

ENGLISH SOCIAL HISTORY

*A Survey of Six Centuries
Chaucer to Queen Victoria*

BY

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To the memory
of
EILEEN POWER
economic and social
historian

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INTRODUCTION

Although I have attempted to bring this book up to date in the light of the most recent publications (1941), it was nearly all written before the war. I then had in view a social history of England from the Roman times to our own, but I left to the last the part that I would find most difficult, the centuries preceding the Fourteenth. The war has rendered it impossible for me to complete the work, but it has occurred to me that the chapters which I have already finished constitute a consecutive story of six centuries, from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth, and as such some readers may give it welcome.

Social history might be defined negatively as the history of a people with the politics left out. It is perhaps difficult to leave out the politics from the history of any people, particularly the English people. But as so many history books have consisted of political annals with little reference to their social environment, a reversal of that method may have its uses to redress the balance. During my own lifetime a third very flourishing sort of history has come into existence, the economic, which greatly assists the serious study of social history. For the social scene grows out of economic conditions, to much the same extent that political events in their turn grow out of social conditions. Without social history, economic history is barren and political history is unintelligible.

But social history does not merely provide the required link between economic and political history. It has also its own positive value and peculiar concern. Its scope may be defined as the daily life of the inhabitants of the land in past ages: this includes the human as well as the economic relation of different classes to one another, the character of family and household life, the conditions of labour and of leisure, the attitude of man to nature, the culture of each age as it arose out

of these general conditions of life, and took ever changing forms in religion, literature and music, architecture, learning and thought.

How far can we know the real life of men in each successive age of the past? Historians and antiquarians have amassed by patient scholarship a great sum of information, and have edited innumerable records, letters and journals, enough to provide reading for whole lifetimes; yet even this mass of knowledge is small indeed compared to the sum total of social history, which could only be mastered if we knew the biographies of all the millions of men, women and children who have lived in England. The generalizations which are the stock-in-trade of the social historian, must necessarily be based on a small number of particular instances, which are assumed to be typical, but which cannot be the whole of the complicated truth.

And small as is the mass of accumulated knowledge in proportion to the vastness of the theme, how pitifully small is the selection from that mass which I have been able to set down in this volume of 200,000 words dealing with six whole centuries of the variegated and wonderful life of England. Yet even a millionth part of a loaf may be better than no bread. It may at least whet the appetite. If it makes a few people more eager to study the literature and records of the past, this book will have served its turn.

Disinterested intellectual curiosity is the life-blood of real civilization. Social history provides one of its best forms. At bottom, I think, the appeal of history is imaginative. Our imagination craves to behold our ancestors as they really were, going about their daily business and daily pleasure. Carlyle called the antiquarian or historical researcher 'Dryasdust.' Dryasdust at bottom is a poet. He may find difficulty in expressing to his neighbour the poetry he finds for himself in the muniment room. But the main impulse of his life is the desire to feel the reality of life in the past, to be familiar with 'the chronicle of wasted time' for the sake of 'ladies dead and lovely knights.'

Scott began life as Dryasdust — as an antiquarian — be-

cause that way he could find most poetry, most romance. Carlyle, like every great historian, was his own Dryasdust. Indeed he is really the greatest defender of Dryasdust in the whole field of literature. He declared, with a striking exaggeration, that the smallest real fact about the past of man which Dryasdust could unearth was more poetical than all Shelley and more romantic than all Scott.

Consider all that lies in that one word *Past!* What a pathetic, sacred, in every sense *poetic*, meaning is implied in it; a meaning growing ever the clearer the farther we recede in time — the more of that same Past we have to look through! History after all is the true poetry. And Reality, if rightly interpreted, is grander than Fiction.

It is the detailed study of history that makes us feel that the past was as real as the present. The world supposes that we historians are absorbed in the dusty records of the dead; that we can see nothing save —

The lost-to-light ghosts, grey-mailed,
As you see the grey river mist
Hold shapes on the yonder bank.

But to us, as we read, they take form, colour, gesture, passion, thought. It is only by study that we can see our forerunners, remote and recent, in their habits as they lived, intent each on the business of a long-vanished day, riding out to do homage or to poll a vote; to seize a neighbour's manor-house and carry off his ward, or to leave cards on ladies in crinolines.

And there is the 'fair field full of folk.' Generation after generation, there is the ploughman behind the oxen, or the horses, or the machine, and his wife busy all day in the cottage, waiting for him with her daily accumulated budget of evening news.

Each one, gentle and simple, in his commonest goings and comings, was ruled by a complicated and ever-shifting fabric of custom and law, society and politics, events at home and abroad, some of them little known by him and less understood. Our effort is not only to get what few glimpses we can of his intimate personality, but to reconstruct the whole fabric of each passing age, and see how it affected him; to get to know

more in some respects than the dweller in the past himself knew about the conditions that enveloped and controlled his life.

There is nothing that more divides civilised from semi-savage man than to be conscious of our forefathers as they really were, and bit by bit to reconstruct the mosaic of the long-forgotten past. To weigh the stars, or to make ships sail in the air or below the sea, is not a more astonishing and ennobling performance on the part of the human race in these latter days, than to know the course of events that had been long forgotten, and the true nature of men and women who were here before us.

Truth is the criterion of historical study; but its impelling motive is poetic. Its poetry consists in its being true. There we find the synthesis of the scientific and literary views of history.

Since, however rashly and inadequately, some attempt is to be made in this volume to imagine the life of our ancestors in such partial light as modern research can afford, in what form can the story best be told? It cannot, like the web of political history, be held together by the framework of well known names of Kings, Parliaments and wars. These indeed have their influence on social development which has often to be noted. The Puritan Revolution and the Restoration were social as well as political events. But, on the whole, social change moves like an underground river, obeying its own laws or those of economic change, rather than following the direction of political happenings that move on the surface of life. Politics are the outcome rather than the cause of social change. A new King, a new Prime Minister, a new Parliament often marks a new epoch in politics, but seldom in the life of the people.

How then is the tale to be told? Into what periods shall social history be divided up? As we look back on it, we see a continuous stream of life, with gradual change perpetually taking place, but with few catastrophes. The Black Death is perhaps one, and the Industrial Revolution another. But the Industrial Revolution is spread over too many generations to be rightly regarded either as a catastrophe or as an event.

It is not, like the Black Death, a fortuitous obstruction fallen across the river of life and temporarily diverting it; it is the river of life itself in the lower part of its course.

In political history one King at a time reigns; one Parliament at a time sits. But in social history we find in every period several different kinds of social and economic organisation going on simultaneously in the same country, the same shire, the same town. Thus, in the realm of agriculture, we find the open-field strip cultivation of the Anglo-Saxons still extant in the Eighteenth Century, side by side with ancient enclosed fields of the far older Celtic pattern, and modern enclosures scientifically cultivated by methods approved by Arthur Young. And so it is with the varieties of industrial and commercial organisation — the domestic, the craft, the capitalist systems are found side by side down the centuries. In everything the old overlaps the new — in religion, in thought, in family custom. There is never any clear cut; there is no single moment when all Englishmen adopt new ways of life and thought.

These things being so, it has seemed to me best to tell the story as life is presented on the stage, that is to say by a series of scenes divided by intervals of time. There will be a good deal in common between one scene and the next, between the age of Chaucer and the age of Caxton, the age of Dr. Johnson and the age of Cobbett — but there will also be a good deal that is different.

To obtain a true picture of any period, both the old and the new elements must be borne in mind. Sometimes, in forming a mental picture of a period in the past, people seize hold of the new features and forget the overlap of the old. For example, students of history are often so much obsessed by the notorious political event of the Peterloo massacre that they imagine the Lancashire factory hand as the typical wage earner of the year 1819; but he was not; he was only a local type, the newest type, the type of the future. The trouble was that the rest of old-fashioned society of the Regency period had not yet adjusted itself to the change heralded by his advent. They were annoyed with him, they could not place him, because he was not then, as he is now, the normal.

So then the method of this book is to present a series of successive scenes of English life, and the first of these scenes presented is the life-time of Chaucer — (1340-1400). I have already confessed that the reason why the book begins at that point is personal and accidental. But in fact it is a good starting point. For in Chaucer's time the English people first clearly appear as a racial and cultural unit. The component races and languages have been melted into one. The upper class is no longer French, nor the peasant class Anglo-Saxon: all are English. England has ceased to be mainly a recipient of influences from without. Henceforward she gives forth her own. In the age of Chaucer, Wycliffe, Wat Tyler and the English bowmen, she is beginning to create her own island forms in literature, religion, economic society and war. The forces moulding England are no longer foreign but native. She no longer owes her progress to great foreign churchmen and administrators, to Norman ideas of the feudal manor, to Angevin lawyer Kings, to cavalry armed and trained on French models, to the friars coming over from Latin lands. Henceforward England creates her own types and her own customs.

When, in the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) the 'Goddams' (as Joan of Arc called them) set out to conquer France, they went there as foreign invaders, and their successes were due to the fact that England was already organised as a nation and conscious of her nationhood, while France as yet was not. And when that attempted conquest at length failed, England was left as a strange island anchored off the Continent, no longer a mere offshoot or extension of the European world.

It is true that there was nothing sudden in this growth of our distinctive nationhood. The process neither began nor ended in the life-time of Chaucer. But during those years the principle is more active and more observable than in the three previous centuries, when the Christian and feudal civilization of Europe, including England, was not national but cosmopolitan. In the England of Chaucer's time we have a nation.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SECOND HALF OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

[1865-1901]

One of the difficulties of an attempt to write the social as distinct from the political history of a nation is the absence of determining events and positive dates by which the course of things can be charted. The social customs of men and women and their economic circumstances, particularly in modern times, are always in movement, but they never change completely or all at once. The old overlaps the new so much that it is often a question whether to ascribe some tendency in thought or practice to one generation or the next.

But on the whole the most marked changes of tendency in Victorian England may be ascribed to the later 'sixties and the 'seventies. The old landmarks are still there, but they are no longer so prominent. The territorial aristocracy still rules the rural parts, and still leads society in London and in its country-house gatherings; the individualist business man still flourishes, with the honest, limited virtues of bourgeois self-help. But these classes no longer fill so much of the scene as in the days of Palmerston and Peel; and the ideas or lack of ideas for which they stand are challenged now by others beside 'low Radicals.' In all ranks of life free debate of social customs and religious beliefs is taking the place of the settled creeds of the early Victorian era. John Stuart Mill in his *Liberty* (1859) preached the doctrine of revolt against the tame acceptance of conventional opinions, and a dozen years later, such an attitude has become very general. It is a liberal, out-spoken age, whose most representative men are neither the aristocrats nor the shopkeepers, but men of University education, or of trained professional intelligence, read-

ers of Mill, Darwin, Huxley and Matthew Arnold, George Eliot and Browning — the gentlemanly bearded intellectuals whose family life Du Maurier delighted to delineate in the pages of *Punch*.

Democracy, bureaucracy, collectivism are all advancing like a silent tide making in by a hundred creeks and inlets. A short list of some of the changes which marked off the 'seventies from the previous generation, may at least be suggestive. The impact of Darwinism on the Bible religion of the English was being widely, though not yet universally, felt; in 1871 Oxford and Cambridge were thrown open to all irrespective of religious belief; science and history were rapidly taking their place beside classics and mathematics in the academic world; in 1870 competitive examination was made the normal method of entry to the Civil Service, in order to enlist the ablest young men from the Universities in the new bureaucracy; the working men of the towns had received the Parliamentary franchise by the Reform Bill of 1867; and three years later Forster's Act provided primary education for all; by the legislation of 1871-1875 the Trade Unions received a new Charter of rights corresponding to their growing power; in business administration, limited liability companies were taking the place of the old family firms; the professional and social emancipation of women went forward on the lines advocated in Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869); women's colleges were founded at Oxford and Cambridge and women's secondary schools were much improved; the Married Woman's Property Act released the wife, if she had money of her own, from economic bondage to her husband: the 'equality of the sexes' began to be advocated in theory, and found its way increasingly into the practice of all classes. The demand for the political enfranchisement of women was the outcome of a very considerable degree of social enfranchisement already accomplished.

But the greatest single event of the 'seventies, fraught with immeasurable consequences for the future, was the sudden collapse of English agriculture.

From 1875 onwards the catastrophe set in. A series of bad seasons aggravated its initial stages, but the cause was the

development of the American prairies as grain lands within reach of the English market. The new agricultural machinery enabled the farmers of the Middle-West to skim the cream off virgin soils of unlimited expanse; the new railway system carried the produce to the ports; the new steamers bore it across the Atlantic. English agriculture was more scientific and more highly capitalized than American, but under these conditions the odds were too great. Mass production of crops by a simpler and cheaper process undercut the elaborate and expensive methods of farming which had been built up on well-managed English estates during the previous two hundred years. The overthrow of the British landed aristocracy by the far-distant democracy of American farmers was one outcome of this change of economic circumstance. An even more important consequence has been the general divorce of Englishmen from life in contact with nature, which in all previous ages had helped to form the mind and the imagination of the island race.

The other States of Europe, which still had peasantry and valued them as a stabilizing element in the social fabric, warded off the influx of American food by tariffs. But in England no such policy was adopted or even seriously considered. The belief in Free Trade as the secret of our vast prosperity, the unwillingness to interfere with the world-commerce on which our power and wealth seemed to stand secure, the predominance of the towns over the country in numbers and still more in intellectual and political leadership, the memories of the 'hungry forties' when the Corn Laws had made bread dear for the poor — all these circumstances prevented any effort to save the rural way of life. Least of all did the late Victorians see any need to grow food in the island to provide for the necessities of future wars. After two generations of the safety won at Waterloo, real national danger seemed to have passed away for ever, like a dream of

'Old unhappy far-off things
And battles long ago.'

In 1846 Disraeli had prophesied the ruin of agriculture as an inevitable result of Free Trade in corn. For thirty years he had been wrong. Now he was suddenly right —

and now he was Prime Minister. Yet he did nothing about it, and allowed the 'curse of Cobden' to blight the English cornfields. Immersed in oriental policies, the old man made no attempt to oppose the spirit of the age at home, to which in fact he had become a convert.

Statesmen regarded the fate of agriculture with all the more indifference because it involved no acute problem of unemployment. The farm labourer did not remain on the land when his occupation there was gone, as unemployed miners hang round a closed mine. When 'Hodge' lost his job, or when his wages fell, he slipped away to the towns and found work there. Or else he migrated overseas, for the Colonies and the United States were still receiving the overplus of our still rapidly rising population. As a class, the English agricultural labourer was well accustomed to the idea of leaving the land. He could not love the fields that he tilled as a hireling for others, as passionately as the Irish peasant loved the plot of earth from which he wrung the food of his family and which he regarded as by right his own. The English rustic moreover, knew more about the town and the opportunities and the wages it offered. He had the desire characteristic of our people to 'better himself,' and so he raised no outcry when this involved exile from the scenes of his boyhood.

Meanwhile the landlords and farmers, who had neither the wish nor the power to divorce themselves from the soil, suffered and complained in vain, for their day as the political rulers of England had gone by. Both the Liberal and the Conservative intelligentsia of the 'seventies and 'eighties were saturated with the Free Trade Doctrine: they believed that if one industry, agriculture for instance, went under in free competition, other industries would gain proportionately and would take its place — and so all would be well. But all was not well. For political economy does not cover the whole field of human welfare. The men of theory failed to perceive that agriculture is not merely one industry among many, but is a way of life, unique and irreplaceable in its human and spiritual values.

In the first decade of the decline that began in 1875, the acreage of wheat in England fell by nearly a million acres.

Already in 1881 there were some hundred thousand fewer farm-labourers than ten years before, and that was only the beginning of the exodus. Whole regions of cornland in the West, Midlands and North were laid down in grass, but without any corresponding rise in the number of livestock, though there was a considerable substitution of cattle for sheep. The introduction of frozen meat from Australia, New Zealand and South America was a new feature of the 'eighties and 'nineties. From 1891-1899 a second wave of agricultural depression followed, as severe as that of 1875-1884. By the end of the Century the corn area in England and Wales had shrunk from over eight million acres in 1871 to under six million. Permanent pasture had greatly increased, but the fall in cattle and sheep prices kept pace with the fall in the price of corn. And the agricultural labourers, in spite of the fact that they had been given the franchise in 1884, continued to flock into the towns or to pass oversea.

The historian of English farming thus epitomizes the last decades of Victoria's reign:

'The legislature was powerless to provide any substantial help. Food was, so to speak, the currency in which foreign nations paid for English manufactured goods, and its cheapness was an undoubted blessing to the wage-earning community. Thrown on their own resources, agriculturalists fought the unequal contest with courage and tenacity. But as time went on, the stress told more and more heavily. Manufacturing populations seemed to seek food-markets everywhere except at home. Enterprise gradually weakened; landlords lost their ability to help, farmers their recuperative power. Prolonged depression checked costly improvements. Drainage was practically discontinued. Both owners and occupiers were engaged in the task of making both ends meet on vanishing incomes. Land deteriorated in condition; less labour was employed; less stock was kept; bills for cake and fertilizers were reduced. The counties which suffered most were the corn-growing districts, in which high farming had won its most signal triumphs.' Ernle, *English Farming*, p. 379.)

The damage indeed was the greater because English agriculture was a highly capitalized system for producing the staple products — corn, particularly wheat so costly to grow in most parts of England, and the best sheep and cattle in the world. Other uses of land had been unduly neglected. There

was a fixed acreage of hops, chiefly in Kent. But potatoes occupied only two per cent of the cultivated area. Not enough had been done either with fruit or vegetables. Market gardening had never been systematically organised.

Neither the small cultivators nor the State were playing their proper part. It was only after the war of 1914-1918 that the State undertook the large-scale forestry which it is specially fitted to conduct. The landlords, who had planted diligently in the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, lost interest in forestry as a trade, when government no longer required great oaks to build our battle-ships, and when timber of all other sorts poured in from Scandinavia and North America at prices that discouraged the home-grower. The vast demand for pit-props and for builder's wood was supplied from oversea.

England in 1880 could boast of finer trees than any other country, if judged by aesthetic, not by commercial standards. The forests had all gone, save a patch or two like the New Forest and the Forest of Dean. Yet seen from the air, the landscape would not have appeared ill wooded. The trees were hedgerow timber scattered over the countryside, or park trees preserved for their beauty, or coverts planted for game. Estate agents were not interested in timber values and neglected to remove ivy, to thin out, and to cut and sell at the right time. The conifer was creeping in for the purpose of the new plantations, and so was the rhododendron, approved by the taste of that age. Both were exotic in most parts of the island, but both were well fitted to lodge the 'kept cock pheasant, master of many a shire,' whom the youthful Kipling disliked as the symbol of an England going to fat, in a dream of wealth and peace that might some day have a rude awakening.

The fate of agriculture was only one example of the near-sightedness characteristic of English State policy. The later Victorians laid no far plans for the future. They were content to meet those demands and to solve those problems of which the pressure was already felt. But within those limits they were more active reformers than their self-satisfied fathers of the Palmerstonian era: they brought up to date the

civil service, local government, education, Universities — and even to a limited extent the army.

For the English had already lost some of the complacency and cocksureness of the 'fifties and 'sixties. In those lucky days gone by, England had manufactured for a world that was still a generation behind her in industrial machinery; there had been no military power more formidable or more hostile than the France of Napoleon III; in 1848, the year of Continental Revolution and Reaction, Macaulay's countrymen had rejoiced to think that in wealth, in liberty and in order our country was ahead of every other, 'the envy of less happier lands.' The Franco-Prussian war of 1870 was the first shock. And during the three following decades America and Germany rose as manufacturing powers rival to our own. The immensely greater natural resources of America, the scientific and technical education provided by far-sighted governments in Germany, told more and more every year. To meet this new situation, our island liberty, Free Trade and individualist self-help might not alone be enough. Some sense of this led to improved technical education over here. It led, also, to greater interest in our own 'lands beyond the sea,' the Imperialist movement of the 'nineties; and it induced a more friendly and respectful attitude to America than our political classes had shown during her Civil War at the end of the Palmerstonian epoch. The democratic England of the new era was better able to understand both the United States and 'the Colonies,' as Canada and Australasia were still called.

The new situation led also to an anxious interest in modern Germany, which our countrymen until 1870 had been content to ignore. In that fateful year two books, Matthew Arnold's *Friendship's Garland* and George Meredith's *Harry Richmond* warned England that national education and national discipline in the Teutonic heart of Europe was creating a new kind of power that had a jealous eye on our easily won, carelessly guarded, ill distributed wealth. At the same time Ruskin nobly spent the popularity and influence which he had won as interpreter of art and nature, in a new role as social prophet, denouncing the ill employment of our boasted wealth in destroying beauty, and its ill distribution so corrupting alike to the superfluously rich and the miserably poor.

There was no strong movement of socialism among the working class till the last years of the Century, but discontent with the spirit of *laissez-faire* had been growing long before. John Stuart Mill died in 1873, bequeathing a testament of neo-liberal philosophy that strongly influenced the thought and practice of the age that followed. Mill's doctrine was semi-socialistic. He urged the better distribution of wealth by direct taxation, particularly taxes on inheritance; the bettering of conditions of life by social legislation enforced by an effective bureaucracy, national and local; a complete system of manhood and womanhood suffrage not only for Parliament but for the bodies entrusted with local government. In Mill's thought, democracy and bureaucracy were to work together, and it is largely on these lines that the social fabric of modern England has in fact been constructed, even after Mill himself and his philosophy had passed out of fashion.

But in spite of the decay of England's agriculture, in spite of the diminution of her industrial lead over all other nations, in spite of the increasing sense that all was not well with her social system and the conditions of life in her city populations, nevertheless the last thirty years of Victoria's reign were on the whole years of great prosperity and increasing wealth in which most sections of the community shared. The Queen's Jubilees of 1887 and 1897 were celebrated by all classes with real pride and thankfulness, due in part to a sense of delivery from the conditions endured at the beginning of her reign, for the 'hungry forties' were still remembered. Manners were gentler, streets were safer, life was more humane, sanitation was improving fast, working class housing, though still bad, was less bad than ever before. Conditions of labour had been improved, real wages had risen, hours had shortened. But unemployment, sickness and old age, not yet regularly provided for by the State, still had terrors for the workman.

The Free Trade finance of Peel and Gladstone had lifted the weight of taxation from the poor by reducing indirect taxation to a minimum. Yet the income tax in the 'eighties varied from a bare twopenny in the pound to a mere sixpence halfpenny. It is now ten shillings (1941), to say nothing of the surtax.

Free Trade, besides relieving the burdens of the poor, also claimed credit for the enormous increase of our shipping and overseas trade. Even our coastal trade had been thrown open to the ships of all nations, but the foreigner had, in open competition, only secured one half of one per cent of it. And in the 'eighties this coastal trade, which included so large a proportion of home-consumed coal, was greater in cargo tonnage than the whole of our vast overseas commerce. Yet the oceans of the world were the highways of England. In 1885 a third of the world's sea-going ships were on the British register, including four fifths of the world's steam-ships. Masts and sails were on the decline, but the fast ocean going 'clippers' were British, and in 1885 our tonnage under sail was still as large as it had been in 1850, while our steam tonnage was four millions greater.

The tonnage of the port of London was still sixty per cent greater than that of the Mersey, though Liverpool, dealing in Lancashire's cotton, exported more British goods than the capital. The great Thames and Mersey docks were both completed in the 'eighties. The railway system had greatly increased the volume of overseas trade, but had further reduced the number of ports, a process begun in the Eighteenth Century. Whitby, Lancaster, Ayr and many other small harbours had now gone the way of Fowey, Chester and the Cinque Ports. But in the last half of the Nineteenth Century, thanks to the railways, Barrow had sprung to greatness out of nothing, and Grimsby out of 'almost nothing.' Southampton had revived, after a long eclipse, for it was now the headquarters of the P. and O. line to the East. Cardiff had increased its population thirteen fold, and had just passed Newcastle as the world's greatest coal exporter, though Tyneside, in the great days of Armstrong's Elswick, was itself mightily on the increase. Such was the work of reconstruction of industry and commerce done by the railways. But 'railways had not made Tyneside; it was Tyneside that made them.' (Clapham, II, 519-529.)

Under such conditions of 'free trade' prosperity, many articles that were luxuries in 1837 were common comforts in 1897. Food, clothing, bedding, furniture were far more

abundant than in any previous age. Gas and oil lighting were giving way to electricity. Holidays by the seaside had become a regular part of life to the lower middle class and even to large sections of the working class, particularly in the North. Already in 1876 Blackpool had grown to the size and status of a Borough, as the scene of the annual holiday of the Lancashire artisan, and he supported Llandudno and the Isle of Man as well. Distant Cornwall was already the holiday resort of the well-to-do at Easter and of the masses in August. In the summer, the lodging houses in Keswick and Windermere and the farms of the Lake District were thronged with family parties.

Even before the age of railways, Londoners had swarmed on the pier at Brighton and darkened the sands of Margate with their multitude. Now the whole coast of England and Wales was opened out to 'trippers' and 'lodgers,' by steam locomotion and by the increased earnings and savings of all ranks. In remote creeks and fishing hamlets, where families from town came to lodge, children and their parents bathed and dug and searched the tidal treasuries of the rocks; here was at least some mitigation of the divorce of the city-dweller from country life.

But if seasonal holidays away from home were now common, the 'week-end out of town' was only beginning. It was already a custom among owners of big country houses and their guests, but the 'week-end cottage' for the middle class family was scarcely yet known. Family church-going and business tradition still kept folk in town for seven days of the week.

Women were becoming more athletic and better walkers as their skirts became somewhat shorter and less redundant; after the disappearance of the crinoline and the long sweeping dress, the active movements of lawn-tennis took the place of croquet in the 'eighties as the game for the encounter of ladies and gentlemen. In the 'nineties the bicycle became fashionable, as soon as the two low wheels succeeded the dangerous 'high bicycle'; this further emancipated women, by sending them out to scour the countryside alone, or in company with the other sex. The common use of the motor car and motor bicycle was still in the future when Victoria died.

While the town-dwellers were learning to explore the by-ways of their own land on foot or on bicycle, others swarmed over France, Switzerland and Italy in greater numbers than ever; they were the chief patrons of the best hotels of Western Europe, of the Mediterranean and of Egypt. And Thomas Cook's 'tours' gave a taste of the delights of continental travel to multitudes of the thrifty and the humble. In the 'sixties and 'seventies, the period of Leslie Stephen, Whymper and Professor Tyndall, the English, with the help of the splendid race of Swiss guides whom they employed, developed mountain craft on rock and snow, and conquered the great summits of the Alps. In the last decade of the Century rock-climbing in Wales and the Lake District became a skilled pastime at home.

John Buchan in his *Memoirs* has thus described the London society of his youth, on the eve of the South African War of 1899:

London at the turn of the Century had not yet lost her Georgian air. Her ruling society was aristocratic till Queen Victoria's death and preserved the modes and rites of aristocracy. Her great houses had not disappeared or become blocks of flats. In the summer she was a true city of pleasure, every window box gay with flowers, her streets full of splendid equipages, the Park a show ground for fine horses and handsome men and women. The ritual went far down, for frock-coats and top-hats were the common wear not only for the West End, but about the Law Courts and in the City. On Sunday afternoons we dutifully paid a round of calls. Conversation was not the casual thing it has now become, but was something of an art, in which competence conferred prestige. Also Clubs were still in their hey-day, their waiting lists were lengthy, membership of the right ones was a stage in a career. . . . Looking back, that time seems to me unbelievably secure and self-satisfied. The world was friendly and well-bred as I remember it, without the vulgarity and the worship of wealth which appeared with the new century. (*Memory hold-the-door*, pp. 92-94.)

Yet already 'society was getting mixed,' and men of mere wealth, like Sir Gorgeous Midas in Du Maurier's *Punch* pictures, had been prominent in London drawing-rooms for twenty years before the Queen died — the more prominent

perhaps for being still somewhat exceptional. 'Society,' in the older and stricter sense of the term, had still in Palmerston's day been a limited world, its entry closely guarded by certain Whig and Tory Peeresses. But in the 'eighties 'society' had a vaguer meaning, perhaps covering the whole of the upper and professional classes, perhaps including all the well-dressed men and women, who crossed and recrossed each other in Hyde Park parades, or made conversation during the innumerable courses of a London dinner party. Yet, as John Buchan truly records, these people maintained, at least in the capital, a certain aristocratic flavour and convention until the end of the Century. They were different from the well-to-do bourgeois of the provinces, who still in Yorkshire and Lancashire preferred 'high teas' to dress dinners.

In the 'seventies and 'eighties, large families were still customary in the professional and business world, as well as in the working class, and the population rose apace since so many of the children born were now kept alive. The death-rate dropped with the improvement of town sanitation and the constant progress of medical knowledge and practice. In 1886 the excess of births over deaths in England was 13.3 as against Germany's 10.8 and the French 1.4.

After 1870, the parents of working class families had the relief of a universal system of primary education, but even so it was a hard struggle, and except in school time the children of the poor still roamed the streets uncared for. In middle-class homes, it was the era of the rocking-horse and Noah's ark: the full nursery and schoolroom were lively, noisy societies, where childish impressions and characters were formed, till Tomkins major, minor and minimus successfully went off to the boarding school, and could no longer be the joy or the plague of their sisters except during the holidays. Governesses, nurses, butlers, housemaids and cooks were still plentiful and their demands for wages and nights out were still moderate. Many of them became attached and valued members of the household; others came and went, dimly recollected. Their services were arduous and essential, for the tall, narrow town-houses of the middle-class were not fitted up with labour-saving appliances; armies of maids staggered

up the stairs with hot water for the nursery tubs, and coals for every room, that helped to thicken London's fog.

Only in the 'nineties did it become evident that a reduction was beginning in the size of families, in the first instance in those of the professional and middle class, charged with heavy 'public-school' fees, and among the better-to-do artisans struggling to keep up a high standard of life. In 1877 a prosecution of Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant for publishing a neo-Malthusian pamphlet had given methods of birth-control their first national advertisement. But the slum population, of whom these reformers were chiefly thinking, were the slowest to adopt the advice. The families best able to rear children as they should be reared, were, unfortunately, those that became most addicted to 'race suicide' in the coming century.

The 'seventies and 'eighties had been a period not only of large families but of puritanism in ethical and sexual ideas, qualified by the too frequent weakness of human nature in practice. Queen Victoria had put the example of her court on the side of the stricter code. The genuine honesty of most British merchants as men of business had been one of the causes of our great commercial prosperity. The popular heroes of the period — and they were true heroes — were religious men first and foremost: Livingstone the African explorer and missionary; General Gordon the soldier-philanthropist; Lord Shaftesbury and Mr. Gladstone; to these four, so different from one another and from everyone else, life was the service of God.

But the older and more definite religious beliefs that meant so much to these men were being successfully attacked by the 'Agnostics' of the same period. Yet even the 'Agnostics' were puritan in feeling and outlook. Matthew Arnold, the prophet of 'culture,' spoke of 'conduct' as 'three parts of life,' though his idea of 'conduct' was neither narrow nor purely negative. The fame and authority enjoyed by George Eliot's novels were largely due to the fact that they were taken by many as 'restating the moral law and process of soul-making, in terms acceptable to the rationalist agnostic conscience.' Carlyle's prophetic utterance in *Sartor* supplied a vague but

emphatic creed to many, including Darwin's militant champion Huxley, who defied the clergy at the famous meeting of the British Association in Oxford in the spirit of Luther at Worms. Leslie Stephen's and John Morley's passionate refusal to compromise with dogmas they had come to disbelieve, breathed the unyielding spirit of Seventeenth Century Puritanism. Leslie Stephen had once been a clergyman, and so had J. R. Green, the popular liberal historian. In literature and thought it was a period of quasi-religious movement away from religion.

In its many-sided curiosity and competence, its self-confidence and alertness, this Late Mid-Victorian culture is Greek. In its blend of intellectual adventure and moral conservatism, it is really Athenian. I doubt if any lines of Tennyson were more often quoted by contemporaries than these:

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,
But vaster.

No words could express more perfectly the Victorian ideal of expansion about a central stability. But would anyone guarantee that they are not a translation from Sophocles? (*Daylight and Champaign*, p. 264, G. M. Young.)

The Puritan attitude to life and conduct was inculcated not only by the Bible religion of the mass of the Victorians, but by the Anglo-Catholic religion that had grown out of the Oxford Movement of the 'thirties, and was now spreading wide, with such men as Gladstone and Salisbury among its lay representatives. But Anglo-Catholicism was strongest among the parish clergy, to many of whom it gave a new professional pride and motive, to take the place of the fast vanishing social ascendancy that had once belonged to the 'clergy of the Establishment' as such. The Anglo-Catholic influence made easier some concessions to ordinary human nature, including a less strict observance of the 'Sabbath' than Evangelicals could approve. The gradual modification of the 'English Sunday' has had effects both good and bad. In this transition period, between the overgreat strictness of the past and the entire laxity of the present day, there was much good

in the practice of many families who still insisted on 'Sunday reading' of serious though not necessarily religious books. For one day in the week, novels and magazines were laid aside, and great classical literature like the Bible, *Pilgrims Progress* and *Paradise Lost*, besides more secular poetry and history had a chance of perusal which they no longer enjoy.

Not only a modified Sunday observance, but Bible reading and family prayers were common until near the end of the Century. Canon Smyth has written in his study of the effect of Charles Simeon's influence on English life:

Evangelicalism was the religion of the Home; and in this revival of Family worship it won the most signal and the most gracious of its triumphs. It may well be that this revival was virtually restricted to the upper and middle classes of society, especially the latter: but within these limits it was so widely spread that in 1889 the Provost of King's (Cambridge) in a circular letter addressed to the undergraduates of that College on the subject of voluntary attendance at morning Chapel, could write: 'You, most of you, come from homes where family prayers are the custom.' . . . Today that pious custom is virtually extinct: not only because the Victorian piety is virtually extinct, but also because the Victorian family is virtually extinct.' (*Simeon and Church Order*, Charles Smyth, 1940, pp. 19-20.)

English religion had been an imposing fabric in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, but there had been a weakness in its foundations which the movement of scientific discovery was certain to undermine: the belief in the verbal inspiration of the Bible was common to the Nonconformists, to the Church Evangelicals and, to a scarcely less degree, to High Churchmen like Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and Mr. Gladstone. Charles Darwin was as unlike Voltaire as any human being could well be; he had no wish to be an iconoclast; he did not regard the Church as 'the infamous'; and in the end she reverently buried him in Westminster Abbey. But his scientific researches led him to conclusions incompatible with the narrative of the early chapters of Genesis which were as much a part of 'the English Bible' as the New Testament itself. More generally speaking, the whole idea of evolution and of 'man descended from a monkey' was totally incompatible with existing religious ideas of creation and of man's central place in the Universe.

Naturally the religious world took up arms to defend positions of dateless antiquity and prestige. Naturally the younger generation of scientific men rushed to defend their revered chief, and to establish their claim to come to any conclusion to which their researches led, regardless of the cosmogony and chronology of Genesis, and regardless of the ancient traditions of the Church. The strife raged throughout the 'sixties, 'seventies and 'eighties. It came to involve the whole belief in the miraculous, extending into the borders of the New Testament itself. The 'intellectuals' became more and more anti-clerical, anti-religious and materialistic under the stress of the conflict.

During this period of change and strife, causing much personal and family unhappiness and many searchings of heart, the world of educated men and women was rent by a real controversy, which even the English love of compromise could not deny to exist.¹ In the Twentieth Century that storm has rolled away; that battle is ended and its dead are buried. Faith and Denial are both in a different position. The materialism of the scientist of the 'seventies is felt to be as unsatisfactory as the literal truth of all parts of the Bible is felt to be untenable. Both sides wistfully acknowledge that the whole truth about the Universe cannot be discovered in the laboratory or divined by the Church. But where it can be found is a more difficult matter to determine.

The shaking of dogmatic assurance within the pale of the Anglican and Protestant Churches in the latter years of the Nineteenth Century helped the propaganda of the Roman Church, whose undeviating claim to full and certain knowledge appealed to persons who could not bear to be left in doubt. The Irish immigration below, the flow of converts from the fashionable and intellectual classes above, and the high Roman Catholic birth-rate gave to the Roman Communion a very much more important place in English life

¹ People unduly depreciate Tennyson's intellectual acumen, as shown in the poems he wrote in the formative period of his youth before he took to hymning King Arthur's knights. His *In Memoriam*, written in the 'forties, and published in 1850, nine years before the appearance of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, anticipated the poignancy of the struggle between Faith and Science that convulsed the following era.

at the end of Victoria's reign than that which it had enjoyed at the beginning.

In the last half of the Nineteenth Century, Archaeology and History were in rapid progress, and their discoveries strengthened the hands of science in the strife against orthodox beliefs. Lecky's wise *History of Rationalism* (1865) and the over confident materialism of Buckle's *History of Civilization* (1857) were part of the strong current that carried men away from ancient faiths. An academic 'liberal' party, of great intellectual distinction and very much in earnest, fought the battle to free Oxford and Cambridge from the bondage of Church monopoly, and won it by the Test Act of 1871. The younger Universities of London and Manchester had long enjoyed such freedom as their birthright.²

The two older Universities became so far assimilated to the new that before the end of the Queen's reign Oxford and Cambridge were much more lay than clerical in the personnel of their 'dons,' who were moreover now allowed to marry while continuing to hold Fellowships. Academic study now embraced physical science and mediaeval and modern history as strongly as the older humanism and mathematics. In the last decades of the Century, Cambridge was represented to the world by great men of science like Clerk Maxwell, Rayleigh and young J. J. Thomson, while Archdeacon Cunningham was founding Economic History, and the more brilliant genius of Maitland was revealing the common thoughts of mediaeval men through the harsh medium of their law. Even more rapid had been the change at Oxford, which had been dominated, in the early years of the reign by Newman and his antagonists, disputing over the miracles of Saints and the authority of the Fathers. Very different, thirty years later was the atmosphere of the University, of which the practical and liberal character was represented to the world by Jowett as Master of Balliol, while the scholarship of Stubbs and Gardiner revealed the growth of the English Constitu-

² Most of the Provincial Universities were founded later still, in the first years of the Twentieth Century. The want of a proper system of popular secondary education prior to Balfour's Bill of 1902 was the fundamental reason why the new Universities developed so slowly.

tion, and T. H. Green opened out a new scheme of ethical philosophy.

The last half of Victoria's reign was indeed the period when Oxford and Cambridge were most in the public eye. Their reform, particularly the abolition of religious tests for academic posts (1871) was one of the chief political questions of the day. The liberal-minded and highly educated governing class of the 'seventies were more nearly affiliated to the Universities than to the declining aristocracy or the rising plutocracy. Gladstone abolished patronage in all public offices and made competitive examination the normal entrance to the Civil Service. To select men for practical careers on the report of examiners had seemed an absurd proposal to Palmerston and the aristocratic politicians of the previous era. It was a compliment paid to the reputation of the Oxford and Cambridge system of examination for degrees, and it had the effect of making closer than ever the connection of University men with public life. Trained intellect was henceforth to be a young man's best passport, instead of social patronage or fashionable friends. The evils of the Examination system, especially in its effect on school education, were not yet realized, nor were they yet as great as they have since become.

But perhaps the most characteristic achievement of the last years of the reign was the *Dictionary of National Biography*. It was not the undertaking either of a University or of the State. It was initiated and largely financed by a private individual, George Smith the publisher, who had made his money by selling valuable books to a serious-minded reading public. The great Dictionary is a monument of the business ability, the enlightened public spirit and the widespread literary and historical scholarship of the Victorian age at its final culmination. It is the best record of a nation's past that any civilization has produced.

It has already been pointed out that the agnosticism of the English revolt against early Victorian religion had no connection with hedonism in theory or in conduct. Only in the 'nineties, the *fin de siècle* as the time was called, a change in the direction of levity, if not of laxity, was observed, due no doubt in part to the gradual crumbling of definite religious beliefs with which a strict and slightly ascetic moral code had

been associated. When religion had been transformed, from the 'public and documented system of beliefs, practices and aspirations' that it had been when the Queen came to the throne, into a 'provision for personal needs,' it could no longer influence the conduct of those who felt no such need for themselves. The movement away from family prayers and church going, the movement towards 'week ends out of town,' towards the race-course and other pleasures, some innocent and some less innocent, was led by the Prince of Wales (afterwards Edward VII) himself reacting against an unsympathetic mother and an unwise education. This last decade of the Century is the era of the *Yellow Book* and 'art for art's sake.' But its greatest writers, Meredith, Hardy, William Morris, Stevenson and Housman, though all opposed to orthodox religion, were each in his own way as deeply 'serious' as the earlier Victorians.

The conflict between science and religion among the educated classes was crudely but effectively reproduced in Charles Bradlaugh's militant atheism, preached on public platforms to mass meetings of working men; while the last great evangelical revival, the Salvation Army, founded by 'General' Booth, brought the enthusiasm of 'conversion,' after Wesley's original fashion, to the army of the homeless and unfed, to the drunkard, the criminal and the harlot. It was significant of the coming era that the Salvation Army was more sensational in its methods than the older Nonconformist bodies. To bring street bands and coloured uniforms into the service of Protestant religion was something new. It was no less significant that the Salvation Army regarded social work and care for the material conditions of the poor and outcast as being an essential part of the Christian mission to the souls of men and women. It was largely for this reason that its power has become a permanent feature in modern English life. It does not depend on revivalism alone.

Another movement, analogous to the Salvation Army in its combination of religious and social motive, was Total Abstinence, or 'Teetotalism.' Drunkenness and excessive expenditure on drink constituted one of the major evils of city life, one of the chief causes of crime and the ruin in families, espe-

cially since spirits had largely taken the place of beer. Our great caricaturists had held up the mirror to this unpleasant aspect of English nature, from the days of Hogarth's *Gin Lane* to George Cruikshank's prints of *The Bottle* and *The Drunkard's Children* (1847-1848), which were circulated by tens of thousands. In the years that followed, an organised and largely successful attack was made on the drinking habits of all classes by the 'Blue Ribbon Army': takers of the total abstinence pledge wore the blue ribbon on their breasts, to pledge them in the face of the world to keep their promise. In the 'seventies the Temperance party, specially strong among the Nonconformists³ became a force in Liberal politics; but there was an element of fanaticism in their legislative proposals to suppress the drink traffic, that long postponed more practical measures. The movement provoked the better led activities of the drink interest; the brewing companies were backed by a great army of shareholders, and in the last decades of the Century they captured the Conservative Party, with whom after 1886 the government of the country principally lay.

Not only 'Teetotalism' but the proper and moderate use of wine and beer were encouraged by the increasing amenity and diminishing monotony of life, by rival amusements and occupations such as reading, music, playing and watching organized games, bicycling and sight-seeing, country and seaside holidays, above all by more active and educated minds and more comfortable homes. All these things helped to counteract the dullard's itch for the bottle in the cupboard, and diminished the attraction of the lights of the 'gin palace' glaring out its promise of warmth and welcome on to the wet inhospitable street. Moreover the brewing companies were gradually frightened or shamed into a more enlightened policy in the management of the public houses they controlled, making them more decent, more ready to sell other things besides drink, less anxious to send their customers away tipsy. And Balfour's Licensing Act of 1904 at length found a practical

³ But all religious bodies promoted the Temperance movement. In 1909 the Church of England Temperance Society contained 639,233 members. Of these 114,444 were pledged to 'total abstinence,' and as many as 486,888 were 'juvenile members.' For it was a regular policy of Temperance Societies to enlist children before they acquired the taste for drink.

method of reducing the excessive number of houses of sale.

In the Twentieth Century, drink has found fresh enemies in the cinema at the street corner, and the wireless at home; and the increase of skilled and mechanical employments, particularly the driving of motor cars, has put a premium on sobriety. Gambling perhaps now does more harm than drink. But when Queen Victoria died, drinking was still a great evil from the top to the bottom of society, more widely prevalent than in our day, but decidedly less than when she came to the throne.

In the Victorian era photography made its effective impact on the world. Already in 1871 it was acclaimed by an observer as 'the greatest boon that has been conferred on the poorer classes in later years.'

'Any one who knows what the worth of family affection is among the lower classes, and who has seen the array of little portraits stuck over a labourer's fireplace, still gathering into one the "Home" that life is always parting — the boy that has "gone to Canada," the "girl out at service" the little one with the golden hair that sleeps under the daisies, the old grandfather in the country — will perhaps feel with me that in counteracting the tendencies, social and industrial, which every day are sapping the healthier family affections, the sixpenny photograph is doing more for the poor than all the philanthropists in the world.' (*Macmillan's Magazine*, Sept. 1871.)

By the cheapest and most accurate form of portraiture possible, photography had indeed brought to all classes a prolongation of poignant and of delightful memories of the dead, of the absent, of past years, incidents and associations.

Its effect on art was of more doubtful benefit. Many thousands of painters had formerly lived on the demand for portraits of persons, for accurate delineations of events, scenes and buildings and for copies of famous pictures. Photography henceforth supplied all these. By reducing the importance of picture-painting as a trade, and surpassing it in realistic representation of detail, it drove the painter to take refuge more and more in theory, and in a series of intellectualized experiments in Art for Art's sake.

If the English language at the end of Victoria's reign be compared to its predecessor in the last years of Elizabeth, it will be seen that it is the same language: a modern English-

man can easily understand the Bible of 1611, and he can even understand the more idiomatic dialogues of Shakespeare much more easily at any rate than he can understand Chaucer. For the three centuries between Elizabeth and Victoria had been a period of transactions by writing, governed by a literate upper class who defended the language against fundamental changes in grammar or in the structure of existing words. But in another sense the language had changed — from a vehicle of poetry and emotion to a vehicle of science and journalism. An Elizabethan reading a Victorian newspaper article or listening to the conversation of modern educated people, would be bewildered by long words unfamiliar to him, which have been formed, usually from the Latin, not for the purposes of poetry like ‘the multitudinous seas incarnadine,’ but for the prosaic purposes of science and journalism, and for the discussion of social and political problems: *opportunist, minimize, international, centrifugal, commercialism, decentralize, organisation*, and the yet more technical terms of physical science — a useful but unlovely jargon.⁴

In the last half of the Nineteenth Century ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ were enlarging and perfecting their rival organisations on modern lines. Many an old family firm was replaced by a Limited Liability Company with a bureaucracy of salaried managers. The change met the technological requirements of the new age by engaging a large professional element and prevented the decline in efficiency that so commonly marred the fortunes of family firms in the second and third generation after the energetic founder. It was moreover a step away from individual initiative, towards collectivism and municipal and State-managed business. The Railway Companies, though still private concerns managed for the

⁴ Mr. Pearsall Smith, in his *The English Language* (Home University Library, p. 124) says: ‘Science is in many ways the natural enemy of language. Language, either literary or colloquial, demands a rich store of living and vivid words — words which are “thought pictures,” and appeal to the senses and also embody our feelings about the objects they describe. But science cares nothing about emotion or vivid presentation; her ideal is a kind of algebraic notation, to be used simply as an instrument of analysis; and for this she rightly prefers dry and abstract terms, taken from some dead language, and deprived of all life and personality.’

benefit of shareholders, were very unlike old family businesses. They existed by reason of Acts of Parliament, that conferred on them powers and privileges in return for State control. At the same time the great municipalities went into business to supply lighting, trams and other services to the ratepayers.

The growth of the Limited Liability Company and municipal trading had important consequences. Such large, impersonal manipulation of capital and industry greatly increased the numbers and importance of shareholders as a class, an element in the national life representing irresponsible wealth detached from the land and the duties of the landowner; and almost equally detached from the responsible management of business. All through the Nineteenth Century, America, Africa, India, Australasia and parts of Europe, were being developed largely by British capital, and British shareholders were thus being enriched by the world's movement towards industrialization. Towns like Bournemouth and Eastbourne sprang up to house large 'comfortable' classes who had retired on their incomes, and who had no relation to the rest of the community except that of drawing dividends and occasionally attending a shareholders' meeting to bully the management. On the other hand 'shareholding' meant leisure and freedom which was used by many of the later Victorians for the highest purposes of a great civilization.

The 'shareholder' as such had no knowledge of the lives, thoughts or needs of the workmen employed by the Company in which he held shares, and his influence on the relations of capital and labour was not good. The paid manager acting for the company was in more direct relation with the men and their demands, but even he had seldom that familiar personal knowledge of the workmen which the employer had often had under the more patriarchal system of the old family business now passing away. Indeed the mere size of operations and the numbers of workmen involved rendered such personal relations impossible. Fortunately, however, the increasing power and organisation of the Trade Unions, at least in all the skilled trades, enabled the workmen to meet on more equal terms the managers of the companies who employed

them. The harsh discipline of the strike and lockout taught the two parties to respect each other's strength and understand the value of fair negotiation.

Under these conditions the increasing national dividend was rather less unevenly distributed between classes. But the distinction between capital and labour, the personal segregation of employer from employed in their ordinary lives still went on increasing. The mere fact that philanthropic 'settlements' were formed in working class districts in order to show the well meaning bourgeois how the poor lived, was significant of much. Marxian doctrines, therefore, as to the inevitability of the 'class struggle' were rife at the end of the Century; and the more opportunist collectivism preached by the Fabian Society was still more influential.

But these doctrines were too theoretic to affect the English working man very much. It was no theory, but the practical need to defend Trade Union rights against judge-made law that brought Labour into politics to form a party of its own. For the English law courts developed a most unfortunate habit of discovering that liberties which Parliament intended by its Acts to grant to Trade Unions, had not in fact been granted by those Acts at all. By the legislation of 1825, Trade Unions and combinations to raise wages had been legalized — at least so Parliament and everyone else had supposed for forty years. But in 1867, in the *Boilermakers' case*, the Judges headed by the Lord Chief Justice decided that Unions, being 'in restraint of trade,' were illegal associations. Fortunately by the Reform Bill of the same year the working classes were granted the Parliamentary franchise and were therefore able to remedy their grievances by constitutional pressure on politicians. Consequently Gladstone's Act of 1871 restored to Unions the right to exist on very favourable terms, and Disraeli's Act of 1875 legalized 'peaceful picketing.'

After that, the Judges left the Trade Unions alone for another generation, during which the movement spread from the skilled to the unskilled trades, particularly in the great strike of the London dockers led by John Burns in 1889. By the end of the Century, Trade Unionism was in most trades and in most regions of England a very powerful weapon of defence for workmen's wages, on the whole wisely used.

Then, in 1901, the Judges struck again with their Taff Vale decision, when the work of former Parliaments was again undone, and strike action by Unions was again pronounced illegal. This decision provoked the effective formation of a separate Labour Party in Parliament at the opening of the new Century, and the Act of 1906 which secured to the Trade Unions highly privileged immunity from legal action. But these events belong to another chapter of social history, beyond the date and outside the atmosphere of Victorian England.

The close of the reign and the end of the century saw the so called 'feudal' society of the countryside still in being, but under changing conditions indicative of the advance of democracy even in rural England, and the penetration of village life by forces and ideas from the cities. In the following generation, with the coming of motor transport, the intrusion of urban life upon the rural parts became a flood, turning all England into a suburb. But when Victoria died (1901) the process had not gone so far; country roads and lanes were still country roads and lanes, with all their sleepy charm come down from countless centuries, which the invading bicyclist could enjoy without destroying. The 'country houses,' great and small, still flourished, with their shooting parties and their week-end guests from town; and the estate system was still the method by which English agriculture was organized.

But the country houses and the country estates were less than ever supported by agricultural rents, which American imports had lowered and brought into arrear. The pleasures of the country house and the business of the estate system were now financed by money which the owner drew from industry or other investments, or from his income as ground landlord of more distant urban areas. He was still a country gentleman, but he paid for himself by being other things as well. For British agriculture as an economic proposition, had collapsed.

Under these circumstances, the estate system, 'feudal' as it might be, was fairly popular in the countryside, because it brought money from the industrial world to support decadent agriculture, and because the squire and his family brought

into village life educated interests and friendly leadership.

But even before the coming of the motor-car with the advent of the new century, the old village life was being transformed into something half suburban by newspapers, ideas, visitors and new residents from the cities. The contrast between the democratic city and the 'feudal' countryside, which had characterised Trollope's England in the middle of Victoria's reign, was less marked in the last decades of the century. As the result of the Education Act of 1870 the agricultural labourer of the next generation and his women folk could all read and write. Unfortunately this power was not directed to foster in them an intelligent and loving interest in country life. The new education was devised and inspected by city folk, intent on producing not peasants but clerks. Before Victoria died, the *Daily Mail* was being read on the village ale bench and under the thatch of the cottage. The distinctive rural mentality was suffering urbanization, and local traditions were yielding to nation-wide commonplace.

In the realm of politics also, town and country were becoming assimilated. In 1884 the agricultural working man received the Parliamentary vote, which had been denied to him in 1867 when his brother of the town was enfranchised. Protected by the ballot, the agricultural labourer could vote as he wished, regardless of farmer and landlord. Proof of this was given in the General Election of 1885, the first held under the new Franchise Bill. On that occasion the boroughs voted Conservative, but the counties unexpectedly voted Liberal, in defiance of squire and farmer. The control over English country life which the squire had exercised for so many centuries was in fact drawing to an end, as far as Parliamentary elections were concerned. It followed inevitably that the local government of the counties must also be put on an elective basis.

In 1888 therefore the Local Government Act established elected County Councils as the administrative organs of country life, in place of the patriarchal rule of the Justices of the Peace. The Justices of the Peace were preserved in their judicial capacity as magistrates. But their administrative functions were handed over to the elected County Councils, strengthened a few years later by the creation of elective Ur-

ban and Rural District Councils. Thus more than fifty years after the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 had set up democratic local government in the boroughs, the same principle was applied to the rural districts. It was an irony of fate that the farm hand was given the Parliamentary and local franchise only after the destruction of English agricultural life had set in, with American competition and the fall of food prices. The agricultural labourers, if they stayed in the countryside, could now take part in its government, but in fact they were trooping off to the towns.

The Municipal Reform Act of 1835 had affected only a limited number of towns, but the scheme of urban self-government was made general throughout England by the Local Government Act of 1888.

The legislators of 1835 had shirked the problem of the capital: greater London, that is to say, all London outside the old City boundaries, had been left without unity of administration. Fifty years later, a bewildering chaos of overlapping authorities still carried on the affairs of the five million inhabitants of the capital in haphazard fashion. The Local Government Act of 1888 applied a remedy long overdue. It established the London County Council, which has since governed London, all except the area of the ancient City, reserved as an historical monument under the Lord Mayor and Aldermen. Foreigners come to see the Lord Mayor, but the head of London's government is the Chairman of the London County Council.

The newborn London County Council sprang at once into vigorous life, and in the first twenty years of its existence carried out many new schemes of social welfare. And the London School Board during the same period made many leading experiments in education, till the Education Act of 1902 merged its activities in those of the London County Council. This forward move in local government by London, hitherto so backward, was conducted by the Progressive party that got the majority on the Council at one election after another. It called itself the *Progressive* party — so as not to be completely identified with either the Liberal or the Labour party; but it had close affinities to both. It existed for municipi-

pal purposes only, and therefore people who voted Conservative at Parliamentary elections could vote Progressive at the County Council Election. The average London voter in the 'nineties was conservative and imperialist in national politics, but wanted democratic social improvement for himself and his City. It was in this atmosphere of a municipally progressive London that the Fabian Society flourished; the intellectual leadership of the Fabian publicists, the Sidney Webbs and Graham Wallas, had much to do with the Progressive government of London. But the popular leader was John Burns, who represented the coming alliance of Labour and Liberal. John Burns of Battersea was the first great apostle of a London patriotism, as distinct from pride in the 'City,' now shrunk within its ancient boundaries, a dignified memory of the past.

The towns, therefore, in the last decades of Victoria's reign were undergoing rapid improvement in sanitation, lighting, locomotion, public libraries and baths, and to some extent in housing. The example set in these matters by the Birmingham municipality under Joseph Chamberlain in the 'seventies, and by the London County Council twenty years later, was widely followed elsewhere. And the Central Government supported the efforts of the local authorities to better the life of the citizen by grants from taxes in aid of the local rates, conditional on favourable reports by Government Inspectors.

This movement of municipal reform supported by the State prevented an utter social catastrophe. The death rate, so high in the early Victorian city, rapidly declined, town life was made increasingly tolerable on its purely material side, and primary education became universal. Nevertheless it was in many respects a dreary heritage to pass on to the Twentieth Century. The modern city, in the unplanned swamp of its increase, lacks form and feature; it is a deadening cage for the human spirit. Urban and suburban life in modern England made no appeal through the eye to the imagination, as had the old village life of our island, or the city life of ancient and mediaeval Europe. Civic pride and civic rivalry among the industrial towns of the north was almost entirely materialistic and not at all aesthetic. The pall of smoke and smuts in

itself was enough to discourage any effort after beauty or joy in the visible aspect of life.

The new cities were too big to have individual unity or character, or even to be seen by the eye as Athens, Rome, Perugia, Nuremberg, Tudor London and a thousand other older cities had been seen and loved. And to make matters worse there had been practically no town planning of the Victorian cities. The State had permitted the landlord and the speculative builder to lay out modern England as best suited their own private gain, too often without a thought given to amenity or to the public welfare. In vast areas of London and other cities there were no open spaces within reach of the children, whose only playground outside the school yard was the hard and ugly street. To millions the divorce from nature was absolute, and so too was the divorce from all dignity and beauty and significance in the wilderness of mean streets in which they were bred, whether in the well-to-do suburb or the slum. The new education and the new journalism were both the outcome of these surroundings and partook of their nature. The race bred under such conditions might retain many sturdy qualities of character, might even with better food and clothing improve in physique, might develop sharp wits and a brave, cheery, humorous attitude to life, but its imaginative powers must necessarily decline, and the stage is set for the gradual standardization of human personality.

The later Victorians, though incapable of coping with their own distress, were beginning to be aware of it. Ruskin had inspired the rising generations of writers and thinkers with disgust at the industrial civilization that had filled their fathers with such pride. Looking back through history, they thought they saw a fairer world than modern Lancashire; as early as 1868 William Morris, in the Prologue to *The Earthly Paradise*, had written:

Forget the counties overhung with smoke,
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
 Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
 And dream of London, small, and white and clean,
 The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green . . .

But there was no going back, except in imagination.

The year 1870 was a turning point in educational and therefore in social history. Education was not only a national requirement on the necessity for which politicians were agreed; it was also the chief battleground of religious denominations. The main reason why English Education lagged behind in the mid-Victorian period, was that no government, Whig or Tory, could conceive a means of setting up a national system at the public expense that would not have given the bitterest offence either to the Dissenters or to the Established Church. Until Gladstone's gallant venture in 1870, every government had shrunk from embarking on that sea of trouble. A network of Voluntary Schools paid for by private subscription had been spread over the country owing to religious and sectarian zeal; but the same zeal had frightened off both political parties from tackling the Education question as a national affair.

The great majority of the Voluntary Schools by which the primary education of the people was supplied, were conducted on Church principles: they were known as National Schools, because founded by the (Anglican) National Society. They had been aided by a very small grant since 1833. Gladstone's Bill of 1870 was the work of W. E. Forster, an ardent churchman though of Quaker origin. Forster's bill doubled the State Grant to the existing Church Schools and to the Roman Catholic Schools, so as to enable them to become a permanent part of the new system, while it introduced publicly controlled schools to fill up the large gaps in the educational map of the country. These new Schools, called Board Schools, were to be paid for out of the Local Rates, and they were to be governed by popularly elected School Boards. In most of the old Voluntary Schools, that is in all National Schools, Church teaching was to be continued. But in the new Board Schools denominational teaching was prohibited under the famous Cowper-Temple clause of the Education Act. The Bible was to be taught without denominational comment in the Board Schools.

The grievance of the Dissenters was that the State thus perpetuated the Church Schools of the villages, and in each village there was only one school available to which all children had to go. In the towns there were Board and Voluntary Schools side by side. It was unfortunate that the Church

Schools were found most of all in the villages where there was no alternative school. That is so very largely to this day (1941), but it is less resented now than in 1870, partly because the hostile feeling between Church and Dissent has very much subsided, and partly because by Balfour's Act of 1902 the Church Schools have been brought under a considerable measure of control by County Councils as the public Educational Authorities.

By the religious compromise of 1870 England was enabled to obtain, better late than never, a system of universal primary education without which she must soon have fallen into the rear among modern nations. Between 1870 and 1890 the average school attendance rose from one and a quarter million to four and a half millions, while the money spent on each child was doubled.

But the State did nothing as yet for Secondary Education;⁵ nor did it provide a ladder of school scholarships to the Universities for the ablest children in Primary Schools. The new School Boards were charged with Primary Education only. In 1900 the Law Courts decided, in the famous Cockerton judgment, that the ratepayers' money could not be spent on any form of Secondary or Higher Education, under the terms of the Act of 1870.

Another defect in that measure was the smallness of the School Board areas. Each School Board being the affair of a single town or village could have no wide educational outlook. And their parochial character made the feud of Church and Dissent more personal and intense.

These defects in the Act of 1870 were remedied by Balfour's Education Act of 1902, inspired by the great public servant, Sir Robert Morant. This measure abolished School Boards and gave the power to provide for Education, both Primary and Secondary, to the elected County Councils, and to certain large Borough Councils. Such is our system today. The Councils do their educational work through their Education Committees. The improvement due to the larger area

⁵In 1899 the amount of public money spent per head on Secondary Education was only three farthings in England, as compared with one shilling and a penny three farthings in Switzerland. Bernard Allen's *Sir Robert Morant*, p. 141.

and broader views of these County Education Committees has been of great benefit to Primary Education, and of still greater benefit to Secondary Education; and the ladder to the Universities was created by Balfour's Bill.

Without the Education Acts of 1870 and of 1902 England could not have competed in the coming era of machinery and organization, and her people would have sunk into the barbarism of an uneducated city population, a far worse form of society than the uneducated rural population of old times, where the mind and character of ploughmen and craftsmen were formed by the influences of nature, the agricultural life and the old system of apprenticeship.

Our modern system of popular Education was indeed indispensable and has conferred great benefits on the country, but it has been a disappointment in some important respects. Being a town-made system it has failed to meet rural needs, of which the Board of Education failed to recognise the distinctive character. It has speeded up rather than diminished the rural exodus. More generally speaking it has produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading, an easy prey to sensations and cheap appeals. Consequently both literature and journalism have been to a large extent debased since 1870, because they now cater for millions of half-educated and quarter-educated people, whose forbears, not being able to read at all, were not the patrons of newspapers or of books. The small highly educated class no longer sets the standard to the extent that it used to do, and tends to adopt the standards of the majority. Whether in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries the lower forms of literature and journalism will completely devour the higher has yet to be seen. If they do not, it will be due to improved Secondary and Higher Education forming a sufficiently large class to perpetuate a demand for things really worth reading.

The subject matter of this book has been confined to the social history of England, and has not included the vast and varied expanse of lands beyond the ocean associated in the British Commonwealth of Nations and Dependencies. But social life in little England would have been a very different thing if it had not been the centre of a great maritime trade

and moreover of an Empire. We had long prided ourselves on being a seafaring people; that was part of the island habit. But consciousness of the Empire of which we had become the centre, lagged far behind the reality. In the middle of the Nineteenth Century popular patriotic songs still celebrated 'the nice little, tight little island.' And that island was not yet generally thought of as the heart of 'an Empire on which the sun never set.' That aspect of our position was first fully appreciated at the two Jubilees of Queen Victoria (1887, 1897) when the pageant of distant and diverse lands, all come to pay homage to the little lady in grey, was first fully displayed, with startling effect, in London streets.

Yet, for generations past, the ways of thought and habits of life in English towns and villages had been strongly influenced by overseas connections. In the Eighteenth Century tea and tobacco had become as much the national food as beef and beer. And ever since the Seventeenth Century the adventurous and the discontented had been going across the ocean, first to the American colonies, then to the United States, to Canada, to Australia, to South Africa. It is true that until the Nineteenth Century the emigrant usually parted for ever from the folk he left behind and, however he fared, little more was heard of him. But in Victoria's reign, when the tide of emigration was still running stronger than ever, the penny postage kept the cottage at home in touch with the son who had 'gone to the Colonies,' and often he would return on a visit with money in his pocket, and tales of new lands of equality and self-help and maybe an affectionate contempt for slow old ways at home. In this very human manner the middle and lower classes knew quite as much about the Empire as their 'betters,' and rather more than their 'betters' about the United States, as was shown at the time of the Civil War of 1861-1865. But the professional and upper classes also went out to careers all over the world, to govern, and trade, and shoot big game, in Africa and India. And all ranks of the army knew India, so far as it could be seen from the lines.

In this manner, a vast and varied overseas experience was for ever pouring back into every town and every hamlet in Victoria's England. Since Tudor times the influence of the sea had been strong even in upland villages, no one of which

is more than seventy miles from a tidal estuary. And to the old maritime influence was now added in equally full measure the Colonial. Our island people were, in some respects, the least insular of all mankind. To Europeans we appeared insular, because we were not continental. But our experiences and opportunities were greater than those of the folk of other lands.

Victorian prosperity and Victorian civilization, alike in their grosser and their higher aspects, were due to a century's immunity from great wars and from any serious national danger. Safe behind the shield of the navy, Englishmen thought of all the problems of life in terms of peace and security which were in fact the outcome of temporary and local circumstances, and not part of nature's universal order. No great country except English-speaking America has ever been so utterly civilian in thought and practice as Victorian England. Service in the army was regarded by the middle and working classes as disgraceful — except in time of war.

It's Tommy this and Tommy that, and turn him out the brute;
But it's 'thank you Mr. Atkins,' when the guns begin to shoot.

It was a vulgar attitude, especially as it went with occasional fits of Jingoism like those which preceded the Crimean and Boer Wars, and nearly caused several others. But for a hundred years after Trafalgar and Waterloo it led to no fatal results. For we held the surface of the sea, and the surface was then all the sea for human action. On the whole our supremacy in the oceans and along the shores of the world was used in the Nineteenth Century on the side of peace, goodwill and freedom. If it were to be destroyed, mankind would breathe a harsher air.

The carefree Victorians knew little about the spirit and inner workings of the militarized continent, off which this green and happy isle was anchored. They knew more about Australia, America, Africa in a human and business way. Europe was the Englishman's playground, with its Alps, its picture galleries, its ancient cities. We were islanders with an overseas Empire, not continentals. We were sailors not soldiers. We thought of European politics not in terms of power or of

our own national security, but according as we liked or disliked the governments of Turkey or Russia, Napoleon III or the Italian *risorgimento*. Sometimes these sympathies led us right, sometimes wrong. But in any case there could be no consistent national policy with armaments adapted to it. To the Englishman, foreign affairs were a branch of Liberal and Conservative politics, tinged with emotion, a matter of taste, not a question of existence.

In the Victorian era this attitude could be indulged without disaster. But when the reign and the Century came to an end, a tremendous revolution in all human affairs was imminent. The internal combustion engine had been invented, and its space-annihilating consequences were about to be disclosed. The motor-car and motor-lorry, the submarine, the tank, the aeroplane were about to plunge the world into a new era, widely different from the past in peace and in war. And England would be the country most concerned of all, because she would lose half the benefit of her insular position. The surface of the sea could no longer be held by ships alone; and whether it was held or not, the aeroplane could violate the thousand-year-old sanctities of the peaceful island. In such new conditions our happy-go-lucky attitude towards power on the Continent, and our wholly civilian way of life, our refusal to arm ourselves adequately to new needs, if continued too long, might become a terrible danger.

And even in peacetime the new age of motor traction on the roads made a more rapid social and economic revolution in the first forty years of the Twentieth Century than railways and machinery had made before. In the age of the railway, supplemented by horse traffic and bicycles, the pace of changes, the disappearance of local and provincial differences though rapid, was limited. But, under the new conditions England bade fair to become one huge unplanned suburb. Motor traction created the urgent need for the State to control the development of the whole island, but unhappily the matter was left to chance and the building exploiter. Political society could not at once adjust its habits of thought to new conditions coming on with unexampled speed.

But there are good points in this latest age. The progress actually made in the first forty years of the new Century par-

ticularly in education ⁶ and in social services, has perhaps been as much as can be expected of limited human wisdom. The material conditions of the working class in 1939 were much better than in the year Queen Victoria died.

What will now happen to England in peace and in war, the historian is no better able to guess than anyone else. And the tremendous changes that have already taken place in the first forty years of the new Century will no doubt, a short time hence, look different from what they now appear, and will fall into a new historical perspective. The best place, therefore, to bring to an end a social history of England is the death of Queen Victoria and the end of the railway age.

⁶ The battle of Waterloo was won, not on the playing fields of Eton, but on the village greens of England. The men who fought in the ranks on June 18, 1815, were little educated but they had the qualities of countrybred men. Today we are urban and educated. The flyers of the R.A.F. are not and could not be the product of rural simplicity. If we win this war, it will have been won in the primary and secondary schools (1941).