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<b>Author</b>	Smith, Anne G. M.
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**The Novel of Factory Life, 1832-55**

by

**Anne G. M. Smith**

Dissertation presented for the Ph.D. degree, Edinburgh  
University 1971.



To my Mum and Dad.

### SUMMARY

The thesis gives an analysis of several novelists' treatment of the subject of factory life in the north of England during the period 1832-55. No comprehensive and detailed analysis has yet been made of this aspect of the fiction of this period, but it has been judged it would be more useful to explore themes and techniques than to try to follow a preconceived line of argument which might lead to a distorted representation of the novels.

The first work studied is Harriet Martineau's A Manchester Strike (1832), one of her influential series of Illustrations of Political Economy, which in their rudimentary attempt at embodying social problems in fiction, probably pointed the way for later, more sophisticated writers of such fiction. Her logical, scientific approach to the problems of society may well have helped to provoke the sentimental reaction which manifests itself ten years later during one of the most wretched phases in the history of the working class, in the near-hysteria of a novel like Charlotte Elizabeth's Helen Fleetwood (1841). The totally biased picture which Charlotte Elizabeth painted of the most sordid aspects of factory life may in turn have induced Mrs. Stone to publish her William Langshawe (1842). Mrs. Stone tried to redress the balance by showing a variety of manufacturers in the process of reorientating themselves in the new society of their own creation. The originality of her contribution lies in her portrayal of the manufacturers as people with private lives and human problems. Yet in proving that Manchester is not an industrial Hell, she left out altogether the feeling of it as a city, and ignored many of the special problems which followed in the wake of urban industrialisation.

While Harriet Martineau virtually showed the uselessness of the trade union, Charlotte Elizabeth and Mrs. Stone were unanimous in anathematising it as the work of the devil. Mrs. Stone included the assassination of a manufacturer, based on a real case, in the plot of her novel, to prove how dangerous trade unions were. Mrs. Gaskell wrote about the early forties in Mary Barton (1848), using a murder with an almost identical background, and succeeded brilliantly in doing for the factory workers what Mrs. Stone had tried to do for the manufacturers. She made it possible for her readers to see that there was no stereotype of the factory worker; that he was as capable of human dignity and a full emotional life as anyone else. The assassination in Mary Barton is used to show the middle-class public how dangerous their detachment was, in a situation which demanded the immediate personal involvement of human sympathy and understanding.

The greater complexity of Dickens' work on the subject of factory life shows the increasing awareness, after the hungry forties, of the larger issues at stake for the country as a whole. Mrs. Gaskell handles the same themes in North and South (1855), combining the optimism of Bleak House (1853) with the seriousness of Hard Times (1855). She shows herself to be as aware as Dickens of the fragmentation of human relationships peculiar to the machine age, and of the pressing need to provide an education for both masters and men which would enable them to meet on common ground. Like Dickens, she stresses the futility and destructiveness for both masters and men of class warfare, hot or cold. But ultimately she does not share Dickens' grim fabular vision of man's inhumanity to man, and the loss of spiritual vision or culture which are the result of the perverse worship of the mechanical abstraction, or merely scientific logic, seen at its most absurd in Harriet Martineau's arguments against fencing

in the dangerous machinery of the factories.

All these novels are urgently concerned with the nature of human and class relationships and the quality and content of life in the nascent industrial society. They are primarily novels about people in the process of recreating their own society - in some ways a reversal of the usual practice of the novelist. This study attempts to show the value and limitations of the art of writing a genre novel.

## PREFACE

First and foremost I wish to thank Professor K. J. Fielding for his help with this work. I can only say that I owe a debt to his scholarship, patience, and kindness, which can never be repaid, nor forgotten. Immeasurable as that help has been, the judgements, opinions, flaws and mistakes in this work are all my own.

Mr. J. A. V. Chapple of Manchester University has often helped me by providing information about studies of Mrs. Gaskell. Mr. W. H. Challoner of Manchester University very kindly provided guidance with the economic background to the chapter on North and South. Dr. K. Fielden of Edinburgh University has been consistently helpful in answering questions about the historical background and details of this work. Again, any errors in the sections where these people might be presumed to have given me help, will be entirely my own fault. I wish to thank them.

I am also grateful to the staff of the Edinburgh University Library, who have always been cheerful and prompt in their assistance. I wish particularly to thank the staff of the Inter-Library Loans department, and Mr. D. Easton, for their extensive help.


The Chief Librarian and the staff of the Manchester Central Reference Library have been more than kind and efficient in answering my many, often obscure, enquiries. I have to thank, too, the Keeper of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and the Librarian of the Brotherton Library, Leeds.

More than any particular help given by these people, I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the generous spirit in which it was given.

Another debt which I can never fully repay, I owe to my sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Pryde, for her patience in the tedious job of typing this work, for the care with which she did so, and for her co-operation when I wished to alter what she had already done.

Chapter V, "The Ironmaster in Bleak House" was published separately in Essays in Criticism 21 (April 1971).

This dissertation has been written entirely by me, except for Chapter VI, "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau," which was written jointly with Professor Fielding and published in Nineteenth Century Fiction 24 (March 1970). I have altered it very slightly.



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### INTRODUCTION

"Man is not alone; he lives in society, in a social condition; and consequently, for us novelists, this social condition increasingly modifies the phenomena. Indeed our great study is just there, in the reciprocal effect of society on the individual and the individual on society."

Emile Zola in "The Experimental Novel" (1880),  
The Experimental Novel and Other Essays, trans. from  
the French by B. M. Sherman. (New York, 1893).

## Introduction

The period covered by this study, 1832-35, contains the most crucial phase of Victorian man's recreation of himself and his society in a new image. Perhaps the most important single factor to influence him in this metamorphosis was his own creation, machinery. It is impossible to overstate the impact which the invention of the machinery of bulk production had on men's minds: they were as intoxicated as Frankenstein when his monster came to life, as willing to ignore its faults and its potential for evil. The factory system seemed to be a triumph of scientific logic. From, say, the flax going in to the finished cotton coming out in bales was a straightforward process, with each stage separate and simple, yet logically connected with the next and previous stages. The mystery of the finished article was laid bare. Men quite naturally marvelled at the miracles of increased production, with the prospect of increased material comfort, which the rationalisation of the processes of manufacture brought about. They also marvelled, at least in the days before "Brummagem wares" became infamous, at the reliable uniformity of quality which was the result of mass-production by machine. The attitude of the optimists might be summed up in the words of Carlyle, who described cotton-spinning as "the clothing of the naked in its result; the triumph of man over matter in its means."<sup>1</sup>

Spiritually, too, the industrialists felt that mankind was the better for the new inventions, in that it gained a new awareness of its godlike ability to control nature, to shape its own environment. In frequently admiring machinery, the Victorians were admiring themselves; its unlimited potential was of course theirs. The businessman, the

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<sup>1</sup> Chartism (1839) ch.8, p.83.

merchant, the entrepreneur, saw themselves as pioneers of civilisation - in an age which (like others) confused material comfort and an orderly existence with civilisation. Men did not fail to make hopeful comparisons between the wealthy manufacturers and the merchant princes of the Renaissance. Yet those who made such comparisons were doomed to disillusionment, because, as I hope this study will show, the Victorian manufacturing classes were, on the whole, as Matthew Arnold saw them, vulgar materialists, who left "the claims of intellect and knowledge not satisfied, the claim of beauty not satisfied, the claim of manners not satisfied." His verdict on "the hideousness, the immense ennui of the life which this type has created"<sup>1</sup> was supported by every artist of the age. Ruskin, asked to lecture on industrial design at Bradford, warned businessmen that their lives, if they did not change them, would have been "successful in retarding the arts, tarnishing the virtues, and confusing the manners"<sup>2</sup> of their country. Later, in another lecture in Bradford, he suggested that the design of the new Exchange there should include the decoration of its friezes "with pendant purses."<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels argued that the bourgeoisie had used the economic power which the new machinery gave it to create "a world after its own image."<sup>4</sup>

The following chapters represent an attempt to trace the running critique of this new image of society provided by its novelists. The artist, at the same time deeply committed to the society in which he lives and detached from it, offers it an alternative image to that which it tries to project, an image which no amount of biographies, statistics or journalism can give. Although the reliability of fiction as a record

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<sup>1</sup> Mixed Essays (1894) p.53.

<sup>2</sup> The Two Paths (1889) p.131.

<sup>3</sup> The Crown of Wild Olive (1886) p.107.

<sup>4</sup> The Communist Manifesto (1848) p.36.

of social history is often disputed, in some respects the validity of its revelations cannot be challenged. Only if we fall into the worst fault of the early Victorians, and, like Gradgrind, refuse to credit the existence of that which cannot be measured, will this be denied. In recognition of this no attempt has been made in the following chapters to measure the effectiveness of novels of factory life, but rather to explore the potential and discover the limitations of one genre of the novel, as a literary phenomenon.

Perhaps the most difficult problem which confronts the critic of social-problem fiction is to ascertain its relationship to two worlds which it claims to portray: the world of hard fact, and the closely related world of less solid reality. In the period of 1832-55 it is not even easy to establish how correct the facts which novelists bring forward to support their arguments are. The collection and collation of hard facts - statistical analysis - was hardly yet a science. [redacted] It was to a great extent a hobby of the amateur, with its methodology completely undeveloped. The early novelists who wrote about factory life were as guilty as anyone else of gathering only the facts which would support their arguments and reinforce their appeal to the reader's sympathy. Yet there is sufficient evidence to reassure us that the facts which they brought forward were verifiable, although revealing perhaps only one side of the truth, and therefore, arguably, distorting it.

A clear example of the kind of problems this poses can be seen in Mrs. Trollope's Michael Armstrong (1838). For the writing of this novel Mrs. Trollope asked for the help of Lord Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury referred her to an article in the Quarterly Review of 1836 for an analysis of the situation, and provided her with the opportunity for

first-hand experience of what she was to write about. Her son,

T. A. Trollope, records the visit:

I was the companion of her journey, and was more or less useful to her in searching for and collecting facts in some places where it would have been difficult for her to look for them. We carried with us a number of introductions from Lord Shaftesbury to a rather strange assortment of persons, whom his lordship had found useful both as collectors of trustworthy information, and energetic agitators in favour of legislation.<sup>1</sup>

He testifies that the novel which resulted from this visit contained no exaggeration of the conditions of labour for the factory children. Yet we know that one of the documents used by Mrs. Trollope for the background to Michael Armstrong, the Memoir of Robert Blincoe, was a heavily-biassed account of conditions of labour in a run-down factory at the beginning of the century.<sup>2</sup>

When the quality of the writing is so poor, as in this novel, and the grasp of the real situation so dubious, it is perhaps difficult for the modern reader to see where lay the value of such fiction, which is really a dramatisation of social and industrial statistics. But if we look at the novel in this instance as a medium of communication, rather than as an art-form, its usefulness becomes obvious. It is a subject which still needs more theoretical consideration. In D. H. Lawrence's phrase, the novelist may be wrong to write with a "didactic 'purpose' up his sleeve," but the reason for Lawrence's enthusiasm for the novel is that it somehow conveys "life" without being capable of the absolute.<sup>3</sup> The novel is a means of conveying an understanding of people, life, and society, as well as being an art-form. At different times, in different hands, the stress falls differently. From about 1832-55 it largely falls upon society, although as time went by, the public became better

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<sup>1</sup> What I Remember I, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> See ch. 3 below, p.112.

<sup>3</sup> "The Novel," Selections from Phoenix ed. A. A. Inglis (1971).

informed, the taxes which hindered the publication of periodicals were lifted and the periodical press took over the function of promoting discussion and the spread of information about the problems of the factory workers. Readers may have been more practised or sophisticated. The novelists were then free to concentrate on the more complex issue of the effects of the system on the human nature of the people connected with it.

But it is not simply this which distinguishes the later novels of this study from the earlier ones. The earlier novelists tended to substitute patronage of the people about whom they wrote for sympathy. They were too close to their beliefs and too remote from human sympathy. Again, Mrs. Trollope provides an outstanding example of this, when in the preface to the collected parts of Michael Armstrong she wrote:

It is grievous to see misguided and unfortunate men pursue a course which must necessarily neutralise the efforts of their true friends. When those in whose behalf she hoped to move the sympathy of their country are found busy in scenes of outrage and lawless violence, and uniting themselves with individuals whose doctrines are subversive of every species of social order, the author feels that it would be alike acting in violation of her own principles, and doing injury to the cause she wishes to serve, were she to persist in an attempt to hold up as objects of public sympathy, men who have stained their righteous cause with deeds of violence and blood.

The poor are a species upon whom one can exercise one's Christian charity, as remote from the writer as Mrs. Jellyby's "natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger." The real (human) sympathy which can only exist when one person is able to enter imaginatively into the sufferings of another is just not there. So, in an important way, the writers of what might be called the "Christian charity school," Mrs. Trollope and Charlotte Elizabeth, did a great deal to aggravate the problems of the poor factory workers. By their "telescopic philanthropy" they exaggerated the differences between the working classes and

other classes. Yet, so heavily-weighted is their appeal to the reader's sense of justice and Christian charity, they make it as difficult for him to criticise them with an easy conscience as it is easy to criticise the political economists, laying down the "natural" laws of their science with all the stern inaccessibility of an Old Testament God.

There were mistakes on both sides. Harriet Martineau wrote A Manchester Strike (1832) to explain the political economists' solution to the problem of strikes in the cotton industry. Her advice was good common sense as far as it went, but it ignored the crucially-important consideration of why men would strike when they must have known that a strike was sure to be a financial disaster for everyone concerned. The element of apparently irrational motivation, or the emotional drives of ignorant men, was an incalculable factor in the situation, and one which her solution failed to take into account. Yet, as the following chapters will show, Harriet Martineau's work had a positive value in its time. If it did nothing else, it provided a clear analysis of a technically complex situation, and a calm assessment of trades unions.

Since Mrs. Trollope and Charlotte Elizabeth make a very similar kind of appeal, using a similar technique; and to examine both Helen Fleetwood (1841) and Michael Armstrong would only mean repeating the essential points which both make, Helen Fleetwood being slightly less familiar, and more interesting, it has been chosen to represent a certain way of looking at the problems of factory life. There is the additional inducement, that Charlotte Elizabeth's interest, unlike Mrs. Trollope's, extended itself to the writing of two other, non-fiction, works on the same subject, so that it is possible to have a more complete idea of how one person interpreted the effects on society as a whole of the factory system. The mistake these two writers made was to allow

the passion of their plea for justice in the factories to give way to hysteria, which must always force the reader to look for some qualifications to the case as it is presented, and set their pity at a discount. Their sympathy was abstract, their characters are angels or villains, but never human beings. When the angels are also perfect evangelists, as they are in Helen Fleetwood, the reader may be tempted to sympathise with the villains, or at least to look for reason to sympathise with them. Because the family, <sup>with</sup> whom Charlotte Elizabeth chooses to lead her reader through the vicissitudes of factory life, are a family of saints, alien to the world of both master and man, we are never close to getting inside either world.

Mrs. Stone's William Langshawe, although it is very badly written, is an early and interesting attempt (1842) to restate the situation in less frenetic terms, to give a picture of Manchester which is not all gloom. She presents a new departure and a new way of looking at the industrial scene. Her real interest is the Manchester nouveaux riches, the way they live, the problems they have to cope with, their nature as social beings. Unlike her predecessors, Mrs. Stone shows a sense of humour, and for her the manufacturers at least are more than vicious brutes or pretentious arrivistes. We can see the beginning of a more democratic attitude in her awareness of the working class as a body capable of independent, desperate action despite her morbid fear of trades unions, or any independent association of the working classes, a fear which she shares with Mrs. Trollope and Charlotte Elizabeth.

With Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens we have at least a portrayal of master and man in the wholeness of their lives. In Mary Barton (1848) Mrs. Gaskell insisted upon, and won, respect for the human dignity of the working man, and a real sympathy, rather than patronage or pity, for

him as an individual rather than as an anonymous member of the unutterably boring masses of factory workers. Hard Times (1855) and North and South (1855) presented different ways of interpreting the impasse between masters and men which the Preston strike had brought to the attention of the public, alternative views of the future of the struggle between the classes. Both novels focus sharply upon the personal price men are paying for their selfishness, when they harden themselves into attitudes no longer relevant; both novels stress the narrowness of industrial man, and his ignorance.

As this brief description will have shown, this study follows no formulated line of argument, but merely explores and analyses the themes, techniques and approaches used by certain novelists confronted by a totally new social situation. The difficulty of a study which involves a close look at class relationships is to achieve detachment and not to let personal prejudices influence one's interpretation of these novels. Similarly, the novels chosen for examination take up so many themes in so many different ways that to approach them with a thesis in mind would be to present a distorted view of them. An instance of this kind of distortion can be seen in Ivan Melada's The Captain of Industry (1971), in which, in order to present a developing image of this mythical man, he misrepresents the contents of more than one of the novels he describes. In reading his outline and discussion of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth's Scarsdale, for example, we would not learn that it includes curious studies of Malvoisin (a French student of society), Deloisir (an Anglo-Frenchman, a worker, thinker, and trade-unionist of a sort), and other unionists whom Melada hardly mentions: because his study of Hard Times is centred on Bounderby he distorts the content of that novel in a serious way. Since no full study of the novels of factory life has

yet been made, it seemed that a series of open-minded studies would be a useful preliminary, perhaps indicating some ways of looking at the genre of the social novel, and avoiding the kind of pitfall which, if nothing worse, detracts from the reliability of the work.

That is not to say that this study has no limitations. Not all of the novelists of factory life have been included. Disraeli's Sybil has not been studied because the limitations of space would not allow the full-length analysis which alone would do justice to its unique political approach. Yet the fact of its omission is admittedly a limitation, and a serious one, in a work which purports to be an open examination of a class of novels. The period which this study covers is also restricted, again partly because of space, but also because little that was fundamentally new was written on the subject after North and South until Gissing's Demos in 1886, by which time significant changes had come about in the industrial world. Yet another limitation is the fact that it has not been possible always to show the views of historians when they conflict on certain questions important to the background of this study . . . questions like "how hungry were the 'Hungry Forties'?" The most which this work attempts, is to open themes and raise questions which, as others might discuss them and answer them, will ultimately add something to our understanding of the novel itself, in a much wider sense than it has been possible to do here.

CHAPTER I

"Balances of Expediency"

Harriet Martineau's A MANCHESTER STRIKE

In the 1830's fiction was still hardly an accredited art-form.

The reading of novels was widely regarded as a symptom of mental weakness, and it was supposed that the majority of habitual novel-readers were idle, silly, and above all impressionable.<sup>1</sup> It was this impressionability

that writers of social-problem and religious fiction felt justified in exploiting for their own "higher" aims of indoctrination and persuasion.<sup>2</sup>

The early writers of the fiction of factory life (which was almost by definition social problem fiction) cast themselves in an impossible role, they were not committed to their art but to informing the public about the problems of factory life. Although none of them were good novelists, their work suffered even more as a result: it is sometimes made to descend below the level of competence by the use of various devices of propaganda, not suited to fiction; flights of uncontrolled rhetoric; diagrammatic exposition; obvious bias which distorts the real facts or wilfully shows only half the truth, and authentication by footnotes which interrupt the flow of the text. Because they are attacking specific abuses or mistakes which can be rectified, or which seem to be capable of correction as they state them, they are tied to a pedestrian approach which excludes the imaginative exploration of the more important problems of society as an aggregate of individuals. Yet, paradoxically, because they used fiction to propagate wholly serious and respectable social or

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of this see Richard Stang: The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870 (1959) pp.46-51.

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the phenomenon of the religious novel in the mid-nineteenth century see Margaret Maison: Search Your Soul Eustace (1961).

political or politico-economic dogmas, it may be that the writers in this genre helped raise the intellectual status of the novel.

Harriet Martineau's Illustrations of Political Economy<sup>1</sup> certainly impressed many of her contemporaries as a more valid use of the techniques of fiction than for mere entertainment. As the title implies, the series of long short stories which made up the Illustrations was planned to dramatise various principles of political economy for the layman. They are only concerned with relating social problems to the answers which she believed political economy provided - illustrations, not explorations. Yet it is likely that to an immeasurable extent they led the way for the exploratory social problem novel, simply by showing that it was possible to reach a wide public by treating such subjects in fiction. Although this chapter shall be closely concerned with only one of the Illustrations, A Manchester Strike (1832), a brief general account of the background, the genesis, and the impact of the Illustrations as a whole is equally relevant to this study, because Illustrations which do not have a factory setting deal with topics which became central concerns of the later factory novels.

The popularity of the series implies that the way of thinking which it represents would have had a fairly strong influence on the way people were to look at the problems of factory life for a long time afterwards. The other writers to be discussed in the following chapters were certainly aware of this influence, either in its dehumanising, coldly scientific aspect, or as an antidote to the hysteria which sometimes affected the champions of the downtrodden working classes. Inasmuch as the structure of thought in Dickens' and Mrs. Gaskell's work in the same field was built on the demonstration of the fact that there was no easy solution to the

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<sup>1</sup> 9 vols. (1832-34). Hereafter referred to as Illustrations.

problems of factory life, because they were fundamentally problems of human nature and not of political economics, their work is an attempt to right the balance which Harriet Martineau's Illustrations upset. Political economy, especially the popular version of it, was often attempting to answer the wrong questions, or offering a false reassurance by suggesting answers to questions which were not within the sphere of its validity. The latter error was most often committed by the lay popularisers of the subject.

The idea for the Illustrations came to Harriet Martineau from two different directions. In 1827, she had written a tale for her "solemn old Calvinistic publisher," Houlston, on the subject of machine-breaking. This tale, The Rioters, proved so successful that "some hosiers and lace-makers of Derby and Nottingham" asked her to write a similar tale on the subject of wages. She wrote The Turn Out, which was equally successful, and led to her writing "a good many tracts" for Houlston. But at this time, she says in her Autobiography,<sup>1</sup> she "had not the remotest idea" that she was "meditating writing on Political Economy, the very name of which" conveyed no meaning to her.<sup>2</sup> But in the autumn of 1827 she read Mrs. Marcet's Conversations on Political Economy,<sup>a</sup> and realised that she had been "teaching it unawares." In reading Mrs. Marcet's book, and then in reading Adam Smith "and all the other Economists," she found that "groups of personages rose up from the pages and a procession of action glided through its arguments."<sup>3</sup> By 1831, having completed other projects and suffered from a period of ill-health, she had planned the form of the Illustrations, and began to approach publishers with her

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Martineau's Autobiography with Memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 3 vols. (1877); afterwards referred to in the text as Autobiography, with volume and page numbers.

<sup>2</sup> I, p.135.

<sup>3</sup> Autobiography, I, pp.138-139.

(a) See below p.3<sup>4</sup>

project. In 1832 she published an article "On the Duty of Studying Political Economy" in the Monthly Repository, possibly, as R. K. Webb remarks, paving the way for her series.<sup>1</sup> She had great confidence that there was a market waiting for her Illustrations. She wrote in her Autobiography that she was "resolved that, in the first place, the thing should be done. The people wanted the book; and they should have it."<sup>2</sup> Yet her conviction that it was "craved by the popular mind" was not shared by any publisher. The various publishers whom she approached, and even the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge turned it down, because they thought that the public interest was so engaged with the Reform Bill and the cholera epidemic which was sweeping the country that no-one would wish to buy it.<sup>3</sup> One firm, Baldwin and Craddock, seriously considered publishing the series, but "wanted to suppress the words Political Economy altogether." They suggested the alternative title of "Live and let live" which Harriet Martineau instantly rejected, because she "knew that science could not be smuggled in anonymously." After Charles Fox had undertaken, on very cautious terms, to publish the series, James Mill advised him that "it could not possibly succeed" as it was. Fox then asked Miss Martineau to issue it straightforwardly "in a didactic form."<sup>4</sup> There was a general, and probably healthy, unease at the method of exhibiting the principles of political economy "in their

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<sup>1</sup> N.s., vi (Jan. 1832) pp.24-34. R. K. Webb summarises the content of this in his Harriet Martineau, A Radical Victorian (1960) ch.4 p.108. I am generally indebted to Webb's study for his political and economic assessment of Harriet Martineau's work.

<sup>2</sup> ibid., I, p.161.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Dibdin the publisher, wrote in 1832 that "The wish for Reform in Parliament, like Aaron's serpent, had swallowed up every other interest and pursuit; and books were now only the shadow of what they were," (Bibliophobia, by Mercurius Rusticus, p.6).

<sup>4</sup> Autobiography, I, pp.162-169.

natural workings in selected passages of social life."

There is no doubt that her motives were wholly admirable. She wrote of how her confidence was shaken by Mill's comment and Fox's request. As she began to believe that the series would never be published, she "thought of the multitudes who needed it, - and especially of the poor, - to assist them in managing their own welfare."<sup>1</sup> While it is impossible to say how effectively the Illustrations achieved this aim, it seems much more likely that they reached a far wider section of the middle and upper classes than of the lower classes. Although she mentions that she had letters from operatives, the evidence in her Autobiography points to the conclusion that they made their greatest impact on the middle class, to whom they were really directed. R. K. Webb points out that many of the Illustrations are "certainly aimed at higher game than working men," that "eighteenpence monthly for two years was a heavy outlay to expect from a working-man," and that "manufacturers undoubtedly distributed them, particularly A Manchester Strike." He concludes that "their circulation was almost entirely middle-class."<sup>2</sup>

A Manchester Strike is the earliest work of fiction to deal exclusively with the problems of the relationships between masters and men in the cotton industry. Yet the fiction of the tale does little more than gild the pill of economic doctrine which Harriet Martineau prescribes for society. Didactic fiction such as this is objectionable to all but the uneducated reader, looking for his information predigested. A Manchester Strike has no literary value, but it is of interest to the student of the novel of factory life for other reasons. It provides a blueprint of the typical strike, and in this indirectly leads us to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., I, p.171.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. (p. 14 n.1 ), ch.4, pp.123-124.

conclude that for awhile at least, the novelist had a real contribution to make to the troubled situation of the cotton industry, for the point is not so much that Harriet Martineau was especially perceptive, or prophetic, but that strikes were predictable, and followed a pattern. Thus twenty-three years after the writing of A Manchester Strike, Mrs. Gaskell was writing North and South, centred on a strike which follows an identical pattern. Harriet Martineau's work was widely read; the points she makes are on the whole sound - but nobody saw fit to practice what she preached.

The usefulness and interest of A Manchester Strike is not limited to providing a clear pattern of a strike, with which later writers tend to assume their readers will be familiar. It attempts to set the problem of the relationship between capital and labour in human terms. In the confusion of industrial strife, it is the novelist who can see that worker and employer are often driven by the same needs. Seeing this and showing it, he can help both sides to understand themselves. Harriet Martineau's aim was to put what master and man saw as a problem of conflicting interests, confused by personality and greed for money, into an economic perspective, to illuminate the situation by showing it in the light of the "natural" laws of political economy. This is effectively the obverse of what every other novelist tried to do. Yet curiously enough the effect of the tale is to excite sympathy for the intelligent working man, struggling to discover what his rights are, and to obtain them by fair means. Although it is a mere sketch, it is a fairly comprehensive one, with a sound grasp of the complexities of factory life.

A study of A Manchester Strike, thus, shows why employers would be keen to pass it on to their men, not because of any heavy prejudice

which it might contain against unions or even strikes, but because of the commonsense attitude it has towards both highly-emotive subjects. Because of the form it takes, the story comments on itself for the most part, so I shall first confine myself to an account of its development. Its value to this study lies largely in how it lays out very clearly the whole workings of a strike, and its relevance lies in the fact that the relative positions of masters and men, and the description of how a strike ought to be conducted, as Miss Martineau describes it, is very much the way the problem was ultimately reduced to manageable proportions.

Allen, the hero of the story, is a hand in a cotton factory in Manchester, "one of the most respectable looking among them, decent in his dress, and intelligent though somewhat melancholy in countenance" (1, p.2). He has a wife and an eight-year-old daughter, Martha, who also works in the factory. The story begins with father and daughter walking home from work at the end of the week, downcast at having their wages lowered. When Allen is sent to a public house to bring home the drunken husband of a neighbour, he is collared and led into a discussion with his fellow workers about what they are to do about the reduction of wages.

One of his fellow workers, Clack, a potential demagogue of the Slackbridge school, proposes a strike of the workers at the factory of Mortimer and Rowe, their employers, to "frighten" them and "make them more reasonable" (1, p.10). Allen suggests that this would only lead to a combination of the masters, and a lockout. Clack retorts that this would provide an opportunity for the workmen to measure their strength against their masters'. When Allen replies with a reminder that their interests are identical, Clack points out that Mortimer and Rowe, by lowering wages, have shown that they do not think so. Allen's

response to this is eminently sensible advice which unfortunately, as we shall see in the course of this study, could not be put into practice until sad experience had proved its worth. He says that to strike with the object of ruining individual employers

is to acknowledge at the outset that the object of our union is a bad one: it will fill the minds of the operatives with foul passions and provoke a war between masters and men which will end with the destruction of both. Whenever we do strike, let it be in defence of our own rights, and not out of enmity to individuals among our employers (1, p.12).

In her acceptance at the outset, of the formation of unions and the occasional necessity of strikes, Miss Martineau shows an admirable fairness, objectivity, and far-sightedness which are noticeably lacking in other writers on the subject.

The Committee of the Union agree that they will strike for an equalisation of wages, since the firm of Mortimer and Rowe pay the lowest wages in town, provided that the workmen are found to favour the action. There follows an interesting description of how the union organises itself for a strike. In this again, Harriet Martineau shows an admirable lack of the hysteria commonly found in other writers on the subject of union activity. She is completely practical, and much more convincing as she writes of twenty-five members of the union spending Sunday "in obtaining the names of as many as were willing to turn out, or to subscribe for the assistance of those who should turn out" (2, p.17), than Mrs. Gaskell, with her melodramatic descriptions of hands beckoning John Barton from his door.<sup>1</sup> The union has decided that if most of their members are in favour of action, they will address a petition to the

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<sup>1</sup> "Strange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes, peered into the inner darkness, and seemed desirous to ascertain if her father were at home. Or a hand and arm (the body hidden) was put within the door, and beckoned him away" (Mary Barton, ch.10). The edition used for all references to Mary Barton is Stephen Gill's (Penguin, 1970).

masters for a public meeting to agree on the equalisation of wages.

When the twenty-five return on the Sunday night, it is found that "the list of names with signatures or marks annexed, amounted to several thousands" (3, p.23). This delights Clack, who has appointed himself organiser of the strike. True to the character of the demagogue, he immediately wishes to proclaim "war against the masters at once," and brags of "the many thousands of pounds that would pour in from Leeds, Coventry, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other places" (3, p.23). The moderate party prevails despite his enthusiasm, and the committee draws up the petition which three men are to take round the masters the next day. Rowe, of Mortimer and Rowe, is the first master to be approached. He agrees to the public meeting but disappears when asked to sign the petition, and sends the senior partner to the men. Mortimer "begged the deputies would make their way off his premises," bluntly adding that "the masters had been too tolerant already of the complaints of the men; and that it was time the lower orders were taught their proper place" (3, pp.28-29).

They go next to the house of a manufacturer called Elliot, who gives the highest wages in the district. They find him ready to go out riding. When Clack takes hold of the reins of Elliot's horse to detain him, and to get his attention, saying "By your leave, sir," Elliot cuts him across the knuckles with his riding whip and demands "How dare you handle my rein with your greasy fingers?" His reaction to the petition is as high-handed as Mortimer's, but much more insolent:

Elliot glanced his eye over it as well as the restlessness of his horse would permit, and then struck it contemptuously with his riding-whip into the mud, swore that that was the proper place for such a piece of insolence, rode up against the men, and pranced down the street without bestowing another look or word upon them (3, p.29).

Clack's reaction is equally violent; he is tempted to "cram the soiled

petition down the gentleman's throat" using "his greasy fingers." The selfish violence of both of these men clearly comes from within their own characters, and not from any real desire to protect the rights of manufacturers or workmen. Although as men they never come alive in this story, as a portrayal of a type of master and a type of man they are an important contribution to the fiction of factory life. As the story goes on we shall see how successfully Miss Martineau portrays in the character and motives of a born demagogue like Clack, a representative of the most destructive element in the working-class movement, and in Elliot, the type of master whose negativity men like Clack exploited as an example of the indifference of masters in general.

Just as Elliot is made to represent the worse type of master, Mr. Wentworth, who pays a wage somewhere between those of Elliot and Mortimer and Rowe, is brought in to represent the best of the masters. Wentworth, who "had been rich as a young man, had failed through unavoidable misfortunes, and had worked his way up again to a competence, after having paid every shilling he owed" (3, p.31),<sup>1</sup> receives the deputation with a good-humoured welcome. He ignores the challenge in Clack's remarks about the masters, which are worth quoting for the ironic way in which they show that the imagination of the section of the working class which detested the masters worked in exactly the same way as that of the middle-classes when they thought of the detested trade unionists. In their tone, and extremity, these remarks can easily find their parallel in the work of Mrs. Stone and Charlotte Elizabeth:

They openly treat us like slaves as long as they can, and when we will bear it no longer, they plot in secret against us. They steal to one another's houses when they think we

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the career of Thornton in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South (1855), described in ch. 8 below.

are asleep; they bolt their doors and fill their glasses to their own prosperity, and every bumper that goes down their throats is paid for with the poor man's crust (3, p.33).

Wentworth proves the absurdity of this statement by pointing out that the workmen intend to strike for an equalisation of wages - an action which certainly would not be necessary if the masters had combined to determine what wages they would pay.

In the long discussion which follows Wentworth explains the theory of the wages fund, complicating the explanation a great deal by needlessly comparing the situation with how Adam probably organised labour after he was turned out of paradise. The main theme of his advice to the men, and a theme which runs through this and most of the other Illustrations is, as it is given in the "Summary of Principles" at the end of the volume, that the condition of the working classes may be best improved "BY ADJUSTING THE PROPORTION OF POPULATION TO CAPITAL" (p.126).<sup>1</sup> This, it seems to me, is where the political economists show themselves to have their heads in the clouds. It is all very well for Wentworth (and Harriet Martineau) to say to the workmen:

If you choose to bring a thousand labourers to live upon the capital which was once divided among a hundred, it is your fault and not mine that you are badly off (3, p.39),

but how, without very complex organisation, were they to regulate the numbers of men in any trade? And how, in their state of ignorance, were they to learn effective methods of birth control? In answer to the first question, when men tried to combine for anything other than a strike for higher wages they met with every kind of opposition from the other classes, jealous of their own power. On an even simpler

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens satirises this doctrine of the political economists in the person of Mr. Filer in The Chimes (1844), who declares with exasperation that the political economists just cannot persuade the poor that "they have no right or business to be married," and "no earthly right or business to be born" (1st Quarter).

level, [redacted] the science of statistics, which alone could have provided the basic tools for regulating the supply of labour in accordance with the demand for it, was nowhere near sophisticated enough to cope with this problem. Nor it is a very convincing argument from a manufacturer, who knows the limits of his own capital, and is much more familiar with the fluctuations of trade, that he will hire as many men as he can, even if it means that wages will be at subsistence level. In hiring so many men, he is as irresponsible - more so - than the workmen who come seeking work. The political economists would have done better to admit that the situation was beyond anyone's control, and look elsewhere for a solution. But lateral thinking was not the strong point of the machine-age.

The same kind of attitude was applied to the question of birth-control, only here the absurdity is even more plain. Harriet Martineau was a strict Malthusian in this. In her Illustration of the economists' view of the population problem in Weal and Woe in Garveloch the method of birth-control advocated is the Malthusian one of "moral restraint." As well as the practical absurdity, there is a logical absurdity here: it was useless to expect that the improvident labourers, who probably did not want the children they had, who learned in their struggle to live day by day how much it cost to keep a child, were suddenly, at the magic words "moral restraint," going to become chaste. If the Malthusians had preached "the population check" and also offered to provide information about contraception, they would have made some sense, but the moral, religious opinion of the age was as immeasurably shocked at the idea as Malthus himself.<sup>f</sup> Yet it must be said that there was

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<sup>f</sup> For an account of the controversy over birth-control, and the efforts of Francis Place, Richard Carlile, and J. S. Mill to educate the working-classes in the practice of it against extremely hostile public opinion, see Peter Fryer, The Birth-Controllers (1965) ch.5.

something not altogether foolish in this: if by writing in this way Harriet Martineau could indoctrinate the working class and make them see that there could be no advantage in having a large family, she would certainly be doing something for their good, even though it would never come about that, as Wentworth maintains, "by foresight and care, labour may be proportioned to capital as accurately as my machinery to the power of my steam-engine" (3, pp.38-39).

When the time for the meeting comes, the people form a kind of procession to march to the appointed place. Led by musicians, and with the children carrying green boughs, the whole thing has an air of carnival. Since the Committee think that such a procession will only make the masters believe that they intend to intimidate them by it, none of them joins in, except Clack. Of those who took part in the procession, Miss Martineau writes: "Many had no clear idea of what was doing or going to be done: some had no idea at all" (4, p.41), showing the element with which Clack identified as leader. But when the Committee meets they choose Allen to take the chair. He is reluctant to do so, knowing that a man who is so prominent in a strike is unlikely to get his job back, or any job in the industry, when it is over.<sup>1</sup> It is represented to him as a duty, and he accepts, as Clack watched "with a feeling of jealousy" (4, p.45).

He opens the meeting with general remarks on the nature of combinations, some of which deserve quoting as a rare and perhaps uniquely clear, and openly sympathetic statement of the principle and necessity

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<sup>1</sup> The same situation confronts Higgins in North and South, when the strike is over. Mrs. Gaskell shows the way out of it by having Thornton employ him, partly from sympathy and partly from curiosity. In doing so, and in showing the subsequent relationship to be a success, she may be said to endorse trade unions, but with more or less the same qualifications as Harriet Martineau.

of combinations in such fiction. Allen describes the people who form combinations as:

such as have their brows knit with care; such as meet because the lives and health of their families, their personal respectability, and the bare honesty of not stealing a loaf from another man's counter, are the tremendous stake which they feel to be put to hazard (4, pp.48-49).

He defends the formation of combinations with the argument that "it is necessary for labourers to husband their strength by union, if it is ever to be balanced against the influence and wealth of capitalists" (4, p.49). Perhaps the most important comment he has to make is his account of the reason for the present strike, and the tone in which he wishes it to be conducted:

The best of the masters say, and probably with truth, that their interests demand the reductions under which we groan. Be it so: we have interests too, and we must bring them up as an opposing force, and see which are the strongest. This may be, - allow me to say, must be - done without ill-will in any party towards any other party (4, p.50).

Miss Martineau must be given credit here for the absolute fairness with which she represents the workmen's case, and further credit for having Allen raise the question "whether a social being has not a right to comfortable subsistence in return for his full and efficient labour" (4, p.51). The question is left to be answered later, and, with an admonition that the men must fulfill their contracts before striking, Allen closes the meeting.

At the meeting with the masters the Committee asks if all the masters will raise their wages to the level of those given by Elliot. The masters refuse, then one of them suggests that they should meet half-way and all pay the same wages as Wentworth. Both sides reject this, and the meeting breaks up. Later, the operatives agree that all men employed at a rate of wages lower than Elliot's shall turn out the

next morning, leaving only the children to work. In the course of the meeting between masters and men, Miss Martineau finds an opportunity to insert a lecture on the difference between real and nominal wages, along with more hints on the responsibility of the men themselves for the flood of the labour market. Wentworth, the spokesman for the political economists, gives this lecture, and warns the Committee that

A strike works the wrong way for your interest. It does not decrease your numbers, and it does decrease the capital which is to maintain you (5, p.60).

Although the experience of this and later strikes, both in fact and fiction, demonstrate the truth of his remark, it cannot be said to offer any comfort to men working hard all day and not earning enough to live on, which is the point made by Mrs. Gaskell in her plea for sympathy with these men, in Mary Barton.<sup>1</sup>

The next two chapters describe the action of masters and men once it is generally known that the strike is on. Allen barely escapes being thrown in the river by pickets, as he goes to the factory to collect his daughter from the night-shift. Despite all the good sense that has been talked to them about overstocking the labour market, some of the young men plan to take advantage of the holiday which the strike gives them by getting married. The union despatches delegates all over the country to collect funds to finance the strike, and it is agreed that, so long as the children remain at work, each married couple shall receive five shillings a week. Weekly meetings of the strikers are arranged, and it is further agreed that they should pay something to "have the proceedings of the body made public through the newspapers" (7, p.73), which shows that they were conscious of the

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<sup>1</sup> But Harriet Martineau was aware of this, as she showed in her History of the Thirty Years' Peace (1850), see below, p.37.

national significance of their action. In the process of deciding all this, there is a lot of squabbling. Allen is vexed "to the heart to hear the evil motives assigned for every proposition which did not please the people" and reflects that

it must be a very different thing to sit in a committee of gentlemen where opinions are treated as opinions, (i.e., as having no moral qualities, and to be accepted or rejected according to their expediency,) and in a committee of persons who expose their deficiencies of education by calling all unkind or foolish who differ from themselves (7, pp.73-74).

Where Allen himself got the education to make him capable of this detachment, we are not told, but it is worth noting at this point that Harriet Martineau was ahead of most of the influential people of her time in showing that education for the working-classes, while it would not teach them the "folly" of their trade union activities, would certainly give them the detachment to be able to negotiate more effectively. The practical knowledge of when a strike would be most likely to succeed, and the sense to know then to stop striking, to prevent the ruin of both sides, was, as history shows, not easily acquired by the working classes.

The masters' first step is to publish a placard, threatening "to turn off every man in their employ who should continue, after a certain day, to belong to the Union" (7, p.72). The rumour is spread that they intend to bring in labour from Glasgow, Belfast, and elsewhere, to keep the mills going. The Committee is told on good authority, though not by one of the masters, that if they get Clack out of the way, the masters will be much more ready to negotiate. They are advised that the masters think Clack

a vulgar speechifier that knows nothing about the matter in dispute, and is only fit to delude the more ignorant among the spinners and to libel the masters. Send him back into the crowd where his proper place is, and then you will see what the masters have to say to the Committee (7, p.83).

Clack's reaction to this is violent. He rages and vows revenge "in

such a style that it was plainly right to dismiss him," since his prejudice makes him unfit to be entrusted with any power against the masters. He is asked to resign, but prefers to make a public appeal to the members of the union to be kept on the Committee. The decision against Clack is immediately followed by a decision to reward the reluctant Allen for his services, "according to what seemed the general rule, to admire one man in proportion to the contempt with which another was treated" (7, p.84). Although he refuses a reward this time, Allen is later made to take a new suit of clothes, to make a decent appearance as the men's representative. Throughout the story the difficulty of achieving any constructive action while the workmen are constantly swayed one way and another according to how their emotions are influenced, is stressed. And just as Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell were to do later in much more depth, Miss Martineau demonstrates how closely this is connected with a lack of education. The uneducated workman saw a strike for higher wages chiefly as a humanitarian issue, whereas the employer left this out of account and saw it as an economic one. But, as I hope to show in the following chapters, it was a long time before this distinction was generally admitted or appreciated, and the workers could be found claiming that they were starved to death when they were fairly prosperous, or the masters could be found disclaiming any responsibility for effects of fluctuations of trade when the workers were slowly starving. Early in the history of the factory system, each side took up a stance which, while it was naturally difficult for them to abandon, certainly hindered any development of communication between the two sides and caused both a great deal of unnecessary trouble.

As the first flush of enthusiasm for the strike wears off, the Committee begin to encounter difficulties on every side. Funds are

not adequate to meet the needs of the distressed operatives, and, to keep up the morale of the strikers, "it was frequently necessary to borrow money . . . on the security of what was to come in during the next week" (8, p.85). To add to this, the perfect integrity which Allen had tried to preserve for the body of the strikers is marred by an accident presumably involving Clack. Clack's fiancée is arrested and imprisoned for breach of contract, as an example to the others, and, it is thought, as an act of hostility to Clack. Immediately after this a carrier who is taking work into the country for Mortimer and Rowe is attacked, beaten, and has his cart ransacked by union men. Although it is generally known that Clack led these men, no-one openly accuses him, because all know that Allen would immediately hand him over to the police.

Shortly after this, the case for the dismissal of Clack comes up before the general meeting of the strikers. Allen addresses the men first, speaking in very moderate terms about Clack's not having the confidence of the masters, and therefore being likely to "prove an obstacle in the way of an amicable agreement" (9, p.93). He speaks vaguely of Clack's having injured their cause, and makes it clear that there should be no shame for Clack in having to step down because his usefulness as an individual "was not in proportion to his zeal in the cause he had espoused" (9, p.93). The men agree with Allen, and Mr. Wentworth rises to say that his presence at the meeting is no indication that the masters would make terms after Clack's dismissal. The great majority then vote for the dismissal of Clack. After the chagrined Clack goes off with his followers "to fish for popularity in the streets of Manchester" (9, p.94), his fiancée's case is put to the assembly. There is general agreement that she ought to have completed her contract, that the strikers would have helped her to do so, and

and that it was not "lawful revenge" to "waylay the carrier and strip his cart" (9, p.95).

With this settled, Allen tries to determine what concessions, if any, the men are prepared to make to the masters. He accepts their cry that equalisation of wages is necessary, but asks them if they will take equal wages below the highest at present given. There is no unanimous response to this, and Wentworth interrupts Allen to explain to the men the deleterious effect of the strike on the capital of the employers, and their prospects of gaining new contracts. Everyone, he says, has been "consuming idly" and thus there has been much waste. This in turn, as far as the masters are concerned, has changed the grounds of the dispute. The question now is

whether fewer of you than before shall be employed at the same wages, or fewer still at higher wages, or as many as before at lower wages than you have yet received (9, p.96).

He states it as a fact that the strikers' capital will run out before the masters', but that if they wait until that time to settle the strike, they will have immeasurably injured their own prospects. He returns to the point which he made before, about the workmen being responsible for the supply of labour, which he illustrates by comparing the wage-rates in different parts of the country and relating them to the number of men employed. The situation in which a strike is most likely to succeed, he says, is one in which there is the exact number of labourers as is required, so that the power of the men is equal to that of the masters, "and the contest fair."

Someone makes the comment that it is "poor comfort to tell the people that wages could not be any higher on account of their numbers, since it was not in their power to lessen their numbers" (9, p.102). He is given the advice which, if not encouraging, is at least sound:

All that you can now do, is to live as you best may upon such wages as the masters can give, keeping up your sense of respectability and your ambition to improve your state when better times shall come. You must watch every opportunity of making some little provision against the fluctuations of our trade, contributing your money rather for your mutual relief in hard times, than for the support of strikes. You must place your children out to different occupations . . . and above all, you must discourage in them the imprudent, early marriages to which are mainly owing the distresses which afflict yourselves (9, pp.102-103).

Where this advice failed to work was in the kind of unforeseen deep depression of trade which Mrs. Gaskell describes in Mary Barton, as happening in the early forties, where those who had saved against such a time were sooner or later reduced to hopeless poverty. If wages were already at subsistence level, it was next to impossible for a man to save enough to cope with a long period of unemployment, and this was one of the points in favour of striking when wages were low and there was no obvious depression in trade. No mention is made, either, in the complaints about the workmen overstocking the labour market, of the great recruiting drives which many manufacturers made when trade was prosperous, luring hundreds of men away from jobs in the country. Charlotte Elizabeth shows in Helen Fleetwood how the manufacturers were not entirely blameless for the creation of this problem.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. J. Poulett Scrope, reviewing the Illustrations in the Quarterly 19 (April, 1833), complains that:

this story has its moral marred entirely by the constant reference of the distress that arises from a temporary and local redundancy of hands, to the sinfulness of those weavers who marry without having previously ascertained that there cannot for a generation occur a stagnation of business in the cotton-trade! What? - when masters occasionally advertise throughout the kingdom for 'several thousand fresh hands wanted' at Macclesfield or Manchester - when hordes of Irish are pouring in daily to supply the demands for labour in our great manufacturing districts - are the natives of those very districts to be told that it is their fault if labour is ever in excess? p.145.

Wentworth's speech leaves the men thoughtful. They make no immediate decision about accepting a compromise, but agree to meet the next day. In the meantime, they insist that Allen accept a suit of clothes from the union, as recognition of his unpaid services, and so that he might make a respectable appearance as their representative. So easily swayed are the workmen, however, that by the next morning Allen finds all his popularity gone, from the action of a group of men who were angry at his apparent acceptance of Wentworth's views. As soon as he realises this, he sends home for his working clothes and hands back the suit. This does not change the men's opinion, and every proposition put to them by the Committee is rejected out of hand. The meeting breaks up with nothing decided. Clack and his friends are delighted at this turn of events, but wiser people are filled "with grief and apprehension of the consequences" (10, p.110). The first consequence is that the children are turned off, the masters being disappointed at the failure to negotiate and anxious to bring the strike to an end as soon as possible.

After a description of the effect of the dismissal on the children, now free to play, but not knowing how, Miss Martineau turns to the serious effects of the continuing strike. She describes the bad effects of their financial hardships on the relationships between husbands and wives, with the husbands spending more and more time in the dram-shops, ill-treating mother and children. The pawnshops are full, and the pawnbrokers refuse to take any more. All this is described sympathetically. Yet, unlike Mrs. Gaskell in Mary Barton, who concentrates on these hardships and their effects on the workmen, Miss Martineau is content to give them a very brief outline. In this she is typical of the early writers on the subject of factory labourers, who, in their concern

to explain or defend or rail against the system, reveal a total lack of interest in the personalities of the people concerned with it. They invariably produce stereotypes of some kind, and, in doing so, to a very great extent defeat the whole purpose of embodying social problems in fiction. If the reader has no interest in the characters he is unlikely to be impressed by the message which they have been created to put across. But Harriet Martineau is probably the most successful writer within these limitations, because her story is short, clear, obviously without any personal hostility to either side, and shows an understanding of the problems which can be accepted with confidence. She faces facts, and hides very little.

She therefore brings out one aspect of the behaviour of men in the hard times of the prolonged struggle with the masters which Mrs. Gaskell, although she had personal experience of it,<sup>1</sup> ignored in both her novels of factory strikes. Miss Martineau describes the problems which the union Committee had to cope with:

These were the days for close scrutiny to be made by the Union Committee whether men's wives were really lying-in, and whether each really had the number of children he swore to; and therefore, these were the times when knaves tried to cheat and when honest men were wounded at having their word questioned (10, p.113).

The deterioration is not confined to the weakest families; Allen's wife goes without his knowledge and asks the Union for the suit which he had returned and pawns it, while he himself persuades his daughter to sell her pet bullfinch, the only comfort and amusement she has, since her crippled knees prevent her from going out and playing in the holiday with the other children. It is obvious that they are fighting a losing battle, but such is their ignorance and obstinacy that the

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<sup>1</sup> See below, ch. 4, pp. 157-8.

operatives have to be reduced to these desperate straits before they will consider negotiation.

Their last hope is that the delegates who have been sent to other towns to raise funds will bring back enough to keep them going, both in money and sympathy. The reports of the delegates are conflicting: "there were exhortations from some places to hold out to the very last shilling; and from others to retreat, while retreat could be managed with honour" (11, p.119). Allen proposes that they should act on the advice of the London delegates. The London advisers send word that they

believed their strike to be in a hopeless condition, and advised making the best terms they could with their masters, without any further waste of time and capital . . . for a general and permanent rise of wages, no strike could ultimately prevail, where there was a permanent proportion of unemployed labour in the market (11, pp.120-121).

The strike must now be brought to an end. The masters meet and decide to give the wages already given by Wentworth, but of course, because of the orders they have lost while their factories were not operating, they can only employ two-thirds of their former labour force.<sup>1</sup>

Allen has to suffer the most serious consequences of the strike. Because he led it, his former employers will not take him on again, and an application to Mr. Wentworth only brings a refusal, on the grounds that he cannot make a special case of Allen, when he is turning many of his own former employees away. Allen learns what he suspected all along, that he will never be able to get a job in the cotton industry again. In this way Harriet Martineau persuades potential union-organisers to refrain from leading strikes. Allen ends up as a road-sweeper, after

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<sup>1</sup> For verification of the details of this cf. Rhodes Boyson: The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise: The Rise and Fall of a Family Firm 1818-1880 (1970) ch.8, "The 1830 Mill Strike and the Subsequent Ashworth Attitude to Trade Unions."

suffering the further humiliation of having his conduct of the financial affairs of the Committee queried, being criticised for paying the press to publish the events of the strike, and finding out in front of the whole union meeting that his wife had taken and pawned the suit.

Honesty does not pay. The end of Clack's story is far different from Allen's. After Allen has explained all his conduct of the strike to the meeting, Clack comes forward, and

supported by a powerful party of friends near the waggon, succeeded in obtaining the public ear. With more success than delicacy, he enlarges upon his public services, pleaded his betrothment to one who was now suffering under the persecution of the masters, as a title to their support, as well as the certainty that he should not again be employed by any firm in Manchester . . . and . . . declared his willingness to travel into every county in England, Scotland and Ireland, in behalf of the Union. He boasted of his connexions in all places, and pointed out the wisdom there would be in employing him as a missionary of the Union, in preparation for any future struggle (12, p.130).

He has gone too far with his last proposal, made to men who are heartily sick of the thought of striking, but gains the point that, when they can afford it, they will appoint him as a "missionary." And so a demagogue is born. We might almost say that Clack reappears as Slackbridge twenty-three years later, in Hard Times. Similarities like this make A Manchester Strike worth examination. The characters of Clack and Allen found their parallels in real life in the Preston strike of 1853-54,<sup>1</sup> and it is this strike which engaged the attention of Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell when they came to write their novels of factory life in the mid-fifties.

Virtually all the practical advice given in A Manchester Strike is sound, and eventually had to be adopted, as the history of the labour movement shows. But even when she was writing the story, experience had

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. 6 , p.236 below.

more than once offered the men the same lesson. The most recent example was a strike of the Lancashire spinners to secure a minimum national wage, which failed in circumstances similar to these described in Miss Martineau's story. Indeed, John Doherty, leader of the union of the Grand General Union of Operative Spinners, which organised this strike,<sup>1</sup> commented in the Poor Man's Advocate that "Every incident of the tale is drawn from real life, the characters are accurate and striking, and the whole plot of the story, or rather history of the 'strike' is natural and easy." He also wrote, as R. K. Webb records, that "all the incidents of the general strike are most accurately drawn . . . and anyone familiar with the great turnout of 1829 could place several of the characters." The point surely is, that if their own bitter experience could not teach the unions the useless destructiveness of such strikes, then Harriet Martineau's story would not.

This confirms that the tale must have reached a public almost wholly middle-class. The Manchester operatives who sent her "the bundles of documents" which she said "qualified" her to write the tale must have known it too, as this passage in her Autobiography proves:

In spite of all I could say the men of Manchester persisted that my hero was their hero, whose name however I had never heard. It gratified me to find that my doctrine was well received, and I may say, cordially agreed in, even at that time, by the leaders of the genuine Manchester operatives; and they, for their part, were gratified by their great topics of interest being discussed by one whom they supposed to "have spent all her life in a cotton-mill", as one of their favourite Members of Parliament told me they did (I, p.216).

It looks as if the operatives were taking the opportunity of having their position explained to other classes by a member of the middle class. It gives an ironic twist to the aims of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which tried very hard to buy the Illustrations

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<sup>1</sup> Doherty was to Mrs. Stone the epitome of the rabble-rouser, see below ch. 3, p. 102.

to sell cheaply to the working classes. Yet there is very little wrong with teaching other classes that the workers had a case, which is one of the things A Manchester Strike does. There is no doubt that Harriet Martineau had considerable sympathy for the working classes. Much later, in 1850, she wrote

The tremendous Labour Question remains absolutely untouched - the question whether the toil of a life is not to provide a sufficiency of bread. No thoughtful man can for a moment suppose that any considerable class of a nation will submit forever to toil incessantly for bare necessaries - without comfort, ease, or luxury, now - without prospect for their children, and without a hope for their own old age. A social idea or system which compels such a state of things as this must be, in so far, worn out.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, as we shall see when we come to look at her controversy with Dickens over the fencing of dangerous machinery, she was capable of weighing the lives of these people in the balance against the cost of protecting them from the danger of death or mutilation. This is the kind of absurdity which makes a farce of the apparent "naturalness" of the laws of economy as she expounds them. John Stuart Mill perceived this as early as 1833, when he wrote to Carlyle that "she reduced the laissez-faire system to absurdity as far as the principle goes, by merely carrying it out to all its consequences,"<sup>2</sup> and Carlyle remarked after reading the Illustrations that Harriet Martineau was "the most intelligible of women; also the most measurable."<sup>3</sup> When the situation was one of blind self-interest operating on both sides, there was a place for rationalisations such as Miss Martineau makes, but when it is one of exploitation on one side and dumb agony, helpless in its ignorance, on the other, the appeal of the novelist must be to the

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<sup>1</sup> History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace 1816-1846 (1850) II, bk.6, ch.17, p.715.

<sup>2</sup> Letters of John Stuart Mill, ed. H. S. R. Elliot (1910), i, p.46 (11 and 12 April, 1833).

<sup>3</sup> Letters of Thomas Carlyle to J. S. Mill, John Sterling and Robert Browning, ed. A Carlyle (1923) p.90.

intangible, unmeasurable qualities of his reader: to sympathy, compassion, a sense of justice. The problem then is no longer a vertical one, it calls for the kind of lateral thinking which Mrs. Gaskell or Dickens were to apply to it. But because Harriet Martineau had stated problem and solution so perfectly, in such a way as to seem to close the subject, it needed other writers, like Mrs. Trollope and Charlotte Elizabeth, to restate it in terms which, although they seem to be hysterical, may well have suited the urgency of the problems of the poor.

Additional Notes

- (a) Introduction, Mrs. Marcet's technique in the Conversations is much less sophisticated than Harriet Martineau's in the Illustrations. She wrote in the Preface that she used the form of a conversation to introduce the theories of political economy, "not that she particularly studied to introduce strict consistency of character, or uniformity of intellect, in the remarks of her pupil" (p.6), but because it gave her the chance of answering objections which might be made. She was writing another book, John Hopkin's Notions of Political Economy (1833), at the same time as Miss Martineau was writing the Illustrations. The later book was much closer to the Illustrations in form and content, but a very inferior production, not successful, aimed only at the working man. In a sketch of Mrs. Marcet (1769-1858), written in 1869, Harriet Martineau wrote, curiously enough, that she "lived to see the decline, and almost the extinction, of strikes in the cotton and woollen districts," (Biographical Sketches, 1869, ch.8).

CHAPTER II

"Riches Grow in Hell": HELEN FLEETWOOD

Mrs. Stone might well have had Charlotte Elizabeth's Helen Fleetwood in mind when she outlined the public image of Manchester in her introduction to William Langshawe, published one year later:

Cotton bags, cotton mills, spinning jennies, power-looms steam-engines; smoking chimneys, odious factories, vulgar proprietors, and their still more vulgar wives, and their superlatively-vulgar pretensions; dense populations, filthy streets, drunken men, reckless women; immoral girls, and squalid children; dirt, filth; misery, and crime; - such are the interesting images which rise, "a busy throng to crowd the brain", at the bare mention of the "manufacturing districts": vulgarity and vice walking side by side; ostentatious extravagance on the one hand, battenning on the miseries of degraded and suffering humanity on the other; and this almost without redeeming circumstances - we are told. (William Langshawe, Introduction pp. 1-2)

It is this Manchester, the "shock city," which emerges from Helen Fleetwood. Mrs. Stone's was, as we shall see, an earlier Manchester, the Manchester of the middle classes, comfortably rural, and, by the 1840's, quite obsolete. Yet even seven years after Charlotte Elizabeth's novel, Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton showed a Manchester in which green fields were still within walking distance, though the depression of spirit might effectively block them out. But Charlotte Elizabeth's Manchester is Engels' Manchester, or Carlyle's "Sooty Manchester..built on the Abysses." Her vision of the city is a narrow one to suit the polemic of her novel; and is further straitened both by her evangelical commitment to the doctrine of original sin which gives her a dismal view of humanity, and by the impossibly high standard against which she measures everything and finds it hopelessly wanting.

In Charlotte Elizabeth's eyes Manchester comes as close to Hell as anything on earth can. A claustrophobic atmosphere not unlike that of Milton's Hell haunts the story, as the members of the family on whom the plot is centred move into smaller and smaller accommodation until they

end up with two of them dying of consumption, in a single room, in a condemned house. Indeed, the story is something of a latter-day allegory, with the Green family being cast out of its Eden into the wilderness of the industrial city.

Yet Helen Fleetwood is not the creation of a subtle imagination. The cruel realities of life among the poor in Manchester, and its fantastic contrast with that of the wealthy industrialists, especially in the grim years of 1839-42, would have seemed to present a surrealistic picture to the outside observer touring the new industrial world of the north. Helen Fleetwood is an impossibly biased novel - Lord Shaftesbury himself might have written it - but because it concentrates so exclusively and uncompromisingly on the bad aspects of factory life, and because these abuses did exist, it deserves attention. Mrs. Gaskell's work, and Dickens' too in a way, focusses on what Professor Briggs calls the "newer image of the city as a cradle both of wealth and of new and formative social values." Charlotte Elizabeth's study has a particular interest for us, since it balances those of other writers of the time with which we are more familiar: it shows the city as "a cradle of wealth and of social disorder."<sup>1</sup>

Yet again it would be wrong to label Charlotte Elizabeth as simply retrogressive, and to assume that she was like Margaret Hale in North and South, merely nostalgic about an idyllic rustic life that did not exist. Despite - or it may be because of - her evangelism and other-worldliness, she seems to have had a good grasp of the nation's problems. This is shown most clearly in her book on The Perils of the Nation, written and published in 1843.<sup>2</sup> Its fervent religiosity apart, it shows

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<sup>1</sup> Both of these phrases are taken from Victorian Cities (1963) ch.3.

<sup>2</sup> The Perils of the Nation. An Appeal to the Legislative, the Clergy, and the Higher and Middle Classes (2nd edition revised; 1843).

a good deal of sound common sense. She begins by quoting a speech of Gladstone to the House of Commons, on 14 February 1843, in which he said that

It was one of the most melancholy features in the social state of the country, - that while there was a decrease in the consuming powers of the people, and an increase in the privations and distress of the labouring and operative classes; there was at the same time a constant accumulation of wealth in the upper classes, and a constant increase of capital (p. viii).

She uses this as a base from which to attack the political economists, and their theory that the accumulation of capital would necessarily improve the standard of living of all classes. She attacks the general reliance on private benevolence, because it robs any poor man who is able and willing to work of his independence and dignity. But she is even more bitter against those who would do away with charity and put nothing in its place. The Malthusians also, in the persons of Harriet Martineau and Mrs. Marcet, come in for severe criticism, particularly for Harriet Martineau's two tales A Manchester Strike and Cousin Marshall in her Illustrations and for Mrs. Marcet's John Hopkins. Charlotte Elizabeth writes that she "would not encourage English ladies to step forward and write little fictions for the guidance of the simple," complaining that their "instruction" of the poor is pernicious in its substitution of "infidel cant," "brutalizing selfishness" and "savage reproaches" for the healthy attitude of the poor characterised in their proverb, "where God sends mouths he will send meat." And she saw what Dickens was to imply in Hard Times, that

the most horrifying abominations of Socialism are avowedly reared on the foundation laid down in these little books, which prepared the gross mind of the most ignorant classes for any practical application of the system that Satan might suggest.

Where Dickens asserted that any system must leave a place for the human heart, and that one founded on the subhuman logic of political economists

must be flawed, Charlotte Elizabeth saw in her own way that the works of Harriet Martineau and Mrs. Marcet were a substitution of "man's shallow reasonings" for "the infinite wisdom of God," and so paving the way for the "hideous enormities of Socialism and trade unionism."<sup>1</sup> Her reasoning is not far from Dickens's, however far apart they may be in their artistry.

Yet in spite of their radical differences in opinion, Charlotte Elizabeth and Harriet Martineau are alike in their strength of conviction or mere dogmatism. Like Harriet Martineau, Charlotte Elizabeth would not put pen to paper unless it was to advance these convictions or dogmas. She began writing to make some contribution to the Dublin Tract Society while she was living in Ireland: she was too poor to give money, so she wrote a tract instead. In her own words: "When I first began to write, it was with a simple desire to instruct the poor in the blessed truths of the gospel."<sup>2</sup> Her beginnings as a writer were not unlike Harriet Martineau's. Like the latter, the death of her father left her and her mother with only a pittance to live on, and like Harriet Martineau the first way which occurred to her to earn her living was by writing. But she despised novel-writing. She describes this period in her life:

I resolved to become a novel-writer, for which I was just qualified, both by nature and habits of thinking, and in which I should probably have succeeded very well, but it pleased God to save me from this snare.<sup>3</sup>

Some time later, when she was making a name for herself as a writer on religious themes, her estranged husband, Captain Phelan, claimed the royalties from her work,<sup>4</sup> and she was again badly in need of

<sup>1</sup> All the quotations in this passage are from ch. 10, pp. 155-157.

<sup>2</sup> Personal Recollections (1841) Letter 11, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* Letter 3, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> She wrote under the pseudonym "Charlotte Elizabeth" to avoid having to pay the royalties to her husband.

money. At this time she records:

A friend, who did not look upon the main subject in the light that I did, made, through my brother, a proposal that I should become a contributor to the most popular magazine of the day, supplying tales, &c., the purport of which was to be as moral as I pleased, but with no direct mention of religion. The terms offered were very high: the strict incognito to be preserved would secure me from any charge of inconsistency.<sup>1</sup>

Yet she refused, because she was afraid, as a Christian, "to give the reins to an imagination ever prone to wander after folly and romance."

Writing for no other purpose than to make money would be "to engage in the service of that world the service of which is enmity with God."<sup>2</sup>

At about the same time a wealthy friend offered her £100 to ghost a novel, which he had written but could not find a publisher to accept. Although she had read and enjoyed the novel a long time before, and the task tempted her almost as much as the money, she refused this too. As a Christian, she could not encourage "the evils of novel-reading" in others.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Helen Fleetwood was published in the same year as these Personal Recollections, from which we might gather that even such positive religious convictions, and their apparently absolute prohibition of imaginative writing might be waived in the good cause of the factory poor. But the writing of this novel could not have demanded any great concessions from these convictions, because it is, ultimately, half an evangelical tract for adults and half a straight account of the abuses of the factory system. One passage in the novel explains why she turned her hand to fiction of this kind. A member of a committee formed to put the facts of the abuses of the system before Parliament, explains:

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* Letter 11, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* Letter 11, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* Letter 11, pp. 226-227.

You see, the facts are brought before Parliament, by having witnesses up to be examined on oath before the committee; these reports, as they are called, are printed, and sold too: but . . . I don't think one lady in a thousand ever looks into them, to say nothing of other classes: and if they are not read, how can the statements be known? What we chiefly want is to have some public information given about it, such as will be read, and may stir up the hearts of God's servants to succour us (18, p. 343).

That the necessity of embodying her message in fiction constantly irritates her, she makes quite clear. After one digression she writes:

We return now to this tale, which, however needfully disguised as to persons and places, we can assure our readers is substantially correct in its leading particulars (20, p.396).

Like Mrs. Stone, she does not wish her reader to confuse the fact and the fiction in her novel. Before she describes the factory-town and its inhabitants, she warns:

Let no one suppose we are going to write fiction, or to conjure up phantoms of a heated imagination, to aid the cause which we avowedly embrace (4, p. 51).

She never really in the course of this novel gives way to her propensity, which she had fought since her childhood in the vicarage, for "folly and romance." There is nothing light or frivolous in Helen Fleetwood. Her position is paradoxical, and must seem especially so today. Yet it was perhaps no more extraordinary than Carlyle's who so heartily despised Pickwick, but who could not keep himself from reading it; who decried mere fiction, but inspired novelists. Again, they are writers astoundingly different in their power and artistry, yet more representative of novelists and readers of fiction than we may now allow.

Since Helen Fleetwood has received little attention from readers and critics, a mere outline of the plot is possibly necessary before any further discussion. The novel starts with a series of deaths in the Green family, which leaves the widow Green in sole charge of her four grandchildren, and one foster-child, Helen Fleetwood. Helen is sixteen

years old; Richard Green, the eldest of the grandchildren, is seventeen, James is thirteen, Mary is eleven and Willy is eight. As the lease of the house in which the family has hitherto lived cannot be transferred to old Mrs. Green, the family, deprived of the support which the land attached to the cottage has provided and unable to find employment in their small rural community, is faced with the prospect of the workhouse. But the workhouse committee is reluctant to undertake the burden of supporting the Greens, and some members of the committee secretly contact a manufacturer's agent who travels about the country recruiting a work-force for the cotton-mills in a nearby town, called "M."

The agent is persuasive in his arguments for the Greens to move. In the light of what is to come his words are heavy with irony. He says to the widow Green:

You must know, the town where I live is one of the first places in England for furnishing good, healthful, profitable employment for industrious people, from those of your own age down to the small children (2, p.27).

They do not know that he is paid to recruit workers and think that he is doing them a favour when he promises a letter to his friend who has a factory in M. The guarantee of work, he declares, is a guarantee of prosperity:

Those who are lucky enough to get fully engaged soon come to live like gentlemen. Good lodging, capital clothing, the best to eat, and plenty of it: kind neighbours, generous masters, skilful doctors (2, p.28).

Speeches like this, a pamphlet given her by the agent, and letters from her daughter who is married and living in M. already, help the independent widow Green to make up her mind. We learn later that the agent is a former overlooker, found guilty of viciously beating a factory-girl. Since he was loyal to his employers, rather than dismiss him, they use him as an agent. Charlotte Elizabeth comments on this practice:

Emissaries are employed, who, by means of such false representations as those contained in the pamphlet shown to the widow, written and published for that express purpose, allure the industrious countryman from his healthful sphere, to perish, with his little ones, amid the noxious exhalations of those unnatural dens (3, p.43).

Even before we are introduced to M., then, we are shown the different, corrupt world which the factory system creates. The voice of the agent in the rustic village is like the Serpent's in Eden.

The Greens emigrate to M., leaving Richard, who has found work as a gardener, behind. On arrival there they find a place as different from the agent's representations as Hell is from Heaven. Not wishing to judge the place by its appearance, they make for what they think will be the warm comfort of the home of widow Green's daughter, Mrs. Wright. But they are disappointed both in the house and their welcome. The living-room of Mrs. Wright's house is described as showing an obvious discrepancy between the way things are, and the way people want them to be:

Of ornaments there was no lack, but of neatness, cleanness, comfort, respectability, nothing relieved the eye: above all, it wanted cheerfulness (3, p.49).

This same contrast extends to every aspect of factory life in M. The cynical worldliness of the daughter and her family shocks the widow; and when she tries to speak of their Christian duties they mock her. Their pretence of a welcome is quickly broken down when they discover that the Greens expect to live with them until they can find lodgings. Their daughter, Sara, has been kept out of the Greens' sight, but the widow Green discovers her the next day. Sara has been the victim of an accident in the factory, and has lost an arm. Because of the bad working conditions, she is also deformed and consumptive.

On the day after arrival the Greens go to the factory of Mr. Z. and produce the letter given them by his agent. Helen and Mary are

immediately employed, but James is too weak and Willy too young to find work. It would have been easy to falsify Willy's age, and so obtain work for him, because as a country boy he is taller than the factory-children of his own age. But the honesty of the widow prevents this. As they travel through the town looking for lodgings their first impression of M. is worse than confirmed, and they are shocked at the general physical debility of the population, and at seeing drunken children coming from gin-shops. On returning to the Wrights' house they talk to Mrs. Wright's husband and to a neighbour, Tom South. South tells them about all that is bad in the factory system, and a great deal of stress is laid here, and throughout the novel, on the lack of education for factory-children. Later we are shown how the provision of the Factory Act for compulsory education for children was abused, in a school-scene where the old teacher concentrates on the paying pupils while the factory children talk and play. The children's backwardness is blamed on their stupidity. Here, Charlotte Elizabeth shows how the manufacturers justified their contempt for their workers. And mixed with her protest is concern for the lack of moral and religious education. Sunday schools are few and little use to the exhausted factory children.

In the same scene a neighbour of the Wrights comes in and testifies that "not one girl in fifty keeps her character clean" (6, p.90). Evidence of this too is produced throughout the novel, and the Wrights' other daughter, Phoebe, who works beside Helen and falsely blackens Helen's character, eventually runs off with a regiment of soldiers. In a later chapter Helen explains how immorality is bred in the factory atmosphere:

Our fingers are employed and our feet too; but our tongues are free, and all the mischief that bad tongues, prompted

by evil hearts, can do, is carried on, to the ruin of the workpeople, but not to the hindrance of the work (9, p.151).<sup>1</sup>

After Helen has been working in the factory for a while, her sheer goodness begins to irritate those around her, particularly Phoebe, who resents the way the Greens have been busy trying to convert her weaker and more susceptible sister Sara. Phoebe therefore starts her malicious accusations against Helen. She is helped in this by her younger brother, who might have been the original of Disraeli's Devilsdust, he is so much the child of the factories.

The widow Green hears from Mary how Helen is being victimised, and goes, without Helen's knowledge, to see the factory-manager to get his protection. The manager laughs at her, so she turns to the owner. On admission to the manufacturer's home, she is overawed by its magnificence, and for a moment bitterly jealous until steadied by her faith. The manager rejects her plea and she sees that riches "have hardened his heart . . . stifled the pleadings of humanity, and made him not only cold and proud, but cruel" (11, p.175).

In the last chapter Charlotte Elizabeth has the manufacturer express his opinion about the workers to the village doctor who has come to M. to see the Greens. It is interesting for the way in which it shows how the outlook of the fictional cotton lord changed very little from the early forties, when Helen Fleetwood was written, to the mid-fifties when almost

<sup>1</sup> Léon Faucher, among many others, testified to this in his account of Manchester in 1844, Its Present Condition and Future Prospects (1844):

"In congregating so many men, women, and children, together without any other object than labour, there is full scope for the birth and growth of passions which eventually refuse to submit to constraint, and which end in unbridled licence . . . The factory girls are strangers to modesty, their language is gross, and often obscene; and when they do not marry early, they form illicit connexions." (pp.46-49)

It was a common complaint, and although it is repeated from one work to another and perhaps often exaggerated, it was probably true.

identical opinions were to be put forward by John Thornton in Mrs. Gaskell's North and South. The doctor tries to point out the moral responsibilities of the manufacturer, on whom so many depend for their living. Z. protests that the doctor is "making out a connexion between the office of a 'cotton lord' . . . and that of a spiritual lord or bishop," a connexion which Z. himself "never dreamed of" (22, p.441). When the doctor asks him why he did nothing to save Helen Fleetwood and Mary Green from persecution, he replies:

Of course it is wholly impossible that I should enter into the personal bickerings of some hundreds of people, just because it happens to be my money that they receive on a Saturday night instead of any other mill-owner's (22, p.437).

It is the same indiscriminating indifference to the moral and spiritual well-being of the operatives that characterises Thornton at the beginning of North and South. The attitude is based on a contempt for the work-people and a distrust of the motives for their complaints, as much with Z. as it is with Thornton. Thornton and Eowderby combine in Z., when he says:

Why every man who has any thing to do with the working classes knows their proverbial discontent: the more numerous, important and well-paid they are, the readier to strike for higher wages, and to pull our houses down about our ears (22, p.442).

The religious silk-manufacturer who employs Willy Green when the widow Green is forced to find work for him, is equally careless of the morals of the people, many of them children, in his employment. Each manufacturer, in his own way, protects himself with a comfortable philosophy which absolves him from any responsibility beyond that of making money. They are, of course, morally at fault, not simply the prisoners of a system: a view of them better suited to treatment in fiction than one which sees them impersonally as agents of society.

The widow Green goes to her Rector as a last resort. She learns



that the difficulty of his position has forced him to withdraw from any active attempts to procure justice for the factory-workers: if he preached at the manufacturers, they would simply not come to church. He agrees with the widow about the moral responsibility of employers, and provides further information about how the manufacturers cheat the children of free time by altering the clocks in the factory, making them eat their meal at their machines, and various other means disgusting in their callousness. He explains that the inspectors can do little or nothing to prevent this exploitation.

Charlotte Elizabeth goes into detail about the absurdity of expecting that the law as it stands can be made to work as it was intended to, when there are not nearly enough inspectors, and when the powers of the few inspectors that there are, are so very limited. In support of her argument she adds a footnote, citing the evidence of the Chief Inspector, Leonard Horner, before a House of Commons committee protesting against the absurd ratio of his staff to the number of factories to be visited. The Rector regrets that, as matters stand, the guardians of the law can do nothing to help the widow, and that he himself, who might be expected to exercise some moral influence upon the manufacturers of his congregation, can do nothing, because:

Your employers . . . would no more think of allowing any interference on the clergyman's part with their worldly concerns, than they would of intermeddling with him in the composition of a sermon (12, p.195).

The manufacturers are Sunday Christians. Mrs. Gaskell made exactly the same point later, in Mary Barton, without much more subtlety.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A contemporary of Charlotte Elizabeth, William Dodd, wrote in his A Narrative of the Experiences and Sufferings of William Dodd, A Factory Cripple (1841):

The manufacturers and their families attend their place of worship, and wish to be considered patterns of religion and piety; but their pretences and their works are so widely different, that their cloak is easily seen through ( p.314).

Later, when we come to examine Hard Times and North and South, we shall see two ways of handling the theme of the hypocrisy of the manufacturer's situation as an exploiter of men and a benefactor of mankind. Dickens shows the older Bounderby to be corrupt all through, not only exploiting the system, but also exploiting the legends of its most worthy exponents, the self-made men; while Mrs. Gaskell shows the younger John Thornton, inheriting the attitude of his elders, but coming, through personal contact with one of his operatives, to acknowledge the humanity of the masses in his employ. Charlotte Elizabeth sees her manufacturers uncompromisingly as mere bandits, whom the law has not yet reached. To trust such men with the responsibility for the moral and physical welfare of hundreds of ignorant operatives, unprotected by the law, is in itself, according to her, sheer criminal negligence on the part of the legislators.

The almost Kafka-esque description of the frustration of the widow Green, an intelligent and independent woman, is easy to understand:

She found herself completely baffled, repelled on all sides, she scarcely knew how, but made conscious that no one admitted his own responsibility, or seemed aware of being under any obligation to judge the cause of the poor who laboured for him (12, p.197).

Thirteen years later, Dickens's Stephen Blackpool suffers from the same sense of helplessness in a society organised to promote the interests of capital. Both he and Charlotte Elizabeth show how most of the apparent dependence of the working classes was attributable to the social and legislative indifference of the other classes, who, with a monopoly of the means and the power, failed to provide the opportunity for the working classes to educate themselves, and to obtain their rights as human beings. Carlyle of course led the way: the influence of his Chartism (1839) is felt all through Helen Fleetwood, although there is no directly-visible

evidence of it. In a way the latter is a point by point illustration of the abuses which lay behind Carlyle's plea for justice for the factory worker.

After seeing the Rector the widow Green makes one last attempt to protect her charges, by going to see Z.'s brother, who has a share in the factory and is known to be a good family man, with a daughter of his own. There is a grim irony in the way he sidesteps the widow's plea for help, by feigning to be shocked at her delicately-worded description of the depraved environment of the factory, made in the presence of his daughter. He utterly refuses to see that what Mrs. Green has so cautiously described as threatening Helen and Mary is infinitely more serious than any effect her description could have on his daughter. Just as the manufacturers prove the stupidity of the working classes by not educating them, they prove their viciousness by fostering an environment of corruption for them.

The written laws are flouted with as much suavity as the unwritten ones. Before Mrs. Green goes to these people, and unknown to her, Helen has been given a heavy blow on the arm by an overseer, but she can do nothing about it, because only such incidents as have occurred no more than fourteen days before the inspector's visit can be brought to court, and the inspector is not due to call. Later, Mary is lucky - or unlucky - enough to have been hit by the overlooker just within this time-limit. Therefore, although she is advised against it, she takes him to court. The trial-scene is witnessed by her brother Richard, come up from the country for a brief visit. South provides Richard with a running commentary on her case, and two others which precede it. The first one Richard hears has been brought against a manufacturer for employing a child who is under-age. The certificate of baptism which the doctor says he was shown by the parents, cannot be produced. Finding him

physically fit, he issued the boy with a certificate to work. The magistrate, who also signed the certificate, says that he took the doctor's word that the boy was old enough and fit to work, and signed the certificate without seeing the boy. Since the two signatures on the certificate were required as a cross-check, this was a feeble excuse. The boy's parents had been paid to stay away, so they could not testify to his age. In any case, they had only had the boy baptised just prior to his examination, and had lied to the clergyman about his age, because they wanted his wages. The case is dismissed for lack of evidence.

The next case is brought against a manufacturer for working some children more than the legal number of hours. The judge is proprietor of an establishment which trades with the defendant, whose father-in-law is sitting on the bench. His rivals have reported him to the inspectors, afraid that his overworking the children will give him the competitive edge over them. Seven children stand up to give evidence of being "cruelly overworked" (15, p.265), despite the fact that by doing so they will in all likelihood lose their jobs, or at the least suffer from the persecution of the overlooker, looking out for his master's interests. No defence is made; the manufacturer is very properly found guilty, and fined two shillings and sixpence, which the overlooker, with a sneer, lays down on his behalf.

Already sickened at witnessing such a travesty of justice, Richard is so shocked when his sister's case comes up that he cannot wait to hear the end of it. The defending lawyer produces a number of witnesses to blacken the characters of Mary and Helen, who is one of the witnesses for the prosecution, and tries to make a farce of the whole case. Everyone but the naïve Greens knows what the verdict will be. The overseer is found not guilty, and Helen and Mary must now look forward

to even more victimisation, since after bringing a case against an overseer, they would find it impossible to get jobs elsewhere. There is something really hellish in the Greens' situation. By this point in the novel the only comforting prospect for most of the family is that, in such circumstances, they will not have to wait long before death releases them, and translates them to the Paradise which they expect, and certainly deserve. Charlotte Elizabeth is making them the mythical martyrs of the factory system.

But, in order to drive home the tendency of such a system to corrupt, at the same time as making her evangelical point, Charlotte Elizabeth has to show a certain amount of moral deterioration in the family itself.

Willy, working long hours in the silk mill, goes to the gin shop to lighten his spirits before coming home. He falls into bad company, and

the sly leer of bold cunning was supplanting the bright open look of innocent animation which had always marked his clear blue eye (9, p.36).

Mary has become forward and sarcastic, continually dropping hints to Helen about her position as a dependent on the charity of the Greens, even though Helen's earnings are more than hers. The physical deterioration of the family is more than equal to the moral weakness of its erring members. Richard, fresh and healthy from the country, and only remembering them as they were when they left, can hardly recognise them. His heart breaks when he sees James, lying on his bed on the floor, holding his bible and waiting to die. Helen has got consumption from working in the heat of the carding room, and, he discovers, has been told by a doctor that she, too, has not long to live. The others have all suffered from a fever which swept through the family during the winter months.

Mary's sarcastic tongue has often got her into trouble with the overseer, especially when she has used it to defend a younger Irish girl,

orphaned early in the novel, whom the family take into their care. As a result of her pertness her wages are almost always lower than they ought to have been, once the fines are deducted from them. The fever of the winter made it impossible for the three workers to go to their factories, so that, even selling in the streets the odds and ends which the invalid James manages to make in his bed, the widow very soon has exhausted her savings and finds herself far behind with the rent of the room they live in.

When Richard learns all this he tries to find a way of improving matters. He goes to the factory where Willy is employed and asks the owner to keep a careful eye on him. The owner says he can do nothing, since if the boy is a sinner, nothing can reform him, and if he is not, he will reform himself. But Richard's action has the effect of shaming Willy into a promise that he will try to stop drinking, and behave better. He soon finds this is easier said than done, and, rather than submit to the kind of persecution which Helen has undergone for her religious principles, leads a life which compromises between going along with the rest of his fellow-workers, and not letting them influence his basic Christianity. Richard has a similar salutary effect on Mary. Helen's health worries him, and he tries to get her a job in a better-run factory, in a more rural situation. Helen cannot accept it, because she has not the strength left to walk the extra distance to work. She hopes to die at her post in the factory, bearing witness to the salvation to be got from evangelism. The situation is altogether depressing. If the Greens were to go back to their original parish, they would certainly have to go to the workhouse.

Richard returns to his village, and consults with the Rector and the doctor about what is to be done for his family, without much result. In the meantime he learns that James has died. The doctor then goes to

see if he can help them, and finds their situation so bad, and, as we have seen, the millowner so unsympathetic, that all there is really to be done is wait until Helen dies, and then move the widow, Mary and Willy back to the village. Helen dies after collapsing at her machine, and this is done. The widow Green obtains a pass to return to her parish, to live in the workhouse there. Willy is hired by the squire as an assistant to Richard. Mary is "apprenticed out to an humble business; where pride had little to feed on, and passion dared not flame out." In the end, as Richard says, they are "a broken family," and "the best and brightest" of them is dead. The last words of the novel are an exhortation from Willy to the middle classes, to pity the factory children, and do something to help them.

In the course of the novel Charlotte Elizabeth handled some controversial topics not directly related to its plot, in her eagerness to call attention to every abuse of the factory system. In discussing accidents caused by unfenced machinery she anticipates (as we shall see) a cause later to be taken up by Dickens, and again takes a view directly opposite to that of Harriet Martineau who defended the practice of manufacturers against Dickens' representations at that time.<sup>1</sup> At one stage in the writing of Hard Times Dickens himself was to make a protest against the manufacturers, about the details of factory accidents, which clearly went beyond the plot. The corrected proofs of the novel contain a passage on the subject which he omitted from the published version. Stephen says to Rachael:

"Thou'st spoken o' thy little sister. There agen! Wi' her child arm tore off afore thy face." She turned her head aside, and put her hand up. "Where dost thou ever hear or read o' us - the like o' us - as being otherwise than onreasonable and cause o' trouble? Yet think o' that. Government gentlemen came and make's report. Fend off the dangerous machinery, box it off, save life and limb, don't rend and tear human creeturs to bits in a Chris'en country! What follers? Owners set up their throats, cries out, 'Onreasonable! Inconvenient! Troublesome!' Gets to Secretaries o' State wi' deputations, and nothing's done."

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<sup>1</sup> In The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation (Manchester, 1855). See ch.7 below for a full discussion of this.

At this point Dickens added a footnote reference to an article in Household Words on the subject, "Ground in the Mill."<sup>1</sup> The passage was taken out before this chapter's appearance in Household Words, but Dickens clearly also felt the need to authenticate his fiction by reference to real cases. Perhaps, too, his temptation to use the cruder techniques of the social-problem novelist reminds us how difficult it is to separate plot and subject. Authentication was vital to the novelist who knew he was writing for readers who denied the truth of what he said; he deliberately aimed to make a breach in the wall between his fiction and the reality which it probed.

Charlotte Elizabeth unashamedly quotes examples from the press and provides a footnote reference to the newspaper, the Bolton Free Press, which published the reports of these accidents. After giving a verbatim account of an accident to a fourteen-year-old girl, she comments:

Now here again, we are not adducing any strange or remarkable event, but a mere everyday occurrence. One or two points of detail, indeed, may in this instance add a further horror to the picture, - such as the tearing this poor girl's legs from her body, and the scattering of her remains in such a multitude of fragments that they were obliged to be "collected together" and put into a box; - but the main facts, - a young girl murdered in broad daylight by machinery, - the case is of so ordinary and common occurrence, that the Lancashire papers of that single week had to report three inquests on the bodies of young persons so killed, and all within a circle of a few mills (15, pp.261-264).

"A little cheap woodwork" she says, would prevent such things. This, along with the other instances of inhumanity described in her novel, makes a strong case for her argument:

On the system, the vile, the cruel, the body and soul-murdering system of factory labour, we cannot charge the innate depravity of the human heart, but we do denounce it as being the foul fruit of that depravity under its hateful form of covetousness, and of being in turn the prolific root of every ill that can unhumanize man, and render an enlightened Christian country the mark of God's most just and holy indignation (10, p.167).

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<sup>1</sup> This passage is quoted in the textual notes to Hard Times ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (1966) p.252. "Ground in the Mill" appears in HW 9 (22 April 1854) 224-27.

The corruption which the factory system fosters is not confined to the manufacturers. Charlotte Elizabeth is not a partisan of the working classes, as she demonstrates, in the characterisation of the Wright family. She also condemns South, who, while he is morally outraged by the system in its exploitation of the operatives, lives off the earnings of his own children, who work in the factory. There is a long passage on the tyranny of parents who employ their own children, and the children of others, to help them at their work. These parents can be crueller and more exacting than the worst overseer. While she makes it clear that economic pressures lead parents to lie about their children's ages, and take them to work with them, she is also quick to point out the utter callousness of many parents.

On the whole, the points which are made against the manufacturing system in Helen Fleetwood are borne out by the Report of 1843 on the employment of children.<sup>1</sup> This report states that the youngest working children are employed by the parents themselves, that when children are hired directly by the workmen, rather than by the owner of the factory, they have to work abnormally long hours, and that it is in these circumstances that the children are most brutally treated. At this early date, the report confirms what Charlotte Elizabeth has to say about accidents from machinery:

accidents - such as hands contused, fingers cut off, jammed between cog-wheels, or drawn in between rollers, and arms caught in straps - are, however, in some establishments, by no means uncommon; that sometimes the straps, wheels, etc. are so crowded and exposed that the utmost care is required on the part of the workpeople to escape injury; and that, in by far the greater number of instances, accidents might be prevented, if proper

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<sup>1</sup> Second Report of the Commissioners on the Employment of Children (Trades and Manufactures) 1843, P.P. vol. XIII, pp.195-199.

attention were paid to the disposition and fencing of the machinery.

It also comments on the general effects of factory-work on the health and physique of children:

from the early ages at which the great majority commence work, from their long hours of work, and from the insufficiency of their food and clothing, their 'bodily health' is seriously and generally injured; they are for the most part stunted in growth, their aspect being pale, delicate, and sickly . . . The diseases which are prevalent among them . . . are disordered states of the nutritive organs, curvature and distortion of the spine, deformity of the limbs, and diseases of the lungs, ending in atrophy and consumption.

This, of course, is the darker side of the report; it does imply that in some cases improvements are being gradually made, and maintains that the work of children is "seldom in itself oppressive." But it does not deny the widespread abuse by manufacturers of their powers, and is in itself a strong argument for legislative interference.

Charlotte Elizabeth has a much more fundamental protest to make than simply to bring the abuses of the factory system to the eyes of the novel-reading public, because she believes that the system itself was pernicious. Her description of Richard's tour of a "good" factory, in which he hoped to find a job for Helen, is in strong contrast to the kind of descriptions which Harriet Martineau later wrote for Household Words<sup>1</sup> What to Harriet Martineau was a wonderful example of the conquest of the disorder of human nature,<sup>of</sup> its inclination to chaos and squalor, was, to Charlotte Elizabeth, a degradation. In one of the rooms of the factory

The same mechanical employment occupied each individual labourer - a human piece of mechanism, attached to those of iron and leather, passing to and fro within a confined space, with an air of vacant listlessness (19, p.359).

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. 7 below.

In another description, her personal reaction to seeing inside a factory for the first time is evident. There is none of what we shall see as of Harriet Martineau's complacency here:

Seen at their work, they are a community of automata. Nothing seems to animate them. The cold listlessness of their looks sends a chill to the heart of the spectator, who, if he feels rightly, must feel it a degradation to his species to be chained, as it were, to a parcel of senseless machinery, confused by its din, and forced to obey its movements with scarcely an interval for thought or for repose (19, p.369)<sup>1</sup>

Her hatred of the machinery is intense. She has Helen Fleetwood say "we have to work along with the machinery. That is never idle; it goes on, on, on, and we must keep pace with it" (9, p.151). Those who attend the machine are "doubly fevered, doubly debilitated, by excessive toil, not measured by human capacity to sustain it, but by the power of machinery obeying an inexhaustible impetus" (10, p.165). She describes what she supposes - not without cause - to be the attitude of the factory-owners:

Machinery yields an immense profit; therefore machinery must first be cared for; and the question is, not by what means the deleterious effects accompanying its operations might be mitigated, if they cannot be neutralized, to the labourers attendant on its movements; but how may these movements be quickened into tenfold velocity, irrespective of the tenfold injury inflicted on the poor (19, p.369).

She concludes with characteristic honesty:

Better were it for England that her commercial greatness were annihilated, and her place among the nations not that of a Queen but a vassal, than that in her skirts should be found the blood of so many poor innocents as she yearly sacrifices at the shrine of her transient prosperity (20, p.304).

The deterioration of the working classes, mentally and physically, and the corrosion of the sensibility of the middle class, were problems

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. 7 below, pp. 265 - 6 .

more serious, and no less urgent, than the problem of specific abuses in the factories.

Dickens was to come to see this, and to leave the specific problem of fencing machinery out of Hard Times to concentrate all his, and his reader's, attention on the deeper cause of it, on the fundamental philosophy which informed the attitudes of the employers. His writing of Hard Times may be seen as thinking through the problems of capital and labour less in terms of an immediate response to the Preston Strike, and rather more than usually admitted in terms of the response made by earlier novelists. This is not to say that Dickens did not enlarge on it and develop his own ideas, nor that the contemporary scene has not a certain importance if we are to understand the novel completely. But the lines between the political economists with Miss Martineau on one side, and the Christian moralists with some of the novelists on the other, were already drawn. Dickens took his place at the head of the latter.

Charlotte Elizabeth is as concerned as Dickens about the education of the working classes, and, like him, partly links ignorance or a bad education with the allurements of trades unionism, or socialism, and links both with the basic "bread and circuses" attitude of the legislators. In the following passage, South, a socialist, explains to Richard how infectious the selfish attitude of the government is

They have given us cheap knowledge, because it is as cheap to them as to us; and because they thought if we saw a little further we should be more willing to put our shoulder to the wheel, and help them forward; but we are looking beyond the point they marked out, and may show them yet that we are not to be bamboozled with fine names, when we want the things themselves that these names signify (16, pp.300-301).

South is an intelligent man, and his reaction to the conditions in which he lives is presented as a dangerous alternative to that of the other men, who formed a committee to bring the abuses of the system to the attention of an apathetic Parliament through the offices of

Lord Ashley. Charlotte Elizabeth clearly shows the circumstances in which some form of radical politics is bound to appear, but absolutely condemns socialism:

Lately a new and almost unutterable curse had been added to those already felt in the mills. A man of whom it is hard to think otherwise than as of an actual incarnation of Satan, had been among them personally, and had circulated by his delegate a vast deal of his infernal doctrine in that and other manufacturing districts. It will suffice to say that some half-dozen of the young men in that mill had become Socialists. Beyond this it was impossible to go - Socialism is the ne plus ultra of six thousand years laborious experience on the part of the great enemy of man (20, p.398).

This is a Christian Tory's version of Slackbridge. But unlike Dickens Charlotte Elizabeth does not attribute the character of the discontent of the operatives to professional agitators. Her demagogue exploits an existing discontent, in itself dangerous, for political purposes, and socialism-unionism is seen as a political movement, not simply as an effort on the part of some operatives to force the government or their employers to grant them certain rights or better conditions. As she sees it, it is a rebellion against the establishment. In 1841 and '42 this was not an unreasonable fear. W.Cooke Taylor, for example, described the tension of the operatives at the time in his Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (1842):<sup>1</sup>

Chartism, and particularly that phase of it which threatens an appeal to physical force, appears to be advancing with fearful rapidity in this part of the country. More than twenty said, "We used to think that something better would turn up, but we have waited so long that hope itself is worn out: we must do something for ourselves, because those above us will never do anything for us."

The kind of politico-economic reasoning with which the complacent middle-class - well exemplified by Harriet Martineau and her Illustrations - attempted to indoctrinate the working classes, became, in the hands of

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke Taylor and his observations are discussed at greater length in ch.3 below.

the intelligent working classes, a potentially dangerous weapon.

Charlotte Elizabeth was right to point this out, and showed greater perception than Harriet Martineau in realising that the spirit of these teachings would be more readily absorbed than the letter. Mrs. Gaskell showed this in John Barton's record of his disillusionment, and Dickens showed it in another way, in his conception of Bitzer.

Although Helen Fleetwood is an utter failure as a novel, and too biassed as a social document, it is interesting as an example of the social novel as almost straightforward propaganda, and does incidentally throw some light on the kind of situations which lay behind the attitude of the working classes to the middle class, situations which most later novelists only sketched out, or were content to assume. It is a vital work in the history of the social fiction of the time. To a certain extent, too, Charlotte Elizabeth's religious bias saves her from the middle-class bias commonly found in writers on the problems of the poor. The argument of the novel has a great deal of common sense: the protective legislation which she called for did, when it was passed, help to make the struggle between masters and men more fair. And her Carlylean warnings about the probable future of society when its only laws were those of a political economy wholly designed to protect the interest of capital were, as we shall see, only too true.

How influential Helen Fleetwood was, it is impossible to say. Like Mrs. Stone's William Langshawe, it appears to have been largely ignored by most critics at the time, possibly rightly so. More than likely she was unwise to incorporate so much direct evangelical preaching into her novel: the saintly Green family hardly arouse the reader's sympathy, because it is impossible to identify with them as human beings, and therefore difficult to enter by imagination into their troubles. Mrs. Stone, writing about the same time in favour of the manufacturers,

is also guilty of not letting her reader get under the skins of her characters. But while Charlotte Elizabeth's is a crusading novel, enumerating current abuses, Mrs. Stone's is largely a defensive novel which shows the perpetrators of the system, the manufacturers and merchants, as much the innocent victims of advancing technology as their employees.

CHAPTER III"The Aristocracy of Talent": WILLIAM LANGSHAW

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(i) Subject and Plot

William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord, like Mary Barton, was its author's first novel: Mrs. Stone's only known book published before this was The Art of Needlework (1840), edited by the Countess of Wilton.<sup>a</sup> Such a beginning, rather incongruously advertised on the title page of William Langshawe,<sup>1</sup> might lead the reader to expect that it would be a type of the Victorian lady's novel, one of the "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" which George Eliot was to criticise so scathingly twelve years later.<sup>2</sup> The lack of notice in contemporary reviews reinforces this impression, and the two reviews which have been located, in the Athenaeum and The Examiner<sup>3</sup> only tends to confirm such a prejudice. The Athenaeum reviewer, W. Cooke Taylor,<sup>4</sup> raises the stock question, one frequently and not unreasonably asked by critics at the time as a preliminary to attacking novels by women with only a superficial gloss of knowledge on their subject: what first-hand experience does the writer have of the world she describes? Then he parries his own question with the

<sup>1</sup> The title-page reads:

WILLIAM LANGSHAW, THE COTTON LORD. BY MRS. STONE.  
 Authoress of "The Art of  
 Needlework."  
 "Of manufactures, trade, inventions rare,  
 Steam-towers, and looms."

<sup>2</sup> Westminster Review, LVI (October, 1856) pp.442-461.

<sup>3</sup> Athenaeum, Oct. 1, 1842, p.846; Examiner (5 Nov. 1842) p.709.

<sup>4</sup> William Cooke Taylor (1800-1849) was the son of an Irish manufacturer. He joined the staff of the Athenaeum in 1829, and was a leading contributor until his death. He produced "a vast number of books, both original and translated," and was a Free-trader (DNB). Carlyle describes his impressions on meeting Taylor in his Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849 (1882):

a snuffy, babbling, baddish fellow, whom I had not wished especially to see . . . poor snuffy Taylor; I pitied, but could not love him - with his lazy, gurgling, semi-masticated, semi-deceitful (and self-deceiving) speech, thought and action. Poor fellow, one of his books that I read "On the Manufacturing regions in 1843", was not so bad (Wed. 4 July, pp.43-45).

I am indebted to the New Statesman for assistance in identifying Cooke Taylor as the author of this review by reference to the office file.

(a) See p. 111 below.

criticism: "though we do not affect to know what were the writer's opportunities, we can form from her work some estimate of her power of using them, which we do not value at a very high rate." The criticism is still, in a way, apt for the modern critic of William Langshawe. It is even more difficult now to ascertain the extent of Mrs. Stone's experience of the cotton world. All that we know for certain is that she was middle-class, spent at least her youth in Manchester, and had no close connection with the cotton industry there. Yet even these limited qualifications make her observations seem potentially interesting. The interest, and the failure, of William Langshawe lie in Mrs. Stone's neglect of these opportunities, which the novel itself reveals were open to her. Much of the material for a Mary Barton lies almost totally unexploited in the half-hewn William Langshawe. As the Examiner's reviewer notes:

Ill-constructed and poor as the story is, the book itself is in no want of extremely clever passages. It has many indications of a clear and just perception of character, and of great womanly tact, good sense, and good-heartedness.

How this material was used later, in Mary Barton, we shall see.

Both novelists made use of the murder of the son of a manufacturer; both set their novels in Manchester; both are aware of writing about an industrial scene quite unfamiliar to most of their readers. Almost all comparisons between them have to be in favour of Mrs. Gaskell; yet Mrs. Stone's work certainly has a historical interest, and, clumsy as it is, its actual crudities help to illustrate the problems faced by Mrs. Gaskell.

Mrs. Stone states in her Preface and in the first chapter that the plot of William Langshawe depends on the characters' being "aristocrats of the cotton-bag," but the actual plot is a stereotype of the romantic novel. Yet since copies of the novel are rare, an outline is unavoidable.

The heroine, Edith, is the daughter of the wealthy, self-made William Langshawe, "a lowborn and uneducated manufacturer," and his wife who has "the appearance of an over-fed well-dressed housekeeper" whose "manners were somewhat boisterous," and whose "countenance was decidedly vulgar," but which is relieved "by an expression of such winning good temper," that it is "impossible to look her in the face without admiring her" (I, 1, pp.16-17). Edith Langshawe herself, although her background counts against her, has, fortunately ("modern education" being what it is), been taught by a minister's wife, who has trained her "to think like a responsible being, and to behave like a gentlewoman" (I, 1, p.25). She is in love with Frank Walmsley, the ward of his uncle, Mr. Ainsley, a cotton manufacturer and self-styled merchant prince. Frank is reading law, but not very energetically, since he has the prospect of inheriting his uncle's fortune. Mr. Ainsley disapproves of Frank's feelings for Edith, on the grounds of her parents' vulgarity. But there are other possibilities. For William Langshawe has a manufacturing friend, Balshawe, who is richer than himself and more vulgar; Balshawe in turn has a son, John, a "low-lived libertine," who works in his father's business; and it follows almost inevitably that John Balshawe is having an affair with a factory-girl. The girl, Nancy, is Edith's cousin, coming from a branch of the family which has not risen in the world. She also has a poor, honest lover, Jem Forshawe, who is a factory-hand. William Langshawe and Balshawe, both ignorant of John's real character, arrange between them that he shall marry Edith as one of the conditions under which Balshawe will make Langshawe a loan. For Langshawe, awaiting the results of a hazardous speculation he has made, is sorely in need of capital to keep his business alive, and he has no idea of the depth of Edith's feelings for Frank Walmsley. John, himself, is keen to marry

Edith, both for her beauty and her father's money. This brings us up to a point slightly more than a third of the way through the first volume; by which time we have met all the principal characters of the cottonocracy.

The plot is somewhat confusing to outline, with its inter-related Langshawes, Balshawes and Forshawes. Yet the author is trying to show how there were variants in the new species of cotton lord. She presents a small gallery of them, all self-made men of remarkable ability. Thus, as well as Langshawe, who is a factory-owner, wholesaler and speculator, there is Mr. Balshawe, magistrate, Member of Parliament, officer of the yeomanry, and master of Broomshaw Lodge, whose wealth puts him unassailably beyond the fortunes of changes in the market. Of similar standing to Langshawe is Mr. Wolstenholme, another mill-owner, rather more benevolent than the rest although they are all personally generous. He is father of Edith's friend Harriet and of her brother, Henry. These manufacturers are all rough in speech and manner in varying degrees, and almost entirely ignorant outside their trade. Then, in the same circle, though rising above it, is Mr. Ainsley, self-educated as well as self-made, who has taught himself foreign languages, has a respectable taste in art, speaks and writes correctly, and who is determined to be a merchant prince, not just a cotton lord. Beyond these, there is a whole perspective of men of the cottonocracy, great and small.

Already it is clear that there are social distinctions between them, rendering Ainsley's disapproval of any match between Edith and Frank entirely credible; he is proved right in his judgement, too, that William Langshawe would prefer one of the mill-owning class for a son-in-law. Langshawe has already warned Edith of his feelings on her apparent attraction to Frank Walmsley long before his speculations force him to arrange her marriage with John Balshawe:

I've earned all my money by the sweat of my brow;  
 I don't care who knows it; I began the world an errand-boy,  
 and not a shilling of what I've so hardly gained shall go to  
 pamper any idle gentleman or fashionable spendthrift. (I, 1, p.18)

So he orders Walmsley to keep off, thus leaving the way clear for John, who becomes a frequent visitor to the Langshawe home. Meanwhile, Frank is made to believe that Edith welcomes John Balshawe's attentions, and leaves the country, making for Italy where he is to transact some business with an old friend of his uncle, on his uncle's behalf. When Edith is told that, all else failing, only her marriage to John will prevent her father's impending ruin, she finally agrees to it. On receiving the news of Edith's approaching marriage while he is still in Italy, Frank allows himself to be manoeuvred into marrying the tempestuous Bianca, granddaughter of Mr. Ainsley's friend, who is dying.

In the meantime, John Balshawe wishes to rid himself of the embarrassment of Nancy before his marriage to Edith, and so tries to bribe her unsuspecting lover Jem into marrying her. In an interview with Nancy, Jem discovers the truth of her relationship with Balshawe and that she is pregnant. Nancy's father learns the story from Jem, goes and confronts John Balshawe (who is his employer) and is discharged, so that the family moves out of the district to another manufacturing town. Without their knowledge John Balshawe contacts an employer there and arranges for Nancy's father to get work on good terms. This is in keeping with the better aspects shown of John Balshawe, who is also a very competent businessman. Yet Jem Forshawe, enraged by Balshawe's betrayal of him, joins a trade union for revenge, and is then shocked into insanity by its startling initiation rites (II, 15). This brings us halfway through the second volume, with no sign of relief in the general prospects of the Langshawes.

The story then reads more and more like the plot of an opera; for

the figure who foreseeably arrives to stop Edith's wedding at the crucial point in the service is a hermit friend of Edith. Nancy is brought into the church, the villain stands accused, and behaves in character by publishing the fact that the wedding was one of the conditions of the loan which his father, now dead, was to make to Langshawe. Langshawe, preferring ruin to the dishonour of his daughter, stops the marriage, and resigns himself to the prospect of a vastly-reduced scale of living.

Mr. Ainsley meanwhile has learned of Langshawe's business difficulties, and has been appealed to by a woman friend, whom he and Edith have in common, to offer help which he discreetly does. The assistance is timely, and the profits realised by his dangerous speculation leave William Langshawe wealthier than before. But money makes little difference now, since he has discovered that he is really more suited to the simpler life he has followed while he believed he was ruined.

As the complications of the plot are thus unravelled, a new element is introduced. There is a strike of the factory-hands for higher wages. A short chapter (25) is devoted to describing the origins of the strike in the distress of the agricultural districts, causing rioting and discontent which spread, with the encouragement of the "demagogues" of the trades unions, to the manufacturing districts. With dark hints of what will be the effects of the strike-leaders' "irresponsible" inflammation of their followers' feelings, Mrs. Stone passes on to another chapter in which she continues to tie up the loose threads of sub-plots. In the next chapter we learn what was portended in the chapter on the strike. Young Wolstenholme, son of the manufacturer whose family has been close friends with the Langshaws, is murdered by three unionists in an attempt to scare the masters into acceding to their wage-claim. The murder has not the desired effect on the masters, and the hands are

forced by starvation to break strike.

The novel ends with the death of Bianca, which leaves the way open, it is implied, for Frank and Edith to marry sometime in the future. The working Halliwells, Nancy's family, are set up in a shop by Mr. Langshawe, and Nancy eventually marries an honest factory-hand who lodges with her family.

(ii) Difficulties of Technique

While Mrs. Stone's series of studies of the impact of the rise of the cotton industry on the structure of the middle class were new to the novel, they were not new in themselves, and were not fully incorporated in her work. Equally she failed to give artistic realisation to her perception of the quality of life and social relationships in the Cottonopolis. Indeed, what is curious and in some ways unique about her work is the way in which she attempts to combine the techniques of the novel and the journalistic essay, the creation of a fictional world along with comment upon the real world of which her fiction is a poor

see over .....

image. From the opening passage she shows an awareness of her readers and their prejudices which sets the tone for the whole work:

Mr. and Mrs. Langshawe lived in the manufacturing districts. He was a cotton-man, and -

"A cotton-man! the manufacturing districts!" - what a host of unpoetical, unromantic associations does the very term excite in the mind, vapoury and wearisome as was the lengthened and unwelcome vision of Banquo's descendants to the aching eye of Macbeth!

"The manufacturing districts!" - "A cotton-man!" exclaims some parvenue, when she opens her monthly importation of novels, and glances over the first page of each - "What can Hookham have been thinking of to send this? it must go back immediately."

"Marvellous!" exclaims the Marchionness of X-, when her monthly importation of fashionable literature also arrives, "Here's a book about the 'Manufacturing Districts!' that may go into the returning box at once."

"What sort of a book is it?" says her lord.

"What sort? why, a novel, to be sure."

"Oh, capital: there'll be some fun in that; - the Cotton-bags enacting the sentimental!"

"Sentiment! what sentiment is it within the limits of possibility to infuse into smoking chimneys and cotton bags?" (I, 1, pp.12-14)

Obviously the authoress did not feel that she ought to apologise to her readers for her choice of subject, yet at the same time she was distinctly aware that there would be an incongruity to the reader's mind in her having centred a novel, the scene of which was Manchester, not on the evils of the factory-system, but on the private lives of the cotton lords - "smoking chimneys and cotton bags" do not really come into the novel. Writers like Mrs. Trollope, Charlotte Elizabeth, and even Harriet Martineau had conditioned the response of the public to the extent that any reference to cotton manufacture would tend to conjure up a definite series of unpleasant images in the reader's mind. The long introduction to William Langshawe shows that it is a novel with a purpose, the purpose being, ostensibly, to examine these images, or to replace them with new, more precise images. These new images must be

sufficiently strong, capable of analysis and proof, before they will be acceptable to the reader; and although, in fact, Mrs. Stone failed to supply an adequate new model of the cottonocracy, a study of her way of writing is instructive.

One outstanding feature of Mrs. Stone's technique in this novel is her extensive use of footnotes. These serve a variety of functions locally in the text, but show on the whole the need she feels to authenticate, and her awareness (possibly also her desire) that her fiction will be read as a document.<sup>1</sup> Two footnotes particularly illustrate this. The first is appended to a discussion of the working-conditions in the cotton-mills, as part of a longer note explaining the factual background of statements made in the discussion. The tone is almost apologetic: "Into the mouth of my cotton-merchant in the text I have put sentiments and opinions, not such as might appertain to the hero of a novel, but such as I believe a great portion of his class to possess" (I, 13, p.188). The second footnote of particular interest here works in the same way as the last, to bridge the gap between fact and fiction, even though it appears that it is intended to work in

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<sup>1</sup> This footnote technique recalls some of the work of Sir Walter Scott. And, in a way, the industrial north awaited its novelist and needed him even more than the romantic north. Just as Scott seeks to justify himself, to make bridges for the reader, and seeks to establish a sense of a different world, so she seems to wish to do this. Yet Mrs. Stone is obviously using a technique which she has not fully mastered, and which works against the smooth flow of her story. There are clear differences. Scott has hindsight; he offers a world which is, possibly, more attractive than the reader's; Mrs. Stone is trying to make real something new, and a society which everyone felt to be less attractive than the one that the usual novel-reader lived in already. There are also points of similarity in the use which Maria Edgeworth made of footnotes, (see for example, Popular Tales, London, 1804), but she in turn probably took the practice from Scott.

completely the opposite way. To a statement made by one of the cotton lords, to the effect that "manufacturing interests are assuming a too great preponderance in the affairs of the country", Mrs. Stone provides a qualifying note: "Perhaps this opinion can scarcely be attributed to the Cotton lords generally" (I, 13, p.197). She finds it very difficult to sustain the dual function of her book, as an entertainment, and, simultaneously, a social document with its roots in fact.

In the process of authenticating her material by the use of further footnotes, Mrs. Stone gives herself the opportunity to intrude a moral judgement on the characters of her own fiction, and of the facts she uses. After the description of an early Victorian alcoholic spree she adds a note to say that the picture of the "revel" is true, having been described to her by "a gentleman who was accidentally a guest at one of these degrading revelries" (I, 9, 143). In another part of the novel, during a discussion of factory accidents, one of the characters maintains that "it has been proved from statistical facts, that fatal accidents are not one twentieth part so common in cotton-factories as in coal-mines." She adds a comment which presumably refers to the 1842 Report on the Employment of Children in Coal Mines (I, 13, pp.190-191). Again, describing a trade union meeting in which the ninety-fourth Psalm<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Stone quotes this extract:

"O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; thou God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.

"Arise, thou Judge of the world: and reward the proud after their deserving.

"Lord, how long shall the ungodly, how long shall the ungodly triumph?

"How long shall all wicked doers speak so disdainfully: and make such proud boasting?

"They smite down thy people, O Lord: and trouble thine heritage.

"Who shall rise up with us against the wicked? or who will take our part against the evil-doers?

"God shall recompense them their wickedness, and destroy them in their own malice: yea, the Lord our God shall destroy them."

was read, she noted that "the use of Scripture language in some of these impious assemblies was frequent" (II, 15, p.170).

At the end of the chapter containing the passage on trade union initiations she was particularly careful to justify her facts. A footnote reads:

In the foregoing sketch of the administration of the oath to a Unionist I have invented nothing; and the effect of it on Forshawe had a precedent in a man of much stronger mind than my poor operative, who died raving mad in consequence of the shock he received on his inauguration into a Trade Union. For corroboration of this, and other circumstances, and assertions of the foregoing chapter, see "Character, Object, and Effects of Trades' Unions." London: Ridgway. 1823. (II, 15, 174).<sup>1</sup>

This is not the only example in the novel of academic documentation.

To a chapter which was only indirectly related to the cotton industry, one which described an eccentric local hermit, she appended a "Note to the Preceding Chapter." This "note" took up seven pages of print.

It contained a letter sent to Mrs. Stone from Samuel Bamford<sup>2</sup> in Jan. 1839 describing a hermit whom he had personally known. Mrs. Stone confessedly lifted the character intact from Bamford's letter (I, 6, pp.100-106).

On another occasion she cited the report of the evidence of a Manchester manufacturer to the Factory Commission (II, 15, p.161).

Again, a footnote was devoted to the quotation of an account, taken from the Times, of a manufacturer's speech at a public dinner for Sir Robert Peel (I, 12, p.176). Sometimes she substantiated her statements in the text by adding a footnote referring to her own experience. In a description of rioting in a strike, for example, she added the note:

This picture is not one iota exaggerated - rather otherwise. I and mine are totally "innocent of cotton;" I have not, I never had, a relative connected with the manufacture.

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<sup>1</sup> See n. 1 p. 83 below.

<sup>2</sup> The working-class author of Passages in the Life of a Radical (1841).

Yet it has been my lot more than once to see my father, a man of unimpeachable honour and of great humanity, go out when my mother has been all but hopeless of his safe return; and I remember frequently the whole front of our house being shuttered and barricadoed, and soldiers or policemen quartered in the hall, whilst we were huddled for safety in the breakfast-room at the back of the house. This was during the tumults and riots consequent on different "strikes." (II, 15, p.164).

This anxiety to verify the facts changes the whole character of the novel from what it might have been, but not necessarily for the worse: there is a certain charm in the earnestness of the attempt, and a usefulness in the presentation of what is really a half-formed fiction about the cotton industry, in that it shows us the kind of material with which later and better writers like Mrs. Gaskell worked.

Mrs. Stone's concern to establish the historical reality of her portrayal of life in Manchester was not confined to explanatory footnotes. In one passage there is a description of Dalton the chemist, working at night on his experiments in a small room used by him during the day for teaching science to children (I, 13, pp.202-203). A chapter is devoted to a pastoral-romantic description of Samuel Bamford's home, and the countryside surrounding it (I, 19). In a guided tour of the town, deserted for the races, the reader is shown the Infirmary and the museum of Natural History (I, 15). The description of the racecourse itself, the crowds of people, the stalls, the cheapjacks, the sideshows - a description almost Jonsonian in its comic breadth - helps to root the Manchester of the novel's fiction in the Manchester of reality. Earlier, in detailing the excitement of the preparations for the races, she quotes from actual milliners' advertisements in the local papers (I, 15, pp.219-221). All the local customs which applied to this general holiday are described. In a chapter entitled "Sir Robert Peel and the Cottonocracy" letters to the Manchester papers from those who had been invited to meet Peel,

enquiring about the proprieties of the occasion, are given. The entire text of Peel's speech at a dinner given for him, and the menu for the meal itself, are also quoted (II, 10). In the description of a strike, mob-orators who were known in the manufacturing districts at the time were used as examples of the type in the fiction (II, 25, p.284). No apology is offered in the chapter on "The Rise of the Cottonocracy" for the abrupt interpolation of history and opinion which it makes, quite unrelated to the plot. In the same chapter anecdotes of the impact of the cotton industry on Manchester life abound, the authoress defending her choice of Manchester life in a footnote:

Those who are acquainted with Lancashire, will at once admit the propriety of our selecting Manchester as a fair specimen of the county at large, in all points referring to the sudden and amazing rise of the commerce of the county, and of the peculiarities which that commerce draws forth. (I, 12, p.170)

References to living manufacturers are made in a plea for the good characters of the majority (I, 12, p.196).

Although it is easily seen that Mrs. Stone was, as it were, "caught between two stools" of fact and fiction, so that her novel is fragmented, and becomes less than a novel, her own ignorance of the awkwardness of her position to some extent preserves the entertainment-value of her work. More important, it is a commentary on industrialised society by someone who knew the scene. We are not likely to turn from Mrs. Stone's writing today like those who were said to want tales of high life: we are disappointed that it is not stark enough. She is an imperfect writer, but certainly interesting enough to deserve a place among the social novelists of the industrial revolution.

(iii) Reliability

Obviously Mrs. Stone's originality does not lie in her plot, for it falls readily into the patterns of Victorian melodrama. There is the love story, the topical interest of the cotton districts, the eccentric hermit, and the two sensational incidents - the attempted suicide of Bianca, and the senseless murder of a manufacturer by trade unionists on strike. A strong counterforce is needed to inject interest into this material, especially since the characters themselves are two-dimensional stereotypes: there is the standard Victorian seducer-villain, the "gentlewoman" heroine sprung from humble stock, the dutiful hero - and the list could go on to include all the characters in the novel. Yet it does possess at least the negative virtue of abstaining from gross sentimentality, from tearfulness and excessive moralising. Mrs. Stone generally gives her intelligence full scope, in the detail if not in the construction of the novel. On purely literary terms, William Langshave is decidedly inferior to Mary Barton and North and South. In its crudeness and ingenuousness Mrs. Stone's manner is refreshing. Her very absence of style, combined with her intelligent self-awareness, and her descriptions of life in Manchester, help to redeem her feeble plot.

Of greater interest than these less easily definable qualities of the novel are the chapters specifically on the cotton industry and its problems. Even for their own time these chapters must have had an

interest which goes beyond their extent in the novel. In fact they may stand out more strongly because they have so little relation with the main plot. Mrs. Stone does not take the pains of Disraeli, for example, whose Sybil was published three years later, and who made a great effort of the imagination to translate his blue-book information into digestible fiction. Yet William Langshawe has an intrinsic interest now, in having been written in the mid-eighteen-thirties and published in 1842, which is the very year in which Mary Barton is set, although the latter was published five years later. In addition to this, it clearly contains many parallels to Mary Barton and North and South, and we know that Mrs. Gaskell had certainly heard of it.<sup>1</sup> In many ways we have a work that should not be altogether neglected in any study of the social novel, just because it has been long unknown. Yet there are a few reservations which must be made before we accept Mrs. Stone's commentary on the industrial scene.

One of the biggest problems which confront the modern reader of William Langshawe is to determine the exact point in time in which it is meant to be set. Mrs. Stone can create a muddled effect as an observer of the contemporary scene. For the novel wobbles uncertainly between referring to the feelings of the early 'forties when it was published, the events and conditions of the early thirties when it was first written, and those of a much earlier period still, which it looks back to from

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<sup>1</sup> See The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966) 30, 31.

time to time. This, as we shall see, seriously affects our assessment of the general reliability, and the intrinsic validity of her commentary on the important subjects of trades unions and master-man relationships, which after all contain the chief interest of the novel. Before examining her views on these subjects, we must at least determine as far as possible the nature and the extent of her unreliability.

After the chapter describing Langshawe's renewed hopes on receiving help from Ainsley, there is a chapter on a strike by the factory-hands for higher wages (II, ch.25). Up to this point Mrs. Stone has focussed her attentions almost entirely on the members of the cottonocracy as social beings, describing their attitudes and ways of living. In the earlier chapter on Jem's initiation into the trade union (II, ch.15), nothing has been made of the reasons for the existence of such a body, except in the context of the oath, when Jem is made to swear that he is ready for "the ASSASSINATION of oppressive or tyrannical masters," and willing to contribute money to support such of his "brethren as shall lose their work in consequence of their exertions against tyranny" (II, 15, p.172). We know from her footnote reference to the sources of her information that Mrs. Stone had attempted to explore the background of her subject. Yet the pamphlet which she used for this chapter, Character, Object, and Effects of Trades' Unions, by E. C. Tufnell,<sup>1</sup> was published in 1834, eight years before William Langshawe. In this time trades unions had obviously developed and changed a great deal, and become more sophisticated in their organisation;<sup>2</sup> and we notice that

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Stone made a mistake in dating this pamphlet: the first edition was printed in 1834 (Brit. Mus. Cat.), and not, as she wrote, in 1823. Tufnell was a commissioner in the enquiry into the Employment of Children (P.P. 1834, vol. XIX). J. T. Ward, in The Factory Movement, 1830-1835 (1962) writes that Tufnell's book on trade unionism was "hostile" (p.129).

<sup>2</sup> See for example J. L. Hammond & Barbara Hammond : The Age of the Chartists (1930) ch. 14; Sidney and Beatrice Webb: The History of Trade Unionism (Revised edn. 1920) ch.3; and The History of the Factory Movement by 'Alfred' Samuel H. G. Kydd (1857, 2 vols.) vol. II.

although in the chapter on Jem's initiation she lays most stress on the histrionic, self-dramatising nature of these bodies, later she admits of the Cotton-Spinners' Union that their power is "multiplied to the nth by their regular organisation" (II, 25, p.160). Internal evidence in the novel shows that it must have been written sometime between 1829 and 1836,<sup>1</sup> which again covers a long period in the history of the cotton trade. Some confusion over the supposed dating of the fictional events of the novel creeps in as we realise that parts of it were probably written much earlier than others. Hence it is difficult to know what were the actual events which led Mrs. Stone to form her adverse opinion of trades unions.

A good example of this carelessness occurs when she adds a footnote to a discussion of factory labour for children in the text. She writes:

This sketch was written some three years ago, when a periodical work was in circulation which defeated its own benevolent and honourable ends by the exaggerations of its statements. These exaggerated horrors were drawn, it is said, from a very scarce pamphlet, (of which I possess a copy,) called "A Memoir of Robert Blincoe", which was suppressed almost immediately on its publication (I, 13, pp. 188-89).

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<sup>1</sup> John Balshaw's father is seized by an apoplectic fit at a dinner given to honour Peel's visit to Manchester (II, 10), which took place, as we learn from the novel, before he succeeded to the baronetcy (3 May, 1830), and while the country was in an agony of suspense on the probable treatment of the Catholic Emancipation question. The bill for Catholic Emancipation was passed on 5 March, 1829. Peel actually visited Manchester in 1829.

Mrs. Stone described Dalton the chemist as experimenting in the evening after teaching classes by day (I, 13, pp.202-203). In 1833 Dalton ceased teaching, after being awarded a pension from the government (DNB).

In a discussion of factory labour for children (I, 13, p.189) the act of Parliament by which children under thirteen years were not allowed to work in cotton factories. This age limit was not in force until 1836: see B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison: A History of Factory Legislation (1903) p.72n. In the same discussion, at this point, Mrs. Stone also mentions the ten-hour day for children under thirteen, which was not introduced until the Factory Act of 1833. Thus while 1829 in certain ways would be a correct date for the main action, the 'dating' is confused.

Considering that William Langshawe was published in 1842, we should expect that the "periodical work" which contained commentary on the Blincoe pamphlet was published during 1839. This is not so. According to R. W. Cooke Taylor's The Modern Factory System,<sup>1</sup> Blincoe's narrative "was first made public in a memoir contributed to Vol. I of "The Lion," a periodical printed and published in 1828." The story was written by "a Mr. Brown", and was afterwards issued separately (1832). Later, in 1832, there appeared in The Poor Man's Advocate a portrait of Blincoe along with a description of him.<sup>2</sup> This unreliability may also extend to the internal facts of the novel, because Taylor quotes Brown's account of the origin of the pamphlet, and this assurance of its veracity; which Mrs. Stone questions:

After I had taken down his communications I tested them, by reading the same to other persons with whom Blincoe had not had any intercourse on the subject, and who had partaken of the miseries of the same hard servitude, by whom they were in every point confirmed (ch.5, p.190).

In mitigation, we must add that Blincoe's narrative deals with the horrors of the apprentice system in the years 1803-1807 - so that by the time Mrs. Stone wrote, the facts that Brown had presented may well have appeared exaggerated.<sup>b</sup> Nevertheless it is hardly an excuse for Mrs. Stone's deliberate haziness. Confusion is worse confounded when, two pages further on in the same chapter, she refers to what is almost certainly the report of the Children's Employment Commission (Mines) for 1842. Here she appends a note:

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<sup>1</sup> 1891, pp.189-198. R. Whately Cooke Taylor was a factory inspector.

<sup>2</sup> Manchester, 9 June 1832, no.21. The author was John Doherty, whom Mrs. Stone was to revile as a demagogue later in the novel. (See p.102 below and additional note (c), p.112.

(b) See p.112 below.

I have before remarked that this chapter (then intended merely as part of a slighter sketch) was written some time ago, and consequently before those fearful and disgusting discoveries of the nature of coal-mine labour. (I, 13, p.190)

We may fairly complain about the seriousness of such amateurish bungling in a novel which was published amidst the inflammatory circumstances of 1842, especially when Mrs. Stone constantly implies that she is writing about the present, and thus leads us to expect a certain amount of topical application in her comments when she turns to the subject of trades unions, and the question of strikes.

(iv) "Cottonocracy" and Manchester life.

Part of the interest of William Langshawe is, perhaps, that it is written with such an innocent eye. If it were written in 1837, as appears, then it preceded both Chartism (1839) and Past and Present (1843), and Mrs. Stone was not the kind of person on whom Carlyle would have made an instantaneous impression. She is not concerned to write the kind of social novel about what Carlyle was to call "all the Actual Labouring Millions of England," in "the Pressing Problem of the Present."<sup>1</sup> This is even apparent, as we shall see, when she is writing about the unions (biassed as she is) or about the murder of Wolstenholme. What she is really concerned about is Manchester life, as she saw it.

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<sup>1</sup> Past and Present (1843), Book IV, ch.3.

In her way, Mrs. Stone was, for her time, surprisingly detached in her appraisal of the impact on the class-system of the new wealth gained in the manufacture of cotton, an economy and class-system which had hitherto been land-based. In a fanciful introduction to the chapter "The Rise of the Cottonocracy" she wrote that cotton "subverts the accustomed order of society", and substitutes a society less stable; it

pulls one down and raises up another, makes kings of dust, and counsellors of fools, and creates palaces in the wilderness and thronged cities in the desert (I, 12, pp.168-169).

In this chapter she records the changes in the social structure of Manchester and attempts to define the subtle index of social status among the nouveaux riches tradesmen. There was a wry mockery in this that irritated Cooke Taylor, (himself the son of a manufacturer) and that put him on the defensive in his Athenaeum review. Typical of the kind of passage to which he took objection is this:

In turning a cotillon (waltzes had not reached Manchester then) the "whole piece" calico man was dodged by him who sold half a piece; and in a "contre danse," the lady of a warehouse proprietor found herself under the necessity of crossing hands with the sister of a shopkeeper. Such recontres were not to be borne. It was not fitting that he who sold a single yard of calico at 16d. should have refreshment at the same table with him who was content to pocket 14d. provided his customer "took the piece together"; nor was it likely that he who under the rose "cut a piece" in his warehouse for a friend, should wriggle his heels in the same room with him who cut it openly in a retail shop. (I, 12, p.172)

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The comic intention is obvious: so, too, is the fact that there is probably much truth in the description. But Cooke Taylor thought such writing to be "mere caricature, at which the world will be more disposed to yawn than to laugh." He misses the point, too, that the whole of this passage is apparently about a previous generation. William Langshawe as we have seen, was written at some time in the thirties, several years before it was published. So that this sketch of a period, when the social problems of the world of cotton were confined to minor differences between petty tradesmen, is put in to illustrate what enormous changes there have been with the newly-earned wealth of the great cotton lords, who dealt in miles, not yards of cotton.

In fact, it is these social changes that chiefly interest Mrs. Stone. She can show a certain snobbery herself about the newly rich. But, although she saw the faults of the cotton lords as a social class, she was quick to point to their "fifty redeeming qualities", including their "shrewdness to plan" and "unwearied energetic assiduity to realise". She acknowledged the fact that "nowhere is money so influential as amongst the mass of Manchester society: nowhere does it cover such a multitude of sins", but added with a dash that the sins arose from ignorance. Furthermore, she pointed out that:

the Cottonocracy generally have no other method of displaying to an admiring world the enviable elevation they have obtained in the scale of society, but by display and expense (I, 12, p.175).

In the chapter on the cottonocracy Mrs. Stone introduced other examples of the type which she was portraying more closely in the characters of William Langshawe and old Balshawe. Langshawe and Balshawe both owned pretentious homes. Of Langshawe's home she wrote that "there was an elaboration in the style, and a profuseness in the ornaments, that savoured more of a heavy purse than a cultivated taste"

(I, 2, p.37). A sentence in another chapter gives the reason for this:

It would be absurd to suppose that men of mediocre birth, whose whole energies are devoted to the active pursuit of trade, can have acquired the grace of manner and refinement of taste which characterize those of higher rank, whose chief occupation is to adorn their leisure (I, 12, p.183).

Balshawe's home, then, displays the same vulgarity and ostentation as Langshawe's. The wives of both men have found it difficult to adjust to being served, instead of serving. Of the difference in manners between the Langshawes and their daughter Edith, Mrs. Stone remarked:

And how is it that Miss Langshawe is of so superior a stamp to her parents? The circumstance is easily accounted for, and is no uncommon feature in Lancashire society, where the rising generation enjoy advantages to which their parents had no access (I, 1, pp.22-23).

Both the Langshawes and the Balshawes live almost entirely in their kitchen-parlours. When Mr. Balshawe decided to have a drunken spree he had it there, in the "homeliest" part of his house, behind locked doors. After Langshawe had come near to ruin, and had to change his style of living to suit his reduced means, he discovered a new happiness, and with the return of his fortune there was no return to the old splendour. These men are like the rebel who has concentrated a lifetime on the moment of winning the crown, to realize that the moment is not self-perpetuating, and that in the drive of his ambition he has destroyed his power of enjoying its fruition. But with the Langshawes and Balshawes portrayed by Mrs. Stone, there is none of the nobility which makes the disappointment tragic. There is, instead, mainly comedy which has its roots in the ridiculousness of common characters thrust into a situation which requires nobility of a kind which they do not possess. Not even the merchant princes can be noble in the Cottonocracy. Mr. Ainsley, the guardian of Frank Walmsley, is

made to say:

Sir, it made my blood boil to hear the sneers and ridicule cast on the 'cotton-lords.' I did not see why trade was inconsistent with gentlemanly habits and refined manners, and I was determined to prove in my own person that it was not. I determined to be a merchant prince - and I am (I, 4, p.66).

He opposes Frank's marriage to the ladylike Edith on the grounds of her parents' vulgarity. Yet we are not asked to withhold our admiration; he has had the success he aimed at, and has thrown off the limitations of his own origins. He is not sentimentalised; he is no Rouncewell to permit his son to marry Rosa if she is educated up to her new station.<sup>1</sup> But "merchant princes" were what some of the new industrialists aspired to be, or liked to be termed. At the banquet to Literature and Art in Birmingham (6 January 1853) John Forster was to hail the "merchant princes" of Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, as "the Medici of a new era."<sup>2</sup> Ainsley is certainly not fully developed in the novel, but he is both more convincing and truer to life than the hero of Mrs. Craik's John Halifax, Gentleman, for example.<sup>3</sup>

He has gone far beyond most of his fellow merchants, but he is still affected by the social and intellectual snobbery adopted as the means they use to raise themselves in the class structure. There are examples given in the chapter on "The Rise of the Cottonocracy" which reinforce these conclusions - examples taken from life. Mrs. Stone

<sup>1</sup> See ch.5 below.

<sup>2</sup> ed.K.J.Fielding(Oxford 1960)  
Speeches of Charles Dickens, p.158 (6 Jan. 1853)

<sup>3</sup> (1857) John Halifax pulls himself out of the gutter by his honesty and perfect integrity, eventually to become a gentleman in every sense of the word. He is the perfect example of the mid-nineteenth century myth of the self-made man, which Dickens earlier parodied in the character of Bounderby. The success of John Halifax, two years after Hard Times, perhaps shows that Dickens did very little to destroy the myth in the popular mind.

writes rather curiously of the analagous case of a butcher who retired to a 'genteel' house which he had built for himself, one of several, the others of which he rented out. He was a "liberal and excellent landlord and neighbour" - but the passage is worth quoting in full, especially as Mrs. Stone clearly considers that the butcher's aspirations and way of life are of the same kind as the cotton lords':

His prime relaxation was a barrel organ, in the purchase of which he spared no expense, and to which he kept buying additional barrels. Every day he ground round his tunes once, from beginning to end, psalms and dances, jigs and hymns, at the same regular railroad speed; and having had "his music," as he somewhat curiously termed it, he was ready for the other duties of the day. The culture of his mind was by no means neglected. He had read the Encyclopaedia through - regularly through - from the first page to the last; and was now, in about his seventh year, beginning the supplement, or as he called it, supple-ment. (I, 12, pp.173-179).

His wife passed her days happily knitting "hose, gloves, and muffatees" for him.

After one or two other humorous examples of Manchester ignorance, Mrs. Stone went on to write seriously about the Manchester character. She very fairly observed that:

Manchester wealth and consequence have sprung quickly as mushrooms from the soil; but with them, step by step, have risen and flourished institutions for the promotion of knowledge, of art, of science, and above all, for the exercise of humanity, which have never found their superiors, seldom their parallels (I, 12, pp.181-182).

The reference is to institutions like the Manchester Athenaeum, and to the Mechanics' Institutions.

Yet Mrs. Stone was reasonably fair to Manchester society as a whole, and she evidently wished to put her readers in a position from which they too might judge it fairly. She allowed the criticisms of vulgarity and ostentation, but here, and in a later chapter, gave a sensible defence of the cotton lords and the factory system. She argued for a more sensitive analysis of the social structure of the

cotton-world on the part of the reader. She provided the basis on which the new image was to be built in a passage which, since its analysis is not worked out in the context of the novel itself, deserves full quotation here:

As a whole, Manchester stands high for her intelligent and benevolent community; but no one can be conversant with society in the manufacturing districts without being aware, that while a great and characteristic resemblance may be traced through the whole, there are yet such varying circumstances appertaining to it as almost to divide it into distinct and separate classes. Though by the self-same steps, and in the same - to speak technically - "line of business," all have risen from a low rank in life to one of wealth and power, and influence; yet light and darkness are scarcely more dissimilar than is the low-lived and ignorant, though shrewd, mill-owner of some out-lying district, from the cultivated denizen of the town; and the disgust with which the vulgar pleasures and brutal excesses of the former are regarded by the latter, are only equalled by the pitying contempt with which the magnate of the country looks upon the more refined gratifications of his compeer of the town. Between these extremes there is a third class, a connecting medium, partaking in some degree both of the vices of the one and the refinements of the other, formed, as may be expected, from circumstances which draw it within the influences of both without entailing exclusive connexion with either (I, 12, pp.182-183).

Later in the novel, when Mr. Ainsley is made to defend the factory system, he develops Mrs. Stone's argument that the public image of cotton lords was over-simplified. He admits that among them are some who are indefensible, but includes men such as the Grant brothers, who had earlier (1838-39) featured as the Brothers Cheeryble in Dickens'

Nicholas Nickleby:

Every body of men will have some "untoward" spirits among them, and I do not deny that there may be some such amongst the Cottonocracy: but I do aver that a system which is fostered by such men as the Grants, the Birleys, and others like them, both in town and country, - I do say that this system cannot be one which would encourage its upholders, - were they so disposed - "daily to send (as it has been lately said) millions of groans to be registered in heaven from joyless young hearts and aching infant limbs" (I, 13, p.196).

In the half-dozen manufacturers portrayed in her novel, Mrs. Stone

attempted to show a fair cross-section of the cottonocracy, to show that the type was capable of variation; but her attempt was marred by the choice of a stereotyped plot, not designed to carry much analysis.

Readers today turn back to this work of the forties expecting it to show the same interests they would have themselves. They are interests they can find expressed in the social novels written immediately after it, and which one might well expect in a work written almost at the same time, and certainly in the same milieu as Engels' Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844. But though the daughter of a newspaper proprietor who had lived through the turmoil of Manchester during the twenties and thirties, Mrs. Stone belongs to an earlier period in her sympathies. Even then she simply remains unaware even of the world of Carlyle, so much admired by both Engels and Mrs. Gaskell.

Her manufacturers are men who deal in power, but their ambitions are confined to the little dominions of their factories, and if they look beyond them it is only for the immediate sake of their trade. She can see that a man such as Balshawe might well be a Member of Parliament, an influential figure in the Yeomanry, a magistrate, and a great man within his own limited society; she is aware of the welcome given to Sir Robert Peel on his visit to Manchester of 1829; she understands that factory-owners were quick to resent inquiries into the conduct of their own mills. But her main interest is in men's manners. She wants us to see the difference it makes to the second generation if the first comes to sudden wealth; she is concerned with what society will be like if such men set the tone; she is genuinely interested in the marriages of the young men and women, and makes very little of them as symbols of the union of class with class. For though she cannot quite avoid the latter, since it is too closely interwoven with the

very nature of fiction, her allegiance is chiefly to fact.

Even her butcher,<sup>1</sup> who is completely irrelevant to the main course of the story, is introduced chiefly because his story was "fact" and partly because it counterpoints the changes that have taken place in the way of life of the manufacturers. But where Mrs. Gaskell prefers to write about Job Leigh, and Dickens often publicly professed to be carried away by admiration of the virtues of the self-educated working-men of the Mechanics Institutes in the industrial north, Mrs. Stone is simply concerned with her butcher. It is a limitation. It leaves such an incident as less than half-digested documentation. But it is genuine, and it makes a point of comparison with her near contemporaries, such as Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens. For there is always this quality about her of the wish to be true to actuality. The squalors of her back streets are not overdrawn: but their excrement is "excrement". In the same way, her fictional seducer, John Balshawe, gives the impression that he knew what he was about; her mill-girl Nancy Halliwell, is seen quite realistically (and not patronisingly) within the conventions of her novel; and her mill-owners express themselves with a proper vulgarity - indeed, in comparison with them, Bounderby appears almost a polished man of the world. Yet they are shown so convincingly that they leave little doubt that Mrs. Stone was justified every time she added the footnotes to their most outrageous remarks, as when she testifies that a lady, in conversation at a dinner-party, identified "posthumous" child with "natural" child (I, 2, 48-49), or when she describes the confusion of Balshawe and Langshawe when they did not understand what "ditto" meant in an invoice for cotton (I, 8, 121).

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It is not easy to be sure what she wishes the reader to think of factory life. Once again, it seems she is content to show what she thought lay before her. From her point of view she sees a community which has been transformed and enormously enriched by the industrial revolution; on the whole, the benefits greatly outweigh the hardships involved; any discussion of working conditions is presented fully in discussion among the employing class; and what concerns her, chiefly, (however faintly developed) are the social consequences of the rise of the industrialists, the formation of a new industrial working class, and the change from a community based on the land to one dominated by, and dependent on, the factory. In discussions about factory life, she shows her mill-owners as concerned with public opinion, and she is clear that there is an obligation not only for the owner to know his own employees but for other members of his family not to be so aloof from the mills that they could not bother to acquaint themselves with how their money was made.

Edith, for example, has often visited her father's mills; to her discredit, Harriet Wolstenholme has not. Mr. Ainsley is brought into conversation with visitors from the south to give the owners' view, and to express the argument, familiar even then from the works of political economists, that it was "in the master's interest to keep his workpeople in health and good humour"<sup>1</sup> (I, 13, 195). The defence of the factory

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens saw the flaw in the "mutual interests" argument. On 17 March, 1842 he wrote to Forster from America, on the slavery question, that it is "not a man's interest to get drunk, or to steal, or to game, or to indulge in any other vice," but he "indulges in it, "for all that . . . cruelty, and the abuse of irresponsible power, were two of the bad passions of human nature, with the gratification of which, considerations of interest or ruin had nothing whatever to do" (Life, I, p. 308).

system is framed by this discussion between Ainsley, the visitor Mr. Ashworth, and his aunt Mrs. Hayling who is little more than a member of the public introduced to represent public opinion. Ainsley's defence contains nothing original: he compares the old conditions of home industry with the present factory conditions, and then goes on to compare the conditions in other kinds of work, particularly that of milliners' apprentices, with factory work. The health of the factory children is compared with that of children in other types of work. The results of all these comparisons are of course universally favourable to factory work. Yet we must not rush to accuse Mrs. Stone of bias; her conclusions are borne out by other writers who might be said to be biassed in favour of the working classes. Mary Barton and Ruth have to work hard as milliners' apprentices, and Alton Locke as an apprentice to a sweated tailor. Disraeli exposed the conditions of other types of employment in Sybil, and Dickens shows the degradation of the brick-makers at St. Albans in Bleak House. Other industries and trades lagged far behind the cotton industry - but, as Mr. Ainsley points out, the cotton industry could not shake off its old image, despite the fact that

a great, a most beneficial and enlightening change has taken place in the factory-system since the time when its degrading and destructive influence gave rise to the evils which have been so loudly proclaimed (I, 13, p.196).

Mrs. Gaskell was to have Thornton put forward the same argument to the Hales in North and South, when they, as southerners, confronted him with the old image of the cotton lord (ch. 10).

(v) The Unions

Since her view of factory conditions is given from the owners' point of view, it is perhaps natural that she should see the trade unions as they appeared to the employers too. She writes from within

the cottonocracy, quite untouched by what would probably have seemed to her the new and alarming doctrine that the worker himself has rights within the sphere of his employment as well as in personal relationships, in which she undoubtedly believed. Thus, the first notice of trade union activities comes when Jem Forshawe, Nancy's lover, is persuaded to join one after he has been enraged by the revelation of Nancy's affair with John Balshawe. His motives for joining, and the way in which he is enlisted, do not give a good impression of trade unions:

In such a mood, Forshawe was easily worked upon, and his tempter had craft enough to make the most of his opportunity. Intimations of revenge, of chastisement on the part of the selfish ruiner of his happiness and Nancy's honour, were greedily listened to by the excited wretch (II, 15, p.166).

One of the incentives which the union agent offers Jem is "an especial vengeance" to be directed against John Balshawe. His initiation-rites are described in detail. They include the oath: "I . . . swear . . . that I will execute . . . the chastisement of knobs, the ASSASSINATION of oppressive or tyrannical masters, or the demolition of shops, that shall be deemed incorrigible" (II, 15, p.172). Mrs. Stone habitually took pains to authenticate her descriptions; but this chapter as a whole is extraneous, interpolated to provide her with an opportunity of informing readers who had no knowledge of the "true nature" of trade unions. Jem Forshawe is driven insane by the initiation - and then no more is made of the atmosphere of mystery and fear which has been built up in the process. It offers a poor preparation for the murder of Henry Wolstenholme, the manufacturer's son, by union members later in the novel, particularly since Jem can have nothing to do with that, as he is by then in an asylum.

A second mention of trade unions in William Langshawe is in connection with their strike for higher wages (II, 25), wages having fallen because of bad trade. In this chapter Mrs. Stone concentrates on the worst side of trades unions and the character of their leaders, "political demagogues," who "took up a cry of distress, which did not exist then, though it was speedily induced by their machinations." A chapter of social events not relevant to the strike then intervenes between this and the one in which Henry Wolstenholme is shot by "ruffians, delegates of the secret committee of that Union to which we have alluded" (II, 27, p.306).

The murderers of Henry Wolstenholme are never discovered; they remain uncharacterised and unknown; and there is only a limited amount of pathos in the description of the impact of the news on the group gathered at the Wolstenholmes' house. This limitation comes partly from the fact that, although Henry Wolstenholme has occasionally been mentioned in the novel, he has been left as a vague figure, simply the good friend of Frank and the responsible elder brother of Harriet. It is also because the news of the murder is broken to a group gathered for a party; and although Mrs. Stone obviously meant to give the incident greater tragic impact by showing it as an irruption upon a warm, seasonal scene, she failed to see the other contrast, between this scene and the reader's imaginary conception of the hungry, desperate operatives.

Furthermore her own emotions are again allowed to intrude in the scene: they always are whenever trades unions are concerned. She loses her detachment in the telling; and yet she is detached enough, it seems, to be able to add a footnote. This note deserves quoting in full as it shows more clearly than anywhere else Mrs. Stone's attitude to the workers and the industrial strife around her:

Let not my readers imagine that this awful incident has been invented for the nonce. A few years ago a young cotton

manufacturer of the highest respectability, and most excellent character, was murdered even so, and as suddenly, as we have described, by order of the Spinners' Union. His factory was at the time in full work, and he on excellent terms with his work-people.

The wretches, who had been hired by the Secret Committee to execute this atrocious act, (which was perpetrated within a few miles of Manchester,) undertook "the job" for a reward, to be divided amongst three of them, of TEN POUNDS. The sole motive of the Union was to strike terror into the minds of the "masters," and not to punish any individual offences (for here were none) of the hapless sufferer.

From the scene of blood one of the party hastened to the Secret Committee, who were waiting in anxious expectation to learn the result of the enterprise: the other two, less hardy, skulked into the woods. They met again to receive from the emissary of the Union the price of blood, but - oh! the power of conscience! - of the three one only would accept the wages of his sin. That one signed a book as a receipt for the money. All afterwards drew their knives, and crossing them, pledged themselves to eternal secrecy, and imprecated curses on the one who should prove a betrayer.

For more than three years not the slightest clue was gained in any way to the unravelment of this dark transaction; after that lapse of time one of the culprits did "prove a betrayer" (II, 27, pp.305-306).

Her description of the fictional murder is equally charged with contempt, and empty of even an effort to understand:

This excellent young man - a good son, a good brother, a kind master, for he, and indeed his father also were beloved by every individual in their employ, and their factory was full of hands, in full work, - had been shot by some coward, who stood close behind him; the weapon was loaded with slugs, one of which pierced his heart, the other his backbone (II, 27, pp.306-307).

Yet if what Mrs. Stone says earlier is true, there is in fact little room for sympathy with the murderers, except as they are the dupes of their union-leaders. In the chapter which describes the origins of the strike, she writes that "there has been murder, - not hasty slaying in hot blood, but cool, deliberate, well-"proven" murder, committed at the behest of the leaders of the 'Spinners' Union'." Certainly the murder of Thomas Ashton, of Pole Bank, Werneth, which no doubt Mrs. Stone used as the original of her murder, was committed in cold blood at the orders

of the Spinners' Union at Ashton-under-Lyne. Confirmation of the similarity between the murder of Ashton and the murder in William Langshaw is provided by the testimony of Léon Faucher, who wrote in his Manchester in 1844 of the benevolence of Mr. Thomas Ashton of Hyde.<sup>1</sup>

But this incident forms only a slight interruption in the story; Wolstenholme having been, as we have noted, in a sense very much an extra, with no place in the plot. The murder has little deeper motive than to relieve the utter frustration of the strikers, and no effect:

Even this last blow had not the desired effect. The advance of wages, so boldly and wickedly sought, was not obtained; the "strike" ended very nearly as and where it had commenced, save that it left its traces in the naked cottages of the work-people, the pallid and half-famished faces of mothers and children, the over-laden shops of the pawnbrokers (II, 17, p.307).

The only recognition given to the hardships of the striking workers and their families ~~suffer~~ is seen here: the chapters on trade union activities, then, neither have any effect on the main plot, nor do they contribute to the reader's understanding of the movement. The reader is first disappointed by the removal of Jem from the scene of the action, and the inconsequence of his insanity; then he is disappointed that it is not John Balshaw who is murdered. But Mrs. Stone is trying to persuade her readers against trades unions; and to have had a union agent murder Balshaw would have been to enlist the reader's sympathy (to some extent) on behalf of the unionists against a master. In effect, the murder of Wolstenholme, in its sheer arbitrariness, was the best means of advancing her argument - if only it had been adequately prepared for in the rest of the novel.

On the subject of trade unions, which she describes as "extraordinary . . . excrescences appended to the general system of cotton manufactures,"

<sup>1</sup> pp.111-114. See also Thomas Middleton: Annals of Hyde and District (1899) pp.82-94.

(II, 15, p.159) Mrs. Stone consistently shows her partisanship:

Thus, while the orators of the political clubs and the scribes of the Radical newspaper press were declaiming on the slavery and the long-protracted toil of the factory operative— whilst ill-judging "philanthropists" were sighing over the much-exaggerated sorrows of the manufacturing labourers, these same people were not only devoting the night-hours, which, it might be imagined, with "slaves, o'erworn with toil," were best and naturally given to the pillow, — to midnight meetings of committees and delegates, but they were absolutely giving weekly, systematically, and readily, a considerable portion of the money "wrung from their sinews" to support all the arrangements of a "Trade's Union," with its liberally-stipended secretaries, delegates, and treasurers, and rout of inferior officers. (II, 15, p.163)

Memories of her own fear during violent "turn-outs" colour her description of the cotton-spinners' union. Her language in describing their powers and influence, comparing their leaders with the "familiar of the Inquisition," describing their actions "as if commissioned by the Evil One himself", and a delegate as a "wily seducer" (I, 15, p.166), shows a degree of emotional involvement not present anywhere else in the novel. Yet she does try to be fair, and writes that "the multitude of the Unionists were honest and well-disposed men" (II, 15, p.165), granting also that a strike against "an oppressive or illiberal master" may be justifiable. Her chief objections are against apparently groundless strikes, strikes which escalate into violence and rioting, or which ruined innocent employers. She shows a naïve wonder at the power of the union, and assumes the same reaction on the part of her reader, to whom she explains:

Readers who have not happened to reside in the "Manufacturing Districts," may be surprised to learn that, on an intimation from the leaders of the "Spinners' Union," who may have some cause, real or imaginary, of dissatisfaction with some of the masters, "all hands" will strike: that is to say, every workman, of whatever description, employed in or about the delinquent factories, will, on a certain appointed day, at a certain appointed hour, leave off working, and neither threats nor entreaties on the part of their masters can induce them to do a hand's-turn till the oracles of the Union permit them

to work again. Picquets, regular soldierlike picquets, are set to watch the condemned mills; and if any well-disposed men venture still to their work, they do it at the risk of their lives (II, 15, pp.160-161).

She stresses that the power of the Cotton Spinners' Union "over an immense portion of the manufacturing population has been enormous and fearful," (II, 15, p.159).

She assumes that normal relationships mean that mill-owners and workers live as a community; and, early in the novel, Wolstenholme's daughter Harriet speaks with cheerful assurance of his charity, asserting that "papa's people have only to come to him, or mamma, when they are ill or in trouble, and get relieved" (I, 3, pp.61-62). Mrs. Stone also comments upon

a widely-extended and unwearying benevolence which redeems the character of Lancashire "cotton-folks" generally from much that might otherwise degrade it, though it be not generally so shiningly pre-eminent as it was in Mr. and Mrs. Wolstenholme (I, 3, pp.53-54).

It may also be that by having such a vaguely benign figure as young Wolstenholme murdered, she thought to stress that a fear of violence by strikers or trade unionists was real and justified. Certainly, she would have remained unconvinced by the twentieth century view of Raymond Williams that such a murder was out of place in a representative social fiction because it was "exceptional."<sup>1</sup> Yet she writes so entirely from a narrow and frustrated middle-class view that she spoils her subject.

The workers' leaders are mob-orators, and objects of hatred:

Thus matters stood for two or three weeks; the "leaders of the people," the Doghertys, et id genus omne, rousing the jaded spirits of their dupes by almost daily out-door orations against the masters and the system of "white slavery," and then hieing themselves home: leaving the seed they had sown to ripen into a bloody harvest, but taking care not to do aught, or to appear so as to give the law a chance of clutching them. (II, 15, p.284)

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<sup>1</sup> Culture and Society 1780-1950 (1958) ch.5. p.101.

But there is no suggestion - as we shall find later - that an attempt to understand the motives of these men, the special conditions that call them forth, would improve the situation. Mrs. Stone is content to describe life in the Manchester cotton world as fully and fairly as she can, but from only one point of view, which is confessedly middle-class. Yet if this is conceded, then, for its time and for its subject, her novel is remarkably free from conscious bias against a large class of people.

(vi) Realism and the Image of Manchester

On the title-page of William Langshawe Mrs. Stone quotes these lines:

"Of manufacture, trade, inventions rare,  
Steam towers, and looms,"

and in the introduction she poses the question whether the popular image of a dirty, vulgar, vicious Manchester was true.<sup>1</sup> The version she gives of this public image of Manchester is the one which had been encouraged by the studies of Peter Gaskell, J. P. Kay, and others, who had concentrated on the worst side of factory life.<sup>2</sup> Describing Manchester at its worst, Mrs. Stone asks, is it so? And she at first leads us to expect a novel of social analysis, a defence of the factory system focussing on the industrial life of Manchester, in which its sordid image will be partly erased. But she does very little to meet this expectation.

On the one hand she does not really provide a social analysis. Her wealthy factory-owners are not seen as capitalists, but men with the power of enriching themselves in the world of industry. She has answered her own question rather in the same way that Hemingway answered Scott Fitzgerald when Fitzgerald said "The rich are different from us," and Hemingway replied, "Yes, they have more money."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See ch.2 above, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gaskell: The Manufacturing Population of England (1833); J. P. Kay: The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (1832).

<sup>3</sup> See Arthur Mizener The Far Side of Paradise (1951). Hemingway quoted Fitzgerald as saying this in the original version of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," but took out Fitzgerald's name when he protested (p.271).

On the other hand, she does not deny much of the truth of the popular image. Against the negative side of the Manchester described in her introduction, she sets the positive image of a somewhat different kind of environment; more ordinary, less frenetic - an environment in which the only real gulf between employers and employed is financial, and one in which the old moral values still operate.

As we have already noted, Mrs. Stone's commentary has a certain value; through her we see Manchester as it appeared to someone who knew it neither as it now appears to the historian, nor as it then appeared to a visitor. Instead of pulling the old image to pieces, she may be said to offer a modified image qualifying the old one. But it has to be said that, although it is refreshing to be shown a rather different Manchester, there remains after reading William Langshawe the impression that many of the criticisms of the cotton world that were current called for a much more direct analysis and refutation, and that we are left with a certain uneasiness about whether it is actually Manchester that we are shown.

The obvious deficiencies and areas of unreliability in the novel present the problem whether Mrs. Stone wrote about Manchester as it seemed to her, or Manchester as she wished to show it to others. It is certainly impossible to accept her picture as entirely faithful. In a social novel, this is a fault; and it happens that this is one of the main criticisms in one of two identified contemporary reviews. W. Cooke Taylor writes, in the Athenaeum:

This novel is not, as its name led us to suppose, an attack on the Factory System, which, on the whole, it defends, but an attack on the social circles of Manchester. Some of the evils on which the writer dwells, are not, however, confined to the metropolis of cotton, but are to be met in every part of Britain.

Taylor's review is given a special interest by the fact that he himself published in the same year a series of letters to the Archbishop of Dublin, with the title Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire.<sup>1</sup> It was perhaps the reason why he was asked to review it. In this book he claimed to be "free from all prejudices of party" (Preface), and gave his reason for publishing as "the great interest which the present condition of the Factory population of Lancashire excites generally," and his own "earnest anxiety to enlist public sympathy in favour of a noble and suffering people" (Letter I, p.1). We must nevertheless add some slight qualification to his professed lack of bias, and note that most of his letters were addressed from the home of the eminent manufacturer, Henry Ashworth of Hyde, who, as a Free-trader, would be already disposed to show his friendship to Taylor, also a Free-trader.

This reservation about his impartiality is important in the light of his criticism of William Langshawe:

We are disposed to believe that the faults which would exist in any community where there had been an influx of sudden wealth, would be the reverse of those which Mrs. Stone has laboured to delineate; for the experience of all ages testifies that the newly enriched are peculiarly sensitive on topics relating to the means of their rise. So far as Manchester extends, it is by no means an exception to the general rule; on the contrary, its rigidity of etiquette is carried to an extreme, which strangers often feel to be painful. There may be Langshawes and Balshawes in Lancashire and elsewhere, who take a pride in vulgarity, and who delight to proclaim that they are not gentlemen; but we have never met with any such, and common sense teaches that if such do exist, they must be regarded as "Lusus Naturae."

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter references are to the separate letters of which the book is composed.

One suspects that Taylor's argument is entirely wrong here. First, if we are to believe in Mrs. Gaskell's Thornton, Dickens's Ironmaster (leaving aside, for the present, the question of the validity of Bounderby as a representative of a type), the coarse, vulgar masters in Disraeli's work, and the many other examples which can be taken from novels of factory life, then it was a source of pride to be a self-made man in the manufacturing districts. Second, Mrs. Stone has also been careful to bring out the "rigidity of etiquette" which prevailed in towns like Manchester. There were, as she shows, rules of conduct applicable to the new situations encountered by the new class, and the members of her cottonocracy have to feel their way carefully through the maze of conventions which it inherited from the older established middle class. She is not subtle; but neither is she as simple as Taylor suggests. Finally, Taylor perverts the portrayal of the Langshawes and the Balshawes by writing that they take a pride in vulgarity. It is true that they are not ashamed of their origins, nor of their ability to make money; but their more obvious vulgarity they are careful to hide behind locked doors - as when Balshawe has a drunken night with his friends, locked in his kitchen parlour. Mrs. Stone gives many examples of ill-mannered manufacturers, but it is hard to doubt the authenticity of her picture when it is, again, supported by a writer like Mrs. Gaskell, whose experience of manufacturers at social gatherings must have been considerable.

Yet despite his limitations, Taylor can show a side of the manufacturing districts which escaped Mrs. Stone, or which did not attract her interest. The first criticism which Taylor's book leads us to make is that Mrs. Stone did not convey any sense of Manchester as a city in her novel, nor a sense of the multiplicity of levels at which life could be lived there. Life at every level of society as she depicts it is strangely rural,

almost pastoral.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Stone shows a close-knit, virtually insulated community, the members of which are all closer to one another than they are to anyone outside "the manufacturing districts." Only once does she touch on the aspect of industrial living which she has led us to expect will be a main theme of her novel. And here, she is not speaking of Manchester, but of another town, unnamed. The Haliwells have been forced to move after Nancy's father has been turned off by Balshawe. Even this description is hastily passed over: the town merely has

all the discomforts and nuisances appertaining to the poorest and dirtiest part of a manufacturing city, in lieu of the open and wholesome, though humble abode, the clear air and blue sky of the house they had left (II, 15, p.158).

Taylor seems to have less inclination to colour his picture. He writes, like Engels, of Manchester's poorer areas as "the most wretched that can be conceived," already deplores the separation of the town into districts "in which relative poverty and wealth form the demarcation of the frontiers," and concludes that "the rich lose sight of the poor, or only recognise them when attention is forced to their existence by their appearance as vagrants, mendicants, or delinquents." The latter group, that of the delinquents, was on closer enquiry, found to be made up mainly of "an immigrating and non-factory population." He tells how it was estimated that Manchester contained "at least 300,000 souls; and how it had become, to the depression of 1842, "daily more and more a commercial depôt," where "every person who passes you in the street has the look of thought and the step of haste" (Letter I).

So, in Manchester itself, only the environment of the upper and middle classes was suburban, or semi-rural - and it was very different

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<sup>1</sup> The Langshawes live in "Lime Grove." If this is intended to be the real Lime Grove of Manchester in the 1830's, then maps of the time show that it would be virtually in the country.

from that of the labouring classes, who had to live in the town to be near the factories. But the manufacturing villages just outside Manchester, according to Taylor, did still have this country atmosphere. In Rosendale Forest, for example, he strolled through the village and admired "the orderly and peaceful demeanour of its inhabitants" (Letter 6, p.91); whereas in Manchester, Bolton, and some of the villages, he complains that

The commons on which the labourers indulged in healthful sports are enclosed; policemen guard the streets and keep the highways clear; high walls enclose demesnes, and even the iron palisades that surround ornamental grounds are jealously planked over to prevent the humble operative from enjoying the verdure of the **follie** or the fragrance of the flowers. (Letter 8, p.129)

These comparisons with Taylor, therefore, may suggest some ways in which William Langshawe is possibly unreliable as a social novel. As we have noted, the work was published in 1842, written about 1837, and set in the period 1820-30 (with some inconsistencies). In some ways it may also have happened that Mrs. Stone's picture of Manchester was coloured by even earlier memories. What one finds, on consideration, is that she appears to have rather tentatively grasped at some interesting themes implicit in her subject, but to have been incapable of expressing her perception of them in her book.

For instance, this very contrast between past and present, in the development of Manchester and the growth of the cotton industry should have been somewhere near the centre of the novel. All the social novels of this period are concerned with the great changes man had made to his environment. In Mary Barton, for example, this is obviously important in the characterisation of Job Legh, Old Alice, and in the opening scene in Greenhays Fields. The same is true of Sybil (1845), or of Scarsdale, published in 1860, and looking back much further into the origins of the

industry, or even John Halifax (1857). Mrs. Gaskell brings this out again by her quotations from ballads, but she also uses references to and quotation from Ebenezer Elliot, Carlyle, and Samuel Bamford to keep the contemporary world in view.

Mrs. Stone simply makes a great deal of use of Wordsworth and Crabbe, in quotation, presumably in order to draw a contrast between the more sophisticated artificial world which has come with the growth of the factories and the simpler rustic inheritance of many of the factory workers. It is a world in which the potential trade unionist, Jem, can still be tricked because of his belief in folklore (I, 19). But this is all hazily implicit. She has not grasped the significance of what she is doing. She has hardly even bothered to show the city or the factory. The spirit of the whole novel is that of the country, in spite of her declared intention to write about "manufacture, trade . . . steam towers and looms."

Something of the same kind is shown in her portrayal of working relations within the industry. Taylor is, himself, somewhat naïve about these:

I have found, in many mills, operatives whose length of continuance in the same employment proved that they looked up on their masters with all the confidence, if not with all the affection, of old servants in an ancient household; and I know the sturdiness of Lancashire too well to believe that such continuous service could have been procured by wages alone. (Letter 7, p.110)

Mrs. Stone's account of the relations between masters and men has some conviction just because of its naïveté; but it is hard to be sure what period she thought she was writing about. She does, in fact, convey a sense of community within the industry, but it is a simplified sense. Of course, one does not necessarily learn to appreciate a good novel such as Mary Barton better by reading a bad one such as

William Langshawe. But it is clear that in describing the changes in the industrial scene, and the developments in relationships between masters and men, Mrs. Stone merely has some perception of what is happening without the power to express it or relate it to the form of her novel. We no doubt take for granted Mrs. Gaskell's ability, <sup>Yet it is</sup> <sub>^</sub> an ability in dealing with these two themes which might be thought to go beyond even Disraeli and Dickens.

Additional Notes

- (a) None of the standard works of reference gives any information about Mrs. Stone. In the Bentley papers in the British Museum there are agreements with R. Bentley signed by Mrs. Stone (Add. Mss. 46560 - 46682, ff. 133, 134, 164) but there is no record of letters from her to the firm. It appears from the dedication of William Langshawe that she was the daughter of John Wheeler, proprietor of The Manchester Chronicle. There is a passing reference in one of Mrs. Gaskell's letters to "Mrs. Wheeler, a clergyman's wife" (Letters, 11 Nov., 1848, no. 62). I have been unable to find any information about Wheeler, beyond that given by Mrs. Stone herself in her dedication, which reads as follows:

To John Wheeler, Esquire, / late proprietor of /  
 "THE MANCHESTER CHRONICLE," / whose arduous career  
 as a public journalist / continued through a long  
 course of years, / and during many troublous times, /  
 was invariably distinguished / by / integrity, talent,  
 and courtesy, / this work is inscribed / by / HIS DAUGHTER.

The British Museum Catalogue lists Mrs. Stone's works as:

1. The Art of Needlework from the earliest ages . . . by Mrs. E. S. . . . edited by the Countess of Wilton. 3rd Edn. 1841.

Alibone's Dictionary of British and American Authors (1870) dates the first edition of this as 1840.

2. Angels. London, 1859 .
3. Chronicles of Fashion, from the time of Elizabeth to the early part of the nineteenth century, in manners, amusements, banquets, costumes, etc. 2 vol. London, 1845.
4. Ellen Merton; or the Pic-nic. A tale . London, 1856.
5. God's Acre; or, historical notes relating to Churchyards. London, 1858.
6. A Handbook to the Christian Year, for Young People. London, 1860.
7. Miss Pen and her Niece; or the old maid, and the young one. London, 1843.
8. Mr. Dalton's Legatee, a very nice Woman. 3 vol. London, 1850.
9. Three Incidents, strictly true. In verse Worthing, 1873.
10. William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord. 2 vol. London, 1842.
11. The Young Milliner. London, 1843.

Alibone's also notes that she contributed to the New Monthly

Magazine. She wrote for children under the pseudonym Sutherland Menzies (Brit. Mus. Cat.).

- (b) There is evidence that they actually were exaggerated. Stanley D. Chapman, in The Early Factory Masters (Newton Abbot, 1969) brings forward strong evidence to show that "The proper historical context of the Blincoe Memoir is . . . a fast-declining industry" ("Ellis Needham and the Memoir of Robert Blincoe," ch.10, pp. 199-209). Yet Chapman explains that since Blincoe himself eventually became a "moderately successful cotton manufacturer in Stockport," his Memoir was generally credited as coming from an unbiased observer. Blincoe gave evidence to the Commission enquiring into the employment of children in factories (2nd Report of the Central Board; P.P. 1833 vol. XXI, D3, pp.17-18). Chapman writes that Mrs. Trollope used the Memoir for Michael Armstrong as late as 1839. It may be that Mrs. Stone is indirectly arguing against this novel, <sup>since</sup> so much of William Langshawe is aimed at showing that factory work was not harmful to children.
- (c) It may be worthwhile to quote a few comments on Doherty's character and career since it is clear that Mrs. Stone directs much of her anti-union diatribe against him personally. He was in jail for two years after the general strike, "for misconduct according to his enemies, for his share in the general turn-out according to himself" (J. F. C. Harrison: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America, 1969, p.210). John Doherty "was born in Ireland in 1799, and went to work in a cotton-mill at Larne, Co. Antrim, at the age of ten. In 1816 he migrated to Manchester, where he quickly became one of the leading Trade Unionists, and secretary to the local Cotton-spinners' Society. We find him, for instance, taking a prominent part in the agitation against the proposed re-enactment of the Combination Laws in 1825 . . . In 1829 he organised the great strike of the Hyde spinners against a reduction of rates, and became . . . successively General Secretary to the Federation of Spinners' Societies, and to the National Association for the Protection of Labour . . . We naturally find him the object of great suspicion by the Government, but no charge seems ever to have been brought against him (Home Office Papers, 40 -26, 27). The articles in the Voice of the People and the Poor Man's Advocate (see n.2, p.85), which are evidently from his pen, show him to have been a man of wide information, great natural shrewdness, and far-reaching aims . . . In 1832, during the Reform crisis, Place describes him as advising the working classes to use the occasion for a social revolution. He subsequently acted as secretary to an association of operatives and masters established to enforce the Factory Acts, and was one of Lord Shaftesbury's most strenuous supporters" (S. and B. Webb: op. cit. p. 83 above, pp.117-118). The Hammonds write of Doherty that he was a man of "courage and ability," and provide the additional information that he published from 1830, the United Trades Co-operative Journal; was on the Central Short Time Committee to promote the Ten Hours Bill, and formed in 1829 the Grand General Union of All the Operative Spinners of the United Kingdom which was an early step in the direction of Chartism

(The Age of the Chartists op. cit. p. 83, <sup>x</sup>above, pp. 263-285).  
J. C. Gill, in The Ten Hours Parson, mentions a speech by  
Doherty in which he spoke of having been three times in prison  
(p.112), and that he formed the Owenite Society for Promoting  
National Regeneration in March 1834, along with John Fielden, a  
Todmorden manufacturer prominent in the Ten Hours Movement.

CHAPTER IVThe Dignity of Labour: MARY BARTON

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(i) The Critics

Kathleen Tillotson, in her Novels of the Eighteen-Forties,<sup>1</sup> chose Mary Barton as one of four novels for close examination. The reason given was that Mary Barton presented "an outstanding example" of "the novel directly concerned with the social problem," while at the same time it transcended its kind: "alike in motive and effect, it is far more than 'a tract for the times'."<sup>2</sup> In concluding her study Mrs. Tillotson again laid stress on "motive and effect":

It would be far better to remove from Mary Barton the old tag of 'novel with a purpose,' implying social, extra-artistic purpose. It was indeed, more perhaps than any other of the time, a novel with a social effect; but Mrs. Gaskell wrote, then as always, not with her eye on the effect, but as one possessed with and drenched in her subject.<sup>3</sup>

The effect of Mary Barton in its time and afterwards is disputable only as to extent and not to its existence; but Mrs. Gaskell most certainly did have both a purpose and an effect in mind when she wrote the novel. She openly declared in the Preface:

The more I reflected on this unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests, as the employers and the employed must ever be, the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people.<sup>4</sup>

After the novel was published, she wrote to Mrs. Samuel Greg, (sister-in-law of W. R. Greg, who reviewed it for the Edinburgh Review) about the character of John Barton:

<sup>1</sup> (Oxford) 1954.

<sup>2</sup> Tillotson, p.202.

<sup>3</sup> Tillotson, p.222.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Barton, ed. Stephen Gill (Penguin, 1970). Hereafter MB.

I believed from personal observation that such men were not uncommon, and would well reward such sympathy and love as would throw light down on their groping search after the causes of suffering, and the reason why suffering is sent, and what they can do to lighten it.<sup>1</sup>

Although Mrs. Gaskell did not receive the initial impetus to write from the social conditions around her, these conditions had impressed her so forcibly that she abandoned another novel which she had already started, in order to write Mary Barton. She states in her Preface, again:

I had already made a little progress in a tale, the period of which was more than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire, when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided.

Mrs. Tillotson's conclusion is typical of the obliquities into which the critic can fall when he reads Mrs. Gaskell's social-problem novels out of the context of their environment. No-one has as yet attempted in a study of Mrs. Gaskell's social-problem novels to relate the extra-artistic sides of her life and environment to the achievement of the novels.

In doing this there must be difficulties in trying to recreate her environment, or to see what her life was like. But the critic ought to be able in the first place to see what kind of person she was. This has been tried often enough already, but in an unsatisfactory way, with unfortunate results on criticism of her work. Edgar Wright, in his Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment gives a fairly reasonable

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<sup>1</sup> The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell (Manchester, 1966) ed. J. A. V. Chapple and A. Pollard, 42, (late 1849). For this and all subsequent quotations I have followed Chapple and Pollard in giving references to the number of the letter, rather than the page.

appraisal of this situation, up to the date of his book's publication in 1965:

The stereotype of the moderately cultured amateur with a nostalgic affection for childhood traditions and a talent for story-telling, when she could spare the time from maternity and good works has been . . . a hindrance to a just appreciation of her work. This attitude has been coupled with an emphasis on her femininity . . . Too much of the critical reference to Mrs. Gaskell has tended . . . to stress disproportionately the element in her work which draws on the early Knutsford days (p.4).

The admiration of the liberal middle-class critic for the liberal middle-class virtues of Mrs. Gaskell, wife and mother and social worker, has sometimes crept in at the expense of an unbiased judgement as it does in Arthur Pollard's book,<sup>1</sup> or in A. B. Hopkins' critical biography<sup>2</sup> or in Gilbert Thomas' article, "Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot; a study in contrasts."<sup>3</sup> In the latter article, for example, Thomas finds that Mrs. Gaskell, "a gentle, Hellenic woman," "yielded neither to sentimentality nor to an easy faith in political panaceas." She contrasts with George Eliot, who was "cut off from eager and intimate contact with the world" by "philosophical speculation." In the end, the kind of praise given to Mrs. Gaskell is seen to be exactly the kind which she described, in her Life of Charlotte Brontë, as "praise mingled with pseudo-gallant allusions to her sex,"<sup>4</sup> and which Charlotte Brontë herself described as "a flattery which is not true praise."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer (Manchester, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Her Life and Work (1952).

<sup>3</sup> Chambers's Journal 4 (Dec. 1944) pp.631-4.

<sup>4</sup> (1857) ch.18.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey (1850).

Another example of this approach is found in David Cecil's Early Victorian Novelists (1934) in a chapter on Mrs. Gaskell. The defects which Cecil saw in Mrs. Gaskell's works he attributed to her femininity:

Her novels are Victorian novels, for the first time transposed into the feminine key. They are David Copperfield and Barchester Towers, written by a minister's wife in her drawing-room.

Now it is not to be denied that this did in some measure detract from her stature as a novelist. For one thing, it meant that her work was wholly lacking in the virile qualities. Her genius is so purely feminine that it excludes from her achievement not only specifically masculine themes, but all the more masculine qualities of thought and feeling. She was very clever; but with a feminine cleverness, instinctive, rule-of-thumb; showing itself in illuminations of the particular, not in general intellectual structure. The conscious reason plays little part in her creative processes (ch.6).

The positive side of this "femininity" manifests itself as:

Taste, for instance; the Victorian lady was brought up before all things to be careful not to offend against the canons of good taste . . .

"She was sometimes weak and often uninspired; she did not know how to be awkward, obtrusive or over-florid" (ch.6).

It is next seen in "the feminine command of detail," and finally in the kind of "psychological subtlety" displayed in these quotations taken by Cecil from Wives and Daughters to illustrate his point:

Cynthia was very beautiful, and was so well aware of the fact that she had forgotten to care about it.

and

I notice that apathetic people have more quiet impertinence than others.

How these quotations illustrate a particular feminine subtlety, or any kind of subtlety, Cecil did not explain, although it does not seem to

be immediately obvious. The biographical and the "pseudo-gallant" come together in this last quotation from Cecil's work:

Cloistered like a young girl in her convent of peaceful domesticity, she never lost the young girl's eager-eyed response to the world (ch.6).

Cecil's assumption shows how dangerous the biographical approach can be, when knowledge is incomplete. Had he been able to read the recent collected edition of Mrs. Gaskell's letters, he could never have made this statement.

Yet there have been other occasions when a detailed knowledge of an author's character and environment has contributed a great deal to the interpretation of his work, as H. P. Collins' essay, "The Naked Sensibility: Elizabeth Gaskell"<sup>1</sup> shows. Although both Wright and Pollard criticise the severity of his judgement of Mrs. Gaskell, he makes a point which is relevant to both studies:

Elizabeth Gaskell's dimness is partly her own fault, for she never - until her last book - lived consistently up to her own standards, and she yielded again and again to the respectability of nursery moralising. She might almost be emulating Maria Edgeworth's Moral Tales. Though of the chapel, she was a cultured Unitarian, not a provincial Puritan; and we must suppose she yielded to literary convention. Despite her stand for the striker and the unmarried mother, she had little real audacity (p.60).

Thus, her dimness to us today is because of a relative failure of nerve, a respect for conventional morality, and conventional expectations in literature. This is largely true. Yet it is also arguable that both Collins and the other critics underestimate Mrs. Gaskell. Especially a purely critical study, of the kind which Wright's purports to be (but is not), must leave out much that would give a valuable insight into determining what produces "the unique flavour" which Pollard finds in Mrs. Gaskell's work.

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<sup>†</sup> Essays in Criticism 3 (Jan. 1953), pp.60-72.

Such an attempt often ends in finding Mrs. Gaskell to be what Collins calls a "nursery" moralist. Pellard in particular never convincingly justifies his large claim that she was "a considerable artist of the moral imagination" (p.262). He tries, himself, to show two views of Mrs. Gaskell in his introduction:

Where does Mrs. Gaskell stand in 1965? 'The mood of the twentieth century is far from favourable to Elizabeth Gaskell, her tone in fiction is unsophisticated and démodé; the style is neither intellectually modulated nor terse and colloquial and it is unlikely that a culture already impatient of convention will ever be attuned to it.' So wrote Collins. Much of what he says is true, but I am by no means so pessimistic about her . . .

Basically, Mrs. Gaskell is a simple writer, 'unsophisticated' in Collins' phrase, 'nothing recondite' in that of Paul Elmer More. The most appropriate method of interpretation I suggest therefore should itself be a simple one. This may even seem as old-fashioned as Collins thinks this century finds Mrs. Gaskell herself. It seems to me, however, that the search for pseudo-complexity has had too long a run anyway, and that we are altogether, in Swift's phrase, 'too far gone in all the modern critic's jargon'; out of all the authors one may choose to name, Mrs. Gaskell must surely be among those least likely to respond to such treatment. Certainly one recent Freudian analysis of Cranford<sup>1</sup> looked more ingenious than sensible (pp.8-9).

The character of this defence of a "simple" approach to the "simplicity" of Mrs. Gaskell's writing deserves some attention, since it means far more than it appears to say.

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is presumably to Martin Dodsworth's "Women Without Men at Cranford," in Essays in Criticism 13 (April 1963), pp.132-145. Dodsworth sees Cranford as "a kind of trimmed and tidied dream, in which Mrs. Gaskell's unconscious hostility to the male struggles with her awareness of the pointlessness of such hostility in the predominantly masculine society of her day."

Pollard may at first appear to say that Collins is searching for a false complexity in Mrs. Gaskell's novels, when in fact Collins wrote:

Any complexity she has - and art does not go far without complexity - is in herself, it is not fashioned in the creative process (p.61).

Fewer critics than prejudice usually allows set out to search for pseudo-complexities in a novel, so presumably the "pseudo" of Pollard's phrase refers to the language ("jargon") of modern literary criticism, which by its complexity often implies that there is a corresponding complexity in the work being examined. No-one will argue with Pollard that it is undesirable to use complex language where simple language is more expressive and precise. But he confuses the two phenomena, and by adding his comment on Freudian criticism brings the argument back to the refusal to admit criticism which does not appear "sensible" - especially if it is also ingenious.

This adds up to an indictment, not only of modern literary criticism and its language, but also of the idea that literary analysis has progressed, or is capable of progress as a form of criticism. "Mrs. Gaskell is a simple writer . . . therefore . . . the most appropriate method of interpretation . . . should itself be a simple one," makes good sense in itself, but not as an 'ubi sunt' plea to criticism in general. Pollard's answer to Collins' charge that Mrs. Gaskell's work is not relevant to the twentieth century is an avowedly reactionary one - if Mrs. Gaskell does not answer to the times, then the times are out of joint. It is difficult to reconcile Pollard's view of Mrs. Gaskell as a simple, unsophisticated writer with his conclusion that she is "a considerable artist of the moral imagination" - the idea of simplicity ties in much more readily with Collins' assessment of her as a "nursery moralist". Examples abound

of fiction which is simple in form and apparently simple in content, but which presents a multitude of complexities for the critical interpreter. Pollard has not drawn any distinction between the form and the content of Mrs. Gaskell's work. The difference between a completely simple novelist and one with some complexities can be shown in this study, by comparing some of the other writers with Mrs. Gaskell. Underlying the argument in Pollard's introduction is a defensive attitude inappropriate to the critic, and harmful, in its inadequacy, to the reputation of Mrs. Gaskell.

Where then are the qualities which make Mrs. Gaskell's work acceptable, in the twentieth century, as that of a "major minor novelist"? Collins lists them as:

. . . her sensitiveness, sympathy with human nature, humour, playfulness, and insight into not-too-complex character, above all her acute feeling for the beauty of the English scene at its best.

But he goes on to qualify his praise:

But her vision of life was confined within her own instinctive feminine sympathies; she never created an objective, dramatised world in which men and women live without revealing the lineaments of their creator (p.69).

Once again, this is largely true. It is here that we find the reason why it is so difficult, in criticising Mrs. Gaskell's work, to separate her life, the 'bourgeois' part of her existence, from her novels' style and content. The moral character of Mrs. Gaskell herself dominates her novels, impressing the reader more strongly than any of the characters in the work, <sup>except</sup> that of John Barton in the first half of Mary Barton. The quality of sincerity which pervades the novels comes directly from their author. The problem of rich and poor in Mary Barton, of conventional morality versus Christian sympathy in Ruth, or of the conflicting values of North and South, contain, apart from their intrinsic interest, a translation into art of the dilemma of the intelligent middle-class Victorian woman (such as

Mrs. Gaskell) in her attempt to come to terms with the society in which she lived. The struggle is not interior clash of good and evil, as it is, say, in Crime and Punishment (which is known to have received some impetus from Mary Barton)<sup>1</sup> but that between greater and lesser social good.

Either to take the view of Collins that she is merely "instructive," or to suppose that she was somehow profound yet not really concerned with a social purpose, is to diminish her achievement. The interest of Mary Barton and North and South lies partly in the manner in which someone so sensitive and humane attempts to realise a fictional world which was very directly related to the world about her.

Mrs. Gaskell was singular, among Victorian women novelists, in the degree of apparent normality in her life; and she was also especially subject, because of her position as a minister's wife, to the pressure of social conventions. Her presence as "a wise, good, woman,"<sup>2</sup> pervades her novels, but there are limitations to her experience and to the range of her imagination.

Yet it was alive to the problems of her times, and her sensitivity led her to see that the loss of her own child was a personal tragedy that others, too, were suffering; that there were no bounds of class in this; that the ordinary people she met must suffer as acutely and even more frequently from such tragedies as she did; so that when a man said to her that she had never seen a child starved, she could be moved to turn from her Yorkshire idyll of a century past

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<sup>1</sup> See L. Grossman: "Mrs. Gaskell's Influence on Dostoevsky," Anglo-Soviet Journal 21 (1960).

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Greenwood, quoted by Pollard, p.262.

and look at life around her.

(ii) Mrs. Gaskell's Manchester Experience

Arriving at Mary Barton by way of a study of Mrs. Gaskell's predecessors in the fiction of the cotton-districts, we can perhaps better appreciate the qualities which made this work outstanding in its field. The aspects of Mary Barton which distinguish it most strikingly from the factory-novels of other writers, are the quality of first-hand experience, and, arising from this, the personal sympathy, which it communicates. These qualities are immediately recognisable as distinct from the blue-book indignation, constructive though it may have been, of a Disraeli or a Charlotte Elizabeth. Probably because Mrs. Gaskell had lived in Manchester for sixteen years before the publication of her first novel, she could provide a picture of it which better conveyed the quality of life there than most.

Although Arthur Pollard, Edgar Wright, and Aina Rubenius<sup>1</sup> have written at considerable length about Mrs. Gaskell's connection with Manchester, it seems to me that the approach which each of them uses is in its own way flawed. To consider only one in detail, in a chapter on "Mrs. Gaskell Herself," Pollard goes briefly through the main events of her life and of her career as a novelist. He follows this with a chapter on Mary Barton, the first three pages of which he devotes to an account of the social, political, and literary climate of the 1840's. This leads on to a more particular description of conditions in Manchester itself, culled from the published material of

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<sup>1</sup> The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works (Upsala University English Institute, Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature 5, 1950).

four contemporary observers.<sup>1</sup> With the questions "Was Mrs. Gaskell's picture untrue?" and "How much of their picture does Mrs. Gaskell reproduce?" he leads in to a discussion of Mary Barton.

There are several faults to be found with this approach. First there is the implicit assumption that there was one Manchester, capable of being grasped intellectually as a whole. Yet no-one was neutral about Manchester, the excitement generated among writers and intellectuals of the time lay in the fact that, as "the shock city of the age,"<sup>2</sup> it was a many-sided symbol of the age. Allied with this flaw is the uselessness of any attempt to describe in a few pages a situation the very facts of which were and are so controversial. But the less obvious, and more dangerous flaw in this approach is that it depersonalizes Mrs. Gaskell's experience of Manchester, making it seem that anyone in her not-so unusual circumstances would have seen the situation in the same way. If we are to look at Mary Barton primarily as literary critics and not as social historians, then what is most useful to us is a study of her own experience, how she coped with it and what she made of it.

Edgar Wright's approach has this same fault of not just telling us about Manchester, describing Mrs. Gaskell's life and giving some details about Mrs. Gaskell's immediate environment and experiences, and then leaving us to put them together. Although Aina Rubenius is more satisfactory in this, her study has the limitations of its particular

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<sup>1</sup> The studies used are: J. Adshead: Distress in Manchester (1842); J. P. Kay: The Moral and Physical Conditions of the Working Classes Manchester (1832); L. Faucher: Manchester in 1844 (1844); B. Love, The Handbook of Manchester (1842).

<sup>2</sup> Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (1963) ch.3.

concern with "the woman question." Some earlier critical biographies of Mrs. Gaskell have also suffered from their bias in favour of Mrs. Gaskell the woman, and, while providing many of the details which more recent studies lack, have failed to use it where it is most valuable, in the interpretation of Mary Barton and North and South. We now begin to feel the need for a more specific account of the aspects of Mrs. Gaskell and her life which are relevant to the interpretation of these two novels. While the following description is necessarily brief, I hope that it represents a more useful approach to the novels through Mrs. Gaskell than has been used before.

It is wrong to assume that Mrs. Gaskell's everyday life would be that of the ordinary minister's wife. In the first place, we have the evidence of A. C. Smith, who knew the Gaskells, given in an address printed in the Sunday School Quarterly for 1911:<sup>1</sup>

She no sooner settled in Manchester than she steadily and consistently objected to her time being considered as belonging in any way to her husband's congregation for the purpose of congregational visiting, and to be looked to for that leadership in congregational work which is too often expected of the 'minister's wife'.

Yet, he says, Mrs. Gaskell did a great deal, "of her own choice and desire," among the poor of Manchester from the time she arrived there in 1832. She taught Sunday School classes in Lower Mosley Street, one of the poorest areas of Manchester, and proved that her interest went beyond what might be thought to be her duty:

She was much interested in the elder girls at Lower Mosley Street Sunday School, and for several years carried out a plan of having them at her own house, once a month on Sunday afternoons, when she read and talked with them.

This is confirmed by W. H. Brown, one of Mr. Gaskell's successors in

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<sup>1</sup> "Mrs. Gaskell and Lower Mosley Street," 2 (1911) pp.156-161.

Cross Street Chapel, who wrote of her "visiting the poor youngsters at Lower Mosley Street schools, and having the senior Sunday School girls at her own home once a month for conversation."<sup>1</sup> An obituary of Mrs. Gaskell in the Unitarian Herald reports that she also "gave up her Saturday evenings" to teach these girls "geography and English history."<sup>2</sup> There is further evidence in The Inquirer of her care for her Sunday School class:

If any of the girls fell ill she visited them, tended and nursed them, and gave pecuniary assistance. On more than one occasion she had a girl brought to her own residence so that she might receive better nursing and food . . . When convalescent she would send them away to purer air, and not only bear all the expense but personally superintend all the arrangements down to the smallest detail.<sup>3</sup>

John Mortimer, another Manchester man who knew the Gaskells, wrote of the

attractive picture we get of her . . . as the centre of a group of factory girls, gathered about her in her own home, to whom she is not only teaching sewing, but, by an intimate companionship, is seeking to guide and regulate their lives.<sup>4</sup>

In a letter to Eliza Fox<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Gaskell mentions "my week at the ragged school which took me into town from 9 till 12 every morning." (Letters 137 (Oct. 1852).

W. H. Brown describes another aspect of this work, that of "visiting the parents of the poor youngsters at Lower Mosley Street." He says that in 1844, for example, "she visited many of the operatives,

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Brown (Chaplain of Cross Street Chapel), Mrs. Gaskell - A Manchester Influence (Manchester, 1932), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> 17 Nov. 1865.

<sup>3</sup> "Mrs. Gaskell and Her Social Work Among the Poor," A Manchester Correspondent, 8 Oct. 1910, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Lancashire Novelists - Mrs. Gaskell," in The Manchester Quarterly, July 1902, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Daughter of W. J. Fox, politician; Eliza Fox was a close friend of Mrs. Gaskell.

and when they sternly demanded a fresh standard of life urged patience in her winning, pleading way." The writer in The Inquirer records that "certain of her good acts were public property during the years of distress in 1848 to 1850, and again during the cotton famine," and that she "assisted Mr. Travers Madge<sup>1</sup> in his labours." Brown records the event, supposed to have been told by Mrs. Gaskell to Travers Madge, which is said to have planted the original idea for Mary Barton in her mind. A Manchester "hand" whom she was visiting answered Mrs. Gaskell's Christian arguments on behalf of patience in suffering with "Ay, Ma'am, but have ye ever seen a child clemmed to death?" The importance to us of this legend lies not so much in the tragedy of the striker's situation, as in its demonstration of Mrs. Gaskell's familiarity with the factory-hands. Mrs. Ellis Chadwick, in her Mrs. Gaskell : Haunts, Homes and Stories (1913), writes that Mrs. Gaskell was:

an expert in the art of sick-visiting . . . Margaret Hale's account of visiting poor Bessy Higgins is one of many pictures from life taken from the novelist's experience when witnessing the pathetic struggle with the hard times in the "hungry forties (p.205).

In 1840, although the Gaskells' house was barricaded against riots, Mrs. Chadwick wrote that "every morning the shutters were opened and Mrs. Gaskell and his wife distributed loaves to the starving poor" (p.209).

References to the poor in Mrs. Gaskell's letters show her extensive and intimate involvement with them. She helped in one way and another with almost every kind of social work. The Inquirer informs us that she was "intimately connected" with Thomas Wright, "the prison philanthropist," and in a letter to her daughters in 1849 she refers to him as "our dear Mr. Wright" (Letters 47, 17 May 1849). The nature of her connection with Wright is shown most fully in a letter to Dickens

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<sup>1</sup> A Unitarian mission visitor who assisted Mr. Gaskell.

(Letters 62, 12 Jan. 1850), detailing the life-story of a young prostitute whom she had visited in prison at Wright's request, and asking for the help of Dickens and Miss Coutts to arrange for the girl's emigration. There are other references to the same kind of work: in a letter to Eliza Fox earlier in the same year she describes another case:

Our girl (yours and mine) sails in the Royal Albert on March 4, and her outfit is ready all except the sheets, which I must see about today; but except that [,] all is ready and right; and I like the girl much, poor creature. I have been to see her twice a week (ibid. 55, 26 Nov. 1849).

Her philanthropy was always of a practical, constructive nature. She wrote to her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Holland, that "the best mode of administering material charity seems to me by giving employment and taking thought in adapting the kind of employment and in helping to find out who can do it" (ibid. 424, April 1850). The range of her contributions to the general welfare of the poor would alone show her interest: she also wrote "Bessie's Troubles at Home" for the Sunday School Penny Magazine (edited by Travers Madge), and in 1850 gave her consent to "The Sexton's Hero," "Christmas Storms and Sunshine," and "Lizzie Leigh," being published together in booklet form "for the benefit of Macclesfield Baths and Washhouses."

"The Sexton's Hero" and "Christmas Storms and Sunshine" also went to aid the cause of Christian Socialism. They appeared in The Christian Socialist in 1851. Her sympathy with working men, it seemed, never allowed her to leave off working in some way on their behalf and led her to be called, as she said in a letter to Eliza Fox "socialist and communist" (ibid. 69, April 1850). Certainly she was familiar with many people within the Christian Socialist movement, and took a deep interest in it, as this extract from her letters shows:

I mean to copy you out some lines of my hero, Mr. Kingsley; and I want to ask you and Mr. Fox if you know anything of a co-operative tailor's shop established by Prof. Maurice. Archdeacon Hare, Mr. Ludlow &c., &c., &c., & Kingsley (many clergymen) on Louis Blanc's principle, Jules Chevalier for a guide, in the New Road (ibid. 55, 26 Nov. 1849 to Eliza Fox).

She helped to disseminate the literature of the movement (see Letters 67 [20 Feb. 1850] to William Robson, Mrs. Gaskell's brother-in-law), and personally knew F. J. Furnivall, A. J. Scott, Froude, Kingsley, and F. D. Maurice, its founders. She also knew Samuel Bamford, the weaver-poet and author of Passages in the Life of a Radical. It seems that she took every opportunity of knowing the poor and the working classes, and that her conscience towards them gave her no peace. In her letter to Eliza Fox in which she <sup>spoken of as</sup> describes herself as a "socialist and communist" she pleads with Miss Fox to "try and make me see . . . that it is right to spend so much ourselves on so purely selfish a thing as a house is, while so many are wanting."

This brings us back to the fact that Mrs. Gaskell was middle-class, and, although spiritually she might identify with the good in people of any class, socially she was identified with the middle class. Yet being a minister's wife must have given her the advantage of a certain amount of detachment from the money-making ethics of mid-Victorian Manchester. A further source of detachment was the fact that her roots lay in the country middle-class, whose values, as she demonstrates in North and South and obliquely in Cranford, were quite different from those of the townspeople. On the other hand, many of her friends were connected with the cotton trade in some way. Extensive knowledge of the workpeople and their environment, and deep sympathy with their troubles did not preclude friendship with their employers. Although there does not seem to be any evidence of a close friendship with a cotton manufacturer, many members of the Cross Street Chapel were

employers.

Mrs. Chadwick describes the close friendship which existed between the Gaskells and James Nasmyth, famous for the invention of the steam hammer, and owner of the Bridgewater Foundry. A relative of Mr. Gaskell, Holbrook Gaskell, was a partner in Nasmyth's firm. Yet a reading of Nasmyth's autobiography,<sup>1</sup> which shows that he was an educated and highly imaginative man, an inventor before he was a business-man, and the son of an artist, goes a long way to explaining the closeness of the friendship. Sir William Fairbairn, also an engineer, whose works in ancoats employed six hundred people, was a friend of the Gaskells and a member of Cross Street Chapel. Fairbairn, as he appears in his Autobiography,<sup>2</sup> was also an imaginative man, but without the education of Nasmyth. It is easy to imagine, on reading his account of his life, that he would provide a useful audience on whom Mrs. Gaskell could test North and South - which she did (see Letters 249 [Summer 1855] to William Fairbairn).

Wainwright Belhouse, a cotton-spinner, was a friend of the Gaskells, and their neighbour in Plymouth Grove. Mr. Gaskell was the close friend of Edmund Potter, a calico printer,<sup>3</sup> and twice went on holiday with him. Other fairly close friends involved in manufacture were the Schwabes, also calico printers, Martin Schunck, a merchant, and the well-known Greg brothers. The only other close connection with a manufacturer was an indirect one with Henry Winkworth, father of Mrs. Gaskell's close friends Catherine, Emily, and Susanna Winkworth, and a silk manufacturer. Yet it is probably significant that with all

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<sup>1</sup> James Nasmyth. Engineer. An Autobiography ed. Samuel Smiles (1883).

<sup>2</sup> W. Pole, The Life of Sir William Fairbairn, Partly Written by Himself (1877).

<sup>3</sup> See p.294 below.

the potential sources of information among her Manchester acquaintances that she wrote to Catherine Winkworth after the publication of

Mary Barton: "I should so much like to talk to Mr. Winkworth about the master and workman part of 'Mary Barton'" (Letters 35, 23 Dec. 1848).

It is likely that most of these contacts were on a fairly superficial level of social acquaintance; or perhaps Mrs. Gaskell's interest in manufacture was as rudely repulsed as Margaret Hale's in North and South.

She confessedly did not possess the first-hand knowledge of the manufacturer's life which she had of the working men whom she visited at home to help in hard times. She wrote to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth on the subject of showing the employers' side in a novel: "I should like some man, who had a man's correct knowledge, to write on this subject"

(ibid. 72a, 16 July 1850). Perhaps too she did not find the manufacturers alien enough to be interesting as people, and was not, in an excusably feminine way, interested in the technicalities of cotton production. And, she confessed to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth quite simply: "I don't feel as strongly (and it is impossible I ever should) on the other side!"

It would seem, too, from a study of the letters from Mrs. Gaskell to her friends before the publication of Mary Barton that in her intellectual life, if so poor an existence can be given so elevated a label, she was quite the typical woman of her time. Indeed, when her earlier letters are compared with those of George Eliot or Charlotte Brontë, they seem to be the productions of a feather-brained female, preoccupied with millinery and marriage. After the publication of Mary Barton we can perceive her gradually coming into her own intellectually, expanding her circle of intelligent acquaintances, and less afraid to write seriously on serious subjects, though still often self-consciously flippant on matters which concern her deeply. She was never confident

of her own intellect, and obviously felt the strain of combining the function of artist with that of wife and mother. In this letter to Eliza Fox we can sense how hard she tries to reconcile the two roles, to convince herself, against her instinct, that they are compatible:

One thing is pretty clear, Women must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life. However we are talking of women. I am sure it is healthy for them to have the refuge of the hidden world of Art to shelter themselves in when too much pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares; it keeps them from being morbid as you say; and takes them into the land where King Arthur lies hidden, and soothes them with its peace. I have felt this in writing. (ibid. 68, Feb. 1850).

It may be because she was long accustomed to the role of wife and mother before she emerged as a writer that her intellectual connections were invariably either at second-hand or undistinguished. In reading through her letters we are made to feel that she assumed the social, outgoing role before her individuality had fully developed, and that her feminine preoccupations and responsibilities restricted her freedom to experiment and develop as a person and a writer.

Possibly Mrs. Gaskell applied the advice she gave to another aspiring novelist, 'Herbert Grey' to every facet of her own life, to exclude the introspection necessary to development. She advised him to

observe what is out of you, instead of examining what is in you. It is always an unhealthy sign when we are too conscious of any of the physical processes that go within you; & I believe in like manner that we ought not to be too cognizant of our mental proceedings, only taking note of the results (ibid. 420, after 15 March 1859).

Although the value of this advice may be debated in its general application, with Mrs. Gaskell, when she was writing a social-problem novel and with her special opportunities for observation, it can be said to have worked fairly successfully. As Asa Briggs puts it, in

Mrs. Gaskell's time "the novelists were recognised to be social explorers," and people "turned to novels about Manchester precisely because they were both novels and social documents."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gaskell's consciousness of this dual purpose in Mary Barton will be clearly seen as we turn now to try to find what she thought was so unique or special about her experience that it deserved communication in the form of a novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Cities, ch.3.

(iii)

The Novel with a Purpose

All through Mrs. Gaskell's letters to friends on the subject of Mary Barton she stresses the fact that the attitudes represented by the working men in the novel are described from first-hand experience. This psychological realism is obviously connected with her theory of "observing what is out of you." In a letter to Eliza Fox she said:

Nobody and nothing was real . . . in M. Barton, but the character of John Barton; the circumstances are different, but the character and some of the speeches, are exactly a poor man I know (Letters 48, 29 May 1849).

We may learn more of the original of John Barton from a letter to the Manchester City News,<sup>1</sup> commenting on a correspondence about Greenheys Fields, where the opening scene of Mary Barton takes place. Although the writer seems rather to confuse the characters of Job Leigh and John Barton, his account of their presumed originals has an authentic ring to it.<sup>2</sup> He gives the history of a cottage in Greenheys Fields:

It was long the residence of a power-loom weaver, who, however, added botanical pursuits, and moreover was a leading delegate whenever disputes arose between masters and men upon trade questions. He is said to have been occasionally visited by the late Mrs. Gaskell, and that he was the original of Job Leigh, so graphically described by her in Mary Barton: but, if so there seems to be no reason why she fixed his residence in the questionable quarters she names instead of the neat white-washed cottage which her notice would have immortalized. But though a turn-out delegate, Job (as I may call him) had none of the firebrand propensities which some of the disaffected indulged in. On the contrary, he was known to be more of a peacemaker, and never advocated violent measures, such as John Barton was accused of. The original of John Barton I afterwards knew well, and also a close comrade of his, also a delegate, both of whom were operative cotton-spinners. The former, whom I shall call R.K., was a thorough-going leveller, his motto being the three T's, as "liberty, equality, and fraternity"

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<sup>1</sup> 22 June, 1878.

<sup>2</sup> Since I cannot find it has been used anywhere else, I will quote it extensively here.

are occasionally described; and I can well imagine, from what I knew of him, that he was one of the most unflinching in upholding the rights of the British workman.

It seems more likely that the original of John Barton was the weaver-botanist, whom Mrs. Gaskell is known to have visited. Although he was not a violent man, we know from Mrs. Gaskell's letter to Eliza Fox that, in creating John Barton, she placed the original character in different circumstances. We know too from the novel that it was only the desperation of his circumstances which made John Barton violent.

Further evidence in the same letter tends to confirm this conjecture:

The Greenheys cottage in question was long under the surveillance of the police, as ten delegates met there every Sunday, and many midnight sittings were known to be held. It was, moreover, searched more than once ostensibly for Chartist weapons, but nothing incriminating was found. Many of these Sunday delegate meetings were professedly called botanist gatherings, but the police were able to point out those who had no pretensions to the science, and hence appearances were against their visits being of so harmless a character as a botanical meeting would imply.

By visiting a man whose home was a meeting-place for Chartist delegates, Mrs. Gaskell was sure to have had every opportunity of learning about working men of the type of John Barton. Hence she could assert to her friend Mary Ewart, "that some of the men do view the subject in the way I have tried to represent, I have personal evidence" (Letters 36, late 1848). She wrote to Mrs. S. Greg that she "believed from personal observation that such men were not uncommon" (ibid. 42, early 1849).

Whatever doubts she may have had about the artistry of Mary Barton, she showed an unwavering faith in its realism. She wrote to Eliza Fox:

I told the story according to a fancy of my own; to really SEE the scenes I try to describe, (and they WERE as real as my own life at the time) and then to tell them as nearly as I could (ibid. 48, 29 May 1849).

This shows that she felt that she knew her subject from life well enough to reshape it in her imagination without altering the truth of it. The same confidence is clear in the letter to Mary Ewart:

I can only say I wanted to represent the subject in the light in which some of the workmen certainly consider it to be true, not that I dare to say it is the abstract absolute truth.

She wrote to Edward Holland, her cousin's son, that "those best acquainted with the way of thinking and feeling among the poor acknowledge its truth" (*ibid.* 39a, 13 Jan 1849). This constant stressing that her portrayal of the factory-hands was truthful reveals the extra-artistic, social document aspect of the undertaking: underlying the statements quoted above is an implication that the truthfulness of Mary Barton can be tested, measured as it were, by those who also know this side of Manchester life. It also betrays her premonitions that the truths which it contains might not be acceptable.

Side by side with her awareness of the relevance and purpose of her novel goes Mrs. Gaskell's deep sense of responsibility towards the world she portrays in it. She frequently protested in her letters that her "intention was simply to represent the view many of the workpeople take." Her argument against those who found fault with her heavy bias towards the workpeople was invariably the sincerity of her own feelings on that side. She wrote to Miss Lamont:

Some people here are very angry and say the book will do harm; and for a time I have been shaken and sorry; but I have firm faith that the earnest expression of anyone's feeling can only do good in the long run (*ibid.* 39, 5 Jan. 1849).

To her publisher, Chapman, she wrote in the same vein: "I have faith that what I wrote so earnestly and from the fulness of my heart must be right" (*ibid.* 38, 3 Jan. 1849). She was even more explicit to Mary Ewart:

But independently of any explicit statement of my intention, I do think that we must all acknowledge that there are

duties connected with the manufacturing system not fully understood as yet, and evils existing in relation to it which may be remedied in some degree, although we as yet do not see how; but surely there is no harm in directing the attention to the existence of such evils.

The sincerity of the conclusion of this letter is palpable:

No one can feel more deeply than I how wicked it is to do anything to excite class against class; and the sin has been most unconscious if I have done so . . . I could only repeat that no praise could compensate me for the self-reproach I shall feel, if I have written unjustly (ibid. 36, late 1848).

All these statements taken together demonstrate how deeply involved with her subject Mrs. Gaskell was. She was writing from personal experience, an experience which did not only touch her social conscience, but which also reached, and went on all her life reaching, the centre of her existence:

It is a painful subject and must be painful, and I felt it all so deeply myself I could hardly be light-hearted any part of the time I was writing it (ibid. 35 [23 Dec. 1848] to Catherine Winkworth).

It is unjust to look on Mrs. Gaskell (as some critics do) as having only the experience of a poor-visiting minister's wife whose talent as a novelist benefitted from her fortuitous presence in Manchester in the eighteen-forties. She did have a special insight into the lives and minds of the factory-workers, and she was to a great extent able to express it in her industrial novels. What is eventually in question is where, and how, her successes and failures occur.

(iv)

The Issues

G. H. Lewes wrote that Mary Barton created an "extraordinary sensation" when it was published, in October, 1848.<sup>1</sup> By February 1849, when it had gone into a third edition, a critic in The Manchester Guardian could protest that "the work has already become very popular, and will be generally considered a faithful and true picture of Manchester life."<sup>2</sup> More than a hundred years later Stephen Gill writes that "modern criticism of Mary Barton is likely to start from . . . an appreciation of Mrs. Gaskell's truth to life."<sup>3</sup> None of Mrs. Gaskell's critics has ever argued against the faithfulness of her portrayal of the domestic life of the Manchester working class; even W. R. Greg, her most formidable critic, wrote that "she has evidently lived much among the people she describes, made herself intimate at their firesides."<sup>4</sup> The psychological realism, too, of her characterisation of the working classes was rarely disputed. The Westminster Review, for example, welcomed it with open arms in a way that shows more clearly than any other review the novelty of Mrs. Gaskell's approach:

Compare Mary Barton with the Evelinas, Cecílias and Belindas which superseded the Romances of the Forest, the Children of the Abbey, and the Haunted Towers of the age which preceded theirs. Mary Barton is no heiress, nursed in the lap of luxury, living upon the produce of other people's labour, without knowing, or even the curiosity to know, how it comes to her - refined, generous, capricious, indolent - dying first of ennui, then of love, and lastly falling a prey to a fortune-hunter, or a military swindler. No; Mary Barton is one of Labour's daughters - heiress of all the struggles, vicissitudes and sufferings consequent upon the ignorance and prejudices of the society into which she was born.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In "The Lady Novelists," Westminster Review, LVIII (1852) p.138.

<sup>2</sup> 8 Feb. 1849, "Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life."

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to MB p.16.

<sup>4</sup> Edinburgh Review, LXXXIX (April, 1849) p.403.

<sup>5</sup> LI (April, 1849) p.48.

John Forster, reviewing Mary Barton for the Examiner, compared the "very ordinary home-spun stuff" of which John Barton was made, with Disraeli's Gerard, who had "ancestors who had fought at Agincourt," and whose "lineal connection" went back to one of the last abbots of the middle ages.<sup>1</sup>

The attention which it received from serious reviews, and the controversy to which it gave rise, shows that Mrs. Gaskell was probably correct in urging Chapman to publish Mary Barton as soon as he could.<sup>2</sup> In 1848, as she knew, all Europe was in a revolutionary ferment, and England was by no means sure that the crisis would pass her by. Looking back in 1850, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to the American critic John Seely Hart, that

A good deal of its success I believe was owing to the time of its publication, - the great revolution in Europe had directed people's attention to the social evils, and the strange contrasts which exist in old nations.<sup>3</sup>

The Chartist petition of that year, although it had resulted in a humiliating débacle, did show the other classes that the working class was growing capable of organising on a large scale. When the Chartist petition failed, it did not mean that their movement towards organisation was at an end, because the motives for organisation still existed to be channelled into other movements mainly Trades Unionism and Co-operation.<sup>4</sup> There is a great deal of evidence from the period that other classes were afraid of the combined power of the poor and the working classes. Carlyle had already prophesied in Past and Present in 1843 that "as an anarchic multitude on mere Supply-and-demand, it is becoming inevitable

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<sup>1</sup> 4 Nov. 1848, p.108.

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 23 and 24, to Edward Chapman (2 April and 13 April, 1848).

<sup>3</sup> See Letters, 71 (28 April, 1850).

<sup>4</sup> See S. and B. Webb: History of Trade Unionism (1935), pp.174-179.

that we dwindle in horrid suicidal convulsion . . . Good Heavens, will not one French Revolution and Reign of Terror suffice us, but must there be two?"<sup>1</sup> Since this prophecy, the condition of the poor in England had not improved. It is not surprising, therefore, that reviewers should seize upon Mary Barton (in which the influence of Carlyle is evident everywhere) as providing an opportunity to discuss issues which were felt to be critical. The reviewer in Fraser's Magazine could have been speaking for them all when he wrote that "the matter puts the manner out of sight. The facts - the facts are all in all; for they are facts."<sup>2</sup>

Yet they were divided when they discussed what Stephen Gill calls "the really fundamental issues of the social situation in the 1840s." Some, like the Eclectic Review, Fraser's Magazine, and the Westminster, wholeheartedly approved of Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of these issues, saw no unjustifiable bias in it, and hailed it more or less as "a masterpiece of this kind of writing."<sup>3</sup> Although the Athenaeum's critic wondered "How far it may be kind, wise, or right to make Fiction the vehicle for a plain and matter-of-fact exposition of social evils," he conceded that he had "met with few pictures of life among the working classes at once so forcible and so fair as Mary Barton."<sup>4</sup> Others, like the Edinburgh Review, the British Quarterly, and the Manchester Guardian, argued that "the authoress has sinned gravely against truth, in matters of fact either above her comprehension, or beyond her sphere of knowledge."<sup>5</sup> There is Mrs. Gaskell's own testimony that this attitude was not uncommon.

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<sup>1</sup> Bk. III ch.4.

<sup>2</sup> XXIX (April, 1849) p.430.

<sup>3</sup> Eclectic Review, Jan. 1849, p.69.

<sup>4</sup> British Quarterly, IX (Feb. 1849) pp.117-136.

<sup>5</sup> Manchester Guardian, see n.2. p.139.

In a letter to Miss Lamont she complained: "some people here are very angry and say the book will do harm; and for a time I have been shaken and sorry."<sup>1</sup>

It is hard not to wonder at the tone of almost naive surprise which Mrs. Gaskell adopts when she writes about the hostile response in Manchester to Mary Barton. Throughout the novel there is an implicit reproach against the other classes for allowing the working classes to suffer so much; in one way or another she lays the responsibility for the condition of the poor upon the well-to-do - often overtly, as in this passage:

The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then, in the sorrowful moment of our triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with a mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness?

John Barton became a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. Ay! but being visionary is something. It shows a soul, a being not altogether sensual; a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself (MB, 15, p.220).<sup>2</sup>

Obviously censure of this kind was bound to provoke the factory-owners.

Mary Barton is after all not only about personal relationships between characters, but to an equal extent about the relationships there may be between classes, urging the need for 'sympathy' between men who are only connected because they are members of one society. She is concerned with their struggle with the really tragic difficulties of overcoming the problems of unemployment and starvation, even when the duty

<sup>1</sup> Letters, 39 (5 Jan. 1849).

<sup>2</sup> In a speech to Parliament on the presentation of the People's Charter, Mr. T. Duncombe, M.P. for Finsbury, who helped the chartists to present their petition, said that "many called the Chartists wild and visionary." (Annual Register 1842, p.153).

to do so is recognised.<sup>1</sup> It is because of the controversial nature of this subject, and because Mrs. Gaskell tries in the novel to involve her reader through feeling or sympathy that it is illuminating to read contemporary responses, whether in reviews or letters. "The importance of the passions,"<sup>2</sup> or feeling, in fiction, we have recently been reminded, has been passed over in criticism. But the passions are central to a novel of revenge, like Mary Barton, in alliance with its theme or object. It is difficult, therefore, to see how Mrs. Gaskell urged her novel's topicality on Chapman, and yet was then surprised that it stirred up a hornet's nest of controversy. Yet even more puzzling is the fact that when W. R. Greg (who was himself a relatively progressive, liberal kind of factory-owner) critically analysed Mary Barton, she could write to his sister-in-law

Mr. Greg has exactly described, and in clearer language than I could have used, the very treatment which I am convinced is needed to bring such bewildered thinkers round into an acknowledgement of the universality of some kind of suffering, and the consequent necessity of its existence for some good end. If Mary Barton has no other result than the expression of the thoroughly just, wise, kind thoughts which Mr. Greg has written down with regard to characters like John Barton, I am fully satisfied.<sup>3</sup>

Greg's criticism is of particular interest and his prescription for the social ills of the manufacturing districts in his time is summarised in the last paragraph of his review:

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<sup>1</sup> Carlyle also perceived this. He wrote in Past and Present:

'A fair day's-wages for a fair day's work': it is as just a demand as Governed man ever made of Governing. It is the everlasting right of man. Indisputable as Gospels, as arithmetical multiplication-tables: it must and will have itself fulfilled; - and yet, in these times of ours, with what enormous difficulty, next-door to impossibility. (18)

<sup>2</sup> See Barbara Hardy: "Dickens and the Passions," Nineteenth Century Fiction 24 (March 1970) p.449.

<sup>3</sup> Letters, 42 (early 1849).

We would show that sympathy - not in idly mourning over sorrows which are common to all ranks, nor in weeping at distresses for which, as for all human evils, there is a compensation and a cure, but - by calling on all our fellow-labourers to brace up their souls for sterner endurance and hardier exertion; by exhorting them to carry with them through all trials, as their sword and shield, the settled faith that they, and no man else, must do their own work; that the blessings of comfort, independence, and security are not to be mendicated from others, but to be achieved for themselves (p.435).

His "just, wise, kind thoughts" include a criticism of Barton for

spending his time and money on trades' unions, when both his child and himself are unsupplied with the barest necessities of life; and wasting (as so many operatives do), in subscriptions for such objects, funds which, duly husbanded, would have saved his only son (whose loss, we are told, has warped his temper) from an early grave (p.413).

The tone of Greg's arguments, and the arguments themselves, show that his way of seeing the situation which Mrs. Gaskell had made into fiction, was very different from hers, and that what he understood by "sympathy" was not the warmly spontaneous emotion which she herself felt and tried to excite in her readers. She may have 'agreed' with his opinions simply because the gap between her interpretation of the problems and his appeared to her to have been impassible, and rather than explain the whole point of her novel again (which the novel itself ought to have done in any case) she may have given in gracefully to make a friend. Of course, it may be just that by this time she was tired of answering criticisms of the novel, and gave in for the sake of peace. Or it could be that she did not feel qualified to enter into a controversy with someone of Greg's standing as an economist. Or it may be that there is a certain weakness in her whole point of view; for the whole tenour of her argument is not that this or that point of view is the right one, but that one must be prepared to see the other point of view. She was an advocate not for controversy, but for sympathy - and this

inevitably led her to be swayed by the arguments of the employers as well as those of the workmen. The peculiar characteristic of Mary Barton is that it supposes that not only opinions but passionate convictions can be changed - that a man may forgive even the murder of his own son. When not deeply engaged with the lives of her characters, she appears someone of almost inhuman detachment.

There is the difference, too, between Greg and Mrs. Gaskell, that he simply does not believe that her kind of sympathy is needed. Mrs. Gaskell sees the danger and the wrong in the workers' believing that no one understood or felt for their sufferings: she is not, in fact, asking for charity, she is asking for understanding and sympathy. Greg actually believes that this is not "bracing" enough. Their views are really irreconcilable: at least the person who believes that we should see the other man's point of view, is in a dilemma when that point of view (which is Greg's) is that it is actually wrong to allow oneself to see anyone else' point of view. This, and not questions of political economy or labour relations, is the crux of Mary Barton.

Thus in the Preface to Mary Barton she confessed to her ignorance of the economics of the situation, disclaiming any knowledge of "Political Economy, or the theories of trade,"<sup>1</sup> and she was probably well-advised not to enter into a controversy on the subject with an economist like Greg. She had written, too, to Chapman to say that "I am not thinking of writing anything else: le jeu ne vaut pas la

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<sup>1</sup> There is a definite hint in the Preface to Mary Barton that Mrs. Gaskell herself suspected the good faith, or at least the absolute honesty, of the political economists. The sequence of her thoughts perhaps reveals an intentional irony in the following passage:

I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully; and if my accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional.

chandelle. And I have nothing else to say."<sup>1</sup> This implies that nothing she could answer to Greg's criticisms could add anything to what she had already shown in Mary Barton. We thus have an interesting situation here, with Greg apparently pulling Mrs. Gaskell's case to pieces, Mrs. Gaskell apparently approving of his argument, yet maintaining, as we have seen, that she wrote the truth as she saw it.

(v) Nature Regenerate and Unregenerate;  
Mrs. Gaskell vs. W. R. Greg

Greg's review of Mary Barton provides the unique opportunity of having the comments of a literate, fairly liberal factory-owner on a novel about the problems of the factory society. It seems to me that Mrs. Gaskell's novel and his criticisms provide, not a dialogue such as there ideally should be between the artist and his critic, but rather two monologues issuing from separate platforms. An unpublished review by Emily Winkworth, daughter of a silk manufacturer and a close friend of Mrs. Gaskell, will reinforce the impression which we get from Greg himself.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that an approach such as Greg's, with its refutation of the novel's essential "message," deserves close and cautious attention, though less for what he says than for what he shows for its need. His analysis is rather generously taken by Stephen Gill to represent what he calls "the best of a certain kind of contemporary opinion," and it certainly does demonstrate another way altogether of looking at the situation in the cotton districts.

Mrs. Gaskell was careful to point out in her Preface, and indeed throughout Mary Barton, that she was anxious only "to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people," and not to put both sides of the problem dispassionately. She freely admitted that the views of the workpeople, which she tried to show, were

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 41 (9 March 1849).

<sup>2</sup> "Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life," MS. in the Brotherton Library, Leeds (n.d.). I have reproduced the text of this in an Appendix.

biased. After a passage which describes the feelings of the poor weaver as he sees his master rise in the world when he himself is still struggling for bread, she comments:

I know that this is not really the case; and I know what is the truth in such matters; but what I wish to impress is what the workman feels and thinks. True, that with child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight (MB p.60).

Some time before he has thought of murder, she describes John Barton's state of mind: "And so day by day, nearer and nearer, came the diseased thoughts of John Barton" (MB p.219). Her sin against the employers, if any, is one of omission.

W. R. Greg, himself, could hardly be a disinterested commentator on a novel like Mary Barton, concerned with the relationship between worker and employer, since he himself was the son of a cotton manufacturer, had managed one of his father's mills in Bury, and, in 1832, had begun his own business, which he gave up only in 1850. His brother, Samuel Greg, was also a mill owner, of the more benevolent kind, who introduced various schemes for the moral and physical improvement of his employees. These included "a Sunday-school, a gymnasium, drawing and singing classes, baths and libraries, and finally . . . the order of the silver cross as a reward for good conduct in young women." But in 1847 "he had trouble over the introduction of machinery, and retired."<sup>1</sup> W. R. Greg's other brother, Robert Hyde Greg, was a liberal politician who had also worked with his father. Each of the brothers had published work on contemporary problems in the cotton districts: Samuel Greg was the author of a pamphlet consisting of "Two Letters to Leonard Horner, Esq.,

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<sup>1</sup> DNB.

on the Capabilities of the Factory System," published in 1840; Robert Greg wrote on The Factory Question (1839), and in 1831, W. R. Greg had written his Enquiry into the State of the Manufacturing Population, and the Causes and Cures of the Evils Therein Existing.<sup>1</sup> Each of the Gregs then took a deep interest in the factory system and its future.

Little or nothing is known about W. R. Greg's factory, except that two main reasons for his closing it down were the ill-health of his wife and his own increasing interest in writing about economics. But we might still gain some information about the practical background of his theories in his review of Mary Barton by looking briefly at descriptions of his father's and his brother Samuel's factory, which was well-known in its time. Andrew Ure, in his The Philosophy of Manufactures (1835), provides a description of Quarry Bank mill, "the oldest of the five establishments belonging to the great firm of Messrs Greg and Son, of Manchester, who work up the one hundredth part of all the cotton consumed in Great Britain." He writes of the "female apprentices" as having comfortable quarters, nourishing food, and an adequate education. The Gregs were, according to Ure, "humane and intelligent proprietors."<sup>2</sup> Greg himself wrote in an article on "The Relation Between Employers and Employed" that the employer could be useful in improving the condition of his employees "in the establishment of schools, reading-rooms, baths, wash-houses and the like."<sup>3</sup> He certainly would seem to have come from

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<sup>1</sup> According to J. T. Ward, this pamphlet was a considerable embarrassment to Greg's family for some time, because of the sympathy it showed to the factory-hands. His brother R. H. Greg dismissed it as "little more than a college thesis, written before he had any experience," (The Factory Movement: 1830-55, pp.39-40, 169).

<sup>2</sup> But the benevolence seems to have been largely the policy of Samuel Greg the elder, see Ward (p. 22) p.17.

<sup>3</sup> In Essays on Political and Social Science (2 vols., 1853) 2, p.265.

a background of the more enlightened factory-owners. Yet J. T. Ward, in his study of The Factory Movement, writes that, in the period 1835-36

Samuel Greg had been convicted 12 times in 11 months and Robert and Rathbone had also been fined for overworking children, while Robert was notorious as the employer of 100 girl 'apprentices' (p.202).

Earlier in his book, Ward explained that R. H. Greg was frequently convicted "for overworking children," and that

The bad conditions of his female 'apprentices' were investigated by Liverpool workhouse authorities, after clamour by Manchester reformers (p.170).

All in all, the Gregs seem to have been fairly representative factory-owners, leaning to the liberal side from a position perhaps best described as enlightened self-interest.

An examination of his journalism will demonstrate his attitudes to the current problems of his time, and provide a useful indication of what his position was likely to be on the issues raised by Mary Barton. Throughout his Essays on Political and Social Science (1853), a collection of articles which he had published in magazines (mainly the Edinburgh Review), there is the same strongly jingoistic tone which we shall later find in Harriet Martineau's paeans to the industrial revolution. Although Greg is deeply conservative, he has an equally deep faith in the progress of the nation. Criticising the Young England movement in an article on "Unsound Social Philosophy," he complains that their "erroneous notion of our deterioration":

generates the impression that there is no time to be lost; that evils are increasing upon us with such frightful rapidity that, if we do not act at once, action will come too late; that there is no space nor leisure for deliberation, for experiment, for caution. To speak colloquially, the public gets into a fuss. We act hastily, and therefore we act wrong.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The articles used here will be referred to subsequently by their initials. They are, from vol. I: "Unsound Social Philosophy" (USP), "Principles of Taxation" (PT), "England As It Is" (EAI), and "English Socialism" (ES). This quotation is from USP, p.213.

Obviously the remedy for the diseases of society that Mrs. Gaskell is arguing in her plea in the Preface to Mary Barton is one which Greg would regard as a poison: she urges the public to provide tangible evidence for the "poor uneducated factory-workers" that it cares for their plight, "and that speedily." (We are reminded of Dickens's "while there is yet time" in Hard Times.<sup>1</sup>) But Greg, in an article on "England As It Is," asks is the "present state" of the country improving or deteriorating, and answers that

it has improved, and is still improving, with a rapidity and in a direction, which, viewed aright, justify the most sanguine anticipations (p.303).

Yet it would only be fair to him to say that this piece was written in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, when pride in the nation's advance was in the very air.

Yet he never relinquished his faith in the age. The foundations of its progress were laid, he believed, by the scientists:

The superb achievements of which human intellect is capable have in recent years chiefly shown themselves in the sphere of physical science, and in the application of scientific discoveries to the furtherance of material civilisation; and natural philosophers and engineers have been the real poets (ποιηται, makers or doers) and wonder-workers of our day (ES p.458).

In his own times, he believed, the supreme science was political economy, and its practitioners were to him all but saints. He calls them "the true martyrs of philanthropy," and claims that they are "the only philanthropists . . . whose benevolence rises from a mere good feeling, to the height and the dignity of a virtue." (ES p.470 . Political economy is, he writes, "merely benevolence under the guidance of science" (ES p.469). Political economists have a "deep, almost religious, sense of their responsibility," which "demands no common qualities." It

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<sup>1</sup> Hard Times, ch.9.

demands

primarily and pre-eminently, a close observation and humble imitation of the plans of Providence, as far as it is given to man to discern them, and to aid in their accomplishment; it demands profound compassion, but profounder patience; boundless sympathy with every form of suffering, combined with quiet resolution in the application of the most searching probe; an unshaken conviction that no great cardinal truth of science can be discarded with impunity, or worshipped and followed without leading to ultimate and mighty good; a firm faith that sound principles will, in God's good time, however slowly, and through whatever tribulation, work out his merciful and happy ends (ES p.471).

This calls to mind Dickens's retort to Mr. Snapper on the train to Preston, to cover the lock-out for Household Words: "Political Economy was a great and useful science in its own way and in its own place; but . . . I did not transplant my definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods."<sup>1</sup> Greg is a world removed from Mrs. Gaskell's prefatory remark to Mary Barton, "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade."

Without any education except the lessons of her own experience, Mrs. Gaskell successfully engaged the sympathies of her public. The appeal to the sympathetic imagination is part of the art of fiction, and she was skilled in its techniques. The Victorians understood the critical relevance of this better than most readers and critics today, and were aware that this kind of engagement was demanded of a reader and a novelist. It was the reason why Greg's views and hers could never be reconciled, and why the "rational" political economists found the "sympathetic" novelists so peculiarly exasperating. We find that Maria Edgeworth writes to a friend of the characters in Mary Barton as being "recognised by all who have thought and by all who can feel." Matthew Arnold's brother wrote from Simla, three years after the novel was published, that the novel was

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<sup>1</sup> HW 11 Feb. 1854, "On Strike," p.553.

well-known in that country, and that

there can be few societies, I should imagine, where the Lessons of Poverty and common Humanity are more needed than here, where we . . . have no Manchester millions to alarm us from our selfish indifference.

Susanna Winkworth noted its effect on a Chartist family whom she knew:

These people have . . . grown much less bitter in their feelings towards the higher classes, though they are as warm Chartists as ever.

See over . . .

Mary Howitt's eyes were "weak with crying" when she read the manuscript, and, like W. D. Arnold, was impressed by its "grand spirit of love and humanity." Eliza Cook wrote of "the intense and tearful sympathy" which the novel excited in her. Possibly the most welcome comment of all was made by Carlyle, to whom she sent one of the author's copies. He placed it "far above the ordinary garbage of Novels," as making the first "real contribution" towards the development of a "huge subject, which has lain dumb too long."<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that Mary Barton, which owes so much to Carlyle's teaching, should wring from him such praise. Without taking up the whole question of what Carlyle meant in Past and Present and Chartism, and the influence of his teachings on the writing of Mary Barton, he could not be clearer that Greg's doctrine of laissez-faire is completely offensive to him, and that

whatever other griefs the lower classes labour under, this bitter and sorest grief now superadds itself: the unendurable conviction that they are unfairly dealt with.  
(Chartism, ch.5).

No doubt Carlyle would have classed Greg with the "Paralytic Radicals" described in Chartism (ch.6). Much of Chartism might be thought directly relevant to Mary Barton, as, for example, the end of ch.7, "Not Laissez-Faire:"

But in regard to . . . Trades-Union craftsmen, Chartist cotton-spinners, the time has come when it must either cease or a worse thing straightway begin - a thing of tinder-boxes, vitriol-bottles, secondhand pistols.

It is hardly too much to say that, literary merit aside, the big difference between William Langshawe and Mary Barton is that Mrs. Gaskell had read Carlyle, or that the social novel was the creation of Carlyle.

Like Dickens in Hard Times, Mrs. Gaskell saw the dehumanising

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<sup>1</sup> All these quotations come from/letters in the possession of the Brotherton Library, Leeds, as does Susanna Winkworth's note.

effect of the industrial revolution, and the breakdown of communications between classes, which left only mutual irritation where sympathy should have been, as the fundamental crisis of the age, of which economic problems were merely a secondary symptom. She placed her faith for the future in the reawakening of this sympathy, in a Christian context. At the end of Mary Barton she describes the dearest wish of the enlightened Carson,

that a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love, might exist between masters and men (MB p.460).

Greg's faith for the future lay in another direction entirely, but equally naive:

It cannot be <sup>that</sup> the same intellect - which has wrung from nature her most hidden secrets, which has triumphed over the most gigantic material obstructions, which has "exhausted worlds and then imagined new," which has discovered and described laws operating in regions of space, separated from us by a distance so vast that human imagination cannot picture it, and arithmetical language can hardly express it - should not, when fairly applied to social and administrative science, be competent to rectify our errors, and to smooth our path. (ES, p.459)

He quotes Mill's Political Economy to substantiate this, and is clearly confident that he represents a large and respectable body of thinkers. Probably because of its representative quality it is easy to see from Greg's work how widely, if subtly, he differed from Mrs. Gaskell, and to some extent just what Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens, in their different ways, were fighting so arduously against.

Greg maintains that

all our sufferings and evils (so far as they exceed those inseparable from a finite and imperfect nature) may be traced to ignorance or neglect of those laws of nature which God has established for our good and <sup>has</sup> displayed for our instruction. (ES, p.460)

What these "laws of nature" are, he never defines. But he was slightly more explicit in another article:

We have hitherto erred in our view and our treatment of social maladies, from neglecting to study Nature (by which we mean always the Author of Nature) in her mode of dealing with them. We have been habitually too tender and too hasty. We have wanted nerve, and we have wanted patience. We have forgotten to observe that Nature cures the sins and follies of man by <sup>means of</sup> the penalties which she attaches to them, as at once their consequence and their corrective . . . Evils, such as those inveterate and deep-rooted ones that now pervade our social system, cannot be removed without long time and much suffering . . . Awakened reflection will show that Nature, in working her cures, is impatient of no needful slowness, and appalled at no needful suffering: And we must learn our course by watching hers (USP p.235).

We are instantly put in mind of Dickens's irony in Sissy Jupe's confusion of "national prosperity" with "natural prosperity."<sup>1</sup> Yet, although Mrs. Gaskell would not have expressed herself in quite these terms, she would probably have agreed with Greg's basic premise, that suffering was necessary. In her letter to Samuel Greg's wife on the subject of Greg's review of Mary Barton, we have seen that a predominant notion in her mind at the time of writing the book was that suffering of some kind is both universal, and creative of ultimate good.

Either here or ~~henceforth~~, it seems to me that Greg believes in a view of life which is ruled by nemesis; he believes that, in a sense, wrongdoing is punished by consequences and in time this results in something better. It is a belief that if the sins of the father are not visited on themselves, then they will be on the children - (and it is not necessarily a contemptible view). But, as we see in the novel, Mrs. Gaskell explicitly rejects this view of life; she believes in Christ rather than Orestes,<sup>2</sup> and thus she is led to express this rather too explicitly, by having one father (Barton) avenge his son by taking the life of his employer's son, and then by having a father (Carson) forgive the death of his son and work towards

<sup>1</sup> Hard Times, ch.9.

<sup>2</sup> She comments in the novel:

"Oh! Orestes! you would have made a very tolerable Christian of the nineteenth century!" 13, p.266.

reconciliation or redemption. One is inclined to say that neither Greg nor Mrs. Gaskell has the dispassionate interest in truth that one expects of a political economist; but, at least, that Mrs. Gaskell does not profess to be dispassionate, but Greg does.

A further difference is that Mrs. Gaskell would have this philosophy that suffering is inevitable (in which both she and Greg agree) should be explained to the hands, while Greg would just let it take its course. In turn of course Greg's attitude illustrates the attitude of the employers as Mrs. Gaskell describes it in Mary Barton:

No one thought of treating the workmen as brethren and friends, and openly, clearly, as appealing to reasonable men, stating the exact and full circumstances, which led the masters to think it was the wise policy of the time to make sacrifices themselves, and to hope for them from the operatives (MB, p.232).

In writing North and South at least seven years later and probably more, she voiced the same complaint more than once.

Where she sharply differs from Greg, again, is in her eagerness to alleviate this suffering. In his articles on "Unsound Social Philosophy" and "Principles of Taxation" he argues strenuously against giving the poor help which might discourage them from helping themselves. He objects to the Poor Law, and to "impulsive" philanthropy, and constantly stresses that the working classes must help themselves:

Those are no true friends of the working classes . . . who would induce them to rely on external aid, for objects which must be achieved by themselves, if they are to be achieved at all, and to seek their emancipation in a change of circumstances and social arrangements, rather than in a change of character and conduct. (ES p.503)

Greg would stand back and condemn the poorer working classes for their poverty. He advocates, as we have seen adherence to the "laws of nature," which, as he describes them in this passage, seem to be grim laws indeed:

If . . . all these cases of misery and degradation - where

they are not these casual exceptions which must always exist in human, and therefore imperfect, societies - are distinctly traceable to the former neglect of natural laws which are now beginning to be studied and obeyed, and to a violation, by the last generation, of principles which have been taken as the guide and the pole-star of the present, - then this impeachment can no longer be justly sustained. It is the law of nature that children should suffer for their father's faults: it is the law of nature that indolence, improvidence, recklessness, and folly should entail suffering and degradation; and it is no just ground for the condemnation of our social arrangements that they carry out this law (EAIL p.322).

All this is fair-sounding in its way, yet underneath it there is more than one indication that Greg would stand back and condemn the poorer working classes for their poverty.

Mrs. Gaskell would in all likelihood largely have agreed with Greg on the ways of administering charity. She wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Holland in 1859 that

The best mode of administering material charity seems to me by giving employment and taking thought in adapting the kind of employment and in helping to find out who can do it.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, unlike Greg, she could not stand by and, for his own good, see an improvident 'hand' starve, or sink into the degradation of utter poverty.

In November, 1861, she wrote to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth of the coming distress in Lancashire which the American civil war would certainly bring about:

I only hope that those who have made such large fortunes during these last two years by manufactures will give of their abundance to work-people in their distress - however improvident these latter may have been.<sup>2</sup>

In 1863, looking back on the past winter, she wrote to Charles Eliot Norton that in administering charity to those who suffered from the effects of the war on the cotton trade:

at the last we seemed to have done more harm than good

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 424 (April 1859).

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 494a(18 Nov. 1861).

. . . the imposition, the deterioration in character were so great.<sup>1</sup>

Although she might agree in principle with Greg's advice: "we should enable them to get everything, but we should give them nothing, - except education" (EAIL p.338), in practice she could not restrain her "impulsive" charity, her sympathy which, despite Greg's censure of it in favour of the nobler motives of the political economists, is more warmly human and natural than their cold confidence in scientific formulae elevated to the authority of "nature."<sup>2</sup>

Greg looks upon the evils of the time in a way characteristic of many of his contemporaries, seeing them as problems which advancing science can solve:

The apparent contradiction between the vast amount of unrelieved misery and the vast amount of energetic benevolence now existing in our country, which strikes so many with despair, inspires us, on the contrary, with the most sanguine hopes; because, in that benevolence, we see ample means of remedying nearly all our evils - means hitherto impotent and unavailing solely because misapplied. There is now, more than ever before, an adequate knowledge of the ills which are to be battled with and conquered; there is energy without stint or limit waiting, panting to be let loose upon it; there are agents without number only anxious to be shown how they can do good . . . and there is money ready to flow in the most liberal abundance for the furtherance of any scheme which promises to relieve want or to assist exertion. All that is needed is the wisdom to direct this vast machinery for good, and a strong conviction on the part of the public that, unless it can be placed under the guidance of sound principle, it must be mischievous and not beneficent (ES p.460).

To read Greg, one would think that the millenium was only a matter of years away. He writes with stern encouragement of "this perpetual but

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 526 (13 July 1863).

<sup>2</sup> "Laws of nature" are easily invoked. We may notice, too, that in Past and Present (Bk.4, ch.4, "Captains of Industry") Carlyle threatens that the "cash-mexus" without "love" must bring another revolution: "The Laws of Nature will have themselves fulfilled." In Greg's review he warily respects Carlyle and quotes him as preaching the value of "work," yet he pointedly avoids direct argument.

silent social revolution,"<sup>1</sup> and asks

Has not, in fact, the whole of our legislation for the last fifteen years been marked above all other characteristics by attention to the wants, interests, and comforts of the poor? (EAIL p.312)

Everything is expected from "the growth of an earnest spirit of universal social sympathy which was never so aroused as now."<sup>2</sup> Now, this is in direct contrast to the evidence which Mrs. Gaskell presents in Mary Barton, of the spirit of the legislators of her age. She tells us that Mary had missed the political news of the day:

that Parliament had refused to listen to the working-men, when they petitioned with all the force of their rough, untutored words to be heard concerning the distress which was riding, like the Conqueror on his Pale Horse, among the people; which was crushing their lives out of them, and stamping woe-marks over the land (MB p.141).

Where, in 1842, was this "money ready to flow in the most liberal abundance?" How, in the scene surging with potential benefactors of the poor, was a situation like this described in Mary Barton, allowed to arise:

Deeper and deeper still sank the poor; it showed how much lingering suffering it takes to kill men, that so few (in comparison) died during those times (MB p.159).

The argument that Mrs. Gaskell was writing about 1842, and Greg in 1851, does not hold water, first because Mrs. Gaskell felt that her work was very relevant in 1848, and second because she describes similar scenes in North and South in 1855, corroborated by Dickens in Hard Times. Yet perhaps we can see, too, why Mrs. Gaskell put the date of her action in 1842. Optimism about the future is no consolation to a man whose children are dying in the present.

Greg was out of sympathy with Mrs. Gaskell's way of looking at the

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<sup>1</sup> Essays in Political and Social Science "The Relation Between Employers and Employed" (2, p.259).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.257.

industrial situation in another important respect. The end of Mary Barton lays stress upon the Christian brotherhood of man, with workers "bound to their employers by the ties of respect and affection, not by mere money bargains alone" (MB p.460). In "The Relation Between Employers and Employed," Greg states that "the relation between master and servant is that of contract between two independent parties" (p.265). He counsels the "great employer of labour" to "bear in mind that his relation to his workpeople is passing, if not passed, from the feudal into the democratic age."<sup>1</sup> In this aspect of his view of the relationship, he was wiser than Mrs. Gaskell in Mary Barton (although by the writing of North and South she seems to have learned the truth of this), or than Dickens, in his confusing portrayal of the Stephen-Bounderby relationship in Hard Times. There seems to be a great deal of truth in what Greg has to say of the process of change in class relationships, and especially the change in the nature of the working classes. We can easily recognise Mrs. Gaskell's characters here:

among artisans and handicraftsmen of every denomination . . . a proud sense of self-dependence, a resolution to owe their well-being and advancement to themselves alone, a surly and contemptuous thrusting back of charitable aid or guidance from above, are rapidly spreading, and manifesting themselves sometimes in forms which we might resent and deplore, were not the substance which gives rise to them beyond all price (EAIL p.337).

The corollary of his thesis that society is passing into the democratic age is that the lower classes must be considered to be responsible for themselves. All Greg's grievances against the lower classes come out once he has established that they are to be judged by the same standard as others:

Nor can it be said that, in contending that improvidence, idleness, dissipation, and early marriages should be allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p.299.

to encounter their natural fruit and salutary punishment among the poor, we are guilty of any partiality or harshness. We demand no more from them than from all other classes. Privation and wretchedness are the allotted consequences and correctives of these vices in all other ranks, - why should the lowest be exempt from the common law? Why should we enact that the poor alone should be idle and imprudent, yet never come to want? - should be reckless and wasteful, and yet be fed at the cost of the sober and the frugal? (USP p.230).

Elsewhere, he complains that the poor, and the working classes are alone exempt from taxes, always provided that they do not smoke, drink spirits, or tea, and use sugar. It is a curious argument. In "Unsound Social Philosophy" he divides the destitute into three classes, the second of which is "those who have become destitute through their own fault, or that of their parents." In this category, alongside "the idle, the dissolute, the dawdling," and the Irish beggar, he places

the spinners and weavers in manufacturing towns, who waste hundreds of thousands of pounds in strikes for higher wages, which always end in the impoverishment of both themselves and their employers, and in leaving numbers of them permanently unprovided (USP p.228).

In the case of these people he argues that helping them betrays a "shallow and short-sighted humanity." All in all, while he appears to give a fair analysis, in these articles, of the social and economic situation, he loads the dice heavily against the lower classes, makes their lives seem almost enviable and makes them seem to be unappreciative of the fact.

(vi)

John Barton

Greg carries this attitude over into his criticism of Mary Barton. Indeed, so controversial were the issues which the novel raised, that any contemporary reviewer was almost bound to be biased. Greg's position, although representative of a large body of socio-economic thought, was not universally representative. Other reviewers were more receptive to Mrs. Gaskell's message, as can be demonstrated by placing their comments beside his. W. R. Greg introduces Barton as:

a factory operative of considerable, but no way remarkable intelligence, of a sensitive and affectionate, but moody

and unchastened temper, a zealous member of the 'Trades' Unions, and a diligent reader of the 'Northern Star' . . . at length quite soured by calamity (p.402).

Later in the same review, wishing to show that the character was inconsistent with life, he protests that Barton, "not only an intelligent man but a steady and skilful workman," with habits "of reflection and discussion," would be likely to have had a knowledge of the rudiments of political economy, which Mrs. Gaskell does not give him. Yet to the critic of the Westminster Review Barton is:

a weaver, possessing more than the average intelligence of the artisan class, with honesty, steadiness of purpose and steady industry - never neglecting his labour, contented with "a fair day's wage for a fair day's work," and free from the degrading vice of intemperance (p.48).

Both descriptions are of course correct in their separate ways, depending upon how one wants to look at the working classes. Such a diversity of opinion might also suggest a certain amount of ambiguity in Mrs. Gaskell's own view. But before coming on to a discussion of this point, we must state what can be said with assurance about the character of Barton.

Mrs. Gaskell was invariably frank about the defects of Barton's character. Her description of him in the beginning of the novel indicates his potential:

His features were strongly marked, though not irregular, and their expression was extreme earnestness; resolution either for good or evil; a sort of latent, stern, enthusiasm (ME p.41).

The use of the word "earnestness" suggests an endorsement of Barton's good nature.<sup>1</sup> Barton is a model working-class type, and a good trade unionist would not have been disposed to cavil at his gloomy sternness, appropriate to a man seriously concerned with the problems of his fellows in the early '40's. A series of events conspire to turn the balance

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dickens's description of the Ironmaster in Bleak House.

of his nature. First, his wife's death:

One of the ties which bound him down to the gentle humanities of earth was loosened, and henceforward the neighbours all remarked he was a changed man. His gloom and his sternness became habitual instead of occasional. He was more obstinate (p.58).

Then are to be seen the immeasurable psychological effects of physical deprivation and addiction to opium:

The mind became soured and morose, and lost much of its equipoise. It was no longer elastic, as in the days of youth, or in times of comparative happiness; it ceased to hope. And it is hard to live when one can no longer hope (p.218).

Mrs. Gaskell never makes Barton the middle-class ideal of a working man. Unlike Dickens with Stephen Blackpool, she does not load the dice in his favour from the beginning by claiming for him "a perfect integrity."

If we can believe Samuel Bamford, people of Barton's type were not uncommon at the time. On reading Mary Barton he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell "Of John Barton's I have known hundreds; his very self in all things except his crime."<sup>1</sup> It would seem that Greg has no real grounds for complaining of the authenticity of the character. Yet he tries to offer some by saying that

As a picture of an individual, - that is, of the feelings of this or that person, - John Barton is unhappily true to the life; as the type of a class, though a small one, he may be allowed to pass muster: but to bring him forward as a fair representative of the artisans and factory operatives of Manchester and similar towns generally, is a libel alike upon them and upon the objects of their alleged hatred (p.412).

Earlier in his review he was more explicitly condemnatory:

from the circumstance of the discontented man, John Barton, being the more prominent person, the erroneous impression would be conveyed to the reader, that patience is the exception, and ill-humour and vindictiveness the rule, - especially among the stronger and more thoughtful natures (p.405).

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<sup>1</sup> From a copy of part of a letter to Mrs. Gaskell (n.d.) in the Brotherton Library.

Clearly Greg sees him as untypical and resentful. But when Barton is introduced, it is in the company of the mild Wilson, also a factory operative, and the contrast between the two characters is immediately evident. The presence in the novel of other examples of the artisan class - Job Legh, Davenport, Wilson, Jem Wilson - must reassure the reader that Barton's extremism is not typical of the whole class. It ought also to teach him, what I think Mrs. Gaskell intended, that the wide term "manufacturing operatives" covers many types of human beings. It is probably with this in mind that she changed her original conception of the character of Job Legh. In her rough sketch for Mary Barton she wrote "How he joins a Chartist club at the instigation of Job Legh."<sup>1</sup> She never implies that Barton is representative of the whole class: she makes him stand out from his workfellows in several respects. He is, after all, chosen to represent his branch of the trade union in presenting the Chartist petition in London - and he is capable of committing murder, an act of violence which would be hard to imagine say Job Legh or Wilson doing. Obviously it is now almost as impossible as it was at the time to calculate how many hands were of Barton's way of thinking, and able and willing to commit murder to coerce the employers into offering a settlement. But it is possible to gauge to some extent how serious a threat these 'malcontents' were generally felt to be. Harriet Martineau, looking back in her History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace, published only eight years later in 1850, but speaking of 1842, commented:

The great majority of Lancashire operatives showed, for instance, that they knew that their employers were sinking into ruin, and had nothing to give, but out of their dwindling capital. But hunger is maddening - not only by

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<sup>1</sup> The plot outline is given as an Appendix in Mary Barton, p.469.

the bitter thoughts that it calls up, but by the actual irritation of the brain that it causes; and among the hundreds of thousands of famishing men, women, and children, some disorder and rebellion could not but arise . . . the evil and danger was reduced to the smallest possible amount: but there was enough to keep the ministry in a state of perpetual anxiety, and to make the Queen's heart sink within her, in the security of her palace . . . In Manchester, the influx of malcontents became alarming in August, 1842. Mills were stopped, and, in some, the windows broken, and machinery injured. The Riot Act was read four times in one day, and prisoners were taken by scores at once. A large attendance of military was necessary, as there were threats of tearing up the railways, and cutting the gas pipes (Bk.6, ch.5, p.522).

Harriet Martineau held economic views very similar to Greg's, and tones down her description of this unrest (just as he does), preferring to dwell on the help given to the starving poor, as indicating "that the great social tendency of the day was to consider the poor." Still, we gather from this description that Barton did not belong to an inconsiderable body of men and feelings - if we had not already reached the same conclusion by mere reference to the size of the Chartist petition.<sup>1</sup> And naturally the warning in Mary Barton held for 1848, only six years later, when a repetition of the bad times of the early forties threatened, and when the men who rebelled then would most likely be still alive, and possibly better organized, more desperate.

Several comments throughout the novel, and in the Preface, impress on the reader the fact that Mrs. Gaskell did not think that Barton was untypical, but belonged to a class within a class. We are told that he has "joined clubs, and become an active member of the trades' union:" that he is "among the few" who still, in times of full employment,

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed accounts of the period see A. G. Rose, "The Plug Plots of 1842 in Lancashire and Cheshire," (Transactions of the Lancs. and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, LXII, 1957); G. S. R. Kitson-Clark, "Hunger and Politics in 1842," Journal of Modern History 25 (4 Dec. 1953), and Wm. D. Grampp, The Manchester School of Economics (1960), p.47. Five rioters were shot by the militia in Preston in 1842.

brood over "the difference between the employer and the employed."

The reviewer for the British Quarterly Review, although almost entirely antipathetic to Mrs. Gaskell's case, admitted that:

No doubt there are discontented men, filled with vague ideas of a levelling and communistic character; for socialism and chartism have not been idle in these parts (p.120).

This, and other sources, make it plain that what Greg implies in his review, that the number of dissident workmen was small, and that John Barton hardly represents them, was at best optimistic, and certainly misleading. It is this kind of white lie (made consciously or unconsciously, to reassure the middle class reader) that a novel like Mary Barton, which Mrs. Gaskell wrote as realistically as she could, set out to correct. Greg's commentary on Mary Barton is important on two counts: first because it shows us some of the thinking which lay behind the social scene of the time, and second, for the impression which we shall see it made on Mrs. Gaskell, in its influence on North and South.

Again, in his interpretation of Barton's deterioration, Greg shows him from the least sympathetic angle. He writes:

By constantly dwelling on his own sorrows and on the privations and sufferings around him, he grows morose, passionate and vindictive (p.402).

This too is true within limits, but Mrs. Gaskell has clearly shown, by her description of Barton's past; by making him a witness to the scene in the Davenports' cellar, and most tellingly, by describing his having to pawn the familiar and dear household objects which he had associated with his dead wife, that circumstances conspired to inflame his sense of social injustice. Mrs. Gaskell explained Barton's reaction to his own privations and those of his fellow workers, with an economy of expression which forms (as Emily Winkworth notes) much of the strength of the novel:

he did bear it, but not meekly; that was too much to expect. Real meekness of character is called out by experience of kindness. And few had been kind to him (MB p.159).

It is perhaps not too ~~write~~ to say that here, that in the revelation of every phase of John Barton's development, Mrs. Gaskell emphasises his individuality: the fact that he has a private history and a personality of his own, reacting to events and situations in a way which, given his character and history, is almost inevitable. The Westminster Review interprets Barton's deterioration in a way more in tune with Mrs. Gaskell's argument:

The train of thought called up in the mind of the gloomy, earnest man - his joining a trades-union, and his becoming a delegate - are most naturally described. He reflects according to his lights, and arrives at conclusions according to his knowledge . . . That John Barton should have had the discontent, engendered by want, increased to hatred towards the class of rich employers, is not strange nor forced. The patience and long-suffering of the industrious poor, left in the ignorance which we see, are more strange than the conclusions to which John Barton arrives (pp.50-51).

The genius of Mary Barton lies largely in the way in which Mrs. Gaskell shows convincingly how Barton deteriorates, and how his deterioration is speeded up by his own interpretation of events. It lies just precisely in the fact that Mrs. Gaskell has been able to see the world through the eyes of such a man - which no other social-problem novelist successfully did. Greg was blind to the uniqueness of this achievement, and mistook a sympathetic portrayal for total identification - almost as if a later critic might mistake Madame Bovary's universe for Flaubert's.

When Mrs. Gaskell remarks on Barton's "real meekness of character," she uses a technique which she applies at various points in the novel, introducing the human side of Barton, factory operative and trade unionist. Readers of any class background can understand, and feel for Barton, who, simply, had not experienced much kindness in his life: everybody knows what it is to want kindness and receive none. Where Mrs. Gaskell is different from other novelists is in her own "recognition of the

universality of some kind of suffering." She sympathises with Barton, and gives her readers points of contact with him, which is very different from pitying him, and providing barely-disguised blue-book facts to inform her reader of his remote plight.

This is most easily demonstrated by a closer look at the opening chapters, in which Mrs. Gaskell builds up our impression of Barton's character from his domestic life: the very life-like altercation with his wife about how much bacon they should buy: "Say two pounds, missis, and don't be stingy," his concern for his wife in her pregnancy, and the innocent pleasure he takes in entertaining his friends:

Barton vibrated between the fire and the tea-table, his only drawback being a fancy that every now and then his wife's face flushed and contracted as if in pain (p.53).

Throughout the first two chapters Mrs. Gaskell adds detail to detail to show the material simplicity and emotional richness and depth of Barton's life, and of the life of Old Alice, and the Wilsons. Barton's not having enough cups for his guests and his excitement at entertaining shows how rare such occasions were. As the Bartons are described in their home atmosphere they possess a simple dignity, a lack of sophistication rather than ignorance. Here again Mrs. Gaskell achieves what no other social-problem novelist did: she manages to make her factory operatives unselfconscious. The other social-problem novelists, Mrs. Trollope, Mrs. Stone, Charlotte Elizabeth, Disraeli, Kingsley, and even Dickens in Hard Times, never quite succeed in reproducing the natural relaxation and the warmth of the working-class home in good times. They always see it in contrast to their own middle-class background. It is impossible for them to identify with the environment they describe. Not one of them could, as it were, ever live there, but only visit, and hence in their descriptions of these homes they themselves are felt to

be present, like an audience at a play. But Mrs. Gaskell immediately, in her descriptions of objects, actions and feelings, creates an authentic atmosphere. We don't feel that the Bartons know that they are being observed as an example of domestic life in the working classes, and their behaviour is hence much more recognisably normal.

Through all this John Barton does not emerge as a particularly attractive, or likeable man, but she does make him worthy of respect. He supports his family and takes his responsibilities seriously. Unlike Charlotte Elizabeth, Harriet Martineau and many others, Mrs. Gaskell does not emasculate the men in her novel. Whereas the former group bring out in their virtuous male characters only the qualities which women and society defer to, Mrs. Gaskell imparts a definite virility to John Barton. He is a strong, forceful character, rough in many ways, but gentle with his wife and daughter. He has a positive male dignity as his family's provider, which comes through in his ordering rum, and extra bacon, and inviting Old Alice as an extra guest. His tragedy begins when circumstances frustrate him in that role, and his masculine pride is threatened. In her perception of this fact, that the Lancashire operative will sacrifice everything before he sacrifices his pride, and in the subtle way in which she communicates it to her readers, lies another facet of Mrs. Gaskell's brilliance in Mary Barton. She shows Barton's warm loving relationship with his wife, his care for Mary, his gruff manliness - an inside view of his world, in which he has an important role to fill, and a full life, physically, intellectually, and emotionally, according to his limitations. Although Mrs. Gaskell's middle-class readers would find it difficult to think of themselves as being under the same circumstances they could again recognise in themselves the state of mind which Barton's situation induces in him, at least relatively: the essential

factors of his position. So, as he is stripped of everything, losing his wife, his health, his job, the furnishings of his home, they can feel sympathy with him. The most serious threat with which he is confronted is the threat to his masculine dignity: the long unsubtle process which corrodes it, from the point of his violent first betrayal of himself when he hits Mary (p.161), to the point where he sees Carson's caricature, and in his wrongheaded desperation to keep what little pride he has left, urges violence against the masters.

A brief comparison with the other novelists demonstrates how significant an achievement the portrayal of Barton was. In William Langshawe the operatives are dependent, the tools of their employers, to be disposed of more or less as the employers wish. Even when they take the apparently independent action of striking, their failure only provides Mrs. Stone with the opportunity of emphasising their dependence. The murder of Wolstenholme is an act of spite rather than revenge, furtively done by cowardly men hired for the job, and the dominant middle-class society of the novel, operating through the author, assigns them a role which they are never allowed to abandon. It is tempting to believe, from a comparison of the two novels and knowing that Mrs. Gaskell was acquainted with Mrs. Stone's book, that William Langshawe was the seminal work which gave Mrs. Gaskell the idea, and possibly even the frame, for Mary Barton. The similarities between the two novels are almost too strong to be coincidental, yet we have no proof of influence, and the differences are so great as to make speculation useless. But a comparison of the techniques of the two women writing on a similar subject, shows where Mrs. Gaskell's originality and superior artistry lies. Mrs. Stone's novel, as we have seen, is an amateurish attempt in many ways: all the disparate elements which should be fused together

by the author's vision are, in William Langshawe, left fragmented. It is obvious even from a superficial comparison of the two novels that very much the same basic ingredients impressed the two writers in totally different ways. First, Mrs. Stone's approach to her material was made as a full communicating member of the middle class, which is her central concern. Mrs. Gaskell is wholly concerned with the world as seen through the eyes of the operative. Second, the rhetoric of Mrs. Stone's attempt to persuade her readers into sharing her point of view relied very heavily upon her demonstration of facts, and on her tacit refusal to acknowledge the failure of communication between classes, which both contributed to and realised from the problematic relationship between management and labour in the cotton industry. Mary Barton is written as a result of Mrs. Gaskell's recognition of this problem.

Mrs. Gaskell, like Mrs. Stone, writes about the trade union, the strike, the murder, the attempted seduction of a working-class girl by a factory-owner's son, and the anguish of her working-class lover. Yet, to take only one - probably the most important - of these common topics, the murder, we can see that Mrs. Gaskell gives it a significance which Mrs. Stone altogether misses. John Barton's murder of Harry Carson is an act which stems from two motives: the desire to frighten the masters into compliance with the workers' demands, and an impulsive desire to be revenged upon Harry Carson for the humiliation they have suffered from the callous cartoon which he drew and passed around the masters' conference table. Ironically, Barton was unaware of Mary's flirtation with Harry Carson - but his act has consequences which reach into the plot, and affect the lives of everyone. In this act of vengeance the two worlds of the novel are brought together, and Mrs. Gaskell contrives to appease the sense of injustice brought from her own, middle-class world, without compromising her own position with regard to trades'

unions, or her declared sympathy for the workers in the other.

In Michael Armstrong, William Langshawe and Helen Fleetwood the operatives have no real world of their own; they are either looking up towards the middle classes, or being looked down upon by them. Harriet Martineau was slightly more successfully democratic in A Manchester Strike, but even there, she was more closely concerned with the technical, contractual, side of the relationship between employer and employee. Dickens touches upon the independent nature of the industrial worker in Bleak House: it can be felt even in George's conversation with the hand from whom he gets directions to Rouncewell's factory (ch.63). Yet in Hard Times he is unable, or unwilling, to follow where his insight leads him, and Stephen's relationship to Bounderby, his maudlin religiosity as he dies, leave an overall impression of dependent weakness. John Barton has none of these faults. While in a way he of course depends on the factory owners for employment, in every other way he is independent of anything but the strength of his own hands. His pride and dignity stem from this.

John Barton, in the main, is well characterised. What is weakest in Mary Barton is the ending and the conversion of Carson. It ought to bring us back to a consideration of what the whole novel is about, but we are asked to believe that Carson can forget the death of his son, when he sees the "angel child's" forgiveness of the rough rude boy. It is poorly realised and inadequately written. So is the confrontation of Carson with Job and Jem, which Mrs. Gaskell added to pad out the novel<sup>1</sup> and which Emily Winkworth criticised as having "the appearance of being dragged in because our authoress wanted to make them say what they did" (pp.9-10).

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<sup>1</sup> See Letters 42 (1849).

Mrs. Gaskell's strength lies in her appeal to sympathy and her moral teaching, and here it failed her, perhaps because she too obviously contrived the scene to make the appeal, and the reader has no vested interest in any of the characters involved in it.

This brings us back to a consideration of what Mary Barton is about, and what Mrs. Gaskell was aiming to do in the novel. She sees the problem as one of communication: if one side could be brought to understand the special difficulties which the other had to face, there would be greater sympathy and tolerance all round, and less violence of speech and action. She makes it plain in her Preface that it is a novel with a purpose: to enlighten the middle class, fiction-reading public, by informing it about the factory operatives and making it question its own attitude. Her reasoning was, that at the time of writing, the public, which looked at the factory operatives from a safe distance and from an outsider's point of view, saw only a threatening mass of discontented, ignorant people, constantly grumbling about their lot and resentful of the other classes. Mrs. Gaskell addresses the latter, though she does not altogether assume that Mary Barton will have no other readers.<sup>1</sup> Such a situation, with almost no communication except demands from either side, would naturally produce, as it did, a defensive hostility on the part of the class complained against, who could easily see the

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<sup>1</sup> We may note that Marianne Gaskell said in an interview that a working man from Rochdale

wrote to the effect that, after reading Mary Barton, his whole idea of relations between employers and employed had changed, and that he had been enabled to view things in a much fairer light, and to realise that masters had, too, their grievances, and that it was the duty of both masters and men to work together, and that by so doing the interests of both were served. The Woman At Home, IV, (1896-97).

glaring faults of the operatives and blame them for their own wretched condition.

Thus the situation in which she was writing can be seen almost as a diagram by placing Mrs. Gaskell's and Greg's accounts of it side by side. The operatives in hard times look around them and see squalor and starvation, with only a faint hope even of surviving. Job Legh explains to Carson:

I can use my eyes. I never see the Masters getting thin and haggard for want of food; I hardly ever see them making much change in their way of living, though I don't doubt they've got to do it in bad times. But it's in things for show they cut short; while for such as me, it's in things for life we've to stint (MB p.456).

They look at the classes above them, and draw their own conclusions.

Referring back to the years 1839, 1840 and 1841, the author herself speaks in the novel:

I have heard of the sufferings and privations of the poor, of provision shops where ha'porths of tea, sugar, butter, and even flour, were sold to accomodate the indigent, - of parents sitting in their clothes by the fireside during the whole night for seven weeks together, in order that their only bed and bedding might be reserved for the use of their large family, - of others being compelled to fast for days together, uncheered by any hope of better fortune, living, moreover, or rather starving, in a crowded garret, or damp cellar, and gradually sinking under the pressure of want and despair into a premature grave (MB p.126).

Yet the other classes, perhaps look at the operatives like Greg. He

See over . . . .

gives figures for the average incomes in the cotton factories, and comments that saving ought to be easy, but

Unhappily it is rare: for not only is much wasted at the ale-house (though less now than formerly); not only is much squandered in subscriptions to trades' unions and strikes; but among the more highly paid operatives, spinners especially, gambling both by betting and at cards is carried on to a deplorable extent. Much also is lost by bad housewifery (p.417).

The middle classes compare the working-class way of life with their own, probably as Greg does. He accounts for the employers' comparative affluence in times of bad trade thus:

they, in the days of prosperity, had laid by a portion of their earnings, and . . . the operatives had not; and therefore, when profits ceased and losses took their place - a change which long precedes the reduction of wages or the cessation of employment - they could subsist out of their previous savings, while the improvident operatives had no savings to fall back upon (p.415).

Neither side even begins to appreciate the other's problems, or to understand its attitude; as long as each regards the other from the vantage-point of his own world, he will consider himself to be the injured party. Since the middle and upper classes, Mrs. Gaskell's argument runs, have the advantage of education, they are in a better position to understand the cause of, and help to span, the widening gap between themselves and the operatives. Only they, it seems, can communicate effectively without using violence. But they do not grasp the advantage of their position, and take up a defensive attitude:

They forgot that the strike was in this instance the consequence of want and need, suffered unjustly, as the endurers believed; for, however insane, and without ground of reason, such was their belief, and such was the cause of their violence (ME p.232).

Mrs. Gaskell tries, in Mary Barton, to show the life-style of the operatives, their way of coping with the circumstances of their existence, their thought-processes. Fraser's Magazine's reviewer

summed it up enthusiastically, in a series of rhetorical questions addressed to "people on Turkey carpets, with their three meat-meals a day" in this vein:

Do they want to know why poor men, kind and sympathising as women to each other, learn to hate law and order, Queen, Lords and Commons, country-party and corn-law leaguer, all alike - to hate the rich, in short? Then let them read Mary Barton. Do they want to know what can madden brave, honest, industrious North-country hearts, into self-imposed suicide strikes, into conspiracy, vitriol-throwing, and midnight murder? Then let them read Mary Barton. Do they want to know what drives men to gin and opium, that they may drink and forget their sorrow, though it be in madness? Let them read Mary Barton (p.430).

The task of informing the public about this was obviously a right one, as Mrs. Gaskell implies within the novel:

I think that surely, in a Christian land, [the state of distress among the operatives 1839-41] was not known even so feebly as words could tell it, or the more happy and fortunate would have thronged with their sympathy and their aid (MB p.126).

Judging from the record of response which letters to Mrs. Gaskell on the publication of Mary Barton represents, she was not unsuccessful.

Yet, as Emily Winkworth points out:

the kindly feeling she would endeavour to substitute for the at present most injurious one between master and man can do we fear but a small amount of good, and it is all she has to suggest (p.12).

Mrs. Gaskell was nonetheless aware of the problems which the ending of such a novel as hers would pose. She wrote to Lady

Kay-Shuttleworth in 1850:

the utmost I hoped from Mary Barton has been that it would give a spur to inactive thought, and languid conscience . . . How could I suggest or even depict modes of proceeding, (the details of which I never saw,) and which from some error, undetected by anxious and even conscientious witnesses, seems so often to result in disappointment? It would require a wise man, practical and full of experience, one able to calculate consequences, to choose out the best among the many systems which are being tried by the benevolent mill-owners. If I, in my ignorance, chose out one which appeared to me good, but which was known to business men to be a failure, I should

be doing an injury instead of a service.<sup>1</sup>

The description of the wise, practical, experienced man would seem to fit such a contemporary figure as W. R. Greg; his comments ought to throw a great deal more light on what kind of solution the economists and social thinkers of the time expected would eventually be reached. But when we turn back from a brief study of Mrs. Gaskell's achievement in Mary Barton to his review of it, our reaction must be that he is either wrong or heavily biased in almost every point he makes. He is, for example, totally unrealistic about human nature, and not just the nature of the factory hand. Talking about the "sacred Patience of the poor," he has the temerity, in an article largely concerned with discrediting the factory-hand in every way, to enlarge:

They are often very deficient, it is true, in the foresight and self-denial which might provide against the recurrence of privation; but, when it comes, they meet it with a simple, cheerful, manly resignation, accepting

'Each ill

As a plain fact whose right or wrong  
They question not, confiding still  
That it shall not last overlong;  
Willing, from first to last, to take  
The mysteries of our life as given,  
Leaving the time-worn soul to slake  
Its thirst in an undoubted Heaven'

(p.404).

Mrs. Gaskell's examination of Manchester in the light of Christianity was not simply the irrelevant response of the wife of a Unitarian minister. The 'scientific' doctrines of political economy were already being given a theological twist by such writers as Greg. If he was right in his assumption that the working-class were prepared to wait for justice until they went to heaven, then there would have been no need for all the writing and debate about the dangerous discontent of the working classes at the time. There would have been no strikes. Of course it is

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 72a (16 July 1850).

nonsense, if dangerously plausible; it is Greg reassuring himself and his readers. We find him later in his review, lecturing Mrs. Gaskell:

It is, we fear, too true that some envy and much exasperation do arise, at times, in the breasts of the more inconsiderate of the manufacturing poor, when they see those periods of commercial depression, which press so heavily upon themselves, borne so easily and with so little apparent privation by the masters. But there was only the more reason for seizing the opportunity to impress upon them both the real fact and the real philosophy of the case. (414)

Apart from his contradiction of his own earlier words, we have to note here the way in which he has completely brushed aside Mrs. Gaskell's case, and ignores the direction of the novel, in the Preface, to those who are in a position to help the hands when they suffer. The Preface of Mary Barton is directed entirely at the middle-class reader: Mrs. Gaskell was obviously not envisaging a large readership among the factory-hands. She says that she is trying to show her readers how these hands feel, and why they feel as they do, rightly or wrongly. Evidently she was not primarily intending to explain this to the hands themselves. What Greg is complaining of is that Mrs. Gaskell had not written another Illustration of Political Economy, to instruct the recalcitrant workers. Sixteen years after Harriet Martineau's gospels had been promulgated, it seems that the factory operatives would still not learn and worship the laws of political economy; they still could not be brought to accept the logic of starvation as nature's remedy for the continuing problem of unemployment in trade recessions. Job Legh explains to Carson:

You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, given two facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are for ever changing and uncertain (MB p.457).

He is made to reiterate the message of the Preface, in a way that effectively shows up Greg's praise of the patience of the poor for the

shallow thing it is:

If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy, - even if they were long about it, - even if they could find no help, and at the end of all could only say, "Poor fellows, our hearts are sore for ye; we've done all we could, and can't find a cure," - we'd bear up like men through bad times. No one knows till they've tried, what power of bearing lies in them, if once they believe that men are caring for their sorrows, and will help if they can. If fellow-creatures can give nought but tears, and brave words, we take our trials straight from God, and we know enough of His love to put ourselves into His hands (MB p.458).

It is in the solution which presumes on the ultimate unity of the classes that Mrs. Gaskell (and Dickens too) is marked off from the revolutionary socialists. Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions of conditions among the unemployed Manchester operatives were difficult even for the most prejudiced reviewers to contradict. Although they may have disputed the degree of misery, they had all to admit that it was intense in the early forties, and that it created animosity between master and man. Emily Winkworth takes a practical view:

It is enough to say, that this belief of the injustice and unkindness which they endure from their fellow creatures limits what might be resignation to God's will, and turns it to revenge in too many of the poor uneducated factory-workers of Manchester. This is most important - the feeling exists, and without attempting any subtle reasoning, there are few who will be inclined to dispute the impossibility of its existence without some cause for it (pp.2-3).

(vii)

#### The Solution

Mrs. Gaskell's self-appointed task was, as we have seen, rather a descriptive than a prescriptive one. Yet we shall not be moving far from the central themes of Mary Barton if we look at the kind of remedies which reviewers suggested for the social evils which she describes. In examining two of these in particular, Greg's and Emily Winkworth's, we may find out more about the relationship between classes which Mrs. Gaskell was trying to improve, and incidentally throw some light forward to her treatment of similar problems in North and South.

Greg quotes the description of the Davenports' cellar, then comments,

typically:

Are there any of our readers, living in comfort and luxury, who can pause over this picture, and feel it to be true, - without a sickening of the heart, and a sense of shame and self-condemnation, - that multitudes of fellow-creatures, at least as deserving as ourselves, should be sinking under miseries like these, while we are daily wasting in vanities, or worse indulgences, what might be available for their relief? These are uneasy feelings, no doubt, - and we naturally seek to quiet them by such anodynes and restoratives as may be at hand. But may they not be salutary as well as uneasy? and may we not be merely inviting their recurrence, and engendering our permanent comfort, by flying too soon even to the allowed and approved remedies for them? (p.409).

What is typical about this comment is that it is made apparently to bring the worst into the open and bravely examine it, to seem to have nothing to hide, while in fact it is made only to more firmly place himself and his middle-class reader among the righteous. He goes on to insist, again with apparent severity:

Instead, then, of turning eagerly to the considerations which would persuade us that it is a false shame and a groundless self-reproach which have assailed us, let us examine ourselves jealously on the subject, and make sure that we are entitled to acquittal at an unerring tribunal (409).

After this there is a reassuring digression about "the daily offerings of mutual love which we witness among the lowest members of the struggling artisans," which leads to the comforting conclusion:

What is . . . true sympathy between the poor, becomes, when transferred to the relation between rich and poor, what is commonly expressed by the word compassion -- a sentiment far feebler and less complete. Moreover, the rich can never have the same knowledge of the troubles and difficulties of the poor, which the poor have of their own (p.410).

Here he adds the final exoneration in this close scrutiny of the conscience of the middle classes: "the very shrinking and reluctant pride of the independent poor opposes another barrier." Again, we must remark on the facility with which he changes his position, because later in his review he writes of the same people as "men who will lend no helping hand to their own emancipation."

In fairness to Greg, his descriptions of the working class are probably true for various sections of it: the fault in his treatment of these people lies in his technique of lumping them all together, and discussing what is obviously a heterogeneous mass of people as if they were homogeneous. This makes his arguments operate in whatever way he chooses, of course, but it also leads to a great deal of confusion around his central argument. He is fundamentally concerned with the dependence of the lower classes upon the middle classes, because his remedy for the miserable condition of the former relies upon their potential for independence. Half-way through his review he comes out into the open about this:

the working classes, and they only, can raise their own condition; to themselves alone must they look for their elevation in the social scale; their own intellect and their own virtues must work out their salvation; their fate and their future are in their own hands, - and in theirs alone (p.420).

Yet two pages further on he laments that they should be so weak-willed; he says that they lack "moral courage" and "resolute individual will" (p.422). This want "of individual character" manifests itself in their blindly following trades union agitators. No doubt this was as often true then as it is today, but the forming of trades' unions can be seen in another way, as a step towards independence on the part of the operatives as a body. Greg complains of their wasting money by contributing to union funds, and fails to see that it is these self-same funds which maintain many of the workers in periods of unemployment, and that John Barton could have got money from his union if he had not generously ordered that the union's assistance be given to someone else who had a family. He could also have got "relief" from the guardians' relieving office, but his reaction to Mary's suggestion of this was the proudly independent:

'I don't want money, child! D—n their charity and their money! I want work, and it is my right. I want work' (p.159).

Greg misses the point altogether when he tries, by his level-headed discussion of philanthropy, charity, and the system of wages and profits, to bring the whole question to one of economics. Mrs. Gaskell makes the point in her Preface, and shows clearly in the character of Barton, that what such people in such circumstances want primarily are both justice and sympathy, to be helped to help themselves and maintain their dignity. The great point which she makes here is that the Lancashire operative will sacrifice everything before he sacrifices his pride.

Even if Barton's demand for work was unreasonable in current conditions, it is vitally necessary that the demand should be recognised and respected as an independent desire to help himself. By being unable, even if from no fault of his own, to provide for his family and himself, he suffers in his own estimation of himself, and needs reassurance from others. This is true not only of Barton but also of Wilson, who is guilty about taking Jem's help, and of Job Legh, who worries about accepting Margaret's earnings. Being uneducated and uncultured, all he has to justify his existence in his own eyes is the work of his hands; when there is no use for that then he has nothing to live for. He needs to be reassured of sympathy, to be told that others whose lives he might envy, because they seem to be useful, do not think that his existence is sheer selfishness. The last straw to the loss of human dignity to a man in this position is to be offered charity from someone comfortably off, whom he feels disapproves, on Malthusian principles, of his very existence.

Emily Winkworth comes closer than Greg to realising this. She starts from virtually the same point:

If this book is a true picture of the sufferings, and

state of feeling engendered by such suffering among the Manchester operatives, which people comfortably lolling in their easy chairs not only read, but even in spite of being so comfortable themselves also believe, should we not think their first almost irresistible impulse must be to jump out of the said easy chairs (p.11).

Her long-term remedy for the condition of the poor is an education which would point out to them "the connection between imprudence in marriage, and starving vicious children," and to provide "other comforts, and amusements, than that of increasing the population and lowering his own wages." She sees that misery such as the Davenports suffered

does not act as a warning, it produces no prudence, except in those who would have been prudent without it. Its only effect upon the others is increased recklessness. And who can wonder where there is literally no hope? (p.22).

Early in her review, after quoting the description of the burning of Carson's mill and Mrs. Gaskell's explanation to the effect that while it benefitted the Carsons it brought misery to their workpeople, she commented:

There is a terrible reality about this description where the enjoyment of the masters is literally the starvation of their workpeople. There is no difficulty in seeing how one follows from the other, nor any more in understanding that the sufferers who do see it, should contemplate, even a red republic (p.8).

But the insight shown here is not allowed to develop in the rest of the review.

Going on to the duties of those involved in the problem of the poor, she acutely perceives what the social-problem novelists were loth to acknowledge:

To begin with the capitalist, we do not believe the world will ever be reformed by benevolence when opposed to self interest. The idea is an absurdity, and those who build their hopes on it, have more enthusiasm than logic (p.23).

She discusses one proposed solution, that the employer should allow the worker a share in his profits. Greg also discussed this solution, but

whereas he proved that this could not be made to work, Emily Winkworth, citing a pamphlet by "M. Leclaire a housepainter in Paris,"<sup>1</sup> and Babbage's On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures (1832) proves that it can. The advantages of the profit-sharing system, as she lists them, are many, but chief among them is the elimination of trades unions, or combinations, since, she writes, "the workman and the capitalist would so shade into each other . . . the only combination which could exist would be a most powerful union between both parties to overcome their common difficulties," (p.26). Although she thinks that only jointstock companies in England prevent the adoption of such a system, it is easy for us to see how near-impossible an ideal it was. Some attempts at co-operation did work at first, but none of them survived for long. Beatrice Webb describes such a system operating in Bacup in 1866:

As a great many working people have shares in the co-operative mills, there is a recognised desire to keep down wages, which reacts on the public opinion, and makes even the non-owning men take a fairer view of the employer's position.<sup>2</sup>

Yet for this to be done on a large scale would involve some kind of social revolution, which, given the state of education of the men and the dogmatic capitalism of the manufacturers, could only exist as an ideal in the hearts of philanthropists and communists. Nonetheless as Emily Winkworth's suggestion of it, and her intelligent discussion of it, constitute a responsible attempt to look at the situation constructively. A dynamic approach like this must always be preferred to the laissez-faire attitude of the Gregs in the world which Mrs. Gaskell describes. When we come to consider North and South we shall see how the idea influenced Mrs. Gaskell.

On the subject of the operatives' share of responsibility,

<sup>1</sup> Reviewed in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal 4 (27 Sept. 1845) "M. Leclaire of Paris" pp.194-196.

<sup>2</sup> In My Apprenticeship (1950) p.143.

Emily Winkworth thinks along the same lines as Greg:

the most important thing for them to learn, is their own self dependance, that if when wages are good, they dissipate them as soon as earned in eating, and drinking, &c. they have no right (when it is no longer in the master's interest so to do,) to call upon him for maintenance even though obtained through wages (p.27).

This is echoing what she has said earlier:

One of the most important things for the "hands" to learn is . . . that they are men, and women, who must act with the strength and prudence of men, and women, not as children who first burn their fingers, and then complain of those who do not bind them up, though they literally may be without the means of doing so (4).

She too misses the point which Mrs. Gaskell makes about it being necessary to communicate to the hands the fact that the masters have tried to alleviate their misery, even if they have failed. She does not appear to have grasped the point that the need for sympathy is as great as the need for material help, that the workman who is responsible to his family needs to be treated like an adult in other ways than blaming him for his improvidence.

The question of responsibility is obviously a crucial one in Mary Barton and in the discussion surrounding it. It is possible to sympathise with the middle classes, suddenly charged from all directions with the responsibility, well-being, and often even for the lives of a huge anonymous mass of the poor and working classes. The industrial revolution must have been as sudden for them as it was for the 'lower orders,' and equally confusing in its earlier stages. One feels that the desire shown by people like W. R. Greg and Emily Winkworth, to push at least some of that responsibility back onto the lower classes, was a natural reaction, and not an unreasonable one. They were, possibly in their alarm, seeking to rationalise this natural shrinking from an unsought-for social burden by formulating elaborate systems of political economy; taking refuge in "the laws of nature;" very often

giving their own emotions the appearance of a logical attitude, and beneath all this, resenting the need to do so, feeling sorry for themselves.

In a way Mrs. Gaskell was offering the Greys and the Winkworths of her world an easy way through the burdens of formal responsibility which they felt were being thrust onto them. Her suggestion (because she does not put forward a solution as such) was to let a kind of regenerate, New Testament nature take its course: setting aside economic systems, to release the flow of human sympathy which the new barriers of environment had dammed. On the surface this may appear to be the weak, wishful suggestion of a minister's wife, easy to make but unrealistic and impossible to carry out on any scale. But it seems to have been at least as effective as any of the solutions offered by the pre-Keynesian economists. A reviewer in the British Quarterly wrote in 1867:

that her words, and others like them, have been laid to heart, and have brought forth the fruit of good deeds, witness the universal charity that prevailed during the recent cotton famine, and contrast it with the angry distrust that existed between rich and poor in the years 1846 -47 - 48, when she first began to teach and preach.<sup>1</sup>

Yet we might think it strange that Mrs. Gaskell tries to win her readers' sympathy not just for a cotton operative, but for a cotton operative who murdered an employer. It seems to be an unusual way of promoting better feeling between classes. Raymond Williams implies that the murder would have a cathartic effect on her readers, John Barton being "a dramatisation of the fear of violence which was widespread among the middle and upper classes at the time." He maintains that Mrs. Gaskell

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<sup>1</sup> "The Works of Mrs. Gaskell," 45, (April 1867) 339.

confuses "violence and fear of violence," and that

taking the period as a whole, the response of political assassination is so uncharacteristic as to be an obvious distortion. The few recorded cases only emphasize this.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me that the distortion is largely on Mr. Williams' side.

Yet he is not alone in seeing Barton's murder of Carson as a failure of conscience, or shirking of artistic responsibility, on Mrs. Gaskell's part. John Lucas objects:

Her mind shuts out the awareness of a muddle so colossal that it defeats the explanations of her social creeds, and so she attempts to impose order by turning to murder, where a neat pattern can realise itself: class antagonism producing a violence from which springs reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

To the modern critic looking back this might explain the murder, and the subsequent weakness of the novel, but to a contemporary critic, and to Mrs. Gaskell herself, it would be begging the question. Lucas' interpretation might be much better applied to those who committed, or attempted to commit, or thought of committing, such a murder as John Barton did. It is quite possible that Mrs. Gaskell included Carson's murder with the deliberate intention of dramatising the middle- and upper-classes' "fear of violence," although she might not have phrased it so to herself. There is no real refusal to confront the complexity of the "muddle" by introducing the murder: in many ways it makes the chaos more complex - an "earnest," sober, respectable cotton-hand brought to murder an employer by the pressures of his sympathy for his fellows - even if, as Raymond Williams says, it may lose some of its force in the end, in "a kind of writing-off."

Any study of the period in which Mary Barton is set will show how Mrs. Gaskell's exploration of her theme could at best amount to what

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<sup>1</sup> Culture and Society 1780-1950, ch.5, p.101.

<sup>22</sup> In "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood," in Tradition and Tolerance: Nineteenth Century Fiction, ed. Howard, Lucas, Goode, p. 173.

Barbara Hardy describes as a "bewildered and frustrated social questioning."<sup>1</sup>

In everything but the conversion of Carson, she seems to have been more practical than her critics, making a more realistic assessment of the situation. Because she is questioning, and not challenging, existing social systems, the ending of the novel is credible enough. Barton, ordinarily a decent, responsible man, having committed murder in a starving, drugged, state of mind, is likely to be haunted by his conscience, and to suffer a violent reaction which throws him back upon the moral code of his childhood. We have seen that John Barton has always had a highly-developed social conscience, only exchanging the impracticable code of Christianity for that of the trades unionist, and the private man trying to survive in a hostile world. It is the conflict between these last two that finally destroys him. He has not been able to predict for himself the personal consequences of what he saw as a public, political action:

To intimidate a class of men, known only to those below them as desirous to obtain the greatest quantity of work for the lowest possible wages, - at most to remove an overbearing partner from an obnoxious firm, who stood in the way of those who struggled as well as they were able to obtain their rights, - this was the light in which John Barton had viewed his deed (MB 435-436).

Mrs. Gaskell shows how unnatural and dangerous is the split between the public and the private man in the new society. Barton the cotton-operative, the "hand," can commit murder; Barton the man is capable of deep tenderness:

He carried the woman to the fire and chafed her hands. He looked around for something to raise her head. There was literally nothing but some loose bricks. However, those he got; and taking off his coat he covered them with it as well as he could. He pulled her feet to the fire (MB p.100).

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<sup>1</sup> In "Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot," in The Victorians (ed. A. Pollard, 1970) p.172.

With tender address, John Barton soothed the little laddie, and with beautiful patience he gathered fragments of meaning from the half-spoken words (MB p.251).

It is significant that Barton used a gun to murder young Carson, a method which involved no physical contact - unlike the murderers of Thomas Ashworth, who stabbed him to death.<sup>1</sup> The gulf between classes is preserved even in death. Critics have noted the irony in the fact that had Barton known of Harry Carson's flirtation with Mary, he would have had a personal motive for the murder. Yet it is difficult to see him committing a murder of this kind, and easy to see him, had young Carson's proposal of marriage been accepted, acquiescing in the elevation of his daughter. But there is a greater irony in the situation. Mary comes near to forming the most personal of all relationships with one of the employers. Obviously Mrs. Gaskell could not take the union of classes so far. There are good reasons provided for Mary's not marrying young Carson, mainly his self-indulgent nature, his vanity and insincerity. Perhaps we ought to wonder why Mrs. Gaskell made Carson so morally repulsive. The answer could be that she wished to make Mary's refusal satisfying to the reader, to suggest the possibility of such a union in a way which really only emphasises its impossibility. In North and South she marries the old world and the new, represented by Margaret Hale and Thornton, but she rejects a marriage across classes in Mary Barton, and again in Ruth. The relationship between Mary and Carson is a selfish one on both sides, and in this respect it reflects the relationship between employer and employed which is at the centre of the novel. Both plots involve a hesitation on the brink of understanding, then a final turning-away. The psychological impossibility of Mary's marrying Carson is quite plain - as, unfortunately is the impossibility of master and man

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<sup>1</sup> See above, ch.3, p.100.

ever being brought to recognise a common interest, far less a common humanity, despite the contrivance of the Job Legh-Mr. Carson interview at the end. How much this parallel was part of Mrs. Gaskell's intention in writing the novel it is not possible to know. Probably it is the unconscious revelation of the whole way she looked onto the world, and it would not be to insult her, in her position and era, to call her undemocratic. It is anyway an indication of the gulf which was indeed set between classes in that world, that in none of the social-problem novels does a factory girl marry a manufacturer.<sup>1</sup>

Although Mary Barton must be seen as a social-problem novel, Mrs. Gaskell is always much happier and confident in her writing when she is simply prescribing remedies for the evils which, she carefully stresses, <sup>the working man</sup> feels he endures. When critics write of the solution at the end of the novel, they tend to confuse the two ideas of solution of a problem by process of logic, and the resolution of the plot. Hence they quibble with the emigration of Jem and Mary, which was after all a commonplace solution of the times, and strongly recommended by Carlyle:

If this small western rim of Europe is overpeopled, does not everywhere else a whole vacant earth, as it were, call to us, Come and till me, come and reap me! (Chartism, ch.10)

Of course Mrs. Gaskell can offer no solution - because there was no solution which could be offered as a system before the hearts of men were changed. One incalculable contribution which she did make, was to show that an enormously powerful motive behind the active discontent of the cotton operatives, which possibly more than any other led to the

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that on occasions when a man of the middle class marries beneath his station in the novel of this period, it is usually someone with a quiet pastoral background, with the exception of Dickens's Lizzie Hexham and Eugene Wrayburn, in Our Mutual Friend.

illogical, ill-timed strikes, was their simple need, as "anonymous masses,"  
for sympathetic attention.

CHAPTER VDickens and the Industrial North

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(i) Dickens and the Industrial North: Introduction

Dickens' vision of life in the industrial north and what it meant for the future quality of life in Britain as a whole is of permanent relevance and value. He is the greatest novelist of factory life, and it is in keeping with his greatness, that, as K. J. Fielding explains, his criticism "was almost always effective but seldom consistent; it is often personal and usually difficult to place."<sup>1</sup> This study, which begins with Bleak House goes on to Hard Times and ends with an examination of his controversy with Harriet Martineau about preventable factory accidents, is an attempt to chart his developing attitude, and to analyse something of the complexity of his vision of industrial society. It is a subject which really needs a full-length study in itself, and which rapidly annihilates any preconceived notions which might be brought to it. The great value of Dickens' work lies in his expression of what he perceived, with an unequalled sensitivity, to be the moral and spiritual threats to humanity in his age. As he himself put it:

And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like - to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way - I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.<sup>2</sup>

In a way, his work itself constitutes a solution to the problems it shows; and Dickens himself represents the triumph of the creative spirit over the fragmenting, analytical spirit of the industrial revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> "Charles Dickens and the Department of Practical Art," Modern Language Review 48 (1953), pp.270-277.

<sup>2</sup> Forster, Life (1872-74) 3, p.320.

The following chapters contain a very limited investigation of some aspects of this conflict. In Bleak House he shows how the old system is dead, but the weight of its unburied corpse burdens the new world, stifling its potential growth. The energy, the dynamism, and the future - whatever it may be - lie in the north, where a new society, made up of a heterogeneous amalgam of people with hope and enthusiasm as a common factor, is in the process of being born. The machine's role in this is that of liberator; it overcomes the limitations of time and space, and extends man's reach to a point yet out of sight. It will free him from the limitations of the daily grind of repetitious hard work, and in this it has a democratising effect, or at least promises an aristocracy of talent rather than the old, worn-out hereditary aristocracy. Then in Hard Times we are shown how the meanness in human nature is destroying all this potential, with its systems closing like a prison around the spirit which created the new inventions.

One of the most flagrant examples of this self-imposed slavery to a system was the refusal of the manufacturers to fence in their machinery when it was causing death or mutilation to dozens of workers. Dickens campaigned against this through the columns of Household Words in a way which showed how totally committed he was to the interests of humanity rather than mere abstractions. The arguments brought against him, chiefly by Harriet Martineau, only tend to prove the point he made in Hard Times. There is no radical change in Dickens' attitude between Bleak House and Hard Times: although he was obviously disillusioned in the later novels with the whole of the industrial society, his basic broad humanitarianism did not change. As early as 1842 he had protested the necessity for government interference in the conditions of labour for the poor.

In that year he had written a review of a letter by Lord Londonderry, who had published a pamphlet entitled A Letter to Lord Ashley, M.P. on the Mines and Collieries' Bill, which attacked Ashley's work on this important reform.<sup>1</sup> Londonderry was himself a mine-owner, and an ardent opponent of reform. Dickens' review of the pamphlet for the Morning Chronicle showed how much he himself identified with the reformers. His tone is savage, fierce:

. . . The refined and witty attack on Mr. HORNER, a prominent member of the Children's Employment Commission, and a gentleman well known to the public for his valuable and zealous services in the cause of Humanity, and Human Improvement, is the best. The cutting humour, and bitter sarcasm, of printing in large capitals "EXTRACTS FROM VARIOUS PUBLICATIONS SHEWING MR. HORNER'S VINDICTIVENESS, HIS QUARRELSOME DISPOSITION, HIS LACK OF MORAL COURAGE, ETC.," is in the spirit of true manly nobility, and if Lord Londonderry were not already "most noble" by courtesy, we should have ventured to suggest that he be called so.

Reading this, and comparing it with the journalism of the Household Words campaign for fencing in machinery, we might not think that Dickens' attitude had changed much over the years.

The difference between the Dickens of 1842 and the Dickens of 1855 seems to be that as time went by he began to perceive that what appeared to be specific, local, and remediable abuses of the system, were symptoms of a much deeper sickness. The following chapters represent an attempt to trace the development of his vision which, particularly as it was dramatised in Hard Times, demonstrates better than any theoretical argument could, how significant the situation in the north was for the future of the country as a whole. Although such an approach as this, limited to only a few aspects of Dickens' work, must leave many questions unanswered, it is hoped that it might indicate another useful way of looking at his development as an artist.

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<sup>1</sup> The text of this review is given in Moses Tyson's "A Review and Other Writings by Charles Dickens" in the Bulletin of the John Rylands' Library 18 (1934) pp.177-196.

(ii)

The Ironmaster in BLEAK HOUSE

Bleak House (1853) is a novel about the present and the past:

about both the times when it was written (1852-3) and the past in which it is supposed to take place, ten or twelve years earlier. The worlds of the Dedlocks and of John Jarndyce are relics of the past; for, in showing their way of life, Dickens reveals the incompetence of Jarndyce as well as the obsolescence of the Dedlocks. Jarndyce's haphazard benevolence helps to perpetuate people like Skimpole and Mrs. Jellyby. It is only at the end of the novel that the future is taken over by people who are fit to be useful members of a new society - represented most forcibly in the person of Rouncewell the Ironmaster. Esther and Allan work for this future when they are married and take up their new life in Yorkshire, ready to follow a way of 'usefulness and good service' (ch. 60). For, although they are given the new 'Bleak House' by Jarndyce, the emphasis is not on its being an inheritance from the past but (as Jarndyce tells Allan) on what Esther "will make it' (ch. 64). It is significant that the new community they move to is far removed from either Lincoln's Inn or Lincolnshire. Like the iron country (in the set phrase), it is 'farther north'; and so the descendants of Lady Honoria Dedlock, the princely ap-Kerrigs and the Hawdons, 'begin the world" again, in a sense, with the Rouncewells.

Rouncewell is a character who appears only on the perimeter of the novel. He is always simply Mr. Rouncewell the Ironmaster, and we are never told his Christian name. Yet he certainly has an essential part to play in its design. In his relationship with his brother, as counterpart to Sir Leicester, and as father of Watt who is to marry Rosa (for whose sake Lady Dedlock defies Tulkinghorn), he has a vital place in its plot though he does not figure in it at all largely. It is perhaps,

because of this that his importance has sometimes been misunderstood, and nowhere more notably than by Trevor Blount in "The Ironmaster and the New Acquisitiveness"<sup>1</sup> and David Craig in "Fiction and the Rising Industrial Classes"<sup>2</sup> which hailed Blount's essay as "so searching and complete that it should stand as the central interpretation of the novel." They show the difficulties of readers who interpret Bleak House with the hindsight of Hard Times, to whom it may well seem (as Blount concludes) that 'on the realistic level.' to exchange Sir Leicester for Rouncewell is to replace one 'tyranny' with another, and that the "the Ironmaster merely represents, in Dickens's view, the old privilege translated into different terms." The only way out of the dilemma of this interpretation, it seems, is to believe that all is to be set right by Watt's marriage to Rosa, and that the ending must be read allegorically with 'the thematic meaning of Miranda's union with Ferdinand . . . or Perdita's marriage to Florizel.' Perhaps there is something in this as regards Rosa; and certainly no one is likely to argue that the Ironmaster is presented altogether realistically. Yet to regard him as no more than a new tyrant is to force an interpretation alien both to a true reading of the novel and to an understanding of Dickens at this stage in his development.

Dickens frequently declared his belief in progress. Ruskin recognised it, when he wrote to Charles Eliot Norton that 'Dickens was a pure modernist - a leader of the steamwhistle party par excellence.'<sup>3</sup> It can be clearly illustrated from such varied sources as Dickens's Speeches,<sup>4</sup> his Pictures from Italy,<sup>5</sup> or from his journalism for

<sup>1</sup> Essays in Criticism, 15. (1965)414-27.

<sup>2</sup> Essays in Criticism, 17. (1967)66-74.

<sup>3</sup> 19 June 1870

<sup>4</sup> See for example K. J. Fielding (ed.) The Speeches of Charles Dickens (Oxford, 1960) pp. 150, 153.

<sup>5</sup> 1846. The last sentence reads: 'The wheel of Time is rolling for an end, and . . . the world is, in all great essentials, better, gentler, more forbearing, and more hopeful, as it rolls!'

Household Words. In his "Preliminary Word" to the first number of Household Words<sup>1</sup> he wrote of his age as "the summerdawn of time," and in later articles he campaigned against the undue veneration which characterised the attitude of a large number of his contemporaries towards the past, and of their tendency to ignore "all that has been done for the happiness and elevation of mankind during three or four centuries of slow and dearly-bought amelioration!"<sup>2</sup>

Before Rouncewell's role in *Bleak House* can be examined it is necessary to understand how Dickens meant his readers to interpret his portrayal of Sir Leicester Dedlock and his world; Rouncewell and Sir Leicester are counter-balancing figures. Is Sir Leicester's model of society capable of adapting to the great social changes which readers of the early fifties inescapably saw around them? Obviously not, for the world which Sir Leicester represents is an impotent one; he can do no more than embody and repeat the past. In an article written jointly with W. H. Wills for Household Words, entitled "Spitalfields," Dickens gave a warning to men of Sir Leicester's breed: "What can the man of prejudice and usage hope for, but to be overthrown and flung into oblivion! Look to it, gentlemen of precedent and custom standing, daintily opposed to progress, in the bag wigs and embroidered coats of another generation, you may learn from the weaver in his shirt and trousers!" (5th April 1851).<sup>3</sup>

The Ironmaster's personal appearance, on the other hand, tells

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<sup>1</sup> 1 (30 March 1850) p.1. Household Words hereafter HW.

<sup>2</sup> "Old Lamps for New Ones" (15 June, 1850). See also "The Great Exhibition and the Little One", by Dickens and Horne (5 July, 1851) p.356.

<sup>3</sup> This part was probably written by Dickens alone. See Charles Dickens's Uncollected Writings from Household Words 1850-1859, ed. by Harry Stone (London, 1969), p.234.

immediately in his favour:

He is a little over fifty perhaps, of a good figure, like his mother; and has a clear voice, a broad forehead from which his dark hair has retired, and a shrewd though open face. He is a responsible-looking gentleman dressed in black, portly enough, but strong and active. (Ch. 28)

Later in the chapter we are told that he has "a strong Saxon face, a picture of resolution and perseverance!". Since Dickens nowhere qualifies this description, we must surely assume (such is the nature of Dickens's art) that the Ironmaster is a good man. The adjective "responsible-looking" is important, for in Bleak House the personal quality of responsibility is heavily emphasised - particularly in its negative aspects, as in Skimpole and Richard Carstone.

Rouncewell is altogether positive and dynamic. Whereas Sir Leicester, before Rouncewell's first entry, has been bemoaning "The confusion into which the present age has fallen!", Rouncewell displays his faith in the progress of the times:

In these busy times, when so many great undertakings are in progress, people like myself have so many workmen in so many places, that we are always on the flight. (Ch. 28)

To this dynamism Sir Leicester opposes "his repose and that of Chesney Wold" - both of which the reader knows are moribund. Rouncewell represents the new society living with an eye to the future. A self-made man, he now behaves like Sir Leicester's equal. Yet there is nothing of the Bounderby about him; he does not vaunt his origins in a kind of inverted snobbery.

Rouncewell shows his awareness of Sir Leicester's ignorance of the new society by the way in which he leads up to his statement about his intentions for Rosa, explaining step by step the kind of world he lives in and its flexibility. The emphasis which he lays on education reflects Dickens's acknowledged interest in the subject, and foreshadows

the deeper study he makes of it in Hard Times. But Rouncewell is not a Gradgrind; he has sent his children abroad to finish their education. His mother's admission about this is significant: "There may be a world beyond Chesney Wold that I don't understand." And her words recall earlier comments about the smallness and deadness of Sir Leicester's world. So to Sir Leicester, in his deafness "at the rushing of larger worlds," Rouncewell's theories are a sign of bad times. He thinks that Rouncewell wants to educate people 'out of their stations,' and that this, like Rouncewell's being invited to stand for Parliament, "opens the floodgates" and threatens the framework of society - a society Dickens clearly believes to be obsolete.

We next hear of Rouncewell in connection with the defeat of Sir Leicester's party in the election on Sir Leicester's own political territory. Tulkinghorn reports that the Ironmaster has been very active on the opposite side, that as a speaker he was effectively "plain and emphatic," and that "in the business part of the proceedings," aided by his son, "he carried all before him!" Sir Leicester's only response is to maunder on again about "The floodgates of society," and to think vaguely once more of Wat Tyler.<sup>1</sup>

Dickens is clearly emphasising the better side of life in the north through Rouncewell & Son: its inventiveness, its dynamism, its capacity for hard work and efficiency, and above all its progressiveness.

Rouncewell is shown as accomplishing in one generation what it is hard

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<sup>1</sup> The joke about Wat Tyler is extended by its association (without comment) with the Christian name of Rouncewell's son, Watt. No doubt he was named after James Watt, the inventor of the steam-engine. Rouncewell, himself, as a boy, "took . . . to constructing steam-engines out of saucepans," as well as "constructing a model of a power-loom." It is not surprising that everyone in rural Lincolnshire thought that he would be more at home in the "iron country" (ch. 7).

to believe that any family actually achieved in less than two.<sup>1</sup> Not only is this proud Radical leader ready, for her own sake, to allow his mother to stay in the service of Sir Leicester, but he himself lives in "an elegant house, in all the arrangements of which there is to be observed a pleasant mixture of the originally simple habits of the father and mother, with such as are suited to their altered station and the higher fortunes of their children" (ch. 63). His son is dutiful, his daughter is affectionate, everything about his home is "pleasant."

It is equally obvious that Dickens hardly touches on the darker side of the industrial north. In fact, the only description we have of the north is in "Steel and Iron" (ch. 63); and so if Rouncewell is to be shown as a "tyrant" or "merely" representing "the old privilege translated into different terms," it has to be here. Trevor Blount declares that the Ironmaster is "as hard in his business as iron," that he is "ruthless," that because his iron is rusty he is like Tulkinghorn, that because he has a scrapyard he is like Krook, that his workers are as much enslaved as the little Pardiggles, and that through their "sooty hands" they should be linked with the slovenly Jellybys and contrasted with the cleanly Bagnets. Even Phil Squod, tinker's apprentice, gas-works man, firework maker and London shooting-gallery attendant is re-written into the novel as if he were a victim of "the sort of industrialisation that is symbolised in the 'iron gentleman!'" "The muddy treachery of Chancery," Blount writes, "the grimy squalor of Krook's shop, the dispirited glumness of the St. Alban's slums, the cobwebs on Tulkinghorn's port bottles, the chaotic disorder of the Jellybys, all string together the neglect, ignorance and evil that the novel correlates with darkness and mystery. Thus the "iron dust on everything" in the Ironmaster's office (ch. lxii

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, DNB on the Stephensons, father and son.

[really ch. 63]) and the 'swart dust of the coal roads' link up with the disgust and censure that the dirt references as a whole are meant to evoke."

But Blount's theory of the symbolism of dirt in Bleak House will not bear close examination. He finds that dirty hands after a morning's work at a foundry are disgusting, but gives Phil Squod's dirt the flavour of moral approval. It is "quite enough washing" for Phil to see George's military yellow soap and cold water morning ablutions (ch. 26). George's best suggestion on being consulted about the fever-stricken Jo, is to have Phil take him off for a bath. Jo dies almost immediately on his return (ch. 47). These instances at least figure in the text quite as largely as Tulkinghorn's "cobweb-covered bottle" (end of ch. 42). But, of course, Tulkinghorn's port bottles have cobwebs only because they are so aged that they contain a "radiant nectar . . . that fills the whole room with the fragrance of southern grapes" (ch. 22). They are like Sol Gill's cherished final bottle of old Madeira in Dombey and Son, "hoary with dust and cobwebs" (ch. 62). It is inappropriate and even absurd at times to elevate such incidental associations to the level of pervasive symbols. One of Dickens's concerns, as a novelist fully aware of the industrial revolution, was to find "new associations" for his public within the new world. Hence, although he may speak in "A Preliminary Word" in Household Words against an "iron binding of the mind to grim realities," in Bleak House he stresses the value of iron in this new society. Of Sir Leicester's parasitical relations he writes:

It would have been happier for them to have been made of common iron at first, and done base service. (ch. 28)

In fact, life in the north is sketched in almost as lightly as possible. It is true that when the two brothers meet face to face George is seen to have "a certain massive simplicity and absence of

usage in the ways of the world" (ch. 63). But it is easier to see this as a solitary comment meant to keep George from seeming too absurd in the bustling world of the foundry. There has been nothing servile about the workers he has met. On knocking off for dinner, they are seen to be "very sinewy and strong" and "a little sooty too." In a sense, master and men are thus identified.

Rouncewell is a man of imagination and sympathy. We see his opinion of the Dedlocks when he comes to take Rosa away (ch. 48). Rosa is weeping. Tulkinghorn remarks, ironically, that she "seems after all . . . as if she were crying at going away." Rouncewell replies, with some quickness in his manner, "Why, she is not well bred you see . . . and she is an unexperienced little thing and knows no better." He adds, ironically, "if she had remained here, she would have improved." This scene is significant not only for our understanding of what the Ironmaster stands for, but also as anticipating one of the main themes of Hard Times. The Gradgrind school was to produce people as emotionally stunted as the Dedlocks, for neither have any room in their lives for the feelings or fancy. Rachel and Stephen are the two most "worthy" characters in Hard Times, yet they have spent most of their lives among machinery. But Rouncewell's consideration of his mother's happiness before his own pride of position, in letting her stay with the Dedlocks, his fatherly pride, and the warmth with which he greets the long-lost George, all show the same kind of humanity and affection as Rachel and Stephen show. He is meant to be someone who is not out of touch with ordinary people, but who has recently been a worker himself.

Dickens linked the best human qualities with the ability to imagine. In "A Preliminary Word" to the first number of Household Words he had also stressed the importance of the element of fancy in human life:

No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast.

The Ironmaster's mind is not bound only to 'grim' realities, but to the pleasant realities too. He says to Lady Dedlock:

In our condition of life, we sometimes couple our intention with our - our fancies, which renders them not altogether easy to throw off. I think it is rather our way to be in earnest. (ch. 48)

Lady Dedlock has just described Watt's love for Rosa as a "fancy", implying that it is a light, ephemeral emotion. Rouncewell takes the word and gives it a range of meaning which Dickens would approve.

"Fancy" in Rouncewell's usage is nearly synonymous with the quality of conceiving ideals; and he links it, in his world, with the determination to achieve them. The Dedlocks' interpretation of "fancy" reflects the shallowness and sterility of their own way of life; Rouncewell's shows the depth of earnestness and the imaginative fertility of his. There is no progress without Fancy: fancy and hard work led to the inventions which in turn lead to a higher degree of civilisation.

In some ways, no doubt, Blount is right in seeing Rouncewell's brother George as embodying 'plain soldierly virtues like probity, courage and loyalty'. Yet his virtues have, at least, certain limitations.<sup>1</sup> Even his probity comes in question when we realise that, in a Micawberish way, he lets Bagnet stand surety for his debts. He is good-hearted, but a little stupid. Even his courage in the face of the charge of murder

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<sup>1</sup> This interpretation of George's role in the novel agrees with that of G. H. Ford, in an essay on "Self-Help and the Helpless in Bleak House" (R. C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr., eds.: From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, Minneapolis, 1958). Ford writes: "George, the prodigal son, is redeemed by qualities of heart. He is aware, nevertheless, of his failure" (p. 96).

is part obstinacy, just as his failure to get into touch with his mother is a kind of irresponsibility disguising itself as self-denying love. Richard uses the same sort of argument to prove that his mania for the Jarndyce suit stems from a consideration of Ada's interests. Trevor Blount apparently asks us to admire George's eventual willingness to surrender a specimen of Hawdon's writing to Tulkinghorn because of his "friendship with the Bagnets." But in fact he had no choice.

The difference between iron and steel, between George and Rouncewell, it is said, is the difference between "truth and ruthlessness." Steel is a refinement of iron, and gold is better than both. Nevertheless Dickens has twice indicated the serviceable nature of iron, once in describing the uselessness of the "golden" Dedlock cousins (quoted above), and once in asserting the ironmaster's honesty:

The iron gentleman having said that he would do it, was bound to do it. No difference in this respect between the base metal and the precious. Highly proper. (ch. 48)

Steel may be the finer metal, and more dependable, but George is decidedly not more dependable than his brother, nor is steel always a superior substitute for iron. George's way of life has more glamour, but Dickens is indicating that true romance and adventure lie all with the Ironmaster. While George is a vagabond, Rouncewell goes from one side of the country to the other for constructive purposes. George has a feudal relationship, first with Hawdon, then with Sir Leicester: the Ironmaster is his own master. The Ironmaster helps young people in love; George comforts the derelicts. Bleak House constitutes an effort to help people adjust their ideas and values to the real world, to cast off obsolete ways of thinking about the world. The new society does not demand the denial of fancy, only its readjustment; however, the fanciful in George's life is synonymous with a not ignoble illusion, and in this he differs from

the Dedlocks.

We must study Dickens's description of the Iron Country in the same light. His descriptions of the "scorched verdure" and the gigantic chimney need not be taken as an adverse critique of industrialism. They are both seen as descriptions of the workshop in which the progress of civilisation is forged. When George rides north, leaving behind "such fresh green woods as those of Chesney Wold!" there may be some irony in the contrast. He leaves behind him the corpses of Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn, the shell of Sir Leicester, and a society built on corruption; Chesney Wold itself has begun to go to ruin.

The determining, or even moral, factor in the environment is provided by the people in it, and what they do. This is clearly implied in an article written by Dickens and W. H. Wills in Household Words, describing a visit to a plate glass factory:

In dark corners, where the furnaces redly glimmered on them, from time to time, knots of swarthy muscular men, with nets drawn over their faces, or hanging from their hats: confusedly grouped, wildly dressed, scarcely heard to mutter amidst the roaring of the fire, and mysteriously coming and going, like picturesque shadows, cast by the terrific glare. Such figures there must have been, once upon a time, in some such scene, ministering to the worship of fire, and feeding the altars of the cruel god with victims. Figures not dissimilar, alas! There have been torturing and burning, even in Our Saviour's name. But, happily these bitter days are gone. The senseless world is tortured for the good of man, and made to take new forms in his service. Upon the rack we stretch the ores and metals of the earth, and not the image of the Creator of all. These fires and figures are the agents of civilisation, and not of deadly persecution and black murder. Burn fires and welcome! Making a light in England that shall not be quenched by all the menkish dreams in the world!<sup>1</sup>

Fires are associated with light, the light of knowledge. Rounswell is associated with such "agents of civilisation," and uses the money

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<sup>1</sup> This part was probably written by Dickens himself; see Harry Stone (ed.): Charles Dickens's Uncollected Writings from Household Words. 1850-59, I, 205.

gained by this association to educate his family. The play on the word "torturing" reminds us of the "eccentric and perverse forms" of the iron machine-parts in Bleak House (ch. 63). Dickens shows his awareness of the discrepancy between the appearance of the new industrialism and the reality of its forces as a civilising influence. The imagination has to make the adjustment; new associations have to be formed. One of the aims of Household Words was to disseminate knowledge of the new world of technological advance, and to help its readers to assimilate this knowledge. Thus, in his "Preliminary Word" Dickens wrote:

The mightier inventions of this age are not, to our thinking, all material, but we have a kind of soul in their stupendous bodies which may find expression in Household Words. The traveller whom we accompany on his railroad or his steamboat journey, may gain, we hope, some compensations for incidents which these later generations have outlived, in new associations with the Power that bears him onward . . . even with the towering chimneys he may see, spurting out fire and smoke upon the prospect.

We must be careful, then, not to read any adverse moral judgement of the men who work the machinery of industry into Dickens's description of it, or to mistake his awe of it, and his efforts to come to terms with the enormity of it, for fear and aversion.

CHAPTER VI"Grossly and Sharply Told;" HARD TIMES

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|------|-----------------------------------|-------|
| (i)  | <u>Stephen the Martyr?</u>        | 2 0 9 |
| (ii) | <u>Hard Times for These Times</u> | 2 3 3 |

(i) Stephen the Martyr?

F. R. Leavis's "Analytic Note"<sup>1</sup> is inevitably associated with criticism of Hard Times: the many valuable interpretations and comments which it stimulated have never completely superseded it, largely because it does lay hold of the main point of the novel, and bring out its central thesis. Yet while he praises Hard Times as a "masterpiece" and a "completely serious work of art," Leavis is aware that the novel is not entirely satisfactory in its handling of the working-classes, trades unions, and Stephen Blackpool:

it is a score against a work so insistently typical in intention that it should give a representative role to the agitator, Slackbridge, and make Trade Unionism nothing better than the pardonable agent of the misguided and oppressed, and, as such, an agent in the martyrdom of the good working man.

But, having made this criticism, he swiftly passes it over, and then succeeds so well in analysing the strength of Hard Times, that we are led to forget the novel as a whole. This combination of Leavis bent on "reinstating" Hard Times and so evading its weakest aspect, and the tendency of the novel itself, which operates in a similar way, is a potent and dominant one. Yet as soon as we stand aside from what they both have to say, problems arise.

Some of these problems are centred upon Stephen Blackpool, about whom Leavis is content to paraphrase accepted critical opinion, citing him as an example of Dickens's sentimentality:

the good, victimised working-man, whose perfect patience under infliction we are expected to find supremely edifying and irresistably touching as the agonies are piled on for his martyrdom.

<sup>1</sup> In The Great Tradition (1948): "Hard Times: An Analytic Note," ch. 5, and reprinted with slight alterations in Dickens the Novelist by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (1970).

He maintains that this has no seriously damaging effect upon the novel - but what, then are we to make not simply of Stephen, but of his relationship to the main fable, and with Dickens's intentions? Even with so subtle a critic as Dr. Leavis, it is bound to lead to over-simplification if this aspect of the novel is thrust to one side without examination. Stephen is at the centre of many issues which are raised in the novel: the nature of the working-man, for example, or the effect on him of urban industrial life, reasons why the worker is not properly represented by the unions, the way he is affected by problems of education.

For there are times when Dickens as a novelist appears to have had a sound and clear conception of a character at the beginning of the work. To anticipate the argument that follows, it may be that we should realise that the characterisation of Stephen had potentialities that were sacrificed to the main thesis as the novel developed. For there are times when Dickens appears to have had a sound and clear conviction of a character at the beginning of a novel, and one which is convincing in psychological terms and which agrees with events of the past and as far as they are foreseen. We might instance Esther Summerson as an example.

Dickens's initial conception of Esther was interesting and convincing. She is a girl who has a childhood not unlike Miss Wade's. She is unloved and ill-treated by her godmother; consequently she is both unsure of herself, and seeks for affection even from her doll.

Her subsequent happiness at school does not alter this bent in her character, and she always remains someone who seeks and inspires affection in others, but who needs such re-assurance. Hence her attraction for Peepy, Ada, Caddy, Charley, and eventually Jarndyce and Alan Woodcourt. Her genuine sense of insecurity means that she accepts, even though uncertainly, the love of her elderly guardian, and remains genuinely uncertain about Alan's love; and so in the novel of Dickens's intention the way in which she can accept the ultimate transfer from Jarndyce to Woodcourt could have been accounted for. Unfortunately this is not the impression that the novel leaves on most of its readers, since Dickens was unable to carry out this initial conception. In the first place, this is because he is not prepared to confront at all clearly what is implied in the relations of Esther and Jarndyce, "a child" and a man "past the prime of life." Then, as everyone sees, he is unable to manage to solve the problems of first-person narration, and cannot convey properly that Esther's modesty and uncertainty go deeper than the conventional response of a Victorian young lady. This is the kind of dilemma which Dickens sometimes avoided by refusing to elaborate a character. But if he made the initial mistake of giving such a character an essential place in the development of the plot, as he did with both Esther and Stephen, then the result is bound to be unsatisfactory.

This is certainly what appears to have happened. In his initial conception of Stephen, Dickens seems to have taken a hero whom he did not intend to be wholly attractive and admirable. He even took pains to call attention to this, and to show Stephen's dullness in spite of his honesty, and his inadequacy in spite of all his good intentions. Yet, as the novel developed, Dickens grew sorry for him - almost as sorry as

Stephen for himself. He is shown as the victim of his wife, his employer, and then of Tom, as well as of his own weakness. The resulting final loss of employment and fall down Old Hell Shaft, only to be raised after three days to pass to his Redeemer's rest, "through humility, sorrow and forgiveness" (III, 7, p.208) makes him Stephen the martyr but not the human character he might have been. Perhaps, too, the original intention of giving Stephen greater depth was given up because Dickens was tempted to make him a more obvious foil to other characters.

This can best be seen, perhaps, first by considering the genesis of the novel, then some of the ways in which it has been interpreted, and finally by looking more closely at the progress and apotheosis of Stephen.

Just before Hard Times began to appear in Household Words there were the usual preliminary announcements; and one of Dickens's friends, Peter Cunningham, also realised that Dickens had been down to Preston to investigate the strike. Writing in the Illustrated London News, therefore, he naturally made the assumption that the forthcoming novel originated in the author's "recent enquiry into the Preston strike."<sup>1</sup> Dickens felt driven to write to Cunningham almost immediately to deny it; and he emphatically stated that "the title was many weeks old, and chapters of the story were written" before he went to Preston, "or thought about the present strike."<sup>2</sup> He must have been aware that he was stretching the truth considerably when he wrote this, because on 20 January 1854, only nine days before he went to Preston,<sup>3</sup> he sent his list of possible titles for the novel to Forster, asking him to help in choosing

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<sup>1</sup> March 4 1854, p.194.

<sup>2</sup> 11 March 1854. Quoted in Ford-Monod ed. of Hard Times (hereafter F-M), p.275.

<sup>3</sup> See letter to John Forster, 24 Jan., 1854 (F-M, p.274).

one.<sup>1</sup> On 23 January he wrote to Miss Coutts that "the first written page now stares at me."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there are two references to the strike in letters written before he went to Preston to write "On Strike" for Household Words.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Miss Coutts on the twenty-seventh of October, 1853, he mentions having read an account of a riot at Preston in an Italian newspaper,<sup>4</sup> and on the sixteenth of January, 1854, he commented briefly on the strike situation in a letter to W. F. de Cerjat.<sup>5</sup>

While it could still be true, as appears from the list of titles sent to Forster,<sup>6</sup> that Dickens had his theme clearly in mind before

<sup>1</sup> See letter to John Forster, 20 Jan., 1854 (F-M, p.273).

<sup>2</sup> 23 Jan., 1854 (F-M p.273).

<sup>3</sup> 11 Feb., 1854, pp.553-59.

<sup>4</sup> F-M p.272, letter to Miss Coutts from Italy, 25 Oct., 1853.

<sup>5</sup> 16 Jan., 1854 (F-M p.273).

<sup>6</sup> These appear in a letter to John Forster (20 Jan., 1854) as:  
 1. According to Cocker; 2. Prove it; 3. Stubborn Things;  
 4. Mr. Gradgrind's Facts; 5. The Grindstone; 6. Hard Times;  
 7. Two and Two are Four; 8. Something Tangible; 9. Our Hard-Headed Friend; 10. Rust and Dust; 11. Simple Arithmetic; 12. A Matter of Calculation; 13. A Mere Question of Figures; 14. The Gradgrind Philosophy (F-M, p.273). H. P. Sucksmith points out that this list is incomplete, and provides a complete transcript of alternative titles in the original manuscript of the novel. Titles not included in Forster's list are: Hard-headed Gradgrind; Hard heads and soft hearts; The Time Grinder; Mr. Gradgrind's grindstone; The Family Grindstone; The general/universal grindstone; Heads and Tales; Black and White; Facts are stubborn things; No such thing sir; Calculation; Extremes meet; Unknown quantities; and Damaging Facts, (The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens, 1970, p.358).

personally observing the strike at Preston, it is patently not true that he had not thought about the strike before beginning the novel. Forster, in his biography of Dickens, appears to contradict himself, when he states that Hard Times "was planned and begun in the winter of 1853," then writes later in the same chapter of the list of titles sent in January of the next year.<sup>1</sup> But the fact remains that Dickens was anxious to disclaim any connection between Hard Times and the Preston strike. The reason for this is almost certainly that in writing a novel with a contemporary setting, Dickens did not want what he said to be limited to a specific locality and a special dispute.

This unwillingness to be tied down to an ephemeral dispute is evident in the novel itself, first from the fact that there is no strike in Hard Times,<sup>2</sup> and then because Dickens entirely cancelled a passage in the novel which was directly relevant to a series of articles on factory accidents which appeared in Household Words.<sup>3</sup> The consideration of these facts raises the question of the usefulness of research into the background of the Preston dispute in interpreting the novel. Yet I hope to show that, as K. J. Fielding has pointed out, "in whatever way one regards Hard Times as a commentary on mid-Victorian society it unquestionably makes an exceptional demand for a knowledge of the times themselves."<sup>4</sup> In another article, Professor Fielding adds:

According to his own account (Dickens) had been considering the twin subjects of Education and Industrial Relations, off and on, throughout the whole of 1853; he decided to write the new novel

<sup>1</sup> Life of Charles Dickens (1872 - 74), III, 44-5.

<sup>2</sup> See letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, 21 April, 1854: "I have no intention of striking" (F-M p.276).

<sup>3</sup> See F-M p.252, n.68.26, and p.59 above.

<sup>4</sup> In "Charles Dickens and the Department of Practical Art," Modern Language Review 48 (1953) 270-277.

early in the new year.<sup>1</sup>

His explanation of the process which led to the way in which Hard Times is written is probably the most accurate and perceptive, and ought to be quoted in full here:

Always seeking for a particularly close relationship with his public, he found his chance in movements for reform. Yet, particularly when he published serially, he had to catch an audience ready-made and could not afford to wait and gather one around him: in a single number he had no time to develop entirely fresh ideas. It was not that he was ever insincere, but that his method of publication forced him to be an opportunist: as public opinion began to form on anything, he would seize his chance, attract its attention, and then begin to develop the subject in his own way. Naturally such a practice was bound to affect his choice of subject as well as his manner of expression: and, for a time, his style tended to become increasingly pointed, and his ideas more and more "critical" rather than "constructive."<sup>2</sup>

We are bound to conclude that Dickens thought of Hard Times as a commentary on "these times." Its dedication to Carlyle rather reinforces that view. It is a document in many ways, although it is never from a detached observer. The contemporary situation was such that it was impossible to write on these themes without immediately calling it to men's minds. Therefore, although, as Geoffrey Carnall points out, "to approach Hard Times by way of the Preston strike is manifestly to direct attention to what is least successful in it,"<sup>3</sup> I think we cannot avoid looking at it from this vantage-point.

Yet in looking at the novel in this way we must be careful not to

<sup>1</sup> In "Hard Times and Common Things," in Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novels and Novelists in Honour of John Butt, ed. by Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (1968), p.195.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.194.

<sup>3</sup> In "Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, and the Preston Strike," Victorian Studies 8 (1964-65) pp.31-48.

fall into the mistake of looking for a "solution" to the problems it shows in the text. This is a characteristic mainly of earlier critics, who often interpreted the novel with a political bias which in many instances amounted to sheer blindness<sup>1</sup>, but it is also true of some modern critics. Sylvère Monod, for example, finds "a kind of sentimental socialism" in it.<sup>2</sup> There is almost invariably an ultimate note of disappointment, even reproach, in this kind of criticism. Monod, again, concludes his study with:

He was conscious of the existence of a problem, but it was one that acted on his emotions rather than on his intelligence, and thus the solutions he contemplated were all of the benevolent, patronizing kind.<sup>3</sup>

Paul Edward Gray complains that

Hard Times ranges unpredictably between self-enclosed art and denotative argument. It is neither completely self-dependent nor literally "true," and it is therefore peculiarly vulnerable to criticism on both aesthetic and historical grounds.<sup>4</sup>

If Gray is correct, Hard Times is open to criticism but it does not mean that it is not a good novel. If there is a discrepancy between the external and the internal views of the novel, or if there is a discrepancy between Dickens' commentary on his times either as we know of them as they appeared to him, or as they were (as far as we can judge), then the novel is plainly flawed. But we must ask what these flaws are; and when we do it seems clear that the most crucial of them is probably the characterisation of Stephen Blackpool.

<sup>1</sup> Notable among these are T. H. Jackson in his Charles Dickens: the Progress of a Radical (1937); Jack Lindsay in Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study (1950), and Edgar Johnson in his Charles Dickens. His Tragedy and Triumph (1953): all of these critics assume that there is a strike in Hard Times.

<sup>2</sup> "Dickens as Social Novelist," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hard Times, ed. Paul Edward Gray (1969).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.85.

<sup>4</sup> In his editorial introduction to Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hard Times p.10.

In general, critics of Hard Times have been content to accept Ruskin's verdict that Stephen Blackpool is "a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman;"<sup>1</sup> they see him as idealised by Dickens almost to saintliness, a victim made more spotless to emphasise the corruption of the social muddle - a muddle which the middle classes see as a system even if a defective one. They too easily accept the paradox, that the characters meant to be seen as the most imaginative or humane in the novel (apart from the circus people) are Stephen and Rachael - and, in some ways, Louisa - who are the products of the system at its worst. Yet a relevant enquiry here might be to ask where the critics themselves, who are so sure that Stephen is too good to be true, formed their own ideas of the character of the working man. The accusation that Stephen is not representative of his class may be based on the naïve assumption that it was possible to find and describe such a representative man. But it is not at all clear that Dickens began with this assumption. Mrs. Gaskell does insist that John Barton is representative of his class, but one of the difficulties she created for herself may have been the way in which she wants him to be typical of a class and an individual too.

I would rather suggest that Dickens is more subtle than his critics give him credit for, and that certainly by this stage in his career as a novelist he cannot have been entirely unaware of the problem that the idealisation of Stephen would create. If his thesis were simply that slavery to "hard facts," and the abolition of fancy, were brutalising the working classes, then why does he place the most "brutalised" characters, Tom and Bounderby, among the middle classes? Nor should it

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<sup>1</sup> In Unto This Last (1862) Essay 1.

be too easily assumed that because Dickens rejected the moral tale, and Cruikshank's <sup>re-telling of old fairy tales</sup> "Frauds on the Fairies,"<sup>1</sup> that he meant to make his latest work a mere simple moral story in reverse. It is possible, therefore, that critics have been dazzled by the "circle of stage fire" that illumines the dark vision of Hard Times, and have not looked carefully enough at the paradoxes inherent in their own judgement. We must set aside, for the moment at least, other questions of the interpretation of the novel as a hymn to bread and circuses, the great needs for "amusement" and imagination, and concentrate on one crucial issue, the role of Stephen. If I am correct in my judgement, that Stephen at first was not simply <sup>to be</sup> one more victim of Dickensian sentimentality, then we must see what he is, and why Dickens made him so. To do this, it is necessary to look more closely at passages of the novel in which Stephen appears.

There is a simple dilemma in the conception of Stephen. He is to be the victim of industrialism, and yet he is presumably to be a character for whom we can feel sympathy, and a certain amount of admiration. He is only introduced in the novel after a passage which described where he works and lives:

In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who

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<sup>1</sup> HW 8, 1 Oct. 1853 (pp.97-100) As P-M explain, Dickens wrote this article rejecting Cruikshank's re-telling of traditional fairy tales, giving them a moral slant (see P-M p.271).

might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown . . . - lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. (I, ch. 10)

This clearly indicates that the reader is to see Stephen in terms of his environment. The maturer Dickens's conviction of the effect of environment is plain. It comes out, for example, in the Speeches.<sup>1</sup> It was a view which had developed slowly: clearly enough in an early novel such as Oliver Twist, the story has been fabular: it was the "Parish Boy's Progress," and Oliver himself had shown "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last."<sup>2</sup> But Jo in Bleak House is a person, not a principle; he suffers rather than survives; he is in his natural environment in Tom-All-Along's. And although Bleak House is not simply realistic, this is true of many of Jo's fellow-characters in the novel - Guster, Prince Turveydrop, Guppy, and George Rouncewell, for example. Bleak House is the novel which immediately preceded Hard Times, and it is clear that Dickens by then never aimed merely at the most simple effect.

Raymond Williams questions the simple relation between character and environment:

It is easy to show that, having defined a social condition, as the cause of virtue and vice, Dickens then produced virtue, almost magically, from the same conditions which in others bred vice . . . We may or may not believe in it, as social

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, his speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, 10 May, 1851, in which he said that "Searching Sanitary Reform must precede all other social remedies," and that "even Education and Religion can do nothing where they are most needed, until the way is paved for their ministrations by Cleanliness and Decency," (Speeches p.129).

<sup>2</sup> In "The Author's Preface to The Third Edition" of Oliver Twist, ed. K. Tillotson (Oxford, 1966) p.lxii.

observation, but though it has the character of a miracle it is the kind of miracle that happens.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt it is true that a bad environment encourages crime, but it does not create wickedness from nothing. But an environment such as Stephen's, as the passage above, in its collocation of ideas about Coketown suggests, must severely restrict the potential of a man who has the will to do good. A recent critic, Ivanka Kovacevic, accepting the standard view of Stephen as unintentionally shown to be both dull and saintly, has complained:

Dickens also contradicts his own theory of characterisation. He first insists on the environmental factor in the formation of character, and then proceeds to present a character that refutes his theory. According to the environmental theory, Stephen, who grew up among the sordid slums of Coketown and the foetid atmosphere of its cotton-mills, should have emerged as a different man from the Stephen whom Dickens presents to us.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the contradiction is in the reader. Stephen's limitations are openly shown, even though they may not be exactly what we expect. The question is, how far Dickens consciously imposed these limitations on Stephen. It may be that Stephen's inadequacy was the result of a conflict within Dickens himself, between his old idealism and a new pragmatism which is shown most clearly in the next "dark" novel, Little Dorrit. Yet the idea of a man like Stephen having his innate goodness frustrated by his environment, although not perverted by it, is tempting to the critic who wishes to justify the function of Stephen in the novel in terms of a Dickens who was aware of such a complex possibility. Yet there are indications that this theory cannot be sustained throughout the novel, that even if it were his conscious intention in the beginning to show how his environment threatened and frustrated the goodness of

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<sup>1</sup> In "Social Criticism in Dickens : Some Problems of Methods and Approach," Critical Quarterly 6, no. 3 (Autumn 1964) pp.214-217.

<sup>2</sup> "The Ambivalence of a Generation. Dickens Juxtaposed to Harriet Martineau," Univerzitet U Beogradu - Filoski Fakultet. Odsek za anglistiku. ( Beograd, 1969) pp.87-102.

Stephen, Dickens sometimes allowed himself to slip back into the old, naive, Christmas Carol philosophy. Yet again he never does even this completely, for Stephen's virtue, as we see it gradually revealed, is almost entirely negative, and consists wholly in the abstaining from all that he desires most.

Surely this can be seen in the way Dickens shows us the inadequacy of Stephen's response to life. He is old at forty, unfortunate, but rather unattractive in manner, too. Dickens appears to appeal for the reader's sympathy for the hard life Stephen has led. But the rhetoric of his account of Stephen can sometimes have another function: to suggest Stephen's own thought-processes. On his first appearance, for example, the fact that Stephen appeared to have had more than his own share of troubles is repeated three times:

Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life. It is said that every life has its roses and thorns; there seemed, however, to have been a misadventure or mistake in Stephen's case, whereby somebody else had become possessed of his roses, and he had become possessed of the same somebody else's thorns in addition to his own. He had known, to use his words, a peck of trouble (I, ch.10, p.49).

In its context the careful process of reasoning out the roses-and-thorns metaphor seems rather to belong to Stephen's mind than to Dickens's. It is the slow reasoning of a simple, not very intelligent man.

Intellectual dullness or simplicity is one of Stephen's main limitations, and the hint of it here prepares us for the fuller revelation of the next paragraph. How it limits his life is explained in these sentences:

Old Stephen might have passed for an intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable "Hands," who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates. Thousands of

his compeers could talk much better than he, at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity (I, ch.10, p.49).

Taking this in context, when we go back to the beginning of the paragraph, and read again that Stephen has "a knitted brow, a pondering expression," we are led to conclude that thinking was a painful process to him. We are also, as if incidentally, shown that there were intelligent operatives, more articulate than he. This too is reinforced in the next paragraph, with its picture of Stephen standing still, "with the odd sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced - the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head," (I, ch.10, p.49). Here he is in contrast with his surroundings, alive with sound and the homeward surge of the operatives. He is pointedly set apart, a bewildered creature on whose behalf Dickens asks for pity. And here the point must be made that it is impossible to pity and admire simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

Stephen may have a simple nature, but he lives in a complex world, as Dickens makes clear. During Stephen's interview with Rachael in this chapter, Dickens insists on showing his incapacity for making judgements or decisions. When Rachael implies that she habitually avoids his company, for fear of being compromised, he looks at her "with a respectful and patient conviction that she must be right in whatever she did," (I, ch.10, p.50). Under other circumstances, it is virtually the same moral and intellectual submission which the feeble-minded Toots offers to Susan Nipper in Dombey and Son. Later in the same passage

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<sup>1</sup> Kovacevic quotes Chesterton's penetrating comment on this theme: "He is neither 'the oppressed man intensely miserable' nor 'at the same time intensely attractive and important' as Chesterton would put it," (op. cit. p.90). It may be significant that the first name that occurred to Dickens for Stephen (as shown in the part plan) was the uninspiring "John Prodge," (see F-M p.234).

Stephen uses the words which come, by his repeating them on every appearance in the novel, to be a cumulative expression of the frustration of the uneducated man. When Rachael anxiously remonstrates with him to "Let the laws be," he answers "with a slow nod or two," "'Tis a muddle, and that's aw . . . awlus a muddle," (I, ch.10, p.51). After this he falls into thinking and "biting the long ends of his loose neckerchief" - a strange action for a man of forty. He is shown in this scene as helpless and ineffectual. Returning home, he finds his drunken wife waiting for him. He lets her take the bed, and keeps his face hidden in his hands as he passes the night in a chair.

On the following day, when Stephen goes to Bounderby for advice on his problem (I, ch.11), we are shown the passiveness of his nature: having borne with his drunken wife for nineteen years, and having presumably loved Rachael for much of that time, he now comes to ask his employer how to rid himself of her. Driven to despair, he tells how he had contemplated suicide. He has paid her to stay away from him. In the course of his cross-questioning of Bounderby, he suggests that he might live with Rachael without marrying her, but he cannot, because she is "so good," and because their children would suffer under the law.<sup>1</sup>

When he finally realises the impossibility of gaining a divorce, he

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<sup>1</sup> It is surely clear that if Stephen had taken Rachael in place of his wife (without committing bigamy) any children he might have would not have been punishable by the law. Stephen's remark is nonsense. Dickens, whose uncle, John Henry Barrow, had done this, - whose brother Augustus was to follow suit, and who had friends outside the family who did the same, knew this perfectly well! There are plenty of illegitimate children in Dickens's novels, but though they may suffer from circumstances or lack of affection, they do not suffer from the law. Is this, therefore, a place where Dickens over-wrote, having developed a situation which was a false one, or is he aware that Stephen is pitifully lacking in spirit?

reverts to his statement, "'tis a muddle." Nevertheless he displays some pride and some passion in this interview, and some power of rational thought, in his catechism of Mr. Bounderby. He also gains in stature by comparison with Bounderby. His direct honesty and sincerity is brought out the more strongly when set against the sophisticated deception of the lives of Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. Yet the paradox remains that such a worker should go to consult his "Master" to ask how he is "to be ridded" of his wife; and all that he can do when he is told that it would be impossibly expensive, is to waver with his right hand "as if he gave everything to the four winds," and say "'tis a muddle. 'Tis just a muddle a'together, an' the sooner I am dead, the better," (I, ch.11, p.58).

When he comes out, he meets the mysterious old woman (I, ch.12), later to be known as Mrs. Pegler, Mr. Bounderby's mother. He feels that he has "seen this old woman before," and had "not quite liked her." In fact, she is pitiful; and if Stephen is deferential (though not "servile," we are told) her human relationship, with her own son, has been reduced to a single visit a year, on a laborious journey, when she watches him unknown from the street. She kisses Stephen's hand (the hand of the Hand) that has worked for a dozen years for Bounderby, and does so with an air that seems "neither out of time nor place." Meanwhile, Stephen returns to his loom, brooding over his misfortunes, and leaving when his work is done. Failing to find Rachael to soothe him, and dreading to go home, he wanders about in the rain, "thinking and thinking, brooding and brooding." There are two points of Stephen's character to notice here: first, he knows that his wife needs help, and yet he does not go home. The second point emerges in his train of thought as he broods:

He thought of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every day . . .

He thought of Rachael, how young when they were first brought together in these circumstances, how mature now, how soon to grow old. He thought of the number of girls and women she had seen marry, how many homes with children in them she had seen grow up around her, how she had contentedly pursued her own lone quiet path - for him - and how he had sometimes seen a shade of melancholy on her blessed face, that smote him with remorse and despair (I, ch.12, p.62).

Stephen feels himself to be deteriorating. He knows that Rachael loves him, and that his position makes it impossible for anything to come of their love, but he does not set her free, or force her to accept the freedom which would eventually give her a better life. More than that, he threatens to compromise her by seeing her so much in public. This is not the behaviour of a saintly character; it is much more consonant with weak, ordinary, fallible, human nature. He is not so irreproachable that he has not already put it to Bounderby that (if Rachael would allow it) he might live with her without marrying her.

As he goes home he thinks dangerously of the arbitrariness of death, that good women die while his wife still lives. When he enters his house he finds Rachael beside his wife, nursing her as he himself, if he were a perfect person, would have done. On seeing the medicine bottle with poison in it, his reaction is like Macbeth's to the witches' prophecy: "He turned of a deadly hue, and a sudden horror seemed to fall upon him," (I, ch.13, p.64). He acknowledges his weakness to himself, and characteristically relies on Rachael "to defend him from himself." The idea of murdering his wife comes back to him again: "His eyes fell again on the bottle, and a tremble passed over him, causing him to shiver in every limb" (I, ch.13, p.65). And again: "It seized him again; and he stood up." He has to make a great effort to control himself, and looks at Rachael for strength. Then, when he falls asleep, his dream also suggests that he is contemplating murder. He awakes, watches his wife fill out a draught of the poison for herself, and, if Rachael did

not wake in time to stop her, he would have watched her drink it:

"The draught was at her lips. A moment and she would be past all help, let the whole world wake and come about her with its utmost power. But in that moment Rachael started up with a suppressed cry . . .

Stephen broke out of his chair. "Rachael, am I wakin' or dreamin' this dreadfo' night?" (I, ch.13, p.67)

As Rachael prepares to go home, he asks: "Thou'rt not fearfo' . . . to leave me alone wi' her!" Then he tells her that she has "saved" his "soul alive," and Rachael, sorry for him, stifles a reproof. When he is more explicit, "How can I say what I might ha' done to myseln, or her, or both!" Rachael is terrified. The reassurance which Stephen offers her in her terror takes the form of a vow which in a way makes her even more responsible for him. He declares that

Evermore I will see thee there. I nevermore will see her or think o' her, but thou shalt be beside her. I nevermore will see or think o' anything that angers me, but thou, so much better than me, shalt be by th' side on't. (I, ch.13, pp.68-69)

While this scene does not detract from the impression that Stephen is a good man, it does show him as, again, extraordinarily dependent, turning to the saintly Rachael for the strength he lacks. He is morally exhausted. Hence his story is, as Humphry House puts it, "a slow record of inglorious misery and defeat."<sup>1</sup>

Even the chairman at the trade union meeting publicly introduces him as notorious "awlong o' his misfortins," (II, ch.4, p.107), i.e. for having a wife who is a drunkard. Obviously this is grotesquely unconvincing. But at the same time as he appears to enjoy the generous sympathy of his fellow-workers, he also indulges in a little self-pity. This has already shown itself in the interview with Bounderby, in the scene with his wife, and it is implicit again in this speech: "Let him

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<sup>1</sup> In "Politics", The Dickens World (1941), ch.7, p.206.

give no heed to what I ha' had'n to bear. That's not for noboddy but me," (II, ch.4, p.108). That is true, and possibly his misfortunes had better not been mentioned, for Stephen could not have been the only man there with troubles of some kind. Yet the authorial comment is made: "There was a propriety, not to say a dignity, in these words." This might be regarded as a turning point in Dickens's conception of Stephen. Up to this stage he can be seen as someone who is honest but dull, unlucky but weak. Here Dickens unfortunately makes his first special plea on Stephen's behalf. And in examining this comment we come close to this crucial problem of how we are to regard Stephen. For both here and later Dickens's own authorial interpretation of Stephen's speech seems to run contrary to what the speech itself shows of Stephen. Are we simply to take both speech and commentary together and simply to regard Stephen as an honest man whose actions are entirely admirable, or are we to regard him to some extent as the pitiable embodiment of the confusion into which the workers themselves had fallen? On the one hand, some of the workers are as deferential as Stephen,<sup>and</sup> as unlikely to take matters into their own hands; they are all too respectful towards the Law, and, in some ways, have had their wills broken by attendance to the Machine: at the same time, they have the virtue of integrity and the virtues of their defects - they are peaceful and law-abiding. On the other hand, there are the majority of those at the meeting who have "great qualities susceptible of being turned to the happiest and best account," men "gravely, deeply, faithfully in earnest," and "submissively resigning" themselves only to the "sour" and "cunning" Slackbridge. Thus neither Stephen nor his "comrades" are anything but honest; yet they are all irrational - either in blindly following Slackbridge, or as blindly keeping out of the union.

We must next look to Stephen's interview with Bounderby, in the chapter "Men and Masters" (II, ch.5) to find out how Stephen himself thinks of the "vexed question" of labour and capital. First we find that if he had not made the promise he would have joined the union, because he respects the sincerity of his fellow-workers. Then, when he explains the situation for Harthouse's benefit, he begins with a reference to the "muddle," yet as he describes it, it appears to be no muddle at all:

Look round town - so rich as 'tis - and see the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an' to card, an' to piece out a livin', aw the same one way, somehows, 'twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, and wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no higher to onny distant object - ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born (III, ch.5, p. 14).

The complaint is honest and straightforward, that for all the committee-work, discussion, and prosing that is done, the hands are left always as before. Yet if we take this with a statement which Stephen makes just before it, we can see again an element of self-pity:

"How 'tis, ma'am . . . that what is best in us fck, seems to turn us most to trouble an' misfort'n an' mistake, I dunno. But 'tis so. I know 'tis, as I know the heavens is over me ahint the smoke. We're patient too, an' wants in general to do right. An' I canna think the fawt is aw wi' us" (II, ch.5, pp.113-114).

The obvious conclusion of Stephen's line of reasoning, here and in his earlier interview with Bounderby, is that the poor hands receive a raw deal from society in general and from the masters in particular. The further conclusion which Stephen points to in his argument, but never reaches, is that the hands must procure justice for themselves by some means, since the conventional machinery of negotiation has failed them. But although he does not draw this conclusion, feeling as he says he does,

Stephen ought not to be standing humbly answering Bounderby's rough questions. There appears to be in this the inescapable odour of either hypocrisy or weakness. It is difficult to respect Stephen, when he comes to a man like Bounderby as a suppliant, and has the naivete to plead with someone so grossly insensitive and totally selfish, for the sympathy due to their common humanity. Stephen, like Trooper George in Bleak House, belongs to another era: in appealing to Bounderby he tacitly accepts and helps perpetuate an obsolete social system.

Yet a more probably interpretation, in terms of Dickens's intentions, is that at this point he is using Stephen as representative of the opinion of the operatives in general, setting up a dialogue with Bounderby, as a representative of the hard-line employers, on the subject of trades unions. In his working plans for Hard Times Dickens describes this scene as "Stephen's exposition of the Slackbridge question,"<sup>1</sup> which suggests that he intended to make Stephen more lucid and articulate than he has been until now - or will be again in the novel. Possibly the demands of weekly serialisation forced Dickens to modify his plans for Stephen, in such a way that he had to make the development of the character subservient to the argument. It could equally well be that Dickens lost interest in the character, because of the limitations he had imposed on him, because of his own lack of knowledge in depth of the character of the operative, and because there was no comic potential in him. Certainly from this point onwards there is nothing for us to learn about Stephen. The interest has shifted, with the introduction of Slackbridge, and Stephen's "exposition," to trades unions.

From his description of Slackbridge, and his power over the hands,

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<sup>1</sup> See "Dickens' Working Plans," for ch.21 of the 11th weekly number, (F-M p.237).

it seems that Dickens did not look upon trades unions with favour. Yet at a later date he certainly took a close interest in, and approved for publication, an article in Household Words which reached this conclusion:

the instinct of the operative may not be altogether reprehensible when it suggests to him that against the worst uneasiness which he feels in the system to which he belongs, a blister or a blood-letting, in the shape of a strike, is the best remedy.<sup>1</sup>

But the tone of the article elsewhere is to regret this extreme remedy, and to seek other ways of reconciling masters and men. The extent of Dickens' commitment to the radical side in politics can be argued endlessly, especially since his views quite naturally changed from time to time. What is more difficult to dispute is his antipathy to the worn-out doctrine of laissez-faire,<sup>and</sup> his belief in government interference to alleviate the condition of the poor. We might perhaps see him coming to this position in Stephen's first interview with Bounderby, on the subject of the laws, in particular of the divorce law. Stephen very justly points out that, while there are many laws to punish him if he tries to help himself, there are no laws to help him (I, ch.11, p.57). We have from Forster the information that Dickens was at the time of writing Hard Times, contemplating separation from his wife,<sup>2</sup> and we know from the articles on factory accidents which later appeared in Household Words, that he was thinking about the unfairness, and the sheer inhumanity,

<sup>1</sup> "The Manchester Strike," 13 (2 Feb. 1856) pp.63-66, by Henry Morley.

<sup>2</sup> See Life, III, 475 et seq. Forster is, in fact, noticeably reserved in what he says of Hard Times, and appears to have disliked its arguments. If Dickens was still consulting Forster about his novels, as he probably was, he would have had the experience at this point of writing, as it were, "for" someone who did not agree with him, and who may well have been doubtful on a number of the issues raised from the "divorce" question to the whole "blue-book" style which he certainly disapproved. There is some reason to think that even Carlyle, to whom the novel was dedicated, cannot have been happy with it. This is too large a question to raise in a footnote; but there is reason to believe that Dickens must have known that he was writing a propagandist novel in which he could not present some of the issues openly, and that this may have adversely affected the way he wrote it.

of there being no law to interpose efficiently between the hand and the master who would not fence off his machinery.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his speeches there are exhortations to the legislators to govern. Hard Times was dedicated to Carlyle, who had warned in Past and Present (1843) that

Legislative interference, and interferences not a few, are indispensable; that as a lawless anarchy of supply-and-demand, on market wages alone, this province of things cannot be left.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, in Stephen's second interview with Bounderby, we are shown the jaded Harthouse, a potential legislator, who has come to Coketown to learn, and who sits through the entire interview without any comment or question (II, ch.5). We know that Harthouse is not in the least interested in what passes. With these facts before us, we can for once conclude with Stephen, though for different reasons, that it's "aw a muddle," with no-one in authority accepting or perceiving the responsibility for his own share in the nature of industrial society.

It may be instructive here to turn to the real-life muddle of the Preston Strike, where the situation was fundamentally the same, to see what recommendations Dickens had to offer when he wrote his report on it for Household Words.<sup>3</sup> Here we find him deploring the strike on the grounds that it is a "waste of time," a waste of "a great people's energy," a waste of capital, but chiefly a waste in the "gulf of separation it hourly deepens between those whose interests must be understood to be identical or must be destroyed." He suggests mediation:

I would entreat both sides now so miserably opposed, to consider whether there are no men in England, above suspicion, to whom they might refer the matters in dispute, with a perfect confidence above all things in the desire of those men to act justly (p.559).

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. 7 below.

<sup>2</sup> Book IV, ch.3.

<sup>3</sup> "On Strike," (Feb. 11, 1854), pp.553-559.

If we accept then, that at least in this period of his life, Dickens believed that the interests of masters and men were "identical," and if we further accept that he thought that both sides might be brought to a recognition of this, we are left to ask how he thought it could be effected. The hope offered in Hard Times is a faint and even ambiguous one. It appears that the future of the nation depends on whether it is Bounderby and Slackbridge, or Stephen and Gradgrind, who confront each other over the conference-table.

If it is Stephen and Gradgrind, then there is some real hope for the future. Dickens clearly shows the process of enlightenment working in Gradgrind. From the beginning, in his virtual adoption of Cissy, we can see that he has some spark of humanity in him. By the end of the novel he has developed this through his suffering, and grown in stature, from "a man of facts and calculations" (I, ch.2, p.2), to "a wiser man, and a better man, than in the days when in this life he wanted nothing but Facts" (III, ch.7, p.209). He acknowledges the human dignity of Stephen, and clears his name. In the last chapter Louisa broods on

Broad-sides in the streets, signed with her father's name, exonerating the late Stephen Blackpool, weaver, from misplaced suspicion, and publishing the guilt of his own son (III, ch.9, p.226).

Gradgrind is of course one of the legislators: he is a Member of Parliament. Yet it is unlikely that Dickens is offering any hope through his work in Parliament, since he presents it here and in the other novels as hopelessly remote and useless.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the scene in which Sissy confronts Harthouse (III, ch.2), Dickens shows that the simple dignity of the poor can sometimes penetrate the selfishness of

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens was an active member of the Administrative Reform Association, begun on 5 May 1855. His speech to the Association on 27 June 1855 is virtually a manifesto of his lack of faith in Parliament (Speeches, pp.197-208).

the upper classes - but how can the poor obtain access to the upper classes? This is a very weak, distant solution to what Dickens presents as a pressing problem. What he argues for is compromise, but his artistic temperament is hardly capable of believing in compromise: the image which lingers is that of Stephen and Bounderby face to face, as incapable of communicating with each other as if they had come from two different planets. It is much easier, from what we know of their characters, to imagine Bounderby and Slackbridge negotiating an agreement which would appease, if not satisfy, both sides. Neither has any idealism to stand in the way of compromise; each has the nature which the other expects to find on the other side - and they speak the same language, the language of hyperbole. Bounderby talks, as the real employers did, of throwing his factory into the Atlantic; Slackbridge talks of "every man and woman" emigrating across the Atlantic.

(ii) Hard Times for These Times<sup>1</sup>

Here a closer look at the real deadlock in Preston might show some of the complexities of attitudes, action, and reaction, to the problems of the situation, reports of which must have sharpened Dickens's perception of the effect industrialisation was having on the quality of life in his time.

The Times reports on the Preston strike show how the operatives of Lancashire were regarded by at least one section of the middle class, from a vantage-point which must have been close to Dickens's own, and which may even have helped to form his views. In a leader on the strike while it was still in its early stages we find comments on the same characteristics which we have criticised in Stephen Blackpool:

when working men have once taken their stand on any list of demands, they find it impossible to recede, and will not recede until starvation drives them. The common feeling of an organised class, standing face to face with a higher class, possibly both of them insolent and provoking, is something imperious and uncontrollable. Thousands of men will walk

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<sup>1</sup> Title of first edition.

about a city, daily more squalid and wan, only revisiting their homes to see their wives and children pining for lack of all things, rather than succumb to masters they have once defied, or break their word with their fellow-workmen. [7 Oct. 1853]

Just as there must be some ambivalence in our approach to Stephen and his promise, there are two ways of looking at the tenacity of these operatives: in one way they are to be admired for keeping their promise even in the face of death, but in another they are stubborn fools to risk their lives when the circumstances in which the promise was made are so changed as to render it absurd. Moreover the necessity of actually making a promise betrays a certain degree of weakness, which the sheer obstinacy in holding to it emphasises. Stephen the "blackleg" is no different from the ordinary hand in respect of this basic weakness.

Regardless of his personal motive for standing outside the union, Stephen was by no means so "exceptional" as critics like Kovacevic would have us believe; the limbo into which he was thrust by his refusal to join the union would not in fact have been a solitude:

The pinch of the strike is at present falling mainly upon the hands who have no quarrel with their masters and no union to go to for relief, and who are the only class that are really not to blame in the matter. I have not been able to get any reliable estimate of their number, but it is considerable. [Times, 8 Nov. 1853].

Life was not easy for non-members of the union (or association), particularly during a strike. In the early stages of the Preston strike the Times carries a report of a meeting at which a weaver named Newsham:

came forward and challenged the committee to debate, saying that he would undertake to prove that the position they occupied at the present time would do more harm than good to the 10 per cent question. He would prove, if any of them thought proper to accept his challenge, that strikes were wrong in principle, and that they never did good to the working classes of this country. (Great confusion). [10 Oct. 1853].

*the leader of the Prestonians,*

After Cowell<sub>h</sub> had parried this challenge by first agreeing that strikes

were harmful, and then pointing out that this was a lock-out, not a strike:

Newsham was escorted from the place of meeting by a policeman and several members of the committee, amid the execrations of the crowd, who were with difficulty restrained from laying violent hands upon him.

Later the comment was made in a leader:

The only insufferable feature about these transactions is the coercion generally put upon many members of the trade who would work if they were permitted. [26 Oct. 1853]

But men like Newsham - who seems rather more admirable and much more articulate than Stephen - obviously could not swim against the tide:

The unwilling seceders are forced to follow in the steps of the agitators and the agitating committees. [Times, 2 Nov. 1853, p.8]

The basic weakness of the Preston men showed itself, according to the Times, in their complete submission to the "professional agitators" who led them. "A Prestonian", writing in Eliza Cook's Journal,<sup>1</sup> tells of being asked in a London barber's shop, "Are the delegates influenced by honest motives, or are they merely dangerous, and professed agitators?" This question must have troubled many people, not directly concerned with the strike, who wished to be fair-minded about it. The prevailing (and apparently approved) attitude at the time is summed up in a letter to the Times from "Mediator", who quoted without reference:

strikes are instigated by prating demagogues always ready to make a grievance for their own advantage, and to prey upon the peace of their deluded and more simple and industrious brethren. [13 Oct. 1853, p.5]

The question of the sincerity of the strike-leaders of Preston, and their relevance to the portrayal of Slackbridge in Hard Times has

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Hardwick: "Lancashire Stump Oratory and Reminiscences of the Labour Battle," by a Prestonian. Eliza Cook's Journal, nos. 276-283, 19 August to 30 Sept., 1854.

been largely answered for the modern reader by K. J. Fielding<sup>1</sup> and Geoffrey Carnall.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is interesting to examine not only the apparently true characters of Grimshaw and Cowell, but also how they were presented to the general public.

Time and again we find statements like this:

As to demagogues and agitators, no doubt they are at work in their usual ways, and with their usual false and selfish spirit, but this cannot be helped. Times, 28 Oct., 1853

Other articles referred to the "deliberate wickedness" of these "mere traders in agitation" who were attempting "to upset the whole manufacturing system." The truth is that there were definitely elements of this in strike. Depending upon which way he wanted to represent the agitators, a reporter could choose either Cowell, undoubtedly a man of integrity, or Grimshaw, a "professional demagogue." The two stood side by side in the strike, according to "A Prestonian", like "the Cobden and Bright of this 'Labour League'." It was no doubt reassuring to the general public to have the blame for the strike laid at the door of these specific individuals, rather than to admit, as Stephen does, that "'Tis not by them the trouble's made," (HT, II, 5, p.115). Yet despite the efforts of newspapers like the Times or the Manchester Guardian to hint at pressures brought to bear on the operatives by unscrupulous agitators out for their own selfish ends, they could not really help allowing some impression of the solidarity of the strikers to come through, nor could they quite gloss over the obvious sincerity of Cowell. Occasionally there is an admission like this: "we do not dispute the right or the dignity of the part taken by the operatives under the guidance of Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> In "The Battle for Preston," The Dickensian, LIV (1954) pp.159-62.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. p.215 above.

George Cowell," or,<sup>as</sup> "A Prestonian" remarks:

Indeed, had Cowell been merely a "professional agitator" or "spouting demagogue," the struggle could not have lasted half the time it did.

Dickens himself commented, in "On Strike," on the workers' side of the struggle:

Some designing and turbulent spirits among them, no doubt there are; but I left the place with a profound conviction that their mistake is generally an honest one, and that it is sustained by the good that is in them, and not by the evil.

He makes Stephen specifically state that he would have joined the union, even under the leadership of Slackbridge, if it were not for his private promise to Rachael "not to be one of them" (II, ch. 6).

But we return to the question, why portray Grimshaw in Slackbridge, and ignore what we might call the 'Cowell-element' among the union-leaders of the time? Several answers suggest themselves, notably Geoffrey Carnall's, already discussed, that Dickens could not come to terms with a revolutionary who was also a man of integrity. To the objections which I made previously, it might be added that it was Grimshaw, not Cowell, who was the real revolutionary in the strike. In a speech to the workers of Preston, part of which Geoffrey Carnall quotes, Grimshaw proposed:

We must commence working for ourselves, and when the manufacturers see our tall chimneys creeping up, they'll begin to look about them. We must erect another Preston, and we'll call it "New Regenerated Preston." We can do this, and we'll emigrate, every man and woman, out of Preston; and of what value will their mills be then? They are only valuable so long as you are here to work in them. Concentrate your funds; drain every bank in the country where you have money; build factories of your own, and then there'll be an end of cotton-lord tyranny, oppression, and despotism. That being the case, I see no reason to be daunted at any termination of the struggle. [Times, 5 April, 1854, p.12]

Yet Cowell devoted his energy and enthusiasm simply to uniting the men in their demand for the ten per cent. The most reasonable answer which in fact presents itself is that Dickens, who, while appreciating

the sincere and good elements on the operatives' side, chose, in portraying Slackbridge and the union, to show them at their most pernicious, just as he did with the masters and Bounderby. We need not look far to see why he only seems to give a small part of a complex truth. Although the "On Strike" article is fairly well-known, its last words must be quoted again to show how Dickens was thinking:

Masters right, or men right; masters wrong, or men wrong; both right, or both wrong; there is certain ruin to both in the continuation or frequent revival of this breach. And in the ever-widening circle of their decay, what drop in the social ocean shall be free!

The point for Dickens was that there were people like Slackbridge and Bounderby - not that they were each representative of their class, but that they were despicable examples of human beings, who were functioning as examples to the mass of honest men around them. Earlier in "On Strike" he stressed his belief

that whatever faults you may find to exist, in your own neighbourhood for instance, among the hands, you will find tolerably equal in amount among the masters also, and even among the classes above the masters.

It was an adverse comment on the times that men like Slackbridge/Grimshaw in whom the worse side of human nature predominated had a voice that was heeded. Their powers to corrupt were incalculable.

That there were masters like Bounderby, on the other hand, cannot be doubted. In an address by Cowell, which was placarded throughout Preston, he gives a description of the beginning of the strike which recalls Stephen's interviews with Bounderby. On 1 June 1853, a meeting of power-loom weavers resolved to ask for a ten per cent increase of wages, and a circular to that effect was sent to the masters. Some, Cowell wrote, when they approached the masters, were treated courteously, but

the majority of the masters spurned the hands from their presence, treated them with insult, and, in a few cases,

rudeness unbearable. The result was that several weavers were discharged from their employment, and thrown upon the wide world to starve, as marked men and women. And for what? For simply and respectfully soliciting an answer to the memorial . . . Sad experience had taught us the folly of pursuing [our just claims] in isolated bodies. Had our claims been partially acceded to - had we not been treated as degraded slaves - the best workpeople in Lancashire would not have formed such a formidable organisation.

[Times, 20 Oct. 1853]

Earlier, a committee of "clergymen and prominent inhabitants" of the town had "admitted that their published appeals to the manufacturers were couched in the most humble and respectful terms," [Times, 15 Oct. 1853].

An article which appeared in the same paper in the next month, entitled "The Lancashire Strikes," described the masters of Preston with a rare impartiality. The masters, it said,

have always felt themselves pretty strong in Preston, and that sense of security has, no doubt, had a powerful influence in attracting enterprise and capital to the town. Perhaps it has, at the same time, made the employers too confident in themselves, and rather disposed to exercise in ordinary circumstances unbendingly, and in emergencies with precipitate severity, the power which they possessed over their people.

[Times, 8 Nov. 1853, p.7].

This looks forward to Dickens's statement in a letter to Mrs. Gaskell, in April 1854:

The monstrous claims at domination by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme.<sup>1</sup>

Bounderby's feudal-overlord attitude to Stephen is not merely the invention of a Dickens secretly longing to return to the patriarchal society. Nor, though he showed his actors "within a circle of stage fire," does this mean that his thinking was necessarily wrong.

Bounderby's boasting, too, had its foundation in reality. In a speech to the Manchester Commercial Association, its president,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in F-M, p.276.

James Aspinall Turner, said:

If we look back at the history of these districts . . . we should be made aware that some of the most eminent firms in this neighbourhood contained men who had risen from the ranks, and that such men, by their industry, energy, and skill, were raising still higher that capital by which the trade of this district was carried forward. (Hear) [Times, 17 Jan, 1854, p.8]

The same speaker showed how far these self-made men had come from their origins, and the general attitude to them. These words could have been spoken by Boucherby:

Times had been when we had had to put down regal tyranny; and times had been when we had put down aristocratic tyranny; and if ever the time came when we should require to put down democratic tyranny, he did not doubt but the same spirit and disposition would be found to exist. [Ibid.]

Boucherby's readiness to "pitch his property into the Atlantic" is also foreshadowed in this speech:

as labour was driven from Ireland by those who ought to have fostered and encouraged it, so he believed capital would be driven from this country by the arbitrary conduct of the operatives. [Ibid.]

Throughout the reports of the strike hints are dropped which are not too far from Boucherby's defensive exaggerations about "the gold spoon lookout."

The elements of Boucherby's character are all there.

Masters of this calibre were obviously ill-equipped to provide the skilful handling which the men described in this passage require:

The operatives of Preston are less intelligent and less educated than the body to which they belong are generally believed to be. There are men of considerable natural ability among them, and they share with the entire population of this great manufacturing district a certain rough vigour and independence of thought and feeling which one cannot help respecting. This valuable quality, however, combined with a low standard of education, becomes an element of great danger where it is not skilfully handled. It tends to make the clever operator an agitator, and the whole body turbulent and apt to follow evil counsels on slight provocation, ["The Lancashire Strikes," Times, 8 Nov. 1853, p.7].

Throughout the reports of the strike the question of education was

also continually raised, often linked, as it is in Hard Times, with the quality of amusement offered to the working classes. Henry Ashworth, a local manufacturer, commented:

Their ignorance, of which the majority are far from being unconscious, only renders them the more docile. Where they do not see clearly, they submit to be led.

For him, as for others, education was a means of social control. A leader-writer in the Times saw "the ignorance and gullibility of our workmen" as a threat to "the magnificent establishment of manufactured industry," (8 Nov. 1853). "S. G. O."<sup>2</sup> wrote in a letter to the Times that the men and their leaders "should be dealt with as misguided in an ignorance which is their misfortune rather than their crime," since

they live surrounded by everything which can vitiate mind and body; millions have been made by those who trade on their vices; little has been expended to open out to them any domestic comfort at home or any sources of rational amusement abroad (4 Jan. 1854).

Cobden, speaking at the Mechanics' Institution in Barnsley - a speech which was widely reported - maintained that "you can't do anything in social reform but you are met with the question of education," [Times, 27 Oct. 1853]. On the subject of the Preston strike he specifically said:

Look at the destitution and misery caused by laying a town in this state for a month or six weeks. Why is this? I answer, it springs from ignorance. (Hear, hear.) Not ignorance confined to one party in the dispute. (Applause.) It is ignorance on both sides, and deplorable is its result.

This is obviously Dickens's conclusion, too. In a speech made at a reading of the Carol on behalf of the Birmingham and Midland Institute,

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<sup>1</sup> In The Preston Strike, an enquiry into its Causes and Consequences (Manchester, 1854) pp.26-27. For more information about Ashworth see ch.3 above, p.105.

<sup>2</sup> "S.G.O." was Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne (1808-1889) a parson of Durweston, in Dorset. He was well-known for the series of 'lay sermons' written to the Times, on various topical questions, but chiefly on the plight of the agricultural labourer. He was related by marriage to Charles Kingsley (DNB).

he insisted: "Erect in Birmingham a great Educational Institution, properly educational; educational of the feelings as well as of the reason."<sup>1</sup> This was on the 30th December, 1853, at a time when, according to Forster, Dickens was already thinking about Hard Times.

Very little can be added to the comprehensive study of the education theme in Hard Times made by Philip Collins in his Dickens and Education, by K. J. Fielding, and by Robin Gilmour in an article on "The Gradgrind School: Political Economy in the Classroom."<sup>2</sup> Yet it is worthwhile to note the theme as it appears occasionally in the Times throughout the period of the Preston strike. One important point which was made in Cobden's speech was the political aspect of educating the working classes. He was very clear about the implications of power in the hands of the workers:

He said that we want education as a security for the preservation of our political liberties. If the people are to be admitted to political power they must be educated for the performance of the trust. We want education as a security in the march of social progress (Times, 27 Oct. 1853).

A leader in the Times for November 3, 1853, advocated the extension of the franchise, but not to include the "irresponsible" strikers. It can be argued against the critics who object to Dickens's apparent naïveté in his plea to the middle and upper classes to assume a kind of paternal responsibility, his insistence that they have this responsibility, of providing the working classes with the proper stimuli from which they could begin to help themselves, that the education of the poor was in fact a political necessity.

Equally serious, as Dickens shows in Hard Times, was the problem of educating the educators. On January 30th, 1854, when Dickens was in

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<sup>1</sup> Speeches, p.766.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Studies II . 2 (Dec. 1967) pp.207-224.

Preston, the Times carried a leader on this subject. It makes some points very relevant to Dickens's case, both in themselves and as a reflection of the growing concern with the quality as opposed to the quantity of education given to the working classes. The writer notes:

there is very general distrust of the education given in parochial schools, as being of an unreal, formal, and useless character.

He specifies:

Manuals of general knowledge, we are told, are the driest and most unintelligible books that can be put into a child's hands. Destitute of story, of sentiment, of poetry, and every other recommendation or aid to the understanding, they demand the attention of the child to a series of definitions generally in hard words about as new to the child as the thing itself.

The intermediate result is discussed:

The knowledge of "common things" has been decried as something vulgar, utilitarian, material, apt to dissipate the attention on a mere jumble of dry facts, and, after all, not so easy to be carried out into practice.

Bitzer is personified in "the good boy" who is

always at his chapter, his hymn, his slate, his copybook and his own little dull world of literary achievement. If he fails, he becomes gloomy and desponding; if he succeeds and is flattered, he is all the more wrapt in himself.

Gradgrind appears in this:

Men, in these days, do not read themselves mad so much as they read themselves blind, deaf, and dumb, inapt to perceive, unready to act.

This is not to say that Dickens was simply taking up a theme which was begun by the Times. The Times remarks were probably made in connection with the Common Things Movement. Dickens was part of this movement, and it is more likely that the Times was reporting a theme begun by Dickens.<sup>1</sup> For, clearly, Hard Times was a book "for these times," in that it

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<sup>1</sup> This has been fully discussed by K. J. Fielding in his "Hard Times and Common Things" (op. cit. p.215 above ).

raised the serious questions of the times, and dealt with them with an undeniable urgency.

Yet, in the end, we must ask how successfully Dickens managed to deliver his message. Immediately the scene of Stephen's death, such a signal failure on Dickens's part, springs to mind. In a novel which is essentially about communication, on a personal and on a class level, the occasional efficacy of silence ought to have been recognised by Dickens. But he falls into the same trap which caught Mrs. Gaskell in Mary Barton, one which was perhaps the hardest for the social-problem novelist with religious faith to avoid: that of offering a Christian consolation to the sufferers, which almost never fails to appear to be an over-statement of a faint and in many ways irrelevant hope. Stephen's blessed star and his prospects of paradise can only irritate us here, who are left nursing the problem which has already been demonstrated in all its vital urgency. His final admission, "If soon ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in' me better, I, too, ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in' them better" (III, ch.6, p.207) may be in keeping with his character, but it does nothing to deepen the reader's understanding of the condition of the operative. It is merely a trite comment in a maudlin scene.

Mrs. Cliphant in Blackwood was right (for the wrong reasons) when she complained that it was "a lame and impotent conclusion."<sup>1</sup> The novel would have almost certainly have gained in force if Dickens had resisted the fault which he was ready to criticise in Mrs. Gaskell, an over-readiness to indulge in death-scenes. Stephen has been in some ways moderately impressive in his scenes with Bounderby and Racheal; we have been able to feel that his helplessness and his impotence to alleviate

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<sup>1</sup> "Charles Dickens," vol. 77, (April 1855) p.454.

his misery have not been entirely his own fault. If he had had the stuff in him to struggle, he would have lost in any case, because the utilitarian society raises itself on the "weakness" of the altruist. But in death he reinforces the image of himself which has run counter to the one Dickens had mainly tried to project, that of a man who cuts himself off from the pity of others because he pities himself. For once, Dickens has left out of a working-class character the essential ingredient which makes him acceptable, even lovable: the ability to laugh at himself, or his life, which always commands respect. It is a novel which would have been better without a hero.

The apotheosis of Stephen does not offer much hope for the future of society. As I think this study shows, the future to which Dickens points here is one in which the Slackbridges and the Bounderbys are most likely to succeed. This is the situation which Harriet Martineau had prophesied twenty-three years before, in the characterisation of Clack in A Manchester Strike.<sup>1</sup> Yet curiously enough, Miss Martineau herself was in some ways instrumental in fulfilling her own prophecy. In the next chapter I wish to show how this apparent contradiction of her own opinions was really the logical development of her political economist's attitude to the human problems of factory life, and how this attitude provoked Dickens to the extent of influencing the composition of Hard Times.

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<sup>1</sup> See ch.1 below.

CHAPTER VII

HARD TIMES and the Factory Controversy

Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written jointly with Prof. K. J. Fielding, and the 'we' of the fns. refers to him and myself. See Preface.

Hard Times is possibly now accepted as the most central of Dickens's works to an understanding of his attitude to society. It has been studied, for example, in relation to his beliefs about education, the Preston strike, disputes between capital and labour, and his general views on the quality of nineteenth-century urban industrial civilization. Yet one obvious gap remains in investigations about the beliefs and experience that lay behind the creation of the novel: his attitude to the workers themselves, the lives they led, and the conditions they worked in. In general, critics are so dismayed by the saintly character of the power loom weaver, Stephen Blackpool, that they do their best to ignore this part of the novel. Whether in Dickens's day or ours, they (like John Ruskin) think of Stephen as "a dramatic perfection" rather than "an honest workman," or (like George Orwell) dismiss him as "merely pathetic," or (like Harold Perkin) assume that in Household Words (in which Hard Times appeared) Dickens simply purveys "edifying tales, and cautionary advice against strikes."<sup>1</sup>

This is quite true about Stephen Blackpool though much too simple a generalization about Household Words. But if we are to consider the novel at all seriously as a study of the "times," it needs some explanation,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruskin "Unto This Last"; Essay 1. Orwell, "Charles Dickens," in The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, 4 vols. (1968), 1, p.426; Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society: 1780-1880 (Toronto, 1969) p.307.

if not defence, for the way in which parts of it are so vehemently simplified. To some extent it follows on the question of Dickens' changing attitude to changing industrialism, which has been already partly examined in chapter 5, but which would still need an even fuller examination if it is to be understood. It is too large a topic for the present enquiry. But within this last question lies another which brings us down to the simpler detail of the rights and wrongs of a dispute in which Dickens was involved when he was writing Hard Times. The dispute had a direct effect on the novel, and it may even have helped to form and alter Dickens' opinion about the subject he had taken up. It also leads one to a better understanding of Dickens' attitudes to the new world of large-scale industry.

As far as Dickens' own response to the wonders of the industrial revolution goes, there is no doubt (as we have partly seen)<sup>1</sup> that he welcomed them at the beginning of the 1850's. Dickens had a pride in progress even though he opposed any mechanization of the spirit. It is no doubt true, as Herbert L. Sussman says, that "although he saw the factories of England and America at first hand, his imagination never thrilled to mechanized manufacturing as it did to the railway."<sup>2</sup> All the same, when he began Household Words he made some striking affirmations in "A Preliminary Word" in the first number (30 March 1850). He welcomes the "stirring world around us"; he expresses faith in the "progress of mankind" and gratitude for "the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time"; he reminds his readers that the "mightier inventions of this age are not all material"; and he feels that "all the voices we hear, cry Go on!" Later, in the third volume in an article written jointly with R. H. Horne, "The Great Exhibition and the Little One," the two countries which showed

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. 5, pp.

<sup>2</sup> Victorians and the Machine (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 61.

respectively "the greatest degree of progress and the least," England and China, are compared, and Dickens's optimism is even more explicit:

That we are moving in a right direction towards some superior condition of society - politically, morally, intellectually, and religiously - that newly turned-up furrows of the earth are being sown with larger, nobler, and more healthy seed than the earth has ever yet received, we humbly yet proudly, and with heartfelt joy that partakes of solemnity, do fully recognise as a great fact.<sup>1</sup>

With Bleak House (1852-53) it is reasonable to read the novel as showing that, as between the old order and the new, Dickens's sympathies are with the Ironmaster. Yet in Hard Times, barely a year later, we can see him revealing a much greater awareness of what this new order was to cost. It is true that the novels are set in different times, with the industrialist in each of them shown in a different social and fictional context. Yet the change may well be thought to suggest that Dickens's position had shifted: that the author of Hard Times apparently holds different beliefs and that as far as these went he is hardly the same man as the author of "A Preliminary Word" in 1850.

Another way in which we can see this change illustrated is in Dickens's relations with Harriet Martineau as a contributor to Household Words. Miss Martineau, then in her late forties, was a forceful journalist whom Dickens had been glad to enlist when the periodical was founded. She had a ready pen, wrote clearly, and even more evidently than Dickens she was a firm believer in progress. In 1855 she wrote in her Autobiography:

It appears to me now that, while I see much more of human difficulty from ignorance, and from the slow working (as we weak and transitory beings consider it) of the law of Progress, I discern the working of that great law with far more clearness, and therefore with a far stronger confidence, than I ever did before (2, p.447).

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<sup>1</sup> Household Words (hereafter HW) 3 (12 July 1851) p.356, comparing the Great Exhibition with one in the Chinese Gallery, Hyde Park Place; cf. Dickens's "The Chinese Junk," Examiner, 24 (June 1848) which takes the same view.

In her obituary in the Daily News (29 June 1879), which she wrote herself, she echoes this earlier statement of faith: "She saw the human race, as she believed, advancing under the law of progress"

(Autobiography, 3, p.470). But in spite of this shared belief, the temporary and uneasy alliance (for five years) between Dickens and Harriet Martineau came to be sharply broken, and the main reason for the disruption appears to have been their disagreements arising from the publication of Hard Times and certain articles associated with it. For the novel, as Harriet Martineau writes, "startled" her (2, p.419).

Her own account of the break is given in her Autobiography, where she explains that it was finally caused by what she saw as Dickens's prejudice against Roman Catholics. Yet, as she says, for a long while before this she had been "uneasy about the way 'Household Words' was going on" (2, p.418). She ascribes her growing concern to three causes: Dickens's attitude to the social role of women, allegedly expressed in a number of articles; his account of the Preston Strike;<sup>1</sup> and his treatment of the "Factory and Wages controversy" in Hard Times. Writing in the Autobiography, she declares that she thought the proprietors of Household Words "grievously inadequate to their function, philosophically and morally" (2, p.418). She is more specific in an earlier comment in the same work in which she says that Hard Times shows Dickens's "vigorous erroneousness about matters of science" in connection with "the controversies of employers" (2, p.378). She also attacks him for showing "irresponsible sentimentality": "Nobody wants to make Mr. Dickens a Political Economist; but there are many who wish that he would abstain

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<sup>1</sup> "On Strike," HW 8 (11 Feb. 1854) pp.553-59; see also James Lowe's "Locked Out," HW 8 (10 Dec. 1853) pp.345-48. All articles were published anonymously; identification is from a typed copy of the HW Contributors' Book, the original of which is now in the Princeton Univ. Library. Harriet Martineau did not know which articles were by Dickens and which by other contributors. For "the social role of women" see n.(a) p.275 below.

from a set of difficult subjects, on which all true sentiment must be underlain by a sort of knowledge which he has not" (2, p.378).

What is rather strange is that in her account of their differences, Harriet Martineau, the exact and high-principled economist, is almost inconceivably irresponsible or forgetful about matters of fact. For example, she says in the Autobiography:

In the autumn of 1849, my misgivings first became serious. Mr. Wills (subeditor of Household Words) proposed my doing some articles on the Employments of Women, (especially in connexion with the Schools of Design and branches of Fine-Art manufacture;) and was quite unable to see that every contribution of the kind was necessarily excluded by Mr. Dickens's prior articles on behalf of his view of Woman's position; articles in which he ignored the fact that nineteen-twentieths of the women of England earn their bread, and in which he prescribes the function of Women; viz., to dress well and look pretty, as an adornment to the homes of men. I was startled by this; and at the same time, and for many weeks after, by Mr. Dickens's treatment in his Magazine of the Preston Strike, then existing, and of the Factory and Wages controversy, in his tale of "Hard Times." (2, p.419)

She goes on to say that a "more serious incident still occurred in the same autumn" and then tells how a story she had written for a Christmas number was rejected because it gave a favourable view of the Roman Catholic faith. Later in this passage she writes that the time of this occurrence was "at the end of 1853" (2, p.421), as it was.

Now all this is rather astonishing. It is hard to accept that a regular journalist and the author of The Thirty Years Peace could not remember the year when Household Words began (March 1850). It is odd that she should say that William Henry Wills approached her in 1849 when he had not even been engaged as subeditor by then. Her apparent belief that Dickens wrote certain articles on "his view of Woman's position" is part of the same muddle, since he had written none at all, nor had he published any, and it is hard to imagine what articles she may have meant of a subsequent date. She even seems to have thought that the Preston Strike happened in 1850 instead of 1853-54. It leaves one

nonplussed. "Vigorous erroneousousness" was almost her own speciality, and it must briefly be said that her paragraph is extremely confused. The tone of respect in which she was treated throughout the subsequent controversy and with which she has sometimes been treated since (merely with regard to that controversy) is undeserved, and, as this passage suggests, her grasp of the situation was incompetent.<sup>a</sup>

There are several excuses to be made for her. Although she had many years in which to revise the Autobiography, she did not bring it out herself. She had been very ill, she composed it hastily, and the period at which she wrote it (according to Mrs. Fenwick Miller) "was the most aggressive and unpleasant of her whole life."<sup>1</sup> W. R. Greg, who reviewed the Autobiography for Nineteenth Century in 1877, commented that in speaking of herself she gave a false impression of ill nature, bitterness and depreciation, but added that "in conveying this impression she does herself grievous injustice. There has seldom been a more kindly-hearted or affectionate person" (2, p.100). She is possibly, as Walter Houghton suggests, a typical example of the Victorian who was dogmatic or rigid because he felt that he must hold fast to his own convictions in the midst of confusion.<sup>2</sup> In addition she may well have regarded herself as an acknowledged authority whose position was being undermined, and the controversy which arose out of the Household Words articles and Hard Times possibly affected her even more acutely because she herself had written a somewhat similar story with a very different outcome over twenty years before.<sup>b</sup> All of which both helps to excuse and explain her; yet it does not prevent her account of her relations with Dickens from being misleading.

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Martineau, 4th ed. (1896) p.176.

<sup>2</sup> The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1966), pp.137-80 (chaps. 6-7).

(a)(b) See p. 275 below.

What had really happened was that they had differed very sharply indeed over Dickens's views on political economy, factory employment, workmen's compensation, and certain manufacturers' defiance of the law. And in spite of what she says about rejecting Wills's proposal, she did write a series of articles on factory employment with some special reference to women between 1851 and 1852. All these incidents, taken together, are possibly as helpful to us now as they were to Dickens at that time in defining his opinions. As Humphry House remarks of a similar situation, "if we now wonder how Fezziwig's 'oily rich, fat, jovial voice' could have seemed tolerable, even to Dickens, in the 'forties, we must look for the answer in Harriet Martineau and the Westminster Review."<sup>1</sup> Equally if we want to understand how Dickens could so simplify Coketown and sanctify Stephen Blackpool we must read Miss Martineau's The Factory Controversy and her articles in Household Words.<sup>c</sup>

The dispute came into the open after she had finished her Autobiography (late 1855) and had published a pamphlet entitled The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation (issued by the National Association of Factory Occupiers, Manchester, 1855).<sup>d</sup> The pamphlet is largely made up of a scathing criticism of the so-called "editors" of Household Words for their publication of a series of articles on factory accidents advocating enforcement of the law requiring proper fencing-in of factory machinery.<sup>2</sup> In these articles Henry Morley, one of Dickens's regular assistants, argues on behalf of the enforcement of the Factory Act of 1844, which rules that "all parts of the mill-gearing in a factory should be securely fenced." The factory inspectors had

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<sup>1</sup> The Dickens World (London, 1941), p.69, cf. pp.74-75.

<sup>2</sup> Those listed in add. n. (d) but with the addition of "Two Shillings per Horsepower," HW 12 (8 Sept. 1855): 130-31. Dickens was the sole editor. (c),(d) See pp. 275-276 below.

issued a circular on 31 January 1854 saying that they would have to "compel every shaft of machinery, at whatever cost and of whatever kind, to be fenced off," because of the annual toll of fatal accidents and mutilations (about forty) from unfenced machinery.<sup>1</sup> The reaction of the manufacturers to this belated decision to enforce the law had been to form an association. Morley makes no objection to the formation of a manufacturers' association for mutual insurance against claims, but he does object to the outright illegality of their express intention to resist the law by paying the fines imposed on any manufacturer for refusing to fence his machinery. He represents it as a threat to society and objects to the monstrosity of their risking even one death for the sake of saving the expense of adequate fences.<sup>6</sup>

Harriet Martineau retaliated by defending the manufacturers, arguing that they were not (as Morley said) "striking" against the law but against an interpretation of it by men less qualified than themselves. Speaking for the factory owners, she agrees with their interpretation of the law to mean that it was enough for the machinery to be encased to the height of seven feet. She then argues the question of moral responsibility on the grounds that if any workman (or child) climbed above the height of seven feet, even if in the course of his work, he was responsible for his own safety. Writing specifically against Dickens (although Household Words was not alone in its protest but had fairly widespread support including that of Leonard Horner, the most active of the factory inspectors), Miss Martineau says that she holds

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<sup>1</sup> Reports of the Inspectors of Factories to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department for the Half-Year Ending 30th April 1854 quotes from a factory inspectors' circular (15 March 1854) "that above forty persons employed in factories annually lose their lives or suffer mutilations from unfenced shafts which the law requires to be securely fenced" (p.59); it adds that in the previous half year there had been six deaths and thirteen mutilations. Hereafter these semiannual inspectors' studies are referred to as Reports.

(e) See p.276 below.

Dickens "alone" to be "answerable" for the "disgrace" of the series of articles in Household Words:

He uses the opportunities of the subject in the palpable way which a just-minded writer would scrupulously avoid, - vividly describing the crushing of bones and the rending of flesh, and the tearing of joints out of their sockets, carrying this method so far as to speak of the members of the Association as "men not squeamish about a few spots of spilt brain, or a leg or an arm more or less upon a poor man's body." (p.37)

Here Harriet Martineau represents the inhuman school of political economy which Dickens often satirizes so bitterly. The contrast between the two points of view is plain, and surely there is nothing out of place in Morley's plea for a greater assumption of responsibility on the manufacturer's part to avoid scenes like the one she objects to:

Perhaps it is not good [writes Morley] when a factory girl, who has not the whole spirit of play spun out of her for want of meadows, gambols upon bags of wool, a little too near the exposed machinery that is to work it up, and is immediately seized, and punished by the merciless machine that digs its shaft into her pinafore and hoists her up, tears her left arm at the shoulder joint, breaks her right arm, and beats her on the head.<sup>1</sup>

This was in fact an incident (typical of several in the factory reports) which Dickens originally meant to carry right into Hard Times, for the manuscript and extant corrected proofs of book 1, chapter 13, show him as not only identifying this girl as Rachael's younger sister but intending to footnote the text with a reference to Morley's article.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Ground in the Mill," HW 9 (22 April 1854):p224; almost certainly taken from "Extracts from Reports of Certifying Surgeons," in Reports . . . Ending 31st October 1853, about a young girl who had been "playing . . . above some bags of wool" and whose injuries were "left arm torn out at shoulder joint, right arm fractured, and contusion of head"(p.113). The Reports are outspoken in detailing injuries, and apart from their "personifying" the machine, there is nothing "sentimental" about Morley's or Dickens's remarks.

<sup>2</sup> F-M p.252 (textual notes). This edition also includes part of Martineau's pamphlet, pp.302-5. See further references to Hard Times

Why he finally cut it out is now impossible to say. Partly it may have been because he disliked footnotes in fiction and partly also because it would have been too specific, whereas in Hard Times he wanted to avoid (as he says) incidents being "localised."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the reason, Harriet Martineau accuses the author of the Household Words articles (Dickens, "or," as she says, "his contributor") of "unscrupulous statement, insolence, arrogance, and cant" (p.35). She turns on him directly with the old charge that his inaccuracies in past novels were always excused because "he was a novelist; and no one was eager to call to account on any matter of doctrine a very imaginative writer of fiction . . . But Mr. Dickens himself changed the conditions of his responsibilities and other people's judgements when he set up 'Household Words' as an avowed agency of popular instruction and social reform" (p.36). In her outrage she deplors the lack of room (in fifty pages) "to convict the humanity-monger . . . of all his acts of unfairness and untruth" (p.44). It is only the "benevolence of their employers" which "has generated a mutual understanding" that saves "Mr. Dickens's representations" from causing "deadly mischief" among the workers (p.45).

Dickens was in Paris at the time the pamphlet was published, and it was left to Wills to ask Morley to write a reply and have it set up in proof. He then sent it to Dickens, who was in the middle of writing Little Dorrit and who replied expressing the wish "to avoid reading Miss Martineau's outpouring of conceit" and saying that he was putting it by for a while "without opening it."<sup>2</sup> But three days later he went carefully over Morley's draft reply, evidently making revisions and additions, returning it to Wills with the remark, "I do suppose that

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<sup>1</sup> To Peter Cunningham, 11 March 1854, Letters, 2, p.546.

<sup>2</sup> 3 Jan. 1856, Letters, 2, p.720.

there never was such a wrong-headed woman born - such a vain one - or such a Humbug."<sup>1</sup>

The reply written by Morley and Dickens appears in Household Words as "Our Wicked Mis-Statements,"<sup>2</sup> and the position taken is that "it is strictly within the province of the law to protect life." It is a humble position, arguing against her insistence that Factory-owners should refuse to obey "meddling legislation":

Might we not say . . . that a writer who believes in his heart that resistance to a given law dooms large numbers of men to mutilation, and not few to horrible deaths, may honestly speak with some indignation of the resistance by which those deaths are produced; and that the same right to be angry is not equally possessed by an advocate who argues that the deaths cannot be helped, and that nobody has a right to meddle specially in any way with a mill-owner's trade? (p.14)

Now, after over a hundred years, it is possible to make a careful, point by point reading of the original articles by Morley, the pamphlet by Harriet Martineau, and the Morley-Dickens reply, and to try to come to an impartial conclusion. It is only too clear that neither his privately expressed opinion that she was a conceited "Humbug" nor her public charges that he was unscrupulous, untruthful, and unfair, are dispassionate, but it is our judgement, without going into every detail here, that the arguments used by Miss Martineau and her accusations against Dickens are wrong.

For his part Dickens (with Morley) notes how quick Miss Martineau is to take up the Bounderby view that the factories might as well be

<sup>1</sup> 6 Jan. 1856, Letters, 2, p.721.

<sup>2</sup> 13 (19 Jan. 1856):pp13-19; see also Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writings from "Household Words": 1850-1859, ed. Harry Stone (2 vols., 1969) pp.550-62. The article is listed in the Contributors' Book as solely by Henry Morley, probably because the first draft to be set up in type was written entirely by him on Wills's initiative. But from Dickens's letters and from internal evidence it seems clear that Dickens took an effective part in modifying it. See Stone, with whom we agree.

thrown into the Atlantic if their owners have to bear the expense of protecting their own workers.<sup>1</sup> For she clearly says, on behalf of the factory-owners, that "if the charge is thrown upon the employers of industry, they will retire from occupations so intolerably burdensome" and that everyone with "any common sense" could see that "our manufactures must cease, or the Factory Laws, as expounded by Mr. Horner, must give way" (p.46). Yet the expense of complying with the ten-year-old law was certainly small,<sup>2</sup> and the positions she takes on the practical difficulties of applying the law and on the liability of employers to pay compensation were both shown (in the course of a few years) to be unfair in the light of "common sense" and untenable in principle. In their use of facts, dates, figures, statistics, and references to the law, Dickens and Morley are well informed, restrained, and accurate.<sup>f</sup>

On her part there is a personal element in Harriet Martineau's attack in the way in which she lays down that Dickens must "confine himself to fiction" (p.38), declaring that "as a matter of taste" it was "a pity . . . that a writer of fiction should choose topics in which political philosophy and morality were involved" (p.36). Dickens replies by pointing out that she herself was extremely well known as the author of Forest and Game-Law Tales and "many volumes of Stories on Political Economy"; but Miss Martineau evidently regarded her own fiction as somehow "true," since the doctrines or principles it teaches were, as she thought, scientifically established. This dogma is given ex cathedra and is closed to any rational examination; and in some ways her arguments can best be understood as the embodiment of all that the fable of Hard Times rejects. It is remarkable that Dickens did not foresee from the first

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<sup>1</sup> P.16: "We believe it was Mr. Bounderby who was always going to throw his property into the Atlantic."

<sup>2</sup> See Reports . . . Ending 31st October 1855, pp.56 and 110.

(f) See p. 276 below.

that there was this risk in inviting her to be a contributor, and it is not less surprising that she should have agreed to become one in spite of knowing very well from his earlier works that as soon as either of them touched on political economy they were bound to be in fundamental disagreement. It was inevitable therefore that their relationship should end sooner or later with exasperation on Dickens's side and disdainful withdrawal on hers.

As we have already noted, difficulties first came into the open when her story for the Christmas number of 1853 was rejected, when she says that she decided that she could "never again write fiction" for Household Words "nor anything in which principle or feeling were concerned"; although it is characteristic that, as she correctly explains elsewhere in the Autobiography, she had in fact already given up submitting fiction. Their final rupture came only in 1854, apparently over another difference about Roman Catholicism, following which, since she received no expression of "repentance or amendment" (Autobiography, 2, p.422), she at last withdrew.

Now, leaving on one side the question of Dickens's prejudice against Roman Catholicism (about which she may have been in the right), her treatment of contemporary industrial life in her contributions remains most interesting. Even as subedited by Wills and Dickens they are a remarkable illustration of some of the assumptions of the class and world of Bounderby and Gradgrind. In fact, so marked are these assumptions and so strikingly do they conflict with Dickens's editorial views that they suggest that differences about political economy must have underlain and caused the whole disagreement.

At first, as we have seen, Dickens and Harriet Martineau had been united by a faith in progress. Yet by 1854 Dickens was increasingly

concerned with reports of industrial strife, and, with a visit to Preston and publication of his article "On Strike" (11 February 1854), he began to put forward his opinions about political economy again more clearly. They may seem moderate now, but there are three references in the article which must have been extremely disturbing to Miss Martineau. The first of these is similar to Sissy Jupe's attempted definition of statistics in Hard Times (book 1, ch.9) and is a protest against the undue veneration claimed for the subject. Dickens remarks that:

"Political Economy was a great and useful science in its own way and in its own place; but . . . I did not transplant my definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods."

Then, although admitting that political economy was useful, Dickens maintains that its validity is severely limited by its usual exclusion of the human factor, stating his belief that

into the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance and consideration; something which is not to be found in Mr. McCulloch's dictionary, and is not exactly stateable in figures; otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit.

Dickens also stresses that unless political economy "has a little human covering and filling out," it is a "mere skeleton." This was a fundamental belief. He writes to Wilkie Collins about this time of his sympathy for "the working people" with "their wretched arena chalked out for them . . . by small political economists."<sup>1</sup> There is also a letter to Charles Knight about his scorn for mere "figures and averages," respected by "addled heads who would take the average of cold in the Crimea during twelve months as a reason for clothing a soldier in nankeens on a night when he would be frozen to death in fur."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 17 Dec. 1854, Letters, 2, p.609.

<sup>2</sup> 30 Jan. 1855, Letters, 2, p.620.

Such a point of view is completely antipathetic to Harriet Martineau's, as can be seen in her pamphlet in which she complains that "Mr. Dickens cannot endure a comparative number which may diminish the show he makes with a positive one" (p.38). For, rather like Mr. M'Choakumchild (Hard Times, book 1, ch.9), she demonstrates that although there might be over four thousand workers a year injured by machinery in textile factories, "only" twelve of that number were killed because machinery was still unfenced and that in "no other" occupation was "the proportion of deaths so small" (Factory Controversy, p.9).

Harriet Martineau's pamphlet did not, of course, appear until well after Hard Times; it was partly a consequence of the novel, not a provocation. But although she was a self-appointed spokeswoman, she graphically represents views already held by the factory-occupiers who welcomed her support. It is not surprising, therefore, if Dickens's exasperation with such views led him into the trap of idealizing Stephen Blackpool, nor that his judgement of utilitarianism in Hard Times should aggravate the annoyance given Miss Martineau by the earlier Household Words articles on workers' injuries in factories.

At the same time, although the break between them was not final until early 1855, Dickens had been growing increasingly disillusioned with her contributions. The opening paragraphs of "Our Wicked Mis-statements" are determinedly fair:

We have a respect for Miss Martineau, won by many good works she has written and many good deeds she has done, which nothing that she can now say or do will destroy; and we most heartily claim for her the respect of our readers as a thing not to be forfeited for a few hasty words.

Yet his letters to Wills show his private complaints about her being "grimly bent upon the enlightenment of mankind."<sup>1</sup> There are possibly

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<sup>1</sup> 14 Oct. 1854, Letters, 2, p.597.

two reasons for this alteration in his attitude. One is the change in Dickens himself, which we have already glanced at, and the other is an increased awareness that they were both looking very differently at the industrial scene. It is true that for a time Dickens almost became what Ruskin was to call him, "the leader of the steam-whistle party par excellence."<sup>1</sup> But at no time in his career did he forget the nature of human participation in industry. As early as the absurd Miss Monflathers, for example, in The Old Curiosity Shop (ch.31) he had satirized those who did forget:

"Don't you feel how naughty it is of you," resumed Miss Monflathers, "to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-ninepence to three shillings a week?"

There is much more to Dickens's view than this, but for the moment it may be illuminating to turn aside and see what Harriet Martineau wrote for him in her series of factory articles in Household Words. It reveals how narrow but how vitally important the divisions could be among those who sincerely believed in progress, especially when some of them remained so severely aloof from the workers who helped to make it possible. It reminds us that although Dickens kept a close control over Household Words, it cannot be argued that every word in it gives opinions he approved; it may help to suggest how his views were often shaped by a response to others; and it makes clear how Miss Martineau was welcomed as a contributor at first, even though disagreement seems to have been inevitable as they went on.

Harriet Martineau's first contributions to Household Words (began as early as 25 May 1850) are in the form of fiction: four of her stories

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 19 June 1870, The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London/New York, 1903-12), 37, p.7.

appear in the first three volumes, seven in the first six up to December 1852. Her series of factory articles began on 18 October 1851. She later explains that after giving up fiction she decided that "a full, but picturesque account of manufactures and other productive processes might be valuable, both for instruction and entertainment" (Autobiography, 2, p.385). So she visited her brother in Birmingham and with the advantage of his introductions and technical knowledge went to work on the series there. Her titles give some idea of her approach to the subject. A description of the manufacture of papier-mâché tea trays, for example, is "Flower Shows in a Birmingham Hot-House," electro-plating is dealt with as "The Magic Troughs of Birmingham," and a visit to a nail factory is entitled "Wonders of Nails and Screws." It was an interesting approach, and was no doubt (as she says) "eagerly accepted." The articles were good publicity for the firms concerned, and she received pressing invitations from other districts. But she and Dickens prudently agreed that "our chief textile manufactures were already familiar to every body's knowledge" (2, p.388).

Yet in this series of articles she is doing more than writing clear descriptions of little-known processes. She writes persuasively, using what are now some of the familiar techniques of advertising or public relations. Some of the unpleasant aspects of the factories are noted, but quickly erased from a reader's impression by pleasing contrasts with other parts of the work or by thoughts of their ultimate contribution to progress. Miss Martineau herself was not only deaf but had no sense of smell (she was assisted on her visits by her sister-in-law and nieces); thus much unpleasantness may have escaped her notice.

The articles are remarkably detailed and vivid. In "Rainbow Making" we see how she offsets a recognition of the physical discomfort

by an excited appreciation of the brilliance of dyed silks:

"from trough to trough we go, breathing steam, and stepping into puddles, or reeking rivulets rippling over the stones of the pavements; but we are tempted on, like children, by the charm of the brilliant colours that flash upon the sight whichever way we turn." An assumed childlike awe at the accomplishments of British manufacture pervades every article. "There is a mystery in most houses of business," she writes in "Time and the Hour." And in "The Magic Troughs": "As for the gilding and silvering chambers, they are like seats of magic. One might look on for a year, and have no idea of the process, but that it must be done by magic." Of the machine process of worming screws, she declares "it is wonderful to see." Every process has her unbounded admiration: "But, oh! the beauty of those candlesticks, and of the ornamented parts of the gas-fittings, and of the most massive of the chains. And the ingenuity too! - the cleverness with which the tubing is concealed in gas-furniture" ("Tubal Cain"). Even the outside of the factories could be attractive - seen in a certain light. After a walk through the ancient streets of Coventry, she remarks: "It is strange, after this, to see the factory chimney, straight, tall and handsome, in its way, with its inlaying of coloured bricks, towering before us, to about the height of a hundred and thirty feet" ("Rainbow Making").

Outside the factories with their "Magic Troughs," workmen are "improvident"; inside they have something of a Carlylean dignity, and craftsmen become artists: "The chasing of the cast articles is one of the most astonishing processes . . . it seems as if every man . . . must be an artist." She has great patriotic pride. The contribution of each factory to the Great Exhibition has a proud notice.

All this, it hardly needs saying, is in strong contrast with

Hard Times, in which Coketown is "a town of machinery and tall chimneys," savage, monotonous, and dirty (book 1, ch.5), where the chimneys are "built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes," like "the kind of people who might be expected" to live there; where it is only to "travellers by express-train" that the great factories look "illuminated, like Fairy Palaces"; and where those who work in them leave their shifts, like Stephen, with "the odd sensation . . . which the stoppage of the machinery always produced . . . of its having worked and stopped in his own head" (book 1, ch.10).

To Harriet Martineau the workpeople are most admired when they do go like machinery. There is little difference in the kind of admiration she has for the human and for the mechanical as long as each is performing its function. In the button factory she is delighted with the row of "harping lathes" which in "their clean and rapid work are perhaps the prettiest part of the whole show." Her approval of the human machines in the screw factory is expressed in much the same tones:

The job looks anything but a tidy one, while we regard the process alone. But it is different when we stand aside, and survey the room. Then we see that these six score women are neatly dressed; hair smooth, or cap clean - handkerchief or little shawl nicely crossed over, and fastened behind; faces healthy, and countenances cheerful.

In the same piece she may reveal her identification of women and machines by the use of metaphor:

As we turned away from the hundreds of women thus respectably earning their bread, we could but hope that they would look to it that there was no screw loose in their household ways, that the machinery of their daily life might work as truly and effectually as that dead mechanism which is revolving under their care, for so many hours of every day.

A passage in "Gold and Gems" shows the total identification of worker and product in the author's mind, as she describes women who give a special polish to metalware by burnishing it with their bare hands:

What curious finger-ends they have - those women who chafe the precious metals into their last degree of polish! They are broad - the joint so flexible that it is bent considerably backwards when in use; and the skin has a peculiar smoothness: more mechanical, we fancy, than vital. However that may be, the burnish they produce is strikingly superior to any hitherto achieved by friction with any other substance.

Elsewhere a machine is seen as almost human: "Probably the first thing every stranger does on entering the grinding-room is to burst out a-laughing, - the machinery is so grotesque; - so like being alive and full of affectations" ("Birmingham Glass Works"). The description has a Dickensian touch that is not unlike the pistons of the Coketown factories, working "monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness" (book 1, ch.5), except that in Coketown it does not seem so amusing.

Yet people are not nearly so reliable as machinery; as they age they are less productive:

We saw a woman in her own home . . . tacking the buttons on their stiff paper, for sale . . . This woman sews forty gross in a day. She could formerly, by excessive diligence, sew fifty or sixty gross; but forty is her number now - and a large number it is, considering that each button has to be picked up from the heap before her, ranged in its row, and tacked with two stitches. ("What there is in a Button")

It does not occur to the author to wonder whether this employment has anything to do with the woman's deterioration as well as age. Ruskin, faced with his Birmingham nail makers, is saddened by their "manufacturing toil" which left them with "no form of comeliness."<sup>1</sup> Dickens sees Blackpool imaginatively as "Old Stephen" (at forty) since "he had had a hard life" (book 1, ch.10). But Harriet Martineau appears as coolly detached as Gradgrind in his Stone Lodge and as warmly disapproving of any self-indulgence of the workers as Mr. Bounderby with his comments on

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 80 (16 July 1877), Pors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of England (8 vols. [1871-84]), in Works, 29, p.172 and 175.

"turtle-soup and venison" (book 2, ch.2).

Harriet Martineau never stresses the dangers of industrial work, merely notes them occasionally in passing, and rejoices to report when the manufacturer has made conditions better. She describes such conditions as those she finds at the glassworks:

We find ourselves on a sort of platform, in front of six furnace mouths, which disclose such a fire within as throws us into a secret despair; despair for ourselves, lest we should lose our senses, and for the men, because it seems impossible to live through the day in such a heat. ("Birmingham Glass Works")

Similarly with the women who work in the heavy air of the lacquering-room at a brass foundry: "There sit companies of women . . . One wonders that they can be healthy, sitting in such a heat, and in such a smell. They earn good wages" ("Tubal Cain"; the wages were 11 shillings per week). It is always implied that the workpeople are capable of adapting themselves to any conditions. In the description of varnishing and "stoving" tea trays she remarks: "This must be unwholesome work to the superintendents of the process. The heat of the stove rooms is very great, and the smell of baked varnish is almost intolerable to novices." To Harriet Martineau accidents are all preventable by the workpeople themselves. As she describes the glass-blowing, she makes no mention of the dangers to the workmen, but she is well aware of them for herself:

All swing their glowing cylinders as if they were desperate or demented; a condition which we suspect we are approaching under the pressure of the heat, and the strangeness and the hurry of incessantly getting out of the way of red-hot globes, long pipes, and whirling cylinders.

Writing about wire drawing, she notes:

Women are preferred to boys for this work. Their attention is more steady, and they are more careful of their own flesh and blood. Boys are apt to make mischief; and, if they look off their work, it is too likely that they may lose their finger-ends. It is in this department of the business that most of the accidents happen. ("Nails and Screws")

Yet she does give a lengthy description of the attempts made by needle

manufacturers to get their employees to wear masks which would prevent their fatally inhaling tiny pieces of ground steel. In this case it is the employees who refuse the protection offered them - a fact which she makes much of. It is the employers who have "saved" the needle-grinders from "their own folly."<sup>8</sup>

Inevitably Harriet Martineau's justifications for the working conditions she found are that mass production made necessities cheaper and that all present-day working conditions are an improvement on the past: "Cyclopaedias of the present century - within the last thirty years, even - give such an account of the formation of a needle, as appears quite piteous to one who was at Redditch yesterday." Manufacturers are never blamed for bad working conditions; they are invariably praised for their care. Good working conditions are noted with complacency. Winding silk is "easy work," many of the women are allowed to sit at their reels, and the air is "pure and cool." She congratulates the employees in the needle factory: "Those who work on Mr. James's premises are well off for air, light, and cheerfulness." Similarly where labour relations are good, the credit goes to the employer. It is true that the employer, himself, may say that their improved "health, understanding, and morals" is simply the result of "Sunday schools . . . and the good free-school" - and he may be right. But she thinks that: "There is something in the tone of the intercourse between himself and everybody on his premises, which convinces a stranger that there is also somebody else to thank for the improvement, which drives out all the stranger's preconceptions of the wretchedness of needle-makers" ("Needles"). All the best points of the employers are dwelt on, their ingenuity, enterprise, and economy being judged the most praiseworthy. Her series is thus an enormously forceful exaltation of "the entrepreneurial ideal,"<sup>1</sup> appearing

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<sup>1</sup> Perkin, Origins, ch.8.

(g) See p. 276 below.

in the same journal that was to call the Preston Strike an employers' "Lock-Out," to deride a sympathizer of the factory-occupiers (in "On Strike") as "Mr. Snapper," to suggest that strikes might even be justified, and to ridicule the "masters" in Josiah Bounderby. Yet to Harriet Martineau the only fault of the masters is that they are too complacent about their workers' improvidence: "It is too common to hear employers speak coolly, if not with satisfaction, of this state of things, because it keeps the workmen dependent and humble, and lessens the dangers of those strikes about wages, which are the plague of the manufacturer's life" ("The Magic Troughs at Birmingham").

The same series of articles shows her severity when she has to remark on any legislative interference in trade. She objects particularly to taxation and import dues. The paper duty forces the manufacturer to use cheap materials. Coventry ribbon-workers are blamed for their "tenacity about protective duties." A whole page in "Time and the Hour" is devoted to commenting on "legislative impediments which annoy the manufacturer . . . What confusion, and trouble, and waste, are caused by all these legislative meddlings!" The only answer is Free Trade. In her last process article ("How to Get Paper"), which Dickens found so "grimly determined," she writes against the paper tax once more. This was a tax which, in spite of the unpopularity it brought him, Dickens defended in preference to other forms of taxation which he judged bore more heavily on the poor.<sup>1</sup> It is one instance of the way in which he did not insist that no contributor should express views contrary to his own.

In all these articles there is not even the Smilesian encouragement to the worker to "come and join the masters," although they are written

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<sup>1</sup> To Charles Knight, 8 Feb. 1850, Letters, 2, p.205.

in the belief that society's problems can be solved only by self-help. Their author may have been cut off by her deafness, yet, even though writing for such a popular periodical as Household Words, she shows no personal interest in the people she meets, notes no conversations with the workers, and merely expresses the hope that they can be improved by education. In her eyes the workers appear difficult children, and she is the teacher, as when she cheerfully lectures them on how they must adapt themselves to the machine: "Here must be no Monday laziness after Sunday's rest; no caprice as to going to work or staying away. Like time and tide - like brewing and dying - the work at Messrs. Elkington's cannot wait for men's humours" ("Magic Troughs").

Nothing could be more dissimilar to Dickens's approach, whether in his own journalism in which the personal interest is emphasized or in his admission in Hard Times that he entertains "a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people on whom the sun shines" (book 1, ch.10). Being the daughter of a ruined manufacturer may have helped to shape Harriet Martineau's ideas of the relations between "masters and men" - as much as Dickens's childhood experiences affected his. What is curious, though not altogether surprising, is that Harriet Martineau's nonfiction, which is supposedly the work of a dispassionate observer, may be thought to be as strongly marked by its author's characteristic preferences as Dickens's fiction.

Part of the interest of all this lies, moreover, in the change (as we have explained) that had been taking place in Dickens. And it could hardly be more strikingly shown than in his having allowed Harriet Martineau her head in her factory articles for Household Words and then having felt driven to repudiate everything she stood for in Hard Times.

For as he shows in "A Preliminary Word," he had also been fascinated by "the mightier inventions of the age"; he had been ready himself to pay tribute to the manufacturers; and early in 1853 he could speak of seeing "in the factories and workshops of Birmingham such beautiful order and regularity, and such great consideration for the workpeople provided, that they must be justly entitled to be considered educational too."<sup>1</sup> And of course he never questioned that, with good will, the interests of all classes "are identical."

The difference that existed from the first between him and those who thought like Miss Martineau lay chiefly in his deep concern both for the individual and for the quality of working-class life. It shows chiefly in his novels, but it is also reflected in such Household Words articles as "The Amusements of the People - I" (30 March 1850) in which he says that the people have "a right to be amused," or in "To Working Men" (7 October 1854) in which he declares that they have "a right to every means of life and health that Providence has afforded." He can write of such a city as Manchester in 1852 as an "awful machine," kept "in harmony" only with the help of such institutions as its new Public Library;<sup>2</sup> and fascinated as he may be by the new inventions he refuses to admit that "the hardest workers at this whirring wheel of toil" are to be "excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination" ("A Preliminary Word," 30 March 1850).

But with Hard Times a change arose. He decided to write it for Household Words because the journal was thought to be declining; and he may have thought that with contributors such as Miss Martineau it had become rather too complacent about workmen and the conditions in which

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<sup>1</sup> 3 Jan., Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford, 1960), p.160.

<sup>2</sup> Speeches, pp.153-54, Pierpont Morgan Library, ms quoting letter to Miss Coutts, 3 Sept. 1852.

they lived and worked. He certainly found himself, as he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell (21 April 1854), rebelling against "the monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturer,"<sup>1</sup> and he declared that the "idea" of the novel had "laid hold" of him "by the throat in a very violent manner."<sup>2</sup>

Nor was this quite all. For one of the consequences of the Martineau dispute was that he certainly recognized where his sympathies lay when the spinners and piecers struck in Manchester (November 1855 to January 1856) following a reduction in wages at a time of higher prices. So when Morley sent him the draft of an article about the strike, at about the same time as his draft of "Our Wicked Mis-Statements," Dickens was uncompromising in his demand that Morley's article be rewritten. The creator of Slackbridge, the union agitator, and of the antiunionist Stephen Blackpool gives very clear instructions in a letter to Wills that this strike-article cannot possibly put forward the opinion that "all strikes among this unhappy class . . . are always necessarily wrong."<sup>3</sup> He is clearer than ever before that to open such a piece "by saying that the men are 'of course entirely and painfully in the wrong' . . . would be monstrous." Nor would he concede that they were wrong because such a strike would throw other men out of work without their consent, exclaiming "O Good God when Morley treats of the suffering of wife and children, can he suppose that these mistaken men don't feel it in the depths of their hearts, and don't honestly and honorably - most devoutly and faithfully - believe - that for those very children when they shall have children, they are bearing all these miseries now!" Morley's draft

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 2, p.554.

<sup>2</sup> To Hon. Mrs. Richard Watson, 1 Nov. 1854, Letters, 2, p.602.

<sup>3</sup> 6 Jan. 1856, Letters, 2, pp.721-22.

was immediately revised and published as "The Manchester Strike" (2 February 1856); from it we can see the curious result that the editor (and in some instances author) of articles on the wonders of new manufacturing processes is now represented as holding that "unwholesomely cheap production" is "a perversion of the common law of trade, which will in the course of time be blotted out by the advance of education." He is shown as arguing that though free competition is healthy, the unskilled worker is at such a disadvantage that he has no freedom to compete, and that ("O, political economist!") such a class must be protected.

In the course of their differences we can see a development in Dickens which also partly underlies his fiction. It is evident that this was a period of crisis for him. Of course it is obvious how painfully inadequate Stephen Blackpool is, but we have also to consider how extraordinarily confined up to this time had been the imaginative understanding even of Dickens and certainly of most of his readers when faced with the results of the industrial revolution. Industrial life was a new experience for the imaginative writer; its achievements were at first a matter of simple wonder to everyone; and the break with the dominant "entrepreneurial deal" was something which not only had to occur within Dickens's own general editorial policy but within himself, and this was in defiance of the very strongest tendencies of the age as well as his own. The effects of the break can be seen in Hard Times; also in Little Dorrit in the partnership of the inventor Daniel Doyce and the factory manager Arthur Clennam; they can even be seen in Great Expectations and certainly in the spirit of the Uncommercial Traveller. George Orwell may be right in saying that Dickens was "not mechanically minded,"<sup>1</sup> but he had to adapt to the machine age.

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<sup>1</sup> Collected Journalism, 1, p.444.

That he did so deserves to be recognized more clearly by those who now read Dickens's novels at all closely.

Harriet Martineau's mentality was naturally suited to the machine age. Yet, although the views she expressed at this period in her life were so damagingly limited, the record of her life as a whole is one of constant concern for suffering humanity. She sincerely felt that to give employment to the destitute masses was to save their lives. Machinery, therefore, which provided employment for so many people, and lowered the price of the basic necessities of life, was to be welcomed as the salvation of the masses. That she had some mechanical understanding of the feelings of the working people and their problems, she had already shown, as we have seen, in A Manchester Strike. A deeper understanding had been evident in 1850 when she wrote about the Chartists in her History of England During the Thirty Years' Peace:

They had an indistinct but fixed idea that there was unbounded wealth every where, for every body, if only there were no tyrants to intercept it; and there can be no wonder in any sympathizing mind and heart, that a man in a desolate home, without occupation, and suffering under that peculiar state of brain caused by insufficiency of food, becomes a torch-bearing Chartist.<sup>1</sup>

But it may well be that this only reflects the potent influence of Mrs. Gaskell's sensitive dramatisation of such feelings in Mary Barton.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., ch.1, p. 37 above, vol. II bk.5, p.265.

Additional Notes

- (a) For the date of Wills's engagement see Dickens to Wills, 22 Jan. 1850, The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter, 3 vols. (Bloomsbury [London], 1938), 2, p.200. The remarks about Dickens's "articles" on women can refer to at most only one by him, which was partly about an American emancipationist, Mrs. Amelia Jenks Bloomer ("Sucking Pigs," HW 4 [8 Nov. 1851] pp.45-47), and there do not appear to be any of the kind by other contributors. It is true that Harriet Martineau may have been rather vexed by Mrs. Jellyby's specifically feminist activities referred to in the last chapter of Bleak House, as she shows by her remarks in The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation (Manchester, 1855), pp.35-36 and 45, though she cannot spell her name. For the factory articles see n. (c), p.275 below. Her last contribution to HW was "The Hampshire Militia," 10 (13 Jan. 1855), pp.505-11. Harriet Martineau's own "erroneousness" has corrupted her biographers such as R. K. Webb, who writes in his Harriet Martineau: "The connection ceased in 1857 when, alarmed by the anti-Catholic bias of the paper, she turned her artillery of principle on W. H. Wills, the editor, while Dickens ran increasingly afoul of her for his crudity, his attitude towards women, and his sentimentalizing about factories in Household Words" (p.312); the date and the plain statements here are wrong.
- (b) The Hill and the Valley, vol. 1 of Illustrations of Political Economy. It is a story about a strike in a South Wales ironworks which follows the death of a boy who, "most unfortunately . . . was careless, and put himself in the way of a blow on the head, which killed him on the spot" (p.92). It is written clearly and intelligently but entirely from the point of view of the fair-minded, hard-working owner-employers who close down their factory when the strike makes it impossible for them to go on. We owe this reference to Ada Nisbet; no doubt detailed comparisons of interest might be made between Hard Times and several of Martineau's stories.
- (c) These articles, published from 18 Oct. 1851 to 17 April 1852, are "Flower Shows in a Birmingham Hot-House," 4, pp.82-85; "The Magic Troughs at Birmingham," 4, pp.113-17; "Wonders of Nails and Screws," 4, pp.138-42; "The Miller and His Men," 4, pp.415-20; "Gold and Gems," 4, pp.449-55; "Rainbow Making," 4, pp.485-90; "Needles," 4, pp.540-46; "Time and the Hour," 4, pp.555-59; "Guns and Pistols," 4, pp.580-85; "Birmingham Glass Works," 5, pp.32-38; "What There is in a Button," 5, pp.106-12; and "Tubal Cain," 5, pp.192-97. Similar "process-articles" (about factories and their manufactures) by Dickens and others had already been published.
- (d) It was first sent to the Westminster Review and rejected. She then offered it on her own initiative to the National Association of Factory Occupiers which delightedly gave her a hundred guineas for it. It was set out in the form of a review of a variety of

parliamentary, legal, and manufacturers' reports, newspaper reports, and four articles in HW 11 (1855): "Fencing with Humanity," pp.241-44; "Death's Cyphering Book," pp.337-41; "Deadly Shafts," pp.494-95; and "More Grist to the Mill," pp.605-6. Further references to the pamphlet are included in our text.

- (e) Cf. Maurice W. Thomas, Early Factory Legislation (Leigh-on-Sea, 1948), and John Trevor Ward, The Factory Movement: 1830-1855 (London/New York, 1962); but although these partly help to confirm what was said in the dispute, they add little in detail and nothing in sophistication. More important are the Factories Acts and the Reports reviewed by Martineau (add. n. (d), p.276) as well as those for the rest of 1855 and 1856. Although the Reports are cited by Martineau, they offer evidence to show that the fencing asked for and refused did reduce accidents, and they clarify both the legal and moral positions, even though written by men who believed (as did Leonard Horner, the chief factory inspector) that the "law is an interference with private enterprise only justified by a strong moral necessity" (Reports . . . Ending 30th April 1855, p.5).
- (f) See Ward, pp.401-3. In the short run the Association was actually successful in some of its aims, but by 1860 Rev. George Stringer Bull could fairly claim that "there is now scarcely a manufacturer who does not thank God for the factory regulations which were forced from an unwilling government" (Richard Castler: A Sermon [Bradford, 1861], p.12). That Dickens was well informed is shown not only by his part in the articles written by Morley and himself which can be checked against the Reports, but also from his letters (e.g. to Wills, 10 Jan. 1856, Letters 2, pp.724-26); he was clearly quick to see points involved and understood, e.g. the implications of Lord Campbell's Act, 9 and 10 Vict. 93, which for the first time allowed the relatives of someone killed at work to sue for compensation.
- (g) To be fair to Harriet Martineau, this was no doubt a genuine problem, and Dickens himself was to write about "knowing from the instance of the Sheffield Sword Grinders and their magnetic mask, and from other analogous cases, how difficult it is to induce ignorant people to take precautions provided for them when doing dangerous work" (29 Dec. 1868, Letters, 3, p.692). This letter was in reply to a reasoned protest from the proprietors of Limehouse lead mills who were disturbed by what Dickens had written about some cases of lead poisoning in "A Small Star in the East" (All the Year Round, n.s.1 19 Dec. 1868, pp.61-66). It is worth remarking that Dickens taking a doctor with him had visited some of the victims and talked to them in their own homes. He came back to the subject in "On an Amateur Boat" (All the Year Round, n.s.1 [27 Feb. 1869], pp.300-303) after a further visit to the mills when he noted the precautions taken and praised the employers' care but still concluded that the work was highly dangerous. His remarks ended by looking to "American inventiveness" for an advance which would make the production of white lead possible "entirely by machinery."

CHAPTER VIII"Balances of Justice": NORTH AND SOUTH

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(i) Developments and Changes 1848-54

Between the publication of Mary Barton and that of North and South in 1855<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gaskell had changed, and part of this change was from an amateur to a professional novelist. After the publication of Mary Barton she wrote to her publisher that she had been trying to find the places where John Forster (who had read the novel for Chapman and Hall) said that she had "strained after commonplace materials for effect."<sup>2</sup> The sensationalism of incidents like the chase after Will, the trial-scene, and the murder itself in Mary Barton certainly never reappeared in the same crude shape in the later work. In fact, after Mary Barton Mrs. Gaskell seems to have been in no hurry to write another novel. Six years elapsed between the beginning of writing Mary Barton and the first instalment of Cranford, which was published in Household Words in irregular instalments between December 1851 and May 1853. Cranford itself, started as a short story, and grew piece by piece to the length of a novel almost by chance, because of public demand following the success of the first part.<sup>3</sup>

Cranford has more in common with Mary Barton than at first appears. Edgar Wright remarks that the first three novels - Mary Barton, Cranford and Ruth - are "based on familiar experience of a small social group."<sup>4</sup> We can easily see in the second novel the same eye for domestic detail which, apparently chosen almost at random, evokes in a short space whole

<sup>1</sup> I have used the Penguin edition, ed. Dorothy Collin (1970).

<sup>2</sup> Letters 38 (3 Jan. 1849).

<sup>3</sup> The first instalment of Cranford appeared in a less polished form in Sartain's Union Magazine (July 1849). Another chapter was added, and both appeared together in HW (13 Dec. 1851). It was on Dickens's persuasion that she wrote more.

<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Re-assessment (1965) p.12.

areas of a character, his history and culture. We note too the same quality of sympathetic observation: Mrs. Gaskell as Mary Smith is in a similar position to Mrs. Gaskell as obtrusive author in Mary Barton, there is the same balancing of commitment to and detachment from the group. Her talent for the sensational, exercised in the earlier novel, is used in an original, comic, and much more effective way in the "Signor Brunoni" episode in Cranford. In this episode Mrs. Gaskell deflates the sensational potential of the threat of a burglar to the old ladies of Cranford only after she has used it to show another aspect of their individual and communal natures. The anti-climax of Signor Brunoni's turning out to be not only not a burglar, but "Samuel Brown, a mountebank," deepens the effect of the whole episode.

Ruth appeared in the same year in which Cranford was completed, and stirred up a great deal of controversy in its handling of the "fallen woman" theme. That she had taken Forster's criticisms of Mary Barton to heart is evident in the novel itself, and Mrs. Gaskell wrote to her sister-in-law, Anne Robson:

I could have put out much more power, but that I wanted to keep it quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or over-strained sentiment I might weaken the force of what I had to say (148, Jan. 1853).

Yet she was to suffer considerably from the "hard things people said of Ruth," much more than she had done with the reception of Mary Barton.

In a letter to Eliza Fox she complained that two men had burned the first volume of it, and a third had forbidden his wife to read it. (150, Feb. 1853). She wrote to Anne Robson, "I shrink with more pain than I can tell you from what people are saying . . . I had a terrible fit of crying all Saty night at the unkind things people were saying" (148, Jan. 1853). Yet there is a remarkable similarity in her defence of Ruth and her previous defence of Mary Barton, shown in the way in which she wrote to her friends

after the publication of each novel. She writes to Anne Robson in the same letter: "I have no doubt that what was meant so earnestly must do some good." When the hostile reaction of some of the factory-owners came to be known to her after the publication of Mary Barton she wrote to Chapman "I have faith that what I wrote so earnestly . . . must be right" (38, 3 Jan. 1849). There may appear to be a certain naiveté in this conviction, a lack of the experience of life, which teaches that it is possible to feel earnestly about something, and be wrong. Yet in Mrs. Gaskell's private world, a world of moral intension, where the consequences of good and ill intent are clearly to be seen, "feeling earnest" does count. But conscience, a sense of right and wrong, religious beliefs, are one thing: statistical relations another, as Dickens showed in Sissy Jupe's comments on political economy to Louisa. Mrs. Gaskell's moral earnestness is still present in North and South, but we feel that Mrs. Gaskell has learned the lesson of experience. There is no villain in the later novel, unless it is "the state o' trade."

What Mrs. Gaskell wrote about her restraint in Ruth might equally apply to North and South. Where she could quite legitimately have been sensational, she carefully subdues the tone of her writing - notably in her treatment of the strike which takes place in the novel. This may well be because Mrs. Gaskell has become more fully aware of the complexities of the situation than she was in Mary Barton. Much had occurred to affect people's views on the industrial system since Mary Barton was published. Between 1848 and 1855 two major strikes - strictly speaking lockouts - had taken place. The first was the strike of the Amalgamated Engineers in 1852, and the second was of course the Preston strike of 1853-54, which we have already considered in connection with Hard Times. Both of these strikes are worth looking at, because both

caught the attention of the public to a greater extent than any previous industrial disputes had done, and were widely reported and discussed. Because of this, we can assume that they were most influential in the formation of the views which Mrs. Gaskell puts forward in North and South. And it is useful to have a practical idea of the background of industrial strife against which North and South was written.

The strike of the Amalgamated Engineers began locally, with men at one Oldham firm demanding, among other things, the abolition of overtime and the exclusion of unskilled labourers and non-union men from the machines. As the Webbs record, the employers, thinking that this single instance was instigated by the central body of the union, formed themselves into "the Central Association of Employers of Operative Engineers."<sup>1</sup> In the meantime the entire union of the engineers decided to stand behind the Oldham men, and they informed the employers that they too would strike if employers generally did not accede to the same demands. In their turn the employers issued a manifesto declaring that a strike at any one works would result in a general lockout, and then ignored the subsequent offers of the engineers to go to arbitration. In the ensuing lockout, the engineers had the support of the Christian Socialists, to whose aims, as we know, Mrs. Gaskell had shown herself very sympathetic.<sup>2</sup> Both sides in the dispute were adamant, the masters holding out for the complete destruction of the union itself, expressly denying "the men's right to take any collective action whatsoever." The men failed through lack of funds, and most of them found themselves forced to sign a document forswearing their trade union, in order to get their jobs back. They did not consider themselves bound by this document, which was in effect a piece of moral blackmail, and their union continued to

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<sup>1</sup> History of Trade Unionism (1920) ch.4.

<sup>2</sup> See ch.4 above.

thrive. Nothing was solved; organised capital simply proved to be more powerful than organised labour.

The Preston strike, too, was not simply a case of might defeating right. At a time when the prospects of trade were bad, the men demanded a rise of ten per cent, claiming that this was merely the amount of a reduction which they had willingly accepted three years before when trade was falling off. As with the strike of the engineers, the masters refused the demand, formed an association which they claimed was defensive, and locked the men out. They agreed to arbitration but would not accept the findings of the arbitration committee, preferring to starve the men out, which they eventually did. Again as with the engineers' strike, the masters considered that the fundamental issue was much more important than the incidental demands which led to the strike: it was one of who was to be the real masters of industry. And here too there was no satisfactory solution. The struggle was ultimately an economic one, and the outcome of future struggles would depend on which side could command the more money to keep going. Taking the situation to its logical conclusion, when the day came in which the hands had more funds than the masters, given the stubbornness of the masters, the whole economy of the cotton industry might founder. As it was, several masters of small firms were bankrupted by the strikes which did take place.

A study of North and South makes it evident that Mrs. Gaskell was acquainted with the complex problems of relationships between masters and men. A glance back at her description of the origins of the strike in Mary Barton, to compare it with North and South, will show how subtly she has altered her interpretation, given it new aspects, to fit the new movement in industry. In Mary Barton she describes the masters' position first, explaining that although they had won an order from a

foreign market, unless they could fill it as fast and as cheaply as possible, they would be undercut by their continental competitors, and as a result the trade would suffer, and, of course, the hands themselves must ultimately suffer from that. That is their position; this is their attitude:

But the masters did not choose to make all these facts known. They stood upon being the masters, and that they had a right to order work at their own prices (MB ch.15).

In North and South Thornton, speaking as a representative of the masters, declares:

Yes; the fools will have a strike. Let them. It suits us well enough. But we gave them a chance. They think trade is flourishing as it was last year. We see the storm on the horizon and draw in our sails. But because we don't explain our reasons, they won't believe we're acting reasonably. We must give them line and letter for the way we choose to spend or save our money (NS ch.15).

The attitude is essentially the same; only Thornton's rough directness makes a harsher impression than Mrs. Gaskell's authorial comment had done in the earlier novel. She might even be demonstrating, in this passage, the cause of the bias against the masters of which she was so vehemently accused in Mary Barton. Whatever the motive, she has exactly caught the tone of the masters' statements as they were reported for the Preston strike. Thornton shows himself to be much more conscious of the existence of the workers as a class, rather than as a certain number of hands, than Mr. Carson - by birth so much closer to them - or by the employers whom he represents.

In examining Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of the operatives' case, we can see how she does provide a better balance in North and South. In Mary Barton she explained the operatives' point of view as carefully as she had explained the attitude of the masters:

The masters (of the tottering foundation of whose prosperity they were ignorant) seemed doing well, and like gentlemen,

'lived at home in ease,' while they were starving, gasping on from day to day . . . It was bad enough to be poor, while by the labour of their thin hands, the sweat of their brows, the masters were made rich: but they would not be ground down to dust. No! they would fold their hands, and sit idle, and smile at the masters, whom even in death they could baffle (ME ch.15).

Higgins is made to explain the strikers' attitude to Margaret in North and South:

State o' trade! That's just a piece o' masters' humbug . . . The masters keep th' state o' trade in their own hands; and just walk it forward like a black bug-a-boo, to frighten naughty children with into being good . . . We help to make their profits, and we ought to help spend 'em. It's not that we want their brass so much this time, as we've done many a time afore. We'n gotten money laid by; and we're resolved to stand and fall together (17, p.183).

The working man has become as pragmatic as his master. Mrs. Gaskell now makes no outright demand for sympathy for the operatives as a body of men suffering from no fault of their own. In Mary Barton she showed individual reactions to the humiliating process of starvation, and the weakness of the united forces of the workmen against the organised system of capital. When we come to North and South, the union has become a powerful threat, a potential system in its own right. The men have taken a leaf out of the masters' book, and the masters are being forced to re-think their own position. Mrs. Gaskell shows the operative trying to separate the character of the workman as union-member and organiser from his private character, just as she shows Thornton the master separate from Thornton the son and lover.

This statement adds another dimension to the character of the struggle between employer and employed and an important qualification to Higgins' earlier rhetoric about fighting not for himself but for Boucher, with his eight children under working age, and for "th' cause o' justice" (NS ch.17). As it happens, Thornton and his mother were essentially right in thinking that the strike was a struggle for higher wages only

"on the face of the thing," and that the hands wanted "to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground" (NS ch.15). In the 1850's the struggle for the means of existence gave way to the struggle for power; the desperation and idealism of the Chartists were replaced by the political manoeuvrings of the trade unionists.

Mrs. Gaskell shows the new scene clearly, and with a subtlety which would not have been appropriate in Mary Barton. The masters and men of North and South are emphatically not the masters and men of her first industrial novel. In Mary Barton the manufacturer Carson had risen from the working classes, and we take this, on the surface, to imply that there are some points at which the Carsons and the Bartons might identify, and meet. But Mrs. Gaskell does not develop this implication: as we have seen, the whole tenor of the descriptions of the masters' and the men's ways of life in this novel only stresses the virtual impassibility of the gulf between them. They belong to different worlds, and can only communicate at the one point where these worlds meet, in bargaining for wages and conditions of employment. If Mary Barton were to marry Harry Carson, she would, as she plainly sees, rise up several steps in the social scale at one leap. Young Carson sees equally clearly that the marriage would be something of a degradation to him. His ridiculing caricature of the delegates illustrates the absolute objectivity with which he regards them. In the end of the novel Carson, risen from the working classes, has to ask Jem Wilson and Job Legh to explain their point of view to him. This may be just a miscalculation, or it may be that she is implying that the master risen from the working class is less sensitive to their legitimate demands than a man of different birth and wider cultivation. Carson is of course inadequately shown, yet the development from Carson to Thornton seems to imply such an

interpretation.

Although Thornton is the son of a manufacturer, he has had to make his own career, and has raised himself from poverty to affluence, in achieving a high position among the manufacturers of Milton-Northern. The achievement demanded sacrifices. He says in reply to Mr. Hale who has naïvely asked him if "the recollection of the heroic simplicity of the Homeric life" strengthened him in his purpose in his early struggles, that he was "too busy to think about any dead people, with the living pressing alongside of me, neck to neck, in the struggle for bread" (ch.10, p.127). As he explains the nature of his struggle, we begin to understand, if not to condone, his attitude to the operatives:

Now when I feel that in my own case it is no good luck, nor merit, nor talent, - but simply the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned, - indeed, never to think twice about them, - I believe that this suffering, which Miss Hale says is impressed on the countenances of the people of Milton, is but the natural punishment of some dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives (10, p.126).

This is not difficult to understand, when we consider the fact that Thornton, his mother and sister, had "absolutely lived upon water-porridge for years" (11, p.129) in order that he might succeed, and pay off his father's debts. In terms of W. R. Greg's social philosophy Thornton is wholly admirable. Greg, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> maintains that the poverty-stricken second generation of the manufacturing poor, if they are not suffering as a direct result of their own improvidence or dissolution, are suffering for that of their fathers, according to the laws of nature and the Old Testament. Thornton has atoned for the sins of his father before he begins life for himself. We are obviously intended to admire him - but not absolutely. In the struggle to succeed he has become a

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<sup>1</sup> See ch.4 above.

narrow person. Our initial reaction to him is probably meant to be the same as Margaret's:

What a pity such a nature should be tainted by his position as a Milton manufacturer . . . by that testing everything by the standard of wealth . . . And the poor men around him - they were poor because they were vicious - out of the pale of his sympathies because they had not his iron nature, and the capabilities that it gives him for being rich . . . I do think Mr. Thornton a very remarkable man, but personally I don't like him at all (pp.129-130).

Certainly Mrs. Gaskell intends that beginning from this position we should learn to understand Thornton, and through him, a considerable section of the class of successful manufacturers.

He is a much more credible figure than Carson. It would be impossible to imagine Thornton undergoing the simple kind of conversion which Mr. Carson so improbably underwent at the end of Mary Barton. Thornton's outlook is not likely to be changed, because it is not, like Carson's, founded on blindness to the men around him, but upon an awareness of their natures and their motives. This awareness is the result of the narrowness of his training - he needed to know the natures of the men around him to succeed against them - and of course also comes from his intelligence. It would be impossible too, to imagine Thornton marrying a Mary Barton, although not because of his snobbery, but because the whole background of members of the working class such as Bessy Higgins, is shown to be radically different from his, and incompatible with it. They are not different in the way that Harry Carson is from Mary Barton, for there, despite their apparently coming from two partially different worlds, the only effective difference is a material one. The unbridgeable gap between Thornton and someone like Bessy is one of culture, education, and pre-eminently of prejudice. As we see them at first, there is almost a natural enmity between Thornton's world and Higgins'.

The best of Mrs. Gaskell's achievement in North and South is that she has been able to show three distinct life-styles as they co-exist within the industrial town, and has succeeded in suggesting others; and the detachment which she shows in doing this is remarkable for the impassioned author of Mary Barton, or the author who has responded to and appreciated the pleasures of the retired life of Cranford. But before going on to assess the contribution which North and South made to the understanding of the troubled industrial scene which it portrays, I wish to consider the reaction of one contemporary critic, the reviewer of the novel for the Leader, presumably G. H. Lewes.<sup>1</sup> The Leader review is useful not only because it provides us with a contemporary reaction to North and South, but because it raises the whole question of the relevance and effectiveness of the social problem novel in the changed situation of the fifties.<sup>2</sup> We cannot afford, in studying the social-problem novel at this time, not to take Lewes' response into account, more particularly since his assessment of this novel is completely at variance with that of the modern critics.

In his review of North and South Lewes adopts an attitude of righteous indignation, lists eight technical errors which he says Mrs. Gaskell made in her account of the cotton industry,<sup>a</sup> and concludes:

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot be certain that the review was by Lewes. Although he was reviewing novels for the Leader at this time, the style is difficult to identify as his. The review is in vol.6 (1855) p.356.

<sup>2</sup> It may be somewhat significant of the changing interests of the reading public that North and South only received two full reviews, as far as I can find: the Leader review and one in the Athenaeum (7 April 1855) p.403 which contributes nothing of interest. It is only given a paragraph in Mrs. Oliphant's review in Blackwood's (see p. 290 ) Emile Montegut reviewed it in "Le Roman de Moeurs Industrielles en Angleterre" (Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 Oct. 1855).

(a) See p.328 below.

If our objections seem too technical, we have to allege in excuse that we take so deep an interest in the questions that agitate Lancashire and its trade arrangements; are so convinced that nothing but sound, strong, masculine, practical insight can aid their solution; are sure that in this, above all other social complications, sentimental yearnings and feverish idealisations only complicate matters; are so certain that if there are two classes that should give trade and masters-and-men questions a wide berth, these classes are clergymen and women; that we have taken pains to show, and it could only be shown by such technicalities, that our authoress knows too little of the Cotton Trade to be entitled to increase the confusion by writing about it.

He is essentially making the point that it is a bad social novel, likely to cause more damage than it sets out to repair. So angry is his criticism of it that he loses himself in the detail. Thus he is found to appear to contradict himself, when he first drives home his point:

The book is interesting, but how? By Thornton being made an untrue picture of a Lancashire millowner, by Higgins and the hands being made embodiments of Mrs. Gaskell's ideas of the workpeople's feelings, but not of their real feelings.

Towards the end of his review he tries to soften his criticisms by commenting:

It has all that purity of style and true appreciation of character and skill in its delineation for which Mrs. Gaskell has hardly a rival among our lady novelists.

Although the review might perhaps be accused of exaggeration, (as in this obviously-extravagant statement):

Men who can neither read nor write, and with capacities little removed above that of the swine, make fortunes in the trade: men with education and ideas are not more successful, rather less. . . .

he does articulate a question which must have begun to suggest itself in the mid-1850's, and is especially relevant to North and South:

as to assisting to solve vexed questions of capital and labour by a fiction, why take two round-about volumes to say what we can say in thirty words? There can be no solution of this question till both masters and men have learned that neither money, nor things purchasable by money, are the highest ends of man's being here.

Literature was conscious of its power as a mediator, but it may have overestimated its effectiveness. Perhaps the realisation of this, which could only come from an exploration like North and South, brought an end to the genre of the social-problem novel of factory life.

Certainly Mrs. Gaskell herself did not attempt another work in the same field after North and South. The question that remains is, was there any validity left even to such a discursive novel as this?

Yet where Lewes has to complain at what he sees as Mrs. Gaskell's ill-advised attempt at handling the current problems of the cotton industry, another contemporary reviewer, Mrs. Oliphant, complained in Blackwood's Magazine:

There is one feature of resemblance between Mrs. Gaskell's last work and Mr. Dickens' Hard Times. We are prepared in both for the discussion of an important social question; and in both, the story gradually slides off the public topic to pursue a course of its own . . . it is Mr. Thornton's fierce and rugged course of true love to which the author is most anxious to direct our attention; and we have little time to think of Higgins or his trades-union.<sup>1</sup>

She accuses Mrs. Gaskell further, of joining the vogue among writers of fiction of following Charlotte Brontë, and making her lovers hostile to each other. Although the difference between Lewes' review and Mrs. Oliphant's is largely one of the reviewer's own experience and taste, they share common ground in their disappointment with North and South. Modern critics, perhaps not so critical of Mrs. Gaskell's handling of the social problems of this novel as Lewes was, nor so eager to receive further instruction on what Mrs. Oliphant must have seen as an urgent problem, tend to agree with Barbara Hardy in considering it to be "the best of the three social novels." Professor Hardy goes on to say that Mrs. Gaskell "takes a step beyond Mary Barton and Ruth in the very mutedness of North and South," because "there is no trace of the stereo-typed

<sup>1</sup> "Modern Novelists Great and Small," 77 (May 1855) p.60.

fable of Mary Barton," nor of "that degree of simplification and crudity which escaped her control" in the latter novel.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Pollard too sees it as a high-water mark of achievement in the social novel:

North and South is a didactic work, a roman à thèse, like Ruth and Mary Barton, but the thesis is much less dominant. This is because it is better worked into the artistic realisation of the novel than in the earlier books. The areas of action and character in which it is primarily important are themselves much less important and less central within the work as a whole. Of greater significance, however, is the fact that Mrs. Gaskell has achieved a coalescence between personal and public stories in the relationship of the two major characters.<sup>2</sup>

What both critics seem to be arguing is that North and South is the better novel because it is much less centrally a social-problem novel, although neither of them openly admits as much as this.

Yet North and South is, centrally, a social novel. Arthur Pollard, in praising the integration of the thesis and the artistic realisation of the novel, implies that they are separate in the first place and that Mrs. Gaskell, the superior technician, has managed somehow to weld them together almost in the way that the metaphysical poet created his conceit. His mistake in the first instance is to fail to distinguish between a novel with a social thesis and a social novel. North and South depends for its unity not upon a thesis, such as Mrs. Gaskell had demonstrated in Mary Barton, but upon social analysis. Margaret, the title which Mrs. Gaskell suggested for her novel, is probably in this case more appropriate than North and South, suggested by Dickens, because Margaret Hale stands at the centre of the action, and has the opportunity of assessing both sides, master and man, in their social life. But the quality of her life and its values, too, is scrutinised. We must beware

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<sup>1</sup> "Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot" in Sphere History of Literature (ed. A. Pollard) 6, p.179.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Gaskell p.138.

in going too far in directly identifying Margaret and Mrs. Gaskell, because although Mrs. Gaskell may have been in a very similar position on her arrival in Manchester, the fact is that she was already married, and to a minister, when she arrived there, and that by the time she was writing North and South, she had lived in Manchester for twenty-two years.

What we have in North and South is a kind of descriptive analysis of several aspects of life in the new society of a manufacturing town; and it seems likely that Mrs. Gaskell did not in this case call the town Manchester was because she meant her picture of the town to have a more general application. It also shows that she was not writing a thesis-novel of the kind of Mary Barton.<sup>1</sup> Lewes is correct in his summary of the thesis of North and South, but it is a weak interpretation of the novel as a whole, grossly undervaluing Mrs. Gaskell's contribution. In the following pages I shall attempt to assess the originality and the quality of Mrs. Gaskell's contribution to the solution of the "vexed question" of capital and labour through her study of the character of Thornton. In doing so we need to bear in mind what Lewes could not grasp and what Mrs. Gaskell showed herself fully aware of, that simple solutions are never to be trusted, especially the idealistic one which Lewes suggests. Lewes short-sightedly accuses Mrs. Gaskell of writing from an experience which she has not had, and lists mistakes which he says arise from this ignorance. Yet none of these mistakes are serious,

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<sup>1</sup> Yet it is clear that she had Manchester in mind, for Thornton says to Mr. Hale of the invention of the steam-hammer

And this imagination of power, this practical realisation of a gigantic thought, came out of one man's brain in our good town (ch.9 p.122).

The inventor of the steam-hammer was James Nasmyth.

they are all mere technical points, which do not have to be learned by experience but can be found in books. His own mistake is much more serious when he assumes that her contribution would be significantly improved if only these few points were right. Mrs. Gaskell has used and explored another kind of experience, the experience of the whole person, in North and South. She shows the interaction between the characters and the society they live in.

(iii) Manchester Men and the Thorntons of Milton

David Shustermann has suggested that W. R. Greg was the original of Thornton in North and South,<sup>1</sup> but it is far more likely that Mrs. Gaskell simply put many of Greg's ideas into Thornton's mouth. Yet he may have had an important influence on Mrs. Gaskell's conception of the character of Thornton, for it seems that the friendship of the Gaskells and the Gregs grew steadily after the publication of Mary Barton. Greg attended Mr. Gaskell's church. But his review of Mary Barton, as we have seen, showed him to be almost entirely without understanding of Mrs. Gaskell's vision of the plight of the operatives, and fundamentally antagonistic to it. The review was republished in 1853 in his Essays in Political and Social Science. Although Mrs. Gaskell did not reply to Greg's criticisms of her first novel at the time they were written except to seem to agree and be instructed, we might guess that she took them seriously to heart. She wrote to Chapman that she had not troubled herself about the reviews of Mary Barton, "except the one or two which I respect because I know something of the character of the writer," (38, 3 Jan. 1849). In a way, the whole of North and South is by way of an answer to Greg, and an attempt to integrate his views with Mrs. Gaskell's own. This is very evident in her characterisation of Thornton.

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<sup>1</sup> "W. R. Greg and Mrs. Gaskell," Philological Quarterly 36 (April 1957) pp. 268-272.

Certainly Greg approved of North and South; he found "no fault in it,"<sup>1</sup> but - ironically enough - did not think it had the genius of Mary Barton. We shall trace Greg's influence on the novel as we go through it.

It is also possible that Edmund Potter had a strong influence on North and South. Potter, a calico printer, later M.P. for Carlisle, belonged to a family which was very prominent in Manchester. In his book on The Manchester School of Economics (1960), W. D. Grampp describes the section of the Manchester businessmen who supported the Free Trade movement, "the middle-class radicals," which included Edmund Potter: "in energy, persistence, ingenuity, courage and power, they were the most important group in the school."<sup>2</sup> Like Greg, Potter attended Cross Street Chapel, but he was much closer to the Gaskells than Greg. Mr. Gaskell frequently spent his holidays with the Potters in Scotland, and once went on a walking-tour with Edmund Potter. Unlike Greg, Potter seems to have been most sympathetic to the argument of Mary Barton. In Mrs. Gaskell's own words, he thought it "so true that he is going to buy it for his men," (35, 23 Dec. 1848, to Catherine Winkworth). Generally speaking, he was deeply involved in the kind of problem which engaged Mrs. Gaskell's attention, and was the author of several essays on contemporary problems. Among these are two which particularly merit attention: a pamphlet on the Preston strike - A Letter to the Working Classes (1853), which reflects the same ideas expressed by Thornton at Ashworth.<sup>3</sup> and a later pamphlet on Trades Unions and Their Tendencies, published in 1861. There are several echoes of Thornton's phraseology, and a great many of his practical ideas, reflected in both of these pamphlets. Perhaps the most obvious is Potter's warnings of the threat of American competition in the cotton industry, and Thornton's "the Americans are getting their yarns so into the general market, that our

<sup>2</sup> 1, p.9.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Introduction to North and South by A. W. Ward ed. (1966).

<sup>3</sup> See above p. 241

only chance is producing them at a lower rate" (18, p.195), or Mrs. Gaskell's own attribution of the crash which ruined Thornton to "the immense speculations that had come to light in making a bad end in America," (ch.50, p.510). Potter's pamphlet is the only obvious source for this mistake of Mrs. Gaskell - the Americans were no real threat to British cotton at this time.

Although Mrs. Gaskell was probably influenced by both these men, and possibly by the opinions of other manufacturers whom she was likely to meet in her husband's church, in her conception of the character of Thornton, we can be fairly certain that the character as a whole is an original. This is apparent from her letters, just as it is apparent that she took great pains with Thornton all along, because of the special purpose he was to fulfill. She wrote to Emily Shaen (née Winkworth) when she was four-fifths through the novel:

Mr. Thornton ought to be developing himself . . . but hitherto Thornton is good; and I'm afraid of a touch marring him; and I want to keep his character consistent with itself, and large and strong and tender, and yet a master. That's my next puzzle. I am enough on not to hurry; and yet I don't know if waiting and thinking will bring any new ideas about him (217, 27 Oct. 1854).

This passage provides us with an important key to understanding the ambivalence of Mrs. Gaskell's attitude to Thornton - or rather, what appears, on a fairly close reading, to be ambivalence, but on closer examination turns out to be a demonstration of the complexity of the private and public man, and a very precise placing of him on a scale which includes both aspects and integrates them. It was written, as Mrs. Gaskell says in her letter, at the point in the composition of the novel where Mrs. Hale has died and Mr. Bell has come to stay with the Hales. We must now turn to the beginning of the novel to see how Thornton has been developed up to the point where his further

development is a "puzzle."

On his first appearance in North and South we are made aware of Thornton's complexity. In his interview with Margaret and her father in their hotel, we learn first that he is a busy man, "impatient at the loss of his time on a market-day." We are told that he is "in habits of authority," which is soon afterwards demonstrated by the ready response of the Hales' landlord to "the short sharp remonstrance of . . . the wealthy manufacturer." He seems to have no experience of women, being as abashed as an adolescent boy in Margaret's presence. On meeting her "his unready words would not come;" as he sits opposite her he feels himself to be "a great rough fellow, with neither a grace nor a refinement about him," and as he leaves he feels "more awkward and self-conscious in every limb than he had ever done in all his life before." And this is seen to be partly a social awkwardness as well as a sexual one, because even after he has recovered from the shock of meeting the beautiful Margaret, instead of the little girl he expected, he cannot make light conversation, his responses to her conversational gambits are "little, short, abrupt answers" (ch.7).

This in itself is simple enough, and not inconsistent, nor more than the reader might have expected, even thirteen years after Mrs. Stone's Marquis' amusement at the thought of "the Cotton-bags enacting the sentimental!"<sup>1</sup> But Mrs. Gaskell makes much more of it by adding indications of the actual delicacy of the social balance between Thornton and Margaret. On her side, she "always gave strangers the impression of haughtiness," and, as she speaks, her lips move "so slightly . . . not breaking the cold serene look of her face with any variation from the

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<sup>1</sup> William Langshawe ch.1, p.14 and see ch.3 below.

one lovely haughty curve" (ch.7). Thornton's discomfiture is not entirely brought about by his own inexperience. But this "impression of haughtiness" provokes a reaction in Thornton which has interesting implications in the later development of his character.

Immediately upon their meeting in the hotel room, Margaret tells Thornton that her father has gone to rent a house in Crampton. In accordance with the "largeness" of his nature, Thornton has already looked at the house, "in compliance with a request of Mr. Bell's that he would assist Mr. Hale to the best of his power." We have in what follows not only the first indication that a different order prevails in the society of the manufacturing north, but also the assurance that Thornton himself is the product of that society. Before he actually sees Margaret, he has already assigned the Hales to their social position, but now, impressed by her grande dame manner, he instinctively recognises a social order which depends on gentility and the personal refinement of good breeding, rather than on the cash nexus:

Mr. Thornton had thought that the house in Crampton was really just the thing; but now that he saw Margaret, with her superb ways of moving and looking, he began to feel ashamed of having imagined that it would do very well for the Hales, in spite of a certain vulgarity in it which had struck him at the time of his looking it over (7, p.100).

But the point is that Thornton does immediately see his mistake, and subsequently treats the Hales with what might be called due respect. Yet he resents himself doing so in this first meeting with Margaret, her "quiet coldness of demeanour" striking him as "contemptuousness," and her whole attitude as "superciliousness." Of course he is not entirely wrong, in that Margaret has also prejudged him, setting him down as a tradesman - albeit a "great tradesman," "not quite a gentleman; but that was hardly to be expected." Mrs. Gaskell has managed

to convey a great deal in this brief scene, relating Thornton's abashment to the love-theme and to the cultural theme at the same time.

She is not quite so successful with the next meeting of the prospective lovers, but in between we are given Thornton's impression of Margaret in his own words to his mother. The language of his description betrays Mrs. Gaskell's unfortunate weakness in occasionally lapsing into the style of the silver-fork school: "She held herself aloof from me as if she had been a queen, and I her humble, unwashed vassal," (ch9, p.117). Yet this is more or less in keeping with the earnestly boyish side of Thornton which Mrs. Gaskell makes quite explicit in Margaret's examination of him from across the room as he speaks to her father, at their next meeting. We are obviously meant to admire the character shown in this description:

in Mr. Thornton's face the straight brows fell low over the clear, deep-set earnest eyes, which, without being unpleasantly sharp, seemed intent enough to penetrate into the very heart and core of what he was looking at (ch.10, p.121).

His "rare bright smile" has the effect of "sudden sunlight," and works a transition from

the severe and resolved expression of a man ready to do and dare everything, to the keen honest enjoyment of the moment, which is seldom shown so fearlessly and instantaneously except by children (*ibid*).

The description is wholly romantic, and the suggestion of boyish eagerness is reinforced when Mrs. Gaskell zooms in, as it were, to pick up the conversation between Thornton and Mr. Hale. Margaret's presence has been forgotten as he enthusiastically describes the wonder of the steam-hammer.

The passage which follows is crucial to our understanding the better side of Thornton's philosophy, the ultimate purpose in human terms of the apparently self-perpetuating vulgar struggle for money and

power which absorbs the energies of the inhabitants of the industrial north. Here again Thornton echoes the Greg of the Essays, but with such a lead in we are obviously meant to take it without reservation. He never manages to express this so well again in the novel, so it deserves full quotation:

And this imagination of power, this practical realization of a gigantic thought, came out of one man's brain in our good town. That very man has it within him to mount, step by step, on each wonder he achieves to higher marvels still. And, I'll be bound to say, we have many among us who, if he were gone, could spring into the breach and carry on the war which compels, and shall compel, all material power to yield to science (10, p.122).

The end of this materialism is the conquest of materialism itself: the hard-headed businessman is a Utopian idealist, or so it seems. The idealism of his next statement is also laudable, and worth quoting as being central to his character:

I won't deny that I am proud of belonging to a town . . . the necessities of which give birth to such grandeur of conception. I would rather be a man toiling, suffering - nay, failing and successful - here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South (10, p.122)<sup>1</sup>

Here the dialogue between Thornton and Margaret begins, with Margaret not so much criticising Thornton's ideals, as his blindness to the under-side of them.

His boyishness has its drawbacks: immaturity, a selfish shirking of the responsibilities of an adult. Before Margaret points this out in this scene Mrs. Gaskell herself, in an interruption more characteristic of Mary Barton than of this later novel, has drawn her reader's attention to it in a comment with wider application:

Margaret went less abroad, among machinery and men; saw less of power in its public effect, and, as it happened, she was

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<sup>1</sup> We might note in passing an impression of a new civic consciousness.

thrown with one or two of those who, in all measures affecting masses of people, must be acute sufferers for the good of the many. The question always is, has everything been done to make the suffering of these exceptions as small as possible? Or, in the triumph of the crowded procession, have the helpless been trampled on, instead of being gently lifted aside out of the roadway of the conqueror . . . ? (3, p.108).

Margaret certainly extracts a great deal of the impressiveness from Thornton's speech, by showing how the wonderful world of technological progress appears from another, and equally valid, point of view, in speaking of "the gambling spirit of trade, which seems requisite to force out these wonderful inventions." She directs his and the reader's attention to the wider social responsibility of the mature person, in pointing out "the terrible expression . . . of a sullen sense of injustice" which she has seen on the faces of the Milton poor. Her brief sketch suggests another picture of Thornton - not the pioneer of civilisation, the idealistic member of an idealistic society forging forward, making enormous sacrifices to a brave new world of the future. The other Thornton is indeed a vulgar tradesman, an opportunist out to glorify himself and content to accept the fact of the sacrifice of others, wilfully blind to what he does not wish to see. To reinforce this impression of him as anti-social, Mrs. Gaskell has him complain of the "interference" of Parliament in the alteration of the factory chimneys to prevent the pollution of the atmosphere. Although for economic reasons he had already had his changed, he says that if they had not been, he "should have waited to be informed against and fined, and given all the trouble in yielding" that he possibly could.

By this point in the novel Mrs. Gaskell has begun in earnest to establish the unity behind the apparently contradictory natures of the public and the private Thornton. She is already succeeding in containing the idealist and the "money-spinning spider" under one skin.

Thornton's description of the early cotton manufacturers in this chapter (10) shows an intelligent awareness of the danger of wealth and power in the hands of ignorant men. He perceives that "because a man was successful in his ventures, there was no reason that in all other things his mind should be well-balanced," (p.124). Yet he is limited in that he does not apply the lesson of experience to the new situation. He says that the original manufacturers of cotton came from the same class as their workers, and owed their success to "mother-wit, as regarded opportunities and probabilities." He does not account for the change which has taken place in the class of manufacturers over the seventy years since these men were "crushing human bone and flesh," except in terms of economics:

But by-and-by came a reaction; there were more factories, more masters; more men were wanted. The power of masters and men became more evenly balanced (19, p.125).

Obviously this is not the only reason for the improvement of the class as a whole: education must have been a major factor in the process. Yet he only states this indirectly in relating his own rise from rags to riches; he admits with pride that he had "such a mother as few are blest with; a woman of strong power, and firm resolve," one whom he silently thanks for his training. What he does not seem to realise is that all his description and argument tend to prove that the operatives of the present, if they were given the same opportunities as himself and the children of those early "raw, crude, materials," might show a corresponding improvement. In a kind of defensive way he describes the operatives as "self-indulgent, sensual people," not worthy of his hatred, to be looked upon "with contempt for their poorness of character" (10, p.126).

Thornton is wholly identified with the masters. For him, the

division between classes in the cotton industry is one of "prudent wisdom and good conduct" on one side, and "ignorance and improvidence" on the other:

It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not be always as a master, but as an overlooker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order (10, p.125).

From men given to a "wild extravagance of living" the cotton lords have become the representatives of authority, and the guardians of order, according to Thornton. But in his account of the improvement of the standard of these men, attributing it to economic necessity, he has left it ambiguous whether, if they still had the same absolute power, they would not still use it absolutely, for their own ends. The change after all has not been a radical one - the cotton lords are still wielding a nearly absolute power, only now it is to more immediately practical ends, like not wasting money by refusing to alter their chimneys to consume the smoke of the factories, or refusing to tolerate the "interference" of the recognised authority of Parliament. The cotton lords are to decide what constitutes valid authority; anyone connected with the industry but not connected with the management of it, must necessarily be the enemy of authority and order.

In his next long discussion of the relative position of master and man, Thornton emerges as less attractive and more authoritarian. When Margaret, very reasonably, asks him why the masters do not explain to the men their reasons for refusing to raise wages, he answers:

Do you give your servants reasons for your expenditure, or your economy in the use of your own money? We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it (15, p.164).

Margaret and her father - and behind them, we feel, a whole area of society which they represent - are asking Thornton to do precisely what he is trying not to do. He explains:

I agree with Miss Hale so far as to consider our people in the condition of children, while I deny that we, the masters, have anything to do with the making or keeping them so. I maintain that despotism is the best kind of government for them; so that in the hours in which I come in contact with them I must necessarily be an autocrat (15, p.167).

We can feel, and are probably meant to feel, Thornton's acute discomfort when he is asked to think of the hands as men. Yet, like his contempt for the workpeople, this betrays, by its vehemence, a fear of them which he has probably not confessed even to himself. In a way which Mrs. Gaskell does not show quite fully enough, it is possible to sympathise with Thornton. If he had wished to have a personal relationship with his workers, the task of contacting them all would have been impossible, even in a limited way. Sheer weight of numbers would preclude the possibility of sustaining these relationships. It might be feasible within the limits of a community like Robert Owen's New Lanark to exert an influence upon the operatives' lives, and even give some direction to them. But even Owen delegated the greater burden of what might be called this patriarchal responsibility though he himself to some extent vetted the applicants for jobs in his factory.

Other factors operate against the establishment of any relationship beyond the contractual one. The workers in the cotton industry were originally recruited from the ranks of casual labourers, men used to wandering around the country, taking work as they wanted it and moving on when they had enough money, or simply felt like a change. They were recruited, too, from the ranks of the hand-loom weavers, men who were accustomed to working as the necessity arose, not being entirely

dependant on the produce of their looms for a living. It must obviously have been difficult to train men of these habits to the service of the machine and its regular, monotonous demands. In order to adapt him to the requirements of machine-based industry, it may well have been necessary to force the operative to lose his sense of individual identity during the time he was tending the machine. The quickest way of doing this was to treat him as part of the machinery - anonymous, replaceable - indeed more easily replaced than the machinery, and hence less important. A study of the memoirs and comments of owners of large factories at the time clearly shows that one of their central concerns was the discipline of their workers.<sup>1</sup>

In the mills of the Ashworth family at Turton and Egerton, which were for many years the showpiece of the industry for the attention which was paid to the well-being of the operatives, there was a rigid code of discipline. Rhodes Boyson describes the rules which were laid down for them:

The Ashworth mills had large rule boards, prominently displayed which drew attention to the virtues of thrift, order, promptitude, and perseverance. All operatives had to come to work 'clean washed daily' and 'putting on a change of shirts twice a week' and they had to attend 'on Sabbath days, either at a place of worship or Sunday School' . . . Anyone found drunk in the Ashworth mills was fined 5s., and care was taken for their reformation . . . Any seduction of mill operatives or their daughters was severely dealt with: if the man did not marry the girl immediately he was dismissed. Testimonials were often demanded before workers were taken on.<sup>2</sup>

As well as this, there were fines for bad work or misbehaviour at work, spinners were fined a shilling for swearing, being late for work, or

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<sup>1</sup> It is also brought out particularly strongly in Kay-Shuttleworth's Scarsdale I, 14 and 29 (1860) which is largely about a "half savage race of hardy men," driven into "the hot atmosphere of the factory, in which they were under a discipline more exact than that of the soldier, and more regular and engrossing than of any other form of labour."

<sup>2</sup> The Ashworth Cotton Enterprise (1970) ch.6.

being 'out of the room!' All these rules were in operation in small communities where the relationship between the employer and his operatives, at least in the 1840's, was relatively close. Ashworth did a great deal to improve the living conditions of his workpeople, so that an outsider might well suppose that there would be little need for such a system of discipline. We can see what the general character of the operatives must have been to require this, but we can also see how it was possible for the employer to be the autocrat described by Thornton. In describing the Ashworths' relationship with their men, Boyson comments:

it is not surprising that Henry Ashworth confessed to a public meeting in 1844 that by their strict action against drunkenness, disorderly conduct, or keeping improper company, 'they were sometimes thought to exercise a very despotic authority.'

The fines, of course, generally went into the pocket of the employers, adding to their profits an average of 13 per cent of the money which would have been paid in wages. We return then to Mrs. Gaskell's original problem, of how the system affected the employer himself; not forgetting the fact that he was indeed "in it for the money."

Again it is instructive to look at the Ashworths, particularly at Henry Ashworth, for a guide to understanding the theories of Thornton. Although Ashworth was a Quaker and an enlightened factory-owner, his views are so close to Thornton's that he might have been the original of the character. Boyson sums up Ashworth's opinions on the relationship of masters and men in a way which immediately suggests a comparison with Thornton. An agreement of partnership signed in 1861 by Ashworth and his two sons included the statement that "the object of the partnership" was "moneymaking!"<sup>1</sup> Ashworth had complete faith that in making money for himself he was also raising the standard of living of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 6, p.84.

his employees. He resented any kind of "interference" by parliament or any other public body with private enterprise "for social purposes." Like Thornton, he believed that the cotton trade was begun and brought to its present position by common men "possessing little or no outward property, but being richly endowed by those valuable qualities, persevering industry, intelligence and enterprise." Like Thornton too, he did not realise that the time when a man could rise from nothing to being a master manufacturer on the strength of these qualities was gone. He was proud of being a mill-owner, and had no wish to give up trade to become a landed gentleman. His sons were to follow in his footsteps, and were "at work in the factories by their middle teens," a system which Mrs. Thornton would have wholeheartedly approved.

This look at some of Ashworth's ideas makes it clear that a man might have a clear conscience in his position as a master manufacturer once he convinced himself - as Thornton has done - that, because the interests of master and man are identical, by enriching himself he is benefitting his employees. Unlike Thornton at this point in the novel, Ashworth also applied the obverse of the theory, that the well-being of his men was bound to affect the prosperity of the employer. He went to considerable trouble to ensure that his men were comfortable and contented outside their work, as well as in the factory. But of course, this was possible in the small communities which Ashworth had built to house his employees; to establish such a system in big industrial complexes like Manchester was not feasible. And even Ashworth, as Boyson is careful to point out, was always capable of bending his principles to suit the economics of the current situation, and was given to putting forward quite feeble moral justifications of what were only means of making more money. Thornton is more honest:

I will use my best discretion - from no humbug or philanthropic feeling, of which we have had rather too much in the North - to make wise laws and come to just decisions in the conduct of my business - laws and decisions which work for my own good in the first instance - for theirs in the second (15, p.167).

He has a sound case all through this part of the novel; it is difficult to penetrate the reasonableness of this defence:

You suppose that our men are puppets of dough, ready to be moulded into any amiable form we please. You forget we have only to do with them for less than a third of their lives; and you seem not to perceive that the duties of a manufacturer are far larger and wider than those merely of an employer of labour: we have a wide commercial character to maintain, which makes us into the great pioneers of civilisation (15, pp.170-1).

We might be even more impressed by his defence of his autocratic attitude in the factory:

I choose to be the unquestioned and irresponsible master of my hands, during the hours that they labour for me. But those hours past, our relation ceases; and then comes in the same respect for their independence that I myself exact (ibid.)

His argument, that he will be straight and honest in his dealings with his men, and his respect for their independence, commands in turn our respect for him. But behind all this there is the powerful qualification which his earlier statement about the poorness of character of the operatives leads us to make to the real sincerity of this. There is the unavoidable suspicion that it might just suit Thornton to adopt this attitude: it saves him from having to be involved with men whom he - perhaps unconsciously - hates because he fears them.

The suspicion is there, but it is hardly allowed to become more than a suspicion; we see too much of the "large, generous" side of his nature to ever be able to condemn Thornton outright as a master. Yet Mrs. Gaskell has managed to suggest the limitations which being a master manufacturer with ambitions towards becoming a "merchant prince" impose upon the whole man. This she has done very cleverly, by embodying the

best and the worst of the class in its clearest form, in the person of Mrs. Thornton and in the environment of her home. Both Mrs. Thornton and Fanny are shown as characters who are hard to like, even though it is clear that Mrs. Gaskell means us to respect Mrs. Thornton's honesty and strength. Thornton himself necessarily shares some of our repulsion by association: he is shown to be so close to his mother that the reader must be influenced in his reading of his character from what he gathers of hers. Her speech and behaviour is made to run almost parallel to his, and again we have the suspicion that her opinions are only her son's without the varnish which he puts on them, and perhaps are more truly representative of the majority of manufacturers in their unguarded moments. There are indications to show that this was an intentional technique of indirection.

The element of boastful pride which characterises most of Mrs. Thornton's speech is not absent from Thornton's own representations of himself. We have heard him describe the cotton lords, and of course himself among them, as "the great pioneers of civilisation." His mother's attitude to the Hales is exactly the same as Thornton's had been when he looked at the house in Crampton for them. She echoes Thornton's phrase about being too concerned in his struggle with the living to have had time to study the works of the dead, i.e. the classics, and joins it to his contempt for the style of life which both imagine characterises the south, personified by Mr. Bell. Thornton has spoken of "slow days of careless ease" (10, p.122); his mother speaks of "men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges" (15, p.159), men of leisure as opposed to the dynamic Milton men, who "ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the works of today" (15, p.159). She speaks of this with "the pride that apes humility," a phrase which

emphasises the narrowness of her mind, as well as the unattractiveness of her nature. Later in the same chapter we are told that, in talking of the impending strike, Thornton's face "assumed a likeness to his mother's worst expression, which immediately repelled" Margaret (15, p.163).

In her visit to the Hales the worst of Mrs. Thornton is shown. She is cold, partly from shyness, partly from her consciousness of being much higher in the social scale than the Hales. She utters "all the stereotyped commonplaces that most people can find to say with their senses blindfolded" (12, p.139). This is understandable in the situation, but a more revealing comment is made upon the character by Mrs. Gaskell as she describes how Mrs. Thornton assesses the Hales, judging objects by their utility, measuring everything by the cash nexus:

Margaret was busy embroidering a small piece of cambric for some little article of dress for Edith's expected baby - "Flimsy, useless work," as Mrs. Thornton observed to herself. She liked Mrs. Hale's double knitting far better; that was sensible of its kind. The room was altogether full of knick-knacks, which must take a long time to dust; and time to people of limited income was money (12, p.139).

When she boasts of her son's fame and cross-questions Margaret about it she betrays a certain vulgarity and a narrow pride which is stronger than the ordinary social conventions of the middle class:

May I again ask you, Miss Hale, from whose account you formed your favourable opinion of him? A mother is curious and greedy of commendation of her children, you know (15, p.161).

As with her son, it is hinted that Mrs. Thornton confuses material progress with the progress of civilisation, and power with spiritual progress. She can have no shame for her pride in her son's achievement, justifying it by something like the Puritan ethic of economic success demonstrating spiritual health - "her merchants be like princes." But Mrs. Gaskell never clearly condemns this attitude. As I shall show, she balances

Mrs. Thornton's bad points with a number of virtues which, if they cannot make her attractive personally, at least render her a very admirable woman.

Perhaps we can see most plainly Mrs. Gaskell's denial of the combined cotton lords claims to be great civilisers, or even cultured, in the suggestions of negativity which surround Mrs. Thornton. In her first description of her Mrs. Gaskell writes that "there was no great variety in her countenance" (9, p.116). She is sitting in a "grim handsomely-furnished dining-room," mending a fine table-cloth. Although she disparages the idle life of southerners, she herself has not much to do, and Fanny would seem to epitomise everything which the Thorntons criticise about southern life:

Fanny had taken up her interminable piece of worsted-work, over which she was yawning; throwing herself back in her chair, from time to time, to gaze at vacancy, and think of nothing at her ease (18, p.195).

Mrs. Thornton's usefulness belongs very much to the past. Thornton cannot have candles when he wants them, not wishing to interfere in any of "the small domestic regulations that Mrs. Thornton observed, in habitual remembrance of her old economies" (18, p.193).

By extending the technique of indirection, Mrs. Gaskell succeeds in implying the sterility of the Thorntons' world without absolutely applying it to them. Mrs. Thornton's drawing-room is kept like a museum: life has stopped there, and a rationalised, mechanical and pointless existence has taken over:

There was no one in the drawing-room. It seemed as though no one had been in it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence. The walls were pink and gold; the pattern on the carpet represented bunches of flowers on a light ground, but it was carefully covered up in the centre by a linen drugget, glazed and colourless. The window-curtains were lace; each chair

and sofa had its own particular veil of netting or knitting. Great alabaster groups occupied every flat surface, safe from dust under their glass shades. In the middle of the room, right under the bagged-up chandelier, was a large circular table, with smartly-bound books arranged at regular intervals round the circumference of its polished surface, like gaily-coloured spokes of a wheel. Everything reflected light, nothing absorbed it (15, p.158).

The whole house is dominated by the sound of the machinery of the mill. Although it is quite plain what Mrs. Gaskell thinks of this, we can be sure of her disapproval by referring back to Margaret's impression of the house at Crampton, the decoration of which she contrasts with the plainness and simplicity which are of themselves the framework of elegance" (7, p.98). Thornton and his mother cannot escape the implication of the sterility of their environment, the uncreativity of the very atmosphere of the dining-room where Mrs. Thornton prefers to sit, with "not a book about" except the Bible Commentaries of Matthew Henry, while Fanny works ham-fistedly at her "accomplishment" of piano-playing upstairs. There is an unmistakable incongruity between Thornton's boast of being a pioneer of civilisation, Mrs. Thornton's boast about a full, busy life, and the petrified atmosphere of their home. We can be sure that Margaret, with her refined taste, her reading in Dante, and her cultured manners, is going to make heavy weather of living there when she marries Thornton. Although the game of casually referring to status symbols, indulged in at the dinner-party by the ladies, is merely dull to her at the time, it will probably drive her to distraction when she has to suffer it regularly.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Gaskell was aware of how unattractive the prospect of living at Marlborough Mill was. She wrote to Catherine Winkworth:

What do you think of a fire burning down Mr. Thornton's mills and house as a help to failure? Then Margaret would rebuild them larger & better & need not go & live there when she's married (211, 11 to 14 Oct. 1854).

There is nothing attractive about the life which Mrs. Thornton has made for herself after her son's success. Looking at her objectively, we can see her as an example of a woman of sterling worth, whose usefulness has passed too late for her to adapt to their new affluence, but not soon enough for her to retire comfortably. Mrs. Stone showed the same tragedy of waste in the wives of William Langshawe and his friend Balshawe, but chose only to show the humorous, and more attractive side of the problem. Mrs. Gaskell deserves high praise for having the courage to show the uglier side, for taking such a woman as Mrs. Thornton seriously, because of her influence and the influence of such as her on the industrial society is potent still, as the novel is being written. Yet she deserves even greater praise for showing the whole woman, in particular for showing where the ugly and the attractive sides meet, and are inseparable.

In many ways the characterisation of Mrs. Thornton is much better done than that of Thornton himself. There is none of the contradiction in her that is implied, and often appears, in her statement about having to make Thornton "large and strong and tender, and yet a master." When Margaret Hale asks her what the men will strike for, she answers:

'For the mastership and ownership of other people's property,' said Mrs. Thornton, with a fierce snort. 'That is what they always strike for . . . the truth is, they want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground. They are always trying at it; they always have it in their minds; and every five or six years, there comes a struggle between masters and men' (15, p.162).

The spontaneity of this reaction has an authentic ring to it, especially when it is compared to the accounts of the masters' attitude to the strikers at Preston in contemporary journals. Beside it, Thornton's comments and explanation are pale, adding nothing to these contemporary accounts. Mrs. Thornton's comments on the atmosphere of a mob of strikers, too, have a directness which has an authentic tone:

I have known the time when I have had to thread my way through a crowd of white, angry men, all swearing they would have Makinson's blood as soon as he ventured to show his nose out of his factory (15, p.162).

Her manner of describing these things, matter-of-fact, making no excuses for herself, is more convincing than Thornton's attempts to translate his experience and knowledge into a form which the Hales will recognise and understand. These comments on the situation are felt to be at least honest, and we feel, too, that there may be some truth in Mrs. Thornton's explanation of the atmosphere of master-men relationships:

South country people are often frightened by what our Darkshire men and women only call living and struggling. But when you've been ten years among a people who are always owing their betters a grudge, and only waiting for an opportunity to pay it off, you'll know whether you are a coward or not, take my word for it (15, p.163).

It may not be right to live like this, but it is practical. What comes through clearly in the speeches and character of Mrs. Thornton is that her way of life is an established one. She is as surely realised as her son; and the society of the north that they represent is shown as an alternative to the life of the south, although a radically different one.

#### (iv) Other Themes and Resolution

North and South is also structured by other themes. In North and South, as in Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell expounds a view of life which sees humanity as frail, heavily afflicted. Her characters, as Dickens ruefully commented, are "unsteady on their legs." Life is sapped by death and disease; and strength and determination are perhaps made much of in contrast to this. Equally it is a radical novel in the way in which its characters challenge society. The nonconformist tradition is apparent in the sympathy for Margaret's brother who has had to leave England because he refused to accept the cruelties of naval discipline. He, his father,

Thornton, Margaret, and Higgins are all devoted to their own conceptions of justice.

Then, there is the theme of education and self-education; one which Dickens had explored in Hard Times, and which we have seen was a topic of striking contemporary interest.

See over . . .

And at the time, the need for the merchant prince or the clerk to prove himself by going to a lyceum or really learning something, seems to have been a kind of symbol in life and in fiction, of the aspirations of the new age. But in Thornton this is excessive, somewhat extraordinary.

Not only does Mrs. Gaskell show Thornton's exceptional, unusual effort at self-education, but she also puts Milton in the balance against Oxford, which, in the person of Mr. Bell, supports its life on the rents from Milton. Mrs. Gaskell, a nonconformist with a weakness for the Church,<sup>1</sup> supports this balance rather well. Only that year, the year in which North and South was being serialised in Household Words, had Parliament passed the third reading of the Oxford University Bill, abolishing Test oaths on matriculating and on taking the B.A. degree. She herself, as her letters show, was culture-conscious in the high-minded, self-conscious Manchester way, fully seeing the necessity to stress the importance of culture in a world increasingly materialistic: something given heavy emphasis again in Scarsdale. In the struggle for civilisation in Britain in the nineteenth century the workers and the machine were seen either as a threat or an ally. Mrs. Gaskell succeeds here in showing their potential either way.

Although Mrs. Gaskell indicates the forces which operate against civilisation or "sweetness and light" in the north, she still leaves us with what I think is her conviction that the future lies there. She does this without a sense of sadness, nor of joy, but with a sense of courage for the future. The future is at least interesting, and open, as it is in Bleak House. Darkshire people have at least a sense of purpose and direction, the strength and the courage to face up to their

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<sup>1</sup> For a perceptive discussion of Mrs. Gaskell's inclination towards the established Church see H. P. Collins' "The Naked Sensibility: Elizabeth Gaskell" (op. cit. p. 119 above).

shortcomings if and when they are brought round to recognising them. We may not like Mrs. Thornton, but we can respect and admire her in a way which it is impossible to imagine ourselves doing with Margaret's aunt, Mrs. Shaw, whose environment is at least as sterile as Mrs. Thornton's, and worse, it is so in a self-perpetuating way. Edith will follow in her mother's footsteps, and never think of change. Mrs. Gaskell shows Thornton's potential for growth and development, as much through his mother as in himself.

By the time of writing to Emily Shaen about her problem of how to show the process of development in Thornton, Mrs. Gaskell has begun to establish her point that North and South can learn from each other, mainly through the Hales, Margaret and her father. Indeed, Mrs. Gaskell has not been given enough credit for her achievement in portraying Mr. Hale. Having gone through the shattering experience of abandoning his religious vocation, and the security and status of his position, he is the only truly unbiassed character in the novel. In his quiet way he offers a constructive compromise between the narrow enthusiasm and egotism of the north, and the purposeless triviality of the south. It is probably significant that he looks to the future in the north, having found nothing in the south once he has given up the Established Church. One of the most favourable comments Mrs. Gaskell has to make about the north is made indirectly by the fact that Mr. Hale fits in there. Although he has passed all his life in the south, his judgement of Mr. Bell's life anticipates the Thorntons' - "He has lived an easy life in a college all his days" (4, p.72). He is more likely the mouthpiece for Mrs. Gaskell, for we find him at this early stage in the novel expressing an opinion which it is evident throughout, as we have noted, is Mrs. Gaskell's own. When Margaret asks him what have manufacturers to do with "the accomplishments of a gentleman?" he replies:

some of them seem to be really fine fellows, conscious of their own deficiencies, which is more than many a man at Oxford is. Some want resolutely to learn, though they have come to man's estate. Some want their children to be better instructed than they themselves have been (4, p.72).

Yet he feels the pain of leaving Helstone very deeply; therefore his enthusiasm for the north, and his genuine attempt at understanding its values and attitudes, commands respect both for himself and for the north simultaneously.

After the death of Mrs. Hale, and the disappointment of finding Margaret out in a lie, Thornton's character is shown developing from within itself. The strike is over, and he is on the way to failure in his business. Immediately he begins to be admirable as what he is, a manufacturer. Paradoxically enough, the process starts in his interview with Higgins, sent by Margaret to ask for work. The paradox lies in the fact that rude and brusque as he is to Higgins, he shows himself to be straight and fair-minded. When Higgins suggests that he might take work as a labourer, accepting lower wages than other labourers because he would be capable of less work, Thornton points out to him, without sarcasm:

Don't you see what you would be? You'd be a knobstick. You'd be taking less wages than the other labourers - all for the sake of another man's children. Think how you'd abuse any poor fellow who was willing to take what he could get to keep his own children. You and your Union would soon be down upon him. No! no! if it's only for the recollection of the way in which you've used the poor knobsticks before now, I say No! (38, p.398).

In this passage Thornton is decidedly a master, but he is seeing the other side sympathetically, putting himself practically and realistically in the position of someone on the other side of the fence. He can achieve this position by imagining it; Higgins has to learn to make a similar act of sympathy by becoming personally involved, up to the

point where it is no great step for him to put himself in the position of a master. But it is Thornton who has made the first move, who has asserted their common humanity. Even if it is done roughly and indirectly, he has indicated at least to the reader, that he is capable of communicating with the operatives.

It is in his subsequent encounters with Higgins that Thornton really comes to life as an original character. Up to this point we have seen him only in the company of women whom he respects almost with a boyish awe. He has been shown through Margaret's eyes, as a rough lover and an ambitious tradesman; through his mother's eyes as the epitome of the puritan ethic of hard work breeding success; through Mr. Hale's eyes as a keen student who himself deserves studying, and through his own eyes in each of these relationships. Yet we have never actually seen him absorbed in the occupation which takes most of his time and nearly all of his thought. Mrs. Gaskell has, we feel, hovered round the edges of the character for too long. She has spent most of the novel building up for Thornton a character and potential which she might easily have assigned to him in a few lines of description at the beginning. While believing that she has been unfolding the character, she has actually been providing two stereotypes, adapting the mould created by Charlotte Brontë<sup>11</sup> for a watered-down version of the demon lover in the rough manufacturer, and the commonplace nineteenth century image of the dutiful son and brother. Only in the discussions of the dialogue, which contribute nothing to the plot, does Thornton appear to be a manufacturer. He could just as easily be an engineer, or an ironmaster, for all the real significance that has been given to his work. Dickens suggested an equal energy, dynamism, and humanity, in three scenes with Rouncewell. But in this encounter between Thornton and Higgins,

Mrs. Gaskell evokes more of the atmosphere which exists between the master and the hand, in their industrial roles and as human beings, than Dickens perhaps manages to do in the whole of Hard Times. We sense that Mrs. Gaskell's real contribution lies here, and regret that she did not give a lot more of her attention to developing this aspect of the novel.

In the next scene between Thornton and Higgins, when Thornton goes to Higgins' home to offer him work, we have the same satisfaction in seeing the practical working-out of a relationship. The unvarnished honesty which the two men offer each other is credible within the context of their characters, and consistent with the image of the plain blunt Lancashire man. Beginning with such honesty augurs well for the development of the relationship. Here Mrs. Gaskell shows a real grasp of the way things will have to be in the future of industrial relationships generally, Dickens shows indirectly the possibility of communication between two such devious self-seekers as Bounderby and Slackbridge - between them, with a mass of hypocritical arguments about ideals and principles, they will carve up the profits of industry, with no real regard for the men involved. Here, with Thornton and Higgins, we have the other side of the coin. They keep to the area in which they can communicate and understand each other, have no ideal beyond their mutual convenience and profit, and clearly tell each other what they expect:

'I'll have no laggards at my mill. What fines we have, we keep pretty sharply. And the first time I catch you making mischief, off you go. So now you know where you are.'

'Yo' spoke of my wisdom this morning. I reckon I may bring it wi' me; or would yo' rather have me 'bout my brains?'

''Bout your brains if you use them for meddling with my business; with your brains if you can keep to your own.'

'I shall need a deal o' brains to settle where my business ends and yo'rs begins.'

'Your business has not begun yet, and mine stands still for me. So good afternoon.' (39, p.405)

Underlying this conversation is a tacit admission from both men that they need each other. The subsequent development of industrial relationships has proved that Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell were both to some extent correct in their predictions.

Both men are conscious that they have only made a beginning -- and conscious that it is a beginning. By this point in the novel, Mrs. Gaskell has solved her problem of reconciling the Jekyll and Hyde aspects of Thornton. She has shown that a master can be a human being when he is brought into a one-to-one relationship with a hand who is possibly as intelligent as himself. Yet she is not quite easy about her own solution. It might be that, in trying to bring the two sides of Thornton together to make a whole man, she herself felt their irreconcilability. It might be that the problem, which she had not completely faced until this point in the novel, vanished as soon as she came to grips with it; or it may be that she decided to leave it unresolved, as being at least a more truthful approach. What she does is to transfer her own dilemma to Higgins:

'To tell the truth,' said he, 'he fairly bamboozles me. He's two chaps. One chap I knowed of old as were measter all o'er. T'other chap hasn't an ounce of measter's flesh about him. How them two chaps is bound up in one body, is a craddy for me to find out. I'll not be beat by it, though.'  
(40, pp.418-419)

This duality is finally resolved by Thornton's own growth as a person.

His failure as a manufacturer has nothing to do with the experiments which Thornton has been trying, it is carefully dated back to the strike; but it is not implied that had he tried these experiments in industrial relationships earlier, the strike would not have occurred. Mrs. Gaskell is careful not to suggest that there is a panacea for the problems of the cotton industry in this tentative step towards relaxing the unnatural

tensions and fears which smother master-men relationships. On the contrary, she is careful, precise, and modest in the claims which she makes through Thornton. As a result, his last speech on the subject is, in its quiet, practical way, much more impressive than the dramatic conversion of Carson in Mary Barton, or Stephen Blackpool's melodramatic dying speech in Hard Times, both of which lean heavily on a Christian idealism which is present nowhere in these novels, except in the author's own interjections. How much of a contribution to "the vexed question of capital and labour" this analysis of one relationship was, cannot even be guessed at - after the mid-eighteen-fifties industry might have been going along these lines in any case - but even then Mrs. Gaskell deserves credit for her perception into what looked like a confused situation. There is no "feverish idealisation," only sound common sense, in Thornton's reply to the enquiry of the M.P. Colthurst, as to whether he thinks that the "actual personal contact" and the joint "working out of an idea" which Thornton believes will promote understanding on both sides, will "prevent the recurrence of strikes":

'Not at all. My utmost expectation only goes so far as this - that they may render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been. A more hopeful man might imagine that a closer and more genial intercourse between classes might do away with strikes. But I am not a hopeful man.' (51, p.527)

Our only complaint is, that there is not enough of this in North and South. Although Mrs. Gaskell's achievement with Thornton leaves a lot to be desired, it is still admirable in its attempt to portray a manufacturer as a whole man.

(v) The Unions

Having looked at the partial success of the characterisation of Thornton, we cannot fail to contrast with it, the successful treatment of the operatives in North and South. In analysing the life-style and attitudes of the operatives in this novel Mrs. Gaskell achieves a

subtlety which is not present in Mary Barton - probably because the Mary Barton situation did not allow for much subtlety, in its urgency, and the need which Mrs. Gaskell felt to present a case for one side. Yet we ought to appreciate her sheer restrained artistry in the description of the breaking-up of the strike, and particularly, in how she manages the two characters of Higgins and Boucher. In the relationship between Higgins and Boucher she shows some of the struggle which takes place within the working class itself: how difficult it is for a man like Higgins to be a union-leader and a human being, perhaps more difficult than it is for Thornton to be a manufacturer and a man:

I ha' read a bit o' poetry about a plough going o'er a daisy, as made tears come into my eyes, afore I'd other cause for crying. But the chap ne'er stopped driving the plough, I'se warrant, for all he were pitiful about the daisy. He'd too much mother-wit for that. Th'Union's the plough, making ready the land for harvest-time. Such as Boucher . . . mun just make up their mind to be put out o' the way (36, p.367).

Higgins' explanation of the need for the union, and his defence of its methods, make an interesting complement to Stephen Blackpool's description of the same kind of organisation in Hard Times.

Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell would probably agree in seeing the union as a necessary evil, demonstrating by its existence the increasing gulf between master and man. Higgins provides the information which is missing from Hard Times about the good side of union from the working man's point of view, but without being blind to its drawbacks:

I'll not deny but what th'Union finds it necessary to force a man into his own good. I'll speak truth. A man leads a dree life who's not i' th'Union. But once i' th'Union, his interests are taken care on better nor he could do it for himsel', or by himsel', for that matter. It's the only way working men can get their rights, by all joining (36, p.366).<sup>b</sup>

In other words, the union is fulfilling the function which Margaret thinks ought to be the masters', looking after the interests of the men.

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(b) See p.329 below.

In order to do this, the union adopts the attitude to the man outside working hours, which the masters show in the factories:

we can make a man's life so heavy to be borne, that he's obliged to come in, and be wise and helpful in spite of himself (36, p.366).

The union, in North and South as well as in Hard Times, is the only means by which master and men can communicate. Higgins comments on Boucher's employer's turning him away when he asks for work after the strike, trying to bribe him by offering to tell everything he knew about the union's proceedings:

But I'll say this for Hamper, and thank him for it at my dying day, he drove Boucher away, and would na listen to him - ne'er a word - though folk standing by, says the traitor cried like a babby! (36, p.367).

The interests of master and man may not be identical, but their natures are very much alike. As Higgins remarks idealistically about the brotherhood of the operatives, we are quite plainly shown that the union is Big Brother.

The passage of time has brought about strong qualifications in Mrs. Gaskell's original sympathy with the ignorance of the workmen. Where in Mary Barton she saw their thinking as a "blind, groping search" for the cause of their suffering, in North and South she shows them entrenched in that ignorance, capitalising on their reputation for sincerity. They are not yet conscious of doing this - we know that Higgins is perfectly sincere when he avows to the Hales about the masters' forcing the men who return to work to sign a document forswearing all allegiance to the union:

They may pledge and make pledge . . . they nobbut make liars and hypocrites. And that's a less sin, to my mind, to making men's hearts so hard that they'll not do a kindness to them as needs it, or help on the right and just cause, though it goes again the strong hand (36, p.365).

He is right in that the union did help Boucher, but wrong in that it drove him to suicide. And this, Mrs. Gaskell shows, is characteristic of the illogical working man. He is partly incapable of making a detached assessment of his position, but he is also unwilling to do so.

What was right for 1848 is no longer right in the mid-fifties, the appeal for sympathy and pity for the workman is conscientiously changed in North and South to a demonstration of the need to educate him, that is, to provide him with the means and the time to gain from an education, not to merely encourage him to educate himself roughly by whatever means come to hand, for then he will only try to get such education as confirms him in his prejudices. This is clearly true of Higgins, who sends his daughter Bessy to work in a mill where her health is bound to suffer, out of concern for her moral welfare. Bessy explains to Margaret why she worked on in an atmosphere that was slowly killing her:

And I did na like to be reckoned nesh and soft, and Mary's schooling were to be kept up, mother said, and father he were always liking to buy books, and go to lectures o' one kind or another - all which took money - so I just worked on. (13, p.147).

All the books and lectures, so dearly bought, did not give him the power to understand a book on political economy, which ought to have been a subject of great interest to him as a union organiser:

I took th' book and tugged at it; but, Lord bless yo', it went on about capital and labour, and labour and capital, till it fair sent me off to sleep. I ne'er could certainly fix in my mind which was which; and it spoke on 'em as if they was vartues or vices; and what I wanted for to know were the rights o' men, whether they were rich or poor - so be they only were men (28, pp.292-293).

Perhaps the most revealing description of the relative positions of masters and men emerges from Bessy's explanation to Margaret of the attitude of both to proper ventilation:

Some folk have a great wheel at one end o' their carding-

rooms to make a draught, and carry off th'dust; but the wheel costs a deal of money - five or six hundred pound, maybe, and brings in no profit: so it's but few of th' masters as will put 'em up; and I've heard tell o' men who didn't like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made 'em hungry, at after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places. So between masters and men the wheels fall through (13, p.146).

Very little more could be said than Mrs. Gaskell says in North and South, about the problems of labour and management relationships in the cotton industry. Passages like the one quoted above help to convince us that Thornton was correct in his assertion that people outside the industry "with only a smattering of the knowledge of the real facts of the case" ought not to attempt to interfere between masters and men, by trying to preach to them what their relationship ought to be. Mrs. Gaskell's conclusion is very close to Dickens'. She sees that unless both sides receive the real education which would place their reason and their feelings in a more healthy balance, the current impasse will never be broken. In some ways North and South is a confession on her part that there is no longer any usefulness in writing fiction about the cotton industry - or about any industry for that matter.

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The publication of North and South in Household Words, which was itself committed under Dickens' editorship, as we have seen, to a kind of vigilance over social abuses, shows how fiction was falling into a supplementary rôle. And for Mrs. Gaskell the rôle was hard to sustain. A. B. Hopkins has shown how Dickens' editorial demands, during the time North and South was being serialised in Household Words, upset Mrs. Gaskell.<sup>1</sup> Her temperament was not suited to the strains of producing monthly parts

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<sup>1</sup> "Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell," Huntington Library Quarterly, 9 (1946) pp. 357-385, later reprinted in the author's

of the required length, and to the need for an element of suspense at the end of each part. Yet she was never wholly satisfied with her work on North and South. Even before the serialisation began, we find her complaining to John Forster:

I still feel it to be flat and grey with no bright clear foreground as yet - Oh dear! I can't get Mr. Gaskell to look at it, and it is no use writing much longer (192, May, 1854).

By December 1854 she had almost reached her breaking point. She wrote to Eliza Fox:

I believe I've been as nearly dazed and crazed with this c- , d- be h- to it, story as can be. I've been sick of writing, and everything connected with literature or improvement of the mind; to say nothing of deep hatred to my species about whom I was obliged to write as if I loved 'em . . . Seriously it has been a terrible weight on me and has made me have some of the most felling headaches I ever had in my life (222, 24 Dec. 1854).

The following month, with the last number written, far from having any sense of relaxation or achievement, she was still dissatisfied with her work, and felt that she had not carried out her original intention.

She wrote to Anna Jameson:

though I had the plot and characters in my head long ago, I have often been in despair about the working them out; because of course, in this way of publishing it, I had to write pretty hard without waiting for the happy leisure hours . . . at last the story is huddled and hurried up (225, Jan., 1855).

Later in the same month she is still half-apologising to Mrs. Jameson:

If the story had been poured just warm out of the mind, it would have taken a much larger mould. It was the cruel necessity of compressing it that hampered me. And now I can't do much; I may not even succeed when I try (227, 30 Jan 1855).

Another remark in this letter suggests that she had probably asked for Mrs. Jameson's help, because she wrote: "I have sent today since receiving your letter, to stop the press." She was at last forced to add a Preface to the novel, saying that she "found it impossible to

develop the story in the manner originally intended." All the faith in what she has to contribute to the problems of the cotton industry which is shown in the writing of Mary Barton, and in the letters about Mary Barton, has evaporated.

Additional Notes

(a) The errors are listed as:

Thornton is described as a very extensive spinner and manufacturer - trading to all parts of the globe, and known all over the kingdom, and he rents his mill on a lease. We will engage to say there are not two large concerns in Lancashire that rent their mills: except in small concerns, to own them being the invariable rule. Error number one. Thornton, again, is a merchant shipping to all quarters of the globe: this again is extremely exceptional. There are not ten concerns that so ship as a rule, and these ten are owned by millionaires who deal in all manner of produce in the countries to which they ship. Only in times of great depression do manufacturers export on their own account, and this is the time when Thornton ceases shipping. Error number two. Again, Thornton has bills drawn on him for his cotton - cash payments in ten days being the immutable and never invaded rule of Liverpool; a fact that needy men wishing to spin know to their cost. Error number three. Again, accounting for the necessity to keep wages lower, Thornton says, "The Americans are getting their yarn so into the general market, that our only chance is to beat them by producing at a lower rate." We have heard all manner of reasons assigned for bad trade, but this is the first time any man, woman, or child found this out. American competition a bagatelle, and in yarn it is less than nothing. They cannot even supply themselves, with high protective duties. Error number four. Again Thornton stocks heavily, and that after the strike. To stock at all is so much at variance with the custom of Lancashire manufacturers, as coupled with the fact of that stocking following on the strike, to make this Error number five. Again, when Thornton is in difficulties, Higgins stops to work after the mill has closed. To do this the engines <sup>must have run for the</sup> generous Higgins' two looms, in which case, for every twopence his generosity gave Thornton, that gentleman would lose five pounds. Error number six. Again, Thornton gets into his difficulties partly by his stocks falling one-half. From October, 1853, to December, 1854, occurred the greatest fall on record in the history of the cotton trade, and yet stocks never fell one-half, nor one-quarter. Error number seven. Lastly, to crown all, comes the closing absurdity in two senses, in a trade sense and a literary sense. This great millowner, this extensive merchant, this man rich enough to stock heavily, when he has made a severe loss and his stocks have fallen one-half, can be set on his legs by what? - by 1875! why as many thousands would hardly have done it.

Lewes (or the reviewer) is correct in all but the fifth and sixth "errors". Thornton does not deliberately stock: the imported Irish have made such a failure of spinning the cotton that it is not acceptable to the customer, and Thornton is left with it on his hands. With regard to "error number six": Higgins stays late, with another man, to help fulfill a contract, and if Thornton had not met the deadline, it would have cost him a great deal more than it did to run the machines overtime. We are told, too, earlier in the book, that Higgins despises Boucher for only being able to operate one loom.

I am indebted to W. H. Chaloner, of Manchester University, for his guidance in examining these technical criticisms.

- (b) Higgins' speech on unions was later cited by Thomas Ballantyne in Blackwood's Magazine to prove a point about a current strike, with the comment:

Poor Higgins could hardly help admitting that there was something terribly wrong about a system which required such tyranny to make it work effectually; but he laid all the blame on the employers. "It's th'masters as has made us sin, if th'Union is a sin." And there are many persons in Lancashire who will echo that opinion at the present moment, with reference to the present Manchester strike ("Lancashire Strikes," 79, Jan., 1856, p. 55).

### Conclusion

As it is traced in the fiction of 1832-55, the rise to an independent self-consciousness of the working classes is seen as involving a long painful process of disillusionment. It was one in which the ideals of the working man and the liberal humanitarian, springing from an instinctive, lawrentian kind of faith that the best of human nature is to be found where the heart rules the head, were forcibly replaced in part at least by a more workable, materialistic pragmatism. The compulsion came from the upper and middle classes, who were, in the first place, most unwilling to accept the responsibility for the degenerate life-style of the poor and working classes. They insisted that the lower orders should be independent. Yet, as this study has implied, the means whereby the working man could become independent lay in the hands of the other classes, who alone had the legislative power. And this power they were most reluctant to use, being themselves slow to adapt to the new world, and clinging to the old idea of *laissez-faire*. Demanding that the working man become independent was like asking a man with no legs to stand up.

Here the novelists had an important part to play. In dramatising the problems and personalities of the troubled north, they let the men involved see themselves and their attitudes in the wider terms of the future of humanity. Theirs was a wholly sincere and praiseworthy attempt to give their public the kind of education it lacked - not an education of hard facts and insensitive interpretations of the utilitarian philosophy, but a sentimental education in the Flaubertian sense. By showing the separate classes their common human nature, and frailty, they offered each side a bond with the other. At their most successful they

cut through the confused polemics of contemporary controversy to focus attention on the real issues, on the quality of life and the relationship between ends and means, which were too often ignored or lost sight of in the pursuit of material advantage. Only Mrs. Gaskell and Dickens were able to do this, and to combine with their social commentary an interesting and permanently relevant psychological study in depth of the characters they chose to embody their themes.

This was beyond the powers of the lesser novelists studied here. Their work shows that it was not enough to write sincerely from passionate convictions, nor to build a fiction by almost scientific means to illustrate a thesis. It is hard to see where else the difference between literary talent and artistry is so plainly shown as in a comparison between the early novelists of factory life, and Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell, using virtually the same material, and trying to say very similar things. It is with the lesser novelists that the social-problem novel is a genre novel; with the major novelists it becomes one more interesting form which fiction can take, in its engagement with life.

APPENDIX

MARY BARTON: A Tale of Manchester Life  
by Emily (M. J.) Shaen (née Winkworth) <sup>1</sup>.

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Emily Shaen was one of the three brilliant Winkworth sisters, all of whom were close friends of the Gaskells, and had been taught by Mr. Gaskell. (see her Letters and Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth (1908)). It seems from this review that she did not yet know that Mrs. Gaskell was the author of Mary Barton, even though she was living with the Gaskells at the time of publication. Mrs. Gaskell told her that Mary Barton was probably written by "a Mrs. Wheeler" (really Mrs. Stone). (See Letters 30, 11 Nov. 1848, to Catherine Winkworth).

Mary BartonA Tale of Manchester Life.<sup>1</sup>

This is a work of very uncommon merit. We have read it with the deepest interest, and pleasure too, though our pleasure was somewhat of the saddest. Mary Barton is particularly welcome at the present time bearing so directly as it does upon the all important labour question of the day, and the more so because the writer has no particular system which this story is meant to uphold. The quote from the preface "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully; and if my accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional." No one therefore need open the book with fear and trembling lest his or her favourite hobby horse of endurance, or reform, should after its perusal, be unable to show its paces. All alike, theorists, or non theorists, can unite in deploring that the workmen of Manchester "are sore and irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own. Whether the bitter complaints made by them, of the neglect which they experienced from the prosperous - especially from the masters whose fortunes they had helped to build up - were well-founded or no, it is not for me to judge. It is enough to say, that this belief of the injustice and the unkindness which they endure from their fellow creatures taints what might be resignation to God's will, and turns it to revenge in many of the poor uneducated factory-workers of Manchester." This is most important - the feeling exists, and without attempting any

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<sup>1</sup> The MS. of this review, presumably by Emily Winkworth, is in the Brotherton Library, Leeds

subtle reasoning, there are few who will be inclined to dispute the impossibility of its existence without some cause for it. It is also important as showing, though perhaps unconsciously even to the writer, the prevalence of two errors, the fruitful source of much misery, not only amongst the unenlightened and ignorant, but amongst those who, as the phrase is, ought to know better. We know the comparative insignificance of the individual, and his actions, in the formation of his own lot, in relation both to God, and man. Far be it from us either to deny the sufferings brought on by the selfishness or inattention of their masters, - or the beauty and fitness of resignation to the will of God under misfortunes which could not have been foreseen, but we think there is a decided tendency in the philanthropy of the present day towards forgetting what the individual must do for himself. One of the most important things for the "hands" to know is their own individual importance; that they are men, and women, who must act with the strength and prudence of men, and women, not as children who first burn their fingers, and then complain of those who do not bind them up, though they literally may be without the means of doing so.

Though published without a name we feel not the slightest doubt that Mary Barton is the production of a lady: there are passages in it which we do not say no man could, but which no man would have written, and there are some which we are inclined to think no man could.

The heroine is the daughter of a Manchester operative, whom her father unwilling to condemn to a factory life, apprentices to a dressmaker. She is beautiful, and knows it, her head has been rather turned by the admiration she has received, as also by the unwise councils of a beautiful aunt Esther, who at the commencement of the tale has yielded to the voice of the tempter, and whose subsequent life is the usual

succession of falls and degradations. Mary early becomes motherless, and has attracted the attention of gay Harry Carson, the rich son of a rich manufacturer, whose flattery pleases her, though he is unable to win her heart, she also has a truehearted honorable (sic) lover in her own rank of life. Hence the plot of the tale.

There are two judgements to be pronounced on a work of this kind, the one as regards its artistic, the other its moral worth, and the former is less to be neglected now, when almost everyone who has leisure, and can read, thinks they can write too. The style of Mary Barton is good, it possesses that, we might almost say, individual excellence, of no more words being used than are required to express clearly, elegantly, and powerfully, what the authoress intended. The conduct of the story, too, through the first volume is very skilful, incident succeeding incident, as naturally as they do in life; we do not doubt the facts are true, we feel they are not overdrawn. There are passages too of very considerable power, of which there cannot be a surer proof than, that, though describing scenes which have been described a hundred times before, our interest is the same as if we were reading them for the first time. This test, genius alone can stand, and the authoress of Mary Barton has stood it nobly. For the truth of which we need only mention the burning of Mr. Carson's mill. We will not spoil the whole by extracting part but will proceed to what may be called the moral view of that fire. "John Barton was not far wrong in his idea that the Messrs. Carson would not be over much grieved by the consequences of the fire in their mill. They were well insured; the machinery lacked the improvements of late years, and worked but poorly in comparison with that which might now be procured. Above all trade was very slack; cottons could find no market, and goods long packed and piled in many a

warehouse . . . So this was an excellent time Messrs. Carson thought for refitting their factory with first rate improvements for which the insurance money would amply repay. They were in no hurry about the business however. The weekly drain of wages given for labour, useless in the present state of the market, was stopped. The partners had more leisure than they had known for years; and promised wives and daughters all manner of pleasant excursions. It was a pleasant thing to be able to lounge over breakfast with review or newspaper in hand; to have time for becoming acquainted with agreeable and accomplished daughters, on whose education no money had been spared . . . There were happy family evenings, now that the men of business had time for domestic enjoyments. There is another side to the picture. There were homes over which Carson's fire threw a deep terrible gloom; the homes of those who would fain work, and no man gave unto them - the homes of those to whom leisure was a curse. There the family music was hungry wails, when week after week passed by, and there was no work to be had, and consequently no wages to pay for the bread the children cried aloud for in their young impatience of suffering &c." There is a terrible reality about this description where the enjoyment of the masters' is literally the starvation of their workpeople. There is no difficulty in seeing how one follows from the other, nor any more in understanding, that the sufferers who do see it, should contemplate, even a red republic. The only link which united master and man was that of self interest, once broken, the master in affluence, the man in penury, must not those be indeed angels who could avoid coveting, aye even more than the crumbs from the rich man's table?

An artistic production the story somewhat fails in the second volume: the preparations for the trial are too minutely described, they become lengthy, <sup>and we</sup> are wearied before it takes place, besides which as the

chief interest of the story turns upon the event of the trial, when it is over, that is ended before the book is completed. The interest of the book ought not to fail but steadily to increase until the end of the last volume. In the present case this might have been the more easily done as the appearance of the sailor Will was not absolutely imperative at the trial in order to Jem's safety (sic). Even had he not been forthcoming, had Mary sworn to the judge that he was capable of proving the alibi, had sentence been passed on Jem he would not have been executed until time had been allowed for Will's return and though Mary might not have known this, the lawyer employed by Job Legh must have known it and could have told her.

Mary's speech at the trial too is far longer than natural, that she at such a time should confess her love is likely enough, particularly in her then state of excitement, but she could not have said so much about it. We also object to the incident of the little girl which made so much impression upon Mr. Carson when returning home at the end of the second volume. Such certainly do occur in real life quite as à propos as this one is described, but when they do, we say to ourselves, "If this was in a book we should call it unnatural" and consequently it is unfit to be put in a book. And the conversation between Mr. Carson, Job Legh, and Jem, has the appearance of being dragged in because our authoress wanted to make them say what they did, and not because the story necessitated their saying it then, and there.

These however are small defects almost hidden by the great beauties of the work, yet though small, they are worthy the attention of those, who would not content themselves with the mere amateur writer's crumbling nich (sic) in the temple of temporary fame.

We now proceed to the moral worth of this story. The spirit in which it is written is excellent, truthful liberal, and benevolent, as

much to master as to man and we are tempted to draw a few conclusions for lazy readers, from facts so described, which the authoress, and we think wisely, has not done herself. If this book is a true picture of the sufferings, and state of feeling engendered by such suffering among the Manchester operatives, which people comfortably lolling in their easy chairs not only read, but even in spite of being so comfortable themselves, also believe, should we not think their first almost irresistible impulse must be to jump out of the said easy chairs, and offer at least one, to the sick woman "who literally had nothing but some loose bricks" to raise her head with, and that this feeling must lead to something more than mere passing compassion? - but if instead, those with tender hearts, and yet unhardened consciences, still remain passive, without one effort for the amelioration of such suffering, without one effort to do anything but forget the story which has so painfully aroused their feelings, what answer can we give to those who condemn the rich as hardhearted and unselfish (sic)? - who condemn those riches which they think make them so? - There is an answer which may satisfy the philosopher that the argument of accusation is rather post hoc here than propter hoc, but which will hardly avail with the starving man, the hopeless prostitute driven to her unlawful gains by the moral suicide of destitution, and that answer is, - Ignorance, - not of the misery which exists, but how to cure it and which must be felt the strongest by those best acquainted with the evil to be remedied, with the existing state of the working men, women, and children, in Manchester. Our authoress herself is an example of this, the kindly feeling she would endeavour to substitute for the at present most injurious one between master and man can do we fear but a small amount of good, and it is all she has to suggest, nor do we wonder at it. Order hardly arises out of disorder, the fairy's

regulating wand must come from those at a distance whose hearts and intellects are not crushed and paralysed by the apparent hopelessness of any means to the end. Of all those, who would rest satisfied with the plea of Ignorance, we must ask, - Have you sought every means of enlightenment? And when any glimmering of light has been thrown on the subject have you followed it up and endeavoured practically to test its value? - We fear the answer must be, No, - and if so the excuse is their condemnation.

Far be it from us to undervalue the efforts and intentions of private charity, but even supposing it much more extensive than it is, with such masses of misery as here described, it can do but little, and it is utterly powerless towards preventing the evil, in fact to a certain extent it prolongs it. Charity has two consequences, the immediate, and the ulterior, the first is temporary relief, the second and most injurious one is leading those relieved to reckon upon it as a corps de reserve in the times of need. In a smaller degree it has the same effect as the late system of Poor Laws. It somewhat increases the uncertainty of subsistence necessarily attendant on labour for wages. It is one item of the chance which induces recklessness in marriage, and its consequent miseries and immoralities. We hope the time will come when the sphere of charity will be confined to the wants of the soul rather than the bodies of our fellow creatures. But can the poor man see this by the light of innate wisdom? At present as Mary Barton only too faithfully shows he is "aggravated" if he does not receive it, and in proportion to his wants too. "At all times it is a bewildering thing to the poor weaver to see his employer removing from house to house, each one grander than the last, till he ends in building one more magnificent than all, or withdraws his money from the concern; or sells his mill

to buy an estate in the country: while all the time the weaver who thinks he and his fellows are the real makers of this wealth is struggling on for bread for his children through the vicissitudes of lowered wages, short hours, fewer hands employed, &c. And when he knows trade is bad and could understand (at least partially) that there are not buyers in the market to purchase the goods already made, and consequently that there is no demand for more, when he could bear and endure much without complaining could he also see that his children were bearing their own share he is I say bewildered and (to use his own words) "aggravated" to see that all goes on just as usual with the mill owners. Large houses are still occupied while spinners and weavers (sic) cottages stand empty because the families that once occupied them are obliged to live in rooms and cellars. Carriages still roll along the streets, concerts are still crowded by subscribers, &c . . . Why should he alone suffer from the times? I know that this is not really the case, but what I want to impress is, what the workman feels and thinks."

Aeconomically (sic) considered the capitalist is as valuable as the workman. Morally considered they are equally valuable, is there then nothing radically wrong in the present arrangements by which their interests are at variance by which the gain of one may be the loss of the other, by which the capitalist has something to fall back upon when the equation of demand and supply is materially disordered, while the workman has not, arrangements by which, in scarcity of work, labour can only keep up its price by death, and starvation; while at such times, so much recklessness and vice is engendered, though so many die, yet more are born, and the population (unless in very extreme and rare cases) is not really thinned. And when at such times those professing (and we believe honestly,) deep compassion for, and interest in such misery, can relieve their friends by the following mad benevolence. "Oh you

cannot expect the poor to be prudent, not to marry without sufficient means, 'tis his only comfort." Comfort!

"He never heard that maddening cry  
Daddy a bit of bread!"

When a really benevolent man can write "Nous est -il loisible de dire . . . ordonnez à la mère du pauvre de devenir sterile, et blasphemez Dieu qui l'a rendue feconde" Dieu? - qui l'a rendue feconde. Are we to believe in special providences for married women? - would such a plea be entertained for a moment regarding an unmarried woman? - and yet it might with exactly the same amount of truth. Dieu lui à (sic) donné la capacité, et viola (sic) tout. The only thing we agree with in that sentence, is, our not having the right to order anything about the matter, but we not only have a right, but it is our duty, to point out the connection between imprudence in marriage, and starving vicious children, which strangely enough few people seem to consider. And moreover it is our duty to do all we can to give the workman sufficient incentive to such prudence; and other comforts, and amusements, than that of increasing the population and lowering his own wages. We notice this belief not from its peculiarity, but because with a few exceptions, the feeling of its truth in England is nearly universal and its influence most prejudicial. It is part and parcel of that sentimental cowardice which will not endure itself, nor ask for endurance from others, whose sole philosophy of discipline for an immortal being lies in the utmost possible indulgence of mortal pleasures. And what a degrading admission it is that restraint on this one point is the worst evil in life, and really this belief amounts to this admission, that it is less endurable than misery such as our authoress describes, and only too truly. "So Barton was left alone with a little child crying (when it had done eating) for mummy with a fainting dead like woman, and with the sick man whose

mutterings were rising up to screams and shrieks of agonized anxiety. He carried the woman to the fire and chafed her hands. He looked round for something to raise her head . . . There was literally nothing but some loose bricks. However those he got and taking off his coat covered them with it as well as he could. He pulled her feet to the fire which now began to emit some faint heat. He looked round for water but the poor woman had been too weak to drag herself out to the distant pump, and water there was none . . . He seized a battered iron table spoon and with it forced one or two drops, (of gruel) between her clenched teeth . . . gradually she revived. She sat up and looked around, and recollecting all fell down again in weak and passive despair. Her little child crawled to her, and wiped with its fingers the thick coming tears which she now had strength to weep. It was now high time to attend to the man. He lay on straw so damp and mouldy no dog would have chosen it in preference to flags. Over it was a piece of sacking, coming next to his worn skeleton of a body, above him was mustered every article of clothing that could be spared by mother or children this better weather, and in addition to his own, these might have given as much warmth as one blanket, could they have been kept on him . . . Every now and then he started up in his naked madness looking like the prophet of woe in the fearful plague picture . . ." When such scenes as above described are not exceptional but the rule. When houses are cellars, husbands broken hearted, mothers starving, daughters cast on the street, sons dissolute and abandoned, and yet in the midst of all this, so much good feeling and self denial that our authoress can write, and evidently her experience is of much value "The vices of the poor sometimes astound us here; but when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, their virtues will astound us in far greater degree. Of this I am certain."

Is human nature then so contrary, that this virtue cannot be made a little more efficacious? - We are certain it is not. That there is a certain standard of comfort without which even a poor man will not marry and raise an unlimited family, is evident enough, for the world might be much fuller than it is even now. Why therefore need we doubt that this standard may be raised? - Would it make no impression upon the broken hearted father mourning his daughter's disgrace, if it was pointed out that his own intemperance was partly the cause of his daughter's present condition? - as it is but too often the case in every rank of life, though in the higher ones marriage may legalise the prostitution, or it may remain under the veils of coquetting and flirting merely mental. That after marriage a family can be limited to the parent's income, the continent has given proof. Why then should it be impossible in England? But how is it to be done? - with such an amount of prejudice and force of habit in opposition? Misery, even such as quoted above does not act as a warning, it produces no prudence, except in those who would have been prudent without it. Its only effect upon the others is increased recklessness. And who can wonder where there is literally no hope? How then can the problem be solved? - the problem which will regulate the supply of labour to the demand so that in times of commercial distress, the workman may have something to subsist on till better times come, may still eat his dinner and have a warm tidy house, as the capitalist still keeps his carriage and drinks his wine, though in some other respects increased economy may be incumbent on both? Rome was not built in a day, and with that feeling we must not only approach this subject, but continue to work at it. It naturally divides itself into three parts, the duty of the capitalist, the duty of the workman, and

the duty of those members of the public in general who have time, opportunity, or money to assist in the cause, or who by a little exertion and self denial could make them.

To begin with the capitalist, We do not believe the world will ever be reformed by benevolence when opposed to self interest. The idea is an absurdity, and those who build their hopes on it, have more enthusiasm than logic. The question then is, can it be the interest of the capitalist to allow his workmen a share of the profits of his capital besides their usual money wages, which share will be subject to the fluctuations in value of capital, and not to those of wages, so that in troubled times it may diminish, but not cease, or even if temporarily suspended, its previous existence may have allowed the workman to lay by so that he has something to fall back upon when wages are low, and uncertain? It has been satisfactorily proved that it can, by M. Leclaire a housepainter in Paris. See his own pamphlets on the subject or most interesting extracts from them translated in Chamber's Edinburgh Journal for Sept.<sup>r</sup> 27 1845. The limits of a review will not permit their quotation. Babbage in his Economy of Machinery and Manufactures writes, "One of the difficulties attending such a system is, that capitalists would at first fear to embark in it imagining that the workmen would receive too large a share of the profits, and it is quite true that the workmen would have a larger share than at present, but at the same time it is presumed the effect of the whole system would be that the total profits of the establishment being much increased, the smaller profits allowed to capital under this system would yet be greater in actual amount than that which results to it from the larger share in the system now existing." M. Leclaire writes, "We have no fear of being accused of exaggeration when we say, the master will find workmen whose

indifference to his interests is such that they do not perform two thirds of the amount of work which they are able." An increase of 50 per cent is surely not to be despised by even capitalists! - even though half should be returned to the work people. Other advantages stated by Babbage are, "That every person engaged in it would have a direct interest in its prosperity; since the effects of any success, or falling off, would almost immediately produce a corresponding change in his own weekly receipts. Every person concerned in the factory would have an immediate interest in preventing any waste or mismanagement in all the departments. When any glut in the market occurred, more skill would be directed to diminishing the cost of production; and a portion of the time of the men would then be occupied in repairing and improving their tools for which a reserved fund would pay, thus checking present and at the same time facilitating future production.

Another advantage of no small importance would be the total removal of all real or imaginary causes for combinations. The workmen and the capitalist would so shade into each other, would so evidently have a common interest and their difficulties and distresses would be mutually so well understood, that instead of combining to oppress one another, the only combination which could exist would be a most powerful union between both parties to overcome their common difficulties." Nor need capitalists be alarmed at the mere novelty of the system for Mr. Mill in his late work on Political Economy writes "In American ships trading to China it has long been the custom for every sailor to have an interest in the profits of the voyage" and again "An instance in England not so well known as it deserves to be is that of Cornish miners." Here then is a clear way equally advantageous to capitalist and workman: but unfortunately the present law regarding Jointstock companies in England

prevents its adoption. If our legislators are sincere in their efforts for the improvement of the people, they surely will not delay inquiring, and at once, if there are any insurmountable objections to the alteration of that law. It might be the most important step they could take toward seconding the efforts of the Board of Education. The result of M. Leclaire's experiment was published in 1842, since which though nothing has been done towards its adoption in England, the misery and degradation in Manchester has not been diminished. But we must hasten to the workmen. The most important things for them to learn, is their own self dependence, that if when wages are good, they dissipate them as soon as earned in eating, and drinking, &c. they have no right (when it is no longer their master's interest so to do,) to call upon him for maintenance even though obtained through wages. It is as unjust a tax upon the capitalist for the benefit of the poor man's family, as those upon the workmen which are spent in the payment of unnecessary places for the destitute sons of noble families. Both must have to economise for themselves. At present in ignorance and despair the poor man lays his miseries at his master's door, engendering reckless bad feeling between the two parties: he must learn how much depends on himself, that when in full work he must lay by, a sum in the Savings Bank regularly increasing until enough to purchase a small annuity for the latter part of his life, would be far better than a Tradesunion (sic). A limited family would be better than none at all, or than daughters demoralised in factories, (in some instances but little better than harems for their masters,) their afterwards completed by the pangs of hunger. But we must not enter further into the subject, but with a few words to the public in general conclude. We have been credibly informed, that many young ladies in Manchester have so much

pocket money, and are otherwise so well provided for, that puzzled how to dispose of it, no small portion is spent literally in sweetmeats, eating which has become, in a certain set, the fashionable amusement. Though not enjoying the pleasure of their acquaintance, of two things we feel confident, one that their health would be materially improved by the discontinuance of such a practice; the other, that at least some of these young ladies possess hearts. Would it not be a gratifying occupation to the latter if the money spent on the above injurious amusement was destitute brothers and sisters? It is beginning to be felt that employment is both honorable (sic) and advantageous to young ladies. Manchester is forward in some things will she not here also take the lead? Supposing these young ladies were to subscribe a fund among themselves for improving the houses of the poor, doing away with the Manchester cellars, - or for opening rooms provided with light, warmth, newspapers &c., where the steady industrious young man might find some compensation for refraining from too early marriage or more unlawful pleasure, - or even supposing such of these young ladies, or any others, as were competent, instead of spending quite so much time in fancy needlework, copying music, visiting &c., employ some of their mornings in preparing lectures on subjects interesting and beneficial to the intelligent "hands" of Manchester, which they might afterwards deliver themselves. Mrs. Balfour has shown there is nothing impossible, or objectional, or even unpleasant in a woman's lecturing. Young ladies have a great deal of time, but how is it spent? Yet they will have to bear the consequences of their stewardship. But we are transgressing our limits, and must conclude, once more heartily recommending Mary Barton to all those who desire either an intellectual treat, or a stimulant for their moral energies.

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