (1871-5) that George Howell made his most significant contribution to the Labour Movement. He became known as 'the champion bill passer'. All the major Trade

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Union legislation of the late 'sixties and 'seventies owed its final acceptance and much of its clarity and comprehensiveness in part to him. Howell retired voluntarily from the secretaryship at the age of forty-two, again to attempt to win a parliamentary seat. He achieved this ultimate ambition in 1885 as the member for North East Bethnal Green in 1885. But once he left the T.U.C. for the rest of his life he made little creative impact on the Labour cause.

After 1875 he attempted to support himself by writing on Labour problems, and dependent on the patronage of wealthy Liberal sympathisers to the Labour Movement, to establish a secure position within the Liberal party. He twice attempted without success to set up in business as a slum-landlord. Haunted by his childhood experiences, his tenuous claim to support from the Liberal party and his fractious relationships with other working-class radicals, he increasingly began to appear to toady to the respectable middle-class radical Liberals. The tragic early death of his only son, in whom he had invested much of his own frustrated ambitions, sapped his energy and aggravated his self-involvement and depression. At the end of his political career he attacked the dangerous tendencies of the militant 'new unionism' in the manner of classical Gladstonian Liberalism: decrying in 1890 the T.U.C.'s endorsement of the demand for a statutory eight hour day: 'we shall be plunged into a whirlpool of turmoil, until the workmen of England have awakened from the fascinating dream that the State can do everything for the individual, and do it better than he can do it for himself.' In 1895 he was defeated in Bethnal Green by a Tory barrister and journalist and spent the remaining fifteen years in obscurity, plagued by poor health and lack of money. The twilight of his life was briefly warmed by a platonic love affair with a Mrs Edie Price – an

interlude of intimacy in an otherwise neurotic and solitary life in the pursuit of emancipation from his social and psychological frustrations.

George Howell was the youngest of these four respectable men, and the only one to begin his adult political career after the collapse of Chartism. In a recent biography F.M. Leventhal depicts Howell as a characteristic 'mid-Victorian artisan, whose ideas exemplify the prevailing Liberalism of the politically-conscious labour aristocracy of his generation'. He continues:

Howell was firmly committed to the removal of the disabilities which impeded labour's social and political advancement, but his perspectives were shaped by the dominant cultural values of his day. The ideal of self-help, instilled alike by the forces of Benthamite Radicalism and religious dissent, vitiated the class-consciousness of mid-Victorian artisans, fostering accommodations within the existing order rather than rebellion against it. Born in the troubled years of the Reform agitation, the New Poor Law, and militant Chartism, Howell's generation of labour leaders reached maturity in the atmosphere of lessened tension generated by mid-Victorian prosperity. Impervious to the profound sense of alienation among the victims of the Industrial Revolution, these representatives of the artisan élite aspired to become proper Victorians, and some of them ended their lives as moderately eminent ones.¹

Although Leventhal has characterised George Howell's respectability correctly, he has misunderstood it. In contrast to Holyoake, Adams and even Cooper, Howell's personality most closely corresponded to the stereotype of Victorian high seriousness. He lacked their humour, charm and lightness of touch, so that his moralising view of life was unrelieved and morbid. Moreover, he was a driven man - insecure, self-involved, vain and cold.

The key to understanding Howell is that he was by nature a respectable man and that respectability, rather than

¹Ibid., Introduction, p.14.
vitiating his radicalism, constituted its mainspring.¹ Feeling himself worthy of respect as a man of civilized character and talent, he found the political and social oppression of working-class life intolerable. As with the others, his political values were formulated in an era when the overriding concern of politically aware working men was to secure their political freedom, and for the rest of his life, the tenets of European radical Liberalism shaped his attitudes.

George Howell exemplified early Victorian artisan respectability in his drive to acquire education and culture. His formal schooling having been prematurely shortened, he embarked in his adolescence on the typical pattern of compulsive and unsystematic reading. In 1848 he was converted to Methodism and religious reading and enthusiasm absorbed his frustration and began to prepare him for his political career. The inevitable sense of inferiority at this ad hoc self-culture was still with him when he came to write his autobiography:

Let those educated at Rugby or Eton preliminary to Oxford or Cambridge sneer. They are put through courses of study early, I had to begin where they left off. I had to feel my way, in spare hours, with spare means and no real guide to help me or point the way. Books, only books, were my masters, teachers, counsellors and friends at that early date.²

He never lost these habits nor the trace of self-consciousness as his diary disclosed in 1869: 'Afternoon devoted to study.

¹ An example of Howell's concern for working-class respectability and the self-esteem he derived from it, is a pamphlet in his library in which he heavily underlined all the parts on respectability. He was deeply impressed with the argument that 'poor people' and the 'working classes' were not synonymous. A working man proper always had some regular employment or a trade from which he took a subordinate title like 'shoemaker' etc. A poor man was thriftless and took charity. 'And whereas these last are ready, - nay greedy, - to accept any charity, from any quarter, there is in the working man a proper spirit of independence....' Workman! What of Your House (Edinburgh, 1867), p.6, presented to Howell with the author's compliments in 1877. Howell Collection, Bishopsgate Institute.

² Leventhal, op.cit., p.13.
History of Working Classes. Went home early and read history of Nineveh and Assyria.¹

Howell's religious beliefs waned after he went to London and politics became the ruling passion of his life. He began to read a little literature, but his intellectual interests, having to be squeezed in after a strenuous day's work, tended to be relevant to his political interests rather than cultural. In early 1865, while still working as foreman bricklayer, his diary revealed a dull daily round of exhausting physical work, constant illness and depression. One day, suffering from an inflamed eye, he went home early:

'Mr Bartlett called in evening and stayed an hour or two, talked over matters Political, Literary and Scientific.'²

But such luxuries were rare. Howell's diary starkly illustrates the frustration and constant anxiety of life as a 'Labour Aristocrat'. For the rest of his life, he never lost the sensitivity to the weather instilled by a life in the building trades - bad weather always depressed his spirits as once it had reduced his income. Even though he ceased manual labour at the age of thirty-two, it left a legacy in recurrent bouts of quinsy, depression and eye inflammations which were to send him nearly blind in old age. Stricken in 1868 with quinsy, he wrote: 'Spent the day quietly trying to beat back my old enemy in the throat, but to little purpose. So often have I suffered with these attacks and so severely, that I feel timid at every reoccurrence. I am seldom a coward, but I am in this.'³

Howell's lack of sympathy for the eight-hour day movement in 1890 is more comprehensible when viewed against his compulsive capacity for work. He rarely finished work before 11 or 12 at night. In fact he suffered from an inability not to work and in 1887 took his first real holiday in twenty years - a week at the beach with his wife, picking

² Ibid., 4 January 1865.
³ Ibid., 19 January 1868.
up sea shells. In a state of mental collapse, he titled every entry in the diary 'By the Sad Sea Waves', but recovered himself sufficiently to note that it had cost them only £8. 8. 3. His son confessed in his diary to a sense of guilt at not working as hard as 'Pa' would like.

This constant hard work aggravated his lack of humanity and he was neglectful, over callously indifferent to his family, especially to his wife, Dorcas. His son Georgie acidly commented that his father had 'honoured the table with his presence' at a tea party and concert given by Mrs Howell's piano pupils. When Georgie died at the age of twenty from the long-term effects of rheumatic fever, Howell poured out his neurotic grief in a pathetic biography of the boy. From his earliest years, he wrote, books 'were part of the atmosphere he breathed and they filled his soul as with a perfume'. But the Georgie of his own diaries was very different from his father's fantasies - conventional, fun-loving, an indifferent student and with an eye for girls.

Mrs H., as Howell nearly always called her in his diary in typical middle-class style, emerges from the son's diary as a woman of considerable refinement. She was an excellent pianist and during their years of affluence, used her money to attend the opera and concerts. Howell rarely took her out and gave her no companionship at home so that she was forced to create an independent life of her own. For her entire married life, Dorcas mostly saw her husband in bed.

Georgie's death was the great tragedy of the Howell's lives. It sapped Howell of much of his energy and enthusiasm for public affairs, but Dorcas appears to have maintained her independence and resourcefulness until she reached the menopause nine years after the bereavement. All the years

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1Ibid., 14 to 20 August 1887.


3Ibid., 4 April 1878.

4Quoted in Leventhal, op.cit., p.198.

5G.W.T. Howell's Diaries, op.cit., 19 October 1877.
of emotional and possibly sexual neglect broke out and she turned to the most common means of escape - alcohol. Typically Howell ignored her condition, mentioning her in his diary only on days he was forced to be home at Christmas and New Year. He had never cared much about Dorcas and was mortified that his wife should turn into a drunken slattern who screamed at him with foul abuse when she was hopelessly intoxicated. The object of all the aggressions she had repressed or denied was Howell. He suffered her accusations with shame and disgust for eight years until she died. Dorcas had taken her revenge on Howell - a revenge both tragic and ironic.¹

Howell had emancipated himself from the puritanical Wesleyanism of his youth to the extent that he drank wine and beer in moderation. He remained intolerant with bad language and drunkenness - but that was consistent with the respectable working-class culture he advocated.² However he was unquestionably a sexual prude. After seeing a play he found to be in 'bad taste', he stormed in his normally passionless diary: 'This play and the Byron controversy is [sic] doing more than all Holywell Street to debauch our young women and familiarize them with vice. Nothing can be better for old Debauchees than to be able to quote the current topics of the day to girls.'³ He was also purient. Like many working-class radicals he supported the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, but he was so fascinated by the issue that he built up the largest collection of pamphlets known to be in existence.⁴ He may

¹George Howell's Diaries, op.cit., 15 January 1889, 26 December 1893, Notes for February 1895, 6 to 10 December 1897.
²Ibid., 3 August 1869; Howell was disgusted at a Labour Representation League meeting when '[George] Odger got nearly drunk and quarrelsome and even suggested to settle some difference with a fight.'
³Ibid., 8 September 1869.
⁴From the research on the C.D.A. campaign carried out in England by Dr F.B. Smith.
simply have been uninterested in sex, but more probably neurotically disgusted by the sexual act.

His first apparent romantic attachment with a woman was not until he was sixty-five, retired and in poor health. Just over a year after Dorcas' death, he fell in love with a young married woman, Edie Price. Howell was pathetically infatuated and for the first time in his life regretted his emotional inhibitions: 'Mrs Price's birthday - gave her purse. Watch later on. She was not over-pleased with my "cold" good wishes she said. But it was all right after all.' \(^1\) Their liaison was undoubtedly platonic, but Edie ignored all the proprieties and visited Howell alone at night. When Mr Price abused Howell for interfering in his marriage, Howell, with genuine Victorian innocence, found his anger incomprehensible and 'didn't feel well all day - very depressed'. \(^2\)

In other respects the Howells' domestic life was a model of Victorian respectability especially during Georgie's life-time. Friends were entertained with tea parties and singing and Georgie read the Family Herald aloud to 'mama' at night. \(^3\) Dorcas shared the housework with her servants throughout their years of affluence from 1869 to 1880. She even took them to see the sights of London and to the opera. Although Dorcas knew how to behave as Howell's wife in his years of power, she was lonely and liked people irrespective of who they were. Although there are no references in the diaries of either father or son to any church attendance, eighteen-year old Georgie spent an evening

\(^1\)George Howell's Diaries, 1899, n.d.

\(^2\)Ibid., February 1899.
trying to convince his atheistic friend Bob Hobbs 'of the folly and unsoundness of such doctrines'.

The fear of poverty pursued Howell throughout his life and provided the most constant source of his deep depressions. What a sudden financial crisis could mean to a foreman bricklayer with only one child emerges from this entry of 1864:

Left at half past five. Myself and Hawkins had a glass, being my birthday. Mrs H. presented me with a Handsome Smoking Cap. In the evening went to see Mr Walker when he presented me a bill for £13:18:6. It staggered me and threw me into a complete fever. After went [out] But felt chilly and feverish [rest indecipherable]... felt quite done when I reached home.

Even during his reasonably affluent days, he kept scrupulous personal accounts. In 1867, he enjoyed, after a year as secretary to the Reform League, what he called his 'very first year of real comfort when I have felt able to buy a few things and really not pinch for it. Yet I have not lived extravagant [sic] but very moderately and carefully. Never felt that I should live fast or spend in gaiety.'

Howell's sense of his personal worth, morally and intellectually, was the driving force behind his utilisation of politics as a means to emancipation and freedom. He was in many ways a snob - regarding as inferiors those working-class people who could not obey the strictures of respectability. His anxiety that his qualities be recognised

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1 Ibid., 1 January 1878. Howell appears to have been ambivalent in his religious views. His superb library in the Bishopsgate Institute contains a good collection of religious literature, but his contact with Secularists seems to have made him a sceptic. He was evasive about his beliefs. In the 1868 election when he stood in Aylesbury, he declared that he held to the principles of 'our common Christianity as any of these Tory gentlemen'. In 1878 the Greenwich Liberal Association refused to adopt him as a candidate when their dislike of his working-class origin was reinforced by his refusal to answer questions on his religious views. Leventhal, op.cit., pp.122 and 201.

2 George Howell's Diaries, 15 May 1887.

3 Ibid., 3 October 1864.

4 Ibid., Reflections on financial review for 1867.
by others led him to record with satisfaction each small success in his diary.¹

His respectability became both the strength and ultimate weakness of his radicalism. Howell's solution to the conflict between capital and labour and social injustice lay in the moral elevation of the working classes into respectable, independent and self-reliant men like himself. This did not mean that he subscribed to selfish individualism and he urged respectable working men to devote their efforts to the elevation of their fellows. The best statement of his respectable working-class political ideology appeared in an article he wrote for the Contemporary Review in 1878:

There is a large minority who seem to resist every effort to uplift them in the social scale. They neither read nor think; they are content to grovel and drink, utterly regardless of the consequences, either to themselves or their families. They appear to be devoid of all sense of shame; dead to the finer feelings and instincts of manhood; having no ambition and no hope, they are selfish and brutish in the present and heedless of the future. The one bright spot in this sombre picture is that the class above described is surely and steadily, if slowly, decreasing. A hopeful sign it is; and, looking to the results of primary education, the influence of school discipline, the increasing power of the Press, and the improved tone of social life, we may reasonably anticipate that our future progress will be accelerated. It is the duty of every workman with the slightest pretension to self-respect to lend his aid in helping to accomplish this, and in particular to assist in stamping out the demon of intemperance - the source of so much misery. The elevation of their own class is as much in their interest as the individual increase of their own personal comfort, or the addition of a few pounds to their earnings and savings. In proportion to the extent to which the mass is improved, so will the power, influence, moral and material weight of the whole working population be augmented and enlarged.²

¹E.g., ibid., 1 February 1869 and 24 January 1887.

²George Howell, 'Are the Working Classes Improvident?', Contemporary Review, July 1878, p.519.
The other side of the equation was that the middle classes should do their duty as well and his bitterness when they failed was often confided to his diary. He wrote on 7 June 1871: 'The Commune of Paris is in a sad state, civil war has commenced in earnest, the Central Committee are rash and foolish and the National Assembly reactionary and cruel, Good God, when will the wretched middle classes honestly do their duty politically and socially.'

Yet he could not foresee the possible effectiveness of a working-class party which could be free from the need for middle-class support and patronage. Having devoted his career to securing the freedom of the trade union movement from the State, he could only visualise working-class associations using their voting power to elect representatives to 'maintain the concessions already granted by the Legislature'. The economic life of society was by nature separate from political life. To Howell's generation, political power had been used to prevent working men from using industrial power - politics could offer no solution to depressions in trade and the conflict between capital and labour. Therefore labour's role was to seek the same freedom as capital to bargain with it on equal terms.

Howell's radicalism came under assault from another direction. When he retired from the parliamentary committee of the Trades Union Congress, he lost his trade union power base and was forced to fall back upon patronage from the Liberal party. Reluctant to return to bricklaying, the next decade saw him supporting himself with journalism and putting scheme after scheme to wealthy patrons. His disappointments led him to fulminate against their lack of appreciation: 'The Liberals as a party seem too poor to help their workers in the way of employment, or else some of us, or at least I for one, have never been able to get into the

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1George Howell's Diaries, op.cit. Memo for week 2 to 7 June 1871.

stream, and general movements which I have had in hand have barely sufficed for a mere existence.'

Men in Howell's position needed to be able to suffer being patronised easily and Howell fundamentally never could. In 1865, he was in the employ of a contractor called Dove, who had given him a job as a foreman after he had been blacklisted for his trade union activities:

Mr Dove came at about half past 10. Went over the job and stormed in a fearful style, talked about robbing him and it was disgraceful men laying about in such a manner etc. etc. I too stormed, told him I feared him not, I never lived by Plunder or I could get a better living than I got now. Told him I could get my living by my head or hands etc.

Despite his outward decorum and apparent quiescent respectability, Howell never lost his dislike of the middle classes and the aristocracy. In a frenzied account of the foundation of the First International written in 1878, he blamed its decay on the 'introduction of the' religious idea 'by a German "doctor", Karl Marx'. The subsequent 'wild theories' were 'the contributions of the middle class men who were admitted to its councils; they were the devices of "philosophers, journalists and students" rather than dreams of working men, only that the latter too readily swallowed the bait'. He indulged his hostility to upper class liberals in the privacy of his diary: 'If anyone could have seen Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke Bart M.P. as I saw him today with Lady Dilke in Convent Garden, they would never have suspected the dandy baronet of any serious designs against property or even privilege. Dressed in the highest

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1 Howell to John Holms, 7 April 1877, quoted in Leventhal, op. cit., p.194. Howell had cause to be bitter and hurt. He had thrown in his lot with the Liberal party both out of conviction and the need for a job. He was terrified at having to return to bricklaying, and in late 1869, while working as a Liberal agent under the patronage of James Stansfeld, he was mortified when Stansfeld tried to keep him quiet with the offer of a job as a bricklayer in his brewery. See ibid., p.126.

2 George Howell's Diaries, op. cit., 7 February 1865.

3 George Howell, 'History of the International Association', Nineteenth Century, June 1878, pp.25 and 27.
of fashion, with costly fur trimmings to his overcoat, he looked rather like a betting dandy than an M.P. . . . . No quiet Republican stint.\textsuperscript{1}

He was deeply hurt when already by 1870 he found himself being attacked in working class organizations for no longer being a \textit{bona fide} working man.\textsuperscript{2} Despite the stridency of his public statements against the spirit of the 'new unionism', in 1890, he was conscious of the sad irony of being a 'moderate' in the labour movement.\textsuperscript{3}

Howell, unlike Holyoake, or even Adams and Cooper, never quite 'made it'. He was too abrasive, insecure and dour a personality to win life-long supporters and friends. He was, however, conscious of the flaws in his pursuit of significance, as a moment of self-insight in his diary reveals:

Read Horner's (?) life. A good noble fellow, but fettered by caste. He always seemed to fear the result of his own logic. Well caste is not confined to any class, it rankles in all of us.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}George Howell's Diaries, op.cit., 20 April 1871. See also 1 March 1870.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 28 April 1870.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 14 February 1889.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., 20 January 1868.
Caste rankled in all these men and their respectability was to a large extent the mainspring of both their ambition and their radicalism. Respectability assisted them in their movement out of the working class and it provided at least an initial psychological stress in their lives. They became uneasy men in the uneasy class. The stigma of their birth could never be erased, yet however ambivalent their status as middling-class brainworkers, there was no question that any of them wanted to return to manual work. They had no illusions about the insecurity, frustration and misery of being working-class. However, with the exception of Adams, the barriers to social acceptance in the black-coated world kept alive their sense of class injustice. The nexus each of these men perceived between manliness and freedom rendered them constitutionally incapable of responding to concepts of State collectivism. Radicalised by their hostility to social and political authority, they feared the growth of state power over the individual and intellectually wedded to the inevitability of the market-place economy, they underestimated the power and tenacity of capital. However, for men of their generation, they were in part justified to see class conflict in social more than economic terms, and the radical-liberal critique of Victorian society was vindicated by its success in removing many of the political and social barriers to working-class ambition and freedom.

Above all, these four respectable men suffered the frustrations of decent poverty. They were luckier than most in that they had talents which enabled them to move out of the working class, but ambition and talent, as well as respectability, exposed them to stress. W.E. Adams suffered least, but he was endowed with a more pacific disposition and he enjoyed the relative security of a good trade and later a genuine profession. Their ambitions were intellectual and social rather than material, and if they lapsed into moments of deference, it is remarkable how infrequent such lapses were. They needed to be complaisant if they were to survive, but if they had been deferential they may have achieved more worldly success. Desperate to
participate in the public world, they all achieved at least that ambition. Cooper, Holyoake and Howell attained the accolade of inclusion in the Dictionary of National Biography, which marked the immense change which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century in the public acceptability of working-class leaders and thinkers. Their respectability helped them to become political men but it isolated them from the unrespectable and limited their effectiveness as popular leaders. However, the next generation of working-class radical leaders, especially the Socialists, were equally inhibited by the social conflict between the rough and the respectable and it was to be a continuing problem in radical working-class politics.
SHAFTESBURY PARK, BATTERSEA, 1972

Eland Road,

Corner shop at entrance to the Estate in Grayshott Road

Brassey Square
CHAPTER VII

A RESPECTABLE COMMUNITY: SHAFTESBURY PARK 1872-1892

i THE ESTATE

While working for Booth in 1888 Graham Balfour found the most interesting part of Battersea to be the Shaftesbury Park Estate, 'between the railway and the high ground to the south, and chiefly inhabited by superior artisans'. Covering forty-two acres, it housed about 8,000 people in dwellings at rents ranging from 7/6d a week for a ‘two-up two-down’, to 12/- for the largest houses. The Estate was the brainchild of an illiterate navvy, William Austin, who prospered after renouncing the drink at the age of forty-seven. Starting as a small contractor, he was able to solicit support from a modest group of clerks and working men for a joint-stock venture to found the Artizans’, Labourers’ and General Dwellings’ Company in 1867. It was to become the largest private organization providing cheap, sanitary working-class housing in London, surpassing the more famous Peabody Donation in both quantity and quality. Shaftesbury Park, the Company’s first project, was commenced in 1872 and largely completed four years later.

What fascinated Balfour was that here ‘the intelligent portion of the Socialism of the district is chiefly to be found, and the colony represents perhaps the high-water mark of the life of the intelligent London artisan’. It represented also the high-water mark of London working-class respectability and the meeting of two forces - the philanthropic vision of a respectable and domesticated


4Booth, loc.cit.
working class and the attractiveness of that life to skilled workers.

Shaftesbury Park is still a distinctive place - remarkably unchanged by the twentieth century as though its seclusion and protection by the railway line and Lavender Hill have delayed the transformations which have occurred all around it. The poorer and less respectable estates to the east have been blitzed and demolished, making way for council housing. South of Lavender Hill, where once the Shaftesbury Park people turned out to watch the procession of carriages on Derby Day, the three and four storied middle-class houses have been abandoned to multi-occupation by West Indian families and young couples serving out their residence qualification for a council flat. But down in Shaftesbury Park, despite the T.V. aerials and the 'cars, the original atmosphere of Austin's dream of an artisan village survives. The Company thought it fit that model working men should have their modest share of Victorian domestic taste, so the narrow two-storied terraces boast Gothic porches and the entrances to the Estate are proclaimed by minarets. The railway line softens the curve of the tree-lined streets so that even life-long residents lose their sense of direction. It appears still exactly what it was intended to be - a miniature bourgeois society for miniature bourgeois people.

From the beginning, the Company's rules sought to eradicate characteristics of unrespectable working-class life. Public houses were banned, and strictly speaking alcoholic beverages were not meant to be consumed in private houses. The keeping of lodgers was forbidden, pawnshops and fish and chip shops successfully discouraged. To avoid

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1Burns' Collection, 46310 Diary, 30 May 1888. Even John Burns joined in this Battersea public event: 'Christmas came home to tea and accompanied Patty and I to Clapham Common to see the people come from the Derby. No diminution in the numbers, but what a change for the better in their behaviour, very little roughness and horseplay of any kind. The most remarkable feature of large crowds today is their comparative quietness and politeness.'

2Interview with Misses Beattie Baker and Minnie Saxby conducted at 67 Grayshott Road, SW11, on 24 July 1972.
sectarian strife, Churches were excluded from the Estate. The first hallmark of respectability was regularity of income so that well into the twentieth century bricklayers found it difficult to obtain a house.1 Not only rent arrears were cause for eviction, but damage to company property and general 'unrespectability' could land a family in the street.2 The Company kept high standards of house maintenance. The Superintendent, whose four-bedroomed house had the only bathroom on the Estate, could, without notice, inspect a home for tidiness. Halls were repainted every ten years, parlours every eight, bedrooms every seven, and living rooms every five. Tenants had the choice of brown or grey, but external painting was uniform throughout the Estate. Yet in a more democratic age residents still speak highly of the Company, not resenting its discipline which it seems accorded with the yearning for domestic decency of respectable artisans.3 As the inscription on the foundation stone between numbers 21 and 23 Grayshott Road proclaims: 'Healthy Homes the First Condition of Social Progress.'

However the Company's aspirations were not bounded by drains. In 1872 the Directors proposed to turn the premises used as the Estate Agency Office into a Club House 'equal in accommodation to any at the West End'. A hall to hold 350 people was being built and suggestions were afoot to convert the existing temporary hall into swimming and washing baths. 'Brassey Square, a space of about one and a quarter acres, the Estate Company are going to make into a garden like that on the Thames Embankment, in which seats are to be placed and it is intended to have a band to play

1 Interview with Mr J.F. Lane conducted at 197 Elsley Road, SW11, on 21 July 1972.

2 Interview with Miss Florence Jewson conducted at St Johns Hospital, SW11, on 17 July 1972. Interview with Councillor H.J. Harrison conducted at 172 Elsley Road, SW11, on 12 July 1972. During the 1930s Depression evictions were rare as the sense of community was so strong that unemployed families had their rent paid by the neighbours.

3 Councillor Harrison, op.cit.
there in summer months. The 1873 Annual Report noted with satisfaction that in the temporary hall seating 800, a Workingmen's Institute had been formed and 'Self supporting Lectures, Concerts, Penny Readings etc. have taken place, and the large audiences have testified to the satisfaction with which such aids to instruction and intellectual amusement have been received'.

The London School Board ran a day school in the Hall while awaiting the erection of the Estate's own school in Holden Street, which still dominates the skyline.

These plans were soon blasted by the exigencies of private enterprise. The Company began to over-expand, starting new estates in rapid succession until it exceeded its resources and became involved in too much unproductive capital. However a cut in the dividend would have dried up the essential inflow of capital funds. An auditor made allegations of dividends paid from capital and worse irregularities. On 5 June 1877 an Extraordinary General Meeting was called by nine shareholders and on 2 July William Swindlehurst, the Company secretary, and the Chairman, Dr J. Baxter Langley, resigned. On 20 October both were sentenced at the Old Bailey for fraud, making illicit profits from the purchase of a new estate Queen's Park, and for taking commissions for the purchase of goods at excessive prices. Too much had been left to the 'intelligent and energetic' Swindlehurst, who despite his name, had lived on the Estate and organized activities such as the first Rifle Corps. For both men it was a shameful end to careers in radical reform movements. In 1848 Swindlehurst was appointed as a 'Scrutineer' for the Preston branch of O'Connor's Land

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1 Henry S. Simmons, op.cit., p.142.
2 'Artizans' Centenary, op.cit., p.11.
3 Austin was squeezed out of the Company in 1870 complaining then that 'I'm no scholar, so they outvoted me' and later that 'I was too honest for them, and it was for this reason that they hunted me out'. Ibid., p.9.
4 'Artizans' Centenary, op.cit., pp.15-16; South London Press, 5 August 1876.
Company. We know more about the surgeon Baxter Langley. One of the most prominent Reform Leaguers, he led the protest meeting on 23 July 1866 in Hyde Park and stood as a Radical Liberal with Gladstone in Greenwich for the 1874 election.

The old Board was swept away and the Committee of Investigation took over. Lord Shaftesbury's son, the Hon. Evelyn Ashley M.P., who had been an active critic, was the new chairman. Despite angry protests, rents at Shaftesbury Park were raised twice in the year and the central space built over. Yet while the Battersea estate had to pay in part for the Company's mismanagement, the protest movement initiated a capacity for political organization and self-help which became a characteristic of the community. Already there were working-class politicians on the Estate and J.C. Durant, the luckless Radical M.P. for Stepney in 1885, led the residents' committee.

Shaftesbury Hall remained until 1888, providing a venue for entertainment, education and political activity, but it too had to make way for flats. In the 1880s the Estate had a Co-operative Store, a Labour Loan Society, its own Social Review, a Rifle Corps, sporting teams, an Annual Flower Show sponsored by the Company and run by the Shaftesbury Park Improvement Society (this is still an annual event), a music and drama society, two Workingmen's Clubs which foundered on the prohibition of liquor and

1 Northern Star, 12 February 1848.
2 Leventhal, op.cit., pp.62, 66 and 75.
3 South London Press, 22 May 1886.
4 Ibid., 18 August 1888.
5 Simmons, op.cit., p.142. The Social Review appears to have been a newspaper. Unfortunately no copies have survived.
6 South London Press, 1 August 1885.
7 Ibid., 22 May 1880.
8 See below.
branches of organizations such as the Lodge of Good Templars. For the religious, the Estate was ringed by churches eager to evangelize the community and for the freethinker, a Secular Society was just over the railway line. And the politically inclined made Battersea in the 1880s the most active Radical and Socialist borough in London. Club-life was more important than pub-life and the gin palace an anathema. Music Hall came late and seems to have been a treat rather than a habit - the Shakespeare Theatre in Lavender Hill doing well by the turn of the century. Self-organized entertainment as well as Clubs were typical of Estate social life and an aura of respectability was carried into the neighbouring institutions patronized by Shaftesbury people.

There were four classes of houses on the estate, ranging from five to eight rooms and in 1872 the rents were 6/6d, 7/6d, and 8/- per week according to size. By 1888, after the scandal, they had risen to 7/6d to 12/-. The Company had intended to make house purchase easy and in 1872 tenants could purchase their own homes by instalments, paying rates, taxes and ground rent in addition to the purchase money. The Company came to discourage individual purchase, but about 25 per cent of the Estate passed into private hands before the policy was discontinued. At the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes in

1 South London Press, 28 August 1886.


3 Justice, 26 April 1884.

4 See below.

5 Miss Jewson and interview with Mr Dave Clark conducted at 80 Sabine Road, 21 July 1972.


7 Simmons, loc.cit.
1884-5, Lord Shaftesbury admitted that at first Shaftesbury Park was not taken up by quite the sort of people for whom it was intended, attracting too many messengers, porters and bankers' and lawyers' clerks. But the Company's two later estates, Noel Park and Queen's Park, were 'very much indeed taken up by artisans'. He believed that the housing problem for skilled artisans and people who could afford rents up to 8/- a week was 'pretty nearly solved partly by all these suburban cities which are now the most beautiful things I ever saw'.¹ The Company knew where to find the respectable artisans it wanted for its estates and advertised frequently in the Club and Institute Journal.²

The School Board Visitor's Book for 1888 reveals that Shaftesbury Park was becoming more open to working-class people. Of the 818 occupied fathers recorded, 484 or roughly 60 per cent could be classified as manual workers including 129 building tradesmen, 59 woodworkers, 49 metal workers, 93 printing and allied trades workers, 26 tailors and bootmakers, 21 cab and train drivers and 57 packers and warehousemen. Only 10 were labourers. Of the 40 per cent black-coated and uniformed workers, 139 were clerks and prudential agents, 51 were shop-assistants, 25 were in personal service as butlers, door-porters and waiters, 44 were messengers and commissionaires, 5 were shop-keepers and 27 were middling-class men such as Board School masters and visitors (including the compiler of the Book), a civil engineer and some musicians. Allowing for the blurring between manual and black-coated caste status in occupations such as warehousemen and waiters, manual workers had come to dominate the Estate - a trend which has continued.³

However the class division along income lines reveals a remarkably homogeneous community.⁴ 92.5 per cent belonged to Booth's classes E and F, earning between 30/- and 50/-

² Club and Institute Journal, e.g. 3 August 1883.
³ School Board Visitor's Book.
⁴ Ibid.
a week. Class E accounted for approximately 47.5 per cent of the Estate—Booth's 'real backbone' of the London working classes.\(^1\) 45 per cent belonged to Class F, earning up to 50/- a week as the highest paid artisans, clerks, foremen, city warehousemen of the better class, and first hand lightermen. Their sons tended to become clerks, their daughters worked in first class shops and places of business; whereas the sons in Class E followed their fathers into the trade and the girls went into service or worked in local trades.\(^2\) Booth noticed that in Class F the foreman generally saw things from the employer's side while the prosperous artisan was commonly discontented and identified his interests with those of Labour.\(^3\)

Just on 4 per cent of the occupied fathers in Shaftesbury Park were below Booth's poverty line, that is 37 families. In addition there were 22 widows with school-age children living in poverty. If the 'potential for respectability' line is drawn at Class D, then just one per cent of the people on Shaftesbury Park could be described as 'unrespectable' by economic criteria. At the other end of the social scale, 4.4 per cent belonged to classes G and H, the middling-class men and prosperous shopkeepers. Shaftesbury Park constituted a remarkable social microcosm of 'lower middling people' with clear lines of class distinction based on occupational status, yet homogeneous in income and in a common striving for respectability. That it was a very respectable community and consciously saw itself as such is revealed by the School Board Visitor, who after living twelve years on the Estate, must have known it better than anyone else, for he noted after many families, 'very respectable', 'most respectable', 'dresses well' and after a few 'not respectable-drinks', 'never at home' or 'irregular'.

\(^1\)Booth, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.50-1.

\(^2\)Loc.cit.

\(^3\)Ibid., p.53.
Booth maintained that however close they may have been in income, clerks and artisans inhabited entirely different social worlds, had different expectations and values in life, spent money differently — modes of behaviour that went far deeper than 'the wearing or not wearing of a white shirt every day'. However he believed that this separateness could and was being broken down by several forces. He regarded the Church as one such force, where the few artisans who were religious 'became indistinguishable from the class with which they mix'. Noting the similarity in their income he went on:

Thus the financial distinction between clerk and working man begins to break down, so that when for any purpose they consort together, or make common cause, the social distinction is apt to break down too. Moreover many of the children of workingmen become clerks. So that when workingmen are dwelling in the same streets and under the same conditions with well-paid clerks and others of like stations, the two classes approximate in their lives and habits. Socially it depends on the individual character of the man or of his wife, and financially on the way in which their money is spent, whether a first-class workman and his family remain in, or, in effect, step out of the class to which they have hitherto belonged. At the same time the cleavage between the upper and lower grades of manual labour has become more marked industrially.

Booth saw this enforced consorting together as a threat to working-class solidarity, so Shaftesbury Park is an excellent test-case for this 'contagion theory' of embourgeoisement.

Although Shaftesbury Park was a respectable community, it was a mobile and unsettled one in the first twenty years. Between 1886 and 1892 alone approximately 58 per cent of the people moved off the estate (658/1186) — clerks and building trades workers being the most likely to move out: (24 per cent of the mobility sample were clerks when they constituted 16 per cent of the estate population compared to 22 per cent against 15 per cent for building trades workers). More

2 Ibid., pp.399-400.
significantly, around 60 per cent of those who left were white-collar workers, including middling-class people, moving to higher class housing. Emigration to Australia was drawing off a few and the remainder appear to be either moving to another area for work or family reasons or being forced to quit the estate through sudden loss of income.1 Yet there were many people anxious to live in Shaftesbury Park and long waiting lists forced the Company to give preference to those who had relatives on the Estate or who could be recommended by another resident.2 As a result 'extended families' rapidly became, and still are, common.3 Courtship, more often than not, started on the estate, especially at the Holden Street school, so that the cohesiveness created by common status and norms of behaviour was reinforced by intermarriage.4 The 'Workmen's Town' soon became known as 'The Village' where everyone knew everyone else's business, involved themselves in each other's lives and began to feel concern not only to keep 'the good name of the Estate' but even 'the good name of the street'.5

The first requisite of respectability in late-Victorian Battersea was of course a regular job.6 The outward sign of respectability was dress, for ragged clothing, dirtiness and shoeless children were the marks of the unrespectable poor. It was economically and socially essential to demonstrate to the world that one was not poor, so that when

1 School Board Visitor's Book, op.cit.
2 Councillor Harrison, Miss Jewson. Miss Jewson's father was able to come on to the Estate in the early 1880s because of the recommendation of his brother who ran a grocery shop in Shaftesbury Park.
3 Councillor Harrison is the third generation of his family on the Estate and second generation Labour Councillor for the Ward. The Residents' list is full of duplicated names making the identification of activists difficult.
4 Councillor Harrison.
5 Interview with the Rev. A.G. Cookman conducted at the Church of the Ascension, Lavender Hill, on 11 July 1972.
6 Dave Clark, J.F. Lane.
sudden distress descended on a respectable working-class family 'keeping up appearances' was as important, if not more so, than keeping alive. Miss Baker remembers that her mother, who never went outside the house without black gloves more darned than anything else, always said 'If you're poor, you mustn't ever show it'. And when the family was plunged into poverty by the father's illness, Mrs Baker never 'lowered herself' to using credit. Miss Baker and Miss Saxby, after a lifetime as military uniform embroiderers, have keen memories for subtleties in dress and maintain that, whereas outside the estate they could always tell a man's trade and station by his clothing, on the Shaftesbury Estate by the late 1890s, tradesmen never wore their working clothes to work.

Cleanliness and tidiness became obsessions and the first statement to the outside world that here lived a respectable family was a shining white step. In Miss Jewson's family money was frequently short, even though her father earned £2 a week as a pork butcher, but her mother always tried to put enough aside each week to have a 'step girl' come from off the Estate to hearth-stone the front step. Booth was captivated by the scrubbed faces of the children in the Church of the Ascension Sunday School adjoining the Estate. Concern for respectability was as much, if not more, the prerogative of women. With careful budgeting, a home could be pleasantly furnished. Miss Jewson vividly remembers the day her parents bought the 'new' second-hand lounge suite she still uses over seventy years later, and the central decoration in the parlour was a pair of sepia-toned prints her father won in a raffle at the Army and Navy Stores. A respectable working man could find it almost impossible to maintain his self-respect with a drunken and slatternly wife, but a respectable wife could do much to hide the damage to reputation of an unsteady husband. Not only could she keep up standards of decency in the home, but she could also impress on her children the

1Miss Baker.

forms of respectable behaviour. Mr Clark, who grew up in Battersea outside the Estate, recalls that it was 'like going into a cemetery' after the excitement of Lavender Hill, for being a respectable neighbourhood, Shaftesbury Park children never played on the streets.

Keeping up appearances also meant that married women should not work — women who did were 'looked down on' for it was an admission of poverty, of losing grip.¹ Young women mostly 'went into business' — dressmaking and millinery, often in small sweated establishments, or served in high-class shops. Factory work was rare, and although seen as a good job, high-class domestic service was sufficiently uncommon to be used as a threat by the mothers of Miss Baker and Miss Saxby when the girls misbehaved.² Women ceased to work upon marriage and would only return after all possible economies in the face of under- or unemployment failed. Taking in tailoring work was the most common and most respectable form of earning extra money — taking in washing meant an utter loss of caste. Keeping lodgers was forbidden by the Company but did occur — widows and single men being the most likely to do so.³ However, running a small business was a completely respectable, although rare, means of earning extra income: Mrs Claringbold, the wife of a highly respected clerk on the Estate, owned a herbalist shop which kept her after her husband's premature death.⁴

Outward appearances of sexual morality also devolved on the behaviour of women. Miss Baker and Miss Saxby both remember their mothers calling it a 'sin' to wear their hair out loose, 'or else you'll go blind' — perhaps hinting at the extreme consequences of moral looseness. Miss Jewson's father permitted her sisters to go out unchaperoned with their suitors, but they had to be in by 10 p.m. Mr Clark

¹Miss Jewson.

²Misses Jewson, Baker, Saxby.

³School Board Visitor's Book, op.cit.; Electoral Roll for the Parliamentary Division of Battersea, 1885-6, 1888.

⁴School Board Visitor's Book, op.cit.
was brought up 'in a proper Victorian way' and was
'frightened to death of his father' who forbade the children
to talk while he read the paper. His father was 'very strict
as far as girls was concerned' and even the boys got into
trouble if they were out after dark. With marriages
occurring so frequently among Estate residents under the
watchful eye of an increasing number of mutual relatives
and inquisitive neighbours, couples tended to marry young
and stayed with their families until they were allotted a
house. Councillor Harrison, whose father before him was
Estate born and bred, had difficulty recalling cases of
marriage breakdown and sexual irregularity.

The sexual mores of the respectable classes are
difficult to plumb, for their very respectability cuts them
off from the usual sources of evidence of sexual behaviour.
There is one incident in 1885, however, which reveals the
depth of feeling about sexual respectability among people in
Shaftesbury Park. It was the major Liberal-Radical meeting
of the Estate for the 1885 election. Feeling was running
high for the Estate had been effectively disenfranchised
until the 1884 Electoral Redistribution Act, being a County
seat. O.V. Morgan, the Liberal-Radical candidate, had
carefully courted the new constituency and was by then keenly
supported. However it was J.C. Durant, speaking in support
of Morgan, who drove the audience into a frenzy of
enthusiasm by seizing on the Pall Mall Gazette exposures of
child prostitution as an issue of class tension. The 'new
two million voters will require that some check is put on
men's passions' he declared to resounding cheers.

They will not be led away by talk about foreign
affairs and stale platitudes about the honour of
England; with the echo of recent revelations
ringing in their ears, they will ask, 'What
about the honour of England's daughters?' (Loud
cheers)....[They] will not be deluded by talk of

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1 Councillor Harrison.
2 See below.
3 See Glen Petrie, A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of
Josephine Butler (London, 1971), pp.241-54 and Ann Stafford,
The Age of Consent, op.cit., passim.
prosperity and rich clothes....[They] will demand that the humblest labourer shall be fed and housed like a human being, and that his home shall be secure. (Cheers)

Those who tried to throw dust in the eyes of the new voters wanted to lower the age of consent to ten. Calling for twenty-one as the age of consent, Durant concluded:

If the daughters of the rich man were so protected, why not the daughters of the labourer? (Cheers) Let them not rest in their efforts after Radical reforms until Englishmen are a free, enlightened and contented people.¹

Attitudes towards alcohol were another touchstone of working-class respectability and the Temperance Question was an issue no politician seeking votes on Shaftesbury Park could afford to ignore.² Temperance rather than Teetotalism was the standard, and indulgence in alcohol became a luxury to celebrate special occasions rather than even a restrained regular social habit. Mr Baker would have his one drink of the year at Christmas. In Miss Jewson's family, all four girls took the Pledge, but only one, who disliked the taste of alcohol, kept it. Fresh still in her memory is the time her father won another raffle at the Army and Navy Stores and bought a bottle of port wine to celebrate. Although very small, Miss Jewson was given a tiny glass. The family were laughing at something when the teetotal sister jumped up, declared they were all drunk, then in her indignation, tripped and fell flat on her face. Drunkenness and rowdyism were rare on the Estate and Miss Jewson believes that bad behaviour could have cost a family its house. In contrast, Shaftesbury Park was ringed by unrespectable working-class life. The viaducts under the railway into the Estate were, and still are, evil places.³ Lavender Hill and Clapham Junction were alive with prostitutes and drunks,⁴

¹South London Press, 25 July 1885.
²E.g. loc.cit.
³Ibid., 5 May 1876 and 16 September 1876.
⁴Booth Collection: Miscellaneous Notes to District 36. Notes of Interview with Woolcomb, Charity Organization Society, CXXVI: 1, p.1. See Appendix II (ii), 'The Other Battersea', for selections of evidence from the same source on vice, crime and poverty.
and all the people interviewed recalled frequently seeing intoxicated men strapped on to stretchers by the police.

The notable Teetotallers on the Estate tended to be active Non-conformists like the Estate manager W.J. May, a Congregationalist and a Liberal. In 1886 his daughters were married at a double wedding at the Stormont Road church and the 'wedding breakfast - a thoroughly teetotal one - was a most pleasant affair'.¹ In March 1885 a meeting was convened in Shaftesbury Hall to oppose the granting of a licence to the Fox and Hounds in Latchmere Road, just off the Estate. Both sides had organized well and after a division, 195 voted for the licence and 144 against. There were, however, motives for this meeting other than Temperance zeal. The committee supporting Mr Robert Sawyer of the Church of England Temperance Society, included committeemen from the teetotal Shaftesbury Park Club and Institute which was fighting to keep its membership in the face of competition from public houses and licensed clubs. But other committee men were Messrs May, Davey and Howe, leading Estate Liberals, for W.J. Fawcett, the publican at the Fox and Hounds was a prominent Battersea Tory, soon to go on the Vestry.² The Band of Hope held colourful parades and met in the Primitive Methodist Church in Grayshott Road, but its influence was greater on women than on men.³

The history of the Shaftesbury Park Club is a vignette of the attitudes towards respectable leisure and the modes of social leadership on the Estate. In 1877 a group of residents and local clergy under the leadership of J.C. Durant attempted to set up a Workingmen's Club and Institute in Swindlehurst's now vacant house. As Durant argued: 'Altogether the house offered a splendid opportunity for a club where not only workingmen but tradesmen might mingle together for the mutual benefit of each; this mingling would be a mental stimulus which would bring an important new life

¹South London Press, 28 September 1886.
²Ibid., 7 March 1885.
³Miss Saxby.
and vigour to the neighbourhood.' The group was anxious to provide a 'corrective to the growing evils of intemperance and wasted time' among the new working-class population on and near the Estate. Eversleigh House opened on 2 February 1878, declaring its intention to '...afford its members the means of social intercourse, mutual helpfulness, mental and moral improvement, industrial welfare and rational recreation. The Club shall not identify itself with any political or social or theological party.' It faded quickly from lack of enthusiasm.

In December 1883 a different group tried again and this time Durant only helped by printing the circulars. The Directors of the Artizans' Company were sympathetic to mutual improvement clubs on their estates and granted permission for the use of premises in Brassey Square at an annual rent of 1/-. The initial response was enormous - 200 men gave their names as intending members, a string band of fourteen was organized and several well-known cricketers signed up for the formation of a cricket club. The objects of the Club were left unchanged from the 1878 Rules. The opening concert was held in February 1884 and already a library had been organized, consisting largely of periodicals and newspapers. A Literary Society and Athletic Club were formed and by September there were plans for a Dramatic Club and Choral Union and for Elocution Classes. Recreation had the highest priority however and billiards and bagatelle tables were carefully saved for.

Despite the prohibition on political discussion, the colour of the Club was Radical-Liberal with leading Estate

1 South London Press, 15 December 1877.
2 Simmons, op.cit., p.142.
3 Ibid., p.143.
4 Shaftesbury Park Club and Institute, Committee Minutes, 21 December 1883.
5 Ibid., 22 January 1884.
7 Committee Minutes, op.cit., 15 February 1884.
Liberals such as W. Howe, W.J. May, J.T. Maule and J.B. Davey dominating the committee. Improving lectures were solicited from O.V. Morgan and Sidney Webb.\footnote{Ibid., 13 January 1885.} The prohibition on alcohol was a different matter however. In January 1885 there had been 140 members on the books but by September it was down to 97 and the Club was £2.15.0 in arrears.\footnote{South London Press, 19 September 1885.} The experience was similar on the Noel Park Estate where the Company-sponsored club was 'respectable but dull'.\footnote{Club and Institute Journal, 6 November 1885.} Simultaneously in July 1885 the Company withdrew its support from the clubs on Shaftesbury Park and Queen's Park and demanded that a rent of £50 be paid as the membership of the clubs did not warrant their giving further assistance.\footnote{Committee Minutes, 28 July 1885. See Appendix II (v), for an account of the Queen's Park Estate.} This time however the committee refused to give up and, after a number of set-backs, acquired the present premises in Lavender Hill in February 1886.

The move off the Estate meant a considerable change in the character of the club. In 1884 ten of the traceable members were black-coated workers - clerks, school-teachers and shopkeepers, and twelve were artisans. Significantly, nine members did not have children of school age, so their occupations cannot be ascertained.\footnote{See Appendix II (i).} As Miss Jewson pointed out, her father never belonged to anything because he was always too tired after work to go out, and even Workingmen's Clubs used up precious cash. After 1884 recruitment was strongest amongst black-coated workers, and once the Club moved to Lavender Hill, few Estate people joined. The committee was dominated by the black-coated workers - men like E.J. Nash, a teacher, J.T. Maule, a clerk active in Liberal politics and the Church of the Ascension, W. Howe, a greengrocer and another Liberal, and Frederick Cobbold, a clerk who ran the annual Flower Show and the Dramatic Society on the Estate. What is remarkable is that not only
was social and political life on the Estate dominated by a very small group of 'natural leaders', but also they accepted in the beginning a working-class image for the Club. Affiliation with the Workingmen's Club and Institute Union was sought and maintained until 1887.¹ In December 1885 the words 'being workingmen' were finally deleted from Rule 2 which defined the conditions of membership, but not without a strong protest from the clerk Cobbold,² and a week later, 'mutual help' was cut out of Rule 1.³ In February 1886 the rule prohibiting the sale of alcohol was suspended with only one dissentient,⁴ and in September the name of the Club was changed to the Shaftesbury Club and Institute.⁵

Despite the Rules, politics were never completely eschewed and in the feverish political atmosphere in Battersea in 1885, local Conservatives attempted to capture the Club. The Liberals held firm and early in 1886 brought in one of the Estate's outstanding politicians, John Vooght, to replace an Estate Tory, J.J. Lystor as secretary. When the Club came to name its new Presidents and Vice-presidents to replace the disfavoured Artizans' Company Directors, O.V. Morgan and fellow Liberals far outnumbered the Conservatives in the Club's patrons.⁶

Up to 1886 the tone of the Club had been respectable enough. Many of the traceable members scored a 'very respectable' or 'refined' beside their entries in the School Board Visitor's Book and a certain Alphonse Charles Tassart, a grocer's assistant on 35/- a week was noticed to be 'well dressed' - but his subscriptions had to be paid out of Club funds for three months in 1886.⁷ Discipline was only an

¹Club and Institute Journal, 1886, passim.
²Minutes of General Meetings, Shaftesbury Park Club, 10 December 1885.
³Ibid., 19 December 1885.
⁴Ibid., 15 February 1886.
⁵Ibid., 1 September 1886.
⁶Minutes of Committee Meetings, 23 July 1886.
⁷Ibid., 7 April 1886.
occasional problem - a reprimand to a coppersmith, George Easterbrook in 1884 for 'bad behaviour',¹ a fight over a billiards game the following year,² and in February 1885, the secretary was directed to 'call the attention of the members to Rule 21 by which Gambling, Betting and the Use of Offensive Language is strictly prohibited'.³

By mid 1886 under John Vooght's hand, the Club had begun to prosper and acquired an evangelising respectability which markedly contrasted with the other more relaxed workingmen's clubs affiliated with the Club and Institute Union. Vooght seems to have been a bachelor, and the School Board Visitor crossed out the code for a clerk in his entry and substituted 'politician'. He must have been living to some extent on the profits of sub-letting rooms at 5/-, giving him 10/- a week to pay his own rent of 12/6d at 99 Grayshott Road.⁴ John Burns was impressed by him⁵ and his minutes, written in perfect copperplate with a prolixity remarkable even for his time, mark him off as 'superior person'. Always much more a Radical than a Liberal, he nevertheless affected an 'Esq.' after his name while secretary of the Club.⁶ His half-yearly report for 1886 makes revealing reading:

We deem it necessary before closing our report to call attention to the policy (sanctioned by the members) of entirely closing the club on Sundays. This wise and prudent resolve we trust will not be departed from; for we should regret more than mere words can here express did we believe that a desire existed amongst members to have the club open on Sundays, with or without the sale of intoxicants. The rule itself may cause inconvenience to some, whilst being a restraint upon others, but we are too well aware from the

¹Committee Minutes, 6 July 1884.

²Ibid., 7 July 1885.

³Ibid., 6 February 1885.

⁴School Board Visitor's Book and Electoral Roll for the Parliamentary Division of Battersea, 1888. John Vooght was untraceable at Somerset House.

⁵Diary of John Burns, op.cit., 18 May 1888.

⁶Committee Minutes, 11 August 1886.
general tone of the members that in the interests of the club, whatever the individual wish may be, the practice is admitted to be just, as well as expedient, whilst the restriction and inconvenience has been cheerfully submitted to. New members especially may not see the advisability of continuing this rule, which strains their allegiance to the institute, whilst depriving itself of a source of revenue. In reply we would respectfully call attention to the disrepute many clubs have fallen into by fostering and encouraging Sunday drinking, and we should be pained to know that any member left us through the stringency of our rules, who might on mature reflection, be an ardent advocate of our policy. As to the revenue to be gained, your Committee would refuse to support any movement, however successful financially, which they believe would jeopardize the respectability of the Club or involve the welfare of any of its members. It may not be out of place to mention here, that should club legislation be submitted to Parliament, directed chiefly against Sunday Trading, it will not be a barren honour for the Shaftesbury Club to have led the advance in this reform and to have shown its wisdom by voluntary legislation in a direction which has helped to make it one of the best conducted institutions of its kind in London.

The improving tone of the Club did not detract from the gaiety of its social events - smoking concerts and balls. Voted the 'very best ball that had been at the Shaftesbury for a very long time', the one in 1886 started with a concert and dancing did not end until 2.30.

The hall was festooned and decorated with evergreens and hyacinths in profusion and it was curtained from end to end. The proscenium was elaborately arranged with evergreens and hyacinths, interspersed with different coloured oil lamps, which had a beautiful effect. Chinese lanterns were placed all over the hall, the effect of which with the coloured lamps, was enchanting.

In 1886 the Club still saw itself as providing respectable social intercourse for the 'young men of Lavender Hill and the Shaftesbury Estate'. However the majority of the new members were non-estate men, some coming from as far

1 Club Institute Journal, 14 August 1886.
2 Ibid., 24 April 1886.
3 South London Press, 14 July 1886.
as Camberwell. Vooght moved to full-time politics and the Shaftesbury men who stayed were mostly clerks and small businessmen. By 1900 its character was thoroughly middling-class and its connection with the Estate, tenuous.

Fred Cobbold, Robert Claringbold and the May family dominated the rest of the organized social life in Shaftesbury Park. Cobbold's Annual Flower Show was a splendid affair, reminiscent of County Manor Fete. A suitably deferential audience gave Sir Henry Peek, the then Conservative M.P. for Mid-Surrey, strong support when he reminded them at the prize-giving in 1876 that there would be no need for the Permissive Bill if there were more decent housing. Another of Cobbold's activities was the Dramatic Club which annually filled Shaftesbury Hall with programmes of songs, comic sketches and farces, like the Spitalfields Weaver. Tom Robertson's Caste was also a great favourite. Off the Estate for the musical, Battersea had a Tonic Sol-Fah Association from the mid-1870s, and in addition to the Church choirs, there was the Lavender Hill Choral Society and the Lavender Hill Vocal Union.

The preponderance of childlessness among Estate activists underlines the difficulty for family men of finding money and time for leisure activities. It is probable Cobbold and Claringbold worked in the district, and the Mays certainly did. Claringbold, Maule and W.J. May had grown up families. Most workingmen walked to work, being unable to afford train travel. They started off at 6.30 and even on the Saturday half-holiday did not return until 2.30. Many must have been like Miss Jewson's father - simply too tired on Sundays to do much beyond going for a walk in Battersea Park or on Clapham Common, collecting his girls

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1 Committee Minutes, 1886, passim.
2 South London Press, 29 July 1876.
3 South London Press, 22 May 1880, 16 February 1884, 31 January 1885.
4 Ibid., 1 July 1876, 20 December 1884.
5 School Board Visitor's Book.
6 Miss Jewson.
from Sunday School then coming home for the highlight of the week, the Sunday joint. Afterwards he slept all afternoon. Social life for most was family-centred - musical parties amongst relatives around second-hand piano being quite common. 1 Music Hall was a rare treat, even for a family on 40/- a week, but Saturday night shopping was a necessity and a genuine adventure. 2 Sport and walking in the neighbouring parks were probably the most common recreations and in Battersea Park especially on a Sunday morning, there was always free entertainment from political lectures. 3

As for religion, 'everyone went to Sunday School', but not many to Church. 4 The Estate was ringed by churches keen to capture the community, but much of their success depended on the middle-classes over Lavender Hill. The Wesleyan Methodists in Queens Road boasted a Sunday School enrolment of 2,000 in 1900, and the minister, Mr Kinnings, was especially popular in Battersea. Booth's investigator found 'nothing of [the] minister about him in appearance or manners. Swathed in huge dressing gown, dumpy little figure, heavy moustache, coarse plebian face, but a friendly little man and very human.' 5 The church was associated with the local Temperance movement and O.V. Morgan and Durant both lectured on Temperance there. 6 The Primitive Methodists had a chapel in Grayshott Road on the rim of the Estate and by 1900, under a 'slow and dull' pastor, had a membership of 150 and a Sunday School attendance of 200. The Band of Hope met in the chapel and claimed 53 members. 7 In the time of the previous pastor, the congregation had courted Conservative patronage from Countess Grosvenor and the

1 Misses Jewson, Baker and Saxby and Mr Clark.
2 Miss Jewson and Miss Baker.
3 See below and John Burns' Diary, op.cit., 1888, passim.
4 Mr Clark.
5 Booth Collection, Vol.A51.
6 South London Press, 5 September 1885.
leading layman was Miss Jewson's uncle, a Tory grocer. The one church which could claim to have sprung from the Estate was the Lavender Hill Congregational Church. It was started in Shaftesbury Hall in 1875 and in 1878, needing larger premises, built a church, lecture hall and club rooms were built in Stormont Road, off the Estate. Liberals like W.C. May and J.B. Rogers were leading members and the minister, the Rev. J. Guinness Rogers and his son, worked for the Radical-Liberals in Battersea.

The church which most impressed Booth, however, was the massive Church of the Ascension on Lavender Hill - that 'Romish place' as Low Church people and Nonconformists described it. A church without a parish, it was allotted a district consisting almost entirely of Shaftesbury Park and it set out not only to evangelize the Estate, but also to establish itself as the parish church. It was founded in 1876 by private donations from Anglo-Catholics and consecrated in 1883. Deliberately it sought to draw working-class people into Anglo-Catholicism affecting a simple family atmosphere that at times ran dangerously close to patronage. As the founding minister, the Rev. J.B. Wilkinson, wrote in the first edition of the monthly magazine:

'Our' Temporary Church, is, I need not remind you, open and free to all. No-one in it can say 'this is my seat'. It is the house of 'Our Father'. We want to be in it as a true 'Family and Household of God'. We may all give as freely and as liberally as we can, but there are, and shall be, no payments. There shall be no distinction or respect of persons - 'all equal within the Church's Gate', says the good old George Herbert. I want this to be the basis of all 'our' work.

A Mothers' Union, Guilds for young people, a Workingmen's Club and Institute, a Boot and Shoe Club, a Coal and Blanket Club and characteristically named groups such as the

1 Wandsworth and Battersea District Times, 8 December 1888.
2 South London Press, 9 December 1884, 28 July 1886 and 16 March 1889; South Western Star, 6 April 1892.
4 Our Magazine, June 1876.
Association of Prayer for the Building of Our Church were all quickly started. A Mission Hall with Anglican nuns administered charitable relief to the community. Every activity likely to appeal to working-class people was tried, often with immediate failure. But their determination was immense: 'You know, I dare say', preached Mr Wilkinson on 15 October 1882, 'that one of the leading ideas of the Shaftesbury Park Estate when it was first started was to have upon it "neither Church, Chapel nor Public House". The two last conditions must take care of themselves - the first we have taken care to make a dead letter.'

Yet despite the even greater talent of his successor, 'Dear Canon Wallace', the people of the Estate are notably absent from the church magazine. The Sunday School had 800 children in 1887, and on Christmas Day 1888 there were 447 communicants. But the congregation was being swelled by more affluent people from south of Lavender Hill - in 1896 a mere 27.2 per cent of the Christmas Day communicants were from Shaftesbury Park and by 1905 the 'Family and Household of God' had degenerated to the point where a businessman wrote from Clapham Common complaining that he had attended the church for nearly two years before he knew any of his fellow worshippers. 'Like many others who attend the church', he declared, 'I would be glad to speak to parishioners.'

The Church of the Ascension's appeal was hindered by its Anglo-Catholicism. The Liberal and Low Church South London Press mentioned it only to snipe at its 'Ritualism'. The Church's preoccupations were spiritual and its only two excursions into politics in the period were raising money

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1 *Our Magazine*, November 1882.
2 Ibid., August 1887.
3 Ibid., January 1889.
4 *Communicants' Roll 1896, Christmas Day*, 150/549: 27.2 per cent.
5 *Our Magazine*, July 1905.
6 E.g. *South London Press*, 29 December 1877 and 7 July 1883.
for 'our Russian suffering Christian Brethren, in 1877,\textsuperscript{1} and support for the Bishop of Lincoln in 1890.\textsuperscript{2} Booth noted with disapproval that its relief work was guided almost entirely by theological motives.\textsuperscript{3} Yet when Canon Wallace told Booth's interviewer that the Primitive Methodists 'divide the Estate with us' he could fairly claim that the Church had established itself as the Shaftesbury's parish church - providing Sunday School education and performing baptisms and marriages.\textsuperscript{4} As Booth concluded: 'Among the respectable residents on [the Estate] there is much indifference to religion, but it is not flaunted. It is rather the correct thing to attend a place of worship, and neither chaff nor ridicule ensues from so doing.'\textsuperscript{5} It was symbolic of the Church's spiritual failure in Shaftesbury Park that the magnificent Consecration Service held by the Lord Bishop of the Diocese in 1883 was interrupted by the arrival of a 'Bride, Bridesmaid and Bridegroom who came to be married there and then'.\textsuperscript{6} Hence despite the lack of Estate communicants, between January 1884 and October 1890, 103 of the 147 marriages performed were of Shaftesbury people.\textsuperscript{7}

Along with the general indifference to religion, all the churches suffered from the mobility of the community. The already committed made up the bulk of the congregations and the making, let alone keeping, of converts was difficult. The 'very respectable' were the most likely to respond and Booth believed that the 'common aim of respectability' was helping the work of the religious bodies greatly.\textsuperscript{8} But the tendency was for the 'better people' to move up to the new

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}\textit{Our Magazine}, October and November 1877.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., February 1890.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Booth Collection, Vol.A51, Summary for District 36.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Loc.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Booth, \textit{Religious Series}, op.cit., Vol.5, p.159.
\item \textsuperscript{6}\textit{Our Magazine}, July 1883.
\item \textsuperscript{7}Church of the Ascension, \textit{Register of Marriages}.
\item \textsuperscript{8}Booth, loc.cit.
\end{itemize}
STREET EVENTS NEAR SHAFTESBURY PARK

Top: Derby Day along the Clapham Road in the 1890's
Bottom: A Sunday School Procession in Wandsworth Road near the turn of the century. There is scarcely a hatless man, woman or child to be seen.
roads between Lavender Hill and Clapham Common. And while the Primitive Methodists complained that it was 'like preaching to a procession', the Wesleyan Methodists took the initiative and built a 'new and handsome' church near the Common.  

ii POLITICS

The School Board Visitor scribbled on the endpaper of his book what the young men did on Sunday mornings while the women prepared the joint and the children were at Sunday school:

John Burns has a good deal of influence and following on the estate, esp. among the younger men. They go to hear him down by the park, not being irreligious or atheistical, but simply non-religious, using the only time available for purely political and social lectures.  

Politics rather than religion provided the spiritual life of Shaftesbury Park. Battersea in the last two decades of the nineteenth century blossomed into richly political suburb, unique in London for the sustained activity of its radical groups and for the large number of people involved. Its uniqueness sprang from its newness as a working-class suburb, the unusual concentration of respectable artisans as most of the new housing was on estates like Shaftesbury Park and the neighbouring Flower and Beaufoy Estates, a fortunate array of outstanding working-class political leaders and the prolongation of political frustration caused by the electoral distribution. Most of the respectable artisan immigrants found themselves disenfranchised when they arrived in Battersea for it lay within the county seat of Mid-Surrey, a Tory stronghold until 1885. In 1868 there were only 2,000 voters on the Roll in Battersea and the

1 Ibid., p.161.

2 School Board Visitor's Book, op.cit.
Shaftesbury Estate's first election in 1874, saw the Conservative candidates returned unopposed.

The late 1870s' local politics was dominated by the waning of the Tichborne populism and the Liberal revival with the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation. One can glimpse through the disdain of the Liberal *South London Press* that the Magna Carta Association was quite strong in Battersea. A local Branch meeting managed to attract four to five hundred people in September 1876 despite the absence of the main attraction, Dr Kenealy. But the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation at the same time was building up and a Workingmen's Demonstration Committee was formed. The Liberal cause had 'respectability' at the head such as the Rev. G.W. McCree, but his enthusiasms were of a different stamp from those of his working-class audiences. He recounted at one meeting hearing Disraeli make one of his more indelicate quips during a Commons debate, and how when it was received with laughter he could not help saying to himself: 'Oh for an hour of John Bright' (Applause) 'Oh for a day of Gladstone' (Loud and continued cheering) 'Oh that we had Oliver Cromwell back again' (Hear, Hear).

The knowledge that only 7,000 of the 80,000 inhabitants of Battersea were entitled to vote did not dampen the Liberal revival after 1876. In the 1880 election the Liberals made an heroic attempt to capture the seat - disagreements between factions were put aside, local committees were formed in the Lavender Hill and Northcote neighbourhoods and two agents were appointed.

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1 *South London Press*, 27 March 1880.

2 Ibid., 1 July and 16 September 1876.

3 Ibid., 26 August and 16 September 1876.

4 Ibid., 9 September 1876. The Rev. G.W. McCree was the son of a grocer, who became one of the leading temperance advocates and a Presbyterian missionary in St Giles. Brian Harrison calls him a 'broker between the classes', bringing civilization to the poor, and lecturing to the comfortable classes on life in the slums. *Drink and the Victorians*, op.cit., pp. 24-5.

5 *South London Press*, 27 March 1880.

6 Ibid., 20 March 1880.
A registration campaign was started and a 'phalanx of over four hundred electors' began working 'might and main for the Liberal candidates'. The Liberals rightly sensed their new opportunity in the changing social character of Battersea with the rapid growth of a new respectable working-class electorate. The Liberal candidates concentrated on the Bulgarian atrocities and even more wisely on electoral reform, and the South London Press believed that the meetings 'favourably compared with the noisy meetings which have recently occurred throughout the South of London'.

The Conservative meetings were not so decorous. On the afternoon of Saturday 27 April the Conservative candidates Sir Henry Peek and Sir J. Trevor Lawrence 'endeavoured to address a meeting of their supporters in the Shaftesbury Hall'. 'Sir J. Trevor Lawrence, amid increasing uproar during which rotten eggs and other missiles were freely used endeavoured to justify his Parliamentary career and hoped to be again returned as representative of the constituency.' An amendment to the motion of confidence pledged the meeting to support the Liberal candidates and was carried by an overwhelming majority of more than two thirds of the audience. This was the first and last Conservative meeting on the Estate for the period of this case study. It rained on Polling Day and the booths were placed at wide intervals, leaving the Shaftesbury Estate bereft in the middle, not that it mattered in 1880. Of the 7,093 electors in Battersea 4,700 turned out and the Liberals claimed an optimistic 3,000 votes, but Mid-Surrey remained safely Tory.

The Liberal enthusiasm brought in its wake the founding of the first Liberal Club at 3 Battersea Bridge Road and after the election it kept up its agitations by supporting the Battersea Park costermongers against the Battersea Tradesmen's Club which had urged the police to

1 Ibid., 3 April 1880.
2 Ibid., 27 March 1880.
3 Ibid., 3 April 1880.
4 Ibid., 10 April 1880.
remove them from their pitches. The next four years saw a remarkable growth in political clubs which came to dominate the social and political life of the area. In 1882 the Battersea Liberal Association Club and Institute was founded at Laburnum House in Battersea High Street. By 1884 the Battersea Radical Association at 499 Battersea Park Road was active, and the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association was formed for the 1885 elections, using the Battersea Bridge Road premises as its headquarters. The Radical Association changed its name to the Boro' of Battersea Club in 1885 and its large membership and energy remained a persistent challenge to middle-class Liberalism centred on Laburnum House. In May 1885 a branch of the Social Democratic Federation was started and the pro. tem. secretary was John Burns of 8 Holden Street, Shaftesbury Park. The National Secular Society provided a common meeting ground for old Chartists, Radicals and Socialists in Henley Hall. Even the Conservatives joined in the fever to organize political clubs, but they stayed in the public houses until the Salisbury Constitutional Club was set up in 1887 in Battersea Park Road with a great deal of help from Constitutional Clubs in neighbouring constituencies.

The politics of Battersea were the politics of club life and an uneasy tension persisted between the middle-class and working-class wings of the Radical-Liberal movement - a tension from which middle-class Liberalism was ultimately the loser and which the S.D.F. attempted to exploit. The preoccupations of political working-class people were with democratic representation and power. Social and political grievance predominated over economic grievance, and desperate to participate in the processes of government, any display of arbitrary authority was cause enough for agitation. Hence when the residents of St George's, Hanover

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1 Ibid., 1 and 22 May 1880.
2 Club and Institute Journal, 27 February 1885.
3 South London Press, 11 July 1885.
4 Justice, 9 May 1885.
5 South London Press, 24 September 1887.
Square used their influence on the Westminster Vestry and the Metropolitan Board of Works to prevent the District Railway from building ventilators on the Thames Embankment, the Battersea radicals leapt at the chance of a protest. In June 1883 the Battersea Bridge Road Liberal Club convened a meeting, claiming that the Board of Works was discriminating against the probably few working-class people who used the workmen's trains. On the platform were Trade Union representatives, and the chairman, J.H. Dean, a member of the Battersea Vestry, did not hesitate to describe the Board as 'unelective, mismanaged and imperious'. Mr Tucker, a prominent Club member, supported the resolution by confessing that he had 'long since come to the conclusion that when anything had to be done for the working classes, neither Parliament as now constituted, nor the Board of Works were the parties to do it, but the people themselves'.

By January 1884, its effective disenfranchisement notwithstanding, there were more political meetings in Battersea than in any other part of the vast area of South London covered by the South London Press, including the late George Odger's Southwark. The Battersea Liberals and Radicals were both concerned with working-class problems - the Radicals hearing a lecture on the 'Employers' Liability Act from a workman's point of view'; the Liberal Club giving lectures on 'Poor Men's politics' and 'A Sure Remedy for Poverty' to working-class audiences, and having discussions of the housing problem.

While the Liberals and Radicals were becoming more consciously working-class, it was in the small National Secular Society that Radicals began to grapple with new Socialist ideas. In late April and May 1884 the Secularists held four meetings to discuss the Bradlaugh-Hyndman debate. With W. Heaford, R. Vesey and John Burns defending Hyndman, Malthusians, Individualists and Christian Socialists articulated their objections. J.C. Durant argued for

1 South London Press, 30 June 1883.

2 Ibid., January 1884, passim.

3 Ibid., 19 January 1884.
Christian Socialism as a middle ground between Bradlaugh and Hyndman and pleaded a case for the Land Restoration League in which he was prominent in Battersea. Although a teetotaller, he did not believe that sobriety was any solution for 'if all became sober, the advantages which the sober now possessed would be aggravated instead of improved'. Together with A.W. Gill, a fellow Shaftesbury resident, he feared, he said, accelerating monopoly capitalism, but was reluctant to commit himself to 'impracticable' socialism. Both remained active Liberals. The defence of Malthusianism was strong - some speakers regretted that Socialists were so antagonistic, some saw it as the complete panacea and some, merely as a 'measure of individual prudence'.

Mr Herrick, 'speaking as a working-man, thought that too little stress had been laid upon poverty and misery resulting from the vices of working-men such as drunkenness, unthrifty etc.' On the final day, after the debate at the morning meeting, H.H. Champion and John Burns, who made 'an eloquent speech', concluded the argument for Socialism. Another Shaftesbury Park man, W. Willis, carried on the Society's routine work with Sunday lectures on 'Over-population and Poverty'. Willis remained an active Radical Liberal until he joined John Burns' Labour League and he sat on the Vestry in the 1890s as a radical Progressive. Despite the opposition from many Battersea Secularists, Burns used the Society to launch the Battersea branch of the S.D.F., lecturing in November to a 'large and enthusiastic audience' on 'Poverty: its Causes and Remedies'. Along with Vesey, a saddle-maker, a prominent Battersea Secularist who joined the new movement, was 'old Lond, a Chartist, who was 'very eloquent in his praise of the Chartist leaders'.

1 *Justice*, 17 May 1884 and *South London Press*, 28 June 1884.
2 *Justice*, 24 May 1884.
3 *Loc.cit.*
4 Ibid., 31 May 1884.
5 *Justice*, 31 May 1884.
6 *Burns' Collection*, op.cit.; *Diary*, 3 June 1888.
for the great days of Chartism was not confined to the N.S.S. In November also, Charles Murray was invited to give his 'Personal Recollections of Feargus O'Connor, Bronterre O'Brien and Ernest Jones' to the Battersea Liberal Association in Laburnum House. 1

The frustration of working-class radicals at their lack of representation was sharpened at a by-election in June 1884 by the devices used to reduce the working-class vote - Friday voting closing at 5 p.m. and in booths whose location was withheld until the last minute and placed long distances apart. Factionalism and the old Chartist preference for 'honest Tories', such as had blighted Liberal chances in Southwark in Odger's time, angered 'official' Liberals and a 'small number' of Radicals were chastised 'for giving more than passive support for the City Candidate'. 2

During the by-election a new Liberal Club made an appearance in Number 2 ward, the Shaftesbury Estate. At its head were J.T. Maule, J.B. Davey, W. Howe, A.W. Gill and W. Willis: two clerks, a grocer and two Secularists. At a pre-election meeting an Estate man spoke up, objecting 'to the coercive policy of Tories and...still more to their patronage' and recommended the Liberal candidate, Mr Sydney Stern, as a man who respected working-class people. 3

By July 1884 Battersea was all for reform. The Laburnum House Liberal Club and the Radical Association began to organize combined demonstrations. The Radicals, infuriated by the House of Lords' opposition to the Bill, passed resolutions urging Gladstone to refuse to compromise with the Lords and expressed their preference for universal suffrage. The genteel Vooght was among the official supporters of the resolution. 4 On Saturday June 19th the Battersea Reformers gathered nearly 5,000 people for their own demonstration in Battersea Park and on the following

1 Justice, 25 October 1884.
2 South London Press, 21 June 1884.
3 Loc.cit.
4 Ibid., 19 July 1884.
Monday week Battersea cut 'an excellent figure' with 5,000 marching to Hyde Park led by the Metropolitan Temperance Band. 'Old Southwark did creditably' noted an 'Old Reformer' in the South London Press, 'and the various districts of the borough of Greenwich were well represented. There was one exception, however, the great borough of Lambeth was nowhere.' It was Battersea which stole the show for South London and which had the most cause for demonstrating with a mere 12,000 voters in a population which had swollen to 132,000 by 1884. By December Gladstone's Redistribution Bill was through and Battersea became a single-member constituency losing much of its middle-class component over Lavender Hill to the new seat of Clapham. The Shaftesbury Park men were now fully enfranchised. Several members at the annual general meeting of the Shaftesbury Park Liberal Club, lamenting the lack of political interest in the area, expressed the hope that with the Redistribution 'Battersea would wake up to the necessity of an active political life'.

1885 was the first year of triumph for the Liberals and Radicals in Battersea. O.V. Morgan was considered the best candidate for the Liberal nomination despite being a poor public speaker. A local manufacturer, he had associated himself with the working-class side of the movement and had been one of the leaders in the 1884 Reform demonstrations. Morgan carefully cultivated his new electorate and election excitement was already running high in June. He opened his Shaftesbury Park campaign in July, four months before polling day - committing himself to opposing the Civil List and to abolition of the House of Lords, reform of the land laws and active involvement in the Temperance Question. J.C. Durant called him a 'thorough Radical' and when J. Bailey asked who were going to get O.V. Morgan into Parliament, a voice shouted joyfully from the audience 'Ourselves'. Although outclassed at the meeting by Durant's

1 South London Press, 26 July 1884.
2 Ibid., 26 July 1884.
3 Ibid., 13 December 1884.
4 E.g. ibid., 20 and 27 June 1885.
speech on the Age of Consent issue, and by John Burns, who rising from the audience, 'in a vigorous and able speech, frequently interrupted,...proceeded to given an exposition of Socialistic views', there was no question of his popularity.¹

The Clubs and the newly formed Liberal and Radical Association supported Morgan. The Clubs had begun their programme of political education well in advance. Laburnum House set up a Social and Political Education League to provide lectures on 'The Reform Bill and Working-Class Representation' and the Boro' of Battersea heard lectures on 'Not Subjects but Citizens' in July.² The Pall Mall Gazette exposures provided common ground for respectable radicals - Durant at O.V. Morgan's meeting in Shaftesbury Hall and at the Boro' of Battersea,³ and John Burns, who drew a crowd of 1,200 on 25 July in Battersea Park, 'evoked outbursts of indignation' and was 'enthusiastically cheered'. The S.D.F. sold 324 Justices and 100 Socialist Catechisms at that meeting.⁴ By early August the 'political atmosphere [had] assumed a chronic intensity of heat' and a Battersea Liberal wrote to the press complaining of being kept awake by singing until 3 a.m. in the Boro' of Battersea Club.⁵

The Liberals managed to keep the temperature up until the end of November. Morgan again spoke at Shaftesbury Hall and received 'loud cheers for taking up the Land Question in a Radical way'.⁶ The Conservative candidate rallied the clergy round him, with the exception of the Congregationalist Guinness Rogers, and attacked Morgan for endangering the Church by supporting Disestablishment. The Bands of Hope and the Sunday School children were pressed into service. Hoping to undermine Morgan's credibility with working people the Conservatives accused him of paying his employees 16/-

¹Ibid., 25 July 1885.
²Ibid., 18 and 25 July 1885.
³Ibid., 25 July 1885.
⁴Justice, 1 August 1885.
⁵South London Press, 8 August 1885.
⁶Ibid., 24 November 1885.
a week. Morgan issued a bill of self-defence giving details of his company's wage-rates and of the profit-sharing scheme he had initiated. On polling day the publicans came out in Tory blue and the South London Press suspiciously noted that Falcon Road was alive with drunken men who were usually too poor to drink. The polling booths, this time, were open until the late evening, and the Liberal vote was noticeably heavier between 8 and 9 a.m. and again at night. But people were allocated to booths alphabetically rather than by district and the new electors found themselves walking miles to vote.¹ Morgan was nevertheless victorious, with a larger majority than his co-candidate in Clapham. The Lavender Hill and Shaftesbury Park Conservative Association drowned their local sorrows at the Cedars Arms and drank to Lord Salisbury's government.²

With the victory, radicalism in Battersea did not settle back into complacency. 1886 and 1887 marked a further transformation of radical politics - a transformation not reflected in other similar London boroughs.³ The Battersea Branch of the Social Democratic Federation developed into an energetic and electorally successful movement and the Radicals found themselves to some extent drawn to the Socialists. The Battersea S.D.F. was blessed with two of the most charismatic British working-class leaders of 1880s and 1890s - John Burns and Tom Mann.⁴ By January 1886, 200 people could be assembled to hear a debate between a local Liberal-Radical, John Mellor and Burns.⁵ From the pages of Justice the Battersea S.D.F. gains an aura of earnest working-class intellectual endeavour, with reports of evenings like the one at which John Vesey gave a

¹Ibid., 28 November 1885.
²Ibid., 12 December 1885.
³In Southwark, the Liberal party filled the radical vacuum created by George Odger's death, and in Chelsea, Sir Charles Dilke's following was personal and idiosyncratic.
⁴In 1886 Tom Mann ran the Battersea Progressive Society, working for the eight hour day campaign, and the Battersea Debating Society. Justice, 20 April 1886 and 22 May 1886.
⁵Ibid., 30 January 1886.
critical account of the objections to socialism raised by 'Bradlaugh, Samuel Smith, Herbert Spencer and many others'.

But W.S. Sanders, who joined as a youth in 1888, 'learned in the course of time' that the members 'did not share my bookish tastes'.

Bernard Shaw was a popular lecturer, and was mortified one evening walking to Clapham Junction to catch his train home to hear a man behind him confess to his wife: 'When I hear a man of intellect talk like that for a whole evening, it makes me feel like a WORM.'

The people drawn to the meetings at Sydney Hall - a large bare room, above a second-rate waxworks show, with a gypsy camping site next door - were a mixed bag, as Sanders recalled. There was the so-called respectable artisan, the skilled worker in fairly permanent employment; the general labourer, usually connected with the building trade; and a few individuals who ought to be reckoned to belong to the middle classes. Only one of the latter would be considered to be an 'intellectual' and he took but small part in branch affairs.

Among the labourers were angry men, but 'the better-situated mechanics and the middle-class element had joined the movement for more impersonal reasons'. There were a few who were 'undisciplined in habits and temper and would have speedily wrecked any Utopian community which depended for its existence upon orderly methods, mutual confidence,

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1 Ibid., 3 January 1886.


3 Dan H. Laurence (ed.), Bernard Shaw Collected Letters [Vol.II], 1898-1910 (London, 1972), No.8; Bernard Shaw to Archibald Henderson, 3 January 1905, p.498. Shaw was referring to a lecture on 'The Political Situation' delivered to Battersea on 1 December 1895.

4 Sanders, op.cit., pp.14, 17.
and the existence of a sense of duty and responsibility in its units'.

Ideologically, too, the Battersea S.D.F. departed in reality from the image presented in Justice. Meetings were blighted by the anxiety of old Tichborne supporters to reiterate the evidence in favour of their martyr and the branch's Chartist, Lond, the parish road sweeper, dragged into every discussion the Currency Question arguments he claimed to have learnt forty years before from Bronterre O'Brien.

But if the Battersea S.D.F. lacked ideological purity, it was politically effective. By September 1886 an ordinary meeting in Battersea Park could draw a crowd of 2,000, and by the following month, Burns had become sufficiently well-known to impel the South London Press to report on his speeches. In early 1887 the branch had lectures on Sunday and Thursday nights, women's meetings on Monday afternoons, and discussion classes in the evening. They had a co-operative store, a slate club, an athletic club and a library – albeit, all of them small and often understaffed. On Sunday morning, breakfasts were provided.

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1 Ibid., pp.14, 17. See Appendix II (iii) for an interview with Mrs Gray by one of Booth's investigators which is too long to include in the text. She was a leading S.D.F. organizer and a member of the Battersea Union, who was converted from Christianity to Socialism. Mrs Gray criticised her S.D.F. comrades in a different way from Sanders. Disillusioned with their laziness, meanness and lack of spiritual sensibility, she was also aware from personal experience of the dangers and temptations for working-class politicians to be 'bought off' by the opposition. She and her family lived in a 'purple' street in Battersea - by Booth's criteria third from the bottom of the poverty scale and below the line of certain respectability. Her husband had been reduced from 'economic' respectability by unemployment and illness, therefore, although unquestionably a respectable and remarkable woman, her neighbourhood experience was from the 'other Battersea', outside Shaftesbury Park.

2 Ibid., pp.21-2.

3 South London Press, 9 October 1886.

4 Justice, 5 and 18 February 1887; Sanders, op.cit., p.15. Mrs Gray, Appendix II,
for poor children. Determinely teetotal, the S.D.F. looked askance at the Boro' of Battersea Club, where they believed the consumption of liquor was lowering morale. The only S.D.F. branch in Justice to call their members 'comrade', they nevertheless celebrated Christmas in 1887 with a genuine Victorian smoking concert. Burns recorded in his diary the Good Friday soirée in 1888:

In the evening went to Soiree at Sydney Hall. The hall was crowded with members, their wives and sweethearts a very happy throng in high spirits and good humour. Being pressed to have the boxing gloves on, I consented and dusted my opponents jackets very warmly. The irrepressible Rogers doing his best to make all comfortable.

The branch was so successful in recruiting members that as early as April 1886, C.S. Lynch wrote to Justice advising other branches to follow the Battersea example in making all members active in at least one aspect of the organization. Bernard Shaw paid this tribute to Burns in later years:

I threw Hyndman over, and got to work with Sidney Webb and the rest to place Socialism on a respectable bourgeois basis; hence Fabianism. Burns did the same thing in Battersea by organizing the working-classes there on a genuine self-respecting working-class basis, instead of on the old romantic middle-class assumptions.

With Burns' oratory drawing the Battersea men to the Park on Sunday mornings, and a small but devoted leadership, the S.D.F. was poised in the beginning of 1886 to lead the borough further to the left. Not content with lectures on the theory of Socialism, the S.D.F. under Burns' and Tom Mann's inspiration, took on the cause of the unemployed.

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1 Justice, 9 April 1887.
2 Ibid., 31 December 1887.
3 John Burns' Diary, op. cit., 30 March 1888.
4 Justice, 3 April 1886.
In February 1886 O.V. Morgan and J.C. Durant saw fit to
debate with the Socialists, only to find themselves strongly
attacked by Burns and Hyndman. But that same week, the
Battersea Liberal and Radical Association passed a
resolution supporting the unemployed movement and expressing
the hope that the Hyde Park demonstrations would 'not deter
the charitably disposed from contributing to the Mansion
House Fund'.

The move to the left by the Liberal-Radicals was
spontaneous, if cautious. The Boro' of Battersea Club,
rather than having its morale sapped by strong drink, began
to consolidate its working-class character. In February
1886, the Political Council passed a resolution 'condemning
the educational disadvantages for working-class children and
[called] on the Board to recover the educational endowments
intended for the poor and now spent on education for the
middle and upper classes and to use that same fund to
relieve the ratepayers'. More significant was the move to
reform the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association from
within. Paul Thompson maintains that there was no such
attempt in London to form democratic constituency parties on
the model of the Birmingham parties of the 1870s. The
radical clubs in London were suspicious of official
Liberalism, and the tradition of Paineite, Chartist and
republican radicalism, he argues, deterred them from too
close an association with the Liberal party.

However, the Shaftesbury Park Liberals began to agitate
early in 1886 for a reorganization of the Battersea Liberal
and Radical Association 'on a popular basis'. In Battersea,
the Liberals had power and the rank and file membership saw
an opportunity to capture the party for the popular cause.
In protest at the indifference of the middle-class Liberals,
the Estate men formed a separate branch of the Liberal and
Radical Association in February. J.B. Davey and John Vooght

1 South London Press, 13 February 1886.
2 Loc.cit.
3 Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The
made a gallant final attempt to sway the Battersea Association, but it was argued that basing the party on wards would lead to splits. Vooght proposed the election of officers by ballot and was defeated on the executive committee, 38 to 22.¹ The Shaftesbury Estate and Lavender Hill Liberal and Radical Association immediately formed a committee to reorganize the district, to ensure Morgan's re-election, and 'to make the branch effective in its working and representation'.² Morgan was one of the two South London Liberals to survive the 1886 election, and the South London Press, while chastising the old friends of Morgan who had deserted him, praised the working men who had remained loyal.³

The Shaftesbury Park Radical-Liberals settled into a routine of monthly lectures, but the anxiety over democratic representation remained. One of their best meetings was a lecture from George Howell at the Park Town Hall on '...How to make effective the voting power of the new democracy'.⁴ Their anxiety was justified. In the 1888 School Board Elections, John Burns went to vote in Gideon Road, the Estate's polling booth, and found workmen being refused admission by the police, whereas 'several swells' were let inside. The poll was officially closing at 8 p.m., but the gates at Gideon Road were shut at 7.22 p.m. Burns led sixty workmen in a rush at the gates, then reported the incident at the police station. Only one fifth of the people on the roll voted in Battersea, compared to more than a quarter in Lambeth where such harassment was apparently absent.⁵

As the continuing difficulties in even registering a vote by working-class people kept alive the sense of being blocked, the Battersea radicals were drawn to co-operate

¹South London Press, 1 and 6 February 1886.
²Loc.cit.
³Ibid., 10 July 1886. The other Liberal to hold his seat was Arthur Cohen Q.C. in West Southwark.
⁴Ibid., 13 November and 4 December 1886.
⁵John Burns' Diary, op.cit., 24 November 1888; South London Press, 8 December 1888.
with the Socialists on a number of issues, which began to change the ideological shape of their frustration. In May 1886, more fuel was added to the fires of local anger by the persecution of a Battersea political hero, J.C. Durant. Durant had finally been adopted as a Liberal-Radical candidate and narrowly won Stepney in 1885. His opponent, Issacson, challenged the result and demanded a recount. Durant went to Court and won, only to find himself burdened with paying costs to the fantastic sum of £2,000. Needless to say, Durant did not stand again in July, but a fund was launched in Battersea to pay his debts.\(^1\)

The Boro' of Battersea Club became curious about Socialist ideas and in July 1886, William Heaford was invited to lecture on 'Radicalism and Socialism'. He went straight to the point: 'The Radicalism of some folk was a mere Whiggery, with a coating of democracy to make it look respectable in the popular eye....'\(^2\) The S.D.F. continued to ask local radicals like H. Hearne and F. Winchester to debate at their meetings. The S.D.F. threw itself into local issues calculated to evoke the sympathy of the radicals. They joined the radical clubs in their defence of the costermongers and in early 1888 claimed to have gained a 'considerable local reputation' for exposing a scandal in the local workhouse.\(^3\) Sympathetic clergy were drawn into debates and in March 1887 the Town Hall was 'crowded to excess' to hear Burrows deliver a Socialist Sermon, which earned high praise from the clergymen present.\(^4\) The *South London Press* had been reporting Burns' big meetings since October 1886 and the S.D.F. branch notes gradually crept in to take their place alongside the normal Radical and Liberal Club meeting reports.\(^5\) But the most significant thrust of all by the Socialists was their assault on local authority - the Vestry and the Board of Guardians: assaults

\(^1\)Ibid., 22 May 1886.

\(^2\)Ibid., 27 July 1886.

\(^3\)Justice, 16 April 1887, 14 January 1888, 27 August 1887 and 11 August 1888.

\(^4\)Ibid., 19 March 1887.

\(^5\)South London Press, 1887, passim.
which made abundantly clear the locus of middle-class power as working-class candidates challenged the rules of eligibility for election. By 1888 there were four Socialist vestrymen, and in Number 2 Ward, the Shaftesbury Estate, the three successful S.D.F. candidates came second and equal third respectively. But the Socialist successes were matched by increasing Radical-Liberal victories and popular politics found a stage in local government.¹

As the Socialists and the Radicals drew closer together, they did so as equally powerful and self-conscious movements. The Boro' of Battersea Club, despite the competition for people's time and money from Laburnum House and the two other local Radical and Liberal Associations, had 210 paid-up members in February 1889. The August Bank Holiday outing in 1888 was 'about the largest thing I have ever seen in the shape of a political "outing" from South London', declared 'Peter Pickup' in the South London Press, with five hundred Batterseaites, 'all good Rads' out in fifteen four-in-hands.² The social life and sense of community in the political clubs made changing sides difficult, so that the Socialists and the Radicals began to co-operate openly on suitable causes rather than amalgamate. Free speech was one such cause, and Battersea mounted the most extensive protest in South London against the imprisonment of the Irish M.P. John Dillon in 1888. The Socialists carried the Red Flag in the combined demonstration with the Boro' of Battersea Club and Laburnum House on Clapham Common, but O.V. Morgan shared the platform with W. Willis, the Secularist and new radical secretary of the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association, as well as with Charles Marson of the S.D.F.³ Burns' local stature was only enhanced by his imprisonment, for less than a year after his release he topped the poll in Battersea for the London County Council candidature in 1888.

¹Ibid., 29 May 1886, 19 May 1888; Justice, 26 May 1888.

²South London Press, 11 August 1888.

³Ibid., 7 July 1888.
It was this election which reveals the changes which had occurred in the character of popular politics in Battersea since 1885. Burns noted in his diary after attending a meeting for the selection of candidates in the Boro' of Battersea Club that there was now a complete acceptance in the club of ideas that four years before they would have 'hanged' him for. 'The Radicals are now doing our work it is time we moved further ahead.' Burns officially stuck to his Socialist label and in December 1888 the South London Press was disturbed that the political clubs and associations had chosen 'two such extreme men' as Burns and James Tims, president of the Boro' of Battersea Club and secretary to the Metropolitan Radical Federation. But three weeks later the paper confessed that 'Battersea cannot do better... than make [Burns] one of their representatives'. Burns tempered his Socialism, promising at an over-flowing meeting in the Park Town Hall, that if elected 'they could rely on him supporting any plan, wherever it came from, to make London healthy, democratic and free'. Although Burns and Tims were both official candidates for the Liberal and Radical Association, Tims had the active support of the Boro' of Battersea Club and Burns had to rely on his personal following. As remarkable as their clear victory, was the total strength of Battersea radicalism in the election. In the South London Press' election guide, Burns was described as a Socialist, Tims as a Radical and the three other Liberal candidates also called themselves Radicals. The Conservative candidate, depending on support from the Church and Temperance party, dared only to call himself an Independent. Battersea was the only division in South London to have no open Liberal, Conservative and Liberal Unionist candidates.

The Radical and Liberal Associations equally reflected the shift to the left. W. Willis had succeeded the

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1 John Burns' Diary, op.cit., 18 September 1888.
2 South London Press, 22 December 1888.
3 Ibid., 12 January 1889.
4 Ibid., 29 February 1889.
middle-class engineer, B.T.L. Thompson, to the secretaryship of the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association. Willis was prepared to concede to the Shaftesbury Park Association's demands for a more democratic party and in the middle of the L.C.C. campaign, negotiations were started for a re-amalgamation. Officers were to be elected by ballot, subscriptions were set at a maximum of 1/- a year, the district committees were given more power and the powers of the registration committee were modified.¹ The last act of the independent Shaftesbury Park and Lavender Hill Association was to pledge its support for Burns, their former neighbour, and Andrew Cameron, a vestryman and 'Liberal of the advanced school' - a curious alliance which represented the two social and political threads on the Estate, with Vooght now dominating the radical side of the Association and J.B. Davey and W.J. May leading the black-coated Non-conformists.² Vooght began to develop a personal relationship with Burns, who privately described him after a chance meeting on Clapham Common as 'very earnest and intelligent'.³ The change in Vooght symbolized the change in the political character of Shaftesbury Park. A man who could affect 'Esq' after his name in 1886, had no inhibitions in expressing 'working-classness' by 1892 when presiding over a meeting of the Battersea Liberal and Radical Association to support Burns' parliamentary candidature, he warned: 'If Battersea failed to return as its representative the man who through all had laboured to improve the position of the workers, a good deal of remorse would follow.'⁴

When Burns formed the Battersea Labour League in 1889, the working-class radicalism of the borough had been successfully detached from the official Liberal party. Burns himself had met them half way, as desperate for power and recognition, he could see no chance of success while

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¹South London Press, 12 January 1889.
²Ibid., 5 January 1889.
³John Burns' Diary, op.cit., 18 May 1888.
⁴South Western Star, 6 April 1892.
leading the S.D.F. Radical politics in Battersea in the 1890s took on a unique character for London - responsive to Socialist ideas on many issues, electorally effective in local government and confidently working-class. Burns' own political position was secure, but as his ambition drove him deeper into the ranks of the Liberal party, it was more his prestige as a former working-man and a local who had 'made it' which kept him safe. Burns could have taken Battersea into the Labour party had it suited his self-image, but he preferred to remain a local hero and a Westminster gentleman.¹ The daughters of Conservative-voting Shaftesbury Park men remember singing for Burns at elections² and as Burns' radicalism degenerated into theatricalism, the Battersea radicals abandoned parliamentary politics for local government. Richard Price has found Battersea remarkable for the strength of the 'Stop the War' movement in 1900 led by the Progressive Party and those Socialists who remained in politics after the S.D.F. branch closed in 1899. Battersea was the only place in the United Kingdom where anti-war meetings were safe and where Imperialist meetings could be captured. The middle-class movement organised a Patriotic Carnival on 23 May 1900 in celebration of Mafeking Night. Enthusiastically received in middle-class Battersea, it did not once venture during the whole two days of parades into the Shaftesbury Estate or the poorer parts of Battersea by the river.³

¹Paul Thompson, op.cit., pp.150-2. See Appendix II (iv) for a description from The Manchester Guardian of Burns campaigning in Battersea and of his reception on Shaftesbury Park in October 1900.

²Miss Baker and Miss Saxby sang from memory this election refrain:

Vote, vote, vote for Johnny Burns,
Kick old Benny out the door.
If it wasn't for the law,
We would kick him in the jaw,
We wouldn't vote for Benny any more.

A. Shirley Benn stood as a Conservative against Burns in 1906 and 1910.

Shaftesbury Park by the 1890s had acquired a distinctive social and political character. Its respectability and its working-classness shaped its relations to the community surrounding it - hostile to those who were a 'cut above' over Lavender Hill, and in turn, sneered at by the gangs of coster boys for being 'stiff necks'. For Estate radicals, shopkeepers who may have spent a lifetime on the Estate, were always 'outsiders', despised for their exploitation by the credit system and their alleged penchant for inquiring 'Why weren't you at church last Sunday'. Similarly the police families were never accepted in this eminently law-abiding community, as the traditional working-class distrust of the police was reinforced and rationalised by disdain for their Toryism. Shaftesbury families discouraged their children from associating with police and shop-keeping families, and these 'outsiders' were forced to do their courting off the Estate. Miss Jewson, by contrast, comes from a strong Tory family and remembers the police as 'rather superior people', and the family's limited and withdrawn social life on the Estate revolved round seeing her uncle's family of Tory grocers.

There were, of course, Conservative voters on the Estate, but the Conservative Clubs never took on like their Radical and Socialist rivals. The Conservatives appear to have been often social isolates in this working-class 'village', their Toryism being a mark of social distinction which necessitated 'keeping themselves to themselves'. The Conservative Clubs seem to have suffered from this lack of sociability and the persistence of public house meetings probably discouraged respectable Tories from joining the party. Conservative voting in Shaftesbury Park only became a significant problem for the Left with the enfranchisement

1 Misses Jewson, Baker and Saxby.

2 Councillor Harrison.

3 Miss Jewson.
of women, and remains conspicuous among spinsters over thirty years of age.\(^1\)

The most significant development in the 1880s was the apparent reversal of the 'contagion theory' of embourgeoisement. As the Estate became more working-class in composition, many politically active black-coated residents came to identify themselves with working-class politics. The concentration in such a community of respectable and intelligent working men, and the prolongation of their effective disenfranchisement, rendered the problems of democratic representation more urgent. The black-coated workers were forced by their residence on the Estate to suffer the same frustrations. Conscious of their intrinsic right to citizenship and their respectability, obstacles to the exercise of political power were all the more irksome. The experience of the Radicals and Liberals on the Estate predisposed them to view politics with a sharper sense of a conflict with authority which was determined by their class, hence the radical impulse flourished when it could so easily have died in such a safe Liberal seat. As in manners and morals, artisans were becoming embourgeoisé, so in politics clerks and school teachers were finding themselves becoming proletarianized. The forced association on the Estate and the voluntary association of political agitation began to blur class lines, but it was the middling class who stayed who lost out. A 'highly respected' resident like W.J. May, the Estate manager, was drawn into the radical revolt of the Radical and Liberal Association, and his son, who was described by the School Board Visitor as 'clever', became a builder's foreman, and remained on the Estate.\(^2\)

For the old people on Shaftesbury Park the First World War marks the real end of the nineteenth century, and the change from bare comfort to security. However, Shaftesbury

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\(^1\)Councillor Harrison's wife confirmed this from her experience as the District Organizer for the Labour Party. Only now are young married women beginning to vote Labour along with their husbands.

\(^2\)School Board Visitor's Book, op.cit.
people were largely relatively well-off, and it was antagonism to authority rather than economic grievance which radicalised this respectable Workmen's Town. The Artizan's Company boasted an array of titled philanthropists, and after twenty years they could rest content at their tenants' cheerful acceptance of domestic discipline. But any hope they had nurtured that 'Healthy Homes' would ensure a deferential working class had been dashed.¹ The residents brought to Shaftesbury Park their own history, and once in the 'Workmen's Town', they could not escape being part of the wider world. Shaftesbury Park stands as a symbol of nineteenth century materialistic philanthropy and a hundred years later, as a model of town planning with a human face. 'Healthy Homes' were one condition of social progress, but not the first, for as even the loyal Tory Miss Jewson remembers that by the 1920s, 'people had more say. Before the war you just did as you were told.'

¹The Ashley family had connections with the Company for three generations. Sir Thomas Brassey was a director and a square was named after him on the Estate.
CONCLUSION

THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

Respectability was practised as a form of personal and social discipline long before the nineteenth century, but it acquired a new significance and pervasiveness in the Victorian era. The Industrial Revolution and the growth of the cities rendered respectability especially useful as a means of social control and personal discipline. Above all in London, the growing urban working class were out of the reach of clergy, gentry, even village school teachers (until the inception of the Board Schools), who could attempt to inculcate some deference and political containment. The East End was a city unto itself and the old working class of central London contained so many criminals that it was safer for genteel people to keep away. The rapid growth of new suburbs militated against the development of face to face relationships between rich and poor and respectable and rough. As we have seen in Battersea, the respectable working class kept to themselves, unless they went to a church near a middle-class area, and they were few. They had little contact with the rough, apart from shopping expeditions, and respectable children were stoned and called 'stiff necks' if they tried to play with rough children or the Battersea gypsies.

The social dislocation which came in the wake of the industrial revolution unnerved people of all classes. While it created new opportunities for acquiring wealth and new expectations of upward social mobility, when ambitious people found these hopes unfulfilled they were exposed to stress. This occurred both for the struggling middling-class professional, for a man like Trollope and for ambitious and talented respectable working men. For the blocked or thwarted respectable working men the stress was compounded by their poverty, the tedium of their lives and their exclusion, certainly at the mid-century, from participation in the wider world of politics and culture,
let alone the making of money. In a sense they were supposed not to exist, except as part of the human machinery of the economy. These were people not even on the margin, they were just below it. They were blocked and excluded people, and as respectability helped them to feel their frustration more acutely by encouraging reading, self-improvement and self-respect, it also assisted them to perceive that they were a conflict group, thwarted by authority. They were the most stress-ridden people in Victorian society.

With the Industrial Revolution traditional status became precarious within a lifetime for many people of gentle birth. The social changes were of a suddenness which outran the economic and technological changes. Nowhere was that more visible than in London itself. Hence as respectability became one social and political weapon in the bid for pre-eminence and significance by the classes below the aristocracy, there was an opposite if not equal reaction. Aspiring respectables found the classes above them closing ranks and consolidating their caste. But the very crudity of Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander's 'GOD MADE THEM HIGH AND LOWLY, AND ORDERED THEIR ESTATE', reveals the fragility of traditional status. Such a campaign further affronted the dignity of a respectable working man who was just beginning to feel that he was as good as any one else. It even encouraged some radicals to claim that true morality and worth resided solely in the working classes.

The moneyed employing classes saw in respectability an antidote to the drunkenness, unpunctuality, disrespect for regulations and poor workmanship of the pre-industrial worker. If trains were to run efficiently, machines operated quickly and carefully, and profits to be maximised, then workers had to change their old ways of drinking on the job and taking Saint Mondays. Equally, the growing wealthy classes, burdening themselves with the 'paraphenalia of gentility', needed a massive army of domestic servants who could be trusted absolutely and who would know their place. Moneyed-class social reformers and social critics hoped that respectability could improve the material condition of the working classes and quell crime and political dissent. The
Chartist uprising quickened the anxiety over the believed need to wed the working classes to hierarchical capitalist society. The police and the Board Schools did make some impact on the unruliness of the poor, but many parts of London were still nefarious in 1890. The zeal of moneyed-class interest in foisting respectability on the poor became a civilizing mission.

No doubt many working-class people were coerced into becoming respectable if they were to have a job. Over a third of the London female workforce were in domestic service alone. A policeman could scarcely afford to drink very much, and if he developed radical ideas, he probably had to keep them to himself. Where face to face relationships existed between employer and employee, deference was a necessity and frequently spontaneous. However in the artisan world people worked more on their own and the decline of London industry into slop work depleted the opportunities for face to face relationships in the workplace with wealthy employers. Outside working hours the artisan went home to his own life where, even if he had to be respectful to his boss during the day, he could be his own man. Artisan independence and radicalism had a long history, well pre-dating 1850, but even those tailors and shoemakers forced into the slop trades, although they lost their financial security did not have to relinquish their beliefs. In the growing building industry the tradition of personal independence persisted and even filtered down by the 1880s to the builders' labourers.

As we have seen many working-class people took to respectability gladly and were eager advocates for the cause. But in many respects the values they preached evinced a unique working-class stamp and they made their own contribution to the general ideal of Victorian respectability. But this study is about the relationship between respectability and working-class radicalism. It would be foolish to argue that all respectable working-class people developed radical political beliefs. To a large extent people's work environment taught them what they ought to think, and although it is impossible to measure, it is a reasonable assumption that of those who had a secure place
in a job which demanded deference many became deferential. The obvious example is domestic service and Booth observed an identification by the foreman in trades with the employer's interests rather than with those of Labour. Even so, people are always contrary and refuse to conform to sociological models. But working-class Tories must still be given the credit for possessing political awareness. Equally one must not deny the existence of the quiet, even apathetic majority. For reasons which lie within the realm of psychology, some people refuse to be engagé, and are not only politically indifferent, but also may be by choice, social isolates. Finally, for the timid, non-intellectual and unambitious man, respectability and financial security were goals in life in themselves. Such people may have been politically aware, but their political activity went no further than the polling booth.

But the evidence is there that the vast majority of radical political activists were respectable working men and that their respectability contributed towards their political and social anger. Some just practised respectability, but others devoted much energy to advocating it as a means of emancipation of the working classes, even to the point of making a fetish out of it. Therefore if the moneyed classes hoped that respectability would dispel political dissent, they were in part misguided for the respectable radicals learnt to use respectability as one of their weapons against insignificance and social, political and cultural exclusion.

Once a man had a regular job he could begin to call himself respectable. He may not have chosen to follow any of the other disciplines of respectability, but in most regular occupations his job could be in jeopardy. The first criterion of respectability was therefore economic. It determined the job opportunities of working-class people and governed their expenditure. Once they had a regular income they could at least establish some form of permanent home, in contrast to the casual poor who were at the mercy of the seasonality of their work, the irregularity of their income and the intemperate and depraved life constant insecurity encouraged. The regularly employed man could plan for the
future with some certainty and establish a stable domestic environment. He may even have been able to indulge in buying decent furniture, books and periodicals and join a club. He could above all dress cleanly and neatly, which in fact he had to do if he was to maintain the appearance of respectability and keep his regular job.

To obtain a regular job a person needed a skill that remained in demand and a character, and of these two saleable attributes in the job market, character or respectability was the more important and the more precarious. Once a person lost regular employment and was unable to maintain the appearance of respectability, it was very difficult to regain a regular job. The skilled artisan world shrank in London between 1850 and 1890, but the range of occupations requiring character alone seems to have increased. Even highly skilled artisans had to be more respectable in their behaviour by 1890 if they were to remain in the honourable tailoring, shoemaking and furniture trades. Therefore respectability or character advanced in importance over the forty years at the expense of skill alone and is one measure of the increasing practice of respectability between 1850 and 1890. Therefore I cannot agree with Geoffrey Best's argument that vertical social divisions based on respectability were more important in Victorian society than the horizontal divisions created by feelings largely economic in source. Respectability was determined by economic status, and although it comprised a critical social divider, the two cannot be so simply separated.

The economic advantages to become respectable were reinforced by the culture of respectability which developed in the Victorian age. The missionary zeal of money-class evangelists was at least matched by the intensity of working-class respectables preaching the good word to their unenlightened brethren. From trade unions, Friendly and Benefit Societies, political and social clubs, co-operative societies and many political societies to zealous individual writers and pamphleteers, the message came that if the working classes were to improve themselves, develop manly independence, self-reliance and self-respect then their lives would be enriched and they would acquire greater
respect in the eyes of their masters. If working men spent money on books instead of gin and beer they would be more worthy of inclusion in the public world. Active radicals hoped that they would then begin to perceive more intelligently their conflict with authority in society. This culture contributed towards the increasing respectability of the working class by the end of the century. It did awaken some to political awareness, even activism, but probably it contributed more towards the growth of a common working-class identity and class pride. In 1850 the working classes were still divided not only by economic status, but also by craft exclusiveness, geographical isolation, sub-cultural customs and language. As more people became respectable they had more in common, and although a Northumberland miner had been largely civilized by Methodism by 1890 he shared many values with a London socialist.

Those radicals who believed that respectability was a means of emancipating the working classes from ignorance and deference are the central concern of this study. They perceived a conflict with social, economic and political authority which excluded the working classes from full participation in society. If they could prove to the ruling classes that through their respectability and intelligence that they were worthy of inclusion in the political process then they had achieved at least some measure of equality even if their poverty took longer to mitigate. The older radicals, especially those educated by Chartism, developed such a hostility to authority and to the State that they remained unimpressed by state socialism. This more than anything else was the cause for the older generation's hostility to Marxism. The younger men had a shorter history of direct conflict with the State over suffrage, the newspaper stamp tax, the Contagious Diseases Acts and the legislative restrictions on trade unions. Their perception was wider and included the complete reformation of the political and economic system. If the respectability of the working-class élite did stifle revolution, it did so only to the extent that it reinforced individualism, assisted the older radicals to distrust state power and
reduced social violence. But it must be emphasised that respectable working-class people who supported the marketplace economy and industrial capitalism, did so because they believed in them. Other respectable people became Marxists without relinquishing their respectability and were just as stern as their forebears in preaching its value as a means of working-class emancipation.

Those respectable working-class people who perceived a conflict with authority in their lives can be called a conflict group. R.S. Neale's five-class model helps illustrate the potential for frustration with authority in society. Although he is largely interested in the middling class, his model does illumine the potential for frustration and political anger of the respectable working class, which I think was greater than that of black-coated workers. The stress in working-class people's existence was compounded by their greater economic precariousness and powerlessness over the direction of their lives. Moreover, the opportunities for talented, energetic and ambitious people for upward social mobility were more limited than for the middling class. Blocked working-class people permeate the memoirs and records of radical politics and indigenous working-class literature. They were, however, a minority group, even though their influence dominated working-class thought and radical politics. Therefore radical respectable people and blocked people constituted a conflict group within a class or social stratum. They do not conform to Neale's model in all respects because he is concerned with when a class as a whole becomes a conflict group and thereby a political class. Nevertheless his model remains the most useful explanation of nineteenth century radicalism yet offered by a British historian.

The contemporary sociological research of Goldthorpe and Lockwood is suggestive of much of the political behaviour of nineteenth century respectable working-class people. Their modern affluent workers displayed a greater political awareness and loyalty to the Labour party than did process workers. It is the wives of affluent workers who are prone to embourgeoisement with the higher incomes of the
present day.\textsuperscript{1} Women have been sorely neglected in this study largely through the paucity of evidence and their lack of political and public activity. Peter Stearns has made a study, albeit brief and intuitive rather than substantiated, of working-class women in Britain between 1890 and 1914. He argues that artisans' wives were isolated from the political realities of life by their absorption in domesticity and did become embourgeoisé. As real wages improved for men and better housing became more available women gained little more than an improvement in their standard of living. Working-class women were exposed to some new expectations, especially through the Board Schools, but they derived little benefit. They were excluded from most recreation in sport and pub-life and their domestic respectability led to isolation in the home, promoting loneliness and confusion.\textsuperscript{2} With a third of the London female workforce in domestic service, even after the first world war, not a few women absorbed deferential attitudes which they took with them into married life. On Shaftesbury Park it was possible to gain some picture of older women's lives and political opinions, and deference and social isolation appeared common especially among spinsters. The impact of the full enfranchisement of women on Tory deferential voting in the twentieth century is a subject still in need of further research.

Rather than hinder radicalism, as has been so often argued, respectability, certainly with men, assisted it. It intellectually equipped them to diagnose their conflict with authority; it heightened their self confidence as a group and as individuals in an increasingly caste-ridden society; it gave them an effective weapon against their exclusion from society. But it added a new conscious psychological and social stress to their lives when they


\textsuperscript{2}Peter N. Stearns, 'Working-Class Women in Britain: 1890-1914' in Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, ed. Martha Vinicus (University of Indiana Press, 1972), pp.101, 118.
realised that however respectable they were, they still were denied full humanity. Economic and other social problems also played their part in making working men radical, but respectability played its part too and cannot be either under-estimated or misinterpreted.

Politically, respectability was one of the radicals' tactics in assaulting the political and social system. Its greatest success was in the 1867 Reform Act agitation, but after this triumph it exposed a number of radicals into a grudging co-option into Gladstonian Liberalism. The emphasis on morality and manly independence in political life, so cleverly used in the Reform agitation and so attractive to many respectable radicals, rendered them vulnerable to admiring Gladstone as a moral man in politics. The Tory party was believed to represent all the values the respectable radicals detested. It was aristocratic, corrupt, the party deference and of gin and beer. The vast Tichborne movement, populist and irrational, equally confirmed respectable radicals' preference for rational Liberalism. Above all, since the thrust of radical activity until the 1870s had been against state power over the individual, Liberalism was more reassuring to men still perceiving politics as a conflict against authority. The Co-operative movement was attractive to some respectable working men as an alternative economic and social system outside the reach of the State. And others, committed to the idea of the sharing of capital, saw it as a means of moralising the relationships between Capital and Labour. But this alliance was uneasy, as one can see with Howell and Holyoake. Each had different reactions to their relative insignificance in the Liberal party. Howell battled on and eventually entered Parliament. Holyoake threw much energy into his life-long interest in Co-operation and Co-production. The necessity to survive financially was for Howell especially, and for Holyoake to a lesser extent, a strong reason for their attachment to the Liberal party. Adams, the Mazzinian, was too busy with his newspaper to be politically active in the 1870s and 1880s, but his obsession with moralising society led him to admire Gladstone unequivocally. Cooper relinquished politics for religion in later life but he never lost his Chartist prejudices and his class hatred.
This alliance largely afflicted the older generation. Their successors, equally respectable, found in radical clubs and in the Social Democratic Federation new approaches and a renewed vigour for attacking the continuing problems of poverty and class tension. But their respectability often hindered their effectiveness in politicising the unrespectable casual poor - a problem which later afflicted the Labour party. In London the new respectable working-class suburbs encouraged the growth of political club life and radical local politics before the formation of the Labour party. We have seen this in Battersea, but it also occurred in West Ham. The Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company's estate, Noel Park in Wood Green, was notable for its radical activity and S.D.F. membership. Their other estate, Queen's Park in Kensal Green, under the domination of a sporting clergyman, made its mark on history by producing the football team Queen's Park Rangers. Professional sport may have siphoned off much of the energy devoted to politics in the 1880s and early 1890s, giving working men with little leisure, a relaxation denied them in the intensity of political meetings and demonstrations. Not that the political clubs lacked entertainment with their smoking concerts and soirees, but watching football was more fun.

The East End too had its Club life which to some extent has been neglected in this study. In Central London, political clubs may have existed almost continuously after the end of the Chartist agitation. The records are few if even extant, and only Stan Shipley has so far been able to write a history of the Soho O'Brienites who brought Marxism to Britain. The Conservative working-man's clubs were not very successful and few records exist before the 1890s. They also suffered from the domination of their wealthy patrons.¹

The Shaftesbury Park Estate case study is specialised. There are few records before the 1880s and it was impossible

¹See The Club and Institute Journal and The Conservative Clubs' Gazette, passim.
to make an analysis of the changing class composition as John Foster has done for Oldham. The Censuses are still unavailable, the electoral rolls do not include occupations, the Estate's political life began after the Secret Ballot and the School Board Visitor's Book omits names and records only those families with children at school. Perhaps Shaftesbury Park is barely representative of respectable working-class life in London, being such a concentrated and isolated community. It did however have a high turnover of residents during the 1880s and admittedly a fascinating history. It proved to be virtually the only way of gaining a glimpse of the lives of the quiet people and their day-to-day routine and values. As a researcher, I needed the personal contacts on the Estate to introduce me to the interviewees and having a specific geographical area made reading newspapers and other documents easier. It was possible through the interviews to discover what life was like for respectable women. There are vast possibilities for a more peopled social history of London and the rest of Britain, but oral history would have to be a major technique.

Politically, Battersea was in many ways ahead of its time, but it reveals the growing political awareness of the respectable working class. The activists threw their energies into Local Government, had organizations capable of sponsoring successful candidates for the London County Council and for Parliament, and formed the Labour League and later a vigorous Labour Party. Also it revealed that the quiet people too had their politics, and although they may not have chosen to join an organization, the left-wing commitment on the Estate predominated by the 1880s. Shaftesbury Park remains a highly political community, with a Labour party membership of 320 in 1973. The political awareness is partly due to the rare organizing abilities of Councillor and Mrs H.J. Harrison, but despite their efforts the Communist Party vote remains remarkably high at least at local government elections.

The Shaftesbury Park case study is intended to serve as the finale of the thesis. I hope that after the general study of respectability and working-class radicalism that it has succeeded in demonstrating in detail what respectability
meant and how respectable people perceived their relationships to the other classes, their conflict with authority, their cultural and class identity and what by the 1880s, they did about their problems.

Respectability has acquired a bad name; has been vilified and misunderstood. The reason is itself an historical one. Estranged members of the intelligentsia at the turn of the century - Shaw, Wilde and Lytton Strachey - were so appalled by the nadir of middle-class sexual respectability that their revolt was uneasy and their emancipation incomplete. It has been considered a dour and conservative phenomenon, and this in part accounts for the lack of historical interest in respectability and its frequent misinterpretation. We are now reaching the stage when we can regard the values and aspirations incorporated in Victorian respectability with enough detachment to feel more sympathy for them.

It is not so much the high morality of Victorian respectability which disconcerts us today, but rather the unselfconscious racialism in the way the respectables regarded 'the others'. Respectability contributed to the assuredness of racial and cultural superiority which the English took with them into their dealings with the outside world. Within English society, even if a person did not suffer the calamity of being Irish or Jewish, he was considered to belong to another and inferior race if he was a member of the Residuum. He could, however, change his race if he became respectable. Thomas Wright wrote in 1873 of the 'Two Races of Poor' - the respectable and the rough. To his eyes, as a respectable working man, the two races of poor were physically distinguishable and he found the rough physically and morally repugnant. But as a journeyman

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engineer with a talent for writing he drew comfort from such 'racialist' distinctions, for by making them he confirmed his confidence in his own respectability and right to be included in the public world.

In conclusion, I trust that I have demonstrated implicitly, at least, that respectability constituted a significant advance in the civilization of ordinary life. Under its general influence it encouraged temperance, punctuality, cleanliness and self-respect. It helped to reduce violence in personal relationships and promoted the value of stable family life, domestic order and cleanliness and the better treatment of women and children. It whetted respectable working-class people's appetite for self-improvement and education. To some extent it reduced crime, developed a strong opposition amongst respectables towards prostitution and maybe deterred some women from taking to the streets out of economic need. The necessity to maintain respectability to secure a regular income enabled people to plan for the future rather than live from day to day, even hour to hour as the casual poor were forced to do. Above all it conferred on many working-class people a new respect in themselves as a class, for as self-helping, independent, respectable people they could feel at least morally, although not materially, as worthy as their masters.

As respectability for many people assisted rather than hindered radicalism, in doing this and in building class self-respect it had another highly significant effect. In a very different sense from what E.P. Thompson maintains, it contributed towards the making of the English working class. A strict Marxist could not accept such an interpretation, and I use the making of a class in a different conceptual sense.¹ Respectability contributed towards the growth of common class identity, class respect and cultural cohesiveness. It certainly helped to maintain radical political awareness after the failure of Chartism. There was a top layer of the respectable working class who remained

politically active, were sustained in their confidence by their respectability, used it as a political tactic and were to some extent, depending on the personality of the individual radical, were motivated by their respectability to seek social, if not economic equality. The quiet respectables absorbed the personal disciplines of respectability and this gave them more in common with other respectable people and the radicalism of their political leaders did filter down. As we have seen in Shaftesbury Park, not only did the residents share a common set of values, but by the 1880s even the quiet people had their politics and were overwhelmingly radical. By the 1880s the respectable working class all over London appears to have been a more strongly culturally, even politically cohesive group. In this cultural sense, respectability was very important in the making of working class at least in London and I suspect also in other parts of Britain.

Respectability was essentially a means of survival but it was also a common bond between working-class people. Richard Hoggart has captured more vividly and sensitively than anyone else how respectability has been transmuted into the twentieth century:

...there is a clear dignity in that reaction to the pressures of the outside world which takes the form of insisting on 'keeping y' self-respect'. And the moment this idea of 'self-respect' and 'self-reliance' comes to mind, it begins to flower into related ideas: into that of 'respectability' first which itself spreads outwards and upwards from some thin-lipped forms, through the pride of a skilled workman, to the integrity of those who have practically nothing except a determination not to allow themselves to be dragged down by circumstances. At the centre is a resolution to hold on to that of which one can be rightly proud; in a world which puts so many stumbling-blocks in the way, to hold on at least to 'self-respect'. 'At least, ah've got me self-respect'; the right to be able to say that, though it can be said meanly, makes up for a lot. It is at work constantly in the hatred of 'going on the parish', in the worry to keep up sick payments, in the big insurances to avoid a parish burial, in thrift and the cult of cleanliness. There is, I think, a tendency among some writers on the working-classes to think of all those who aim at thrift and cleanliness as imitators of the lower middle-classes, as in some
ways traitors to their own class, anxious to get out of it....Conversely, those who do not make this effort tend to be regarded as more honest and less servile than those who do. But cleanliness, thrift and self-respect arise more from a concern not to drop down, not to succumb to the environment, than from an anxiety to go up; and among those who altogether ignore these criteria, the uninhibited, generous and carefree spirits are outnumbered by the slovenly and shiftless whose homes and habits reflect their inner lack of grip. Even the urge for children to 'get on' and the respect for the value of 'book-learning' is not most importantly produced by the wish to reach another class out of snobbery. It is associated much more with the thought of a reduction in the numerous troubles which the poor have to meet, simply because they are poor:...

'How narrow the gap, how slight the chance', for keeping the raft afloat and being able to 'look people in the face'. It is therefore important to have that sense of independence which arises from a respect for oneself, because that is what no one can physically take away. 'Ah've worked 'ard all me life', people will say, 'and ah owe no man anything'. They own nothing either, except for a few sticks of furniture, but they never expected to own more.¹

This is not contentment with their lot, but the resignation of the working class to the fact that life is still a struggle. But now they can say 'At least, ah've got me self-respect' and that is something other working-class people understand and share. In the twentieth century life has improved relatively little for the British working class, except for the intervention of the Welfare State, and one finds many people who resent it as taking away their self-respect and independence. But the gap between material comfort, and the chance to move out of the working class, and the innate self-respect and respectability of these people, still angers activists and helps them to turn to political action as a solution to their problems.

The burden of my argument throughout is that respectability failed to wed many working-class people to the

hierarchical capitalist society. Instead it contributed in the making of a radical and in the making of the London working class. Therefore I cannot agree with the marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy revived by E.J. Hobsbawm, nor with Trygve Tholfsen's sophisticated argument that the similarity of values between middle- and working-class respectables caused the working-class élite to become co-opted into bourgeois capitalism. Both Hobsbawm and Tholfsen could argue that I have unwittingly proved their points of view. But we cannot deny the facts. Although respectable radicals, especially during the 'Uneasy Alliance' did not consistently attack capitalism, it was not because they were respectable. Certainly respectable radicals were vulnerable to admiring moral men in politics like Gladstone. But even those who forged the Lib-Lab alliance were often ambivalent in their commitment. Even if they craved to be 'gentlemen' rather than just share 'the liberties of gentlemen', as Howell bitterly admitted it was still impossible 'to get into the stream'. Once working-class, always working-class, and respectability only aggravated thwartedness and made deference harder to abide. Respectable radicals' varied and changing political ideologies had little to do with their respectability. Respectability assisted people to perceive that they were in conflict with authority, but it was their access to political ideologies and the prevailing political conflicts of their times which shaped their political beliefs. Therefore it was perfectly consistent that Reform Leaguers emphasised working-class respectability as a tactic in the campaign, that men were drawn to Gladstonian Liberalism to oppose Toryism and populism and that Socialists were stern advocates of respectability. Neither can I agree with Geoffrey Best's question whether dissent from respectability 'ipso facto' mean 'hostility to the hierarchical system'? Again this is an over-simplification. Respectability was used as a weapon against social insignificance and exclusion, and in replacing the aristocracy of birth with the aristocracy of

1Geoffrey Best, op.cit., p.263.
character, respectability constituted a very real attack on the hierarchical system.

In conclusion, although this study is non-marxist, I sympathise with Hobsbawm and Foster. I too ask 'if only?' and believe that the writing of history is a political act. But the facts do not support Marxist theory and I consider it bad history to strain evidence to fit a model. We cannot blame respectability alone for the failure of the British people to forge an egalitarian society and to abolish the continuing poverty of the working class. But in Victorian London, the ruling classes' expectation that respectability could quell working-class political dissent was naive. Instead it intensified blocked men's determination to fight for at least their social equality and contributed towards the making of the working class. Victorian respectability proved to be a two-edged sword.
RESPECTABLE PEOPLE READY FOR AN EAST END OUTING AROUND 1890
APPENDIX I

SOURCES

Gareth Stedman Jones has made a careful statistical analysis of the Censuses from 1861 to 1891 in *Outcast London* which has yet to be bettered. The problems of working on the Censuses before 1921 are daunting due to the inexactness of the classification of occupations, and Stedman Jones has had to apply statistical methods of considerable sophistication to make even the most general comparisons between the four censuses in his period. I have therefore relied on his figures, with minor alterations, rather than attempt my own analyses. The tables are derived from the following sources:


TABLE II: Stedman Jones, p.387.

TABLE III: Stedman Jones, p.391.

TABLE IV: Stedman Jones, pp.360-1.

TABLE I

OCCUPATIONS OF ARRESTED PROSTITUTES IN LONDON,
1850-1860

2,202 of the 41,954 women arrested for 'disorderly conduct' gave these occupations; the remainder being entered in the police records as unoccupied:

74 hatters and trimmers
418 laundresses
646 milliners etc.
400 servants
249 shoemakers
58 artificial flower makers
215 tailors
33 brushmakers
42 bookbinders
8 corkcutters
7 dyers
2 fishmongers
8 general and marine shop dealers
24 glovers
18 weavers.

In the 1861 Census 22.79 per cent of women at work were in personal service, which included laundry work, and 10.04 per cent were in clothing, millinery and boots and shoes. Of these arrested women with occupations, 35 per cent were in millinery and allied trades, 18 per cent were servants, 18 per cent laundresses, 11 per cent shoemakers, 10 per cent tailors. (These are rough calculations and rounded to the nearest whole number.)
### TABLE IIa

**LONDON 1861 AND 1891: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSIFICATION**

(over 10 years of age)

#### 1861 CENSUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>70,391</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>41,006</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>159,304</td>
<td>16.30</td>
<td>44,596</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>309,451</td>
<td>31.66</td>
<td>90,001</td>
<td>7.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>110,466</td>
<td>11.30</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVa</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>81,943</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVb</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>28,967</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVc</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>190,209</td>
<td>16.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Domestic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>196,713</td>
<td>20.12</td>
<td>24,360</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Population</td>
<td>846,325</td>
<td>86.58</td>
<td>501,082</td>
<td>43.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>131,228</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>662,799</td>
<td>56.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>977,553</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>1,163,881</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total of Classes IVa, b and c: 307, 179.

Percentage of Women at Work Minus Classes I and II: 35.7%.
### TABLE IIb

**1891 CENSUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>97,722</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>92,890</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>290,007</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>91,938</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>378,068</td>
<td>24.95</td>
<td>115,791</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>191,930</td>
<td>12.66</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVa</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>110,465</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVb</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>52,231</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVc</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>238,366</td>
<td>13.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Domestic)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>327,321</td>
<td>21.60</td>
<td>54,113</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Population</td>
<td>1,285,048</td>
<td>84.80</td>
<td>755,794</td>
<td>43.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>230,496</td>
<td>15.20</td>
<td>984,623</td>
<td>56.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,515,544</td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
<td>1,740,417</td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total of Classes IV a, b and c: 419, 251.

Percentage of Women at Work Minus Classes I and II: 32.81%
## TABLE IIIa

**LONDON 1861-91:**

CHANGES (PER CENT) IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUP DISTRIBUTION

(over 10 years of age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>-1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>-2.84</td>
<td>-1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>+6.71</td>
<td>+1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVa</td>
<td></td>
<td>+0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVb</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVc</td>
<td></td>
<td>+2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Domestic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>-1.48</td>
<td>-1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>+0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE IIIb**

**LONDON 1861-91:**

INCREASE (PER CENT) IN CLASSIFIED SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS

*(Over 10 years of age)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>+38.83</td>
<td>+126.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>+82.05</td>
<td>+106.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>+22.17</td>
<td>+28.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>+73.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVa</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>+34.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVb</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>+80.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IVc</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>+25.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Domestic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>+66.40</td>
<td>+122.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>+75.65</td>
<td>+48.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE IVa

**LONDON 1861-91: CHANGES IN OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION**

*(over 10 years of age)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Males (per cent)</th>
<th>Females (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Agriculture</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration</td>
<td>+0.14</td>
<td>+0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Defence</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional and Teaching</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td>-0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Entertainment and Sport</td>
<td>+0.17</td>
<td>+0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Commerce, finance etc.</td>
<td>+0.87</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Clerical</td>
<td>+2.49</td>
<td>+0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6c. Retail and Distribution</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>+0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total</em></td>
<td>+3.44</td>
<td>+0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Personal Service</td>
<td>+0.28</td>
<td>-2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Transport, storage etc.</td>
<td>+1.06</td>
<td>+0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Building Industry</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Wood and Furniture</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Metal and Engineering</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Shipbuilding</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Precision Industry</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>+0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Printing and Paper</td>
<td>+0.75</td>
<td>+0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leather and Hides</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Food and Drink Manufacture</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>+0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Textile Manufacture</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18a. Clothing Trade</td>
<td>-0.64</td>
<td>-1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18b. Boot and Shoe Trade</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Total</em></td>
<td>-2.00</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Chemicals, allied trades</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>+0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Miscellaneous Manufacture</td>
<td>+0.87</td>
<td>+0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Miscellaneous Labour</td>
<td>+2.21</td>
<td>+1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Population</td>
<td>-2.21</td>
<td>-1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>+2.21</td>
<td>+1.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE IVb**

**LONDON 1861-91:**

**PERCENTAGE INCREASES IN CLASSIFIED OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS**

(over 10 years of age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total male working population</td>
<td>+ 51.04</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total female working population</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>+ 42.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Agriculture</td>
<td>— 3.53</td>
<td>+ 23.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administration</td>
<td>+ 68.62</td>
<td>+ 56.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Defence</td>
<td>— 6.66</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional and Teaching</td>
<td>+ 26.27</td>
<td>+ 20.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Entertainment and Sport</td>
<td>+ 112.49</td>
<td>+ 209.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a. Commerce, finance etc.</td>
<td>+ 174.95</td>
<td>— 25.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Clerical</td>
<td>+ 175.89</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6c. Retail and Distribution</td>
<td>+ 45.41</td>
<td>+ 109.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>+ 82.60</td>
<td>+ 132.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Personal Service</td>
<td>+ 64.60</td>
<td>+ 35.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Transport, storage etc.</td>
<td>+ 67.23</td>
<td>+ 326.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Building Industry</td>
<td>+ 42.88</td>
<td>+ 86.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Wood and Furniture</td>
<td>+ 26.22</td>
<td>+ 27.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Metal and Engineering</td>
<td>+ 34.79</td>
<td>+ 59.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Shipbuilding</td>
<td>— 27.82</td>
<td>+ 16.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Precision Industry</td>
<td>+ 48.59</td>
<td>+ 156.83*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Printing and Paper</td>
<td>+ 103.10</td>
<td>+ 252.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leather and Hides</td>
<td>+ 28.69</td>
<td>+ 110.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Food and Drink Manufacture</td>
<td>+ 25.68</td>
<td>+ 461.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Textile Manufacture</td>
<td>— 43.07</td>
<td>— 18.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18a. Clothing Trade</td>
<td>+ 22.97</td>
<td>+ 20.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18b. Boot and Shoe Trade</td>
<td>— 6.34</td>
<td>— 18.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>+ 7.64</td>
<td>+ 17.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Chemicals, allied trades</td>
<td>+ 34.49</td>
<td>+ 222.76*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Miscellaneous Manufacture</td>
<td>+ 149.06</td>
<td>+ 312.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Miscellaneous Labour</td>
<td>+ 62.46</td>
<td>+ 0.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Population</td>
<td>+ 151.05</td>
<td>+ 142.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Others</td>
<td>+ 79.33</td>
<td>+ 54.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE IVc

PERCENTAGE INCREASES IN SEVEN MAJOR GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2, 3, 4 Admin., Defence, professional</td>
<td>+27.82</td>
<td>+27.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a, 6b, 6c Commercial etc.</td>
<td>+82.60</td>
<td>+132.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Personal Service</td>
<td>+64.60</td>
<td>+36.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Transport</td>
<td>+67.23</td>
<td>+326.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-20 Manufacture</td>
<td>+34.86</td>
<td>+41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Labour</td>
<td>+62.46</td>
<td>+54.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 5, 22 Other categories</td>
<td>+172.61</td>
<td>+154.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because this category involves so few people, the percentage change is not statistically significant.
TABLE V

GROWTH AND DECLINE OF POPULATION IN VARIOUS DISTRICTS OF LONDON
APPENDIX II

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES AND PROBLEMS FOR THE SHAFTESBURY PARK ESTATE

(a) The Interviews

The interviews with people on Shaftesbury Park were intended to supplement the abundance of written evidence, published and unpublished, available for the estate and Battersea. The Rev. A.G. Cookman and Councillor Harrison introduced me to the people interviewed, who all proved so helpful that in the limited time I had for oral history it seemed advisable to stop after seven interviews. It was very difficult to find elderly men who could be interviewed, and Miss Jewson, the oldest of the women interviewed, was in hospital convalescing after a stroke. After a while, much of the material became repetitive and quite a lot was of a personal nature which it would not be fitting to include in the thesis.

(b) The Identification of Residents

I compiled a list of residents from Kelly's Directory and the Register of Parliamentary Voters for the Division of Battersea for 1885-6 and 1888. I was able to make an estimate of the turnover of population from these four sources. The School Board Visitor's Book was compiled in 1888, so only for that year was it possible to match a name with an address and occupation in the Book. There was no other way of firmly identifying people and finding their occupation, the Census Returns for 1881 and 1891 still being restricted. Even then, when I had traced an Estate man as a member of an organization from newspapers or unpublished sources, he frequently turned out to have had no children of school age and was not recorded by the School Board Visitor. An additional problem was the repetition of surnames on the estate, due in part to the many families who sponsored their relatives for tenancy. Nevertheless, quite an amount of information could be pieced together for enough people to be able to find out quite a lot about Estate life.
These are extracts from interviews which were carried out for Booth's survey of Battersea for Religious Influences (op.cit.). They are Miscellaneous Notes to Note Books 36 and 37, and were never included in the published account. The interviews were made by a local man, Baxter, on the recommendations of Woollcomb, the highly regarded secretary to the Battersea, Clapham and Wandsworth Charity Organization Society. The religious survey of Battersea was made between 1896 and 1899, ten years after the Life and Labour survey and poverty map used for Chapter VII. Baxter's and Woollcomb's interviews were made in 1896 and 1897. In some respects, the interviewees disagree with each other - often because some had little knowledge of Battersea's development over the past forty years. In some long interviews I have paragraphed them for easier reading, but in all other respects they are verbatim. Readers may find it helpful to consult the maps, especially The Social World of Shaftesbury Park in 1892 inside the back cover. The shopping area Clapham Junction is not marked on the map, but is at the intersection of Lavender Hill and Falcon and St Johns roads.

WOOLLCOMB: C.O.S.

Of Battersea as a whole thinks become poorer & rougher. Nine Elms hopeless as ever & parts north of Clapham Junction deteriorated - Clapham Junction neighbourhood has an evil character - professional & nonprofessional prostitution are rife - Lavender Hill swarms with girls of loose character.¹

WELLS: PRINCIPAL OF THE BATTERSEA POLYTECHNIC.

(2) Those who use Polytechnic come from enormous area: Clapham Battersea, Putney. Streatham Norwood etc (?) Large number from Battersea but none from poor streets in immediate neighbourhood - inhabitants of which are touched (if at all) by Sat'y concerts in Great Hall.

¹The slang for Gonorrhoea, 'the clap' was Standard English until c.1840. Its origin is unclear, but it could be a catachresis of clip (to embrace) and clepe (to call). From the mid-eighteenth century into the nineteenth century, a punning catch phrase was common: 'He went out by Had'em and came home by Clapham' i.e. 'He went out a-wenching and got a clap'. Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (London, 1951), pp.156-7. No doubt Clapham Junction's reputation contributed to its use.
(3) Members very mixed Socially: but most of the classes are open to members of the trade for which they cater & so recruited solely from working classes. In other classes (as Art) most students of good social standing some being ladies.¹

MISS CUNNINGHAM: REFORMATORY UNION

In charge of Refuge House Chivalry Rd Wandsworth Common - She is engaged solely in rescue work - mainly 'maternity' cases - 'Street' cases seldom dealt with here looks upon them as almost hopeless & at any rate do not mix well with the others where the girls are often of a decent class & have been seduced by promise of matrimony.

Nearly all her cases are sent by clergy, deaconesses, C.O.S. & many of them terribly young - Two girls of 15 in the house now both mothers - have been so young as 14 – during last year 7 under 16.

Some attempts made at rescue of the women who patrol the neighbourhood of the Junction - but not more than one or two street cases are brought in a year & they are at once transferred to more suitable homes - Does not know where they are but convinced that a number of houses must be used as brothels near the Junction.²

MANTLE: RELIEVING OFFICER

Relief station Latchmere Rd. Most applications from (1) Latchmere Grove & Stainforth Rd & the latter being the worse of the two - (2) near Culvert Rd (3) Knowsley St. off Latchmere Rd (4) The Beaufoy Estate off Lavender Hill where live a number of low prostitutes who work Clapham

¹P.2. Miss Jewson, my best interviewee on the Estate, learnt stenography at the Polytechnic after winning a scholarship. She rose to a senior clerical position in the Civil Service, but never left Shaftesbury Park. She confessed that she disliked living in a working-class area. Like her family before her, she is a strong Tory and knew few people on the Estate, even after living there for 84 years. She is also deeply religious - an Evangelical.

²pp.2-3.
Common

Has some knowledge of the whole of Battersea Tendency throughout to a poorer level - about 3 years ago special access [sic] of poverty & overcrowding owing to Chelsea migrations - Sanitary inspectors active & regular & have done all they could but overcrowding still exists to some extent - Now considerable movement of poorest to new houses in valley of Wandle & Tooting. Buildings of vile character in progress there - almost certainly of creation of slum area there.

But though poorer pop on whole better behaved certainly as regards men & women: fewer drunken fights but some increase of rowdyism among boys & lads - noisy gangs

Though less disorder from drink no decrease in general habits of drinking & in all the applications for relief except from widows cripples and the aged the ultimate if not the immediate cause of poverty is drink.

A good deal of prostitution in Battersea, but not in this district - Mostly near Junction - In Severus, Eckstein & Comyn Roads large colony of foreigners mainly Belgians - Some have been cleaned out lately - Two houses which were practically brothels belonged to one of [them?] overseas. The great difficulty is financial interest of some authorities in this & the drink business -

The English prostitutes who are of a lower class than foreign mostly find accommodation in the streets just north of the Junction.

Policy of the Guardians liberal on relief - 4 labour guardians who would send no one to the House & who are ready to give relief to almost anyone, what ever their character. Of these Mrs Gray of the S.D.F. is learning & becoming more reasonable -

1The Beaufoy Estate deteriorated rapidly as it was built over undrained marsh land. It was one of the horrors of Battersea and has been recently demolished.

2See Appendix II (ii).

3pp.3-4. See Map inside back cover. All streets mentioned by Mantle and Mrs Gilmore are coloured blue to show their proximity to Shaftesbury Park.
MRS GILMORE: DEACONESS

An elderly lady who for 15 years has been head of Rochester Diosces Deaconess' Institution (North side Clapham Common) - Helped in original map & was much interested in the new edition which though it shows much worsement [sic] she thought was not [so poor & rough?] in the part of Battersea where her personal work lies - by Parish of St John which with Orville R° is used as training ground for probationers.

Her verdict on the whole that most parts have slightly improved - best parts greatly deteriorated. The worst part known to the Deaconesses is the Mitton St area - Wayland St. Britannia Pl etc off Plough R° Here largely result of persistent work the worst people have been moved away (to other side of Plough R°) & less hopeless who remained have improved.

The area was full of prostitutes burglars & thieves in early days as many as 5 prostitutes in one room in Wayland St - If you go on visiting without any preaching but let them see you often they gradually move away - Reformation Mrs G seems to regard as hopeless at all events policy pursued has been that of moral or actual harrying & moving on - Mrs G believes that harrying and scattering does lead to amelioration of prostitution. Though there are still criminals there is not the unashamed criminality of the past - ...

Finding room almost impossible - when people have to move they roam the streets looking like hunted dogs - & in the lowest streets Box & Cox arrangements are common - 'Is it right' said a decent woman in Wayland St 'that I should have to sleep in a bed that a man sleeps in during the day'

Described drink & gambling as terrible - Drinking among women greatly on the increase - as too is betting but they do not bet as much as the men ....

As to the work of the churches on the spiritual side it is a failure both C of E & non cons....Emptiness of churches largely due to incessant persecution which church-going entails. 'to walk with God in South London means swelling' -

1pp.7-8, see map.
(ii) MRS GRAY

Member of S.D.F. & Guardian of Battersea Union. Her husband is a working man. They live in Este road, a purple St. Close to Clapham Junction. She is probably between 40 & 50 & looks like a dutch picture with her buxom figure honesty [sic] face - brushed back hair and neat dress. a sweet sympathetic mother person -

Though her views are narrow she is the best educated woman of her class I (Baxter) have met & and has been reading deeply of late years in Economics.

Brought up by an aunt in small Beer Shop at Reading Came with her husband to Battersea 16 years ago. Whatever his trade may be he was about 10 years ago out of work for 18 months & they then became caretakers at Milton Hall (Congregationalist) House & only 10/- a week on this they kept out of debt & in health by scientific feeding. Such knowledge utterly lacking among the people & so when things are short are quite unable to make the most of them.

When they came to Battersea she & her husband seem to have been religious working class people - good Evangelical Christians & attached themselves to Christchurch but to her (though there was nothing extreme) it seemed full of idolatry & so they joined Milton Hall. Here a good deal of social work was done & she saw that the people came with few exceptions only for the loaves & fishes - Neither here nor in the Churches or Chapels could she see anything of the true spirit of Christianity - seemed to her then still more now full of uncharitableness & cant of the two the Chapels the worse.

About 9 years ago Mrs G & her husband joined the S.D.F. Did not at first give up Dogmatic Christianity but appear now to have done so finding in Socialism 'more of the true Christianity than in all the Churches' but Mrs G. remains a deeply religious woman & would rather part with any book in the house than the Bible & deeply regrets aggressive materialism in which most of the comrades are sunk - convinced movement will never advance until placed on a more spiritual & ethical basis instead of economic & materialistic
Started Socialist Sunday School at Sydney Hall that gathers 80/100 of the roughest children of neighbourhood - purely ethical teaching 'trouble which underlies all religion' - Main points inculcated 'Truthfulness - Honour, Cleanliness, Brotherhood' 

Difficulty in carrying on the school lack of help from her comrades - at times is alone with her 80 children. Although spoke of finding spirit of Christianity in Socialism she seemed on the whole not to have a high opinion of her comrades - apart from their materialism dwelt on their meanness & lack of trust in one another & their leaders - Rogers the head of this branch is apparently paid expenses & something more - She asked for out of pocket expenses as guardian having had to give up her dressmaking - they argued that as a married woman her husband ought to keep her & beyond £2.9/- first year she has had nothing. 

It is this meanness which has caused defection of such men as Tom Mann & John Burns - John Burns she says is unquestionably bought tho' perhaps not conscious of it - wages no longer paid by working men & a mystery where his funds come from The temptations are great - & Mrs G has herself been approached in covert ways by opponents on the B' of Guardians - offers of apprenticing her daughter. 

Battersea though much more crowded not poorer - Crowding often great - several instances of men with families driven into the [Work]house tho' in regular employment among them the case of expoliceman mentioned by Dr Whereat - Orville R° the worst place - Dallass & Europa PL greatly improved - (Pretty story of her protege Alf from Europa Place) - 

Terrible increase of drink among women - though brought up in a beerhouse has never since entered she looks with horror at the freedom with which women now enter - quite common to see girls of 16 or so rolling drunk in the streets - Attributes it to the increase of factory labour 

Expressed great admiration of R Co - they alone really influence their people - Especially enthusiastic over Father Whereat & Mrs Despard.
Mrs G's view of Poor Law are those of George Lansbury - & other S.O's. She spoke of lack of support from Progressives - one point in their programme is that no one earning less than 30/- a week should be compelled to contribute towards pauper relatives - but Progressives on board are constantly violating this principle.

I was in luck's way this afternoon [October 1]. Anxious to see Battersea on the eve of the greatest struggle in its history, I had ridden south-west to the silver Thames, crossed that beautiful park of Battersea, with its smooth roads, its ample playing fields, and large calm waters, and had emerged in the Battersea Road. The thoughts of a bicyclist are wonderfully calmed by a smooth road, and I had begun to think pleasantly of Battersea. But the city is the man; you cannot think of Battersea without thinking of Burns. His energy is writ large on every corner of this pleasant city - on the park, the public buildings, the cottages, the very roads. He has sweetened Battersea by the ceaseless infusion of ideas, and so it has become his city - the Battersea of Burns as well as the Burns of Battersea - the one poor suburb of London that has sweetness and light.

So I was thinking when I looked up, and there was the man himself. He was riding towards me on his bicycle, the handle bars decked with a bunch of blue and white ribbons; alert, robust, radiant with confident strength. He greeted me with a gay smile, and, riding side by side, we left the crowds of his too urgent followers and glided into a quieter street.

With that quick gift of intimacy he answered my unspoken question.

'We're going to win,' he said.

We were riding along a row of new villa flats lately erected round Battersea Park. I looked up at them interrogatively. 'They don't count,' he said. 'They are not on the register yet. The whole of these buildings have only 150 votes on the old register.'

'So you actually score by the stale register?'

'That is so. In a year or two's time these people may be serious for me - but not now.'

Few had window-cards, but I noticed that those who had were supporting Garton's.

1Battersea was at the height of the 'Stop the War' agitation over the Boer War.

"Burns was campaigning for this election as a Liberal."
He saw my eye on the cards. 'Come,' he said; 'I will show you where my cards are.'

We left the villas, crossed the main road and entered the working-class district with that swiftness of transition which makes life on a bicycle so vastly exhilarating and entertaining. As we moved he dwelt on the forces which were working on his side. The forces of progress were absolutely [sic] solid. The Social Democrats, who usually fought him, were now with him. The moderate 'Jingo' Liberals did not count; they were gone already. And as for khaki, that had never caught on at Battersea.

Burns analysed his chances simply and clearly, but I noticed that he was never over-confident, and he never hid from himself the chances of defeat. 'Whatever happens,' he always said, 'I have done my best. I have held 56 meetings; I have spared myself nothing — I have fought the good fight.'

We looked in at the committee-rooms, and saw Mrs. John Burns and her workers busy over envelopes, while Master John Burns, aged four, sat in a chair very silent and wise, saying nothing but thinking the more. Then we turned aside from the great Battersea Road and began to move through the real Battersea — the Battersea of the weekly tenant. There is little or no squalor in Battersea, and in this district in the Shaftesbury estate you have a model of how poor men should live well — small, neat cottages, prettily built, each with a gift of 'home' for the occupants. The men were at work, but the women stood at the doors and smiled at Burns as he passed. Each street awoke for a moment from its dulness [sic] like a grey sky lit up by a flash of lightning. The boys and girls shouted. Burns passed quickly with a nod, a smile, or a pleasant word for all, but always reserving that terrible power of swift repartee for his foes. Two women at a street corner hissed as he passed, and cried 'Traitor'. Burns leant lightly from his saddle and gently murmured as he passed. 'You are spoiling your faces.' But we came to see the cards. Let me look. At first they all seem to be blue — for Burns. No, there is one for Garton. But let me count. Burns does it rapidly as we pass. 'One, two, three — twenty in that street for me and three for Garton. One, two, three — thirty for me and four for Garton.'
The majority is overwhelming. The place is painted blue. That is the fact - whatever the result to-morrow.

'Cards are sometimes deceptive,' I suggested.

'That is so, but they have no reason to conceal Garton's, and none to conceal mine.'

We had passed through the district, and every symptom had gone to indicate victory.

Burns had to go off and pay calls on some doubtfuls, and we parted at the turning back into the main road.

'If they beat me,' said Burns, with one of those splendid touches of egoism, 'it will be a crime.' And looking round on Battersea and all that he has done for it, no one can think otherwise.

(iv) THE QUEEN'S PARK ESTATE, KENSAL GREEN

The Queen's Park Estate was the second venture of the Artizans', Labourers and General Dwellings Company and twice the size of the Battersea Estate. It was, of course, the original home of Queen's Park Rangers, which was formed by the Rev. Gordon Young in 1885 for the boys of the Droop Street Board School on the Estate. The club went professional in 1898, and was in the Southern League until 1920, when it became one of the original members of League Division III.

As in Battersea, Booth's investigators entered Queen's Park with a sense of relief after the surrounding poverty and degradation:

To the rude and ragged poverty we have described, the district to the North affords a great contrast. It is the Queen's Park Estate, well laid out and carefully sustained in respectability by its owners, the Artizans, Labourers and General Dwellings Company. The occupants are of the regularly employed class; railwaymen or police, artisans, small clerks and others. The competition for these popular little houses is great. There is always a waiting list of applicants and the rents are raised a little for newcomers....The streets are very quiet at night; it is a district of home-life and of comfort; if other pleasures are sought, they are found elsewhere, as is also the daily work of all the men.

As on Shaftesbury Park, cookshops, restaurants and public houses were banned, hence the public houses near the Estate had an inflated value and the off-licences did extremely well. The investigators believed that most of the residents were church-goers, the Congregationalists being the strongest. (On Shaftesbury Park they were certainly the most active.) The Rev. Young, who formed the football club, was vicar of the Low Church, St Jude's, and had known the district since the creation of his parish nearly twenty-five years before. The Congregationalists had an Institute with numerous technical classes and 'hundreds' of students, many of whom were supported by London County Council scholarships.

(Booth, Religious Series, Vol.III, pp.142-4.)
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NOTES ON SOURCES

UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL AND OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

INTERVIEWS

NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

CONTEMPORARY MEMOIRS, BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

LATER BOOKS AND ARTICLES
It is a curious coincidence that the two first serious modern studies on respectability appeared in the same year, 1954, and yet were so different. Both were brilliant and both have influenced historians since. E.J. Hobsbawm's essay on The Labour Aristocracy was a serious study of a Marxist theory which had for too long been neglected by scholars. He made a clear explication of Marx' and Engels' contemporary observations and of Lenin's later theory on the embourgeoisement of the British working class and the benefits they enjoyed from Imperialism. I am informed that Hobsbawm has publicly expressed his doubts about this theory, but it has animated the work of a number of Labour historians such as Royden Harrison.

The other great breakthrough was by J.A. and Olive Banks with Prosperity and Parenthood. It remains a superb piece of social history, displaying the relationship between the Victorian middle-class' desire for gentility and respectability and their income. As their aspirations exceeded their income, they could not maintain 'the paraphernalia of gentility' without limiting the size of their families. Their work has become such a standard reference that it has received little criticism and attention, but to my knowledge their techniques have been only rarely used since for studying Victorian society.

After these two important social histories, 'respectability' mostly absorbed the interest of historians of ideas and morals: W.E. Houghton's The Victorian Frame of

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2 In the course of the 1972/3 Later British History seminars at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881 (London, 1965).

3 J.A. and Olive Banks, Prosperity and Parenthood (Liverpool, 1954). See also Feminism and Family Planning (Liverpool, 1964).
Mind and Stephen Marcus' The Other Victorians. Peter T. Cominos' essay on 'Late Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System' proposed a model that was neater than reality, but nevertheless full of ideas and questions for students of Victorian England. Trygve Tholfsen's essay, 'The Intellectual Origins of Mid-Victorian Stability' was another landmark. Here was a history of ideas with no overt Marxist commitment which supported Hobsbawm's original theory.

'Respectability' has been written about in people and in institutions. The Webbs first taught that the New Model Unions used 'respectability' as a political and industrial tactic and attempted to impose it on their members. F.M. Leventhal's recent biography of George Howell uses respectability as an essential explanatory device for understanding Howell. Brian Harrison's masterly study of the Temperance movement is a book all about respectability and respectable people. But looking at 'respectability' in the Temperance movement or in the agitation against the Contagious Diseases Acts as F.B. Smith has done, tells us

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more about what problems respectable people perceived, and responded to, in their society than about the meaning of 'respectability' and its effects on people's lives.

The social historians' contribution has until recently been less fruitful. Harold Perkin has offered a vast conceptual framework for the analysis of Victorian society in isolating the 'entrepreneurial ideal' as the significant motive social ideal of the era. However he has imposed on the Victorians a language they rarely used, and presented an ideal of social existence which lay outside the opportunities and experience of the bulk of the population - the working classes.

In 1963 E.P. Thompson revolutionised social history with the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*. Until then social history was not considered a fruitful way of understanding political movements and behaviour. Slowly this new form of social history has taken on, and although general histories like Asa Briggs' *The Age of Improvement* revealed an awareness of the importance of respectability, it has not been until this decade that general history has incorporated social history and included respectability as a fundamental characteristic of the age. J.F.C. Harrison and Geoffrey Best have come close to rewriting the history of Victorian Britain. Best, even more than Harrison, has seized on respectability as one of the most important phenomena which shaped the behaviour, the

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perceptions and the class relationships of the Victorians.

The study of respectability as a thing in itself and as a factor in social and political life is just beginning. Historians now writing are no longer the children of high Victorian respectability and can view respectability with critical detachment and sympathy for the ideals it promoted and celebrated.
The rich holdings in Australian libraries on nineteenth century British material made it possible to do much of the research before leaving for London. The State Library of Victoria holds many rare items in addition to its fine collection of standard works and Victorian periodicals, but it is now the Australian National Library in Canberra which provides the best facilities for students of Victorian Britain. It holds the greater part of the Kashnor Collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets and correspondence on British political economy from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century. To indicate the richness and diversity of this collection, all material used from it is designated in the bibliography with the abbreviation (KC). Many of the items are commonplace ones in the corpus of Victorian social and economic sources, but their collection in one place, together with many rare items, is invaluable to research workers.

I made little use of the London daily newspapers when I found that a careful reading of the periodical press was more fruitful in unravelling the debate about respectability and the changing images of the working classes over the forty years. Local newspapers in Battersea, however, were extensively consulted.

Individual articles from nineteenth century periodicals and newspapers have not been included in the bibliography. They are quoted in full in the footnotes and the titles and authors of unsigned articles have been provided whenever possible. The undated pamphlets from the Kashnor Collection were dated from the type-faces and printing style with the assistance of Mr Ivan Page, the Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts.
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- **Shaftesbury Park Estate**
- **School**
- **Anglican Church**
- **Nonconformist Church**

**PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND AMENITIES**

1. **Free Library**
2. **The Shakespeare Theatre**
3. **Battersea Town Hall**
4. **Latchmere Road Public Baths**
5. **Battersea Polytechnic**
6. **Free Library, Surrey Lane**
7. **Park Town Hall**

**SOCIETIES, ASSOCIATIONS AND CLUBS**

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9. **Battersea Liberal Club and Institute**, Laburnum House, 134 High Street
10. **Borough of Battersea Club**, 455 Battersea Park Road
11. **Battersea Liberal and Radical Association**, 90 Lavender Hill
12. **Battersea Liberal and Radical Association**, Registration Office, 181 High Street
13. **Clapham Liberal and Radical Club**, 1 Cedars Terrace, Queen's Road
14. **Battersea Labour League**, 451 Battersea Park Road
15. **Social Democratic Federation**, Sydney Hall, 36A York Road
16. **Clapham Conservative Club**, 514 Wandsworth Road
17. **Constitutional Club**, 370 Wandsworth Road
18. **Salford Constitutional Club**, 61 Battersea Park Road
19. **Clapham and Battersea Conservative Association**, 181 Lavender Hill
20. **Battersea Workman's Club**, Reine Street
21. **Shaftesbury Club**, 128 Lavender Hill
22. **London and South Western Railway Institute and Club**, 54 Wandsworth Road
23. **London and South Western Railway Friendly Society**, 89 Wandsworth Road
24. **Charity Organisation Society**, 18 High Street
25. **Henley Hall, former meeting place of the National Secular Society**