

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Economic and Social Attitudes to Landed Property in  
England, 1790-1850, with particular  
reference to John Stuart Mill

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

David Ernest Martin, B.Sc.(Econ.)

March, 1972.



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by

D. E. Martin

on

"Economic and Social Attitudes to Landed Property in  
England, 1790-1850, with particular reference  
to John Stuart Mill"

The principal aim of this thesis is to examine the ideas that were held on the subject of landed property in England between approximately 1790 and 1850. In the opening chapters the debate about landed property in the 1790s is considered. Under the impact of the French Revolution and because of the disturbed economic situation, differing attitudes towards land became sharply defined. The ideas of the main protagonists, William Godwin, Arthur Young and T.R. Malthus are examined as well as those of other writers.

Eventually, Malthus's opinions proved strongest and became the basis of a socio-economic orthodoxy that was strengthened and elaborated by Ricardian economics and Benthamite philosophy. According to the majority of political economists and social philosophers, it was desirable that land should be held privately, although this meant that the great majority were excluded from ownership. It was also regarded as necessary for agriculture, if it was to operate efficiently, to be organised on the tripartite system of large landlord, tenant farmer and landless labourer.

However, this conventional view had its critics, and the thesis discusses some of the theories that were advanced against it. While conservatives opposed even moderate reforms, radicals were responsible for a number of proposals. Some, like the Owenites, believed in communities; others favoured land nationalisation, while there was support also for the almost-vanished yeoman, as idealised by Cobbett.

These groups, together with the views of orthodox economists, represent part of the background against which J.S. Mill's ideas emerged. The second part of the thesis attempts to trace the way in which Mill's attitudes towards landed property developed up to the publication of his *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848. By that date he had abandoned much of the conventional thought on the subject, and the reasons for this are suggested.

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## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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Of the many librarians who assisted in the progress of this study, I should like to offer a special acknowledgement to the staff of the Brynmor Jones Library, Hull University. The arduous task of typing was cheerfully undertaken by Mrs. Barbara Brown, to whom I am most grateful.

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes:

Annals

Annals of Agriculture and other useful arts, 46 vols, (1783-1809)

Autobiography

Autobiography of John Stuart Mill, (Columbia University Press ed.)

Bain, James Mill

Alexander Bain, James Mill: A Biography, (1882)

Bain, J.S. Mill

Alexander Bain, John Stuart Mill: A Criticism, with Personal Recollections, (1882)

B.M. Add. MSS

British Museum, Additional Manuscripts

D.N.B.

Dictionary of National Biography

Econ. Hist. Rev.

Economic History Review, First Series 1928-1947; Second Series 1948-

Essay, (1798)

/T.R. Malthus/, An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the future improvement of society, with remarks on the speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers, (1798)

Essay, (1803, 1806)

T.R. Malthus, An Essay on the Principle of Population; or, a view of its past and present effects on human-happiness; with an inquiry into our prospects respecting the future removal or mitigation of the evils which it occasions, (1803; third ed., 1806)

Letters

Francis E. Mineka (ed.), The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848, (Toronto, 1963), Vols. XII and XIII of Collected Works of John Stuart Mill

Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings

Political Economy Club: Minutes of Proceedings, 1899-1920 Roll of Members and Questions Discussed, 1821-1920 with Documents bearing on the History of the Club, vol. 6, (1921)

Political Justice

William Godwin, An Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, 2 vols, (1793)

Principles

John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy, (Toronto ed., 1965), Vols. II and III of Collected Works of John Stuart Mill

Works (ed. Bowring)

The Works of Jeremy Bentham, published under the superintendence of his executor, John Bowring, 11 vols, (Edinburgh, 1838-43)

Works (ed. Sraffa)

The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo, edited by Piero Sraffa with the collaboration of Maurice Dobb, 10 vols, (Cambridge, 1951-55)

See also the bibliographical note on p.404.



## INTRODUCTION

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"Get off this estate."  
"What for?"  
"Because it's mine."  
"Where did you get it?"  
"From my father."  
"Where did he get it?"  
"From his father."  
"And where did he get it?"  
"He fought for it."  
"Well, I'll fight you for it."

Carl Sandburg, The People, Yes, (New York, 1936).

At all times and in all societies, it is self-evident that land is essential for the sustenance of human life. Concepts of property form a part of all social relationships, although in primitive societies land, which if easily acquired has little exchange value, is frequently held in common. Even when land was no longer plentiful, communal attitudes survived in certain sections of European peasant agriculture until the nineteenth century. An instance of communal possession of the soil was noted in Forfarshire in 1813.<sup>1</sup> However, even when land has been

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1. G.L. Gomme, The Village Community, with specific reference to its Origin and Forms of Survival in Great Britain, (1880), quoted in P. Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution, (1902; Pelican ed. 1939), pp.189-190. Kropotkin's study stood in opposition to the Darwinist views of T.H. Huxley and others; much that was written on property at this time provides part of the intellectual background to the late nineteenth century land question. Quantitatively the output was great. Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue contributed The Evolution of Property from Savagery to Civilisation (1891); Charles Letourneau made a similar survey, Property: its Origin and Development, (1892); W.J. Ashley translated Fustel de Coulanges's Origin of Property in Land, (1892); Evelyn Cecil, Primogeniture: A Short History of its Development in Various Countries and its Practical Effects, (1895) examined one aspect from a conservative position; in a book that went into several editions, Henry Sumner Maine insisted that private property was essential to the advance of civilisation: Village-Communities in the East and West, (1871); J.E. Thorold Rogers, by marriage a relation of Richard Cobden, can probably be credited with originating the English academic tradition that begins with his history of agriculture and prices (2 vols, 1866) and includes Frederick



easily available, a notion of territory has been discernable as men appropriated land for the use of their family or of themselves and their tribe.<sup>1</sup> With civilisation, national frontiers evolved and so too did separate holdings within those frontiers. As societies recognised an individual's exclusive right to property, land ownership became regularised and gradually supported by a body of theory and codes of practice.<sup>2</sup>

In England, while nominally the land belonged to the Crown, by the end of the Middle Ages it was in relatively few hands. And at the time of the Tudors, one process that had begun with the Norman invasion was complete, rights in land had become determinate: "Landownership passed from an empirical order of things to a realm of permanent definition".<sup>3</sup> Further a money economy had evolved and this too helped to create a more integrated land market. Although precise statistics are lacking, land values rose steadily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not least due to the demand for landed estates from newly enriched merchants, lawyers and so forth, anxious to achieve the status

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Seebohm, The English Village Community: An Essay in Economic History, (1883); Gilbert Slater, The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of the Common Fields, (1907); A.H. Johnson, The Disappearance of the Small Landowner, (Oxford, 1909); J.L. and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer, (1911); E.C.K. Gonner, Common Land and Inclosure, (1912); R.H. Tawney, The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century, (1912); Lord Ernle, English Farming Past and Present, (1912). Two notable German contributions were translated into English: W. Hasbach, A History of the English Agricultural Labourer, (trans. Ruth Kenyon, 1908) and Hermann Levy, Large and Small Holdings, (trans. Ruth Kenyon, 1911).

1. Suggestive parallels may be provided by anthropological studies but it has not been possible to pursue them here; an interesting, earlier survey is, Ernest Beaglehole, Property: A Study in Social Psychology, (1931).

2. Richard Schlatter, Private Property: The History of an Idea, (1951), usefully reviews theories of property, including landed property, from ancient Greece to the present century.

3. D.R. Denman, Origins of Ownership: A Brief History of Land-ownership and Tenure in England from Earliest Times to the Modern Era, (1958), p.107.

associated with landed property. Entails became increasingly common, especially among large landowners, and as great territorial aggregations were built up, the pressure on small landowners became more acute.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the eighteenth century the ownership of sufficient land still helped to ensure social and political power; and this was confirmed in economic terms for landed property in 1798 still represented, according to the estimate of one contemporary, 55% of Britain's national capital.<sup>2</sup> Patrick Colquhoun confirmed this estimate in 1814. He also calculated that royalty, nobility, and the gentry comprised 1.35% of all families in the country but received each year 13.6% of the "new property", (i.e. the national income).<sup>3</sup> Another estimate made in 1832 still regarded land as accounting for 54% of the national capital.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, however, as Britain's wealth arose from manufacturing and commerce, factory masters and merchants began to lay claim to the privileges enjoyed by the old territorial aristocracy and the gentry. The effects of this tendency only became apparent very gradually for a number of reasons. It had long been the case that many of those with new-found wealth continued to seek the status that only landed property could bestow. By their very nature, such ambitions implied that the nouveau riche shared many of the atti-

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1. The process is outlined by H.J. Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740", Econ. Hist. Rev., vol. 10, (1940), pp.2-17. See also F.M.L. Thompson, "The Social Distribution of Landed Property in England since the Sixteenth Century", ibid., vol. 19, (1966), pp.505-517.

2. H. Beeke, quoted P. Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth, 1688-1959: Trends and Structure, (2nd ed. Cambridge, 1967) p.271.

3. P. Colquhoun, A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources, of the British Empire..., (1814), p.126.

4. P. Pebrer, quoted Deane and Cole, op.cit., p.271.

tudes of the established upper class. The argument stated by Bagehot that the English were a deferential nation abdicating from an active part in government in favour of an elite can be applied to this period.<sup>1</sup> Despite the polemics surrounding the first reform bill and the Anti-Corn Law League's campaign, the economically strong manufacturers and such like were accommodated in the social structure with relatively little difficulty. For its part, the older ruling class - which often had its origins in trade and commerce - absorbed the wealthy cotton manufacturer and Liverpool merchant alike, as the careers of Peel and Gladstone show. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the smooth working of this process was the division of interest between the industrialists who stood to benefit by free trade and the protectionist-minded landed interest. But even in the crisis of 1846 the benefits of government by a landed class to which access was available, could still be insisted upon:

Sir, there is nothing exclusive or restrictive in this territorial constitution,... From the days of Sir Robert Walpole to the present moment, with one solitary exception, all those who have realised large fortunes in our great seats of industry, have deposited the results of their successful enterprise in the soil of their country. The power of acquiring territorial possessions is open to every man. ...Away, then, with this declamation about a territorial aristocracy, as if it were a body distinguished from all other classes.

If by the end of the period examined in this thesis, such a view had been widely challenged, the explanation lies largely in the way in which the English economy had been revolutionised by the middle of the nineteenth century. With economic change, the

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1. Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution, (1867; 7th ed., 1894), p.265.

2. Disraeli speaking in the House of Commons on 4 May 1846, Hansard, vol. 86, cols. 86-87.

class structure too was becoming transformed and innumerable writers and publicists presented newer ideologies which advanced the claims of the growing middle class and of the increasingly cohesive working class.

The ideas which challenged the established system of society were often concerned with the institution of landed property which seemed to be such a basic component of the older order and even the pace of urbanisation only slowly attracted attention away from the titled families and gentry of the countryside. However, before entering into a discussion of this and other themes, a number of methodological points should be made at this stage in order to more nearly define the limits of this thesis.

In the present study, the working-class radical tradition has not been examined in detail, except where it tends to be associated with what might be termed middle-class radical ideas. The subject of landed property is a wide one; not only by virtue of several different schools of thought, but also because of the various aspects of the problem. While the central issue was that of a narrowly-based possession of the land giving a small class considerable power, there was much discussion as to remedies as well as about peripheral problems. Among these other issues was the custom of primogeniture and the system of entails designed to keep large estates intact; the desirability of enclosure and the gains and losses that were resulting from the practice; restrictive legislation favouring the landed class, especially the game laws; the fairness of rents and tithes; and, of particular significance for the present study, the whole question of whether the lower class should be allowed to possess a larger proportion of the land and the social effects that would follow this.

Interesting though many of these problems are, answers to only a few can be attempted in the following pages. The development

of theories of rent, a subject worth a separate study, has not been examined.<sup>1</sup> It has also been beyond our present purpose to describe the way in which the landed interest organised itself.<sup>2</sup> Nothing will be added to what is known about the progress of agriculture in this period; much has already been written on the minutiae of crop rotations, new techniques and so forth, and the reader must assume a background of innovation and improvement which was a feature of the landed classes' increasingly capitalistic attitude towards farming. Part of this process was the advance of enclosure, and this, too, has provided for many years the subject of much research, despite which aspects of the problem remain unresolved. Fortunately, it has been unnecessary to enter into this debate in detail, as the present writer's central concern has been the intellectual developments that took place in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. It is a commonplace that ideas do not exist in a vacuum. Just as they may help to mould the future of a society, they are also produced by and reflect the concerns of that society. While it is necessary to state what beliefs were held, it is also desirable to give some indication of why they were held and the extent to which they may have been influential. At the same time, it is beyond our purpose to recount the changes that were taking place within the English economy and such indications are in no way detailed; we are more concerned with the "steam".<sup>3</sup>

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1. An outline of some principal ideas is given by D.H. Buchanan, "The Historical Approach to Rent and Price Theory", Economica, vol. 9, (1929), esp. pp.123-149.

2. For the institution of the landed estate, G.E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century, (1963); David Spring, The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century: Its Administration, (Baltimore, 1963); F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, (1963).

3. To borrow a metaphor from Dr. Hill, who has observed: "Ideas were all-important for the individuals whom they impelled into action; but the historian must attach equal importance to the

As the amount of material available is considerable and widely scattered, an exhaustive treatment has been impossible. For example, a good deal of use has been made of periodical literature, but as Michael Wolff has pointed out, in the nineteenth century thousands of journals flourished and literally millions of articles were published.<sup>1</sup> Though probably hundreds of these articles contain material of interest, it has only been possible to scratch the surface.

The scope of the thesis has been limited, too, in another sense. In order to present a focal point, particular reference will be paid to John Stuart Mill's attitude towards land. For a number of reasons, Mill is an especially, indeed uniquely, appropriate figure for this purpose. He was one of the outstanding intellectuals of the nineteenth century. His ideas were widely known and influential; his published opinions on social and economic questions, beginning in the early 1820s, span over fifty years. Perhaps unusually for a thinker, he put great emphasis on the need for action in addition to thought and although temperamentally a "private man", he advocated his views in the public arena. Though first a middle-class radical, he showed sympathy towards many of the aims of working-class leaders. Moreover, Mill was closely associated with Bentham and utilitarian ideas and with the development of political economy; an eclectic, he drew upon

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circumstances that gave these ideas their chance. Revolutions are not made without ideas, but they are not made by intellectuals. Steam is essential to driving a railway engine; but neither a locomotive nor a permanent way can be built out of steam. In this book I shall be dealing with the steam." Christopher Hill, Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution, (Oxford, 1965), p.3.

1. Michael Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals", in John M. Robson (ed.), Editing Nineteenth-Century Texts, (Toronto, 1967), p.47.



a number of streams of thought in formulating his ideas, and devoted his attention to all aspects of the social framework.<sup>1</sup> He was also highly aware of the power and influence that was derived from the possession of land and of the controversies surrounding the social and economic effects of a wider distribution of ownership. Not only did Mill help to articulate many of these questions, but a study of his approach to them brings us into contact with, and illuminates, other aspects and ideas that were running parallel with his own. Lastly, the appearance of Mill's Principles in 1848 provides a suitable point at which to bring the present study to a close.

The first part of this thesis gives the background against which Mill's thought emerged. In the 1790s the debate on land became intensified in a process that defined the issues more clearly than they had been stated before.<sup>2</sup> Utilitarian philosophy justified private property in land and economic arguments were developed to provide theoretical support for the tripartite system of landlord, tenant farmer and landless labourer.<sup>3</sup> While the earlier chapters examine the attitudes of radicals and conservatives, an attempt has been made to maintain as a central theme the ideas of those political economists and social philosophers who to

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1. Some of these are discussed in an unpublished thesis, Pedro Schwarz, "Aspects of the Theory of Economic and Social Policy in the Works of John Stuart Mill", (London Ph.D., 1964).

2. Harold J. Laski, The Rise of European Liberalism, (1936), p. 205, has suggested that "until the French Revolution the problem of the power of property in the state did not enter into English political speculation." This is a highly questionable opinion, but does emphasise the importance of the decade.

3. For a summary see my note, "Classical Economics and Landed Property", History of Economic Thought Newsletter, No. 6, (Spring, 1971), pp.18-21.

some degree provide the pedigree of Mill's ideas. This raises the testing problem of causation: a post hoc ergo propter hoc approach presents temptations. The provenance of ideas can seldom be given definitively and in the present study it has sometimes been only possible to suggest the debt that one writer may have owed to another.

Nor has there been any systematic attempt to prove or disprove the views held by contemporaries. Modern research has frequently shown the mistaken notions that have been held in the past. Malthus, for example, despite his training in mathematics and opportunities for first hand observation, according to a recent authority, misunderstood the relationship between population growth and the operation of the Poor Law.<sup>1</sup> Later J. S. Mill was to insist that a wide distribution of landed property discouraged a rapid growth in numbers, but it is now possible to see that in the countries to which he referred this was not always so.<sup>2</sup> It does not follow from this that these writers should be regarded simply as "indignant pamphleteers" or "often wrong-headed and misleading" economists.<sup>3</sup> A wide variety of opinion was held on the issues surrounding landed property, and there are no objective criteria by which some may be described as "right" and others as

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1. James P. Huzel, "Malthus, the Poor Law, and Population in Early Nineteenth-Century England", Econ. Hist. Rev., vol. 22, (1969), pp.430-452.

2. Cf. Mill's Principles, book 2, ch.6, with the table of nineteenth-century population growth in European countries given by D.V. Glass and E. Grebenik, "World Population, 1800-1950" in H.J. Habakkuk and M. Postan (eds), The Cambridge Economic History of Europe, (Cambridge, 1965), vol. 6, p.62.

3. The phrases are used by D.E.C. Eversley, "The Home Market and Economic Growth in England, 1750-80" in E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay (eds), Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution, (1967), p.210. Eversley's essay is an exceptional piece of historical analysis, but while discounting contemporary literary evidence, he accepts the "facts as to prices, wages or output" offered by the same writers, presumably though they may have been selected to support "wrong-headed" arguments.



## CHAPTER I: THE DEBATE IN THE 1790s

All nature's laws he freely clearly scann'd,  
 And found the summum bonum in the land!  
 And show'd that justice planted in the earth,  
 Gave man new right and liberty new birth;  
 And form'd a plan, on the Agrarian scheme,  
 Which we, grown wise, know now to be no dream.  
 That man, that honest man, was Thomas Spence!  
 Whose genius, judgement, wit, and manly sense,  
 Confounded all the dogmas of the schools,  
 And prov'd that statesmen are but learned fools;  
 That priests preach future worlds of pain and bliss,  
 To cheat the weak, and rob the poor in this!  
 Or else their practice and their cry would be,  
"Let all be equal, and let all be free!"

From Allen Davenport's elegy to Thomas Spence

Probably as old as the system of landownership by relatively few, is the tradition of protest. This is an aspect of the long-established and continuing voice against great economic inequality. Clearly, when land was the major source of wealth, unequal possession was keenly felt by the landless and those who spoke for them. Often a simple appeal to previous times provided the basis of their argument, as in the unaffected eloquence of the fourteenth-century serfs who sang:

The landholders are clothed in velvet and in purple,  
 lined with vair and minever; they have meats, and  
 spices, and good wines, and we - we eat the refuse of  
 straw, and drink water. They have ease and fine manors;  
 we have pain and toil, rain and wind, in the open air.  
 Why do they keep us in slavery? we are all come from  
 the same father and mother, Adam and Eve.

1

This appeal to a just past, to a time when conditions were fair and all men enjoyed the same rights, was often based upon the situation that was said to prevail before the Norman Conquest.

In a penetrating essay, Christopher Hill has examined the theory of the "Norman Yoke", showing how by the seventeenth century there

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1. John Ball's couplet, "When Adam delved and Eve span,/Who was then the gentleman?" expresses the same idea; that over five centuries later Ball's Dream provided the subject of William Morris's socialist romance, indicates both its resilience and the deep historical roots of nineteenth century radicalism.

had been established a tradition harking back to the liberties said to be enjoyed in Anglo-Saxon England. The Norman invasion of 1066 was said to have brought an end to these old rights and freedoms, replacing them with the tyranny of an alien monarch and his followers.<sup>1</sup> It is not important that such a view was historically inaccurate, was indeed, a "myth".<sup>2</sup> The fact that the theory was sustained and enlarged indicates its popularity and in the radical literature of the nineteenth century it is a recurring theme. Shelley in his poem "To the Men of England, 1819" echoed the sentiments expressed at the time of the Peasants' Revolt:

Men of England, wherefore plough  
For the lords who lay ye low?  
Wherefore weave with toil and care,  
The rich robes your tyrants wear?

And Shelley's radicalism, like that of Paine, Spence, Cobbett and others, had a strong historical basis.<sup>3</sup>

This historical tradition was galvanised by the events in France. Before the Revolution there had been many advocates of political and social change in Britain but the developments on the other side of the Channel served to rouse radical thought and raise demands for a different form of society. The English had an intense consciousness of the upheavals that were taking place; "everything rung and was connected with the Revolution in France", Lord Cockburn recalled, "everything, not this thing or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event".<sup>4</sup> The

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1. C. Hill, "The Norman Yoke", in John Saville (Ed.), Democracy and the Labour Movement, (1954), pp.11-66; reprinted with amendments in Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, (1958), pp.50-122. The following references are to this latter source.

2. Roger Howell, "King Alfred and the Proletariat: A Case of the Saxon Yoke", Archaeologia Aeliana, vol.47, (1969), p.97; also Hill, op.cit., p.57.

3. Hill, op.cit., pp.108-109, 118.

4. Henry Thomas Cockburn, Memorials of His Time, (Edinburgh, 1856), p.80.

ferment of the 1790s divided society between the supporters of John Reeves's Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers and Pitt's treason trials on one side, and the London Corresponding Society and the Rights of Man representing the other.

Ideas revolving around the concept of property, especially property in land, (distinctions were not always made) were many. One of the best-known campaigners and one continuing the traditions of the "Norman Yoke" was Thomas Spence. To Spence, landlords were "like a Warlike Enemy quartered upon us for the purpose of raising contributions, and William the Conqueror and his Normans were fools to them in the arts of fleecing".<sup>1</sup> Spence was born in 1750 at Newcastle and, as one of nineteen children, he began life as he was to end it, in poverty. Using the Bible as a text-book, he had been taught to read by his father, a net- and shoe-maker, and a brother, and had been able to get employment as a teacher. He had the opportunity to read widely and seems to have been particularly influenced by James Harrington (1611-77), whose The Commonwealth of Oceana, produced during the Interregnum, contained a model of government which placed limits on the amount of land an individual might hold.<sup>2</sup> Spence worked out a new constitution which he proposed before a meeting of the Newcastle Philosophical Society on 8 November 1775; it was not well-received and when he printed his scheme "the Society did the Author the honour to expel him."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Spence, The Restorer of Society, (1800), quoted Hill, op.cit., pp.105-106. The best single source for Spence's life is Olive D. Rudkin, Thomas Spence and His Connections, (1927; repr. New York, 1966); Arthur W. Waters, Trial of Thomas Spence..., (Leamington Spa 1917), gives extracts from his writings, and Thomas Evans, a Spencean, left a short memoir, A Brief Sketch of the Life of Mr. Thomas Spence, Author of the Spencean System of Agrarian Fellowship or Partnership in Land, (Manchester, 1821), as did Allen Davenport, The Life, Writings, and Principles of Thomas Spence, author of the Spencean System, or Agrarian Equality (1836?)

2. For a discussion of Harrington's agrarian ideas, see Charles Blitzer, An Immortal Commonwealth: The Political Thought of James Harrington, (New Haven, 1960), esp. pp.226-234.

3. Spence, The Real Rights of Man, in M. Beer (ed.), The Pioneers

While this plan contained the whole of his doctrine of agrarian socialism, Spence did not begin his public propaganda seriously until he arrived in London, in about 1792. He supported himself for some of the time by the sale of books and saloop (a form of coffee substitute); William Hone has left a description of this business:

His "vehicle" mentioned before was very like a Baker's close barrow - the pamphlets were exhibited outside, & when he sold one he took it from within, & handed and recommended others with strong expressions of hate to the powers that were, & prophesies of what would happen to the whole race of "Landlords".

1

In addition to this unusual form of enterprise, Spence employed several other ways to publicise his plan. He wrote up chalk and charcoal notices on walls and in public places; set up petitions and placards; distributed tracts, handbills and broadsheets, often written in doggerel verse; he manufactured hundreds of copper tokens, intended for sale, but sometimes broadcast among crowds. These tokens bore mottoes and rhymes, usually illustrating aspects of his plan. One die showed an ass, heavily laden with panniers labelled "RENTS" and "TAXES", with the legend, "I was an ass to bear the first pair"; another design was of a North American Indian declaring: "If rents I once consent to pay, my liberty is past away"; the slogan "SPENCE'S PLAN - SMALL FARMS" was punched on one side of some tokens, "FULL BELLIES" on the other.<sup>2</sup>

Even though he preached it in the streets of London, Spence's plan depended essentially on the establishment of village communities. These, he believed, would arise once the people had

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of Land Reform: Thomas Spence, William Ogilvie, Thomas Paine, (1920), p.5.

1. William Hone to Francis Place, 23 September 1830, B.M. Add. MSS 27,808, f.315.

2. Several of Spence's tokens are illustrated and described by Christopher Brunel and Peter M. Jackson, "Radical Tokens as a Source of Labour History", in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, no.13 (1966), pp.26-36. A fuller list of over two hundred of Spence's coins is given by James Atkins, The Tradesmen's Tokens of the Eighteenth Century, (1892), pp.122-137, 144-147.

decided that they had a claim to an equal property in the land and therefore met in their respective parishes to restore to themselves their long-lost rights. His scheme was to be organised on a parish basis, with the people forming corporations to hold the land, representatives were to be chosen by secret ballot, rents paid into the parish treasury, and the threat of social sanction applied to those who were tempted to revert to private ownership. Spence did not state the exact size of farm he proposed other than to specify "the land is let in very small farms".<sup>1</sup> He ended on a note of pure utopianism:

But what makes this prospect yet more glowing is that after this empire of right and reason is thus established, it will stand for ever. Force and corruption attempting its downfall shall equally be baffled, and all other nations, struck with wonder and admiration at its happiness and stability, shall follow the example; and thus the whole earth shall at last be happy and live like bretheren.

2

This aspect of Spence's thought has led to the view of him as the "last of the orgiastic chiliasts";<sup>3</sup> but such an interpretation has been challenged. For although Spence derived many of his ideas from the past, he was aware of the changes taking place within society with the extension of commerce and industry.<sup>4</sup> Often Spence has been dismissed as an eccentric. Place who knew him for some twenty years described him as, "querulous in his disposition and odd in his manners, he was remarkably irritable

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1. Spence, Real Rights of Man, op.cit., p.14.

2. Ibid., p.16.

3. W.H.G. Armytage, Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England 1560-1960, (1961), p.70.

4. In her valuable essay P.M. Kemp-Ashraf develops the argument that Spence should not simply be regarded as a milenarian; P.M. Kemp-Ashraf and Jack Mitchell (eds), Essays in Honour of William Gallacher, (Berlin, 1966), pp.271ff.

Alfred Cobban, (ed.) The Englishman and the French Revolution, (1930), p.393.

5. See, op.cit., classes where the Englishman, as does some other, Political Ideas of the English Aristocracy, 1775-1815, Cambridge Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol. 15, 1982, pp.287-302.

6. Hodkin, op.cit., p.17n.



and seemed as if he had always been so".<sup>1</sup> Again, the treasonable activities of some Spenceans who, a few years after Spence's death, plotted to murder the Cabinet has encouraged the view that as the source of their ideas, Spence too must have been less than sane.<sup>2</sup> But this is a condescending approach. Whatever traits of character Spence may have had, he undoubtedly represented an attitude towards landed property that was part of the "moral economy" of wide sections of the working class. His opinions, which led him into periods of imprisonment, were taken seriously by the authorities who also kept those associated with him under surveillance.<sup>3</sup> While unique in the energy and resource that he was able to bring to his proselytizing, similar views to those Spence held on land were shared by others.

## II

One of the land reformers often grouped with Spence is William Ogilvie (1736-1819), whose Essay on the Right of Property in Land appeared in 1782.<sup>4</sup> This work was known to Spence who placed a special note drawing attention to it in his journal Pigs' Meat<sup>5</sup> - the title of which was an allusion to Burke's "swinish multitude". Ogilvie, however, was a gentleman and a scholar; "His talents", according to The Times of 23 February 1819, "were of the

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1. B.M. Add. MSS. 27,808, f.152.

2. The only detailed, but nevertheless unsatisfactory, study of Thistlewood's plot of 1820, John Stanhope, The Cato Street Conspiracy, (1962), regards the conspirators as "a floating population of psychopaths, with a grudge against society", (p.28).

3. Home Office Papers 119/1 contain a report on a boy who lodged with Spence and sold a hand-bill on The Rights of Man; quoted in Alfred Cobban, (ed.) The Debate on the French Revolution, 1789-1800, (1950), p.393.

4. Beer, op.cit., classes them together, as does James Eayrs, "The Political Ideas of the English Agrarians, 1775-1815", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol. 18, (1952), pp.287-302.

5. Rudkin, op.cit., p.17n.

first order. His taste was of the most refined and correct nature".<sup>1</sup> The son of a landed proprietor, and a relative of Lord Deskford, the Chancellor of Aberdeen University, Ogilvie became professor of humanity at King's College, Aberdeen, in 1765 and held the chair until 1817. One of his students was Sir James Mackintosh who recalled:

The lectures of Mr. Ogilvie....I still remember with pleasure. This most ingenious and accomplished recluse...is little known to the public. He published, without his name, An Essay on the Right of Property in Land, full of benevolence and ingenuity, but not the work of a man experienced in the difficult art of realising projects for the good of mankind. Its bold agrarianism attracted some attention during the ferment of speculation occasioned by the French revolution.

2

Unlike Spence, Ogilvie took no part in campaigning for land reform; he held a respectable social position and his personal contribution can only be seen as that of the theoretician. But his views, appearing when they did, could justifiably be regarded as advanced. His strictures on the existing system of land tenure were severe. Less than one hundredth part of the community, he estimated, had engrossed the land, and this narrow ownership had harmful effects on the dispossessed: it rendered them "mean-spirited and servile", it corrupted their virtue and debased their minds.<sup>3</sup>

Ogilvie, who enjoyed success as a practical farmer, belonged to that stream of thought which continues to have supporters in

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1. Quoted by D.C. MacDonald (ed.), Birthright in Land, (1891), p.150. This book, which reprints Ogilvie's Essay, is an interesting contribution to the late nineteenth century debate on land ownership.

2. Robert James Mackintosh (ed.), Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh, (2 vols, 1835), vol. 1, p.17.

3. Ogilvie in MacDonald, op.cit., p.46.

the present century: he greatly favoured the advantages of rural life compared with man's existence in towns and cities.<sup>1</sup> However, to allow the beneficial influence of the countryside to operate, the monopoly of land ownership had to be broken, otherwise, stated Ogilvie, its tendency would be to starve the population and produce a "dwarfish, debilitated, and deformed" race.<sup>2</sup> In common with many of his contemporaries, he equated the happiness and prosperity of a country with an increasing population and ventured to estimate that, if the monopoly of land were removed, a five-fold rise in numbers could be maintained.

Though the established system of ownership was roundly denounced, Ogilvie, when it came to practical proposals, adopted a much milder tone and envisaged changes taking place in ways more fanciful than those of Spence. Whereas Spence looked towards the men of the parish meeting to reclaim their land, Ogilvie imagined that a conquering monarch at the head of a victorious army might "re-establish in the subjected state, the inherent rights of mankind, and the system of natural justice, with regard to the property of the soil."<sup>3</sup> Failing this expedient, he believed a situation might arise whereby a prince, to secure a disputed throne, would interest cultivators in his cause by offering them equal rights.<sup>4</sup> Even when the old conditions had

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1. In this century intellectual sympathy for the concept of a rural-based, organic community can be found in the writings of G.K. Chesterton, John Middleton Murry, F.R. Leavis and others.

2. Ogilvie, op.cit., p.30.

3. Ibid., p.46.

4. Ibid., p.68.



been changed, Ogilvie still expected rents to be paid, although on a fairer basis, and anticipated that the landowners, while having to undertake certain duties, would continue to have a number of feudal services performed for them.

Ogilvie's appeal to the concept of natural justice is significant. Locke, to whom Ogilvie referred in support of his case, had maintained that individuals had a natural right to the possession of property. The Lockean belief had originated as a revolutionary doctrine against feudal privilege and royal absolutism, taking as its slogan "Life, Liberty, and Property".<sup>1</sup> In a sense, this right to property when applied to land was conditional, in that the ownership of land had to be justified by the individual mixing his labour with it: "As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property".<sup>2</sup> But by the late eighteenth century, Locke's theory had become rather fractured.<sup>3</sup> Blackstone in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-69), sustained it in a confused way which tended to emphasise the legality of the then existing pattern of occupancy. On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), represented the other wing of the Lockean tradition by defining the Englishman's birthright as "Security of property!...the definition of English liberty".<sup>4</sup> Thomas Spence, too, claimed Locke as one of his intellectual masters.<sup>5</sup> It would not do, however, to commit closely those

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1. For an interpretation, C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke, (Oxford, 1962), esp. pp.197-221.

2. Locke, Of Civil Government, quoted Schlatter, op.cit., p.154; for a discussion of John Locke's ideas, see Schlatter, ch. 7, passim, and sources there cited.

3. Paschal Larkin, Property in the Eighteenth Century with special reference to England and Locke, (Cork, 1930), traces some of the interpretations to which Locke's theory was subjected.

4. Quoted E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963), p.79.

5. Rudkin, op.cit., p.18.

writers mentioned above to accepting Locke's ideas fully. Locke, together with Newton and Bacon, and perhaps to a lesser extent such theorists as Hooker, Hobbes, Butler, Hume and Hartley, dominated eighteenth century thought. Most serious writers attempted to recognise this contribution in their own works. Not infrequently they adapted and modified the ideas of earlier authorities in order to support their own point of view. It has been rightly observed that the geometry of ideas is not Euclidean: straight lines, when extended, can form circles, and parallel lines might meet and even cross. Because one thinker might declare himself to be the disciple of another, it by no means follows that both share the same views. Different species of thought evolve, like plants, through a process of cross-fertilisation and adaptation, and different processes might produce a similar result. For example, in the case of the topic under consideration, Bentham who as a utilitarian rejected the concept of natural justice, viewed landed property in a way that was, as we shall see, not dissimilar to what might have been the attitude of a Lockean.<sup>1</sup>

### III

In the ideas of Tom Paine, elements of the liberal concept of natural law are also discernable. "Every civil right," he argued, "grows out of a natural right".<sup>2</sup> Though sometimes classed

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1. This intermingling of thought was noted by Bentham in a passage that also provides a characteristic sally against the concept of natural justice: "I have not, I never had, nor ever shall have, any horror, sentimental or anarchical, of the hand of government. I leave it to Adam Smith, and the champions of the rights of man (for confusion of ideas will jumble together the best subjects and the worst citizens upon the same ground) to talk of natural liberty..." W. Stark (ed.), Bentham's Economic Writings (3 vols, 1952-54), vol. 3, pp.257-258.

2. Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, (ed.) Henry Collins, (1791-92; Penguin ed., 1969), p.91.

as the third land reformer, Paine stands apart from both Spence and Ogilvie. Firstly, he is by far the best known of the three, and for this reason it is not necessary to outline his general ideas.<sup>1</sup> Again, although drawing upon older traditions, especially Locke's ideas, Paine's radicalism belongs essentially to that stream of thought originating with the revolution in America and swelling after the French Revolution. Both Spence and Ogilvie had formed their ideas before the last, revolutionary, decade of the century and were not internationalist-minded in the same way as Paine. Moreover, Paine was foremost a political, not an economic leveller. In advocating democracy he tended to place less emphasis than some other reformers on the need to take from the ruling class that property which was both the source and the manifestation of their political power.

However, Paine still went far enough in his proposals to arouse the anger of the Government. In his reply to Burke's Reflections, the Rights of Man (1791-92), he had proposed a progressive income tax with a view to breaking up great estates. The house of peers, declared Paine, had been described by Burke as the pillar of the landed interest, but were that pillar to sink into the ground, the process of farming would continue; the aristocracy did not work the land, but acted as a "seraglio of males, who...exist only for lazy enjoyment".<sup>2</sup> In part two of the Rights of Man, Paine gave a detailed account of his programme of social security, which made it clear that he proposed to tax the

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1. R.R. Fennessy, Burke, Paine and the Rights of Man, (The Hague, 1963), usefully surveys some wider issues and contains a good bibliography.

2. Paine, Rights of Man, op.cit., p.249.

luxury of an "overgrown estate", but not to "set bounds to property acquired by industry".<sup>1</sup> The implications of such a proposal were quickly realised by William Windham, a follower of Burke, who from 1794 to 1801 was Pitt's Minister of War. Windham, commenting upon the demands of radicals, observed that:

upon this doctrine of universal rights arguments might be brought, such at least as an audience of labouring men might think satisfactory, why there should be an equality of property as well as an equality of voting. Hints of this sort have already been thrown out, I think, in Mr. Payne's pamphlet. I am sure it would not be difficult to improve them in a way to make them circulate among the lower people, as rapidly as arguments about the principle of government are said now to do among the workmen at Sheffield. ...What are all the laws of property but the mere creatures of arbitrary appointment?...Suppose some one should take it into their head to write a work addressed to the labouring people, exposing to them the iniquity of that system which condemns half the world to labour for the other, and pleading for such a partition of goods, as may give to every one a competence and leave to none a superfluity.

2

With the candour reserved for private correspondence, Windham confessed that if such a work were written, he would be sorry to have to write an answer to it.

But Paine, the most feared and accomplished of the popular radicals, when he turned specifically to the question of landed property fell a long way short of communistic proposals. His Agrarian Justice appeared in 1797, having been written in the winter of 1795-96 in Paris to where he had escaped rather than stand trial for sedition. In the preface he observed that he had decided to publish the work in order to answer a sermon preached by Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, whose Apology for the Bible

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1. Ibid., p.273. Part two of Rights of Man appeared in February 1792, twelve months after the first part.  
2. W. Windham to W.J. Gurney, 2 May 1792, in The Windham Papers, (2 vols, 1913), vol. 1, pp.103-104.

was written as an answer to the second part of Paine's Age of Reason.<sup>1</sup>

In Agrarian Justice Paine put forward the view that the landless had been dispossessed of their natural inheritance and this had resulted in their poverty. If the earth was in its natural uncultivated state, he continued, it would be the common property of the human race, but the cultivation that had taken place had absorbed the property of the dispossessed. This was not the fault of the present owners: "No complaint is intended, or ought to be alleged against them". Indeed, Paine insisted that a reform could be effected "without diminishing or deranging the property of any of the present possessors".<sup>2</sup> The solution to the problem lay in creating a national fund to be financed by an inheritance tax based on the value of property. Under the operation of such a fund, Paine proposed that the blind, lame and aged poor should be relieved immediately, while a pension of £10 a year would become payable to persons reaching the age of fifty. He also provided figures to support his calculation that £15 could be paid to every person on attaining the age of twenty-one as compensation for the loss of his or her natural inheritance that had arisen from the introduction of the system of landed property. He envisaged that a young couple in possession of this sum,

could buy a cow, and implements to cultivate a few acres of land; and instead of becoming burthens upon society, which is always the case, where children are produced faster than they can be fed, they would be put in the way of becoming useful and profitable citizens.

3

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1. Paine, Agrarian Justice opposed to Agrarian Law, and to Agrarian Monopoly..., in Beer, op.cit., p.179. Bishop Watson's opinions are examined below, ch. 5.

2. Ibid., p.187.

3. Ibid., p.197.

Such a proposal might have originated from a respectable philanthropist rather than the arch-heretic, Paine, and although the tone he adopted was at times hostile towards the established order, his remedy for ending the land monopoly was neither revolutionary nor drastic. He did not urge the restoration of the land, and because of this, Spence took him to task. Spence, who in 1792 had been committed to prison for selling Paine's Rights of Man, declared that in Agrarian Justice Paine had "erected an execrable fabric of compromissory expediency", and that the "poor, beggarly stipends which he would have us accept of in lieu of our lordly and just pretensions to the soil of our birth, are so contemptible and insulting, that I shall leave them to the scorn of every person conscious of the dignity of his nature."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the differences between them, Spence, Ogilvie and Paine did sustain that tradition which emphasised the doctrines of natural law and they did much to spread the already widely-held view that the narrow basis of land ownership was unjust. The centuries-old notions of lost rights, robbery and spoliation continued to be cherished by radicals and reformers throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> These older, moral-law traditions were to be increasingly challenged by the newer philosophical approaches of which utilitarianism and political economy were representative. But on the other hand, natural rights thinkers often incorporated such newer approaches into their arguments. Thus the Physiocrats provided part of the basis for John Gray's attack on landlordism. Gray, first a moralist and second an economist, charged landlords with having separated their duties to the state from the rents

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1. Spence, The Rights of Infants..., (1797), reprinted in Kemp-Ashraf and Mitchell, op.cit., p.328.

2. See below, chapter 6.

which they collected, and had thus rendered themselves "one of the most unessential and most burdensome classes in society".<sup>1</sup> Later, Ricardian theories were adopted to give a veneer of economic reasoning to what were really tracts on social morality.

Moral as well as economic considerations were continually introduced into the debate on property in land. In the 1790s, Burke was identified as the champion of articulate conservative thought and he had attracted hostile remarks from many radicals.<sup>2</sup> Burke's political message as expressed in his Reflections on the Revolution in France and the laissez-faire dogma of Thoughts and Details on Scarcity came to be received favourably by many Whigs and Tories alike by the time of his death in 1797. The year after, another conservative writer became the subject of widespread approval for the way in which he countered the arguments of radicals. This was Thomas Robert Malthus, whose Essay on the Principle of Population appeared in 1798. Malthus's Essay contains no reference to Burke, although both gave intellectual support to the established order. If examined in detail the two men's theories were often complex and divergent, but both could be, and were, reduced to simple arguments that could serve as a justification of the status quo.

Malthus's Essay originated with William Godwin, to whose writings it was intended as an answer. Before proceeding to trace the debate stemming from Malthus, it is necessary to examine Godwin's ideas in order to understand the basis of the Essay.

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1. Gray, The Essential Principles of the Wealth of Nations (1797), quoted R.L. Meek, The Economics of Physiocracy, (1962), P.355.

2. Often radical tracts were presented as replies to Burke, possibly to avoid direct criticisms of the Government which might lead to charges of sedition; e.g. see John Thelwall, The Rights of Nature..., (1796).



IV

Of the many writings arising from and inspired by the upheavals of the 1790s, Political Justice was among the most important. It appeared in February, 1793, the same month that France declared war on England, when William Godwin was thirty six years of age. Godwin, the son of a dissenting minister, was brought up in the ultra-Calvinism of Sandemanian traditions, and practised as a minister between 1778 and 1783. Partly under the influence of the French philosophers he broke away from these earlier beliefs and worked as a political journalist. Inspired by what seemed to be the new dawn breaking in France, Godwin concentrated his efforts on producing Political Justice, passing the earlier chapters to the printers before the later ones had been written. The impact of the work on the literate public was enormous. According to Hazlitt, Godwin

blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation;  
no one was more talked of, more looked up to,  
more sought after, and wherever liberty, truth,  
justice was the theme, his name was not far off.

1

Crabb Robinson wrote of Political Justice:

It made me feel more generously. I have never  
felt before, nor I am afraid, have I ever since  
felt so strongly, the duty of not living to one-  
self, but of having for one's sole object the  
good of the community.

2

Coleridge praised Godwin in a sonnet which included the lines:

Nor will I not thy holy guidance bless,  
And hymn thee, GODWIN! with an ardent lay;  
For that thy voice, in Passion's stormy day,

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1. Hazlitt, "The Spirit of the Age", in Complete Works, (ed. P.P. Howe), (30 vols, 1932), vol. 11, p.16.

2. Quoted by Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, (1940), p.218.



When wild I roamed the bleak Heath of Distress,  
Bade the bright form of Justice meet my way  
And told me that her name was HAPPINESS.

1

It was Political Justice which above any other work inspired Southey, Coleridge, Robert Lovell, and others to seek their "Pantisocracy" on the banks of the Susquehanna, as "a social colony in which there was to be a community of property, and where all that was selfish was to be proscribed".<sup>2</sup> Others influenced by Godwin included Wordsworth, Mackintosh, Place, Thelwall, Hone, and Holcroft.

Godwin divided Political Justice into eight books, the final one being "Of Property". As a recent commentator has noted, this part of the work is "perhaps the most important...the most eloquent and capably reasoned" of the whole.<sup>3</sup> It opened with the proposition that: "The subject of property is the key-stone that completes the fabric of political justice."<sup>4</sup> Godwin did not, however, write as a political economist, but as a moral philosopher. His ideas on economic issues were derived in the first place from his convictions of what moral principles were correct, and his arguments were not couched in those conventional terms understood by political economists, a fact that may in part account for the harshness of their strictures. Godwin looked forward to a community of property, believing that the person

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1. S.T. Coleridge, "To William Godwin, Author of Political Justice" published in the Morning Chronicle, 10 January, 1795, quoted by Ford K. Brown, The Life of William Godwin, (1926), p.64. By March, 1796, Coleridge was contrite and confessed that "the lines and the subject were equally bad", ibid., p.163.

2. Joseph Cottle, quoted by H.N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle, (1913), p.53; see also Armytage, Heavens Below, op. cit., pp.62-68.

3. George Woodcock, William Godwin: A Biographical Study, (1946), p.87.

4. Godwin, Political Justice, p.788.

with the greatest claim to the possessions of others ought not to be denied their use. An equal distribution of property was the only just system, while the system of charity that operated allowed the rich "to purchase the gratitude of the poor by the payment of a debt".<sup>1</sup> Given equal distribution, Godwin believed that civilisation would advance; "Force grew out of monopoly", he argued, so if the established administration of property were done away with, the spirit of fraud, oppression, and severity would also come to an end.<sup>2</sup>

According to Godwin's conception, the rent-roll of the lands of England represented a formidable pension list; while the labourer and manufacturer performed the duties, the income they produced was spent on luxury and idleness by the property-owner. To support this point he referred to Ogilvie's Essay on the Right of Property in Land, the reasonings of which had "considerable merit", although they did not go to the source of the evil.<sup>3</sup> Godwin showed himself aware of the problem of population in regard to his proposals for equality when he mentioned Wallace's Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature and Providence (1761), which saw an excess of population as making impossible a system of common property, thus in some respects anticipating Malthus. In reply to this argument, Godwin asserted, again looking to Ogilvie for support, that Europe could maintain five times its present numbers, in view of which, "the established system of property, may be considered as strangling a considerable portion of our children in their cradle."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as most of the earth was uncultivated, "myriads of centuries of still increasing population

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1. Ibid., p.798.

2. Ibid., p.809.

3. Ibid., p.804n.

4. Ibid., p.813.

may probably pass away and the earth still be found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants".<sup>1</sup> Even better, Godwin believed with true utopian optimism, it was possible that men might become immortal and cease to propagate.<sup>2</sup> The notion of man attaining immortality had been expressed by the Girondist, the Marquis de Condorcet in his Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progres de l'esprit humain. Also inspired by the Revolution, this book had been written by Condorcet while in hiding, before his capture and death in 1794.<sup>3</sup> A translation appeared in 1795 making known to a wider English audience another view of the perfectibility of man.<sup>4</sup>

The high price of Political Justice, at three guineas, possibly saved it from prosecution by the Government. But prior to the appearance of cheaper editions, this cost does not seem to have lessened its influence to the extent which may have been expected. Labourers contributed towards the purchase of a single copy which might be read aloud or passed from hand to hand. Godwin noted that while travelling in Warwickshire in October, 1794:

there was not a person almost in town or village who had any acquaintance with modern publications that had not heard of the 'Enquiry concerning Political Justice', or that was not acquainted in a great or small degree with the contents of that work. I was nowhere a stranger.

5

Godwin added to his reputation in 1794 when his imaginative novel Caleb Williams appeared. In this study of the mind of a pursued

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1. Ibid., p.861.

2. Ibid., p.871.

3. A brief account of these circumstances is given by G.F. McCleary, The Malthusian Population Theory, (1953), pp.15-16.

4. For a modern translation, Antione-Nicholas de Condorcet, Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, (1955, trans. June Barraclough).

5. C. Kegan Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries, (2 vols., 1876), vol. 1, p.118. However, E.P. Thompson, op.cit., p.98, suggests that Godwin's influence was confined to a small and highly literate circle, and did not reach a working class public until after 1815.

criminal, a "victim of society", Godwin covered in a different manner the principles of Political Justice. To the fame he had acquired as a spectator on political and metaphysical problems, was now added further praise for his literary abilities. Although it may be said that Godwin never again reached the creative level of these works as in the effort "he expended himself",<sup>1</sup> he did not cease to write. When Hardy, Thelwall and others were on trial charged with treason in 1794, Godwin quickly produced a pamphlet, Cursory Strictures on the Charges Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre to the Grand Jury. This enhanced further his popular reputation, especially when the defendants were acquitted, and one of them, Horne Tooke, professed that he was indebted to Godwin's tract for his life.<sup>2</sup>

However, in the following year the reformers were angered by another of Godwin's pamphlets. For this, Considerations on Lord Grenville's and Mr. Pitt's Bills, he adopted the pen-name "A Lover of Order", and castigated both Thelwall's activities and Pitt's policy of repression. In Political Justice, Godwin had abjured the use of force as a means of bringing change, and in his pamphlet the argument was developed that reason was obscured by violence and passions of hatred; the achievements already gained should not be lost by a revolution. For this reason he opposed Thelwall, whom he saw as threatening completely to overturn the established order.<sup>3</sup> Another likely source of friction between the radicals and Godwin was the latter's admiration for Burke, to whom he paid a tribute in the 1797 edition of Political Justice, remarking on the late statesman's "long record of human

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1. W.L. Renwick, English Literature, 1789-1815, (Oxford, 1963), p.27.

2. Brown, op.cit., p.96.

3. B. Sprague Allen, "William Godwin's Influence upon John Thelwall", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, vol. 37, (1922), pp.670-671.

genius" and "the grandeur and integrity of his feelings of morality".<sup>1</sup>

V

As Godwin became estranged from some of his former supporters, he was also regarded increasingly by many as an English equivalent of the extremists who held power in France. The majority of those who had at first welcomed the Revolution changed their mind after the Terror and the outbreak of the war against England, and those who failed to recant were attacked by conservative public opinion in organs such as the Anti-Jacobin Review. Much of this counter-revolutionary agitation was vehemently directed against Godwin from around 1797.<sup>2</sup> In that year Godwin's Enquirer appeared, a work that produced one of the more reasoned replies to his theories, that of Malthus. The Enquirer took the form of a collection of essays, which were fairly summarised in the sub-title as "Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature". In his preface Godwin described these essays, twenty-eight in number, as investigating truth by "an incessant recurrence to experiment and actual observation".<sup>3</sup> This method, which may be termed deductive, stood in contrast to the approach adopted by Godwin in Political Justice, where he sought to build a system of truth upon the few basic principles with which he began. Some commentators, such as de Quincey, believed that in the second edition of Political Justice, which came out in 1796, Godwin had watered down his radicalism.<sup>4</sup> This is not altogether true; the

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1. James T. Boulton, The Language of Politics in the Age of Wilkes and Burke, (1963), p.228.

2. For examples of the abuse to which Godwin was subjected, see Brown, op.cit., pp.154-164.

3. William Godwin, The Enquirer.... (1797), p.vi.

4. "The second edition, as regards principles, is not a recant but absolutely a travesty of the first; nay, it is all but a palinode" de Quincey, quoted by F.E.L. Priestly (ed.), Political Justice, (3 vols., Toronto, 1946), vol. 3, p.81.

first edition had been hastily written and Godwin therefore sought to make amendments to the second. In essence, the ideas did not change, although the suggestion that man might become immortal was dropped and some of the more strikingly radical expressions were omitted. It is likely that in the three years between the appearance of the first and second editions, the ideas which Godwin was expressing became well enough known to blunt their impact. In the Enquirer, too, he had little new to say and the tone adopted by him was not particularly radical. Its reception was unenthusiastic, but the essays did have one important consequence: Malthus took strong exception to the argument in Godwin's essay "Of Avarice and Profusion".

The basic question considered by this essay was one which arose not infrequently in the writings of the time.<sup>1</sup> It was whether the poor derived any benefit from the existence of rich men. At its simplest, the argument of those who believed the poor did gain, was founded upon the premise that the expenditure of wealthy men created employment opportunities for the poor; the expensive tastes of the rich kept the poor occupied and provided with wages. It was, indeed, the duty of the prosperous to indulge in these opulent tastes. Godwin rejected this convenient view. He believed that the poor were in fact injured by the rich who were lavish in their expenditure more than by the person of property who was too avaricious to spend his income. Every new luxury demanded by the rich, Godwin stated, compelled others to labour for their benefit; their houses, gardens, horses, servants, and so forth, "may assume the name of munificence", but were in reality "added expedients for grinding the poor".<sup>2</sup> His reasoning was a

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1. One instance, by Bishop Watson of Llandaff, is referred to below, p.154.

2. Enquirer, op.cit., p.178.



development of Locke's concept of the labourer being entitled to the fruits of his efforts, but Godwin stated this more decisively and in a way that anticipated the "labour theory of value" school, by arguing that all wealth was derived from the labour of man, and what was misnamed wealth was "a power vested in certain individuals by the institutions of society, to compel others to labour for their benefit."<sup>1</sup>

These propositions became the subject of a discussion between Malthus and his father, which led the son, for greater clarity, to state his thoughts on paper.<sup>2</sup> While employed in this task, further ideas occurred to Malthus who decided also to consider Political Justice and Condorcet's essay and test their speculations as to the perfectibility of man and society against his touchstone, the principle of population.

## VI

Robert Malthus was the son of a country gentleman, Daniel Malthus, who had been sympathetic towards the ideas of the French philosophers. It is not without irony, that, while Godwin reacted against a despairing and authoritarian background that emphasised the frailty of the human soul, Malthus's education was a liberal one. In 1766, when Robert was three weeks old, Daniel Malthus was host to Rousseau, and while this event passed above him, his father taught him in the style of Emile, and for a tutor selected Gilbert Wakefield, who had similar liberal attitudes.<sup>3</sup> Malthus, however, did not grow up to be a man who accepted a theory because

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1. Ibid., p.177; cp. below, pp.193-194.

2. Malthus, Essay, (1798), p.iii; also James Bonar, Malthus and His Work, (1885; 2nd ed. 1924), pp.14f.

3. Bonar, op.cit., pp.405-406. In 1798 Wakefield wrote a Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff for which he was imprisoned on a charge of sedition.

it possessed an idealistic content. His training had been in mathematics - he was ninth wrangler at Cambridge in 1788 - and, while his writings are not without unfounded assertions, his intellectual approach to economic questions was to examine facts rather than create theories.<sup>1</sup>

In his Essay, Malthus believed that he had "read some of the speculations on the future improvement of society, in a temper very different from a wish to find them visionary", but could not avoid doing so.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he admitted that in his Essay he had cast his opinion of the threat of over-population in a "melancholy hue" and drawn human life in "dark tints".<sup>3</sup> These attitudes may well have been confirmed by his experience as a curate at Okewood. In the three calendar years which he spent there between 1792 and 1794, fifty-one christenings were recorded as against only twelve burials, and one writer has suggested that this may have had an "emotional impact" on Malthus, especially as he buried three of his christenings.<sup>4</sup> In real life, he noted, the children of the peasantry were not the rosy cherubs described in romances, but stunted due to want of proper or sufficient nourishment.<sup>5</sup> Here was a parallel with Godwin, who wrote of these hardships:

Humanity weeps over the distresses of the peasantry of all civilized nations; and when she turns from this spectacle to behold the luxury of their lords, gross, imperious, and prodigal, her sensations certainly are not less acute.

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1. A characteristic recognised by novelists: Malthus appeared as "Mr. Fax" in Peacock's Headlong Hall, while Dickens caused the hard-headed Gradgrind to name his son "Malthus".

2. Essay, (1798), p.iii.

3. Ibid., p.iv.

4. Patricia James (ed.), The Travel Diaries of Thomas Robert Malthus, (Cambridge, 1966), p.7.

5. Essay, (1798), p.73.

6. Political Justice, p.803.

While there may have been some measure of agreement between Godwin and Malthus on the condition of the peasantry, the latter did not accept that poverty was avoidable. Whatever the rich might do, "no possible form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery", and if all were to be made equal, all would suffer misery.<sup>1</sup> It was pointless for the rich to attempt to help the poor by such devices as subscriptions, stated Malthus, for the giving of money would not make available more food.<sup>2</sup> The poor-law operated as a "pernicious tendency";<sup>3</sup> and the poor-law bill proposed by Pitt instead of providing a solution, would create more poor.<sup>4</sup> Malthus did not impugn the good intentions of those who sought reforms; "I have been warmed and delighted with the enchanting picture which they hold forth", he wrote of the speculative philosophers.<sup>5</sup> It was simply that they failed to realise the unconquerable difficulty which the principle of population presented. This was the leitmotif that ran through the Essay: the multiplication of humanity presented an inexorable problem; the distress of the lower classes of society was "so deeply seated, that no human ingenuity can reach it".<sup>6</sup> Even the most extreme redistribution of landed property would not avail to stem what Cotter Morison was to term "the devastating torrent of children".<sup>7</sup> Malthus was quite clear in relating his principle of population to the system of landownership: "No fancied equality, no agrarian regulations in their utmost extent, could remove the pressure of it even for a single century".<sup>8</sup> It

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1. Essay, (1798), p.36.

2. Ibid., pp.75-82.

3. Ibid., p.85.

4. Ibid., pp.94-95, 134-135.

5. Ibid., p.7.

6. Ibid., p.95.

7. J. Cotter Morison, The Service of Man: An Essay towards the Religion of the Future, (1887), p.xxx.

8. Essay, (1798), p.16.

naturally followed that there would be no point in altering the prevailing pattern of property relationships in an attempt to escape this law.

Having expounded these views, Malthus went on to apply them to Godwin's system. He was more generous with his opponent than many other critics had been. Political Justice was described as ingenious and able; its style had spirit and energy; some of its reasoning showed force and precision; the whole had an air of truth and earnestness, while "The system of equality which Mr. Godwin proposes, is, without doubt, by far the most beautiful and engaging of any that has yet appeared".<sup>1</sup> It was, Malthus declared, "impossible to contemplate the whole of this fair structure, without emotions of delight and admiration, accompanied with ardent longing for the period of its accomplishment".<sup>2</sup> But, continued Malthus, that time would never arrive; the principle of population, mentioned, though not investigated by Godwin, "will be found to be the grinding law of necessity."<sup>3</sup> Even were Godwin's system to be established, it would survive "instead of myriads of centuries, not thirty years...before its utter destruction from the simple principle of population".<sup>4</sup> This would follow because those born after the division of property had been made would come into a world already possessed, and "from the inevitable laws of nature", the perfect society would degenerate into "a society divided into a class of proprietors, and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the mainspring of the great machine".<sup>5</sup> As for Godwin's passing reference to the possibility of man's immortality, Malthus

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1. Ibid., p.174.

2. Ibid., p.175.

3. Ibid., p.176.

4. Ibid., p.208.

5. Ibid., p.207.

devoted a full chapter to demonstrate its utter impossibility.<sup>1</sup>

On these grounds Malthus was fully at odds with Godwin, as he was too in his attitude towards the French Revolution, which had involved:

a fermentation of disgusting passions, of fear, cruelty, malice, revenge, ambition, madness, and folly, as would have disgraced the most savage nation in the most barbarous age

2

Godwin, on the other hand, described Political Justice as "the child of the French Revolution",<sup>3</sup> and remained committed to the cause of Jacobinism to the extent of regarding Napoleon as its later embodiment.<sup>4</sup> But while it would be fair to describe Malthus as a counter-revolutionary, he was not a last-ditcher; he was willing to concede that "the present great inequality of property... must certainly be considered as an evil".<sup>5</sup> He further allowed that a nearer equalization of property would result in one advantage:

The greater number of proprietors, the smaller must be the number of labourers: a greater part of society would be in the happy state of possessing property; and a smaller part in the unhappy state of possessing no other property than their labour.

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Previous to this, he had agreed that "the equalization of property... would tend greatly to augment the produce of the country".<sup>7</sup> Each

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1. Ibid., chapter 12. Condorcet, too, had made a similar suggestion that human life may be prolonged indefinitely; Malthus showed less patience with this adversary than he did with Godwin, dismissing the idea as part of the "present rage for wide and unrestrained speculation", p.162n.

2. Ibid., pp.144-145.

3. William Godwin, Thoughts occasioned by the perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800: being a reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the author of an Essay on Population, and others, (1801), p.2.

4. According to Crabb Robinson, at the fall of Napoleon he knew only four men that grieved: Capel Lloft, Thelwall, Hazlitt and Godwin, quoted by F.K. Brown, op.cit., p.151.

5. Essay, (1798), p.287n.

6. Ibid., pp.344-345.

7. Ibid., p.186.

of these concessions to the critics of the concentration of property in few hands, however, was qualified. Malthus did not see how the government might effectively interfere to prevent the inequality of fortunes; the pressure of want would remain even if the best directed exertions were made, for the principle of population was unalterable, and if a greater output of food was achieved, it would simply be offset by an increase in numbers.

Malthus's thought revealed elements of the whiggish idea that, although all was not well with society, to interfere may result in things getting worse. In the first edition, Malthus's clerical training was also to the fore: in natural theology he found further confirmation of his ideas. It seemed to him that the purpose of the Supreme Being was to encourage those Christian virtues which resulted from the sorrows and distresses of life; prosperity had a tendency to degrade rather than exalt the character.<sup>1</sup> Much of Malthus's first Essay took the form of a philosophical discourse, not dissimilar in approach to that of Godwin. As we have seen, in the course of his treatise Malthus made much of the principle of population, although confusing the issue by mixing together moral judgements with attempts to define the "law of nature" which allowed population when unchecked to increase in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence to increase only in an arithmetical ratio.<sup>2</sup>

Though published anonymously, the Essay enjoyed a wide circulation and the responsibility for its authorship soon became known. Godwin met Malthus in August, 1798, and the meeting was on polite terms with an exchange of letters following it. In one of these letters, Malthus expanded his views on landed property.

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1. Ibid., pp.372-373.

2. Ibid., p.14. After the first edition of the Essay, Malthus discarded most of his theological arguments and his writings came to depend more on economic considerations.



Although his argument is rather lacking in lucidity, it is worth giving at length. Malthus appeared to theorise that, even with greater equality in the division of property, some sort of adjustment principle would act on the demand for labour to regulate the number of labourers:

Were the island of Great Britain divided among a great number of small proprietors, which would probably be the most advantageous system in respect of produce, it would be the natural wish of each of these proprietors to get the labour of his farm done for as small a part of the produce as he could, that he might be able to gratify his inclination in marrying without transgressing the rules of prudence, and provide for a large family should he have one. The consequence of this desire in the proprietor to realise a sufficiency to maintain and provide for a family, together with a desire in the labourer to obtain the advantages of property, would be that the labourer would work 6, 8, or 10 hours in the day for less than would support 3, 4, or 5 persons, working two hours a day. Consequently the equal division of the necessary labour would not take place. The labourers that were employed would not possess much leisure, and the labourers that were not employed would perish from want, to make room for the increase of the families of proprietors, who, as soon as they were increased beyond the power of their property to support, must become labourers to others, who, either from prudence or accident, had no families. And thus it appears that, notwithstanding the abolition of all luxuries, and a more equal division of property, the race of labourers would still be regulated by the demand for labour, and the state of the funds for its maintenance.

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Intellectually, there was little common ground between the two men. As their premises were different, so were their conclusions. Malthus's appeals to the wisdom of the Great Creator could have found little response in Godwin whose speculative philosophy contrasted with the more empiricalist approach of Malthus. And Malthus's main argument, that the pressure of population was responsible for most social ills, was completely at odds with Godwin's estimate that Europe could support a population five times as great.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Malthus to Godwin, 20 August, 1798, quoted by Paul, op.cit., vol. 1, pp.323-325.

2. Political Justice, p.813.

This wide divergence may account in part for the feebleness of Godwin's initial response to Malthus. Later, when Malthus had brought out further editions of the Essay and gained much renown, Godwin produced a long reply.<sup>1</sup> But his first answer was included in the comments made after Parr's attack, in which Godwin even had a word of praise for the "liberality" of Malthus's mind.<sup>2</sup> In his Thoughts on Parr's sermon, Godwin was attempting to reconcile a number of apparent contradictions. While declaring himself "an enemy to revolutions" he believed that "all the great points" embraced by the French Revolution, "remained entire".<sup>3</sup> He also admitted Malthus's arithmetic and geometrical ratios "in their full extent",<sup>4</sup> but refused to draw the same conclusions. Again, Godwin spoke of the majority of men as "corrupt, low-minded, besotted, prepared for degradation and vice",<sup>5</sup> but still hoped for human perfectibility. In essence, his answer was summed up in a fine-sounding sentence, but one too utopian to overcome the objections of his critics: "What the heart of man is able to conceive, the hand of man is strong enough to perform".<sup>6</sup>

With these seemingly confused attitudes, the Thoughts failed to redress the balance. Godwin was no longer celebrated, and the remainder of his long life was an anti-climax, ending in 1836, three years after Sir James Mackintosh (Ogilvie's old pupil) had helped to obtain for him the sinecure office of Yeoman Usher of the Exchequer. Sydney Smith, in reviewing Godwin's Thoughts on

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1. In 1820, when it was generally received with derision; see below, pp.110-111.

2. Godwin, Thoughts, op.cit., p.55. For a discussion of the argument between Godwin and Parr, see Warren Derry, Dr. Parr: A Portrait of the Whig Dr. Johnson, (Oxford, 1966), pp.209-219.

3. Thoughts, op.cit., pp.5-6.

4. Ibid., p.61.

5. Ibid., p.64.

6. Ibid., p.81.

Parr's sermon, declared that "the great expedient which this philosopher has in store to counteract the bad effects of excessive population, (so ably pointed out by Mr. Malthus /sic/), are, abortion and child-murder".<sup>1</sup> This, in spite of Godwin's assertion that it was the established system of property which had the effect of strangling children in their cradles, was not untypical of public opinion. Godwin was considered to be discredited, and by his refutation, Malthus became one of the champions of the established order. His future publications were assured an influential audience.

## VII

During the next few years, Malthus elaborated and refined his theory of population. In 1799 he travelled to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, and while his visit appears to have partly taken the nature of a vacation, he was able to obtain some material for use in the second edition of his Essay.<sup>2</sup> However, a demographic historian has recently suggested that Malthus merely collected data which fitted in with his pre-conceived theories and cannot be regarded as an early application of the inductive method to social science.<sup>3</sup> The widespread scarcity of grain in 1800 resulted in an extensive literature discussing how and why the shortage had arisen and proposing various remedies. Malthus contributed to this debate by publishing a tract which employed the principle of

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1. /Sydney Smith/, "Godwin's Reply to Parr", Edinburgh Review, vol. 1, (1802), p.26.

2. E.g., in the Essay (1803), p.193, Malthus referred to a remark by a Copenhagen professor that agricultural progress was slow due to the absence of example set by gentlemen farmers. In his journal of 12 June, 1799, he recorded a conversation with Professor Abildgaard who made this point, James, op.cit., p.60.

3. Michael Drake, Population and Society in Norway 1735-1865, (Cambridge, 1969), pp.29-40.

population in its analysis of the problem.<sup>1</sup> He argued that his theory as expressed in the first edition of the Essay had been borne out by events. Twenty years earlier, stated Malthus, the country had been able to export grain in considerable amounts. Since that time, it could not be argued that the agriculture of the country had gone backward and, therefore, he declared, it was an increase in population that was responsible for the inability of the country to support its inhabitants.

In his tract, Malthus referred to the essay on population and mentioned that he intended to bring out a second edition. This appeared in 1803 after two years' preparation. Whereas the first edition had been hastily written and made use of few materials, the second contained a parade of learning and evidence of research in some depth. In 1798, Malthus treated the principle of population as a bright idea which he quickly cast to paper. As he studied the question in more detail, he realised much had already been written upon it: certain French writers, Franklin, Sir James Steuart, Arthur Young, and Townsend were authors whom Malthus mentioned and expressed surprise "that it had not excited more of the publick attention".<sup>2</sup> In seeking to add to these authorities, Malthus went into the subject in detail, employing much historical and statistical material to produce a volume substantial and impressive in appearance. Such a treatment no doubt helped to maintain the influence of the Essay. The basic hypothesis, however, remained the same, and was stated from the outset, the principle of population:

appeared to account for much of that poverty and misery observable among the lower classes of people in every nation, and for those reiterated failures in the efforts of the higher classes to relieve them.

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1. /T.R. Malthus/, An Investigation into the Causes of the High Price of Provisions, (1800), by the author of the Essay on the Principle of Population.

2. Essay, (1803), p.iv. For a survey of these earlier writers, James Bonar, Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young, (1931)

3. Ibid., p.iii.

Political Justice was again refuted by Malthus in the second edition, but relatively briefly, being accorded a short chapter. Malthus allowed himself a few pages to comment upon Godwin's reply in which he simply observed that the system proposed by Godwin was unsound and would result in harm rather than good:

The only reason why I object to Mr. Godwin's system, is, my full conviction that an attempt to execute it, would very greatly increase the quantity of vice and misery in society.

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There the debate between the two men rested until Godwin's book of 1820. But the second edition of the Essay opened up a new debate. If Malthus had been able to vanquish the visionary schemes of a speculative philosopher by his principle of population, he was able to use it with equal effectiveness against proposals of Arthur Young's which appeared to be based upon a more practical footing. Young was in most respects completely different from Godwin, but he too had advocated changes in the distribution of property. As a solution to the economic hardships suffered by the labouring classes, Young had proposed that they be allowed to hold land in order to better support themselves. To Malthus such a scheme was replete with the danger of encouraging population, and he called Young to account. But before going on to examine Malthus's strictures upon Young's plan, it is necessary to examine what Young stood for and how he arrived at his controversial proposal.

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1. Ibid., p.381.

CHAPTER II: ARTHUR YOUNG versus T.R. MALTHUS

The Essay /on Population/ not only had the practical value of an insurance against Godwin's utopian dreams, or Spence's nightmare plan to nationalise land, but the intellectual and inspirational value also of an integrating creed.

H.L. Beales, "The Historical Context of the Essay on Population" in D.V. Glass (ed.), Introduction to Malthus, (1953), p.9.

Arthur Young is best remembered as an agricultural publicist responsible for a large output of writing. He was active in this way for a period of some forty years, during which time he edited his widely-read Annals of Agriculture, wrote accounts of the various tours that he undertook, and helped to bring out the Board of Agriculture's "General Views" of the British counties. But his writings were not merely confined to the day-to-day questions of farming practice, for, while Young did discuss crops, machinery, rotations, and all the other points of good husbandry, he also expressed his opinions on broader social issues. The popularity of Young's writings brought him into contact with many of the leaders of the landed and agricultural interests, as well as men such as Burke and Bentham.<sup>1</sup>

Although Young achieved eminence through the works he published, he had received a fairly good start in life. His family were comfortable members of the squirearchy who had held Bradfield Hall in Suffolk since 1620, when it had been purchased by Young's

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1. Young appears to have made the acquaintance of Burke as early as 1770, when the latter sought his advice on carrot-growing; see Burke's letter to Young, 21 October, 1770, in Lucy S. Sutherland (ed), The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, (Cambridge & Chicago, 1960), vol. 2, pp.165-167. Also Donald Cross Bryant, Edmund Burke and His Literary Friends, (St. Louis, 1939), pp.285-287. For correspondence between Bentham and Young, B.M. Add. MSS 33, 541 and 33, 542.



ancestor, Lord Jermyrn of Rushbrooke.<sup>1</sup> Young's father was the Prebendary of Canterbury Cathedral and had married a wife who brought a dowry of £80,000 with her. When Young was born, in 1741, the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Bishop of Bristol stood as sponsors for him: it was, as his biographer remarks, an "appropriate inauguration of a life destined to be spent in the best company".<sup>2</sup> To begin with Young's career did not go smoothly, and an attempt to farm a property of his mother's between 1763 and 1766 ended unsuccessfully. In 1767 he made a tour through the southern counties, of which he published an account. This was followed by the Northern Tour (1768) and the Eastern in 1770. His next principal journey was to Ireland, and the account of it, published in two volumes in 1780, firmly established Young's reputation. By the time this work appeared, a number of volumes covering aspects of the rural economy had been brought out. In this period of agricultural change, there was a steady demand from improving landlords and ambitious farmers for information about new techniques. If not responsible for any major innovation, Young was instrumental in making known the latest methods and details of farming practice. In 1784 he began the Annals of Agriculture which was to provide his main platform for twenty years. Between a quarter and a third of the Annals came from Young's pen and his

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1. M. Betham-Edwards (ed), The Autobiography of Arthur Young, (1898), p.2. This is the best source for Young's life, even though Miss Betham-Edwards shortened the original manuscript which she appears to have subsequently destroyed. Amelia Defries, Sheep and Turnips: Being the Life and Times of Arthur Young, F.R.S., (1938) is unreliable.

2. M. Betham-Edwards, "Biographical Sketch" in Travels in France (Bohn's Library ed., 1889), p.xxix.

correspondents included many of the foremost members of the agricultural community.<sup>1</sup> During 1787, 1788, and 1789, Young travelled in France and wrote an account which became widely-quoted and the best known of all his journeys.<sup>2</sup> In his many writings, Young generally exhibited a vigorous and colourful style. Whether popularising new farming methods or expounding his views of society, his style has a ring of practical common-sense, although his opinions were at times fanciful and self-contradictory.

## II

For the greater part of his career Young supported agricultural improvement. He advocated a general enclosure act in order to simplify and encourage enclosures. He supported the industrious farmer who was anxious to raise the standard of farming and criticised the landlord who, through lethargy or a desire to maintain his sport, left tracts of land uncultivated and unimproved. He castigated those landlords who would not look after what he considered to be their own best interests, referring to them as, "that insensible, torpid, and stupid body, 'the landlords of Britain'".<sup>3</sup> He advocated high rents as a stimulus to efficient farming and favoured leases with security of possession. But, in other respects, Young was a conservative who wished to preserve the social structure unchanged although economic

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1. It is generally accepted that the two contributions of "Ralph Robinson of Windsor" were by the King, and according to Bentham, Young "held a situation of considerable altitude in the good opinion of George III", Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.285. Young claimed the monarch told him, "Mr. Y., I consider myself as more obliged to you than to any other man in my domains", Autobiography, op.cit., p.112.

2. Travels in France is considered in more detail below, pp.316-319.

3. Young, Autobiography, op.cit., p.167; diary entry for 22 April, 1788.

developments such as those supported by him were altering the positions of different sections of society. Many farmers were prospering and sought to imitate the habits of the gentry, for which ambitions they earned Young's rebuke.<sup>1</sup>

These two aims of Young's, to see a progressive and efficient pattern of agriculture and the maintenance of a stable social structure, were bound to conflict. To encourage farming improvements, Young generally favoured the large farm, but this involved the disappearance of the small farmer and also, with the enclosure of common land, the class of semi-independent agricultural labourers which had been able to supplement a livelihood, gained from the common and perhaps a cottage garden, by occasional labour for a larger farmer. These groups had been under pressure for some time, and the number of survivors is problematical. But the issue of quantification is relatively unimportant: the point is, that Young and other contemporaries believed that these classes were disappearing due to the process of economic change. In attempting to reconcile these divergent opinions - to preserve the social order yet encourage modern farming methods - many of Young's views lacked consistency. It was natural, in his order of things, that the labouring class had a duty to work in a contented and wholehearted manner, and to accept this lot in life; in a well-known remark he expressed his opinion that "everyone but an ideot /sic/ knows that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious".<sup>2</sup>

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1. An example from Young's excursion to Lewes Fair, 1791, is quoted below, p.66.

2. Arthur Young, The Farmer's Tour through the East of England..., (4 vols., 1770-71), vol. 4, p.361.

But by "poor" he did not mean "poverty" and the higher classes, too, had duties. He was genuinely concerned when he saw hardship, while his patriotic views were such that he realised unrest among the lower classes could weaken the country. Often writers put forward emigration as a solution for distress, but such a remedy was unacceptable to Young. In 1773, he discussed proposals for emigration to America and rhetorically asked, "why should not these emigrations be to the moors and heaths of Britain, instead of the swamps and forests of America?"<sup>1</sup> To support his argument Young insisted that large estates were worse managed than small as they were left in the care of stewards. Moreover, large landlords because they sought popularity, charged less than the full value of the land, which in consequence was less well cultivated, while wastes were left unimproved in order to be used for hunting. To reduce emigration Young suggested the creation of small farms and special encouragement to the parents of large families:

But such are the charms of giving people land for their own: I am very clear, that if the legislature would purchase all the wastes in Britain that came to market and immediately resell them in parcels of 20 or 30 acres, letting the man that had eight children, or upwards, have his lot for nothing, that such a conduct would stop many immigrants.

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The year after this pronouncement, Young reverted to his previous position by referring to, "small farms with their universal attendant, poor farmers, can never form such a system

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1. Arthur Young, Observations on the Present State of Waste Lands of Great Britain, (1773), p.39.
  2. Ibid., pp.44-45.

of employ as richer farmers".<sup>1</sup> Down to the 1790s, Young typically associated small farms with inefficiency, stating that he knew no tract of country that was well-cultivated and divided into farms of less than one hundred acres. Farms of ten to twenty acres he described as "very generally the residence of poverty and misery; wretchedly cultivated".<sup>2</sup> In the Travels in France, Young gave for the greater part an unfavourable account of the system of petite culture. He had however in the first volume of the Annals of Agriculture, returned to his idea of utilising the wastes to provide small farms for the landless. On this occasion the scheme was prompted by the need to absorb soldiers and sailors lately discharged from the American war. Young proposed that they should be employed by giving those who wished ten acres of waste land apiece. He estimated that Britain contained upwards of eight million acres of unimproved waste land. Figures were provided to show the viability of the scheme; Young computed that 16,666 men would each year bring into cultivation 166,660 acres, and in so doing increase the public revenue by £2 million yearly.<sup>3</sup> While this suggestion was soon forgotten, it did have some points in common with his 1773 programme of waste reclamation and it foreshadowed Young's later proposal which he was to make with much greater force and persistence. When he returned to the idea, Young held a fairly prominent and influential position. Further, as on earlier occasions the proposal arose from patriotic motives and Young's desire for social stability.

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1. Political Arithmetic..., (1774), p.70. Young had also argued that large farms were more efficient than small in The Farmer's Letters to the People of England..., (2 vols. 3rd ed., 1771), vol. 2 pp.88-153.

2. Arthur Young, "On the Size of Farms", in A. Hunter (ed.), Georgical Essays, (4 vols. York, 1803), vol. 4, p.560. It is probable that Young wrote this essay some years before its appearance in this collection.

3. Arthur Young, "An Enquiry into the Situation of the Kingdom on the Conclusion of the late Treaty...", Annals, vol. 1, (1784), pp.56-57.

For over fifteen years Young actively worked as a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and this helped to make him more widely known.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Annals of Agriculture had by the 1790s become something of an English institution. Young was one of the best-known writers of the day; his views on agriculture were widely respected, and when the Board of Agriculture was founded in 1793, he was appointed Secretary at an annual salary of £400. In the early period of the Board, much of its parliamentary grant of £3,000 a year was absorbed in publishing surveys of agriculture in English and Scottish counties. This was largely due to the policy of the President, Sir John Sinclair, whose "sole object" according to Young, was "incessant printing".<sup>2</sup> Hard-working and serious-minded, Sinclair, whose single attempt at humour was said to be a frequently repeated toast, "May commons become uncommon,"<sup>3</sup> owed his position to the services which he had rendered Pitt.<sup>4</sup> It was suggested among contemporaries, that Young had been appointed Secretary as a bribe to ensure his support for the Government during a period of popular unrest and dissatisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Young acknowledged that he had received the office as a reward for his Example of France, and that Lord Loughborough had told him:

You may do what suits yourself best, I conceive, for we all consider ourselves so much obliged to you that you cannot be rewarded in a manner too agreeably.

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1. John G. Gazley, "Arthur Young and the Society of Arts", Journal of Economic History, vol. 1, (1940), pp.129-152.
2. Add. MSS 34,855, f.14, (from a memorandum written by Young). The quality of the early Reports was uneven and many were rewritten; those by Young in the second series show the change that had taken place in his opinions on the subject of land for labourers.
3. Leslie Stephen, Studies of a Biographer, (4 vols, 1907), vol. 1, p.206.
4. Rosalind Mitchison, Agricultural Sir John: The Life of Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster 1754-1835, (1962), pp.138-139.
5. For example, the agricultural writer William Marshall, who admittedly was envious of Young's standing, described the appointment as "a job"; quoted by Sir Ernest Clarke, "The Board of Agriculture, 1793-1822", Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, 3rd series, vol. 9 (1898), p.4.
6. Autobiography, op.cit., p.219.



The Travels in France had not been unsympathetic to the Revolution, but in August 1792, Young changed his position in three articles written for the Annals, which were incorporated into his tract, The Example of France, a Warning to Britain (1793). In this he stressed the value of the British Constitution in preference to ideas involving the rights of man and equality; the levelling of property had brought France into a state of ruin, misery and anarchy. This tract gave great comfort to Pitt and his party, and quickly passed through four editions. His friend Burke thought it a "most able, useful, and reasonable pamphlet."<sup>1</sup> At Lady Hesketh's "a large part of bluestockings" agreed that Young's tract and Hannah More's Village Politics by "Will Chip", "were the best on the subject".<sup>2</sup> To be bracketed with such company must have been a great compliment to Young, who attested that he was "very eager in listening to every word that fell from Hannah More".<sup>3</sup>

### III

In 1793 Young reviewed Godwin's Political Justice. It provided, he declared, "opinions more paradoxical, bolder assertions, morals more depraved; and impudence more unblushing" than were found in the works of Paine.<sup>4</sup> Young denounced the Jacobinism of Political Justice, the real object of which, "is palpable, and even avowed, from the first page to the last of this

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1. Burke to Young, 5 March 1793, ibid., p.232.

2. Charles Burney to Young, 12 May 1793, ibid., p.233. Fanny Burney, the authoress, was Young's niece.

3. Ibid., p.246.

4. "All Property invested in Land, whether by Landlords or Tenants, attacked by Reformers", Annals, vol. 21, (1793), p.176. The article was unsigned, but is clearly in Young's style; it has been attributed to him by G.D. Amery, "The Writings of Arthur Young", Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, vol. 85, (1924), p.201.

bulky emanation of 'mind', - LEVELLING PROPERTY."<sup>1</sup> He then swept on to a trenchant denunciation of the consequences of Godwin's egalitarian principles:

if such writings are allowed freely to be circulated, democracy will effectively abolish everything that has hitherto been respected in the world; all tangible property and all moral good; it will abolish every possession and eradicate from the heart and mind of man every feeling that does honour to his nature and every ray of knowledge that raises him above a brute. 2

One rejoinder to this came from Major Cartwright who attacked Young for adopting such reactionary opinions. Cartwright declared that of "all the books I ever read", the Example of France was "the most dishonest".<sup>3</sup> Young, wrote Cartwright, was "a man of genius, literature, and a well-earned reputation", but he bewildered the intelligence by becoming "the disgraced disseminator of court delusions the most contemptible; the fabricator of false alarms, to serve the dangerous purposes of a domineering faction; and the very personification of political apostasy".<sup>4</sup> Young replied that much had been written against him with unusual acrimony, but Cartwright had "far exceeded the venom of all the rest".<sup>5</sup> He went on to deny that he had been appointed Secretary as either a bribe or reward; he owed the position to his agricultural pursuits of nearly thirty years.<sup>6</sup> Cartwright was charged with misrepresentation by Young who again went through the arguments in the Example of France to show how the original course of the French Revolution had been perverted.

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1. Ibid., p.181.

2. Ibid., pp.182-183.

3. Cartwright to his wife, 1 December 1794, in F.D. Cartwright (ed.), The Life and Correspondence of Major Cartwright, (2 vols. 1826), vol. 1, p.211.

4. John Cartwright, The Commonwealth in Danger; with an introduction containing remarks on some late writings of Arthur Young, Esq., (1795), pp.iii-iv.

5. Arthur Young, "The Constitution Safe without Reform", Annals, vol. 25, (1796), p.250. The article was also printed separately as a tract.

6. Ibid., p.269.

In 1798 Young wrote a public letter to his friend William Wilberforce in which he expressed the view that the minds of the poor were being poisoned by agitators; "the people have been rendered discontent in an inverse ratio to the cause of discontent".<sup>1</sup> One cure for these evils was an extension of church-building - a cause dear to Wilberforce - for, unless there were sufficient churches,

where are the lower classes to hear the word of GOD... where are they to learn the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the highest powers?

2

Young's concern with matters of religion is characteristic of his thought in later life. In 1797 his youngest daughter, Bobbin, to whom Young was deeply attached, died. It was a blow from which he never fully recovered, and he "nursed his grief into a morbid melancholia."<sup>3</sup> From this time on, much of the reading noted by Young in his diary was of a theological nature. As a gesture to his daughter's memory he held dinners to feed the children of the poor, and his attention increasingly turned to the problems of the agricultural labourer. This was an issue receiving widespread attention in the 1790s, and, against a background of economic hardship, Young began to revise his opinions.

Due to a long winter frost, from December 1794 to March 1795, the harvest was poor.<sup>4</sup> The price of wheat in January 1795 stood at 55/7 per quarter, by July it had risen to 77/2 and reached a

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1. Arthur Young, An Enquiry into the State of the Public Mind amongst the Lower Classes: and on the means of turning it to the welfare of the state. In a letter to William Wilberforce, Esq., M.P. (1798), p.13.

2. Ibid., p.19.

3. John G. Gazley, "Arthur Young, Agriculturalist and Traveller, 1741-1820: Some Biographical Sources", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, vol. 37, (1954-55), p.405.

4. T.S. Ashton, Economic Fluctuations in England, (Oxford, 1959), p.25.

peak of 108/4 in August.<sup>1</sup> These high prices naturally entailed particular problems for the agricultural labourer and in the Annals and elsewhere many suggestions to relieve distress were put forward.<sup>2</sup> The provision of allotments was frequently recommended. This was not a new idea; in 1775, for example, Nathaniel Kent had argued that, because great towns were destructive to morals and health, it was wise to encourage a healthy breed of cottagers and that farmers should be willing to rent land for such a purpose.<sup>3</sup> What appears to have been fairly typical of a number of schemes was operated by Thomas Estcourt, M.P., on his estates in Wiltshire and Gloucester, a report of which appeared in the Annals. Young approved Estcourt's system which allowed fifteen perches of land to each cottage for winter potatoes with beneficial results:

these poor had been, for years, a dissipated, idle, drunken set of poachers, &c. yet, with the assistance of shutting up an alehouse, and repairing their cottages, they are entirely changed, and are now a decent, orderly, industrious set.

4

In the year previous to this account, David Davies, the rector of Barkham, Berkshire, had listed the causes of increased poverty, including amongst them the enlarging and engrossing of farms; greater prodigality amongst the poor once the shame of poor relief had worn off; a rise in population, and the ruin brought by ale-

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1. Thomas Tooke and W. Newmarch, History of Prices, 1793-1856, (6 vols., 1838-57), vol. 1, part 4, chs 2 and 3. For a detailed index of the prices of domestic commodities, A.D. Gayer, W.W. Rostow and A.J. Schwarz, The Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy, 1790-1850, (2 vols., Oxford, 1953) vol. 1, p.469.
  2. For a discussion of some proposed schemes, J.L. and B. Hammond, op.cit., ch. 6, "The Remedies of 1795".
  3. Nathaniel Kent, Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property, (1775), p.231.
  4. Arthur Young, "A Good Method of Assisting the Poor", Annals, vol. 25, (1796), p.531.

houses. He claimed that there would be "undoubtedly a great public benefit" if the poor were allowed to grow potatoes on waste land.<sup>1</sup> Davies advocated a whole range of schemes to improve the condition of the agricultural labourer, including among them the proposal to allow the cottager:

a little land about his dwelling for keeping a cow, for planting potatoes, for raising flax or hemp. 2dly, Convert the wasteland of the kingdom into small arable farms, a certain quantity each year, to be let on favourable terms to industrious families. 3dly, Restrain the engrossment and over-enlargement of farms.

2

The diminution of small farms was held to be a chief cause of shortage by another commentator, who went further than Davies by advocating legislative action to prevent further monopoly.<sup>3</sup>

What became the best known scheme for the provision of allotments was that developed by the Earl of Winchilsea in a letter to the Annals in 1796. The intention behind Winchilsea's recommendation was in no way designed to emancipate the agricultural labourer from his station in life; its primary aim was to make him independent only of poor relief. One indication of the innate conservatism of this plan is given by the social position which its author occupied. George Finch, the ninth Earl of Winchilsea, was born in 1752, when at his baptism George II acted as a sponsor. After an education at Eton and Oxford, he became

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1. David Davies, The Case of Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered..., (1795), p.35.

2. Ibid., pp.102-103.

3. Thomas Wright, A Short Address to the Public on the Monopoly of Small Farms, a great cause of the present scarcity and dear-ness of provisions..., (1795), p.9.

4. Ibid., p.231.

5. Ibid., p.231.

6. Ibid., p.231.

7. Ibid., p.231.



Lord Lieutenant of Rutland in 1779, a post which he held until his death in 1826. Between 1777 and 1812 he occupied a sinecure as a Tory Lord of the Bedchamber and was also a Groom of the Stool, 1804-1812.<sup>1</sup> Winchilsea's letter in the Annals indicated a certain amount of paternalistic concern for the labourer, but emphasised strongly the benefits which the landed interest stood to gain. Basing his opinions on the experience derived from his Rutland estates, Winchilsea stated that those labourers who had gardens or kept cows were more contented and fitter for labour; those with a little property were the hardest working. To this remark, Young respectfully added a footnote: "This is a practical answer to certain objections that have been made in other countries to the system".<sup>2</sup> Winchilsea went on to state that he had seventy or eighty labourers, each keeping from one to four cows, and all were industrious. The system also contributed to keeping down the poor rates, which in one village was as low as 6d in the pound; at this, Young declared, "such an instance is worth a hundred arguments".<sup>3</sup> Low poor rates, though important, were not the only consideration which appealed to the self-interest of the landed class; Winchilsea believed it useful for the labourers' children to be brought up to tend cattle, dig and weed their fathers' allotments, and so forth, so that when a boy came to seek employment he would already have acquired certain skills. On the other hand, the labourer accustomed to very poor surroundings was less efficient, as "extreme poverty begets idleness".<sup>4</sup>

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1. G.E. Cockayne, The Complete Peerage, (eds.), Geoffrey H. White and R.S. Lea, vol. 12, (1959), pp.787, 787-788n.
  2. Lord Winchilsea, "On the Advantages of Cottagers Renting Land", Annals, vol. 26, (1796), p.229n.
  3. Ibid., p.231n.
  4. Ibid., p.240.



IV

While distress was lessened by the improved harvest of 1796 and the palliative of Speenhamland, a certain amount of public attention continued to be directed towards the living standards of the labourer, which were still at a low level, and aggravated by the effects of wartime shortages and price fluctuations. Remedies still appeared in the Annals and elsewhere. Bentham proposed his "Industry House" scheme for pauper management based upon the panopticon principle.<sup>1</sup> Young's son, the Rev. Arthur Young, wrote that the "beggary, filth, misery and starvation" to be found in so many cottages could be remedied by allowing the cottager to rent land for one or two cows and a garden.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bernard argued that making gardens available to the poor would encourage them to be more industrious and less of a burden on the rates.<sup>3</sup> With Wilberforce, Bernard founded the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor.<sup>4</sup> Its patron was the King, and the Society's policy included the provision of allotments, on the carefully regulated basis that Winchilsea had outlined.<sup>5</sup> Winchilsea's scheme was also endorsed

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1. J. Bentham, "Situation and Relief of the Poor", ibid., vols. 29 and 30, (1797-98). A recent article by Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Bentham's Utopia: The National Charity Company", Journal of British Studies, vol. 10, (1970), p.120, argues that in its original form Bentham's scheme encouraged early marriages among paupers, a proposal later suppressed by him in the light of Malthusian ideas.
  2. A. Young Jnr, "Cause and Progress of the Dearness of Provisions and Remedy Proposed", Annals, vol. 29, (1797), pp.122-123.
  3. T. Bernard, "An Account of a Cottage Garden near Tadcaster", ibid., vol. 30, (1798), pp.1-9.
  4. Rev. James Baker, The Life of Sir Thomas Bernard, baronet, (1750-1818), (1819), pp.15-20.
  5. Winchilsea's plan was reprinted in the first volume (1798) of the Society's Reports, along with an account by the Bishop of Durham of the "air of content and gratitude" to be found on Winchilsea's Rutland estate, (p.118).

by Nathaniel Kent, who declared himself to be thoroughly convinced of its value and suggested that the farmer might provide the labourer with a cow, deducting a weekly amount from his wages until the cost was met. Kent, the agent for Lord Egremont, went on to state what gains the farmer might expect: the labourer's children would grow up healthier through drinking fresh milk, while the calf would be the farmer's prerequisite.<sup>1</sup>

Up to this point, Young was an enthusiastic advocate of allotments who had the support of many other agriculturalists who were willing to see the labourer rent small amounts of land as gardens. But filled with a "religious humanitarianism", Young was becoming increasingly sympathetic towards the poor.<sup>2</sup> Combined with this was his fear of public unrest and an apprehension that the growing burden of poor rates would cripple agriculture. Young began to view more favourably the idea that sufficient land should be allowed to the labourer to make him independent of relief, even if at the same time his dependence on the farmer was reduced. As Secretary to the Board of Agriculture he undertook a tour of Lincolnshire the published account of which appeared in 1799. As well as a friendly visit to Brothertoft Farm, which was worked by Major Cartwright, Young looked with favour on the small farmers of Axholme. These were proprietors with four or five acres each, who were said to be poor but happy, and "passionately fond of buying a bit of land".<sup>3</sup> Although according to Young they had to work like Negroes, and lived less

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1. N. Kent, The Great Advantage of a Cow to the Family of a Labouring Man, (1797); reprinted in Annals, vol. 21, (1798), pp.21-26.

2. Claudio Veliz, "Arthur Young and the English Landed Interest, 1784-1813", (Unpublished London Ph.D. thesis, 1959), p.91.

3. Arthur Young, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lincoln, (1799), p.17.

well than the inhabitants of the poor house, "all is made amends for by possessing land".<sup>1</sup> Later in his account, Young wrote that it was "impossible to speak too highly in praise of the cottage system in Lincolnshire, where land, gardens, cows, and pigs are so general in the hands of the poor. ...the great object which ought to employ every heart and hand, is to devise the means of rendering the system universal".<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile economic conditions had again worsened. The severe winter of 1799-1800 was followed by a backward spring and heavy August rains which greatly reduced wheat, barley and oat yields.<sup>3</sup> By June 1800 the price of wheat was 134/5 per quarter, and 156/2 by March 1801. A working-class cost of living index based on fifteen articles rose from a base of 100 in 1790 to an estimated 170 in 1800.<sup>4</sup> In a tract published in 1800, The Question of Scarcity Plainly Stated, Young still favoured enclosure but also urged for the provision of land for the poor to grow potatoes and to keep a cow. In a further article of 1800, Young became more outspoken and returned to the argument that waste land should be given over to large families. His declaration is worth giving at length:

But to be the most grating circumstance is, that such poverty should exist with commons and waste-lands in every quarter; which if portioned out amongst these poor men with great families, would raise them to a state of comfort, ease the poor rates, and at the same time remove a nuisance.

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1. Ibid., p.18.
  2. Ibid., pp.419-420.
  3. Ashton, op.cit., p.25.
  4. Based on N.J. Silberling's statistics, see J.H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, (Cambridge, 1926; 1964 ed.), vol. 1, p.602.

Starving labourers with plenty of waste land is a satire upon legislation. Give a man with ten children four acres and a half; that is, a rood a head: he would contrive, with a very little assistance, to hut himself upon it, and soon cover it with potatoes and cabbages, or grass for a cow; and the best interests of the nation would be promoted, while a disgraceful and immoral poverty, immoral in those who have the power to remove it, would be converted into comfort.

1

In a circular letter, Young solicited views of the effects of the ownership of property on the poor. Some replies had favoured allotments while one of his correspondents had favoured small farms.<sup>2</sup> But others were critical. Thomas Ruggles realised the full implications of Young's proposal and wrote "your idea of giving the poor a property in land.../is/ Quixotic in the extreme; in fact it smells strongly of an agrarian law".<sup>3</sup> Now Young still favoured enclosure, but made his first consideration the interests of the poor, declaring, "I had rather that all the commons of England were sunk in the sea, than that the poor should in future be treated on enclosing as they have generally been hitherto."<sup>4</sup>

Conditions among the poor were investigated at first hand by Young in a tour undertaken by him in the summer of 1800. The result of this was his important article, also printed separately, "An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the better Maintenance and Support of Poor". In some detail Young restated his arguments concerning the hardships felt by the poor and advocated the solution of allowing them to possess land:

The system here proposed to be substituted, that of PROPERTY in house, land, or live stock, has

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1. Arthur Young, "On the State of the Poor", Annals, vol. 34, (1800), p.191.
  2. J. 1'Oste, "Effects of Enclosure", ibid., vol. 36, (1801), pp.114-119.
  3. Ruggles to Young, 15 December 1800, printed ibid., p.354.
  4. Arthur Young, "General Enclosure", ibid., p.214.

not, except in one large district, been tried fairly. In that district it has succeeded completely.

1

Just how much land the poor should be allowed to hold, Young failed to make clear. He deplored the loss of cows as a serious one; it was in this context that Young made his well-known remark to the effect that the poor were injured by nineteen enclosure bills in twenty, and that,

the poor in these parishes may say, and with truth, Parliament may be tender of property; all I know is, I had a cow and an act of Parliament has taken it from me.

2

But Young favoured more than gardens, saying that these were usually slovenly because they provided insufficient inducement to the labourer. A half-acre of land was not enough; Young visited the cottagers of Blofield, Norfolk, and "viewed their little farms with singular pleasure" while reflecting that an enclosure which left a cottager with half an acre would be an equal favour with setting his house on fire.<sup>3</sup> The wastes were to provide the solution, upon them the poor could be settled as small farmers, possibly not only renting, but owning their land, and if Young was unclear as to the numbers of poor involved, and the extent to which they would hold land, he had moved beyond the palliative of carefully-regulated allotments.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly Young realised that his proposal was too far-reaching to be well-received by the landed class. The official

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1. - Arthur Young, 'Propriety of Applying Wastes', ibid., pp.543-544.

2. Ibid., pp.538-539. Referring to this passage, two recent writers have suggested that "Young's famous outburst contained much exaggeration", J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880, (1967), p.98.

3. 'Propriety of Applying Wastes', loc.cit., p.566.

4. A recent study by J.R. Poynter, Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834, (1969), understands Young as advocating peasant proprietorship, "which was to be the scorn, and indeed the fear, of later political economists and poor-law reformers", p.103; the interpretation is not untenable.



response of the Board of Agriculture (as well as Young's pious frame of mind) are aptly illustrated in his own words, as recorded in his diary for 28 March 1801:

Tomorrow will be published in the 'Annals' the first part of my essay on applying waste lands to the better support of the poor. I prepared it some time ago for the Board, as it was collected in my last summer's journey; I read it to a committee - Lord Carrington, Sir C. Willoughby and Mr. Millington - who condemned it, and, after waiting a month, Lord C. told me I might do what I pleased with it for myself, but not to print it as a work for the Board; so I altered the expressions which referred to the body, and sent it to the 'Annals'. I prayed earnestly to God on and since the journey for His blessing on my endeavours to serve the poor, and to influence the minds of people to accept it; but for the wisest reasons certainly He has thought proper not to do this, and for the same reasons probably it will be printed without effect.

1

His pessimism was well-justified. Most farmers were seldom more than lukewarm about allotments; this had been recognised by Winchilsea in his letter when he expressed the hope "that as the quantity of land required for gardens is very small, it will not excite the jealousy of the farmers".<sup>2</sup> The idea that the labourer should be given any great measure of independence was regarded as dangerous and foolish. Burke had told Young that he saw difficulties in cottagers keeping cows.<sup>3</sup> Bentham had taken a similar view in 1797 in his observations on Pitt's Poor Bill, noting that even if the poor were able to get cows, each animal would require some

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1. Autobiography, op.cit., pp.350-351.

2. "On the Advantages of Cottagers Renting Land", loc.cit. p.244.

3. Burke to Young, 1 May 1796, Autobiography, op.cit., p.257.



three acres to maintain it, and this land would not be easily obtained.<sup>1</sup> The landed interest generally opposed Young's proposal; as his diary of 20 April 1801 recorded: "Saturday, Farmers' Club. An argument with Lord Egremont, &c., on land for the poor; everybody is against it".<sup>2</sup>

V

Another critic of Young's scheme was Malthus. If the principle of population provided an effective counter to the utopianism of Godwin, it was equally adaptable as the basis of objection to Young's seemingly practical suggestions. Malthus stated his criticisms in the second edition of his Essay. Like Young, Malthus was a social conservative; the two had many attitudes in common. They shared especially an abhorrence of the French Revolution and what it had come to represent. They supported the established order of church and state and believed that inequality was part of the divinely-appointed order of things. In his economic writings Malthus was semi-physiocratic and shared with Young the opinion that agriculture formed the basis of all the nation's wealth. But Malthus could not allow Young's plan for establishing the poor upon waste land to pass without criticism. Therefore, in his chapter "Of the Errors in Different Plans which have been Proposed to Improve the Condition of the Poor", he took Young to task. He began by referring to the views expressed in the Travels in France, where Young "appears clearly to understand the principle of population, and is fully aware of the evils which

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1. Bentham, Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 8, p.448.
  2. Autobiography, op.cit., p.358.

must necessarily result from an increase of people beyond the demand of labour".<sup>1</sup> In his account, Malthus continued, Young had stated that there were no small properties in those areas of France which suffered little distress, but where wretchedness among the poor was met with, "it is twenty to one but that it is a parish which has some commons, which tempt the poor to have cattle - to have property - and in consequence misery".<sup>2</sup>

In view of opinions such as this, argued Malthus, it was "not a little surprising" to read Young's Question of Scarcity which proposed a potato patch of half an acre plus land for a poor man to keep one or two cows; "I should consider the adoption of this system", he wrote, "as the most cruel and fatal blow to the happiness of the lower classes of people in this country, that they had ever received."<sup>3</sup> Young's plan would act as an encouragement to marriage and as a bounty on children, insisted Malthus, and place the lower classes in exactly the situation of the wretched French peasant. The present poor laws encouraged an unwanted population as they stood but Malthus believed that Young's proposal would provide an incomparably stronger stimulus, for,

if, when a labourer had an early marriage in contemplation, the terrific forms of workhouse and parish officers, which might disturb his resolution, were to be exchanged for the fascinating vision of land and cows. If the love of property, as Mr. Young has repeatedly said, will make a man do much, it would be rather strange if it would not make him marry; an action to which, it appears from experience, that he is by no means disinclined.

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The writing in this section is livelier than much of that in the

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1. Malthus, Essay, (1803), p.570.
  2. Ibid., p.571.
  3. Ibid., pp.572-573.
  4. Ibid., p.575.

second edition and nearer to the polemical style of Malthus's first essay. He pointed to the "indolent and turbulent habits of the lower Irish" as a warning of what faced England if the potato system be introduced; in Ireland, "prizes may be given till the Treasury is exhausted, for essays on the best means of employing the poor".<sup>1</sup> Young's plan was interpreted by Malthus as going beyond the provisions of gardens, for he too favoured a well-stocked vegetable garden for every cottage in England.<sup>2</sup> But to give land on any great scale would lead to impoverishment and distress rather than improve the labourers' standard of living. He acknowledged that Young "ardently wishes to ameliorate the condition of the lower classes", but his schemes, as elaborated in "The Propriety of Applying Wastes", would assimilate the English labourer with the lowest classes in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

Young's reply to these criticisms appeared in volume forty-one of the Annals. Characteristically, his approach was that of the practical man who claimed to state the facts as he saw them. This technique he had defined a decade earlier:

My personal pursuit for a long series of years has confirmed me in the habit of experimental enquiry... /I/ value the citation of one new experimented case in point, more than an hundred /sic/ brilliant declamations.

4

The cases of France and England, declared Young, were different:

I found population in France, by means of small properties in land, carried to an excess, that produced great misery and wretchedness; and as

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1. Ibid., p.576.
  2. Ibid., p.578n.
  3. Ibid., p.580n.
  4. Young, The Example of France, op.cit., p.2.

a conclusion, I declare against the system.  
In England, I found districts where cottagers  
renting, (and possessing) land, gave them such  
comfort, that even in the scarcity, they neither  
received nor applied for any parochial relief;  
and as a conclusion I declare FOR the system.

1

For this reason he saw no inconsistency and preferred his plan.  
Like Malthus, insisted Young, he had no regard for the poor laws,  
which "cure few evils which they did not first create".<sup>2</sup> But  
Malthus's remedy was rejected and Young poured scorn on the  
impotency of the preventive check:

And on what is the success of this revolution  
made to depend? why on young men and women  
avoiding matrimony and keeping themselves  
chaste without it!!!

3

Malthus returned to the argument in the Appendix to the  
third edition of the Essay in 1806. There he wrote that the  
"grand difficulty" to Young's proposals was provided by succeeding  
generations.<sup>4</sup> After all the commons had been divided, what land,  
asked Malthus, would be available for the second or third son of  
the labourer. This was similar to the argument followed by  
Malthus in the first edition of the Essay against Godwin, for if  
it was granted that a labourer had a valid claim to a share of the  
soil how could it be met once all the land had been divided up?<sup>5</sup>  
However, Malthus appears to have slightly modified the severity  
of his conclusions; he allowed that with proper precautions a  
certain portion of land may be given to a considerable body of  
the labouring classes. He referred to Estcourt's plan for letting  
land to labourers - a plan to which Young had given his support a  
decade earlier.<sup>6</sup> Malthus agreed that the success of Estcourt's

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1. Arthur Young, "On the Application of the Principle of Population  
to the Question of Assigning Land to Cottages", Annals, vol. 41,  
(1804), p.211.

2. Ibid., p.230.

3. Ibid., p.221.

4. Essay, (1806 ed.), p.540.

5. Essay, (1798 ed.), pp.203-204.

6. See above, pp.44f. Estcourt published further details of the  
experiment in 1804, An Account of the Results of an Effort to  
better the Condition of the Poor in a Country Village.

scheme had been very striking, but included the caveat "that no experiment respecting a provision for the poor can be said to be complete till succeeding generations have arisen".<sup>1</sup> While pointing out that the peasantry of Sweden, Ireland, France, China and Indostan were very poor, and particularly subject to scarcities, Malthus expressed a willingness to experiment with these schemes, provided attention was strictly given to two rules; firstly,

not to let the division of land be so great as to interrupt the cottager essentially in his usual labours.../and, secondly/ to stop the further distribution of land and cottages when the price of labour independently of any assistance from land, would not, at the average price of corn maintain three or at least two children.

2

Young did not again take up the debate with Malthus, although it may be assumed that, as at first with Godwin, the controversy caused no ill-feeling. In later years Malthus requested Young's opinion on the source of agricultural capital, and expressed himself happy to have his information "sanctified by your opinion and superior authority".<sup>3</sup> Another letter of Malthus's suggested that "the great obstacle to the cultivation of wastes is surely that the produce does not pay the expense of procuring it".<sup>4</sup> The aged Young may have agreed, although for some time he retained a fondness for his scheme to make use of waste land; in 1806 he wrote nostalgically:

I have been reading over my 'Inquiry into the Propriety of applying Wastes to the better Maintenance of the Poor.' I had almost forgotten it, but of all the essays and papers I have produced, none I think so pardonable as this, so convincing by facts, and so satisfactory to any candid reader. Thank God I wrote it, for though it never had the smallest effect

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1. Malthus, Essay, (1806 ed.), p.540.

2. Ibid., pp.542-544.

3. Malthus to Young, 26 May 1816, B.M. Add. MSS. 35,133, f.318.

4. Malthus to Young, 21 November, 1819, B.M. Add. MSS. 35,133, f.456.



except in exciting opposition and ridicule, it will, I trust, remain a proof of what ought to have been done; and had it been executed would have diffused more comfort among the poor than any proposition that ever was made.

1

But in later life he did not return to the suggestion of using the wastes to provide small farms for the poor, although he remained an advocate of gardens, noting the need for them in his reports.<sup>2</sup> However, he again saw their advantages from the point of view of the landed interest by adopting a similar position to that of Lord Winchilsea. Thus in 1808, Young referred to Winchilsea's "On the Utility of Cottagers renting Grass Land", recommending it on the grounds that its "grand object is the reduction of poor rates".<sup>3</sup> Again, in his diary of June 1816, Young recorded:

Lord Winchilsea called here and chatted with me upon cottagers' land for cows, which he is well persuaded, and most justly, is the only remedy for the evil of poor rates.

4

In a lecture of 1809 Young expressed his belief that a more important consideration than that of annexing land to cottages could not have come before the Board of Agriculture. Reports had shown that the practice had encouraged the poor to be sober and industrious, and, he asserted, "had the Board never performed any other service to the public, than this single exertion, it would have merited every shilling that was ever voted to it".<sup>5</sup>

1. Autobiography, op.cit., p.433; diary entry for 14 July 1806.
2. A. Young, General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk, (1804), p.24; General View of the Agriculture of Hertfordshire, (1804), pp.21-22; View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire, (1809), pp.22-29, here Young suggested that half an acre of land should be available as a cottage garden; General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex, (1807, 2 vols), vol. 1, p.166.
3. /Arthur Young/, General Report on Enclosures, (1808), p.15.
4. Autobiography, op.cit., p.470.
5. Arthur Young, On the Advantages which have resulted from the Establishment of the Board of Agriculture; being the substance of a lecture read to that institution, May 26th 1809, (1809), p.23.



VI

Malthus remained unconvinced. His preference was to reduce the burden of poor rates by discouraging marriages rather than to make the labourer partly self-sufficient. When in 1807 Samuel Whitbread put forward a scheme empowering parishes to build cottages for the poor, Malthus objected. In an open letter, he wrote that the difficulty of procuring habitations had discouraged early marriages, and went on to urge Whitbread to think again before making the provision of cottages easier.<sup>1</sup> The debate between Young, Malthus and others helped to clarify the case for and against the cottage system largely from the point of view of the landed interest. A central issue was that of rising poor rates. To the Young faction, the "grand object" was to reduce them by encouraging the labourer to supply some of his own food. This he could do by working his allotment in his spare time, while his wife and children could also make themselves useful in this way. Winchilsea pointed out the value of labourers' children being brought up to dig, tend cattle, etc.; Kent observed that the farmer could sell the cottager a cow, claim the calf, and benefit from more healthy and better-fed labourers; Young added that if the poor had property they respected the property of others and rather than go about plundering barns and poaching, they tended their gardens and kept away from the ale-house. Others were to refine these arguments. Thus the Rector of Segrave, in Leicestershire, mentioned that the farmer could keep wages down if the labourer was producing some of his own

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1. T.R. Malthus, A Letter to Samuel Whitbread, Esq., M.P. on his Proposed Bill for the Amendment of the Poor Laws, (1807), reprinted in D.V. Glass (ed.), Introduction to Malthus, (1953), p.193.

food.<sup>1</sup> Allotments also had a quietist purpose: the possession of a little land was an incentive to industry and would ensure support for the government instead of for "those fascinating notions of liberty and equality which now so much prevail in a neighbouring country".<sup>2</sup> The poetaster Samuel Pratt enshrined similar sentiments in the following lines:

O give the heirs of poverty their cots,  
Attach them fondly to their native spots;  
Amidst their thorny paths entwine a flow'r -  
Their's soft submission, thine attemper'd pow'r.  
As the swain views his speck of property,  
In the rude hut a paradise shall see.

.....

Shall gaze, unenvying, on the rich domain,  
Yet of his own a fonder sense retain.

.....

In glad return for all the bounty shewn,  
His pow'r, his praise, his hand, his heart, thy own! 3

The schemes for cottage allotments as approved by such bodies as the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor were in no way revolutionary, on the contrary, they were in part intended to counteract the idea that landed property ought to be more equally distributed. Moreover, proposals for allotments were couched largely in terms emphasising the benefits that the landed class might hope for, and this pattern was to continue to the middle of the century and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the opponents of allowing labourers to hold land generally based their views upon

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1. Robert Acklom Ingram, Disquisitions on Population; in which the Principles of the Essay on Population, by the Rev. T.R. Malthus, are examined and refuted, (1808), pp.110-111.

2. Richard Wills, quoted by Arthur Young, View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire, (1809), p.334.

3. Quoted by William Mavor, General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire, (1809), pp.76-77.

4. See the discussion below, ch. 5.

the need for social stability and the prevention of over-population and a high poor rate. For a number of years Malthus provided the main theoretical statement of this view until it was put in a definitive form by M'Culloch in 1819.<sup>1</sup> Malthus is also a key figure in relation to wider aspects of the debate about landed property. His emphasis upon the principle of population coloured many aspects of economic and social thought during the following century. And, moreover, his contribution to the development of political economy ensured that his ideas featured in subsequent discussions.

Because of his marriage in 1804 Malthus forfeited his Fellowship at Cambridge, but having secured his reputation by the Essay on Population, he was appointed the following year as Professor of History and Political Economy at the East India College. There was a demand for further editions of the Essay which appeared in 1806 and 1807. The principle of population became accepted by and supported in the Edinburgh Review, for which Malthus wrote four or possibly five articles on economic matters between 1808 and 1811.<sup>2</sup> But he did not agree with all that the Edinburgh stood for. In the increasingly apparent struggle between landed and industrial wealth, Malthus sympathised with the older system. His support for agriculture was within the tradition of the physiocrats and he favoured the protectionist purpose of the Corn Laws, a view not popular among the spokesmen

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1. See below, ch. 4. This and other aspects of Malthus's theory led to many controversies; for a good survey, D.E.C. Eversley, Social Theories of Fertility and the Malthusian Debate, (Oxford, 1959), passim.

2. Bernard Semmel (ed.), Occasional Papers of T.R. Malthus, (New York, 1963), p.14.

of the newer order.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while the reputation of the Essay meant that Malthus led the field among contemporary economists for many years, when another champion appeared he lost his position to Ricardo after the publication of the latter's Principles in 1817. The Smithian case for free trade was to be reinforced by several writers; as early as 1808 James Mill had criticised the physiocratic Britain Independent of Commerce by William Spence on the specific grounds that the interest of the landlord was opposed to that of the rest of the community. Mill argued not only against protection but also that the landholders:

By their superior influence in the legislature... have taken care to repay themselves...by throwing the burthen of the taxes upon the growing produce of commerce, while the increasing value of land stood exempt.

2

Significantly, when replying to his critics, Spence quoted Malthus in support of his arguments.

This controversy between Spence and Mill anticipated part of the debate between Malthus and Ricardo which can be traced not only in their published works but also in the lengthy correspondence which passed between them. Many of the points at issue are only incidental to the present discussion, although some aspects will

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1. In 1814 and 1815 Malthus brought out two pamphlets on the Corn Laws; the second in particular argued that the maintenance of a high price for corn would act as a stimulus to English farming. Commenting on Malthus's view in a letter of 16 February 1815 to Sydney Smith, John Whishaw remarked that it was "not at all relished by his friends here, but will gain him a great name among the clergy and landed interest". Quoted by Lady Seymour, The "Pope" of Holland House, (1906), p.93.
  2. James Mill, Commerce Defended..., (1808), reprinted in Donald Winch (ed.), James Mill: Selected Economic Writings, (1966), p.96.

be touched upon in the following chapters. The position by 1815 was that Malthus still held the field, but was to be subject to increasing criticism from a new generation of political economists, despite which his theory of population was to prove resilient. The economic changes and the resurgence of social and political consciousness which followed the end of the war against France, helped to redefine the arguments concerning landed property.

CHAPTER III:

THE CONTRIBUTION OF JAMES MILL AND DAVID RICARDO

I would give James Mill as much opportunity for advocating his opinion as is consistent with a voyage to Botany Bay.

Thomas Arnold, quoted by Lytton Strachey,  
Eminent Victorians, (1918), ch. 3.

By 1815 ideas were in a state of transition. The influence of the thinkers of the period of the French Revolution had diminished, while Utilitarian theories of society had not become widely disseminated. With peace, moreover, came the first signs of a general democratic movement such<sup>as</sup> had been virtually impossible in times of war. This political and intellectual movement was heightened by a period of acute economic problems, and these difficulties quickened the discussion on such issues as the Corn Laws, the position of the poor, and the question of reform. These debates were conducted with urgency and intensity, working-class unrest was marked, and against this troubled background ideas rapidly crystallised.

John Russell began an article in the Edinburgh Review of June, 1816, with the observation: "At no former period of the history of this country, was so great and so general a distress known to prevail."<sup>1</sup> He considered the sufferings of the dearth of 1796-1800 partial, and of short duration in comparison with the previous twelve or eighteenth months when the country had been suffering severely in every direction - in agriculture and manufactures, in home trade and foreign commerce. The trade depression was followed by a bad harvest. James Mill wrote to

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1. /John Russell/, "Distresses of the Country", Edinburgh Review, vol. 26, (1816), p.255.



Francis Place in the summer of 1816 with uncharacteristic passion:

The state of the weather and crops alarms me - no sun - no warmth - there will be no flour in the ear. No work for the people and scarcity will produce an amount of misery which the heart aches to think of - how many a lovely child and meritorious man and woman will perish in all the miseries of want. A curse a tenfold curse upon the villains by whom such scenes are prepared!

1

The war also had the effect of hastening changes within the economy. The changeover from what E. P. Thompson has termed "the old moral economy" to the "economy of the free market" was taking place.<sup>2</sup> Farmers had grown prosperous with the higher prices brought by wartime conditions. Their response to higher prices had been to extend the area of production by enclosure, and to operate their land on increasingly capitalistic principles.<sup>3</sup> Cobbett's Sir Squire Grindum, Bart., was becoming a typical figure in the countryside. The gap between the farmer and the labourer was perhaps wider than it had ever been; agricultural wages had tended to fall behind as prices fluctuated; fewer labourers lived in with the farmer and were thus obliged to find their own food; while the cottages in which they lived were often wretched. The pleas of Young and Winchilsea to allow the labourers land were largely ignored or condemned. That the agricultural labourers were not economically worse off is sometimes argued as part of a controversy which cannot be entered into here. But that they considered themselves wronged, and to be treated less well than their fathers had been, there is - despite the paucity

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1. Mill to Place, 26 August, 1816, B.M. Add. MSS 35,152, f.206 (copy).

2. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, op.cit., p.67.

3. For a discussion of changes in the attitude of the farming interest, see A.J. Peacock, Bread or Blood: a Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816, (1965), pp.16-21, and the sources there cited.

of the recorded opinions of labourers' - little doubt.

The position of the farmers had, meanwhile, been enhanced. The farming class had acquired a taste for genteel living such as Arthur Young had warned them against thirty years earlier, when he wrote:

I see sometimes, for instance, a pianoforte in a farmer's parlour, which I always wished burnt; a livery servant is sometimes found, and a post-chaise to carry their daughters to assemblies, these ladies are sometimes educated at expensive boarding schools, and the sons at the University, to be made parsons, but all these things imply a departure from that line which separates these different orders of being; let these things, and all the folly, foppery, expense, and anxiety that belong to them, remain among gentlemen. A wise farmer will not envy them.

1

Young's advice went unheeded, and Cobbett was to lose his temper with the gentleman farmer:

Yes, and I shall see the scarlet hunting cloaks stripped from the backs of the farmers. I shall see the polished boots pulled from their legs: and I shall see the forte-pianos kicked out of their houses.

2

In many respects, Cobbett looked backwards to draw his inspiration. He opposed Young's proposals for general enclosure. His ideal was a system of small independent owners and self-respecting tenants, living simple, vigorous lives, practising the honest virtues of brewing, bread-making, and cow-keeping as described in his Cottage Economy of 1823. It is no doubt true, that in all periods, there have been those who find little to approve of in their own times, but hark back to some previous age which they invest with advantages which never in fact existed. There was more than a trace of this approach in Cobbett's philosophy. Yet

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2. Political Register, 17 March, 1821, col. 757.

1. A. Young, "Gleanings in an Excursion to Lewes Fair, 1791", Annals, vol. 17, (1792), pp.156-157. There is more than an element in this passage of Young's desire to maintain a hierarchical structure of society.

his opinions, while often muddle-headed and inflamed, were widely known. His attacks were directed not only against the present order, the "System", but also against "Parson" Malthus, "Scotch feelosofer's", and the new political economy.

Another response, which, while more intellectual and less well-known, appraised the situation in a similar manner to Cobbett, came from S.T. Coleridge. As we have seen, Coleridge earlier had been a disciple of Godwin, followed by a government spy as, with Wordsworth, he walked the hills around Stowey.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, Coleridge had ceased to be a radical, although a romantic protest against what he considered to be the injustice of certain social and economic conditions still formed part of his philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In his Lay Sermon of 1817, Coleridge stressed the belief that landed property should be regarded as a trust, held in return for duties carried out by the landlord. The marketable produce of an estate should, Coleridge believed, be subordinated to the moral aspects; then, if need be, "a healthful, callous-handed, but high and warm hearted tenantry" would march for their country at the first call. Instead of this, farmers' motives were governed by the spirit of trade: the commercial system had taken possession of agriculture. By way of illustration, Coleridge went on to quote the Earl of Winchilsea's opinion:

His Lordship, speaking of the causes which oppose all attempts to better the labourers' condition, mentions, as one great cause, the dislike the

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1. E.K. Chambers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (1938), p.38.
  2. William F. Kennedy, Humanist versus Economist. The Economic Thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1958: University of California Publications in Economics, vol. 17), p.10.

generality of farmers have to seeing the labourers rent any land.

1

Coleridge had no sympathy with the aims of "those...poor visionaries called Spenceans", and his attitude towards the labourer was paternalistic, like that of Young and Winchilsea. Like Cobbett, he deplored the increasingly commercial motives of farmers and landlords. Coleridge, however, was writing for a relatively small public.<sup>2</sup> The Lay Sermon was not distributed extensively; indeed, some copies ended up being sold off to cabinet makers to be used as the lining in trunks. His "great service", as J. S. Mill later termed it, was to advance the idea of the trust inherent in land ownership, and this contribution will be examined in greater detail in chapter seven.

## II

Although they had a critical view of the arrangements of society in common, Coleridge was in many ways the opposite of the utilitarian radicals.<sup>3</sup> Under the tutelage of Jeremy Bentham, this group of reformers were adding a distinct contribution to the contemporary debate. These were men who, for the most part, had a philosophy more advanced than that of the Whigs while remaining largely aloof from the radicals of the working class movement and the idealistic notions of men like Godwin and Owen. Nor were they prepared to look back to a previous age, for it was the remnants of older institutions that they wished to sweep away.

As is commonly the case with intellectually influential sects, the Benthamite school owed its foundation and the propagation of its ideas to a large extent to the personal friendship and intimacy

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1. S.T. Coleridge, A Lay Sermon addressed to the Higher and Middle Classes on the Existing Distresses and Discontents, (1817), reprinted in R.J. White, Political Tracts of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, (Cambridge, 1953), p.114.

2. John Colmer, Coleridge: Critic of Society, (Oxford, 1959), p.133

3. For a suggestive contrast between the outlook of James Mill and Coleridge, see Leslie Stephen, The English Utilitarians, (3 vols, 1900), vol. 2, pp.37-38.

of its members. Jeremy Bentham's writings had extended over a period of about forty years when he first met James Mill in 1808. But his ideas were comparatively little-known, partly due to the difficult and abstract nature of his style. Many of Bentham's beliefs were only being spread among the better informed by the popularisations of his French translator, Etienne Dumont. When they met, Mill was sympathetic to Bentham's ideas, if not a convert. During a three or four month stay with Bentham in 1809 he had an opportunity to discuss the theories of the elderly philosopher - Bentham was then in his sixtieth year - and to establish himself as a follower. In 1810 the Mills became Bentham's neighbours in Queen's Square Place until 1814, and, after moving, remained in close proximity.<sup>1</sup> To Mill, his friendship with Bentham was a means of advancement, while he in turn avowed himself a "faithful and fervent disciple",<sup>2</sup> and was active in spreading his master's utilitarian gospel, and probably in making the philosopher more radical in his views.

Mill was also a close friend of Ricardo by 1811. He had already formed a friendship with Francis Place as they had Edward Wakefield as a common acquaintance. Wakefield, father of the colonist E. G. Wakefield, was to become an agent for Ricardo in 1815, and negotiated the Portarlington seat in 1819. Through Mill, Place came to know Bentham. Malthus and M'Culloch were also acquainted with this group, and, while they are more properly termed Whigs, played an important part in formulating the political

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1. Elie Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, (1952 ed.), p.250.

2. Mill to Bentham, 19 September, 1814, quoted by Bain, James Mill, p.137.

economy which was developing at this time. Although until the time of his death in 1832, Bentham was the utilitarians' father-figure, he tended, particularly to the younger members, to be rather remote, and James Mill became increasingly the spokesman of Benthamism. Mill's influence was felt not only through his writings, for he also possessed considerable skills in verbal argument. One of the young men over whom Mill exercised his persuasive powers has left an account:

His unpremeditated oral exposition was hardly less effective than his prepared work with the pen; his colloquial fertility on philosophical subjects, his power of discussing himself and of stimulating others to discuss, his ready responsive inspirations through all the shifts and windings of a sort of Platonic dialogue - all these accomplishments were, to those who knew him, even more impressive than what he composed for the press. Conversation with him was not merely instructive, but provocative to the dormant intelligence.

1

James Mill was born in humble circumstances, the son of a shoemaker, near Montrose in 1773. He received a good education due to the support of Sir John Stuart, who expected him to enter the church. Mill became ordained, but, making little advancement in the profession, decided to try and better himself in England, and arrived in London in 1802. Here, by undertaking a variety of hack literary work, including employment on Gifford's Anti-Jacobin Review, he was able to earn about £500 per year, although journalism at that time was regarded as a not very reputable profession.<sup>2</sup> In 1805 he married Harriet Burrow, daughter of the owner of a private lunatic asylum. His first son, born in 1806, Mill named John Stuart, in acknowledgement of his patron. In the same year, work on the History of British India began. This study, which was to be

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1. George Grote, Minor Works, (1866), p.284, quoted by M.L. Clarke, George Grote. A Biography, (1962), p.21.

2. A. Aspinall, "The Social Status of Journalists at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, vol. 21, (1945), pp.216-232.



Mill's magnum opus, was intended to raise him above the herd of contemporary journalists. Mill had allocated three years for its completion, but was to spend thousands of hours upon it before it was finally published at the end of 1817.

### III

The History not only became a standard work which provided the Utilitarians with a point of view in regard to Indian questions,<sup>1</sup> but was also a central feature in Mill's own intellectual development. It was, in Halevy's phrase, a piece of "conjectual history", based on the deductive, rather than the inductive method, and which employed the principle of utility to judge to what extent a nation was civilized.<sup>2</sup> Mill had never visited India, nor was he familiar with any of its languages, but this he held to be an advantage.<sup>3</sup> His main purpose was not to provide the facts of history, but to present an introduction to the study of civil society and a demonstration of the virtues of utilitarianism.<sup>4</sup> Bentham expected its influence to be great, and observed, "Mill will be the living executive. I shall be the dead legislative of British India."<sup>5</sup> In the History, Mill's ideas were expressed in a trenchant and dogmatic manner, and, in the process of expounding his notion of progress, both Hindu and Moslem society, and the

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1. George D. Bearce, British Attitudes towards India 1784-1858, (Oxford, 1961), chapter 3.

2. Halévy, op.cit., p.274.

3. James Mill, History of British India, (3 vols, 1817), vol. 1, preface.

4. Donald Winch, James Mill. Selected Economic Writings, (1966), p.383. See also Duncan Forbes, "James Mill and India", Cambridge Journal, vol. 5, (1951-52), pp.19-33.

5. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.450.

English governing class, were indicted. As his son recorded, the book was

Saturated...with the opinions and modes of judgement of a democratic radicalism then regarded as extreme; and treating with a severity, at that time most unusual, the English Constitution, the English law, and all parties and classes who possessed any considerable influence in the country.

1

Combined with this strong ideological conviction, Mill's History was remarkable also for its scholarship and style; it was, as J. K. Galbraith has observed, "a great piece of English prose".<sup>2</sup>

Mill scathingly condemned the low state of civilization which, by an application of the measure of utility, he decided Indian society had reached:

Both nations /i.e. China and India/ are to nearly an equal degree tainted with the vices of insincerity; dissembling, treacherous, mendacious to an excess which surpasses even the usual measures of uncultivated society. Both are disposed to excessive exaggeration with regard to everything relating to themselves. Both are cowardly and unfeeling. Both are in the highest degree conceited of themselves and full of affected contempt for others. Both are, in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in their persons and their houses.

3

Accordingly, British rule was not only justified, but was a blessing, while the Indians, believed Mill, felt no resentment against being ruled by foreigners.<sup>4</sup> He was not, however, satisfied with the form taken by British rule. The most important aspect of Indian society was the system of land tenure, which was under British control and provided the bulk of the revenue for

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1. Autobiography, pp.17-18.

2. John Kenneth Galbraith, "James Mill's India", Encounter, vol. 30, (March, 1968), p.40.

3. Quoted by Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India, (Oxford, 1959), p.53.

4. "I consider that the feeling of degradation, from being governed by foreigners, is altogether European. I believe it has little or no existence in any part of Asia", Mill told the S.C. on the Affairs of the East India Company, P.P., vol. 7, (1831), p.396, quoted Winch, op.cit., p.442.

administration. In 1793 Cornwallis, the Governor-General, had introduced the so-called "Permanent Settlement of Bengal" as an attempt to apply the English Whig philosophy of government.<sup>1</sup> By this settlement, private property rights in land were established upon the great landowners, the zemindar class, who in turn rented the land to the peasantry, (the ryots). This was a similar system to that which had evolved in England, and was upheld by a legal framework such as that found in the West.

It was this settlement that Mill attacked. He argued that the productive powers of the soil were the joint product of the community, and so the benefits of the soil ought first to provide the means of government before enriching the immediate occupant. At this point in his argument, Mill turned to make a thrust at the English ruling class. "The most remarkable exception to this rule", he wrote,

is modern Europe. After the conquests of the Gothic nations, the land was thrown in great portions into the hands of the leading men; and they had the power to make the taxes fall where they chose; they took care accordingly that they should fall any where rather than upon the land; that is, upon anybody rather than themselves. Further, as their influence over the sovereign made him glad to share with them what he derived from the taxes, they not only threw the burden off their own shoulders, but taxed, as they have continued to do, and sometimes on a progressive ratio, to the present hour, the rest of the community for their benefit.

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Mill declared against these "aristocratical prejudices", for his attitude towards English landed society was one of hostility. Partly, his beliefs may be explained by the Scottish tradition to which he owed his education and the formulation of some of his

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1. Stokes, op.cit., p.5. S. Gopal, The Permanent Settlement in Bengal and its Results, (1949), gives a brief account of, and the background to, this question.  
2. James Mill, History of British India, op.cit., vol. 1, p.195. For Mill's criticisms of the Cornwallis Settlement, vol. 3, pp.292-300.

ideas. In general, a wider distribution of property was held to be favourable to liberal political institutions and economic progress. Adam Smith had linked property with civil government: great properties brought great inequality which led to the poor being indignant against the wealthy, and government was thus established to protect the propertied.<sup>1</sup>

However, Mill and the other Utilitarian reformers did not demand the confiscation of land and other property, as they believed this would in fact further increase the power of the government, an idea which they abhorred.<sup>2</sup> Bentham declared that to recommend agrarian laws and forced divisions would be the equivalent to cutting off an arm, in order to avoid a scratch.<sup>3</sup> Like Smith, Mill believed large fortunes inimical to saving and foresight and, following Bentham, opposed primogeniture. That Mill became a zealous opponent of the ruling aristocratic class there is no doubt. According to Harriet Grote,

Mr. Mill had the strongest convictions as to the superior advantages of democratic government over the monarchical or the aristocratic; and with these he mingled a scorn and hatred of the ruling classes which amounted to positive fanaticism. Coupled with this aversion to aristocratic influence (to which influence he invariably ascribed most of the defects and abuses prevalent in the administration of public affairs), Mr. Mill entertained a profound prejudice against the Established Church and, of course, a corresponding dislike to its ministers.

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It should, however, be noted that the controversy surrounding the

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1. Halévy, op.cit., pp.212-213. For a discussion of the Scottish tradition, see Roy Pascal, "Property and Society: the Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Quarterly, vol. 1, (1938), pp.167-179, and Ronald L. Meek, "The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology," in Economics and Ideology and Other Essays, (1967), pp.34-50.
  2. Halévy, op.cit., p.314.
  3. See below, p.257.
  4. Mrs. Grote, The Personal Life of George Grote, (2nd ed., 1873), p.22. But see the critical comment on this opinion by Bain, op.cit., p.181; on the other hand, Bentham was quoted as saying of Mill: "His creed of politics results less from love for the many, than from hatred of the few", Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.450.

law of primogeniture was somewhat illusory. This law directed that the landed possessions of a person dying intestate should be exclusively the property of the eldest son or the eldest male heir, but if the law had been abolished, there would probably have been no more than a marginal effect on the size of estates, as the custom would have continued. Large landowners would almost invariably have willed their estates to the eldest son in order to preserve them intact, as they already did. Moreover, it was common for a landlord not to trust merely to the law of primogeniture, but to settle entails on his property as a further guarantee of his estate's survival, not just to the eldest son but to his first male grandson, who might well be unborn at the time his inheritance was arranged.<sup>1</sup> A demand to reverse the law or custom in order to insist on an equal division of property among all the heirs would have been opposed by utilitarians on the grounds that the state had no right to encroach in such a way. James Mill believed that the inequalities arising from entails were "mischievous in every way", although he favoured what he termed "natural inequalities of fortune" for these brought beneficial effects.<sup>2</sup> He failed to explain how the former could be prevented without interfering with the operation of the latter; indeed, on the wider question, Mill had no simple plan to dismantle the power of the landed aristocracy, apart from encouraging those rising interests to which it was gradually losing ground.

#### IV

Not least important of the results of the History of British India was Mill's appointment in May 1819 as Assistant to the

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1. See Eileen Spring, "The Settlement of Land in Nineteenth-Century England", American Journal of Legal History, vol. 8, (1964), esp. pp.210-212.

2. P.Q. /James Mill/, "Aristocracy", London Review, vol. 2, (January 1836), p.285.



Examiner of India Correspondence at the India House with a salary of £800 per annum which rose to £1,000 in 1821 and to £1,200 in 1823.<sup>1</sup> This office not only removed Mill's financial worries, but it also gave him time to pursue his political activities. A major step in this direction was the establishment in 1824 of the Westminster Review as the organ of orthodox Benthamism. Two early articles in the Westminster that had great impact were devoted to showing the way in which the two other leading reviews, the Edinburgh and the Quarterly, supported and catered for the aristocracy.<sup>2</sup> In many respects, Mill constituted himself as the spokesman of the growing middle class.<sup>3</sup> It was this class, Mill judged, which would demand the reforms put forward by he and his friends. If the middle class could be mobilized, the comparatively small aristocratic class, and their supporters in the Church and the Law, would no longer be able to stand in the way of reform. The temper of Mill's proposals was what was to become known as "laissez faire": greater freedom of the press and religious toleration were advocated, as well as parliamentary reform and a sweeping away of economic restrictions.

Both of these ideas - hostility towards the aristocracy and progress by means of economic liberalism - were well-illustrated in an article which Mill wrote for the Edinburgh Review on the subject of Ireland. In the course of his discussion, Mill drew on Wakefield's Account to show the small number of families who had the government in their hands. This "hireling aristocracy" was denounced, and oligarchy and unjust rule were stated as the

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1. Bain, James Mill, p.185.

2. See ibid., pp.266-284, for a summary of the content of these articles. Also below, ch. 7, for the part played by J.S. Mill in their preparation.

3. For a denial of this widely-accepted interpretation of James Mill's role, Joseph Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals, (New Haven, 1965), p.52.



major evils under which Ireland suffered. The article ended:

The grand concluding remark is, - that improvement is the natural tendency of human beings themselves. All that legislators have to do, is remove obstructions: and it is melancholy to think, that, owing to obstructions which may be removed, mankind, are, in so many situations, stationary in wretchedness. 1

Thus, while Mill accepted the private ownership of land, he did not consider that this right was sacrosanct. He continued to 'make war on good breeding',<sup>2</sup> for he considered that the aristocracy had avoided contributing to the proper source of government revenue, which was taxes upon the land. In a letter to his son James, Mill explained his view:

Do not allow yourself to be taken in, as many people are, by an ambiguity in the word property. Englishmen in general incline to think that where property is not entire, especially in the land, there is no property. But property may be as perfectly property, when it includes only part, as when it includes the whole. There is no doubt that the ryot has a property in the soil, though it is a limited property. There is also no doubt that the government has a property in the soil, that also limited - the one property limited by the other. It is therefore a case of joint property. Hence the controversies. 3

Part of Mill's attitude, therefore, appears to have been conditioned by his dislike of the aristocracy, and closely associated with this, was Mill's belief that taxation ought principally to be raised from the land. This principle was made clear in the History of British India, and Mill was to subsequently

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1. /James Mill/, /State of Ireland", Edinburgh Review, vol. 21, (1813), p.364.

2. One of Thomas Moore's satirical attacks on the Mills ran:  
There are two Mr. M--s, too, whom those that like reading  
Through all that's unreadable, call very clever;  
And, whereas M-- Senior makes war on good breeding,  
M-- Junior makes war on all breeding whatever!

The last line is a reference to the birth control issue which is discussed below, chapter 4.

3. Letter of 18 October, 1835, quoted by Bain, James Mill, pp.397-398.

argue for it before the Select Committee of 1831, when he was Chief Examiner of the East India Company.<sup>1</sup> On the issue of a land tax, Mill shared some common ground with his friend David Ricardo.

The acquaintance between Mill and Ricardo dated from about 1807, and they were on terms of close friendship after 1810-1811.<sup>2</sup> Up to mid-1814, they were able to meet frequently as both lived in London, and afterwards, as well as maintaining a regular correspondence, one of Mill's few recreations was to visit Ricardo's country house at Gatcombe Park. Later, Ricardo was brought into contact with Bentham, who declared there was an "epanchement" between them, and claimed, "I was the spiritual father of Mill, and Mill was the spiritual father of Ricardo: so that Ricardo was my spiritual grandson."<sup>3</sup> After Ricardo's retirement from a highly successful career on the Stock Exchange, Mill urged him to produce a systematic treatise on political economy. Ricardo's interest in economics had first been stimulated in 1799 when he read Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations. Since the publication of this work in 1776, there had been no full treatment of economic principles, and it was to remedy this omission that Mill began to encourage Ricardo to produce a complete study of his theories.

Later Mill played a part in supporting Ricardo's decision to enter Parliament. Ricardo offered a perhaps token resistance to

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1. For a summary of this evidence, ibid., pp.342-344.
  2. T.W. Hutchison, "James Mill and the Political Education of Ricardo", Cambridge Journal, vol. 7, (1953-54), pp.81-100.
  3. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.498.

Mill's "parliamentary scheme" saying he was unfit: "Speak indeed! I could not I am sure utter three sentences coherently."<sup>1</sup> In 1819, the dozen or so electors of the Irish pocket borough of Portarlington returned Ricardo to the House of Commons, where he sat until his death in 1823. He never visited Ireland, and on one occasion after he had spoken gravely of aristocratic influence, he was reminded of his own situation.<sup>2</sup> Ricardo, however, had little of Mill's hostility towards the ruling classes. When Mill was trying to persuade him to enter Parliament, he maintained that ninety nine men out of a hundred preached doctrines which would render the human race forever slaves for the benefit of a few, "to such a degree by the operation of the bad principles of our own government, are the intellectual and moral parts of the mind among the leading orders corrupted and depraved."<sup>3</sup> Ricardo's moderate reply included the observation: "your favourable opinion of my honesty is in striking contrast of the opinion of the honesty of those who at present constitute the House of Commons. On this subject you are, as I often thought you unjustly severe."<sup>4</sup> Ricardo made an active M.P., and on general political issues, usually voted with the most liberal side of the House, supporting the ballot, parliamentary reform, and religious toleration (for which he was

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1. Ricardo to Mill, 30 August, 1815, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 6, p.263. The faithful M'Culloch wrote that Ricardo had an "easy, fluent and agreeable style" of speaking, ibid., vol. 5, p.xi, and J.L. Mallet referred to "his perspicacious and agreeable delivery" in the Commons, Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings, p.208.

2. E. Cannan, "Ricardo in Parliament", Economic Journal, vol. 4, (1894), p.249. Among his friends it was jocosely said that Ricardo was the member for Portarlington "by virtue of his breeches pocket", Mrs. Grote, op.cit., p.21. M'Culloch took the view that as Ricardo had never visited his constituents, he had the advantage of being able to speak and vote without being influenced by their opinions; Jacob S. Hollander, David Ricardo: A Centenary Estimate, (Baltimore, 1910), p.53.

3. Mill to Ricardo, 23 August, 1815, Works, (Ed. Sraffa) vol. 6, p.253.

4. Ricardo to Mill, 30 August, 1815, ibid., p.263.

attacked by William Wilberforce.)<sup>1</sup> In these respects, he was close to Mill's ideas, and perhaps nearest to the context which caused Bentham to describe him as his spiritual grandson.

Following Keynes's well-known remark, "If only Malthus, instead of Ricardo, had been the parent stem from which nineteenth century economics proceeded, what a much wiser and richer place the world would be today!",<sup>2</sup> there has been much discussion concerning their respective contributions.<sup>3</sup> It has been suggested that in the field of macro-economics, "the degree of conformity and continuity was high".<sup>4</sup> Other authorities, however, have stressed the diversity of "classical economics", and Coats has argued that there was in the 1820s no more than a "facade" of unity amongst leading economic writers and that "sharp disagreements on matters of theory and policy" existed.<sup>5</sup> Most of these controversies need not concern us here. For our purpose, it is sufficient to note that James Mill took up a more advanced position, not least on non-economic grounds, on the question of landed property than did Malthus. Ricardo, his practical views obscured by a theoretical treatment in his published writings, could be comforting to both

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1. Cannan, loc.cit., pp.252-253.

2. J.M. Keynes, Essays in Biography, (1933), p.144. But J.A. Schumpeter thought the claim was "patently wrong", Economic Journal, vol. 43, (1933), p.653.

3. See the accounts by Morton Paglin, Malthus and Lauderdale: The Anti-Ricardian Tradition, (New York, 1961) and Mark Blaug, Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study, (New Haven, 1958).

4. B.A. Corry, Money, Saving and Investment in English Economics 1800-1850, (1962), p.7.

5. A.W. Coats, "The Role of Authority in the Development of British Economics", Journal of Law & Economics, vol. 7, (1964), p.89.

sides: while both considering themselves Ricardians, J.S. Mill began at a similar point to his father, while M'Culloch's attitudes towards landed property were close to Malthus.

V

On the question of population, however, Ricardo was a Malthusian. "Surely in the minds of all reasonable men the principle for which Malthus contends is fully established", he wrote to Trower.<sup>1</sup> Ricardo's maiden speech was against Sturges's Poor Rates Bill which sought to give free board, education, and training to third and subsequent children of poor fathers. His ground for opposition was that it would tend to increase population.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, Bentham was unhappy with Whitbread's meliorist proposals and worked against Pitt's Bill of 1797 which proposed improved relief for the poor. Ricardo, too, was convinced of the mischievous nature of the Poor Laws, on which his ideas were virtually identical with those of Mill and very similar to Malthus's.<sup>3</sup> These laws had "invited imprudence", and the "pernicious tendency" of the Poor Laws was, wrote Ricardo, "no longer a mystery, since it has been fully developed by the able hand of Mr. Malthus; and every friend of the poor must ardently wish for their abolition".<sup>4</sup> Ricardo did not think that the Poor

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1. Ricardo to Trower, 25 January, 1822, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 9, pp.154-155.

2. Cannan, loc.cit., p.414.

3. Sraffa has suggested that Mill's "touch can be recognised...in the long passage on the 'pernicious tendency' of the poor laws" in Ricardo's Principles, Works, vol. 1, p.xxi.

4. David Ricardo, On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, in Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 1, p.107.

Laws had helped to create a redundant population. On the contrary, he held that increased economic activity had called for a larger supply of labour. Rather was his objection based upon the distortion produced in the free market by the Poor Laws, and the possible future difficulty of removing them. This view he expressed thus:

Happily these laws have been in operation during a period of progressive prosperity, when the funds for the maintenance of labour have regularly increased, and when an increase of population would be naturally called for. But if our progress should become more slow; if we should attain the stationary state, from which I trust we are yet far distant, then will the pernicious nature of these laws become more manifest and alarming; and then, too, will their removal be obstructed by many additional difficulties.

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While Ricardo was by contemporary standards considered to be fairly radical, there was not a scrap of utopian or revolutionary thought about his ideas. Redistribution of land to alleviate working class distress, or as a political objective, was not a part of the Ricardian system. He voted against Owen's plan for communistic villages on the grounds that it was inconsistent with the principles of political economy. On another occasion, he spoke against Maxwell's motion for a Select Committee to inquire into relieving the distress of the cotton weavers, as "the principles of the hon. mover would...violate the sacredness of property, which constituted the great security of society".<sup>2</sup>

The main importance of Ricardo's contribution to the debate concerning landed property lies in the way in which aspects of his theories were open to interpretations critical of landlordism.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.108-109. In view of Ricardo's opinion expressed in the first part of this passage, Hobsbawm's classification of Ricardo as a member of the pessimistic school is curious: E.J. Hobsbawm, "The British Standard of Living 1790-1850", in Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, (1964), p.64.

2. Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 5, p.69.

3. As James Bonar stated, Letters of David Ricardo to Thomas Robert Malthus, 1810-1823, (Oxford, 1887), p.xv, in Ricardo's writings there no feelings of antipathy to landlords as individuals. As with his 'labour theory of value', others developed the implications of Ricardo's theories to suit their own, more radical, ends.



This is best revealed in the Notes which he wrote as a commentary to Malthus's Principles of Political Economy, which was published in April, 1820. These Notes had been written by November of that year, and Ricardo eventually decided against publishing them. But as Sraffa demonstrates, they were read in manuscript by M'Culloch, Malthus, Trower, and James Mill.<sup>1</sup> In the Principles, Ricardo had written that "the interest of the landlord is always opposed to that of the consumer and the manufacturer".<sup>2</sup> Against this argument, Malthus had affirmed his support for Adam Smith's view that the interest of the landowner was closely connected with that of the state. On this point, Ricardo claimed to have been misunderstood: Malthus, he wrote, "represents me as supporting the doctrine that the interests of landlords are constantly opposed to those of every other class of the community, and one would suppose from his language that I considered them as enemies of the state". He denied that this was his view.<sup>3</sup> However, as the Notes were not published, Ricardo's denial would not be so widely known as his remarks in the Principles or as Malthus's discussion charging Ricardo with an anti-landlord bias. Indeed, despite reading Ricardo's Notes, Malthus repeated, in his second edition, the substance of his earlier charges.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Ricardo appeared throughout the land question debate of the nineteenth century as a critic of landlordism.

In a second, and for present purposes more important respect, Ricardo's attitude towards land appears to have been misrepresented. In this case the main culprit was M'Culloch, although Ricardo

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1. Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 2, pp.xi-xii.

2. Ibid., vol. 1, p.335.

3. Ibid., vol. 2, p.117. But see p.104: "Can any one doubt that if a person could appropriate to himself the wind and the sun, he would be able to command a rent from the uses to be derived from them?" While Ricardo may have been writing as an economic theorist, the same question could have been asked by a land reformer.

4. T.R. Malthus, Principles of Political Economy considered with a View to Their Practical Application, (2nd ed., 1836), p.194 and p.194n. This work was published after Malthus's death but a preliminary "Advertisement" to the edition suggests that the author's revisions were all, or nearly all completed, p.xi.

himself was partly to blame. While in the doctrines propounded by Ricardo, land was a major factor in the economic system, the discussion in his Principles was at a fairly abstract level. There was no account of either modes of cultivation or types of land tenure. Ricardo's main interest was to produce a logical analysis, assuming a given institutional background, rather than examine agricultural systems as they existed.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the application of Ricardian economics to the actual conditions of land ownership were founded upon the meaning of his theories as interpreted by other political economists. In addition, friends and correspondents of Ricardo had the opportunity to question him on certain aspects of his doctrines. To some extent, such discussions can be reconstructed from the letters which passed between Ricardo and such men as Mill, Trower, Torrens, M'Culloch, Place, and Malthus.

On its appearance, Ricardo's main work, On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, met with a critically unfavourable reception. It was attacked by the British Review and the British Critic as well as by Cobbett in the Political Register. The Quarterly Review, the Gentleman's Magazine, and the Monthly Magazine ignored it. Blackwood's acclaimed it as a piece of ratiocination, but on realising that the thinking behind it was hostile to the views of John Wilson and his High Tory cronies, made a volte face and joined its denigrators.<sup>2</sup> One reviewer, however, heralded it. In the Edinburgh, Ricardo's theories were enthusiastically expounded and the reader urged to go to the book in order to acquire a thorough

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1. R.D. Collison Black, Economic Thought and the Irish Question, 1817-1870, (Cambridge, 1960), p.15.

2. S.G. Checkland, "David Ricardo", Econ. Hist. Rev., vol. 4, (1951-52), p.373.

knowledge of the subject. Ricardo, the article stated, had produced a "harmonious, consistent and beautiful system".<sup>1</sup> The review came from the pen of J. R. M'Culloch.

Malthus, who could not accept many of Ricardo's notions, in enquiring after the name of the reviewer, commented with a trace of chagrin:

I think I hardly ever met with an article in that journal, which so entirely approved of the views of the work under consideration. Perhaps the review might have had more effect if the writer had had more the appearance of thinking more for himself... the review cannot fail of greatly contributing to the publicity and general circulation of your book, and the extension of your fame.

2

To which Ricardo modestly agreed:

The praise indeed is far beyond my merits, and would perhaps have told really more if the writer had mixed with it an objection here and there.

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The Edinburgh had been established in 1802 as a new type of review. It was generally Whiggish, and, as Malthus implied, it often adopted a vigorously critical edge, contrasting markedly with the puffery which its older rivals frequently contained. By 1818 the Edinburgh was the most influential of the reviews. Its circulation had, at about the time of M'Culloch's review appeared, risen to a peak of 13,500 numbers.<sup>4</sup> And each copy, its editor, Francis Jeffrey, estimated on a modest basis, was read by at least three or four readers.<sup>5</sup> If these figures are accepted, and they seem to be highly reliable, the more popular articles must have been read each quarter

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1. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Ricardo's Political Economy", Edinburgh Review, vol. 30, (1818), p.87.

2. Malthus to Ricardo, 16 August, 1818, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 7, p.278.

3. Ricardo to Malthus, 20 August, 1818, ibid., p.282.

4. Harold Cox, "The House of Longman", Edinburgh Review, vol. 240, (1924), p.221.

5. Jeffrey to Thomas Moore, September, 1814, quoted by John Clive, Scotch Reviewers, (1957), p.134.

by some 50,000 persons, a considerable proportion of the informed reading public of the period. In comparison, it may be mentioned that The Times, then the leading daily newspaper, had a circulation of about 8,000 copies.<sup>1</sup>

Ricardo's Principles had made their appearance in April 1817, and M'Culloch's review came out in August of the following year. 750 copies of the first edition of the Principles were printed, and sales appear to have been fairly slow.<sup>2</sup> But following M'Culloch's favourable publicity, the number of purchases became "much accelerated",<sup>3</sup> and Ricardo offered his appreciation for the review which had made him "exceedingly gratified. My own doctrines appear doubly convincing as explained by your able pen".<sup>4</sup> With not a little of the credit going to M'Culloch, the Principles were successfully launched; a second edition appeared in February, 1819, and a third in May, 1821.

At the time of M'Culloch's laudatory review, Ricardo had not met him personally. The first contact between them seems to have been in the early part of 1816, when M'Culloch sent Ricardo a copy of his first publication, a 53-page pamphlet, An Essay on a Reduction of the Interest of the National Debt,.... In his letter of thanks, Ricardo said he could not agree with such a "violent remedy" as reducing the interest on the National Debt, for it would be beneficial to one class at the expense of another, and provide little relief to the country.<sup>5</sup> M'Culloch sent an extended version of his pamphlet (which he was later to disavow),<sup>6</sup> to Ricardo later

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1. Ibid., p.135.

2. Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 1, pp.xlix-1.

3. Ricardo to M'Culloch, 24 November, 1818, ibid., vol. 7, p.337.

4. Ricardo to M'Culloch, 22 August, 1818, ibid., p.286.

5. Ricardo to M'Culloch, 9 June, 1816, ibid., p.37.

6. Ibid., p.92n.2.

in 1816, and subsequently they corresponded regularly.

In reply to Ricardo's letter of appreciation for the enthusiastic review of the Principles, M'Culloch thanked him in turn for praising his review article, then continued:

I have written a paper on the Corn Laws, and another on the Cottage System for the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, /sic/ which I have entirely founded on your principles.

1

In order to obtain Ricardo's criticisms, he sent him copies of these two papers. Ricardo acquiesced completely to M'Culloch's arguments, beginning his letter of reply:

I thank you much for the sheets of the Supplement to the Encyclopedia which you were so good as to send me by my brother. I have read with great satisfaction the two articles which you have written, one on the Corn Laws, the other on the Cottage system. They appear to me to be correct in principle, ably and clearly written, and to contain much useful and important information. I would say more, because I feel more, but you have disqualified me for the office of a judge, by rendering my impartiality suspicious. The favourable manner in which you have noticed me has certainly been very highly gratifying to me.

2

Thus, M'Culloch became firmly established as a main populariser of Ricardian principles, and by the time of his death, Ricardo had given unknowing encouragement to two separate schools of thought on the question of landed property.

With James Mill's assistance, Ricardo had established reasons why the interests of the landlord were at odds with the rest of the community. By building on this foundation, critics of the landed class, such as J. S. Mill, were able to claim to be following the tradition of a respected and influential political economist and

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1. M'Culloch to Ricardo, 3 September, 1818, ibid., p.295.
  2. Ricardo to M'Culloch, 24 November, 1818, ibid., p.337. It should be noted that Ricardo's blanket approval was also for M'Culloch's article on the Corn Laws, an issue which aroused greater public interest and which was written true to the principles of economic liberalism. See below, p.123 where Ricardo singled out the Corn Trade essay for special mention.

man of public affairs. On the other hand, M'Culloch, also acting as a disciple of Ricardo, formulated his theories in such a way not only to support extensive farms, but also to justify the maintenance of large aggregations of landed property and the survival of a small aristocratic class. This paradox in Ricardo's thought on land, only implicit during his lifetime, had, by 1848, become pushed to two distant extremes. We first examine how one of these extremes was reached by M'Culloch.



CHAPTER IV:

THE ROLE OF J.R. M'CULLOCH AND THE QUESTION OF POPULATION

Mr. Skionar: What is civilisation?

Mr. MacQuedy: It is just respect for property.

Peacock, Crotchet Castle, (1831), ch. 3.

The two articles by M'Culloch, of which Ricardo had approved, appeared in volume three of the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which was issued in January, 1819.<sup>1</sup> The Encyclopaedia had first appeared some fifty years previously. Published in Edinburgh, but widely circulated in England, it was perhaps the foremost example of the influential Scottish scholarship of the period. It was generally accepted as a repository of important human knowledge, and containing as it did, the conventional wisdom of the day, its influence was considerable. To maintain its already high reputation, the proprietors decided to issue a Supplement to the fourth, fifth and sixth editions, under the editorship of Macvey Napier, who recruited many of the age's leading intellects to update the Encyclopaedia.

For present purposes, it is M'Culloch's "Cottage System" which merits attention. In length, the article extended a little above nine double-column pages, of 4to size, and consisted of about ten thousand words. It was argued in M'Culloch's typically vigorous and dogmatic style, typographically strengthened by the use of italics and capitals. To begin with, he noted that of all

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1. The date of publication on the title page of volume 3 was given as 1824, but see the memorandum at the end of volume 6 listing the dates on which the separate parts were issued.

schemes for checking pauperism and contributing to happiness, few were so generally patronised as the cottage system, -

that system which proposes, under certain restrictions, to furnish the industrious poor with cottages and small pieces of land, to be used either for the purpose of keeping a cow, or of raising potatoes, or for some other species of husbandry.

1

M'Culloch then proposed to examine the accuracy of the fundamental principles of the scheme and to resolve the important question:

whether the more minute division of landed property, and the letting of small farms and patches of ground, to any considerable portion of the lower classes, would have any tendency to improve the condition and character of the bulk of the people, and to reduce the sum total of human misery?

2

In this way, M'Culloch broadened his terms of reference to include not only cottage gardens and cow-keeping, but also small farms which other authorities were to see in a very different light. To a great extent, he argued, the answer to the question he had set depended upon whether the tendency of the small farming system was to diminish or increase the exchangeable value of raw produce. If the cottage system tended to reduce prices, it would be a strong recommendation in its favour. M'Culloch then discussed, in Ricardian terms, the thesis that as society advanced and became more populous, prices tended to rise because land of an inferior quality was brought into cultivation and more labour was required to produce the same output. It was, continued M'Culloch, the price of the raw produce which regulated the rate of profit. Thus in the United States, with its immense tracts of fertile and unoccupied lands, the productivity of labour was high and capitalists realized

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1. "Cottage System", Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement, (Edinburgh, 1824), vol. 3, p.378. The article was signed "S.S.", but a key to contributors was given in the final volume.
  2. Ibid., pp.378-379.

an ample profit. But in an old-settled and fully-peopled country, it was necessary to look to improvements to reduce the cost of production, and so by this means maintain the rate of profit.

Where there was an extended cottage system, this was not possible, said M'Culloch, as the small owner would not be able to make additions to his stock beyond subsistence. Here, Young's Travels in France was quoted: "Deduct from agriculture ALL the practices which have made agriculture flourishing and you have precisely the management of small farms".<sup>1</sup> Even if it were to be admitted that the small farmer could accumulate capital, he could not efficiently apply it - as to do so required a division of labour only practicable on a large farm. Arthur Young was again quoted to illustrate this proposition. Similarly, the small farmer was restricted in the use he could make of machinery and draught animals. Therefore, raw produce must rise in price, and this was one of M'Culloch's basic objections against dividing up land:

surely nothing can be more preposterously absurd than to think of relieving the hardships and distresses of the poor, by recommending the adoption of a scheme, which would infallibly tend to raise the price of the principal necessities of life.

2

Moreover, argued M'Culloch, the price of manufactured commodities, as well as raw produce was increased, because the most advantageous distribution of capital and labour was prevented. A quotation from Adam Smith was given to show the benefits possible by the division of labour - advantages which would not be obtained if the country was divided into small farms. As so often among nineteenth century economists, the example of Ireland was called

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1. Ibid., p.380.

2. Ibid.

upon. Ireland's predominantly subsistence economy was attributed to the minute division of land, with a supporting extract from Wakefield's Account on the impossibility of improvement.

Next, M'Culloch mentioned that if manufactures had not existed as an alternative form of employment, the occupiers of land would have been almost entirely dependent upon its proprietors, as it had been in the Middle Ages before "the grinding oppression of feudal tyranny was removed".<sup>1</sup> Thus, new channels of productive industry not only increased the comforts of every individual, "it also renders them less liable to be affected by derangements in any particular branch of business; or by the errors, partialities, whims and caprices, of those in authority".<sup>2</sup> Where there was the perpetual sameness of an agricultural society, there was not the opportunity for an ambitious man to better his position. And where capital could not be accumulated,

large cities could not exist, and the liberal arts and professions, which chiefly depend on them for protection and support, and to which they owe their birth, would neither be patronised nor indulged in. 3

In the next step of his argument, M'Culloch explained away the apparent benefits brought by the cottage system, and developed the point which Malthus made, that it was the ultimate results to which regard must be paid: premature generalisation had led to fallacious conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Were cottages with small pieces of ground to be let

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1. Ibid., p.382.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. A hostile critic of M'Culloch, J.L. Mallet, recorded in his diary for 6 April, 1832, that "McCulloch was ready to turn the whole country into one vast manufacturing district, filled with smoke and steam engines and radical weavers", Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings, p.234.

4. Appendix to the 3rd edition of Essay on the Principle of Population, (1806), vol. 2, p.540; see above, p.56.

to industrious labourers, their circumstances would, M'Culloch agreed, be improved, as they would also be able to continue to work on nearby large farms. But this would be transitory, and it was the ultimate consequences which had to be considered.

Firstly, M'Culloch asserted, the small farmer would become disgusted with the life of unremitting exertion which he had formerly led, and, being comparatively independent, would relax his efforts. He would waste his time making trifling bargains, and, by such habits as taking his gin and porter, attempt to emulate the large farmer. If such consequences did not arise during the lifetime of the first occupier, they would in his successor, who had not had his father's rigid training. The industrious labourer would give way to the half-employed petty farmer.

Secondly, if beneficial effects were to arise from the introduction of small farms, such success depended upon the occupiers being able to employ themselves on other work on more extensive farms. But where an extended cottage system existed, there would be no large farms to employ the labour of extra hands. The small farmer was cut off from all hope of rising in society; he became indolent; his opinions of comfort were degraded, and "he ultimately sinks into a state of apathy, and of sluggish and stupid indifference".<sup>1</sup>

This condition was said to be the certain state of society in every country in which landed property was divided into minute portions. It was only necessary to turn to Ireland where the typical farm was of ten to twenty acres and where over four-fifths of the people subsisted chiefly on the produce of the land which they held, to see these effects exemplified. Wakefield's "valuable

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1. "Cottage System", loc.cit., p.383.

work on Ireland abounds with interesting information respecting the effects produced by this minute division of landed property".<sup>1</sup> Four extracts from the Account were given by M'Culloch, in addition to a passage from Newenham's Inquiry respecting the Population of Ireland, and another from "Mr. Curwen's late work".<sup>2</sup> These illustrated instances of poverty and wretchedness - not difficult to find in Ireland: the people of Kerry, for example, could not be said to live, but to exist; in Fermanagh, the peasants rose so late that the cows were not milked until noon; in Mayo, potatoes were left in the ground until threatened by frost; while to the labouring poor generally, a bedstead was a luxury, and clocks, pans, tea-kettles, cups and saucers, etc., never constituted part of an Irishman's furniture.

"Such", M'Culloch declared, "are the ruinous effects produced by the small farming system! And such, too, with some few exceptions, would be the effects of having a country parcelled out into small FREEHOLD PROPERTIES".<sup>3</sup> Even where small farms were rented, rather than owner-occupied, the division of labour was, M'Culloch argued, inapplicable. He conceded that the small owner would enjoy a better condition than the small farmer who had to pay rent, but in both cases the condition of every other class of society would be the same. Secondly, a surplus population would arise as farms became increasingly sub-divided. In France, where primogeniture was unknown, and, on inheritance, landed property was usually divided equally, farms soon became reduced below ten acres. A passage from Young's Travels was quoted which claimed, "Small

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1. Ibid., p.384.

2. Ibid. J.C. Curwen was the author of Observations on the State of Ireland, principally directed to its agriculture and rural population; in a series of letters written on a tour through that country, (2 vols., 1818).

3. "Cottage System", loc.cit., p.384.



properties much divided prove the greatest source of misery that can possibly be conceived".<sup>1</sup> Since Young's visit, allowed M'Culloch, the condition of the agricultural classes in France had improved due to the abolition of feudal privileges and the acquisition by small proprietors of the land which formerly belonged to the church and emigrants. This had given a fresh energy to agricultural pursuits. But division was still too minute, and the country population excessive. Morris Birkbeck's account of his tour was cited in verification of these remarks.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing, M'Culloch next dealt with the argument that property in land instigated incessant labour. In fact, he suggested, a piece of land from which the proprietor could not be ejected and which preserved him from absolute want, joined to the impossibility of rising in the world, tended to foster habits of relaxation and indolence. Unlike the farmer whose lease might be terminated, the small owner had no incentive to accumulate capital. To argue that feelings of manly independence were kept alive by such a division of landed property, was "most futile and preposterous", for, while men in cities could act in a collective capacity, widely spread agriculturalists could be trampled down piecemeal.<sup>3</sup>

Nor would the cottage system relieve the distresses of the poor: it was perhaps the worst devised for that purpose. For, where the supply of able-bodied labour did not exceed the demand, none but the idle and profligate were without work, "and it will not, we presume, be contended that cottages ought to be built for their reception".<sup>4</sup> If, on the other hand, distress resulted from a redundancy of population, it was absurd to encourage further numbers by offering an inducement to marriage in the form of a

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1. Ibid., p.385.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.386.

4. Ibid.

cottage and land. The cure was worse than the disease:

Neither the circumstances of the general extension of the cottage system increasing the price of raw produce, by its preventing the accumulation of capital and the improvement of machinery, nor its tendency to disseminate a spirit of idleness and of dissipation, are half so injurious to the labouring classes, as the effect it would have on giving a factitious stimulus to population.

1

A passage by Ricardo on the harmful effects produced by the poor law was taken and adapted to the case of the cottage system, for the ultimate results of both, avowed M'Culloch, were poverty and misery. Already in the past, he argued, a very partially adopted cottage system had increased the supply of labour beyond the demand for its exertions.

With small farms, land would become minutely divided until only potatoes, the food raised with least expense, would be grown. A deficient crop would entail disease, famine, and death, for a nation of cottagers or paupers (these terms by this point in M'Culloch's article are used synonymously) could not afford to buy foreign food. M'Culloch grimly concluded:

Millions die in China and Hindostan whenever there is any serious deficit in the rice crop. The extremity of want is felt in Ireland when the crop is not ordinarily productive; and the sole reason why famines are not as frequent there as in China, is because the cottage system is not yet universally introduced, and because some capitalists are still to be found in that country.

2

This sustained and trenchant animadversion may be regarded as the classic statement against the cottage system and its protagonists.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid.
  2. Ibid., p.387.
  3. The article appeared again with only minor variations in the 7th edition of the Encyclopaedia (1842) and in the 8th (1854). It is a feature of M'Culloch's opinions that they cropped up continually; in the next chapter similar arguments put forward in many other of his writings are examined.

II

Yet, a closer examination of the article reveals a number of inconsistencies. In parts, M'Culloch's argument was composed of mere declamations, such as the averment that small farmers were bound to become idle and apathetic (pp.382-3), while, in order to illustrate the difficulty of capital accumulation, an opposite view was also quoted: that none work so hard as the little farmer, although he fails to advance (p.386). This latter point was taken from Arthur Young's Travels in France. The use made of Young by M'Culloch well-demonstrates the selectivity of source material employed by the latter. As we have seen, Young's views on this issue were contradictory and Malthus had been able to find similar passages to those given by M'Culloch. Later, differently pre-disposed writers such as J. S. Mill, were also able to back their arguments with extracts from Young's writings. M'Culloch was concerned to prove a certain case, and consequently treated Young as a source of evidence to substantiate it. He made no mention of Young's proposals for establishing the poor upon waste land, or the support he gave in 1801 to the schemes of Robert Gourlay and others for extending the cottage system. Favourable comments by Young on French peasant agriculture were likewise ignored. M'Culloch added emphasis to quotations, in the form of italics and capitals, without advising the reader that such a method had been adopted.

This cavalier technique, admittedly not uncommon in this period, resulted in the most misleading impression where Morris Birkbeck's tour in France was used as an authority. Birkbeck had been a farmer for part of his life at Wanborough in Surrey before embarking on a journey through France in 1814. His holding had been one of 1,600 acres and he was considered to be an advanced

agriculturalist and gentleman farmer.<sup>1</sup> On his return to England, Birkbeck published an account of his travels in a short volume which seemed to have had a certain popularity, going through several editions.<sup>2</sup> Birkbeck has been fairly described as "a good-tempered, fair-minded observer, well grounded in science and the humanities".<sup>3</sup>

M'Culloch had conceded a recent bettering of French agriculture, although suggesting that the circumstances were exceptional. In fact, the view given of French society by Birkbeck was entirely favourable, with only one section of the book presenting a different picture. It was this passage that M'Culloch seized upon.

Early in his account, Birkbeck wrote:

Since I entered the country I have been looking in all directions for the ruins of France...but instead of a ruined country, I see fields highly cultivated and towns full of inhabitants...everybody assures me that agriculture has been improving rapidly for the last twenty-five years; that the riches and comforts of the cultivators of the soil have been doubled during that period; and that vast improvement has taken place in the condition and character of the common people.

4

Not only did Birkbeck give such a good impression of France, but went on to suggest that in some respects France could be considered as superior to England:

there are very few really poor people in France. In England, a poor man and a labourer are synonymous terms: we speak familiarly of the poor, meaning the labouring class: not so here.

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1. Constantia Maxwell, The English Traveller in France, 1698-1815, (1932), pp.256-257.

2. The British Museum Catalogue shows five editions in 1814-15. The full title of the book was: Notes on a Journey through France, from Dieppe through Paris and Lyons, to the Pyrenees, and back through Toulousse, in July, August and September, 1814, describing the habits of the people and the agriculture of the country.

3. George H. Genzmer, Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 2. Subsequently, Birkbeck emigrated to America. He drowned in 1825, crossing the River Fox by horse, while returning from a visit to Robert Owen at Harmony, Indiana.

4. Birkbeck, Notes..., p.11.

5. Ibid., p.22.

The wretched peasantry, said Birkbeck, had vanished with the revolution. In the Moulins district, however, the lower classes appeared less comfortable. Birkbeck accounted for this as due to it being an old enclosed country, "which probably furnished no small allotments for the poor on the sale of the national domains".<sup>1</sup> Shortly after this observation, occurred the remark which contradicted the tenor of the rest of the book. Perhaps Birkbeck was generalising from the poorer Moulins area that he was visiting. Thornton suggested he had ascended an oracular tripod to make prophecies, rather than to describe what actually was.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reason, Birkbeck commented upon the unprogressive nature of French society, and added:

There is no advancement in French society; no improvement, nor hope of it. Yet they seem happier than we are.

3

This remark was quoted by M'Culloch, who italicised it, and omitted the last sentence which was unfavourable to his case. The rest of Birkbeck's description saw France in as favourable a light as his earlier observations, with sometimes better conditions than those enjoyed by the poorer classes in England. In one comparison, from the Montpellier district, he wrote:

we have not seen, among the labouring people, one such famished, worn out, wretched object, as may be met with in every parish of England, I had almost said on every farm; this, in a country so populous, so entirely agricultural, denotes real prosperity.

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M'Culloch had employed his arguments to cover both small proprietorships, (or freehold properties) and rented farms, as well as small pieces of land for potatoes and a cow.<sup>5</sup> On the former

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1. Ibid., p.30.

2. William Thomas Thornton, A Plea for Peasant Proprietors, (1848), p.140.

3. Birkbeck, op.cit., p.35.

4. Ibid., p.52.

5. Gardens, (which Malthus was willing to allow) were not specifically examined in the main body of the article, but, from his opening paragraph, M'Culloch clearly regarded them as part of the cottage system.

system, his evidence was based upon certain passages from Young's pre-revolutionary account and from Birkbeck, who in actuality was overwhelmingly in favour of the French system of small proprietors. The principal example of small rented farms was Ireland; M'Culloch's chief authority in this case was Edward Wakefield.

### III

Like Young and Birkbeck, Wakefield began life as a farmer, but had sufficient ability to advance himself. As we have seen, he came to know Mill, Place and Ricardo. Pitt had consulted him on Irish questions. In 1808, he appeared before a House of Commons Committee, which helped him to form the idea of producing a detailed study of Ireland. The Rt. Hon. John Foster, Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer, persuaded him of the necessity of such a work and offered him assistance. While accepting this, the work was unconnected with any party, and Wakefield described his opinions as "the unbiassed results of a patient investigation of the state of the country from actual observations".<sup>1</sup> He declared that he was determined to speak the truth without reserve or disguise, as he saw it, after nearly two years collecting material in Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The result was two heavy volumes, totalling over 1,700 pages, and priced at £6 6s. 0d. In some respects, Wakefield's approach was similar to that of Young: he was the practical man, observing and recording his experiences and impressions. He was an admirer of Young, who he considered to be a "benefactor of mankind", whose "labours will shed a lustre on her (i.e. England's) fame through the ages."<sup>3</sup> In his review of the Account, Sir James Mackintosh found their styles similar: "His manner is that of the Tours of

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1. Edward Wakefield, An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political, (2 vols, 1812), vol. 1, p.v.

2. Ibid., pp.xii, xiv.

3. Ibid., pp.vi.ii., vii-viii.



Arthur Young - lively, dogmatical and disorderly", and thought that "Mr. Wakefield...appears to be a sensible, industrious, liberal minded and well informed man".<sup>1</sup> Like Young's writings, the book became a commonly-consulted source of information.<sup>2</sup> It was used by Mill to substantiate his argument as to the cause of Irish misery when he decided that: "A government, by influence, therefore, a hireling aristocracy, and a degraded population, are component parts of the same system".<sup>3</sup>

Wakefield's own views on Ireland's problems, reached after his exhaustive survey, were different from those of M'Culloch. Wakefield was a moderate reformer. While against allotments,<sup>4</sup> he advocated the virtues of a robust peasantry. The sons of Britain had, "rejected the allurements held out to them by the revolutionary demon",<sup>5</sup> which had swept Europe, and so no obstacles must be put in the way of a rich peasantry, which constituted the country's strength. This sentiment had been well-expressed by Goldsmith, and Wakefield quoted six appropriate lines from the *Deserted Village*, including a couplet to be oft-cited by the critics of social change:

But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
If once destroy'd can never be supplied.

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1. /James Mackintosh/, "Wakefield's Ireland", Edinburgh Review, vol. 20, (1812), p.346.

2. E.g., Thomas Moore recorded: "Borrowed 'Wakefield upon Ireland' from Lord Lansdowne, who, in sending it to me, begged I would look over it as speedily as I could, because, with all its faults, it was his dictionary of reference on many subjects which he had to correspond about with his agents, &c.", Lord John Russell (ed.), Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore, (8 vols., 1853-56), vol. 4, p.129; Journal for September, 1823.

3. "State of Ireland", loc.cit., p.352.

4. Wakefield, op.cit., p.579; see also p.274.

5. Ibid., p.257.

6. Ibid., p.258.

However, wrote Wakefield, the treatment of the Irish peasant was tyrannical. Abuses were many. There was no right of compensation for improving tenants. Many landlords advertised to re-let to the highest bidder, and the occupying tenant, as his lease came to a close, "yielding to the emotion of despair, racks and impoverishes the farm he has so little chance of retaining".<sup>1</sup> Another evil was the "hanging gale", the term given to six months credit on rents. It was one of "the great levers of oppression by which the lower classes are kept in a kind of perpetual bondage", for, the "debt hangs over their heads like a load, and keeps them in a continual state of anxiety and terror".<sup>2</sup> Sub-letting by speculating middlemen was a further barrier to advancement. On occasions, the occupier would pay his rent to the middleman, who failed to pay it to the head landlord. The tenant's cattle were then driven into the pound and, if the rent not paid again, sold.<sup>3</sup> Some leases contained clauses requiring the tenant to labour for the landlord at an inferior rate of wages. Such work was performed slowly and carelessly; in consequence, Wakefield did not find it surprising that the Irish were reproached with accusations of being idle.<sup>4</sup> The Irish peasant was compared to the Russian serf: the latter,

seems to be exactly on a level with the Irish slave, who is bound by the terms of his lease to cultivate in like manner the land of his master. The expression I have here used may offend some delicate ears; but to call the former, tenant, would be a perversion of terms, to name the latter, landlord, would be a prostitution of language. Can such a system be suffered to remain any longer in a free country?

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Wakefield went on to plead that the condition of the Irish peasant should be ameliorated.

On the question of absenteeism, Wakefield did not think that

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1. Ibid., p.252.
  2. Ibid., p.244.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid., p.245.
  5. Ibid., p.510.

all abuses were found on the estates owned by landlords who lived in England. If the agent employed was of good character, he would not neglect his responsibilities; but if the landlord was really a virtuous man, anxious to promote the prosperity of those around him, he would live amongst his tenants and set them a good example. If absent, the proprietor could not perform these duties. Those who were natives of England should occasionally visit their Irish property for a few months and become familiar with the condition of their tenants. Were this approach adopted, agents might reform their conduct, knowing that the landlord would hear grievances during his next visit.<sup>1</sup> Wakefield described the widespread corruption amongst agents, who had not the least sense of shame. Leases were given to those who could afford to pay the biggest bribe; tenants were coerced into buying at shops owned by agents' relatives; the agents extracted inflated fees for renewing leases, and dispossessed tenants who could not meet their price. This meant that farms were obtained by those who could pay the biggest bribe, rather than by the best farmers. The spirit of corruption sapped every moral principle and was one of the most destructive evils under which Ireland laboured.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Wakefield's Account contained several reasons to explain the misery of the Irish poor. His emphasis was upon the low status of the peasant and the wretched manner in which he was generally treated. His solution was to ameliorate their condition: by landlords again taking up their duties and eliminating corruption and exploitation, and to remove the disabilities which Catholics suffered under, thus, making the chance

to raise, if possible, what Malthus called the  
'springs of public prosperity', inspiring the

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1. Ibid., pp.290-291.

2. Ibid., pp.297-299.

great mass of the catholics in Ireland with a desire to better their condition.

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From this, it is abundantly clear that, although Wakefield mentioned the ill-effects of minute sub-division, he did not consider it to be the cause of Irish poverty. M'Culloch, as we have seen, argued that the central cause of misery was the cottage system. He ignored Wakefield's evidence of corruption and mismanagement. Further, M'Culloch was of the opinion that absenteeism could not materially injure Ireland. He appeared before the Select Committee of 1825 on the State of Ireland, and was asked:

Suppose the absentee landlords of Ireland were to return and reside upon their estates, is it your opinion that that would be productive of any decided advantage to the lower orders of the people.

M'Culloch's answer was:-

No, I am not aware that it would be productive of any advantage to them, in any way of increasing the general and average rate of wages all over the country.

2

A later question asked M'Culloch his opinion on the moral and political effects of absenteeism. He made reply:

From all the information that I have been able to obtain from reading books on the state of Ireland, and conversing with such Irish gentlemen as I have met with, I should think that in a moral point of view Ireland did not lose very much by the want of the absentee landlords.

3

To the next question, "Will you state what has led you to form that opinion?", M'Culloch's retort is surprising:

The statements that I have seen in Mr. Wakefield's work, and in other works on Ireland; and the various conversations I have had.

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1. Ibid., vol. 2, p.654.
  2. S.C. on State of Ireland, 1825, vol. 8, p.815.
  3. Ibid. M'Culloch's solution to Ireland's problems was to prohibit the further sub-division of holdings and to instruct school children on the laws of wages. This, he told the Committee, would reduce population growth.
  4. Ibid.

IV

Clearly, it would seem, that M'Culloch misunderstood or misrepresented Wakefield on this issue. In fact, a majority of authorities emphasised the misgovernment of Ireland rather than its system of land tenure, which was one of the features of that misgovernment. Moreover, Ricardo, while having given the "Cottage System" article his blessing, does not really appear to have unreservedly accepted its arguments, and, as we shall see, Ricardo's premature death may have prevented him from making his analysis of the problem widely known. Certainly, Ricardo was no supporter of small farms, but on this subject, M'Culloch was, as Halévy described his political economy generally, "more Ricardian than Ricardo himself".<sup>1</sup> He was, moreover, strongly disposed to favouring urban life as against the unprogressive nature of the countryside, and it was peasant agriculture which M'Culloch regarded as equivalent to a "pauper warren" and the most backward of all.<sup>2</sup>

The 1820s were years of distress in Ireland, which made it a focus of attention. In 1822, Maria Edgeworth, the authoress, solicited Ricardo's advice upon the effects of Ireland's dependence on the potato. She thought the question had been ably discussed in the "Cottage System" article, but had some questions, including the

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1. Halévy, op.cit., p.343.

2. The respective virtues and vices of the city and of rural England is a recurring theme among social philosophers in the nineteenth century and can only be referred to in passing. On the one hand, the city was presented as the centre of advancement in government, knowledge, and social organisation, while, on the other, its diseases, crimes, and moral temptations were emphasised. Similarly, the healthy virtues of the countryside were stressed by one school of thought, while another voiced contempt for what Marx was to refer to in 1848 as "the idiocy of rural life".

objection that the potato facilitated the sub-division of cottagers' land. In his answer, Ricardo doubted that he had sufficiently studied the question, although he thought both sides guilty of exaggeration. His objection to the potato rested almost wholly on the crop being liable to accidents which led to distress. If there were more merchants willing to store potato flour for an emergency, he would favour the potato, "for my motto, after Mr. Bentham, is 'the greatest happiness to the greatest number'."<sup>1</sup> Ricardo did not, it is significant, take up Miss Edgeworth's reference to M'Culloch's article or restate his approval of it.

An earlier exchange of letters with Trower had also discussed the Irish situation, and again the difference of the position taken by Ricardo, compared with M'Culloch, is illustrated. Trower wrote:

It appears to me, that no permanent or substantial good can be done till all small farms and small tenancies are got rid of. These are the curse of Ireland. They are calculated to destroy that wholesome dependence of the lower upon the upper classes, which is one of the master links of society; and to encourage habits of idleness, which are the bane of all moral feeling...The two great deficiencies in Ireland are want of capital, and want of industry. By destroying small tenancies you would obtain both. 2

The present system, proposed Trower, should be got rid of gradually by legislative enactments, while giving time to settle vested interests. Ricardo's reply showed that he considered misrule rather than small tenancies to be the real curse of Ireland. His analysis is worth giving in full:

I agree with much of what you say about Ireland, but on some points we differ. I think it desirable that small farms, and small tenancies, should

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1. Ricardo to Maria Edgeworth, 13 December, 1822, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 9, p.239.
  2. Trower to Ricardo, 10 January, 1822, ibid., p.145.



be got rid of, but I do not look upon these, and many other things which might be advantageously corrected in Ireland, as the cause of the evils under which that unfortunate country groans, but as the effect of those evils. If Ireland had a good system of law - if property were secure - if an Englishman lending money to an Irishman could by some easy process oblige him to fulfill /sic/ his contract, and not be set at defiance by the chicanery of sheriffs agents in Ireland, capital would flow into Ireland, and an accumulation of capital would lead to all the beneficial results which every where flows from it. The most economical processes would be adopted - small farms would be laid into large - there would be an abundant demand for labour, and thus would Ireland take her just rank among nations. The evils of Ireland, I, in my conscience believe, arise from misrule, and I hope that during the administration of Lord Wellesley a commencement will be made in the reformation of the enormous abuses under which that country labours.

1

The issue that had caused much of M'Culloch's apprehension, in his "Cottage System" and before the 1824 Select Committee, was the rapid increase which was taking place in the Irish population. Like Malthus, he placed emphasis on a rising birthrate as the cause of an increase in numbers. According to the principle of annuities, he pointed out to the Committee, if births exceed deaths by a thirty-sixth part for twenty five years, a population will have doubled itself.<sup>2</sup> The chief cause of higher births, he argued, was young marriages, and these were encouraged by the availability of cottages and land, which sub-division made possible. As we have seen, Ricardo had reservations, stated in unpublished letters, about

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1. Ricardo to Trower, 25 January, 1822, ibid., p.153. R.D.C. Black, op.cit., p.19, in giving parts of these passages, thinks Ricardo's view, "in no way contradictory of Trower's". This judgement disregards an essential divergence of opinion: Ricardo regarded the problem as bad government; an impoverished land system was an effect of this. Trower considered small farms to be the causal factor, as did M'Culloch. Like James Mill, Ricardo stressed misrule and saw improvement through economic liberalism, with a disinterested government effectively holding the ring.

2. S.C. on the State of Ireland, op.cit., p.808.

M'Culloch's analysis despite having given it his blessing. In his Notes on Malthus's Principles of Political Economy, Ricardo further clarified his opinions. It has been shown above, that in these unpublished Notes Ricardo qualified some of the interpretations which had been based on his writings concerning the difference of interests between landlords and the rest of the community. In these Notes, Ricardo disagreed with Malthus's argument which stated that, "a fearful experiment" was taking place in France in the form of a law of succession which divided property among all children equally. It had not yet been in force long enough to reveal what effects it may have, but, wrote Malthus:

if such a law were to continue permanently to regulate the descent of property in France; if no modes of evading it should be invented, and if its effects should not be weakened by the operation of an extraordinary degree of prudence in marriage, which prudence such a law would certainly tend to discourage, there is every reason to believe that the country, at the end of a century, will be quite as remarkable for its extraordinary poverty and distress, as for its unusual equality of property. The owners of the minute divisions of landed property will be as they always are, peculiarly without resource, and must perish in greater numbers in every scarcity. 1

Ricardo had a long comment to make on this passage. Again it is worth giving in full:

Why should this law occasion so great a sub-division of property? Not only will prudence in marriage counteract it, but the acquisition of wealth, made by each member of the family. These acquisitions will probably enable him to leave to his children as large a patrimony as he received from his father. His children in their turn will be again inclined and probably enabled to follow their father's example. Is not this practice actually prevailing in England in all families excepting the Aristocratical. Do not all merchants, Bankers, manufacturers, farmer, shopkeepers, &c. &c. divide their property equally among their children, and are any of the ill effects,

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1. Quoted in Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 2, pp.385-386. In the 2nd edition of Principles of Political Economy, (1836), p.377, Malthus allowed the passage to stand unchanged.

expected by Mr. Malthus, in the case of France found to proceed from it?

Because the land may be very much sub-divided in consequence of the apportioning it among children, it does not follow, either, that it should be separately cultivated by those children, or that each should continue to be the proprietor of his original share of it. Sales would be made, and leases would be granted, and as well as a great proprietor now divides his land into separate farms for the convenience, and advantage of better cultivation, so would various small contiguous proprietors accumulate their small lots of land into one good farm for the same purpose.

1

As this note was not published, it is always possible that Ricardo would not have allowed this view to stand. Some of his comments on Malthus's Principles in places appear to have been made in a spirit of captiousness. As he wrote to James Mill while working on the Notes:

I take advantage of every leisure hour to work on my reply to Malthus - I consider it as an agreeable amusement, and say everything that offers. It will not probably be desirable to publish it - if I do send it forth it will want a great deal of lopping.

2

The matter is inconclusive. In 1818, Ricardo, perhaps flattered by M'Culloch's attentions, had given his full approval to the arguments in the "Cottage System" article. But two years later, he contradicted Malthus's gloomy forecast of the result of sub-division in France. A few months before his death, moreover, Ricardo wrote to Maria Edgeworth to say that he had not sufficiently studied the question of small farms in Ireland, but in this letter, and to Hutches Trower, he emphasised other factors as being the fundamental problems. Nevertheless, M'Culloch proceeded to

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1. Ibid., pp.386-387.

2. Ricardo to Mill, 14 October, 1820, ibid., vol. 8, p.283. An indication of Ricardo's hyper-critical approach is exemplified when he criticised Malthus for using an illustrative example which he himself had earlier been responsible for suggesting: cp. Ricardo to Malthus, 4 September, 1817, ibid., vol. 7, p.184, with his comment in the Notes, p.339.

establish an orthodoxy, based upon his version of Ricardian economics, although it may have been unacceptable to Ricardo.

In the next section, we examine how M'Culloch propagated the case set out in his "Cottage System" in the thirty years after its appearance. But before considering M'Culloch's career, something must be written about the importance of population and its growth in influencing attitudes towards landed property in our period.

V

"The most substantial friend the poorer classes ever had", declared the first number of the Westminster Review, was the author of the Essay on the Principle of Population.<sup>1</sup> It was this subject, the expansive force of population, which welded together the independent units of the whole social structure, and was thus, "a central point of the Utilitarian creed".<sup>2</sup> The theory of population was a crucial aspect of classical dogma and arose in most contemporary problems, including those surrounding the distribution of landed property, its occupancy, and the size of farms. For this reason, some account must briefly be given of the opinions held by the Benthamite radicals and their contemporaries on the population question to appreciate the manner in which it influenced notions of property in land.

In 1820, Godwin at last made a full-scale reply to Malthus

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1. "On the Instrument of Exchange", Westminster Review, vol. 1, (1824), p.201. The author was T.P. Thompson, see L.G. Johnson, General T. Perronet Thompson, 1783-1869: His Military, Literary and Political Campaigns, (1957), p.121.

2. Stephen, op.cit., vol. 2, p.181.

in his book Of Population.<sup>1</sup> In Ricardo's circle, it was met with unqualified scorn. James Mill thought it "below contempt".<sup>2</sup> "I do not think I ever saw a more miserable performance", reported M'Culloch.<sup>3</sup> Trower heaped invective upon it:

It is not written in the true spirit of philosophick enquiry. It is intemperate and abusive; and with all the pretence of systematic investigation, it is a rambling and disjointed performance. It proceeds upon a gross misconception of Malthus' system, and is supported by scandalous misrepresentations of his opinions. As an attack upon the great principle inculcated in the Essay it is perfectly impotent.

4

To which Ricardo commented: "Your view of Godwin's book exactly agrees with mine".<sup>5</sup>

Francis Place produced a reply in 1822, having, through Ricardo, borrowed Malthus's copy of the Essay.<sup>6</sup> Despite his lowly origins, Place stood in marked contrast with those spokesmen of the working class who abhorred Malthusianism, and, for a number of reasons, the Essay became integrated with his general outlook. Firstly, Place was the archetypal self-made man. His

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1. Its full title was, Of Population: an Enquiry concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on that Subject. See also above, p.30.

2. Mill to Ricardo, 13 November, 1820, in Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 8, p.292.

3. M'Culloch to Ricardo, 25 December, 1820, ibid., p.326.

4. Trower to Ricardo, 1 April, 1821, ibid., p.361. See also Trower's letter to Ricardo of 10 January, 1822, when he was pleased to note that both the Quarterly and Edinburgh supported Malthus, ibid., vol. 9, p.147.

5. Ricardo to Trower, 21 April, 1821, ibid., vol. 8, p.368.

6. Norman E. Himes, Introduction to 1930 reprint of Francis Place, Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population..., (1st ed. 1822), p.41.

father had been a drunkard, and Place's early years were spent in squalor and, at times, starvation. At nineteen, he married and this gave him the incentive to raise his standing, but, because he had become a leader of the journeymen breeches-makers, he lost work and suffered much hardship. He employed his unwanted free time to read extensively, until he became secretary of the Breeches-Makers Union which he had reorganised under the cover of a Sick Club. This paid a small salary of £10 a year. In 1795, while Chairman of the London Corresponding Society, Place took an important decision. It was, ironically, through reading Godwin's Political Justice that he overcame a fear of ruin that had inhibited him from going into business on his own account. Gradually, by application and skilful dealing, he advanced to become a successful tailor, with a shop (and its famous library) in Charing Cross Road.

Place's personal experience led him, therefore, to a belief in the practicability of self-advancement. He came to reject the idealistic notions of men like his "old and somewhat crazy friend Robert Owen",<sup>1</sup> who held that character was formed for the individual by his environment. Godwin too, must have seemed hopelessly utopian in his philosophy to a man of Place's background, and it is this disbelief in an ideal state of nature that represents a main cleavage between the Utilitarians and the socialists, or believers in the abstract rights of man.<sup>2</sup> Godwin made the acquaintance of Place in 1810, and for awhile they were on terms of good friendship. But Godwin, putting into practice his notion that property ought to go to the person most needful

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1. Place to Harriet Martineau, 8 September, 1832, B.M. Add. MSS 35,149, f.191b.

2. Stephen, op.cit., p.180.



of it, overtaxed Place's financial generosity eventually causing him to break off their relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Place had worked within the system to make himself prosperous. Similarly, as a reformer, he accepted much of the conventional wisdom of the day, particularly that of the political economists. With one foot half in the camp of the working class reformers, he perhaps imagined the Utilitarians also approximated to this position. Place was always anxious to vindicate political economy and its authors. In 1832 one of his letters tried to persuade a friend of this: Malthus, he averred, was formerly an "aristocratic parson", who became an advocate of good government when his prejudices gave way before the principles of political economy, and his works came to contain liberal sentiments; M'Culloch had voiced liberal arguments, while "Ricardo was one of the most enlightened reformers I ever knew"; Mill, declared Place, was "as bad as myself".<sup>2</sup> And to the charge that political economists justified the distribution of wealth into a few hands, Place replied that they deprecated any system with such a tendency; even M'Culloch, who, though having "some leaning" to maintain the economic advantage of large estates, did not want to see wealth in the hands of a few.<sup>3</sup> It need hardly be added that Place's judgements are open to serious doubt.

As a man who relied on personal experience and practical observation in forming his opinions, Place clearly would have been impressed by the evidence of rising population which he

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1. Graham Wallas, The Life of Francis Place, 1771-1854, (1918 ed.), pp.59-60.

2. Place to George Rogers, 11 January, 1832, in Himes, op.cit., pp.312-313.

3. Ibid., p.320.

was able to see all about him, This meant a rise in the supply of labour, and, if demand failed to rise, a fall in its price, that is, a decline in the rate of wages. Once Place had accepted this basic premise of the political economists, it was an easy step to embrace the principle of population, particularly as he had a solution which was more practical and far-reaching than Malthus's suggestion of moral restraint. This was birth control by contraceptive methods.

## VI

Many of Malthus's critics had reviled him for advocating celibacy and made taunts based upon biblical allusions. But to propose the practice of "moral restraint" was mild in comparison with Place's expedient which was considered indecent and blasphemous, while advocacy of such a method was tantamount to inviting social ostracism. The Utilitarians were particularly reticent about publicly discussing the subject, although other radicals did commit themselves more explicitly. Yet, despite much careful research, especially by N. E. Himes, in some aspects the subject remains shadowy and the evidence available often fairly tenuous.

While Place's reply to Godwin, Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population, specifically put forward birth control,<sup>1</sup> it did not discuss contraceptive techniques. But this deficiency was soon remedied by Place in the form of the

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1. Place, Illustrations and Proofs, op.cit., p.165.

"diabolical handbills". These publications received a wide circulation during 1823, and were reprinted in a number of radical journals. In them Place advocated coitus interruptus as well as the use of a small, vinegar-soaked, sponge to be inserted into the vagina before intercourse.<sup>1</sup> Himes has suggested that Bentham made ambiguous and cryptic reference to this latter method in an article in Young's Annals of Agriculture, and that he may therefore be regarded as the father of English birth control.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that Bentham could not have been hoping directly to reach the labouring class with his advice in the Annals, while the allusion was so gnomic that it is debateable whether it would have been understood by those readers who may have been willing to pass it on. However, it probably does indicate an awareness of contraceptive techniques at least among those who were in a position to discuss questions of the day with Bentham and relate social progress with the need to curb a rapidly expanding birth rate. James Mill made a guarded reference to the "superstitions of the nursery" in his "Colony" article for the Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement, and similar remarks elsewhere, including the Elements of Political Economy.<sup>3</sup> But the Utilitarians did not think with one mind on the issue. One hostile retort to Mill's observations came from General T. Perronet Thompson, an ardent Benthamite who took over the Westminster Review in 1829.

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1. Norman E. Himes, Medical History of Contraception, (New York, 1963 ed.), pp.212-222. See also John Peel, "Birth Control and the British Working Class Movement: A Bibliographical Review", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 7, (1963), pp.16-22.

2. Norman E. Himes, "Jeremy Bentham and the Genesis of English Neo-Malthusianism", Economic History, vol. 3, (1932), pp.267-276; but see also J.R. Poynter, op.cit., p.125n., who doubts Himes's interpretation.

3. "Colony", Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement, vol. 3, p.261; Elements of Political Economy, (1821), pp.34, 51.

This writer reproduced five quotations from Mill's Elements, and three from articles in the Encyclopaedia, all of which referred to the question of population. Thompson went on to say that it would be painful to misconstrue their meaning, but, "There is no use in pretending not to know what has been disseminated in full and disgusting detail by the instrumentality of the press". He objected that means were being provided to avoid the consequences of immorality; the bluff Colonel and father of six children demanded to know, "what will be the purity of the wives and daughters of the higher classes, when in every room the footmen are neighing after the chambermaids...?" Thompson opposed the designs of the "new" political economy, which he contrasted with "the purity, and even elegance" of Malthus's great discoveries.<sup>1</sup>

A radical who supported contraception was John Wade, who in his History of the Middle and Working Classes, suggested that to make chastity the rule of the community was hopeless, the choice was between vice and marriage. He went on to venture "on delicate ground" by giving extracts from Mill and Place, and suggested that a theory to "divest marriage of its impoverishing consequences" might be collected from them.<sup>2</sup> Wade, the compiler of the influential Black Book, was another of Place's correspondents, and we find the latter writing to him opposing the deferment of marriage as a solution to over-large families, but favouring "early marriage with abstinence from producing more

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1. T. Perronet Thompson, The True Theory of Rent, in Opposition to Mr. Ricardo and Others, being an Exposition of Fallacies on Rent, Tithes, &c, in the Form of a Review of Mr. Mill's Elements of Political Economy, (1826), p.32. At the time a distinction between "old" and "new" political economy was often made, the former relying more on Smith, while Ricardo and Mill were the chief authors of the latter, see S.G. Checkland, "The Propagation of Ricardian Economics in England", Economica, vol. 16, (1949), pp.40-41.

2. /John Wade/, History of the Middle and Working Classes,...., (1833), p.337.

children than may be desirable".<sup>1</sup>

Another of Place's correspondents - although a less receptive one - on the population question was Harriet Martineau. He sent her a copy of Robert Dale Owen's Moral Physiology, and pressed upon her the need for birth control to limit the increase in numbers.<sup>2</sup> Miss Martineau had discussed the matter in one of her improving tales on political economy, Weal and Woe in Garveloch, before receiving the book, and did not subscribe to anything beyond the preventive check of moral restraint.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the Quarterly castigated her severely. Croker had boasted that he would "tomahawk" her by an attack in the Review:

A woman who thinks child-bearing a crime against society! An unmarried woman who declaims against marriage!! A young woman who deprecates charity and a provision for the poor!!!

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The article also wondered where Miss Martineau had picked up her information; was it

by entering into high and lofty communication on such subjects with certain gentlemen of her sect, famous for dropping gratuitous advice on these matters into areas, for the benefit of London kitchen-maids?

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1. Place to Wade, 9 July, 1833, B.M. Add. MSS, 35,149, f.216b.

2. Place to H. Martineau, 8 September, 1832, B.M. Add. MSS, 35,149, ff.189b-191b.

3. It is clear from her letter of 29 March, 1832 to W.J. Fox that she had dealt with the natural check to population before Place's solicitations. The point is discussed by R.K. Webb, Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian, (1960), pp.115-116.

4. "Miss Martineau's Monthly Novels", Quarterly Review, vol. 49, (1833), p.151. The Tory Fraser's Magazine echoed the Quarterly, but was a little less impolite; on Cousin Marshall it commented: "a book written by a woman against the poor - a book written by a young woman against marriage", vol. 6, (1832), p.404. Cousin Marshall was designed to illustrate the workings of the poor laws.

5. Quarterly Review, ibid. The main part of the article was by Poulett Scrope who disassociated himself from the ribaldry which it contained. Lockhart, as well as Croker, appeared to have had a hand in the additions, for which Miss Martineau never forgave them, so deeply had she felt the attack of these "low-minded and foul-mouthed creatures", see her Autobiography, (3rd ed. 1877, 3 vols.) vol. 1, pp.206-207.



This was clearly a reference to the distribution of Place's handbills, and a further allusion to the scrape in which J. S. Mill was involved when he had assisted with this distribution. We have already noted Moore's reference to this incident,<sup>1</sup> although the exact circumstances are obscure. It appears that in 1823 John Mill was responsible for disseminating Place's leaflets, for which he was apprehended and held in gaol for a short time.<sup>2</sup> About the same time, Mill, who was seventeen years old, contributed three letters to T. J. Wooler's Black Dwarf, which concerned the necessity of checking population. But these more circumspect discussions were overshadowed by the much more explicit treatment, "What is Love?" printed in the Republican, which Carlile was editing from Dorchester Gaol.

The complicity of Bentham and Place in the propaganda movement also leaked out and they were lampooned in a sheet called the Bull Dog.<sup>3</sup> From largely circumstantial evidence, it appears that Ricardo probably gave support, but only privately, to Place's "over-population-stopping expedient" (as Bentham termed it).<sup>4</sup> His political views were reformist, and he assisted Place by writing him a letter which made criticisms of the manuscript of the Illustrations and Proofs, but, though Ricardo's discussion

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1. Above, p.77, note 2. Another mention occurred in Moore's satirical attack against the Westminster Review, the fifth verse of which ran:

Art. 3, "Upon Fallacies", Jeremy's own  
(The chief fallacy being his hope to find readers);

Art. 4, "Upon Honesty" - author unknown;

Art. 5, (by the young Mr. M---), "Hints to Breeders".

2. Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill, (1954), pp.56-57; Norman E. Himes, "John Stuart Mill's Attitude toward Neo-Malthusianism", Economic History, vol. 1, pp.457-484.

3. Himes, "Jeremy Bentham and the Genesis of English Neo-Malthusianism", loc.cit., pp.274-275.

4. Bentham to Place, 24 April, 1831, quoted by Wallas, op.cit., p.82.



was at some length, it contained no reference to the controversial passage.<sup>1</sup> Place, undoubtedly the most eager 'Neo-Malthusian' tried to involve M'Culloch in the debate by publishing notes made from his Ricardo Memorial Lectures, given in London in 1824. These gave the impression that M'Culloch favoured birth control by artificial means, a view which was emphatically denied by him.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, although the acceptance of Malthus's principle was central to the thought of the Utilitarians, they were divided upon the question of "natural" or "artificial" checks. While this dichotomy undoubtedly conditioned the approach adopted by them on other questions, the difference between the "Malthusians" and "neo-Malthusians" was seldom avowed, due to the extremely hostile reception with which birth control propaganda was met. Bentham, Harriet Martineau, and the Mills were attacked for the vague strictures which they made upon the matter. Place was for a time ostracised.<sup>3</sup> Robert Owen, who had been identified with the movement (again by Place) denied, on his return from America, any involvement.<sup>4</sup> The matter was too explosive for the Benthamites to risk obloquy by giving unequivocal support to contraception: it never became an important public issue during Mill's lifetime,<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ricardo to Place, 9 September, 1821, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 9, pp.49-57. Ricardo did mention it in a letter to Malthus on 10 September, 1821, when he wrote that, although Place did not dwell upon the matter, "I have a little doubt whether he is right even to mention it", ibid., p.62.

2. Norman E. Himes, "McCulloch's Relation to the Neo-Malthusian Propaganda of His Time: An Episode in the History of English Neo-Malthusianism", Journal of Political Economy, vol. 37, (1929), pp.73-86. See also Blaug, op.cit., p.108.

3. Wallas, op.cit., p.169.

4. Owen's complicity, however, is probable; see the discussion below, p.215.

5. Nor was it always a personal issue: Place at least once referred ironically to the large families of those who preached restraint, writing on 18 January, 1818 to George Ensor, "you & I - and Mill, and Wakefield - mustering among us no less I believe than 36 children", B.M. Add. MSS 35,153, f.41-42. Place fathered 15 children, Ricardo, 8, James Mill, 9, and M'Culloch, 10.

remaining quiescent until the Bradlaugh-Besant agitation revived the controversy towards the end of the 1870s.<sup>1</sup> For practical purposes, therefore, the approach of the more radical middle-class reformers had to be virtually as circumspect as that of their strictly Malthusian associates.

## VII

J. S. Mill's solution to the problem was a compromise. He probably realised that continued advocacy of contraception would possibly lead to further legal difficulties and could be used by his opponents to discredit his other political theories and activities. He therefore abandoned his support of "artificial" checks in favour of the "preventive". But in doing this, he twisted Malthus's basic argument away from its emphasis on the unimprovability of human affairs, into a theory which stressed the control of population growth as "the sole means of realizing that improvability by securing full employment at high wages to the whole labouring population through a voluntary restriction of the increase of their numbers". In this form, Malthus's doctrine became "a banner, and point of union" among Mill and his young associates in the 1820s.<sup>2</sup> Mill, in serving under this banner, discontinued his support of artificial checks, but nevertheless, the whole affair left a deep impression on his thinking. His proposals for human improvement depended upon the practice of

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1. For an account of the English birth control movement from Place to Bradlaugh and Annie Besant, see, Peter Fryer, The Birth Controllers, (1965), chapters 4-17.

2. Autobiography, p.74. Cp. a similar argument in Mill's "Claims of Labour" article, below, chapter 8.

moral restraint, and his writings are soaked with the necessity of limiting population growth. This motive was, as we shall see, very prominent in Mill's treatment of peasant proprietorship and related questions.

The important question of population is an instance of the uncertain position which the Utilitarians occupied between the Whigs on the one hand, and the working class movement on the other. While they avowed contempt for the former, they were equally at odds with the latter. The Whigs were a part of the ruling class, "Juggist",<sup>1</sup> and aristocratical in character, while the working class leaders appeared to be too extreme and often evinced a hostility to political economy, especially Malthusianism. These leaders were in private, frequently decried, and the Utilitarians remained separate from working-class reformers on most issues, as the publication in 1820 of Bentham's Radicalism not Dangerous made clear. Their faith was placed with the middle class, and their ends were to be realised by permeating the Whig party. This James Mill had attempted by his articles in the Edinburgh, and by his friendships with such men as the lawyer and politician, Henry Brougham. Bentham's remark in regard to the latter is significant: "Insincere as he is, it is always worth my while to bestow a day on him".<sup>2</sup> And Mill, for all his avowed radicalism, deplored a lack of moderation among the leaders of the lower classes. In a letter to Brougham, at the time of the reform agitation, he attacked Attwood's descriptions of misery as being exaggerated; such proceedings, moreover, should not be mentioned in the newspapers, which ought to "suppress all knowledge"

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1. This and variants were Benthamite usage for conventional Christianity, derived from the Indian Juggernaut, under the wheels of which religious devotees threw themselves to be crushed to death.

2. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.571.

of them. Mill's letter continued:

I should have little fear of the propagation among the common people of any doctrines hostile to property, because I have seldom met with a labouring man (and I have tried the experiment upon many of them) whom I could not make to see that the existence of property was not only good for the labouring man, but of infinitely more importance to the labourers as a class, than to any other.

1

By the later 1820s, Benthamite utilitarianism was in fact becoming assimilated with traditional English liberalism, its members a group of middle class reformers, whose theories implied a distrust of the classes above and below them; in short, they became "a party of bourgeois doctrinaires".<sup>2</sup> Among them, Francis Place was the only true representative of the labouring class, and, as shown above, he came to embrace the doctrines of Bentham and Malthus.

There was more common ground between the Utilitarians and the Whigs than between the Utilitarians and the working class. Malthus, whose theory of population provided a main support - perhaps the main support - of classical economics, is properly described as Whiggish in his outlook.<sup>3</sup> This is true too, of M'Culloch.<sup>4</sup> Yet Ricardo's choice of a disciple was this young

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1. Mill to Brougham, 3 September, 1832, quoted Bain, op.cit., pp.363-365. For a detailed treatment of Mill's attitude towards reform during 1830-32, see J.D. Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution, (New Haven, 1963), passim.

2. Halévy, op.cit., p.264.

3. Ibid., p.242.

4. M'Culloch was generally hostile to Malthus's economics: see his statement to Ricardo that Malthus "deserves to be very roughly handled", letter of 19 March, 1820, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 8, p.167; also his reference to Malthus's "poisonous nostrums", in a letter dated 19 April, 1821, ibid., p.366; other examples of a similar nature, ibid., pp.312, 338. Mallet referred to the fact that M'Culloch was "always bitter against Malthus, the workings of an envious and mean disposition", diary entry of 6 February, 1835, Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings, p.265. But, while M'Culloch had reservations about the results predicted in Malthus's theory of population, his attitude to sub-division and small farms was virtually identical to Malthus's writings on the issue.

Scots economist. As we have seen, M'Culloch had gained the acquaintance of Ricardo and played an important part in publicising his Principles. In return Ricardo had given his approval to M'Culloch's articles for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, after which a regular and increasingly friendly correspondence developed between them. In a letter of 1819, Ricardo remarked that both Malthus and Torrens were writing on political economy, but,

they adhere too firmly to their old associations to make a very decided progress in the science. You are the person who ought to give us a complete system of Political Economy, written in so popular a way as to be easily understood by the generality of readers:- nobody could do it better, as all will testify who have read your two articles in the Review and your essay on the Corn Trade.

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#### VIII

At the time of this encomium, M'Culloch was thirty years of age. He had been born in Wigtonshire, the son of a small proprietor who was the laird of Auchengool, and had studied, without taking a degree, at Edinburgh University. In 1817 he began to contribute to the Scotsman newspaper and became its editor in the following year. M'Culloch's industry was impressive; he formed a connection with the Edinburgh Review to which his first contribution was the article in praise of Ricardo's Principles. After a regular correspondence, M'Culloch first met Ricardo in London in the summer of 1823, a few months before the latter's sudden death. On learning that Ricardo had died, James Mill wrote to M'Culloch: "You and I are his two and only genuine disciples, his memory must be a bond of connection between us".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ricardo to M'Culloch, 7 April, 1819, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 8, p.22.

2. Mill to M'Culloch, 19 September, 1823, quoted Bain, James Mill, p.211.



M'Culloch was not entirely the "blind disciple" that he is sometimes described as being.<sup>1</sup> At times he deviated from Ricardian theories.<sup>2</sup> But certainly his desire, that he might after three hundred years return to earth to observe the effects of Ricardo's political economy, is not uncharacteristic.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after his master's death, the following panegyric was written by M'Culloch on Ricardo's contribution to political economy:

The powers of mind displayed in these investigations; - the dexterity with which the most difficult and abstruse questions are unravelled, - the unerring sagacity with which the operation of general and fixed principles is investigated, - the skill with which they are separated and disentangled from such as are of a secondary and accidental nature, - and the penetration with which their remotest consequences are perceived and estimated, have never been surpassed; and will forever secure the name of Ricardo a high and conspicuous place in the list of those who have done most to unfold the complex mechanism of society and to carry this science to perfection.

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M'Culloch was fortunate to appear at this time and take up the mantle of Ricardo. Interest in political economy was increasing rapidly, while discussion of the subject was becoming a regular feature in the reviews. Many who purchased periodicals such as the Edinburgh and Quarterly for articles on history, literature, topography, and so forth, had the opportunity to develop an interest in adjoining articles which examined

1. E.g., by Frank Whitson Fetter, "The Authorship of Economic Articles in the Edinburgh Review, 1802-47", Journal of Political Economy, vol. 61, (1953), p.238.
2. George J. Stigler, Essays in the History of Economics, (1965), p.305; D.P. O'Brien, "J.R. McCulloch and the Theory of Value", Scottish Journal of Political Economy, vol. 13, (1966), p.332.
3. Lord Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, (1853), quoted Checkland, "The Propagation of Ricardian Economics in England", loc.cit., p.48.
4. J.R. M'Culloch, A Discourse on the Rise, Progress, Peculiar Objects and Importance of Political Economy..., (Edinburgh, 1824), p.66. See also introduction to M'Culloch's edition of The Works of David Ricardo, Esq., M.P., with a Notice of the Life and Writings of the Author, (1846), reprinted in Henry William Spiegel, The Development of Economic Thought: Great Economists in Perspective, (1952), pp.159-172.



controversies based on economic matters.<sup>1</sup> The subject began to find its way into schools' curricula, something much approved of by its authors, who detected no dangers in wider education, but on the contrary considered that the lower classes would, once they had grasped the basic principles of the subject, regulate their actions in accordance with the inexorable laws of political economy. A knowledge of the science became fashionable amongst blue-stockinged ladies.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Marcet's popularisation, Conversations on Political Economy, passed through six editions between 1816 and 1827 and its authoress received the assistance of Ricardo when preparing her second edition.<sup>3</sup>

At this time, too, academic economics was becoming firmly established.<sup>4</sup> True, Malthus was appointed in 1804 to the chair of Modern History and Political Economy at Haileybury, and thus may be described as the first English professional academic economist.<sup>5</sup> But the East India College was established to provide a general education for cadets before they entered the Indian service, and their behaviour, like that of their Eton contemporaries, appears to have been so disorderly, that Malthus, further handicapped by his mild manners and cleft palate, probably failed to instruct very much his pupils in the canons of political

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1. Frank W. Fetter, "Economic Controversy in the British Reviews, 1802-1850", Economica, vol. 32, (1965), p.424, suggests that there was as much a continuous debate on economic theory as on literary and political topics.

2. Blaug, Ricardian Economics, op.cit., p.38.

3. Ricardo to Malthus, 7 March, 1817, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 7, p.140.

4. S.G. Checkland, "The Advent of Academic Economics in England", Manchester School, vol. 19, (1951), pp.43-70.

5. H.J. Habakkuk, "Thomas Robert Malthus, FRS", Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London, vol. 14, (1960), p.99.

economy.<sup>1</sup> In 1825 the Drummond Chair of Political Economy was established at Oxford, its first incumbent being Nassau Senior. Also in 1825, M'Culloch came close to gaining a similar position at Edinburgh University. John Wilson, who under the pen name Christopher North, was the leading light of the High Tory Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, had obtained the Chair of Moral Philosophy in 1820 despite much opposition from M'Culloch's Whiggish Scotsman.<sup>2</sup> The issue was sharpened not only by political antipathy, but also on a personal level, for Blackwood's had given to the editor of the Scotsman, the nickname "the Stot", a term for an emasculated bull, and frequently ridiculed him in its pages. M'Culloch was made the butt of much High Tory criticism of the whole school of political economists and the ideas associated with Radical-Whig writers. In 1825 strong pressure was applied to establish a separate chair of political economy, for Wilson had offered no lectures on the subject during his tenure. M'Culloch's name was canvassed, as he already spoke on economics in a private capacity, apart from the University.<sup>3</sup> In May, individuals willing to establish a fund, applied to the Crown for the foundation of a separate chair. Wilson was able to resist

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1. Malthus had been troubled by a student rebellion in November, 1811, see Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 6, p.77n. One former student recollected that he took little interest in "Pop" Malthus's "very dry" lectures: Judith Anne Merivale (ed.), Autobiography of Dean Merivale with Selections from His Correspondence, (1899), p.43.

2. Elsie Swann, Christopher North (John Wilson), (1934), pp.131-142; A.L. Strout, "John Wilson's Election to the Professorship of Moral Philosophy, 1820", ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, vol. 6, (1939), pp.291-299; Mrs. Gordon, 'Christopher North': A Memoir of John Wilson, (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1862), vol. 1, pp.301-318.

3. Mrs. Grote, Personal Life of George Grote, op.cit., p.28, referred to the popularity of M'Culloch as a lecturer. Bentham noted that the Cabinet Ministers Huskisson and Robinson were among the audience at M'Culloch's London lectures, Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 9, p.293.

this, but at the trouble of teaching the subject, while M'Culloch continued his own lectures extramurally.<sup>1</sup> His contribution had already been recognised following his Ricardo Memorial Lectures of 1824, and four years later he took the chair of Political Economy at the newly-formed University College.

The rebuttal which M'Culloch received from the University at Edinburgh was compensated for by another, more influential, platform: the Edinburgh Review. He became entrenched as virtually its sole reviewer on economic matters, and warded off any competition from other writers as vigorously, if not quite as effectively, as Wilson had disposed of his own challenge. When in 1829 Spring Rice contributed a review on an economic subject, M'Culloch wrote to the editor, Napier, objecting to the intrusion. To Napier's reply that it was impossible to keep the whole province of political economy sacred to him, M'Culloch answered, "I am a rigid uncompromising monopolist", and threatened to cease his contributions.<sup>2</sup> From his first review in 1818, to the last in 1837, M'Culloch claimed seventy-eight articles on a wide range of economic topics.<sup>3</sup> Nor were his mental energies fully occupied by these committments. For a time he gave private lessons on political economy. His contribution to the Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement was expanded into a full-scale textbook, Principles of Political Economy (1825). In 1828 he edited, and updated with extensive notes, Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations. For the Library of Useful Knowledge he produced a History of Commerce (1831), followed by a widely influential Commercial

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1. Swann, op.cit., pp.173-183. Despite this disappointment, M'Culloch felt his career was advancing favourably, claiming "at present the rage is for Political Economy; and if not a lion, I am at all events a lion's whelp", M'Culloch to Napier, 23 April, 1825, in Macvey Napier (ed.), Selections from the Correspondence of the Late Macvey Napier, Esq., (1879), p.41.

2. M'Culloch to Macvey Napier, 4 January, 1830, ibid., p.76.

3. For M'Culloch's own list, see Notes & Queries, 5th Series, vol. 10, (5 October, 1878), pp.262-263.

Dictionary (1832, 2 vols.) His Statistical Account of the British Empire appeared as a two volume work in 1837. These publications were frequently re-issued in revised editions, and until the end of his life in 1864, M'Culloch was responsible for an immense output of economic literature. His writings were widely accepted as embodying the politico-economic orthodoxy of his contemporaries, particularly the increasingly influential middle classes, economic men who inspired the character of Thomas Gradgrind and who believed in progress, free trade, self-help, hard work, moral restraint (for others if not always themselves), and the diffusion of useful facts.

Thus at a time of growing interest in economic questions, M'Culloch came to prominence as a teacher, reviewer, essayist, author, compiler, and witness of the new science of political economy. It is something of a commonplace that M'Culloch had nothing of originality to contribute,<sup>1</sup> and one that is substantially true. Yet he was a diligent fact gatherer, and was extensively read.<sup>2</sup> By industry and application he became a prominent authority on economic matters; in Peacock's Crotchet Castle (1831) he was sufficiently well-known to be recognised as the gently ridiculed Mr. MacQuedy.<sup>3</sup> To-day, because he did not advance political economy in any new direction, M'Culloch is often dealt with in passing, but a summary treatment neglects the conspicuous position held by him in the contemporary debate on economic affairs.

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1. E.g., see the comment by Spiegel, op.cit., p.158.

2. He possessed a library of some ten thousand volumes, which he listed in a privately circulated book: A Catalogue of Books, the Property of a Political Economist; with Critical and Bibliographical Notices, (1862).

3. A. Martin Freeman, Thomas Love Peacock: A Critical Study, (1911), pp.306-307.

IX

To some extent, M'Culloch simplified his heavy writing tasks by employing repetition<sup>k</sup> in both his style and use of material. This tendency was facetiously exposed in a pamphlet of 1826 written by his erstwhile rival, John Wilson, lightly hidden by a pseudonym.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, this squib consisted of parallel passages reprinted from the Edinburgh Review, the Scotsman, and the Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement to demonstrate M'Culloch's self-plagiarisms. These extracts were from articles which covered a wide range of economic topics, but as will be shown, on the subject of land, M'Culloch relied heavily on certain authorities and arguments which he repeatedly put forth.

M'Culloch soon made it clear that, even though he may have considered himself with Mill as a disciple of Ricardo, there was not unanimity between them on the issue of land ownership. In the first edition of his Elements of Political Economy, James Mill had suggested that the legislature might defray the expenses of government from a tax on the rent of land.<sup>2</sup> This was an idea towards which Mill had been moving since his first critical comments on landlords in Commerce Defended (1808), and a view not unfavourably received by Ricardo. M'Culloch, however, was solidly against it. In his article, "Taxation", published in April 1824, he referred to Mill's proposal:

We cannot assent to this proposition. When an absolute right of property has once been established in land, the owners seem to us to

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1. Mordecia Mullion, Private Secretary to Christopher North, Some Illustrations of Mr. M'Culloch's Principles of Political Economy, (1826).

2. James Mill, Elements of Political Economy, (1821), p.199.



be fairly entitled not only to all the advantages derivable from it, but to all those which it may hereafter be made productive.

1

On the publication of a second edition of the Elements, Mill took the opportunity of replying to M'Culloch, whose view that land-owners should reap the full benefits of property for all time, he could not accept. He limited rights only to the present rent:

that rent upon which the expectations of individuals are founded, and which, therefore ought to be exempt from any peculiar tax is the present rent...Beyond this, no man's speculations...are entitled to extend.

2

This was an early instance of a divergence between the two men that was to become increasingly pronounced. Political differences also helped to deepen it. "It is a pity", M'Culloch wrote in a letter, that Mill "is so incorrigible a Radical", and, quite mistakenly, went on to disbelieve that Mill was responsible for the "contemptible and pettifogging" attack by the Westminster on the Edinburgh and Quarterly reviews.<sup>3</sup> Mill was eventually to make his assessment in more scathing terms:

As for M'Culloch, he has a knack of finding people stealing from him; though there is nothing in him to steal; for all that he has, which is sound is either the opinion of some other previous writer, or an error.

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In July 1824, M'Culloch came out, both economically and politically, against another Utilitarian theory by supporting primogeniture. Criticism of the inheritance of the whole estate

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1. J.R. M'Culloch, "Taxation", Encyclopaedia Britannical Supplement, vol. 6, p.617.

2. James Mill, Elements of Political Economy, (2nd ed., 1824), p.245.

3. M'Culloch to Napier, 2 May, 1824, quoted Napier, op.cit., p.39.

4. Mill to Brougham, 5 October, 1835, Bain, James Mill, p.393. On 11 September, 1823, Mill had written to Napier concerning M'Culloch: "few men have ever made a more favourable impression upon me. I like, and I admire him exceedingly," ibid., p.208.



by the eldest son had been embodied in Adam Smith's economics.<sup>1</sup> And, while the Smithian system had been revised in some of its aspects by the new political economy, writers on the subject acknowledged Smith as the inspiration and basis of their own contributions towards the advancement of the science, and his treatment of primogeniture was generally agreed to be the correct one. In his review, however, M'Culloch referred to Smith's prejudice against primogeniture as a custom which beggared all the younger children. Instead, thought M'Culloch, "it is to this very custom that much of the industry, wealth, freedom, and civilisation of modern Europe, are to be ascribed".<sup>2</sup> He went on to declare that this opinion, "and in the whole science of Political Economy there is probably none of greater practical importance",<sup>3</sup> could be tested by the experiment which was taking place in France. There the law had established a nearly equal system of division, which had been in force for over thirty years, and "it is proper that the result should be generally known".<sup>4</sup> There then followed several pages of quotations, including extracts from Young and Morris Birkbeck, with M'Culloch's commentary on these authorities written in his usual vigorous and uncompromising style. He declared that the political consequences of the French law of succession must be fatal in the extreme. A class of large landowners brought benefits which the

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1. Smith described it as a right which "in order to enrich one, beggars all the rest of the children", Wealth of Nations, (ed. M'Culloch, 1846), p.171.

2. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Disposal of Property by Will - Entails - French Law of Succession", Edinburgh Review, vol. 40, (1824), p.360.

3. Ibid., pp.360-361.

4. Ibid., p.361.

French, lacking a territorial aristocracy, would be without. Therefore, M'Culloch gave his support to the landed interest:

Far from joining in the outcry that has so frequently been raised against the magnitude of the property in the hands of the aristocracy we consider, the existence of a numerous and powerful body of landed proprietors, without artificial privileges, but possessed of a great natural influence, as essentially contributing to the improvement and stability of the public institutions of such densely peopled countries as France and England; and as forming the best attainable check to arbitrary power on the one hand, and to popular frenzy and licentiousness on the other.

1

While Bentham had supported large farms against small on the grounds of efficiency, he was opposed to primogeniture, and the Utilitarians were quick to answer M'Culloch's heresy. Their reply, written by John Austin, appeared at length in the October issue of the Westminster Review.<sup>2</sup> Austin was at the centre of the Benthamite circle, living in Queen's Square, Westminster, near the Mills and Bentham. A brilliant conversationalist, whom Macaulay considered to be one of the best talkers he had known, Austin's published work was slight, and, as it also tended to be dull, his contribution to Utilitarian thought has perhaps been underestimated.

The main theme of Austin's reply was the need for freedom of action, allowing economic forces to produce the best results. It is fairly probable that M'Culloch's authorship of the article was known to him. At one stage, the reviewer was referred to as a "Scottish philosopher"<sup>3</sup>; and the fact that M'Culloch's responsibility for economic articles was not closely concealed -

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1. Ibid., p.374.
  2. /John Austin/, "Law of Primogeniture", Westminster Review, vol. 2, (1824), pp.503-553. Mill thought the article "one of great merit", Autobiography, p.67.
  3. "Law of Primogeniture", loc.cit., p.514.

certainly Wilson had no difficulty in identifying M'Culloch's work for use in his lampoon. For the case against primogeniture, the guiding Benthamite principle was soon made clear:

an institution or custom must be praised or blamed as it tends to increase or diminish the sum of happiness. In a word, the test to which it must be submitted is, utility. 1

Austin reprinted M'Culloch's passage which argued that aristocratically-owned property was a benefit to society, and asked whether this opinion would still be held if the powerful body of landed proprietors, in order to raise their rents, excluded foreign grain. Ironically, Austin referred to the argument by "an able writer in the Edinburgh Review" - M'Culloch - against such an action.<sup>2</sup>

The next step of the case against M'Culloch pointed out that his argument applied only to landed property, and suggested that if he were logical, younger children should be deprived of all property:

To maintain...that property in land ought to go to the eldest son, and to admit, in the same breath, that property in moveables should be distributed among all the children, is to talk most inconsistently and absurdly. 3

Satisfied that the empty arguments of M'Culloch had been exposed, the article went on to consider whether:

by virtue of the law of succession or of the custom of the people in disposing of their property by will, the land will be occupied in small portions, to the great detriment of agriculture. 4

It was conceded that the division of land into large farms augmented the productiveness of agricultural labour and capital, but M'Culloch had exaggerated such savings. There came a size when, if capital were to be increased, "the proportional return would

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1. Ibid., p.507.

2. Ibid., p.513. The passage, from p.374 of M'Culloch's article, is given above.

3. Ibid., p.514.

4. Ibid.

be diminished".<sup>1</sup> After stating this, Austin returned to the evidence presented in the case of France. It did not follow, he claimed, that on the death of the farmer the children would divide the land into small portions. A number of possibilities existed: they might work the land in partnership, or one son may buy the others' shares, or the brothers may sell the farm to a stranger. Equal division of landed property on the father's death would not automatically result in small farms. In Ireland, the laws of inheritance were essentially the same as in England, but the land there was generally occupied in small portions by the poorest farmers in Europe.<sup>2</sup> The explanation, in fact, of such a system lay in another direction. The large farms and good farming found in England could be ascribed to the abundance of capital. The bad farming and small farms in Ireland and France arose from the want of capital.<sup>3</sup> It was this economic force that was central to the Utilitarian argument: no obstructions should be placed in the way of such developments; if capital was free to find its own outlet, the best consequence would naturally ensue. One impediment to such a free economy was primogeniture, which did not ensure large farms. On the contrary:

to the vicious custom of primogeniture, we must ascribe the small farms and the rude cultivation, which wealthy and civilised as she is, may still be detected in England.

4

Some examination of M'Culloch's authorities was made, but it is clear that Austin accepted the construction which M'Culloch put upon them. His comments consisted of the relevance of such

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1. Ibid., p.517.
  2. Ibid., p.529.
  3. Ibid., p.530.
  4. Ibid., p.532.

remarks, or of the knowledge of the traveller, rather than a full reading of these references. The article was based upon the notions of freedom of action and the principle of utility, which were reasserted in the concluding paragraph:

We think that every person of mature age and sound mind should be left to dispose of his property at his own discretion, subject only to the simple and not severe condition of imparting to the same absolute dominion to the object or objects of his bounty.

1

Sir Leslie Stephen's observation that in The Province of Jurisprudence Determined, Austin's style was dry and logical,<sup>2</sup> applies equally to this article. And while it may be regarded as the definitive Benthamite statement upon the inheritance of landed property, set against the more trenchant prose of M'Culloch, it appears colourless. Again, while the Westminster limited itself to this single rebuttal, M'Culloch continued to launch forth and repeat his old set view.<sup>3</sup>

## X

M'Culloch was not in very close contact with the philosophic radicals; and to a large extent in the 1820s, he abandoned the mildly radical notions which he had once possessed. His opinions had never gone much beyond the Whig position, and, as his career advanced, his ideas came to accord to a greater degree with those which the ruling classes held to be respectable. If

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1. Ibid., p.553.

2. Stephen, The English Utilitarians, op.cit., vol. 3, p.553.

3. M'Culloch also had a platform at the Political Economy Club, where, on 2 May 1825, he proposed for debate the question whether primogeniture was a good custom or not: Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings, pp.24-25.

a single indicator of political opinion were to be selected from the period between the end of the war and the Reform Act, the Peterloo Massacre would serve as well as any. While the Tories congratulated Manchester's magistrates upon their firm action, and the working class was outraged by the deaths and injuries, the Whigs were more concerned with the legality of the action. Thomas Hodgskin wrote to Place that it made him "heartily sick" that "the horrid violation of the laws at Manchester seems only now to be a cry and a watchword to support them".<sup>1</sup> James Mill saw the Whigs' dilemma:

Whiggery is whiggizing most characteristically on the present occasion. It would like to make a howl about the Manchester massacres for the sake of turning out the ministers; but it is terrified out of its miserable wits to do so, for fear of aiding parliamentary reform, to which it seems to show pretty distinctly that it would prefer an iron despotism.

2

Among other economists who were contemporaries of M'Culloch, the remarks of Trower<sup>3</sup> and Ricardo<sup>4</sup> showed greater concern on the aspect of legality. Malthus thought the proceeding "cruel and unjust" but was principally worried at the power which the radicals might gain: "I fear it is likely to be attended with the most unfortunate consequences, by giving additional importance and influence to such persons as Hunt".<sup>5</sup>

M'Culloch's earlier verdict on the Manchester incident underwent a change. The two statements that follow, illustrate not only his shift towards the political right, but may serve too as an example of his cannibalistic style. M'Culloch

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1. Hodgskin to Place, 2 September 1819, quoted Halévy, Thomas Hodgskin, op.cit., p.56.

2. Mill to Ricardo, 7 September, 1819, Works (ed. Sraffa), vol. 8, p.58.

3. Trower to Ricardo, 19 September, 1819, ibid., p.70.

4. Ricardo to Trower, 25 September, 1819, ibid., p.80.

5. Malthus to Ricardo, 10 September, 1819, ibid., p.66.



expressed his earlier view thus:

The restriction on importation was the sole cause of the high price of 1817 and 1818; and it was this high price that drove the manufacturing classes to despair, and produced those commotions which were made the pretext for the employment of spies, for the Manchester carnage, and for the violent inroad on the constitution effected by the Six Acts! 1

A couple of years later, he was again discussing the Corn Laws, and arguing that abolition would harm neither landlord nor tenant. One reason in support of his case, believed M'Culloch, was provided by recent events:

The experience of 1817, 1818 and 1819, should not be thrown away. The restriction on importation was the sole cause of the oppressively high prices of those years; and it was these high prices that drove the manufacturing classes to despair - that rendered them ready dupes of violent and designing persons - and produced those outrages that were productive of so much mischief. 2

The Edinburgh Review provided a main vehicle for M'Culloch's reiterated arguments against small farms. Such a system was held to encourage the growth of population, leading to a large body of poor, the absence of capital accumulation, and consequently no economic progress. Evidence from Ireland and France was provided to support this contention and to illustrate the effects of sub-division in those countries. M'Culloch was always more sure in expressing this diagnosis than in proposing a remedy. At times, he echoed Malthus by suggesting that the erection of cottages might be prohibited<sup>3</sup> or approvingly quoted Arthur Young that, "AN OPEN WAR AGAINST COTTAGES" led to them being pulled down, "that they may never become the nests, as they are called,

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1. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Standard of National Prosperity - Rise and Fall of Profit", Edinburgh Review, vol. 40, (1824), p.22.
  2. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Abolition of the Corn Laws", ibid., vol. 44, (1826), pp.358-359.
  3. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Ireland", ibid., vol. 37, (1822), p.108.

of beggars' brats!"<sup>1</sup> But a belief in a free economy disposed of some solutions. As to the suggestion that the law should prohibit the further splitting of farms, M'Culloch had to allow that, "so violent an encroachment on the right of property could not be submitted to".<sup>2</sup> He was chiefly concerned to warn of the consequences which he thought would follow a wider distribution of landed property in England, based upon evidence from other countries. Misgovernment in Ireland was not, as many had suggested, the problem: it was the underletting and sub-division of farms that had "been the chief bane and curse of Ireland".<sup>3</sup>

These arguments were incorporated in the second edition of M'Culloch's textbook in 1830. The Principles of Political Economy: with a Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Science, first appeared in 1825, based upon M'Culloch's article for the Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement. This edition, which was confined to a theoretical treatment, was well-received, and, "until superseded by the great work of Mill, constituted a sort of manual of politico-economic orthodoxy".<sup>4</sup> As M'Culloch explained, his first edition had consisted of a statement of principles, but he believed that the science would be better understood if more attention was paid to practical considerations, and wrote the 1830 edition according to this view.<sup>5</sup> Another characteristic opinion of M'Culloch's was expressed in this

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1. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Poor Laws", ibid., vol. 47, (1828), pp.313-314; quoted from Young's Farmer's Letters, (3rd ed., 1770), vol. 4, pp.300-302.

2. /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Ireland", loc.cit., p.106.

3. "Absenteeism", ibid., vol. 43, (1826), p.72; see also "Sadler on Ireland", ibid., vol. 49, (1829), p.313.

4. "John Ramsay McCulloch", by J.M. Rigg, D.N.B.

5. J.R. M'Culloch, The Principles of Political Economy: with some Inquiries respecting Their Application, and a Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Science, (Edinburgh, 1843, 3rd ed.), p.v.

preface. It was the belief that the economist ought to have an opinion to express. He disagreed with Senior's view that the business of an economist was to state general principles, not recommend or dissuade.<sup>1</sup>

M'Culloch certainly expressed his opinions with typical strength in the enlarged Principles. He had announced that the operation of the English poor law had been modified - again the quotation was from Arthur Young's Farmer's Letters - by gentlemen preventing cottages from becoming the "nests of beggars' brats"; by resisting sub-division, the growth of population had been checked:

of all the circumstances which contributed to render the growth of population in England so much slower than might have been expected under the system of compulsory provision, the most powerful, undoubtedly, has been, that that very system made it the obvious interest of the landlords and occupiers of land to oppose themselves to the too rapid increase of the labouring population. They saw that if, either by the erection of cottages, the splitting of farms, or otherwise, the population upon their estates or occupancies were augmented, they would, through the operation of the poor laws, be burdened with the support of all who, from old age, sickness, want of employment, or any other cause, might become, at any future period, unable to provide for themselves... it is to the operation of the poor laws, more, perhaps, than to anything else, that we find so few small occupancies in England; and that this country has been saved from that excessive sub-division of the land, that has been and is the bane and curse of Ireland.

2

The métayer principle, too, was referred to by M'Culloch as the most objectionable system of any for letting land.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.ix. On this point J.S. Mill was in full agreement with M'Culloch.

2. J.R. M'Culloch, The Principles of Political Economy: with a Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Science, (1830, 2nd ed.), pp.412-413.

3. For a typical account of the "beggary" effects of the system, /J.R. M'Culloch/, "Letting of Land. Metayer System", Foreign Quarterly Review, vol. 4, (1829), pp.484-507.

Here again he reflected conventional English prejudices by pronouncing that, under it, an improving agriculture was impossible.<sup>1</sup> For this statement, Arthur Young was cited as the authority, as he was in M'Culloch's discussion of the optimum size of farms. Practical farmers thought this to be between 400 and 600 acres, but,

This conclusion has...been strongly denied; and it has been contended that the public interests are best consulted by letting land in small farms, or in farms of from 15 to 30 or 40 acres.

2

But those acquainted with agriculture, continued M'Culloch, agreed in their hostility to the small farming system. After paying his rent, the small farmer could not produce more than the barest subsistence, and, on his death, when the children divided the holding, it led to a redundant and wretched population, as exemplified by Ireland's experience.<sup>3</sup>

These remarks were reproduced with only verbal changes in the third edition of 1843, and again, despite the appearance of Mill's Principles, in the fourth edition of 1849. It may be assumed that similar points were made by M'Culloch in his popular lectures. In a syllabus for such a course to be given in 1825, the second lecture was on the "Right of Property", for which a list of headings was given; these included:

Entails - advantages and disadvantages of French  
Law of Succession  
Objections of Rousseau and others to the Right  
of Property - refuted.

4

In 1828 Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations came out in an edition to which M'Culloch had contributed a sketch of Smith's

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1. Ibid., p.463.

2. Ibid., p.469.

3. Ibid., p.471.

4. J.R. M'Culloch, Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on Political Economy: to Commence in the City of London, on the 23rd of March 1825, (1825), p.2.

life, plus nearly two hundred pages of "Supplemental Notes and Dissertations", purporting to bring parts of the original work up to date. Four further editions of this book appeared in M'Culloch's lifetime, in 1839, 1846, 1859 and 1863. One of his Notes was concerned with the "Disposal of Property by Will", which consisted of the usual arguments against Smith's view. M'Culloch stressed that it was the custom of primogeniture that he favoured, for "there can be little doubt of the injurious consequences that must always flow from every attempt to regulate the succession of property by means of compulsory regulations".<sup>1</sup> Predictably, France and Ireland provided examples of the evil effects of excessive sub-division. In the former instance, Birkbeck and Young were among the authorities made to support statements such as the claim that the small proprietors of France were not nearly so well off as the common labourer in England,<sup>2</sup> or that the uncivilized state of Ireland was in part explained by equal division of land upon inheritance.<sup>3</sup>

M'Culloch served up the same version again, when, under the superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, he produced a two volume Statistical Account of the British Empire in 1837. Passages used in the "Cottage System", taken from Young and Wakefield, were re-employed to present the case for large farms and that against small, and to show that in Ireland early marriages and idleness were caused by equal partition. For further discussion, the reader was referred to

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1. Smith, Wealth of Nations, (ed. M'Culloch, Edinburgh, 1846 ed.), p.555.

2. Ibid., p.562.

3. Ibid., p.564.

the article on the Cottage System. In the second edition of 1847, this section was reprinted.<sup>1</sup>

The profusion of scattered writings on these issues by M'Culloch, extending over a quarter of a century in time, received a definitive statement in 1848, when his Treatise on the Succession to Property appeared. This work began by noting that the leading principles developed in it, had been stated in the Edinburgh Review of July, 1824, and the Notes to the Wealth of Nations.<sup>2</sup> M'Culloch acknowledged Adam Smith's criticisms of primogeniture, but demurred from agreement with him: much of Europe's wealth may be ascribed to the system, for, if there was equal division of landed property, younger sons would anticipate an inheritance and be discouraged from industry. The example of this was provided by Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Further, large private fortunes were an encouragement to art, literature, and so forth, as it was primogeniture which enabled wealth to accumulate in the hands of a few families who could afford patronage of this nature.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, entails were advantageous. They continued the principle of maintaining large estates intact, and secured against an unfortunate inheritance. Thus, wrote M'Culloch:

looking at the present English system of entail in a general point of view, or as having reference to all ranks and orders of the community, it appears to be eminently well fitted to promote the public interest.

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1. See 1837 ed., p.439, also pp.450-451. The edition of 1847 has a slightly different pagination.

2. A Treatise on the Succession to Property vacant by Death: including Inquiries into the Influence of Primogeniture, Entails, Compulsory Partition, Foundations, &c. over the Public Interest, (1848), p.v.

3. Ibid., pp.27-28.

4. Ibid., p.34.

5. Ibid., p.51.



He went on to doubt that agricultural improvement might be injured by entails, for, if the inheritance fell on a person with no taste for agricultural life, in all likelihood a competent steward would be able to do the job; perhaps, with no interference from the owner, M'Culloch complacently added, he would make a better job of it.<sup>1</sup>

The question of compulsory partition was considered, which led to the view of France as:

People and poverty, small patches of land and beggarly cultivators, comprise most part of what can be reckoned permanent in the present situation of France.

2

Referring to the claims that peasant proprietorship encouraged diligence and enterprise, M'Culloch dismissed them as dreams, and gave some forty pages of evidence gleaned from such works as those by Young and Birkbeck. Their observations were held to be no less true, as recent events bore witness:

The distresses of the present year (1846-7) has been wholly confined to the countries in which sub-division has been carried to an excess; that is, to Ireland, France, parts of Belgium and of Rhenish Prussia.

3

M'Culloch's treatise concluded with the chapter "Community of Goods - Agrarian Laws". From cupidity or destitution, it said, some men had proposed the abolition of private property. This notion was strongly denounced, and M'Culloch countered it with an affirmation of the benefits of:

A powerful and widely ramified aristocracy, like that in England, not resting for support on any oppressive laws, and enjoying no privileges but which are for the public advantage, is necessary to give stability and security to

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1. Ibid., p.65.
  2. Ibid., p.87.
  3. Ibid., p.131.

the government, and freedom to the people. And our laws in regard to succession being well fitted to maintain such an aristocracy, and, at the same time, to inspire every other class with the full spirit of industry and enterprise, to change them would not be foolish merely but criminal.

1

Significantly, a favourable review appeared in the Quarterly, which welcomed M'Culloch's treatise, noting "he has applied himself...with very superior skill to the topics of which it would be difficult to overrate the importance at the present time".<sup>2</sup> And the old enemy, Blackwood's, the voice of unregenerate Toryism, congratulated him on his work, in a review which ended: "we most heartily thank our author for his noble and energetic contribution to our National Defences at the present time; and as there is a wide field open in connexion with the subject he has so powerfully handled, we cannot take leave of him without expressing a hope that we may before long listen to him again 'on the same side'!"<sup>3</sup>

Particular attention has been paid to M'Culloch's writings on landed property because his arguments were the most categorically stated and were much reiterated. But while his views on the value of an aristocracy took him beyond the opinions of many other political economists, his voice was typical on the question of large farms; Torrens, Senior, Chalmers, Richard Jones all opposed the idea of small farms, and Malthus who in 1830 brought out in a cheaper form a summary of his population principle was still intent on denying any benefit would arise

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1. Ibid., p.172.

2. /W.A. Loch/, "Entails of Land", Quarterly Review, vol. 83, (1848), p.179.

3. /C.J. Prowett/, "The Laws of Land", Blackwood's, vol. 64, (1848), p.16.

from Young's plan for giving land to cottagers.<sup>1</sup>

In the same year as marked by the appearance of M'Culloch's treatise, J. S. Mill put forward a very different set of arguments upon the same issues. Before going on, however, to discuss the development of Mill's thought, the wider context of opinion on the land question against which his ideas emerged will be surveyed. Firstly, conservative attitudes are outlined, followed by a discussion of some radical notions concerning land.

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1. T.R. Malthus, A Summary View of the Principle of Population, (1830), reprinted in Anthony Flew (ed.), Malthus: an Essay on the Principle of Population, (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp.270-271.

CHAPTER V:

THE CONSERVATIVE VIEW OF LANDED PROPERTY

Cursed be he that removeth his  
neighbour's landmark.

Deuteronomy, ch. 27, v.17

As would be expected, the challenge to established thought provided by reformers, whether moderate or ultra-radical, did not go unanswered. The response that occurred sought to justify the status quo and to vindicate existing property arrangements. Just as the questioning of the existing order was on many levels, so, too, were the arguments by which it was defended. Those who took this side have been designated "conservative". In some respects the term is misleading; its political connotations narrow it, for although Tory supporters, almost by definition, opposed sudden change, there were deeply conservative elements not only amongst Whigs, but also outside conventional party affiliations. On the other hand, many belonging to the upper class were unhappy with the state of society as it existed in this period. They did not give it unqualified support, but wished to see far-reaching changes. Often, these men looked back to a previous state of society for their inspiration; but to adopt the term "reactionary" to describe their social thought is to employ another highly-coloured expression.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless,

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1. Compare J.S. Mill's definition of this type of conservatism: "I should not care though a revolution were to exterminate every person in Great Britain & Ireland who has £500 a year. Many very amiable persons would perish, but what is the world the better for such amiable persons. But among the missionaries whom I would reserve, a large proportion would consist of speculative Tories: for it is an ideal Toryism, an ideal King, Lords, & Commons, that they venerate; it is old England as opposed to the new, but it is old England as she might be, not as she is". He named Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, and referred to the "many others whom I could mention", Mill to John Sterling, 20-22 October, 1831, Letters, p.84.

these terms do have a certain convenience value, and this chapter proposes to examine the attitudes of conservatives, both the stream of thought that wished to further entrench its position, and that which, while committed to the maintenance of a landed aristocracy, did interest itself in the condition of the labouring class. In each of these two broad areas, many motives are to be found, together with a great variety of proposals and opinions. But for the purpose of this discussion, the attitude of the landed class to the provision of allotments will be given central consideration.

The first point to be emphasised, is that, even during the period of rapid and far-reaching social and economic change between 1790 and 1850, conservative attitudes towards landed property remained essentially the same as those of many previous generations. Landed property was the basis of political power, social influence, and economic strength; its nature was sacrosanct, and those in possession believed they had a duty not only to resist encroachments upon their estates, but to extend them whenever possible. With great directness and force, this view had been expressed by Lord Braxfield, the Lord Justice-Clerk at the trial of Thomas Muir, on 30 August, 1793:

Mr. Muir might have known that no attention could be paid to such a rabble (the petitioners for reform). What right had they to representation? He could have told them that the parliament would never listen to their petition. How could they think of it? A Government in every country should be just like a corporation; and in this country it was made up of the landed interest, which alone has a right to be represented; as for the rabble, who have nothing but personal property, what hold has the nation of them? What security for the payment of their taxes? They may pack up all their property on their

backs, and leave the country in the twinkling of an eye, but landed property cannot be removed.

1

Over half a century later, the veteran Tory hack, J. W. Croker, sought to staunch another challenge to the power of the landed interest, which on this occasion came from the Anti-Corn Law League, when he expressed sentiments highly similar to Braxfield's:

...the great question which agitates society in this country - disguise itself how it may - is the struggle - not between Democracy and Monarchy, nor between Democracy and Aristocracy, but between Democracy and PROPERTY. ...the broad fact that Property is the foundation of all government, and Landed Property is the foundation of all property; and therefore it is that with a natural instinct, as the wolf attacks the fold, all revolutionists attack landed property.

2

There is no great body of theoretical discussion putting forward the view of the landed class, in contrast to the corpus of writings produced by those who opposed it. The average aristocrat was not given to polemics, preferring to leave them to the Crokers. But as J. S. Mill simply observed, "Land is power",<sup>3</sup> and those who were fortunate enough to be in possession accepted such a premise, while, of course, drawing from it a different set of conclusions. Bolingbroke had stated it concisely in 1749: "the landed men are the true owners of our political vessel",<sup>4</sup> and Burke was to elaborate on the advantages of oligarchical rule by a landed class.

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1. T.B. Howell, A Complete Collection of State Trials..., (1817), vol. 23, col. 231. Such a forthright statement was unusual, and may have embarrassed the Government; as Howell noted, the speech was adversely commented on by Charles Fox in Parliament.

2. /J.W. Croker/, "Democracy", Quarterly Review, vol. 85, (1849), pp.292-293.

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Notes on the Newspapers", Monthly Repository, vol. 8, (1834), p.244.

4. Quoted by Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (2 vols., 1927 ed.), vol. 2, p.178.



It was in the period of Burke's most significant writings, those published under the influence of the French Revolution and events subsequent ~~to~~ it, that political controversy became more intense and radical questioning of the social organization developed. These opinions owed a great deal to the events in Europe. With the example of France before them, Englishmen of advanced opinions responded by examining the nature of their own government. We have discussed in an earlier chapter the ideas on property relationships put forward by men like Paine and Godwin, and the growth of a counter-revolutionary orthodoxy from Burke, Young, Malthus, and others. We have also seen how the economic crises of the 1790s, which the Revolutionary Wars had greatly exacerbated, had led Arthur Young to campaign for the provision of land for agricultural labourers, and how, when taken up by the Earl of Winchilsea and the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor, allotments had been proposed, with the advantages of these to the landlord and tenant farmer emphasised.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Before considering in some detail the allotments movement, something should be said about an important section of conservative opinion, the established church. The gibe that "the Church of England represents the Tory party at prayer" is, in the context of the early nineteenth century, not without a firm foundation in reality. The Anglican clergy were closely identified with the landed interest and propertied classes, and, in aggregate, the Church was a major landowner. This, together

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1. Above, chs. 1-2.

with the abuses of tithes; of pluralism and nepotism; the deliberate remoteness of many clerics from their parishioners; the wealth and privileges enjoyed by the Church; together with the jobbery of the livings system, drew the fire of radicals, and rankled with many Nonconformists.<sup>1</sup> Mill declared of the landed class:

they it is who, by converting the cure of souls into a family property, have made the Christian ministry the provision for the fool or profligate of a family, - for those who, being too stupid or too idle, or too vicious to work, are fit only for an 'easy life'.

2

Nevertheless, however incompetent and unfitted a clergyman might be he occupied a significant social position, whether a bishop and member of the Lords, or as a leading figure in his village. While it would be all too easy to over-estimate their influence, as many men profess what they fail to practice, ecclesiastical attitudes reflect, even if they did not mould,

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1. As Edward Thompson has shown, sections of Nonconformity were highly conservative. However, others were on the progressive side. The Congregationalist John Pye Smith (1774-1851) is not untypical. As a young man, he edited the Sheffield Iris while James Montgomery was imprisoned for libel when the Government was trying to suppress the Sheffield political clubs. He wrote in the Iris on 26 February, 1796 that one of the causes of the existing scarcity of provisions was, "the destruction of the old English system of small farms, and their ingurgitation by the rich and overgrown farmers." In old age, he supported the Anti-Corn Law League. John Medway, Memoir of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S., F.G.S., (1853), pp.33, 446-452. Mill's friend W. J. Fox, editor of the Monthly Repository, was another radical who was active in the Corn Law agitation. There were many others; John Bright had come to prominence over the Church rates issue in Rochdale, and the elements of a moral crusade in Anti-Corn Law League propaganda exactly suited the Nonconformist temperament. This aspect of the campaign may partly explain why Mill remained aloof from it; cf. below, pp.301-303.

2. /J.S. Mill/, "A Reorganization of the Reform Party", London and Westminster Review, vol. 32, (1839), p.480. See, too, William Howitt, A Popular History of Priestcraft in all Ages and Nations, (1833), pp.178-269. For a short discussion of radical criticisms, Desmond Bowen, The Idea of the Victorian Church, (Montreal, 1968), pp.3-15.

the opinions of the class to which the clergy belonged. Not only did the bishops often pride themselves on their learning and accordingly publish their views, but even clergymen whose position in the hierarchy of the Church was a quite humble one, frequently put forth their notions on a variety of social subjects in writing, just as Malthus had done while a curate at Albury in 1798. The study of the ideas and beliefs of the Anglican clergy in this period has - considering the mass of material available - been but slightly undertaken,<sup>1</sup> and this present discussion can only hope to touch upon, in an incomplete fashion, a limited part of clerical opinion; that is, their attitudes towards the agricultural labourer and the nature of property. It would clearly be misleading to suggest that the thousands of clergymen in orders during this period thought with but one mind. They were, for example, much divided on Malthus's principle of population. However, they were uniformly opposed to the atheistic ideas of the French Revolution. This event coloured men's thinking on all sorts of questions for many decades: some were inspired by it, others resisted the forces which it represented. The clergy nearly always belonged to this latter group. Godlessness was equated with radical ideas, whether French in origin, or those of English schools, and men like Paine, Carlile, and Owen. In turn, radicals tended to attack the established clergy; Cobbett even re-wrote the history of the Reformation to show the usurptions and injustices of it. It is, therefore, not surprising that, given this opposition to radical ideas,

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1. A useful recent contribution to this topic is R.A. Soloway, Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1852, (1969). Much can also be learned from Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, part 1, (1966).

together with their close relationship to the landed class, the average priest expressed views that were conservative in their nature. Thus, following this, a body of attitudes may be delineated which are fairly typical of the clergymen who preached in our period. Though more commonly Tory, many were known as Whigs, such as Sydney Smith, Dr. Samuel Parr, ("The Whig Johnson" who made a reply to Godwin), and Ricard Watson, (1737-1816) the Bishop of Llandaff. Members of both parties adopted similar attitudes to the labouring classes, however, preaching that they should be content with the station "to which it had pleased God to call them".<sup>1</sup>

Watson, for example, made explicit a number of commonly held opinions in a sermon which he published in 1793, with a view to "calming the perturbation which has been lately excited, and which still subsists in the minds of the lower classes of community."<sup>2</sup> One of the thirty ordinary members of the Board of

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1. Exhortations to obedience are a continuing theme of clerical pronouncements to the lower orders. As Dr. Vaughan observed towards the end of our period: "The virtues of our English peasantry are nearly all of the passive kind. The great requirements from them are, obedience to their employers, as regards their secular duties; and obedience to the instruction of the parish minister, as regards their religious duties", Robert Vaughan, D.D., The Age of Great Cities: or, Modern Society viewed in its Relation to Intelligence, Morals, and Religion, (1843), p.248. In 1848 Mrs. C.F. Alexander's Hymns for Little Children appeared, containing the well-known verse:

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.

Quoted by O. Chadwick, op.cit., p.347.

2. R. Watson, A Sermon Preached before the Stewards of the Westminster Dispensary..., (3rd ed., 1793), Appendix.

Agriculture, Watson took an active interest in farming as well as being knowledgeable in chemistry. He was on terms with Arthur Young, and wrote the preliminary observations to the Board's report on Westmorland, where he owned property. Watson pressed for the utilisation of waste land, suggesting "another Domesday Book, comprehending a description of every estate in every parish."<sup>1</sup> To Sir John Sinclair he proposed that every man in the Kingdom be given legal liberty to enclose up to five acres of land for a garden and the keeping of a cow.<sup>2</sup> When in 1807 a clergyman wrote to him that Malthus's theory

has already done incalculable mischief within my own knowledge: it has brought benevolence into contempt: in a country where this book is in high estimation, the justices look upon it as an act of virtue to depress the poor: to assist the poor in a time of scarcity is thought to be the extreme of folly...If a poor man be ever so industrious, it matters not if he be found guilty of having a large family, no other accusation is required. He ought to suffer for his own imprudence, they say, lest a famine should be the consequence

Watson agreed that mischief to religion and morals could arise from Malthus's book, which contradicted God's expressed command, "Increase and multiply".<sup>3</sup>

Yet, when Watson noticed "a strong spirit of insubordination and discontent" amongst the common people who were "in every village, talking about liberty and equality without understanding the terms" he saw it was his duty "to endeavour to abate this

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1. Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff; written by himself at different intervals, and revised in 1814, (1817), p.340.

2. Letter of 26 January, 1810, quoted ibid., pp.516-517.

3. Ibid., pp.474-477.

revolutionary ferment." This he sought to do by issuing the sermon for which King George III complimented him.<sup>1</sup> In it, he tried to show not only that there was as much liberty and equality "as can be consistent with the end for which civil society was introduced among mankind", but also to demonstrate that the poor were better off than the rich:

the provision which is made for the poor in this kingdom is so liberal, as, in the opinion of some, to discourage industry. The rental of lands in England and Wales does not, I conjecture, amount to more than eighteen millions a year; and the poor rates amount to two millions. The poor then, at present, possess a ninth part of the rental of the country; and reckoning ten pounds for the annual maintenance of each pauper, it may be inferred that those who are maintained by the community do not constitute a fortieth part of the people. An equal division of land would be to the poor a great misfortune; they would possess far less than by the laws of the land they are at present entitled to.

2

Watson sermonized that a system of property was bound to arise, and that from it sprung the division of mankind into two classes: the rich and the poor. This was appointed by God, "it is his will that they discharge with cheerfulness and fidelity the duties of their respective stations."<sup>3</sup> The poor would not be any better off if the lands were equally divided, Watson repeated, for the fortunes of the rich when spent on superfluities bring a blessing to the poor, as "thousands are more comfortably maintained by administering to the real or artificial wants of the rich, than they could be upon the taking place of an equal

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1. Ibid., p.270. A later counter-revolutionary tract by Watson, An Apology for the Bible in a Series of Letters addressed to Tom Paine..., (1796), aroused the approval of Hannah More: S.C. Carpenter, Church and People, 1789-1889, (1933), p.8. Paine's response was Agrarian Justice; see above, pp.12-13.

2. Watson, A Sermon..., op.cit., pp.13-14.

3. Ibid., p.12.



partition of property."<sup>1</sup>

In many respects, Watson's attitudes belonged to the eighteenth century. The Malthusian spectre failed to alarm him; "the strength of a nation", he believed, "depends on its population, and its population on the facility of providing for a progeny."<sup>2</sup> Other clerics held similar views after the appearance of Malthus's Essay. Archdeacon Plymley, for example, recommended the allowance of land to labourers to encourage matrimonial instead of illicit engagements.<sup>3</sup> Robert Acklom Ingram, described by Sir Leslie Stephen as a member of a group of "respectable and wearisome gentlemen",<sup>4</sup> called Malthus an old maid's advocate.<sup>5</sup> Ingram, who was the Rector of Seagrave in Leicestershire, rejected the view that the pleasures of the rich were a benefit to the poor. Land which supported show-horses was misused, and food wasted in distilleries or through being used to produce hair powder. Servants, grooms, dancing-masters, and so forth, could all be productively employed; small

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1. Ibid., p.9. It was Godwin's reply to sophisms similar to this which provoked Malthus's first essay on population; above, pp.22-23.

2. Watson, Anecdotes..., op.cit., p.517.

3. Archdeacon Joseph Plymley, General View of the Agriculture of Shropshire: with Observations, (1803), p.116. Plymley also emphasised that allotments would yield a proportionately higher rent than that paid by the farmer, and that there would be a "considerable advantage...in the reduction of the poor's-rate", ibid., p.117.

4. Stephen, The English Utilitarians, (1900), vol. 2, p.239.

5. Ingram, op.cit., p.69.

farms should be let to footmen who could then raise a family in the habits of industry.<sup>1</sup> However, Ingram by no means advocated changes within the social structure; he was concerned with the curtailment of luxurious habits among the rich. Like many other writers, he pointed out that land rented to labourers yielded higher rents than farmers could pay.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, not only would labourers who possessed allotments be kept off relief and would, by working in their spare time, be less idle and profligate, but by producing their own food, the wages of labourers would be kept down.<sup>3</sup> The ownership of allotments and cows increased the attachment of a "robust and hardy" peasantry to their native soil, and in times of war would be more valuable recruits for a severe campaign than "the puny degenerated race of manufacturers."<sup>4</sup>

### III

Without an extensive and detailed analysis, it is not possible to be definite about the degree of change which took place in clerical thought as the nineteenth century progressed, but the over-riding impression is that Malthusian ideas, and their implications, became increasingly accepted as part of the conventional wisdom.<sup>5</sup> With the increasing cost of the poor law, together with a rapid rise in population, opinion hardened. Although there was some support for allotments - rented on

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1. Ibid., pp.42-45.

2. Ibid., p.95.

3. Ibid., pp.110-111.

4. Ibid., pp.122-123.

5. Soloway, op.cit., ch. 3, takes a similar view.

carefully defined conditions - this represented an older school of thought. An important stage was the appearance of J. B. Sumner's treatise in 1816 which sought to prove that Malthus's theory was in accordance with the teaching of the Scriptures. Sumner, who later sat as a Poor Law Commissioner and in 1848 became Archbishop of Canterbury, argued against those who advocated equality. Only with a system of private property was the progress of civilization possible, which would entail greater inequality, "the division of property", wrote Sumner, "is the source from which all the arts of civilization proceed."<sup>1</sup> If the land was to be divided equally among fifty families, Sumner asserted, in less than a century it would be held very unequally by twenty, upon whom everyone else would be dependent for their support.<sup>2</sup>

Others in holy orders embraced the newer economic philosophy, and many were active in putting forward their views, not only in sermons and theological studies, but also, in the case for example, of Thomas Chalmers, in organs like the Edinburgh Review. Commenting in 1818 on the problem of distress, Chalmers is worth quoting at length to show an instance of the relationship between laissez faire ideas and a rejection of schemes for improvement:

We certainly do not mean to advocate either the potatoe system, or the cow system, or the cottage system, or the village system of Mr. Owen, - or any one system of miraculous achievement, by which, through some ingeniously constructed method of positive

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1. John Bird Sumner, A Treatise on the Records of Creation, and on the moral attitudes of the Creator; with particular reference to the Jewish History; and to the consistency of the principle of population with the wisdom and goodness of the Deity, (2 vols., 5th ed., 1833), vol. 2, p.51.

2. Ibid., p.122. The same argument had been developed by the Rev. Joseph Townsend, a writer who influenced Malthus, in his Dissertation on the Poor Laws, (1786); see Kenneth Smith, The Malthusian Controversy, (1951), p.31.

administration, it is proposed to combat that menacing hydra who now swells so gigantically, and stalks so largely over the face of the land. We would, in short, raise no positive apparatus whatever for the direct object of meeting and alleviating the ills of Poverty. This we leave to the theorists; and we satisfy ourselves with simply asserting, that unfettered Nature, working in individuals, can do the thing better than regulation can; and, on the obvious principles of human nature, verified by the actual result, in a way most striking and triumphant, throughout all the parishes of the kingdom, do we aver, that it would have been the wiser part in our Legislature to let the matter alone.

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Bishop Copleston (1776-1849), too, was strongly against allotments. If land was provided, it would be "a sort of outdoor workhouse" and discourage the poor from saving; allotments would represent a deduction from the national wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Whately (1787-1863), who in 1829 succeeded Nassau Senior as Oxford's Professor of Political Economy, before becoming Archbishop of Dublin in 1831, combined priestcraft with political economy. He sedulously maintained there was a need for both rich and poor. In his Easy Lessons on Money Matters for the Use of Young People he remarked:

Can it be supposed that the poor would be better off if all the property of the rich were taken away and divided among them... Every man would live as the saying is, 'from hand to mouth', just tilling his own little patch of ground.

3

Like Chalmers, he had little time for allotment schemes and

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1. /Thomas Chalmers/, "Causes and Cure of Pauperism", Edinburgh Review, vol. 29, (1818), p.272. J. Wilson Harper, The Social Ideal and Dr. Chalmers' Contribution to Christian Economics, (Edinburgh, 1910), p.356, notes that Chalmers opposed the abolition of primogeniture, threw aside those in favour of equal distribution of land, and supported the aristocracy and the laws which upheld its power.

2. /Edward Copleston/, A Second Letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel...on the Causes of the Increase in Pauperism, and on the Poor Laws. By one of his constituents. (1819), p.99.

3. Quoted by J.M. Goldstrom, "Richard Whately and Political Economy in School Books, 1833-80", in Irish Historical Studies, vol. 15, (1966), pp.134-5.

suchlike solutions to distress. His biographer quotes from a letter written by Whately in 1830 commenting on the condition of the labouring classes. In it, he warned that giving charity to the poor did not increase the total stock of goods available. It was preferable to find a way of increasing produce through demand, but, "as for food, I like particularly to have all the bones and scraps that would otherwise be wasted, collected for soup; that does increase the quantity of food."<sup>1</sup>

These views were not accepted at all. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, G. H. Law (1761-1845), who was "very much a product of the eighteenth century",<sup>2</sup> favoured allowing small plots of land to the poor. In 1830 he put forward this proposal, observing that the main cause of the disturbed state of the country was scarcity of employment, although the enclosure of commons and the consolidation of farms were also factors.<sup>3</sup> Nearly thirty years earlier, wrote Law, he had commenced assigning land to each cottage at a living which he held in Cambridgeshire. The effect had been a reduction in the numbers receiving poor relief.<sup>4</sup> Resuming the plan of letting about one acre of land for a small rent at Bath and Wells, the Bishop claimed several benefits had resulted: extremes of privation

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1. E. Jane Whately, Life and Correspondence of Richard Whately, (2 vols., 1866), vol. 1, p.77. Whately was an authority on food: at about the time he was recommending bones and scraps for the poor, a contemporary recorded that he was "as great a glutton as ever graced a college Hall. I trust his digestive powers are as unbounded as his appetite; less restraint of that sort I never saw," diary of J.L. Mallet, entry for 13 January, 1831; quoted in Pol. Econ. Club, Proceedings, p.220.

2. Soloway, op.cit., p.157.

3. George Henry Law, Remarks on the Present Distresses of the Poor, (Wells, n.d. /1830/), p.3.

4. Ibid., p.13.

had been prevented; the labourer was saved from the temptation of the public house as his allotment provided useful employment; habits of foresight and economy were generated, and the possession of even a small portion of land attached the poor man to his native soil.<sup>1</sup> These sentiments were repeated by Law in a pastoral letter, in which he referred to the sufferings of the poor. Accepting part of the Malthusian view, he stated that "the principal cause of the evil is occasioned by the largely increased amount of our population."<sup>2</sup> But the solution was for landed proprietors to promote allotments of land for the poor, who would gain much, while the rich would lose nothing. The amount spent on poor rates would decrease, and dishonesty and crime, which idleness produced, would be prevented.<sup>3</sup> Law, who appears to have been a conscientious and public-spirited bishop, inevitably stressed the considerations of the landed interest above those of the labourer. More commonly, the clergy were even more closely identified with the rich and influential.<sup>4</sup>

To sum up, then, ecclesiastical attitudes were solidly conservative, although a number of variations in thought can be distinguished. They defended social inequality and attacked those who wished to lessen it. The existing structure upon which they were directly dependent for their wealth and influence they seldom opposed. They assisted in showing labourers their

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1. Ibid., pp.15-17.

2. George Henry Law, A Pastoral Letter, on the Present Aspect of the Times, addressed to the Clergy, the Gentry, and Inhabitants, of the Diocese of Bath & Wells, (Wells, n.d. /1831/), p.11.

3. Ibid., p.12.

4. See the discussion by J.L. and Barbara Hammond, op.cit., pp.192-200.



place, and helped to see that they stayed there. Some were willing to rent land to the lower classes; but only if they believed it would be a better means of ensuring social stability than the proposals of fellow prelates who, because of Malthusian attitudes or support for the farmers' view, wanted to keep the labourer landless. We will touch again upon clerical activities, as they are closely bound up with the following discussion of allotments. But, having now outlined this important section of conservative thought, we can consider those in holy orders together with their relatives and associates among the landed interest.

#### IV

The question of the extent to which allotments were available at this time is a highly complex one. There are, firstly, problems of definition, for the term "allotment" was often used interchangeably with such expressions as "potato-ground", "cottage gardens", "the cottage System", "spade husbandry", and the "cow-system".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these terms were used to cover a wide range of sizes, from a fraction of an acre, up to several acres. Many complications arise from regional variations, for in those areas where land was scarce, allotments tended to be smaller and less common than where the farmer had more land available or where wastes could be utilised. No statistical records of the extent to which land was rented to

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1. In his important article "Cottage System", which appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica Supplement in 1819, M'Culloch did not closely define his terms, and even included small farmers in his discussion.

the labourer, and what proportion of labourers were involved, exist, and contemporary estimates vary widely.<sup>1</sup> Roughly, the pattern appears to be that in the period of "enclosure fever"<sup>2</sup> between 1790 and 1810, the agricultural labourer tended, on balance, to be deprived of at least some of the land which had been available for keeping a cow or attached to his cottage. After the mid-1820s, support for allotments appears to have grown, and it is likely that the labourer was more easily able to obtain possession of some scraps of land, although generally under carefully limited conditions.

However, our main concern in the present discussion is not so much with the extent of the allotment system, as with showing the motives behind the provision of allotments. Two inter-connected arguments are proposed: firstly, that it was the landed interest who were most active in promoting allotment schemes; and secondly, that by making them available, they intended to protect their own interests, particularly by allaying rural discontent. In other words, allotments were a conservative and quietist measure. These arguments have already been foreshadowed in the above discussion of clerical attitudes; but we will now attempt to bring forward the argument within the landed interest on this topic. It is not suggested that some landlords

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1. For a discussion of this, J.H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, (1964 ed.), vol. 1, pp.119-121. D.C. Barnett prints a map showing the distribution of allotment schemes in English counties in 1833, on p.163 of "Allotments and the Problem of Rural Poverty, 1780-1840", in E.L. Jones & G.E. Mingay (eds), Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution (1967).
  2. The expression is Clapham's, op.cit., p.114.

were motivated other than by a disinterested benevolence and paternalistic concern with the welfare of their labourers. Some were.<sup>1</sup> But in the great majority of the reports, speeches, sermons, pamphlets, etc., it was the advantages which would accrue in the first place to the landed interest, rather than the labourer, that were emphasised. Even so, there was a strong amount of opposition. Many farmers believed the labourers would neglect their work in favour of tending their gardens, or, much worse, gain a degree of economic independence. Malthus's argument that the provision of land might lead to feckless early marriages was sometimes employed, and variants put forward by those who favoured such solutions as emigration to end rural poverty. There was, too, some opposition from landed proprietors and farmers who did not accept a responsibility for the welfare of the labourer, but emphasised the duty of the individual to maintain himself and family, and often refused to believe the frequent assertion of contemporaries that the condition of the agricultural labourer had deteriorated. However, the squire and clergyman were the traditional founts of charity in the countryside. And their good works not infrequently took the form of allotments.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A.C. Todd has dealt, somewhat indulgently, with one such case: "An Answer to Poverty in Sussex, 1830-1845", in the Agricultural History Review, vol. 4, (1956), pp.45-51. Todd stated of Mary Ann Gilbert, the widow of Davies Gilbert, last President of the Board of Agriculture, that, "with vision and humanity she rescued the 'forgotten men'" by letting land near Eastbourne as allotments. Mrs. Gilbert's main motivation appears to have been a highly-developed desire to encourage thrift: the gate to the allotments bore the sign "Here waste not Time and you'll want not Food", while labourers were issued with printed cards on the virtues of foregoing gin. Active in the Labourers' Friend Society, she received advice from Archbishop Whately and Sydney Smith, and read a paper on "The Allotment System" before Lord Rosebery in 1844.

2. But cf. Mill: "the gentry of England are usually charitable. But charitable people have human infirmities, and would, very often, be secretly not a little dissatisfied if no one needed their charity: it is from them one oftenest hears the base doctrine, that God has decreed there shall always be poor", Principles, p.370.

Just as the crisis years of 1795-6 and 1800-1 led to a considerable amount of discussion of what was to be done, the years of dislocation after 1815 provoked a similar response, as did the crisis of 1830-1. It was during these times that proposals for allotments increased.<sup>1</sup> The contemporary literature is immense. Not only do a large number of pamphlets survive which were written specifically to advocate allotments, but discussion of the subject occurred regularly in periodicals, newspapers, sermons, and in Parliament, as well as privately in letters and debates some record of which survive. A very great proportion of this discussion came from the better-off sections of society, with clergymen and landowners being strongly represented. And, while numerous views were expressed, the recurring theme was the problem of the increasingly stretched poor law system. It is significant that while the Government turned aside all proposals for land reform, it was willing to support the provision of allotments. This fact goes a good way to demonstrate the role which the propertied classes believed allotments might play. The legislation in question was the Act of 59 George III. c.12 (1819) which became known as the Select Vestries Act. It owed its origin in part to the report of the House of Commons Committee on the Poor Laws for which Sturges Bourne and Frankland Lewis were mainly responsible. Among its provisions, it enabled Churchwardens and Overseers, with the

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1. Barnett, loc.cit., p.175, gives a table based on 192 pamphlets recommending allotments published between 1795 and 1835. Of these, 40 appeared in the 1816-1819 period and 62 between 1830-1833. Although Barnett gives no indication how his table was compiled, and invests it with a degree of statistical accuracy that is misleading, such a distribution is probably approximately representative of the contemporary debate.

consent of the Vestry, to buy or rent land up to twenty acres to be worked by able bodied men needing relief, who were to be paid reasonable wages and have the status of independent wage earners. The parish officers were, moreover, allowed to let this land at a reasonable rent for cultivation by independent small holders. Very few parishes, however, bothered to take up this remedy for distress. It was felt that the system could not be closely supervised and the preference became increasingly expressed for the "well-regulated workhouse".<sup>1</sup> As the Hammonds pointed out, the "Vestry Reformers of this period were merely interested in reducing the rates".<sup>2</sup>

However, in their discussion of allotments, the Hammonds imply that the plans to allow land to labourers were motivated primarily by considerations of the labourers' welfare. They further suggest that this benevolence was frustrated by the self-interest of the farming class.<sup>3</sup> The present writer hopes to show that, allowing for a number of exceptions, the landed class as a whole shared similar attitudes, and their differences were as to means rather than ends.

Many contemporary proposals for allotments were couched in moralistic terms; and no doubt because of the criticisms of Malthus and later M'Culloch, few were argued from the view of

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1. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part 1. The Old Poor Law, (1927), pp.229-230.

2. J.L. and Barbara Hammond, op.cit., p.158.

3. Ibid., pp.130-137. This is not to argue that when allotments were provided it was invariably the larger landlord who made them available; but it was commonly the substantial owner of land who wished to experiment with allotments while his tenant farmers resisted such schemes; see e.g., Report of S.C. of House of Lords on the State of Agriculture in England and Wales, 1837, vol. 5, Q.2168.

the political economist. Something of an exception was John Barton, an independent country gentleman with an estate in Sussex.<sup>1</sup> Barton also took an interest in economic literature, and is known to have corresponded with Ricardo.<sup>2</sup> In his first publication, a long pamphlet, he argued that the possession of property provided a stimulus; "perhaps it might deserve consideration," he wrote, "whether colonies could be established on our waste lands at home."<sup>3</sup> To support this suggestion, he referred to Arthur Young's testimony that the small proprietor of France worked with great industry. Barton returned to similar ideas three years later when he put forward a scheme to encourage celibacy among agricultural labourers. Noting that Malthus had described how the labourer regarded the prospect of owning a cow as a "fascinating vision", Barton proposed he be granted a cow or allowed other advantages on certain conditions being met. Rather assuming that the average labourer preferred a cow to a wife, Barton stated that the labourer who, by deferring a contemplated marriage, saved £50 which he was able to deposit, should be presented with a cow, or allowed to rent three or four acres of land on reasonable terms, or given the use of a cottage

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1. G. Sotiroff, "John Barton (1789-1852)", Economic Journal, vol. 62, (1952), p.87. Barton's works have been collected by Sotiroff as John Barton (1789-1852): Economic Writings, (2 vols., Regina, 1962-3).

2. Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 7, pp.155-159.

3. John Barton, Observations on the Circumstances which Influence the Condition of the Labouring Classes of Society, (1817), p.71.



and a garden rent-free for life. He believed that, "perhaps... the cow would be found the most attractive; for visible and tangible objects act with far the greatest force on rude and uncultivated minds."<sup>1</sup> Commissioners appointed for the purpose, could make allowances from the labourer's £50 in lieu of all parochial relief. Morals could be protected by debarring from the plan parties responsible for an illegitimate birth, and, Barton suggested, once the habit of looking to future consequences had been implanted in the minds of the poor, breaches of chastity among women of the lower classes would be as uncommon as among those of the middle classes.<sup>2</sup>

This desire to regulate carefully the life of the labourer is characteristic of many of the proposals put forward. It no doubt was in part a response designed to allay the fears of farmers who worried that their labourers, given a little land they might call their own, would become "too saucy".<sup>3</sup> Because of this, rules were frequently made stipulating that an allotment might not be attended by the labourer during normal working hours

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1. John Barton, An Inquiry into the Causes of the Progressive Depreciation of Agricultural Labour in Modern Times; with Suggestions for its Remedy, (1820), p.93.

2. Barton's proposal reflects the great concern of his contemporaries with the question of illegitimacy; see U.R.Q. Henriques, "Bastardy and the New Poor Law", Past & Present, No. 37, (1967), pp.103-129. In his later years, Barton became fully converted to the idea of small farms, see his paper on "The Influence of the Sub-division of the Soil on the Moral and Physical well-being of the People of England & Wales", Quarterly Journal of the Statistical Society of London, vol. 13, (1850), pp.63-77.

3. For instances of farmers' opposition to allotments, see the Report from the S.C. on Agriculture, 1833, vol. 5, Q.12086; Report from the S.C. on Labouring Poor (Allotments of Land), 1843, vol. 7, Q.1242.

without the permission of his master.<sup>1</sup> Detailed regulations governing the renting of allotments were common. A scheme launched by Sir Cullen Eardley Smith near Caistor, Lincs., stated that allottees would lose their holding if convicted of an offence against the laws; or if they received parish relief; were guilty of "grossly immoral conduct", or insolence to passing travellers; several regulations were insisted upon which related to cropping and the general upkeep of the allotment; work on the Lord's Day was forbidden. Despite all this, numerous applications were received.<sup>2</sup>

A more philanthropic scheme, based on religious paternalism, was proposed by William Allen (1770-1843). This, too, had a list of rules, for Allen suggested that as a cottager would be receiving considerable privileges, he should be required to sign an agreement to keep to the following conditions:

- 1st To observe moral conduct.
- 2d To receive no allowances whatever from the parish.
- 3d To cultivate the garden and land with which he is intrusted in the manner which shall be prescribed, to underlet no part of it, not to damage or remove any shrubs or trees, and to keep the land free from weeds, and manured to the satisfaction of the proprietor.
- 4th To send all his children who may be of a suitable age to some school, unless a satisfactory reason why they should not attend, be given.
- 5th To attend some place of public worship on the day called Sunday.

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Allen's scheme is interesting because of the Owenite elements

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1. For example, this provision applied in the parish of Woburn where occupiers were forbidden to work upon their land between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. without permission; see The Labourers' Friend: A Selection from the Publications of the Labourers' Friend Society, showing the Utility and National Advantage of Alloting Land for Cottage Husbandry, (1835), p.288.

2. Stamford Mercury, 29 March, 1833. I owe this reference to J.A. Perkins.

3. W. Allen, Colonies at Home; or Means for Rendering the Industrious Labourer Independent of Parish Relief, and for Providing for the Poor Population of Ireland by the Cultivation of the Soil, (Lindfield, 1832), p.33.

which it contained. His pamphlet provided careful details of which crops would be grown, and strictly mathematical calculations as to the dimensions of the cottages and the size of each holding. In earlier years, Allen had been a keen advocate of Joseph Lancaster's system of education which he promoted in the Philanthropist, (1811-17). His principal contributor had been James Mill. With Bentham, Owen, and four others, he took a share in the New Lanark mill in 1814, and worked with Owen for a number of years before differences - not least on religious matters - led to disagreement. A Quaker, Allen took a part in many philanthropic causes and his later years were spent working for an agricultural colony at Lindfield, Sussex, where he died in 1843.<sup>1</sup>

Detailed rules governing the conduct of allotments also reflects the closeness of these schemes to the poor law system. George Nicholls (1781-1865), who in 1834 became one of the three Poor Law Commissioners,<sup>2</sup> published an account of his administration in Southwell, which foreshadowed the standards adopted by the Poor Law Amendment Act. This included the support of gardens at a moderate rent.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Poor Law Report of 1834 gave favourable accounts of allotment schemes and tended

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1. For Allen's career, Desmond Chapman-Huston and Ernest C. Cripps, Through a City Archway: The Story of Allen and Hanburys 1715-1954, (1954), and sources there cited.

2. The other two were Sir T. Frankland Lewis and J.G. Shaw-Leferve, with Edwin Chadwick as Secretary.

3. An Overseer, /George Nicholls/, Eight Letters on the Management of Our Poor, and the General Administration of the Poor Laws... (Newark, 1822), pp.34-35.

to support their extension. Chadwick, however, took the opposite view. He had worked for Bentham and drunk deeply of Ricardian economics; his attitude was similar to that of M'Culloch; "invariably the labourers who had common allotments", he wrote, "were lower in condition than the labourers living in villages who had none." To suggest otherwise was a "pernicious popular error", for "allotments are most mischievous to the labourer."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Chadwick "torpedoed the allotments scheme".<sup>2</sup>

V

But while utilitarian thinking won the day in the administration of the new poor law, the allotments movement received an impetus from the formation of the Labourers' Friend Society in the early 1830s. The Society enjoyed the King's patronage and numerous aristocrats among its Vice-presidents. It was a solidly "Establishment" organization, which saw itself as continuing the work of Wilberforce, Sir Thomas Bernard, and the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor.<sup>3</sup> It had, moreover, the advantage of a monthly journal, devoted almost exclusively to practical examples of allotments and the benefits which accompanied them,

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1. Chadwick to Earl of Radnor, 19 November, 1844, quoted by S.E. Finer, The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick, (1952), p.87.

2. Finer, ibid., p.94.

3. Labourers' Friend: A Selection, op.cit., preface, pp.v-vi.

to the exclusion of critical papers and such "extraneous matter" as "articles relating to the formation of Dutch Colonies, and others advocating the letting out of small farms to the agricultural labourers". At one stage, shortly after its formation, the Society had printed reports giving details of land reclamation especially in parts of Holland, where, once land had been reclaimed, small farms resulted. In response to pressure to limit themselves merely to allotments, the Society gave way rather than "raising into opponents very many whom it is hoped will now become friends and supporters of the Institution".<sup>1</sup>

The existence of the L.F.S. tended to promote the gathering together of persons whose sentiments were similar to its aims. For example, John Pole, a Commander in the Royal Navy, referred to the Society any of his readers who wished to obtain further information.<sup>2</sup> In another work, Pole emphasised that no more than two acres should be allowed, in case the labourers became small farmers, and if they did become too independent, the answer was to cut down the amount of land held by them.<sup>3</sup> The views of another naval captain were similar: Capt. Brenton, author of The Bible and the Spade (1837), was a firm advocate of spade husbandry. Opposed to emigration and the doctrines of the political economists, Brenton like Pole, possibly thought

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1. Ibid., pp.x-xi. The journal began in 1831 as Facts and Illustrations, demonstrating the important benefits...derived by labourers from possessing small portions of land, becoming, from October, 1834, the Labourers' Friend Magazine.

2. John Pole, A Short Statement; showing that if the Allotment System were adopted, there would be no excess of population; no need for Emigration; nor cultivating waste lands; nor for the importation of food, (1832), p.10. Pole was on the L.F.S. Committee of Management.

3. John Pole, A Few Observations on the Present State of the Poor and Poor Laws, and a Remedy for the Evils respecting them, (n.p., n.d.), p.7.

in strategic terms and viewed the peasantry as a pool to feed the armed forces.<sup>1</sup> He believed in a stable, hierarchical society and was against bills of enclosure which,

limited and curtailed the resources of the peasantry, expelling them from their commons, depriving them of their honest and healthy means of subsistence, and obliging them to seek refuge in the large towns, where between the pawnbroker and the gin shop, they very soon become inmates of a workhouse, or outcasts of society. Had we taken as much care to protect our poor as we have to protect our game, the former had been happy, and the latter more abundant.

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Pelham, too, saw the L.F.S. as a body with similar aims to those which he had been pressing. He wrote to Lord Kenyon, one of the patrons, to express his belief that the Society would

do more to forward the real permanent interests of the poor, and of the empire at large, than all the Emigration Committees that ever sat. Give the poor man his land and his spade - his industry will soon produce the rest: he will become a payer instead of a receiver of rates.

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Other gentlemen gave of their leisure to put forward similar opinions and to show how the labourer might be rescued from the bane of idleness. The Rev. L. B. Wither addressed Hampshire farmers on the allotment system, which, if established, meant

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1. In the early nineteenth century, the peasant was often praised for qualities of hard-work and independence. Indications, however, of later versions which glorified the reactionary features of the peasantry can be traced in some of the writings of this period. Cf. Barrington Moore Jr, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, (1967), p.452.
  2. Letter to Morning Post, 30 December, 1831, quoted by Sir Jahleel Brenton, Memoir of Captain Edward Pelham Brenton, (1842), p.63.
  3. Pelham to Kenyon, 9 April, 1832, quoted ibid., p.81.



there would

be no waste of time, the greatest waste of wealth to those to whom time is their sole estate; every spare hour may be turned to a happy and gainful account: it will be spent profitably to the whole community, and more immediately so to yourselves;

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Numerous other instances might be given, but these would tend merely to cover again the points already made. While the typical pamphleteer or contributor to the Labourers' Friend Magazine expressed a desire to assist the labourer, this was to be achieved in terms beneficial to the upper classes. His "moral" condition might be improved in many ways, such as by no longer poaching or drinking at the public house. The labourer's family would also be morally improved, as their labour, too, could be called upon. Moreover, because of his deep yearning to possess land, the labourer could be more easily kept in his place, by the threat to deprive him of his holding for any misdemeanour. The commonly-made stipulation requiring allotment holders to attend divine service was another means of discipline: in church the duties of the poor and their - ultimate - inheritance of the earth might be preached. There, too, the labourer might have been instructed that his leisure time should not be wasted, but used productively.<sup>2</sup> Rents paid by allotment holders would provide an income for the landowner, often for land which might otherwise have remained as waste, or at a higher rate per acre than that paid by the tenant farmer.

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1. Labourers' Friend: A Selection, op.cit., p.147.

2. For a recent statement of this ethos, E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", Past & Present, No. 38, (1967), esp. pp.77f.

The benefit to social stability was an important argument. "The labourer who has property, however small," Sir Egerton Brydges declared, "has an interest in the welfare and tranquility of his country, and in the good order of society."<sup>1</sup> This view gained much support following the disturbances of 1830-1. Areas where allotments were widespread were less turbulent than those where they were not generally available, a fact seized upon by supporters of the system.<sup>2</sup> In Parliament, some recommended an extension of the amount and availability of land for the poor, and legislation to these ends was enacted, without, however, much long term effect.<sup>3</sup>

But the King Charles's Head to which virtually all these self-appointed "friends" of the labourer returned, was the saving which might be made in the rates. Farmers, they argued, would not have to pay higher wages, for the produce of the labourer's allotment would have the effect of supplementing his income. During temporary unemployment, or in old age, the labourer might well be saved from becoming a charge on the rates by virtue of the food he was able to grow himself. It was only after the operation of the new poor law began to effect a reduction in the amount of outdoor relief that allotments as a means of lessening the burden of rates became less widely advocated. In 1843, the case for and against the system was examined in detail by the Select Committee on the Labouring Poor,

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1. Labourers' Friend: A Selection, op.cit., p.138.

2. For example, Thomas Archer, A Plan for relieving the Pressure of the Poor Rates affording employment to the Agricultural Poor, and improving their Condition, by A Solicitor, (1832), p.54.

3. Barnett, loc.cit., pp.179-180.

which provided a wealth of material, without leading to any significant change in government policy. The 1845 Enclosure Act provided that where common land was enclosed under the act, allotments for the labouring poor should be laid if there was a demand for them.<sup>1</sup>

## VI

There was always a strong prejudice against the system from the farming class, despite all assurances and attempts at persuasion. Their basic objection appears to have been a belief that the labourer who possessed an allotment might get ideas above his station and would obtain from it too much independence, not only by refusing normal wage labour, but possibly also by not relying on the farmer for his food requirements. That the labourer may have been in a position to sell some of the crops he produced would also tend to arouse the jealousies of the farmer. In addition to prejudices of this nature, there were those which stemmed from the political economists. Allotments were constantly associated with minute sub-division of the land and the horrifying prospect that the English agricultural labourer might be reduced to the level of the Irish peasant. Such was the force of this vision that even when successful examples of its operation were quoted, men had doubts. Drummond, for example, wrote of the scheme at Albury in Surrey:

I have followed the allotment system here ever since I came, now nearly thirty years ago; every

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1. C.S. Orwin and E.H. Whetham, History of British Agriculture, 1846-1914, (1964), p.189.

labourer on the estate has as much land as he pleases, from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 5 acres or more. As a practical thing it is good, like charity; but as a national system it is again infinitesimal morcellement.

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J. S. Mill, too, wrote against the "much-boasted Allotment System".<sup>2</sup> In this he was opposed, as we shall see, by W. T. Thornton, a colleague at East India House. Although Thornton advocated allotments, he was in no way a spokesman for the landed class. He was also a supporter of small farms and peasant proprietorship, and argued mainly from a position which sought to assist the labourer to better his circumstances. Other writers whose ideas generally were radical sometimes favoured allotments, for even renting a fraction of an acre was thought better than being utterly landless. Support of this nature reflects the deep concern that people should have some contact with the land, even if wholesale redistribution was impossible.<sup>3</sup>

Once the new poor law showed itself to be a more reliable means of regulating the under-employed, it was the moral aspects of allotments that became increasingly stressed.<sup>4</sup> Philanthropy tended to come to the fore in the place of self-interest. Slowly the Church began to reform itself. Stanley of Norwich was one

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1. Henry Drummond to J.W. Croker, 23 April, 1847, The Croker Papers, (ed. Louis J. Jennings, 4 vols, 1884), vol. 3, p.184.

2. Principles, p.362. See below, ch. 8.

3. William Howitt is an example of this group, see below, pp.329-334.

4. For the "mature" statement, enumerating the advantages, and carefully distinguishing from it the small farm system, see under "Allotment System", in The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, vol. 14, (1845), pp.87-88.

Bishop who recognised the need for the Church to become reconciled with the labouring poor.<sup>1</sup> An interesting example of this change of heart was the Exeter Hall meeting of 28 May, 1846 at which Stanley supported a Christian version of Owen's village communities. J. Minter Morgan proposed, with encouragement from Lord John Manners and others, to form the "Church of England Self-Supporting Village Society".<sup>2</sup> The village would consist of three or four hundred families, with the land held in common. Capital of £45,000 was to be raised which would be paid off at £250 per annum, derived from the estimated yearly surplus of £500. At these figures, however, the community needed 183 years of stable prices, and would not have acquired the land before 2030.<sup>3</sup>

The deeply felt, if rarely articulated, yearning of the labouring class for land was reflected by this proposal as well as the schemes of Owenites and the Chartist Land Plan. In some respects, the allotment system was a response to this desire. The provision of a small amount of land, under carefully defined conditions, went some small way to compensate for the opportunity of owning a small farm which had been lost to the labourer. The idea of living on the land was a remarkably resilient one,

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1. Soloway, op.cit., p.190.

2. For Morgan, who was largely responsible for the plan, see W.H.G. Armytage, "John Minter Morgan's Schemes, 1841-1845", International Review of Social History, vol. 3, (1958).

3. Chadwick, The Victorian Church, op.cit., p.348. The scheme appears to have been still-born. In comparison, O'Connor's maligned Land Plan was a model of good sense.

especially in view of the pressures of industrialization. In some respects it was no doubt a reaction against such pressures, for the "back to the land" slogan found echoes beyond the turn of the century. It is, for example, no coincidence that the city-oriented, populist religion of the Salvation Army emphasised moral regeneration in the "Farm Colony".<sup>1</sup> The Labourers' Friend Society survived until at least the mid-1880s.<sup>2</sup> Discussion of the virtues of allotments continued, in an urban as well as a rural context. Later in the century acts of parliament provided for their establishment, but by then it was a small part of the variegated debate of the firmly-established "Land Question".<sup>3</sup>

The allotment system originated as a solution to the disruptive effects of the last stage of enclosure and the problem of rural underemployment. Intimately bound up with the poor law problem, it tended to decline as the management of that problem improved and with the more regular wage-employment of the agricultural labourer. The advent of railway construction in rural areas not only provided a source of employment for the agricultural labourer.<sup>4</sup> It also hastened the rural exodus.<sup>5</sup> The

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1. General Booth, In Darkest England and the Way Out, (1890), ch. 3.

2. Its Magazine ceased to appear in 1884.

3. For a useful summary, Newlin Russell Smith, Land for the Small Man: English and Welsh Experience with Publicly-Supplied Small Holdings, 1860-1937, (Morningside Heights, New York, 1946), chs. 1-6.

4. Clapham, op.cit., pp.474-475.

5. J. Saville, Rural Depopulation in England and Wales, 1851-1951, (1957), chs. 1-2.



labourers that remained tended to be the more passive ones, and, as law and order became more firmly established, allotments were no longer seen as a means of minimising unrest. For the labourer who required it, sufficient land for renting may have been available, but there are indications that later in the century the average labourer was kept too busy working for the farmer to be able to tend an allotment. Although there remained a pro-allotment body of opinion, those who followed J. S. Mill and opposed allotments would concentrate on the separate issues of peasant proprietorship or in breaking down the "land monopoly" by abolishing entails and primogeniture, while the more advanced radical was not interested in concessions such as small-holdings but in nationalisation.<sup>1</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, the landed interest increasingly fought a rearguard action that was for many years highly successful. If it could no longer publicly speak with the imperiousness of Braxfield, it nevertheless maintained a confidence in its right to rule based on centuries of power and influence. Landowners defended entails and primogeniture, with the same tenacity as their new-found champion M'Culloch.<sup>2</sup> "I consider hereditary succession to unbroken masses of landed property to be absolutely necessary for the maintenance of the British Constitution", declared Palmerston in 1856, and this

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1. Some of these points are amplified below, pp.401f.

2. F.M.L. Thompson, "Land and Politics in England in the Nineteenth Century", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, vol. 15, (1965), pp.30f.

was a belief he would not compromise.<sup>1</sup> As would be expected, it was particularly in the countryside that the landed interest was deeply entrenched and only gradually did the effects of the acts of parliamentary reform and the repeal of the corn laws become felt. We can accept the view that the "landed interest entered the late nineteenth century with its social position largely intact".<sup>2</sup> But in a number of ways erosion was taking place. By the 1860s the village church was in decline as labourers grew in social consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Industrial capital was yearly outpacing agricultural. Rural depopulation continued and the urban worker came to make up an increasing proportion of the labour force. It may appear as a contradiction that the question of "land" should occupy such a central position in late Victorian thought when such a large part of the population depended upon an industrial system for their livelihood. This paradox is no doubt in part due to the fact that the landed aristocracy did still constitute a small but politically influential and immensely wealthy class of society, and because it was easily identifiable and the land it possessed so tangible, it attracted criticism. In the second half of the nineteenth century the analysis of Marx and Engels has some application for they argued there was a stage at which:

the proletarians do not fight their enemies,  
but the enemies of their enemies, the rem-  
nants of the absolute monarchy, the land-

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1. Palmerston to Cranworth, 10 December, 1856, B.M. Add. MSS 48,580, f.332.

2. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century, op.cit., p.291.

3. Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, part 2, (1970), p.154.

owners, the non-industrial bourgeois, the petty bourgeoisie.

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Until socialist ideas had been propagated, the industrial capitalist was not seen as an expropriator as the landowner was, while until the beginning of the twentieth century, the radical wing of the Liberal Party, urban-based and closely associated with trade and manufacturing, found a convenient rallying-cry in attacking the "landed monopoly".

Furthermore, new ideas were slow in dissemination. Many of those with progressive opinions were influenced by Mill's proposals of land tenure reform in the 1870s. Several of these individuals remained in public life until the end of the century and remained committed to a programme of land reform. Nor should it be forgotten that Mill's ideas were pervasive among reformers on a wide range of issues; his intellectual legacy was considerable and on the specific question of landed property the inheritance he offered was based on an attitude towards the landlord class that had been largely formed in the first part of the century.

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1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto, (1848; Penguin ed., Harmondsworth, 1967), p.89.

CHAPTER VI:

RADICAL OPINIONS ON LANDED PROPERTY, 1815-1848

The fault is great in man or woman  
Who steals a goose from off a common;  
But who can plead that man's excuse  
Who steals a common from a goose?

Anon, Tickler Magazine, 1 February, 1821.

With peace in 1815, attention was concentrated upon domestic discontent and the demand for remedies. Although one or two "English jacobins" survived, for the most part the radicals of the 1790s had been suppressed, as were Muir and Gerrald; or, like Southey and Coleridge, had changed their colours; some, such as Godwin, had slipped into obscurity; others, like Place, modified their position; while death had claimed men like Spence and Paine. But following the peace, a new generation, often building on this heritage, began to flourish, and the period between the ending of the Napoleonic War and the presentation to Parliament of the final Chartist petition was extraordinary<sup>il</sup> rich in radicals. Many were of working class origin, others belonged to the middle class, but often had sympathies for the class beneath them.

Their principles, too, were various; some put an emphasis upon co-operaton, education through mechanics institutes, or trade unionism, others looked forward to universal suffrage, while there were those who looked back eight centuries to the moral economy of Saxon England or to the Lockean tradition of natural rights or to a mythical, paternalistic and contented society. A number of writers began to formulate a "labour theory of value" to justify the claim of the working class to a greater

share of the national income. Some reformers viewed the activities of fellow-radicals with disapproval and concentrated on gaining full rights for the middle class as a possible prelude to extending similar benefits to the artisan or labourer, though they were not above forming temporary alliances with working class leaders.<sup>1</sup> Again, the division between the classes was often blurred as some radicals had a foot in both camps, or were moving from one social position to another; Place is the best known example of this type. Problems of definition are further complicated by the tendency some radicals had to change their opinions, become disillusioned or burned out, and lapse into an acceptance of the status quo. The period's strong autodidactic tradition implied the development of men's ideas in different directions as their knowledge became greater. Nor were radical ideas always compatible. There were those reformers who accepted the social system and sought to work within it, while to others notions such as the "rights of property" and the intractable laws of political economy were anathema. By nature disputatious, they not uncommonly quarrelled among themselves, as well as with their opponents.

It is not possible even to begin an examination of the vast range of radicals, their ideas and actions during this period. Instead, only a few, fairly representative, figures who also possessed some point of contact with the stream of thought to which Mill belonged will be considered. As a further limiting factor, it is proposed to give particular consideration to what

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1. For example, in the crisis of the reform agitation, 1830-32. A few years earlier, the Whiggish M'Culloch had, along with men like the Deptford shipwright, John Gast, pressed for the repeal of the Combination Laws.

was usually an important aspect of the radical make-up; their attitude to property in land.

We shall notice how Bentham was abusive about radicals such as Cobbett and Owen, and that he produced Radicalism Not Dangerous in 1820 to separate the utilitarian cause from more extreme programmes of reform.<sup>1</sup> Twenty years later, Mill was to distinguish carefully the philosophic radicals from other varieties. But despite this separation, the more advanced sections of reformers are important as part of the context in which the beliefs embraced by the Mills and their associates developed. In the first place, the groups were not completely separated. Members of different sects met together, if only to debate their differences, and sometimes co-operated with each other to press for a popular reform. Secondly, while the ideas of the middle-class utilitarians were sometimes borrowed by the radicals, this exchange was not only one way. In pressing advanced proposals on men like J. S. Mill, the reformers obliged them to consider increasingly democratic ideas, and if not to accept them, at least to formulate alternative remedies.

## II

A number of these radicals belonged to no party or group but were individuals, who, on weighing society and finding it deficient, put forward their schemes for reform. Of this type, one of the most interesting was George Ensor (1769-1843).

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1. Earlier, Bentham had attacked the French Revolution and the English radicals who had supported it; see J.H. Burns, "Bentham and the French Revolution", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, vol. 16, (1966), pp.95-114.



Ensor was born in Dublin of an English father, was educated at Trinity College, and proceeded to the Irish Bar in 1792. The author of a score of books and pamphlets, Ensor's approach was that of a scholar, and his publications are replete with quotations from the classics and a wide variety of other sources, often to such an extent that he overdid his show of learning. An attack by a Quarterly reviewer ridiculed Ensor's pedantry and the "ostentatious display of useless knowledge" found in his work.<sup>1</sup>

In 1818 Ensor's Inquiry Concerning the Population of Nations appeared. He considered it effectively refuted Malthus's theory and wrote to tell Place so. Place, however, replied that he did

not expect to see what I call the principle disproved; namely that in all old settled countries the population presses against starvation, and is kept from increasing with the rapidity which, but for the want of produce, it would increase.

2

Drawing on a wide range of sources to back his arguments, Ensor asserted that "the rich, the aristocracy, the proprietors of land, the holders of stock, heirs in their own right, and princes by right divine" were maintained by the labourer; "Mr. Malthus may have heard that the strongest spirit is drawn from the poorest grape; but he has not heard that the greatest wealth is produced by the poorest men."<sup>3</sup> Part of his book Ensor devoted to a discussion of Ireland. In it he attacked Malthus's emphasis on the prevalence of the potato, and Ricardo, "whose general sentiments and character I should willingly praise", for

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1. "Ensor's Restoration of Usurped Rights", Quarterly Review, vol. 22, (1820), p.103.

2. Place to Ensor, 18 January, 1818, B.M. Add. MSS 35,153, f.40.

3. George Ensor, An Inquiry Concerning the Population of Nations: containing a Refutation of Mr. Malthus's Essay on Population, (1818), p.81.

suggesting the Irish could be stimulated into exertion by the creation of new wants.<sup>1</sup> Basing his case on Young, Wakefield, and other authorities, Ensor argued that the true cause of Irish misery was misrule.<sup>2</sup> Not only was this true of Ireland, but of Europe also. Ensor summed up in these words:

Having reviewed the state of population in different countries and in dissimilar situations, I conclude that neither the populousness of a nation nor the paucity of its inhabitants is alarming. It is bad government and unequal laws and disproportioned property that are dreadful....I also deny that any country in Europe is overpopulated, though Mr. Malthus states the reverse; and I am persuaded on re-examination, few will believe that the misery of Europe proceeds from superfoetation, but from the rapacity and extravagance of the ruling orders.

3

What these extravagances amounted to in the case of England, were discussed by Ensor in a chapter opening with the declaration: "The people are poor, and growing poorer."<sup>4</sup> The first imposition on them was the monarchy, which swallowed enormous sums along with the court and nobility. Ensor went on to decry the salaries paid to the clergy and the prodigality of the House of Commons with the people's money. Foreign subsidies, wars and military establishments were a great waste, as were the "motley and monstrous assemblage of pensioners, sinecurists, pluralists, who may be called generally state paupers."<sup>5</sup> Britain's unhappy state was contrasted with America, where a representative system of government had brought the people progress and prosperity. The people of Britain, declared Ensor, must bear the abuse of power

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1. Ibid., p.265.

2. Ibid., p.293. Ricardo was closer to Ensor in his opinions than Ensor allowed; see above, p.106.

3. Ibid., p.308.

4. Ibid., p.441.

5. Ibid., pp.471-472.

no longer, "they must resume their rights."<sup>1</sup>

Ensor returned to this last assertion in the following year when he reiterated many of the points discussed in his "refutation" of Malthus. This book began by stating that, as war no longer threatened bankruptcy and even conquest, "reform in Parliament has become not merely the chief but the sole object of political concern."<sup>2</sup> Some of Ensor's limitations emerge from this work; he was neither fish nor fowl. He sarcastically castigated the landed interest and oligarchical government, objecting to property being regarded as essential to the right of suffrage because of the power given to landowners. But Ensor then went on to claim that the "terror" of community of land associated with the Spenceans would sleep if the right to vote were given, and declared himself "as firm a friend of property as any other man."<sup>3</sup> By using immoderate language to advance what were in essence moderate proposals to be pursued by peaceable methods, Ensor failed to find middle class supporters who preferred the more subtle arguments from James Mill's pen. On the other hand, his writings, heavily annotated with references to Greek, Latin, history, and philosophy, had few readers among the working class, who preferred the plainness of a man like Cobbett.

Ensor had, however, one thing in common with Cobbett: a hostility to Owen, who was "as inexpert as he is fantastic", and whose "New View is as old as imperfect reasoning, limited views, and dogmatic presumption."<sup>4</sup> His communal villages were

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1. Ibid., p.486.

2. George Ensor, Radical Reform: Restoration of Usurped Rights, (1819), p.1.

3. Ibid., p.58.

4. George Ensor, The Poor and Their Relief, (1823), pp.54-55.

described as "workhouses", and Owen would have "the whole poor nationalized by act of parliament."<sup>1</sup> Ensor, having rejected this scheme for assisting the poor, went on to consider others. Spade husbandry was dismissed as "the ultra-anti-machine doctrine."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the remedies of cow-keeping, emigration, and home colonization were discounted. Referring for support to Winchilsea's views, Ensor wrote that "the contemptible and pernicious policy of leaving the labourer landless was promoted by the inclosing of commons".<sup>3</sup> Though discussing a number of schemes to establish allotments, including Arthur Young's conversion to small farms, he did not see these as a panacea either.

Returning to his attack on Malthus, Ensor linked him with a discussion of the poor laws and concluded that the poor had a right to relief; it was towards claiming these rights that they should look. He listed the causes of poverty, again giving first place to the wastefulness of the monarchy, followed by the ecclesiastical establishment and then the nobility, made by a monarch's breath, "those accidents of an accident."<sup>4</sup> High rents, heavy taxation and the corn laws all served to bolster up the system and would continue to do so until the poor recovered their rights.

As in his other books, Ensor showed an extensive, if rather unwieldy knowledge. This characteristic was to be summed up by Bentham, who had apparently been asked whether Ensor would be of

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1. Ibid., p.77.

2. Ibid., p.87.

3. Ibid., p.209.

4. Ibid., p.260.

value in Parliament:

Mill knows Ensor extremely well: still better than I do. Good intentions, prodigious learning, sharp wit, poignant satire - all this Ensor has. Close and consistent reasoning? Alas! not;... Mill says he is impracticable, and in Parliament he sees not very well what particular use he would be of.

1

One or two other connections can be traced between Ensor and the utilitarians. Bentham had earlier referred to him in a letter to his sister-in-law when Ensor was entrusted with accompanying the young John Mill to Paris:

On Monday John Mill sets out for Paris in the diligence by way of Calais, Ensor was going thither for about a fortnight: and this was an opportunity not to be neglected: Ensor, a man of good landed property (County Armagh) in Ireland, a literary man, a philosopher, a radical, a very honest worthy man, with whom I am in intimacy, Place and Mill still more.

2

John Mill kept a journal of his visit to France in the form of letters to his father, and the earlier part, before Mill left Paris to stay with Sir Samuel Bentham, affords a number of glimpses of Ensor. One is of particular interest, showing as it does, a link between the less respectable radicals and men like James Mill. On May 23 after breakfasting with Ensor, John called on George Kinloch who had fled to the safety of Paris after making a "vulgar harangue" in a "coarse, inflammatory tone" to the lower orders of the people" at Dundee in 1819.<sup>3</sup> Kinloch gave Mill a

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1. Bentham to Daniel O'Connell, 2 November, 1828, in Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, pp.603-604.

2. Bentham to Lady Bentham, 12 May, 1820, quoted by Anna Jean Mill, John Mill's Boyhood Visit to France, (Toronto, 1960), p.xiv.

3. Lord Cockburn, An Examination of the Trials for Sedition which have hitherto occurred in Scotland, (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1888), vol. 2, p.205. According to Cockburn, who was one of his counsel, Kinloch owned an estate and had the means to live comfortably in Paris; later he was pardoned and after 1832 became Member of Parliament for Dundee. For an account of Kinloch, see Charles Tennant, The Radical Laird: A Biography of George Kinloch 1775-1833 (Kineton, 1970).

package from Major Cartwright to pass on to Ensor for transmission, in the hands of a third person, to Spain, along with Ensor's Inquiry Concerning Population. John Mill further recorded that "Mr. Kinloch desired me to thank you for the interest you had taken in his affair".<sup>1</sup>

In 1821, Cartwright proposed that Bentham and Ensor should be appointed, with others, as "Guardians of Constitutional Reform".<sup>2</sup> But Bentham was unwilling and nothing appears to have come of the idea. If Ensor never entered into the mainstream of radical politics, he did hold true to his opinions, as his last book, posthumously published by Effingham Wilson, demonstrated. Some of its ideas have an affinity with those of J. S. Mill in the 1840s, although Ensor was anti-Malthusian and still considerably more radical than Mill on many points. Like Mill, Ensor lamented the loss of the independent yeoman and the injury done to the poor by aristocratic pleasures such as the maintenance of game.<sup>3</sup> He saw no reason for primogeniture, unless it be Dr. Johnson's: "the law of primogeniture has a great advantage, it makes but one fool in each family".<sup>4</sup>

Ensor believed that most men disagreed with Malthus and spoke in favour of providing cottages with land. In support of this claim, he referred to Arthur Young and to the Annual Reports of the "Strangers' /sic/ Friend Society".<sup>5</sup> He particularly disapproved of large properties and spoke in praise

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1. Mill, John Mill's Boyhood Visit to France, op.cit., p.7.

2. Cartwright to Bentham, 21 January, 1821, Works, (ed. Bowring), p.522.

3. George Ensor, Of Property, and its Equal Distribution, as Promoting Virtue, Population, Abundance, (1844), pp.69,72.

4. Ibid., p.113. Mill was to employ the same aphorism in the Principles, p.889.

5. Ensor, Of Property, p.129.



of the estatemen of Westmorland. The statement in William Ogilvie's Right of Property in Land on the advantages of small proprietors was also favourably quoted by Ensor.<sup>1</sup> However, no attempt was made to distinguish between small independent farmers and labourers' cottage allotments. Nor was the manner defined by which property would be re-distributed, other than by the abolition of primogeniture and a vaguely expressed hope that the people would - as Ensor had been preaching for thirty years - reclaim their rights.

Nevertheless, in this the last of his writings, Ensor showed his wide grasp of literature, not only on the question of the size of farms, but also on an impressive range of topics. He referred to numerous, diverse authorities, including the books of H. D. Inglis, Samuel Laing, and Sismondi, from which he argued against the Malthusian case on small farms leading to excessive sub-division, in a manner which foreshadowed Mill's treatment of this problem.<sup>2</sup>

### III

Another radical Irish landlord known to J. S. Mill was William Thompson. In 1825 the two men had been involved in a series of debates organised by the Owenite Co-operative Society. These debates had been concerned with the questions of population and co-operation. On the latter issue, Mill, though declaring "I should be sorry if it were thought that I am an enemy to

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1. Ibid., p.131.

2. Ibid., pp.133-134, 154. See also below, pp.383f.

Mr. Owen's system," considered Owen's scheme to be "a hazardous experiment", for in the present state of things, the principle of self-interest was "almost an all-powerful one."<sup>1</sup> Mill later recalled that these disputes had been perfectly friendly, and that "the principal champion on their side was a very estimable man, with whom I was well acquainted, Mr. William Thompson, of Cork."<sup>2</sup>

Thompson is often grouped with three other men, John Gray, Thomas Hodgskin, and J. F. Bray, as a "Ricardian socialist".<sup>3</sup> The term is a misnomer. It appears to have been coined by James Bonar.<sup>4</sup> H. S. Foxwell also employed it in his introductory essay to Menger.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, which still holds an important place in the literature of early nineteenth century radicalism, Foxwell argued that although a number of writers flourished under the shelter of the Owenite movement, the really pregnant content of their work - mainly what became known as the "labour theory of value" - was due to Ricardo. Foxwell's contention is open to a number of objections. In the first place, the expression "Ricardian socialist" is an oxymoron, implying that Ricardo was some type of socialist, which of course he was not. Secondly, with the possible exception of Hodgskin, Ricardo was of little importance in the work of these writers. Thompson did not mention

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1. Mill's speech is printed in Archiv für Socialwissenschaft und Socialpolitik, vol. 62, (1929), pp.238ff.

2. Autobiography, p.87.

3. E.g., Esther Lowenthal, The Ricardian Socialists, (New York, 1911), passim, Blaug, Ricardian Economics, op.cit., pp.140-150. Blaug, though doubting the validity of the term, includes Piercy Ravenstone among the Ricardian socialists, which broadens its definition even further.

4. James Bonar, Malthus and His Work, (1885), p.214.

5. H.S. Foxwell, Introduction to Anton Menger, The Right to the Whole Produce of Labour, (trans. M.E. Tanner, 1899), p.lxxxiii.

him, and referred only slightly to other political economists. Gray based his arguments on Adam Smith, James Mill, and M'Culloch, and, like Thompson, but in contradiction of Ricardo, attacked Malthus's theory of population.<sup>1</sup> Bray, the provincial journeyman, belonged to a different tradition and to a somewhat later period. Thirdly, they were not all socialists - though the definition of a socialist at this time is a difficult one to make - and lastly, arising from this point, there were such considerable differences in their ideas that to group them together serves little purpose, other than to demonstrate the ferment of ideas, drawing on a broad intellectual background, which occurred during the period. Even their most commonly shared ideas, that labour was the source of wealth, had been anticipated by earlier writers. Ogilvie, for example, had put forward the maxims that: "All property ought to be the reward of industry; all industry ought to secure its full reward; the exorbitant right of the landholders subverts both these maxims of good policy."<sup>2</sup> Dugald Stewart urged the "moral axioms" of "industry as entitled to reward, and in particular, the labourer as entitled to the fruit of his own labour."<sup>3</sup> And Godwin wrote in 1797, "there is no wealth in the world except this, the labour of man".<sup>4</sup> In fact, these ideas are implicit in Locke's view that:

Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the  
state that Nature hath provided and left

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1. Lowenthal, op.cit., pp.43,48,57.

2. Ogilvie, Right of Property in Land, op.cit., p.v.

3. Sir William Hamilton (ed.), The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart, (11 vols, Edinburgh, 1877), vol. 7, The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man, p.261. The concept was beginning to emerge a century earlier: it was Petty's opinion that "Labour is the Father and active principle of Wealth, as Lands are the Mother", C.H. Hull (ed.), The Economic Writings of Sir William Petty, (2 vols, Cambridge, 1899), vol. 1, p.68.

4. Godwin, The Enquirer, op.cit., p.177.

it in, he hath mixed his labour with it,  
and joined to it something that is his  
own, and thereby makes it his property. 1

Thompson explicitly accepted such notions, having first committed them to paper in answer to a fellow member of a literary society in his home city of Cork.<sup>2</sup> In this work, he advanced and sought to prove the propositions that: "Wealth is produced by labor: no other ingredient but labor makes any object of desire an object of wealth. Labor is the sole universal measure, as well as the characteristic distinction of wealth."<sup>3</sup> Thompson was on friendly terms with Bentham, and adapted the "greatest happiness" principle to argue that all persons had an equal right to happiness, which could only be realised through a system of economic equality.<sup>4</sup> Thompson had something in common with Godwin, whose works were familiar to him, in that his writings advocated a better and happier society, rather than put forward a detailed programme of reform. Both attempted to capture their readers' support by outlining a system of society as it might exist if the human spirit so wished, and their proposals therefore tend to have a markedly utopian aspect. While Thompson acknowledged that individual competition had brought good to society, it was also responsible for certain evils including the retention of the principle of selfishness and the obstruction of progress by the individual's command of property.<sup>5</sup> In place of competition, Thompson advocated

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1. Locke, Of Government, quoted Halévy, Philosophic Radicalism, op.cit., p.43.

2. William Thompson, An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth, (1824), pp.xviii-xix.

3. Ibid., p.6.

4. Ibid., pp.23ff. Cp. Lowenthal, op.cit., pp.20-23. Two of Bentham's letters to Thompson are published in his Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, pp.506-507. Both dated 1819, the first dealt with the establishment of a Chrestomathic school in Cork, the other invited Thompson to visit "my hermitage".

5. Thompson, op.cit., p.369.

"mutual co-operation, and equality of distribution" such as proposed by Robert Owen.<sup>1</sup> For the remainder of his lengthy book, he detailed some of the problems which were likely to arise in pursuing these aims, and their solutions. For example, he dismissed over-population as a threat to co-operative communities, believing like Godwin, "many generations, perhaps hundreds of years, would elapse before a failure of land, materials, and knowledge could render it necessary for such communities to remain stationary as to population."<sup>2</sup>

Many of these arguments were reiterated in Labour Rewarded (1827), partly a reply to Hodgskin's Labour Defended, but also a more outspoken re-statement of some of the ideas contained in this latter book. In 1830 Thompson published his last work which gave a detailed description of what co-operative villages involved.<sup>3</sup> What is known of Thompson's life has been pieced together by his biographer, who suggests that by speculating on the institution of property, putting forward co-operative ideas, and challenging classical economics, Thompson had a significant influence on J. S. Mill.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, he was well-known in co-operative circles, but probably at this time Mill closely identified him with Owen, whose views were "impracticable, & not

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1. Ibid., p.384.

2. Ibid., p.551.

3. Practical Directions for the Speedy and Economical Establishment of Communities on the Principles of Mutual Co-operation, United Possessions and Equality of Exertions, and of the Means of Enjoyments. Thompson advocated extending equality to women, and, as J.S. Mill recalled, published an "Appeal" against James Mill's remarks in an "Essay on Government", Autobiography, p.87.

4. Richard K.P. Pankhurst, William Thompson (1775-1833). Britain's Pioneer Socialist, Feminist and Co-operator, (1954), ch. 19, passim.

desirable if practicable."<sup>1</sup> As, later in life, Mill became more sympathetic towards co-operation, he may have remembered the earnest debates of his youth with Thompson, who, if he failed to convince the young Mill, at least had an enriching effect on the general intellectual climate of his time.

#### IV

Thomas Hodgskin, too, must have been known to Mill. In his long life, Hodgskin managed to touch upon most of the Whig-Radical features of English thought for a period of half a century. The son of a dockyard storekeeper, he was sent to sea at the age of twelve, served for thirteen years, and, following a dispute with the authorities, retired on half-pay. In 1813 he published An Essay on Naval Discipline, which strongly criticized conditions in the navy. In this book, Hodgskin declared himself a disciple of Locke, Paley and Malthus.<sup>2</sup> Coming to the notice of the London radicals, he began to correspond with Place, to whom he explained his rejection of Owen's system, which was too much like the navy with "rules, laws, and what is called order...His system...supposes masters and servants, somebody to govern as well as somebody to obey."<sup>3</sup> For a while Hodgskin came closer to Godwin's ideas. Rejecting Malthus's population principle, he sent to Place a statement of the reasons for this asking him to show it to Godwin.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Mill to Gustave d'Eichthal, 9 February, 1830, Letters, p.47. Cp. Mill to Carlyle, 25 November, 1833, ibid., p.193, where Owen and Fourier are linked in a critical comment.

2. Elie Halévy, Thomas Hodgskin, (trans. A.J. Taylor, 1956), p.31.

3. Hodgskin to Place, 20 August, 1816, quoted Halévy, op.cit., p.38.

4. Hodgskin to Place, 30 May, 1820, B.M. Add. MSS 35,153 f.159, quoted Halévy, op.cit., p.60.



Previous to this, possibly at the suggestion of Place and Mill, Hodgskin had travelled through parts of Europe with a view to making an investigation in the manner of Arthur Young, taking with him a questionnaire which Bentham had dictated to James Mill for him.<sup>1</sup> Having read M'Culloch's review in the Edinburgh of Ricardo's Principles, Hodgskin went to the original and derived much of his labour theory of value from Ricardo, as well as regularly seeing M'Culloch whose laissez faire ideas fitted in with his own mistrust of government. Through the good offices of James Mill who was a friend of John Black, editor of the Morning Chronicle, Hodgskin was found a post on that newspaper in 1822 or 1823, which ensured him a regular income while he pursued his other literary and economic interests. Despite his association with men like Place, M'Culloch, Bentham, and Mill, Hodgskin did not become a disciple. Rather were his ideas a synthesis of many writers and thinkers, especially a confused Lockean notion of natural rights applied to the validity of the labourer's claim to the fruit of his industry.

Hodgskin became active in the cause of working-class education, and in 1823 helped to establish the Mechanics' Magazine, which two years later published his short book, Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital. Lectures delivered by him at the London Mechanics Institute were printed in 1827 as Popular Political Economy.<sup>2</sup> He appears to have attracted a number of

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1. Halévy, Thomas Hodgskin, op.cit., p.40. Hodgskin's account appeared in two volumes, Travels in the North of Germany..., (Edinburgh, 1820). Vol. 2 contains a fairly sympathetic treatment of small farms.

2. Hodgskin explained his book was "popular" in its principles, as opposed to those principles "which have been made prevalent, though still unpopular, by the writings of Mr. Malthus", Preface, p.xix. For Hodgskin's part in the foundation of the London Mechanics' Institution, see Thomas Kelly, George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education, (Liverpool, 1957), ch. 5.

followers, including some disillusioned Owenites.<sup>1</sup> When the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge issued Charles Knight's The Rights of Industry, criticising the ideas associated with Hodgskin, he replied with The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted, (1832), which he addressed to Lord Brougham, the President of the S.D.U.K., whom Hodgskin disliked strongly.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the fact that James Mill wished to maintain utilitarian influence with Brougham partly explains the vigour of the letter he wrote about Hodgskin, but it also shows the moderation of the middle class radicals:

The nonsense to which your Lordship alludes about the rights of the labourer to the whole produce of the country, wages, profits, and rents, all included, is the mad nonsense of our friend Hodgkin /sic/ which he has published as a system and propagates with the zeal of perfect fanaticism. Whatever of it appears in the Chronicle steals in through his means, he being a sort of sub-editor, and Black not very sharp in detecting - but all Black's own opinions on the subject of property are sound. These opinions, if they were to spread, would be the subversion of civilised society; worse than the overwhelming deluge of Huns and Tartars.

3

Mill may have derived this information from Place, to whom he wrote on 25 October, 1831, asking about a deputation which had waited on Black, and whose "notions about property look ugly... the existence of it is an evil to them. Rascals, I have no doubt, are at work among them". Place answered on 26 October, 1831, that they were a small group preaching the doctrines promulgated by Hodgskin.<sup>4</sup>

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1. B.M. Add. MSS 27,791, f.263.

2. C.H. Driver, "Thomas Hodgskin and the Individualists", in F.J.C. Hearnshaw (ed.), The Social and Political Ideas of some Representative Thinkers in the Age of Reaction & Reconstruction 1815-1865, (1932), p.199. See also William F. Kennedy, "Lord Brougham, Charles Knight, and The Rights of Industry", Economica, vol. 29, (1962), pp.58-71.

3. Mill to Brougham, 3 September, 1832, quoted Bain, James Mill, p.364.

4. B.M. Add. MSS 27,790, f.23.

On the specific question of landed property, Hodgskin had relatively little to say, but his work was pregnant with implication. He believed that "political organization depends very much on the mode in which property is distributed",<sup>1</sup> but declared his ideas to be separate from those of Owenites and St. Simonians, as he looked "on a right of property - on the right of individuals to have and to own for their own support and selfish use and enjoyment the produce of their own industry".<sup>2</sup> It followed from this that property in land should be limited by the extent of the individual's labour: no man should take possession of more land than he himself could work.<sup>3</sup>

Hodgskin had, therefore, revived the Lockean slogan of "life, liberty, and property", but had sharpened its implications to such an extent that Marx could refer to Hodgskin's "admirable work" and derive communistic conclusions from his writings.<sup>4</sup> Like William Thompson, Hodgskin helped to enrich the climate of thought during this fertile period, although after the early 1830s he moved into the obscurity of anonymous journalism. His early support for the Chartists evaporated in favour of Cobdenite free trade, and in 1844 he joined the Economist.<sup>5</sup> He does not appear to have slipped socialistic propaganda into these pages, rather instead emphasising his antipathy to state interference. He opposed Herbert Spencer's demand for land nationalization in Social Statics, arguing that "what is usually called the

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1. The Natural and Artificial Right of Property Contrasted..., (1832), p.12.

2. Ibid., p.24.

3. Ibid., p.62.

4. Karl Marx, Capital, (1938, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling, ed. Dona Torr), p.348n.

5. For an account of this part of Hodgskin's career, Scott Gordon, "The London Economist and the High Tide of Laissez Faire", Journal of Political Economy, vol. 63, (1955), pp.469-475. A partial list of Hodgskin's articles in the Economist is given in Halévy, Thomas Hodgskin, pp.184-188.

produce of land is the produce of labour applied to the land" and therefore the entitlement was the labourer's.<sup>1</sup> But as a laissez faire radical, he supported free trade in land.<sup>2</sup> Landlords, moreover, were acquitted of any responsibility for the poor, for the loss of land was a matter of ancient history.<sup>3</sup> It may be that Hodgskin often had to write according to editorial directions, but in his 1848 review of Mill's Principles he could well be expressing his own opinions. Mill had not offered any discussion of Hodgskin in this or his other published works, but apart from the loose association which Hodgskin had with his father, Mill probably knew of some of Hodgskin's work, as in his article on "The Claims of Labour", Mill made reference to Charles Knight's The Rights of Industry which was partly written to demonstrate the falsity of Hodgskin's theories.<sup>4</sup>

Mill's Principles were described by Hodgskin as "a remarkable book, which will add to the great reputation of the author, and become a standard work."<sup>5</sup> Apart from an objection to Mill's "sentimentality", which, Hodgskin suggested, was caught from Sismondi, his longest criticism - based on a now-typical laissez faire argument - was that the laws of distribution were, despite

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1. Economist, 8 February, 1851, p.151.

2. Ibid., 13 December, 1856, p.1371.

3. Ibid., 1 November, 1846, p.1453.

4. For a discussion of "The Claims of Labour", which appeared in vol. 81 of the Edinburgh Review, (1845), see below, ch. 8. It is surprising that Mill subsequently paid so little attention to Hodgskin and his school; G.D.H. Cole, Socialist Thought: The Forerunners, 1789-1850, (1953), p.312, suggests it did not occur to Mill to consider these socialist economists in his critique of socialist theories.

5. Economist, 27 May, 1848, p.603.

what Mill said, no more alterable by man than the laws of production. But in his concluding remarks, an echo of Hodgskin's early views may be detected, as, too, may be, what is in a sense, a still greater radicalism than Mill's:

...it would be more valuable if the long dissertations on tenure of land were distinctly shown to refer to particular conditions of society which tolerate and justify at one time, as to land, what is intolerable and monstrously unjust and injurious at another. The original appropriation of the soil, for example, many centuries ago, was then a bearable evil; but its influence on the present condition of society, particularly in Ireland, has obviously become nothing less than destructive.

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V

No connection has been traced between Mill and John Francis Bray (1809-1897), who may be briefly noted as an admirer of Owen, and for his book which examined from a socialistic point of view the state of society. Born in America, Bray lived in England from 1822 to 1842, working in the printing trade and active in working class politics in the Leeds area.<sup>2</sup> In his book he urged that "THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS OF SOCIETY MUST BE TOTALLY SUBVERTED and supplanted by those more in accordance with the principles of justice and the rationality of man."<sup>3</sup> The earth

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1. Ibid., p.604.

2. For details of Bray's life: M.F. Jolliffe, "Fresh Light on John Francis Bray, Author of Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy", Economic History, vol. 4, (1939), pp.240-244; idem., "John Francis Bray", International Review for Social History, vol. 4, (1939), pp.1-38; H.J. Carr, "John Francis Bray", Economica, vol. 7, (1940), pp.397-415; Cole, op.cit., pp.132-139.

3. Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy..., (Leeds, 1839), p.17.

should be common property, "and the earth cannot be common property, nor can its blessings be either universally or equally enjoyed, under any system which admits individual appropriation of the soil." Where an individual right to one single inch of land existed, there would always be injustice, tyranny, and poverty; "equality of rights can never be enjoyed until all individual claims to landed property are subverted, and merged in those of the nation at large."<sup>1</sup> He was also anti-clerical and republican in his views.<sup>2</sup> Bray represents the working-class tradition, and, although within it seems to have had some temporary influence,<sup>3</sup> his only link with middle class radicals appears to be that he borrowed ideas from them.<sup>4</sup> For our purposes, Bray is important as an example of the intelligent artisan who presented an advanced Owenite analysis emphasising community of property.

Similar notions had been advanced by John Gray (1799-1883). Of Scottish origin, Gray received part of his education at Repton school, Derbyshire, afterwards being apprenticed to a wholesale

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1. Ibid., pp.33-34.

2. These ideas are also represented in Bray's A Voyage from Utopia, which survived in manuscript and was published in 1957, edited and introduced by M.F. Lloyd-Pritchard.

3. A sometimes unreliable witness, G.J. Holyoake, The History of Co-operation in England: its Literature and its Advocates, (2 vols, 1875-79), vol. 1, p.224, referred to Bray's "energetic little book," which "was a good deal read by co-operators of the time. It was a book of the period having no permanent relevance."

4. Lloyd-Pritchard, op.cit., Introduction, p.14.



merchant in Cheapside. Travelling to Scotland, he assisted for a while at Owen's Orbiston colony, but gave it up and published a criticism of it in 1826, based on the difficulty of treating individuals according to Owenite ideals when their character had already been formed for them by a different environment. The previous year his Lecture on Human Happiness had appeared. In this work Gray argued that "the foundation of all property is LABOUR, and there is no other just foundation for it."<sup>1</sup> Using the statistical tables compiled by Patrick Colquhoun in 1814, Gray asserted that the rich man took four fifths of the produce of the labouring man, when strictly he was entitled to nothing. If it was accepted that labour was the sole foundation of property, it followed that the earth was the natural inheritance of all mankind; no man could be a proprietor of land, for all had an equal right to dwell upon it. But, continued Gray, the application of labour would give the right to possession, though no man should occupy more land than he could work by his own labour. In effect this would abolish landlordism and produce a system of small farms, with labourers becoming proprietors.<sup>2</sup>

Gray continued to write in a utopian-Owenite vein for a number of years, but after about 1850 he became a successful businessman and repudiated socialism. In these writings, he was opposed to Malthus's population principle, although his general treatment of political economists was limited; he made

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1. A Lecture on Human Happiness..., (1825), p.34.

2. Ibid., pp.35-37.

no direct reference to Ricardo, but James Mill and M'Culloch were quoted.<sup>1</sup> Gray's personal influence was probably slight; as G. J. Holyoake remarked "his books never sold, nor could they be given away."<sup>2</sup> Rather is Gray typical of the vigorous plea for social change characteristic of proletarian ideas, ideas which often did not appear in books, but as ephemeral pamphlets, fugitive newspaper articles, letters to the press, or in debating societies, public meetings, and mechanics' institutes. These doctrines, anonymously seeping up into the consciousness of men like Mill, represented both a challenge to the existing social order and helped to stimulate established thought. When Mill in the 1840s began to look sympathetically on communistic experiments, it was in part a response to ideas like those of Bray and Gray.

## VI

The name of another writer active in the 1820s, "Piercy Ravenstone", is almost certainly a pseudonym. Max Beer described Ravenstone as a "seminal mind" of the period and as "essentially a Tory Democrat".<sup>3</sup> Joseph Dorfman referred to him as a "Radical Tory" and has argued skilfully that "Piercy Ravenstone" concealed the identity of a retired Anglican clergyman, Edward Edwards.<sup>4</sup>

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1. For an outline of Gray's ideas on these aspects, Janet Kimball, The Economic Doctrines of John Gray - 1799-1883, (Washington, 1948).

2. Holyoake, op.cit., vol. 1, p.368.

3. M. Beer, A History of British Socialism, (1940 ed.), vol. 1, p.251.

4. Joseph Dorfman, Introduction to Piercy Ravenstone, A Few Doubts as to the Correctness of Some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subject of Population and Political Economy, (New York, 1966; 1st ed., 1821), pp.17ff.

Whether or not this attribution is valid - and the evidence for it is tenuous - there was some affinity between the thought of Edwards and Ravenstone, and the two can be considered together.

Ricardo thought A Few Doubts, "though full of the greatest errors" had "some good things in it" and wrote so to Mill.<sup>1</sup> Ricardo also recommended the book to Malthus, who, not surprisingly in view of Ravenstone's opposition to his theories, was much cooler about it.<sup>2</sup> Ravenstone devoted about a third of his work to an attempt to show the falsity of Malthus's doctrine, having been encouraged to do this by reading Godwin's Essay on Population.<sup>3</sup> On the question of property, Ravenstone argued that he who killed a bear was entitled to its skin, "but it is not equally evident that he who first tills a field should acquire any continued property in the land."<sup>4</sup> However, it was not the rights of property he wished to question, wrote Ravenstone, but to restrain their abuse, for where there was most wealth, there was most misery: "Great Britain is oppressed with capital even to plethory, and her labourers are starving; America complains of the deficiency of her capital, but her people are rich and happy."<sup>5</sup> Rent, he continued, was the modern equivalent of slavery, "the idle man's share of the industrious man's earnings".<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ricardo to James Mill, 28 August, 1821, Works, (ed Sraffa), vol. 9, p.45.

2. Ricardo to Malthus, 10 September, 1821, ibid., pp.62-63; Malthus to Ricardo, 13 September, 1821, ibid., p.64.

3. A Few Doubts, op.cit., p.iii.

4. Ibid., p.198.

5. Ibid., p.207.

6. Ibid., p.209.

The old peasantry were far superior in fare and accommodation than the present day labourer; in earlier times almost every cultivator was a holder of land.<sup>1</sup> After analysing the faults of society, Ravenstone went on to propose what should be undertaken as a remedy. The best arrangement was that in which the landowners acted as trustees for the benefit of the state and performed duties such as the defence of the realm, the administration of justice, etc., in return for the rights received by them. Such an organization of landed property was favoured by Ravenstone, as "lands cannot be advantageously held by that metaphysical person the state. What was property to all would in fact be property to none", while, "the other alternative, that of distributing the land into equal portions is not attended with fewer difficulties...it is in fact restoring man to a state of nature."<sup>2</sup>

Enclosures had converted many millions of acres of land from being virtually the property of the poor to being the property of the rich, and in later years the condition of the labouring classes had become much worse; "On this point there is no dispute", Ravenstone continued, "the only controversy is, as to the cause of their increased misery."<sup>3</sup> Some had foolishly attributed it to an excess of population, a notion that had been refuted. The real cause was an increase in taxation, and he proposed that taxes should be raised solely from property, instead of the industry of the labourer.

Also significant in Ravenstone's work was his reference to France and a refutation of Arthur Young. Previous to the French

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1. Ibid., p.220.

2. Ibid., p.237.

3. Ibid., p.263.

Revolution, the condition of the great body of the people of England "was vastly superior to that of the people of France", but the position had been reversed.<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young, said Ravenstone, "ascribed the misery of the French peasantry before the revolution to their having outgrown the means of subsistence," but since his day the numbers had greatly increased, demonstrating the falsity of Young's theory. Equally, Malthus's doctrine, that misery was due to a rise in the numbers of the labouring classes, was unsound, as "the increase of population which removed the wretchedness of the French, cannot have caused that of the English."<sup>2</sup> England's trouble was the same as that which had ruled in France: there was too great an idle class, supported by heavy taxation. But in France, the "revolution restored the rights of industry, by curtailing the pretensions of property."<sup>3</sup> Ravenstone elaborated these arguments and ended with a plea to remove the burden pressing on the great body of the people and "restore them to their natural rights", for property could have no security when its claims were upheld by force; England should take a warning from France before a revolution be brought about.<sup>4</sup>

Three years later, Ravenstone published a short, eighty-page book, which repeated some of these ideas. He began by noting that when land was the only property, "the gentry were a militia always bound to obey the call of the nation: their estates were their stipend, which they spent as they pleased when not required for the service of the country."<sup>5</sup> But the funding system had

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1. Ibid., p.283.

2. Ibid., p.285.

3. Ibid., p.287.

4. Ibid., p.473.

5. Thoughts on the Funding System and its Effects, (1824; reprinted New York, 1966), p.3.

emerged and with it, the aristocracy of wealth, which looked upon men "but as the means of cultivation".<sup>1</sup> Ravenstone expounded a physiocratic view of land as the sole source of wealth, arguing that "as only one-fifth part of the people are now employed in the cultivation of the land, the rest must in reality live on the produce of their industry."<sup>2</sup> The Debt had robbed the ancient gentry of their land, transferring it to "these new fangled hidaglos as a reward for their skill in the arts of fraud and speculation."<sup>3</sup> The number of landowners was estimated at 10,000, and although there was danger in great masses of wealth and the funding system had helped to break these up, it meant that:

one-third of the property of the country has been handed over to Jews and usurers, whilst another third has only escaped from their fangs by the aid of a law, which, artificially raising the price of bread, has carried misery and famine to every cottage in the kingdom.

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Paying off the national debt would not restore things, for those who grew rich by its creation had hastened "to exchange their ill-gotten pelf for the more substantial possession of land."<sup>5</sup>

There is more than a trace of Cobbett's ideas in Ravenstone, with his opposition to Malthus and paper money, while his description of the exponents of the new political economy as "blockheads" might have been taken from the pages of the Political Register.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ravenstone gave the same definition of rent as in his first book - "the idle man's share of the industrious man's earnings - ibid., p.44. The notion of "rent" was at this time a confused one. Against the several theories of political economists may be set a whole range of moral attitudes. A study of the idea of rent in this period would be instructive.

2. Ibid., p.46.

3. Ibid., p.51.

4. Ibid., p.58.

5. Ibid. Although many of his economic ideas were muddled, Ravenstone had the perspicacity to realise that the national debt was not a burden: "nothing was received by the state when it was created, so nothing will be given when it is annihilated", ibid., p.61.

6. Ibid., p.67. Beer, op.cit., p.252, described Ravenstone as a "Cobbett édition de luxe."



His sympathy for the labourer and the old order of things offers another parallel with Cobbett. These features were also characteristic of the writings of Edward Edwards (1789-1832).

About Edwards little is known, other than that he was a retired Anglican clergyman who acted for John Murray as literary adviser on articles published in the Quarterly Review in the 1820s and who also wrote for the other leading Tory organ, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.<sup>1</sup> Like Ravenstone, Edwards argued the case for agriculture against those who emphasised manufactures as the basis of wealth,<sup>2</sup> and there was a very close affinity between their ideas on the condition of the labourer, of whom Edwards wrote:

That an all but universal change for the worse has taken place in the condition and habits of this most important class, is a lamentable and admitted fact; - that honesty, sobriety, industry, and contentment have disappeared almost entirely among a body of men once remarkable for these virtues, is a truth which no person conversant with the present state of our country parishes will venture to controvert.

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However, Edwards went on to suggest allotments and cow-keeping as a solution, a remedy not advanced by Ravenstone. But this does not rule out the two being the same person. The articles known to be by Edwards have inconsistencies. Thus, in an early article he rejected the cultivation of waste lands as a means of relieving distress in favour of emigration,<sup>4</sup> but the following year recommended "emigration to the uncultivated wastes and unreclaimed bogs of Great Britain and Ireland."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Edwards took up the cause with such enthusiasm as to suggest his conversion

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1. Dorfman, op.cit., p.18.

2. /Edward Edwards/, "On Agriculture and Rent", Quarterly Review, vol. 36, (1827), pp.391-437.

3. /Edward Edwards/, "Condition of the English Peasantry", ibid., vol. 41, (1829), pp.240-241.

4. /Edward Edwards/, "The Corn Laws", ibid., vol. 35, (1827), p.282.

5. /Edward Edwards/, "Cultivation of Waste Lands", ibid., vol. 38, (1828), p.411.

to allotments was a recent one. This would explain why he had favoured emigration in his article of 1827 and why, if he was Ravenstone, his books of 1821 and 1824, while sympathetic towards the labourer, did not propose allotments.

Edwards's discussion was typical of the mixed motives surrounding the allotments movement during this period. Essentially, as we have seen, a paternalistic and socially conservative expedient, allotments nevertheless attracted support - and aroused opposition - from most quarters. In the past, noted Edwards, cultivation had been extended through the instrument of small farms, as in Flanders. Allotments might have the same function, and the wastes should be considered as "the people's farm", and divided accordingly.<sup>1</sup> The prevailing system of occupancy meant the labourer, no matter how hard-working, could not hope to better his condition; the "'bold peasantry' which once formed the glory and security of these realms" had been annihilated.<sup>2</sup> Passing from Goldsmith to Wordsworth, Edwards quoted from "Michael" to show the enviable position of the Lakeland "statesmen", and deplored the opposition of economists, who looked with horror on the cultivation of waste, "the land 'last taken into cultivation' is with them an object of utter loathing."<sup>3</sup>

But the case for allotments was usually couched in terms which would appeal to the self-interest of the upper classes, and Edwards was no exception. He urged that the industry of the labourer would be stimulated as he would tend his allotment

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1. Ibid., p.432.

2. Ibid., p.434.

3. Ibid., p.436.

during his spare time which ordinarily might have been used for idleness or dissipation. In a later article, Edwards thought it possible that unemployed paupers would, by using waste ground, be able to provide their own food.<sup>1</sup> Returning to the subject in 1830, Edwards combined an attack on political economists with the advocacy of allotments. Landlords had been led to view cottages with horror, due to "the gross and pernicious absurdities of the Malthusian School."<sup>2</sup> The "wicked experiments of the Economists" had, moreover, drawn too many people into towns.<sup>3</sup> It was possible for the countryside to support these people given the allotment system, while land so let yielded a much higher rent than the common farmer could pay. It was a blessing to the poor and "extremely profitable to the rich capitalist".<sup>4</sup> This was the solution for over-population, declared Edwards, "let the people of Britain have but a free trade in land and cottages, and we care not one farthing to what other branches of industry this principle may be extended."<sup>5</sup>

Edwards's keenness to advance allotments as a remedy for excess population, and his hostility to Malthusianism was demonstrated by a letter written by him to Lockhart, the editor of the Quarterly Review. In it he asked to be allowed to review Michael Sadler's The Law of Population, which exposed the "miserable sophism" on which the Malthusian theory was based.<sup>6</sup>

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1. /Edward Edwards/, "Home Colonies", ibid., vol. 41, (1829), p.547.

2. /Edward Edwards/, "The Influence of Free Trade upon the Condition of the Labouring Classes", Blackwood's, vol. 27, (1830), p.554.

3. Ibid., p.567.

4. Ibid., p.568.

5. Ibid. This must be one of the earliest usages of the expression "free trade in land" which became a widely adopted slogan in the second half of the nineteenth century.

6. Edwards to J. Gibson Lockhart, 26 April, 1830, quoted by Dorfman, op.cit., p.19.

Such an article would serve as an introduction to his allotment scheme, for "the ground would...be greatly cleared of the objections which are usually urged against the system of dividing land to be occupied in small allotments - namely that by rendering the peasant comfortable and happy it encourages the wickedness of procreation and tends in the end to aggravate the evil for which it is suggested as a present remedy."<sup>1</sup>

The reason why Edwards began to contribute to Blackwood's rather than the Quarterly is not known, but certainly Blackwood's was closer editorially to his views.<sup>2</sup> Despite early criticisms by Robert Southey, the Quarterly came round to accept Malthus's population principle in reviews by J. B. Sumner and George Taylor.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Malthus had become a contributor to the Quarterly in 1823 and contributed two major articles on economic matters in reply to the Ricardian school.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Edwards's view of Malthus was out of sympathy with that of the Quarterly's proprietorship. Blackwood's on the other hand, was a haven of old fashioned Toryism which regretted the challenge of the newly-monied classes to the old aristocracy, and delighted in ridiculing the political economists. Edwards could write, for example, of the sufferings of the Irish peasantry, while "the school of philosophers, of which Mr. Malthus is the acknowledged

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1. Ibid., p.20. Sadler's book was reviewed by G. Poulett Scrope, who took a mildly critical view of Malthus: Quarterly Review, vol. 45, (1831).

2. Edwards contributed ten, possibly eleven, articles to the Quarterly between 1826 and 1830 and seven to Blackwood's: one in 1829, the remainder in 1830, see the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, (Toronto, 1966), p.885.

3. /J.B. Sumner/, "Malthus on Population", Quarterly Review, vol. 17, (1817); /George Taylor/, "Godwin and Malthus on Population", ibid., vol. 26, (1821).

4. /T.R. Malthus/, "Tooke on High and Low Prices", ibid., vol. 29, (1823); /T.R. Malthus/, "Political Economy", ibid., vol. 30, (1824).

oracle, will defend these monstrous and unrelenting measures."<sup>1</sup>

Although his writings appeared in Tory organs, Edwards, like Ravenstone, cannot easily be classified. Unlike Thompson and Bray, who, with Owen, looked forward to a new view of society, they had a nostalgia for a disappearing way of life - or perhaps one which never existed - comprising a hierarchical structure of paternalistic landlord and contented peasant, or of independent statesmen. They pointed to problems often without being able to discover solutions.<sup>2</sup> A well-ordered society, without political economists and nouveau riche financiers, was their ideal, and this they shared with others whose social thought was reactionary.<sup>3</sup> But their motives were not selfish as was often the case among conservatives, and it was this absence of ulterior design that characterised Mill's thought when he came to consider similar questions.

## VII

E. P. Thompson has perceptively argued that while Owenism touched one of the deepest responses of the poor - the dream that they might again have some stake in the land - its "vitiating weakness" was its renunciation of expropriation of the great landowners in favour of reaffirming the "sacred" nature of property.<sup>4</sup> If Owen's indifference to political means

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1. /Edward Edwards/, "Poor Laws in Ireland", Blackwood's, vol. 27, (1830), p.753.

2. See Hodgskin's comment on Ravenstone, Popular Political Economy, op.cit., p.77.

3. Ravenstone's sympathy with the results of the French Revolution was however very un-conservative. Since Burke, conservative writers had adopted a hostile position, and generally it was the Liberal-Radical tradition which gained inspiration from the Revolution.

4. Thompson, The Making the English Working Class, op.cit., p.805 and ch.16, passim.

meant that he never attained the whole-hearted support of radical working-class leaders, his ideas were equally unacceptable to Benthamite reformers. Bentham had been an investor in Owen's New Lanark venture, but despite this, and a certain similarity between his panopticon scheme of pauper management and Owen's "parallelgrams", he spoke with hostility against him. If Bowring is to be believed, Bentham's opinion was:

Robert Owen begins in vapour and ends in smoke. He is a great braggadoccio. His mind is a maze of confusion, and he avoids coming to particulars. He is always the same - says the same things over and over again. He built some small houses; and people, who had no houses of their own, went to live in those houses - and he calls this a success. 1

The political economists were blamed by Owen for the rejection of his plan by the Committee for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor in 1817.<sup>2</sup> Ricardo was to declare himself in the House of Commons as being "completely at war" with the schemes of Owen, which he considered to be "built upon a theory inconsistent with the principles of political economy."<sup>3</sup> Owen's proposals fell foul of the principle of population. As Ricardo wrote to Hutches Trower, allowing that Owen was a "benevolent enthusiast", but ignorant of economic principles: he has heard of Malthus doctrine /sic/ and has an antipathy to it", appearing "to think nothing necessary to production and the happiness of a crowded population, but land."<sup>4</sup> Whether Owen advocated birth-control as a solution to the problem of over-population has not

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1. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, pp.570-571.

2. J.R. Poynter, op.cit., p.259.

3. Speech on the motion of Sir W. Crespigny that a select committee be appointed to inquire into Owen's plan, Works, (ed. Sraffa), vol. 5, p.30, 16 Dec. 1819.

4. Ricardo to Trower, 8 July, 1819, ibid., vol. 8, p.45.



been firmly established. Contemporaries believed he did and, on balance his complicity appears more probable than not. Ricardo mentioned "Owen's preventives to an excessive population" in a letter to Malthus."<sup>1</sup> Place wrote in the Black Dwarf that Owen had travelled to France to procure devices by which the French peasantry limited the size of their families.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, documents in Owen's papers show that he had an interest in contraceptive techniques.<sup>3</sup> Owen, however, denied that he supported birth control.<sup>4</sup> Earlier remarks made by him, which were considered irreligious, lost him sympathisers such as Wilberforce and it may well be that he feared the effect on his schemes of hostile public opinion fanned by the emotive issue of contraception.

Until he criticised established religion, Owen had much support among the prominent and respectable to whom his ideas appeared in no way politically radical but rather as philanthropic. He hoped to obtain financial assistance from the government to launch a project scheme, but after harming his case by the London Tavern Speech in 1817, he received a further blow when Torrens wrote a review of Owen's plan, breaking the dreams of community-building on the wheel of orthodox political economy.<sup>5</sup> From this time, no attention was accorded to Owenite

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1. Ricardo to Malthus, 10 September, 1821, ibid., vol. 9, p.62.

2. Norman E. Himes, "The Place of John Stuart Mill and Robert Owen in the History of English Neo-Malthusianism", Quarterly Journal of Economics, vol. 42, (1928), p.634.

3. Peel, loc.cit., pp.17-18.

4. In a letter to the Morning Chronicle, 8 October, 1827, quoted Himes, 'The Place of J. S. Mill', loc.cit., p.639.

5. /R. Torrens/, "Mr. Owen's Plans for relieving the National Distress", Edinburgh Review, vol. 32, (1819).

schemes by the mainstream of political economists.<sup>1</sup>

Owen was to preach his gospel, which became increasingly millenarian in character, for many more years. By his energy and monomania, Owen managed with the aid of disciples to keep his ideas before the public, and his followers injected an element of them into such movements as co-operation, chartism and trade unionism. Essentially conservative schemes for allotments and the colonization of wastes may, too, have owed some of their inspiration to the concept of Owenite villages. But, while he still occasionally came into contact with middle class radicals, they had little time for what Place called his "absurd notions".<sup>2</sup>

#### VIII

Generally, working class politics were much too turbulent, chiliastic, and quarrelsome for middle class reformers. To Cobbett and his followers, the "Scotch feelosofers" such as Mill and M'Culloch, and Change Alley Jews like Ricardo, were tarred with the same brush as "The Thing". Cobbett declared that "moderate reform" was like "moderate chastity in a wife".<sup>3</sup> All the ability of the nineteenth century's greatest popular

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1. J.F.C. Harrison, Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America: The Quest for the New Moral World, (1969), p.67.

2. By the 1830s Place, like many others, treated Owen with an amused scorn; on 7 January 1836 he recorded: "Mr. Owen has this day assured me in the presence of more than 30 other persons that within 6 months the whole state and condition of society in great Britain will be changed and all his views will be carried fully into effect", B.M. Add. MSS 27,791, f.266b. Polite society too tended to dismiss Owen with a joke; Thomas Moore, for example, recorded on 9 January, 1832: "In talking of some of Lanark Owen's speeches, &c., Talbot said, that though he builds in parellelograms he argues in circles", Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence, op.cit., vol. 6, p.242.

3. Quoted by W. Baring Pemberton, William Cobbett, (Harmondsworth, 1949), p.163n. The comparison may not have been drawn in the first place by Cobbett who, in his Advice to Young Men, (1830) Letter III, credited Major Cartwright with using the expression to a Peer "who had not been over-fortunate in his matrimonial affairs".

journalist was devoted to the demand for sweeping changes, and, despite his faults, Cobbett had immense influence, especially after November 1816 when he circumvented the newspaper tax. His "Twopenny Trash" probably had as great a circulation and a wider readership than The Times; the Register sold perhaps 40,000-50,000 copies per week and each copy frequently came to the attention of scores of readers, at a time when the daily circulation of The Times was some 6,000-7,000.<sup>1</sup> He was, to use Hazlitt's expression, "a kind of fourth estate in the politics of the country."<sup>2</sup> And of course, this influence was directed against political economy, which Cobbett described as:

a heap of rubbishy paragraphs, written by a man who 'made half a million of money by watching the turn of the market', and another such a heap, written by a Parson, who proposed to starve the working people, to cheat their breeding children. 3

Cobbett linked the political economists with the spread of paper money, which had in turn drawn property into large masses. Thus the evils besetting society might all be lumped together:

if we could make the enumeration, we should, I am convinced, find, that paper money, large farms, fine houses, pauperism, hangings, transportation, leprosy, scrofula and insanity, have all gone on increasing regularly together. 4

Cobbett's ideal was one of rustic felicity: small independent owners and self-respecting peasants, living simple

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1. A. Aspinall, "The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, vol. 22, (1946), pp.39-40.

2. Hazlitt, "Character of Cobbett", Complete Works, (ed. Howe, 1931), vol. 8, p.50.

3. Political Register, 4 September, 1825. Other examples of Cobbett's abuse for Malthus and Ricardo are quoted by Bonar, Letters of David Ricardo to Thomas Robert Malthus, op.cit., pp.161-162.

4. "To Mr. Coke on the Question of Large Farms and Small Farms and on the Fall of the System out of which they have arisen," Political Register, 26 May, 1821.

vigorous lives, practising the honest virtues of brewing, bread-making and cow-keeping as described in his Cottage Economy (1822). "I wish", he avowed, "to see the poor men of England what the poor men of England were when I was born."<sup>1</sup> To Cobbett, agriculture was unquestionably the basis of all wealth and well-being, as he wrote: "From the land all the good things come".<sup>2</sup> His habit of looking back to a golden past is well-illustrated by his history of the Reformation, which, while purporting to be historical in its nature, contained many lessons for the times. In it he recalled England before the time of the Norman Conquest, when Alfred, perhaps "the greatest man that ever lived" founded the monasteries.<sup>3</sup> They enabled the people to live in happiness and freedom, for the revenues from the land which they held were diffused among the sick and needy. But, maintained Cobbett, this system was destroyed by the Reformation when the lands became private property. In this seizure, even the Abbey where Alfred's remains lay buried was destroyed, and "the estates were so disposed of as to make the loan-makers, the BARINGS, at this day, the successors to Alfred the Great!"<sup>4</sup>

Cobbett believed the Reformation had made thousands into thieves by hunger and established pauperism by law. Yet reform would not come by overthrowing government; "we should lose more than we should gain by getting rid of our aristocracy." The

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1. Ibid., 28 February, 1807.

2. A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, (2 vols, 1829), vol. 1, para.150.

3. Ibid., para.147.

4. Ibid., para.185.

republican government of Pennsylvania was the basest he had ever known, so Cobbett, with characteristic logic, declared it followed that he was for an aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> The aristocracy, however, should discharge its duties to the poor. Private property had arisen out of civil society, for in a state of nature, the lands were for the common use of all the people. This right was given up as part of a social compact, but the people had never contemplated that,

the lives of the millions would ever be placed at the mere mercy of the thousands, or, perhaps, of the hundreds. MALTHUS denies the right of the poor to relief; he denies that they have any right to claim relief from those who hold the lands and houses as their private property.

2

He returned to the obligations of property in one of his last published works, the Legacy to Labourers, dedicated to Sir Robert Peel, and sub-titled, What is the Right which the Lords, Baronets, and Squires have to the Lands of England? In it, he wrote of the "monstrous encroachments of the aristocracy and of the usurers" within the last fifty years.<sup>3</sup> The reformed parliament, instead of restoring good government, had passed the poor law act, based on the argument of an increase in population. Stubborn to the end, and after three censuses of population, Cobbett refused to accept that numbers were rising; it was a "prodigious national lie", which he would leave for the S.D.U.K. to use; in fact, England and Wales had been more populous fifty years previously.<sup>4</sup> Men like Peel, Wellington and Brougham had, Cobbett averred, said the poor law bill was necessary to preserve the lords' estates from the

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1. Ibid., para.153.

2. Ibid., vol. 2, para.20.

3. Cobbett's Legacy to Labourers..., (3rd ed., 1835), p.6.

4. Ibid., p.11.

grasp of the poor people, but, he declared, "I think it proper to ask WHAT IS THE RIGHT, that lords, baronets, and 'squires have to possess the land, and to make the laws?"<sup>1</sup>

In the Legacy, Cobbett marshalled most of the radical's arguments on property together with a lifetime's prejudices. Authorities from the Bible to Blackstone were cited to show that all men had a claim to share in the earth. Cobbett appealed to natural justice and declared against the possession of land arising from the Conquest. Malthus was attacked as bitterly as ever. In a period when few men had any extensive knowledge of history, Cobbett's confidently-asserted and strongly-expressed version must have seemed highly plausible, and, although his muddle-headedness and irrationality, as well as his tendency to over-simplify problems, meant that in his actions and writings there was a degree of inconsistency, to most of his readers this would have gone largely unnoticed. As well as great abilities, Cobbett had faults. A habit of firing off in all directions and the occasional volte face, together with a large share of self-esteem, made him difficult to work with. He was accused of being a traitor to the reform movement because of his support for the Whigs in 1830. Henry Hunt said Cobbett's career had been one of hypocrisy and deceit, and charged him with being a "mean, dirty, grovelling knave."<sup>2</sup> Bentham described Hunt and Cobbett as being like "the rabid animals devouring one another in a drop of water."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., pp.38-39.

2. Henry Hunt, The Preston Cock's Reply to the Kensington Dunghill: Two-penny Exposure of Cobbett's Fourteen-pennyworth of Falsehoods, (1831), p.5.

3. Bentham to O'Connell, 13 September, 1828, Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.601.



Place told Mill that Hunt was an "ignorant, turbulent, mischief-making fellow" and it was "miserable to see the avidity with which they (he /Hunt/ and his political friends) sought to cut each other's throats".<sup>1</sup> Bentham thought Cobbett "a vile rascal"<sup>2</sup> and "an odious mixture of egoism, malignity, insincerity and mendacity."<sup>3</sup> For his part, Cobbett regarded Bentham as a man of dangerous ideas, not least because of his republicanism.<sup>4</sup>

Although the utilitarians believed both Cobbett and Owen to be wrong-headed, these two main leaders of opinion had little in common. Cobbett was essentially backward-looking, to a half-mythical yeoman England. Owen cherished a belief in a future utopia built upon co-operative enterprise. Although both had appeared respectable in their early careers, Owen was still courting Wilberforce, while Cobbett had for long poured hatred on the Evangelical leader; yet Cobbett's work was full of appeals to the Christian religion, while Owen gained a reputation for free thought. They were at odds on the questions of birth-control and the monarchy and aristocracy. Cobbett visited New Lanark and was

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1. Place to James Mill, 2 September, 1816, quoted Wallas, op.cit., pp.119-120. Place fell out with Cobbett in 1810, and subsequently referred to him in terms such as "impudent mountebank" or "unprincipled cowardly bully", ibid., p.117.

2. Bentham to Mr. Mulford, 9 July, 1812, Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.471.

3. Bentham to an unnamed member of the Government, 22 June, 1831, ibid., vol. 11, p.68. In this letter, Bentham counselled the Whig Government not to prosecute Cobbett, whose character was roundly condemned.

4. John W. Osborne, William Cobbett: His Thought and His Times, (New Brunswick, 1966), p.82.

contemptuous of the "eccentric folly" of Owen's Plan.<sup>1</sup> In the agitations of the 1820s and early 1830s there was no co-operation between the two men; Owen, who spent several years in America, was committed to establishing communities, while Cobbett roundly abused the system in general. Cobbett seldom referred to Owen, and the odd instances are generally abusive, as for example his remark about:

that 'humane' half-mad and beastly fellow  
OWEN...who the beastly feelosofers tell us,  
went to the Continent to find out how to  
teach the labouring people to live in a  
married state without having children.

2

In the longer term, each made a contribution to the land question. Cobbett by emphasising lost rights and the possession of the land by a few landlords, Owen by pointing to a socialistic organization of property. Neither, however, advocated direct repossession of the land by the people. They would have disassociated themselves from the proposals of levellers and Spenceans and made clear that they wished to work within the legal framework as it then existed. Their greatest common characteristic lay in the frontal challenge which they made to the social and political arrangements of the day and the energy with which they sustained it over many years. The propaganda of Cobbett, Owen and their followers must have had an immeasurable educative influence on radical thought, and even Mill came to acknowledge Cobbett's contribution when he wrote to Leigh Hunt:

It was not yourself only, & Hazlitt, &  
Cobbett; Godwin & Bentham, & my father,

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1. William Cobbett, Rural Rides, (ed. G.D.H. & Margaret Cole, 3 vols, 1930), vol. 3, p.841.

2. Ibid., vol. 2, p.404. Only near the end of his life did Cobbett have any association with Owen, when John Fielden persuaded him to join the National Regeneration Society.

& various others, had laboured for radicalism with more or less of acceptance...we are now benefitting by what was then done. 1

But for the most part, the Benthamite radicals were alienated by the recklessness of men like Cobbett. However, they were to be found on occasions working with some of the radicals. We have noted John Mill's meeting in Paris with the political refugee George Kinloch, and numerous contacts can be traced in the post-1815 period between the Benthamites and popular radicals such as Wooler, Hone, Burdett, Richard Carlile and Cartwright. Just as, in the 1830s, J. S. Mill sustained many of the features of utilitarianism of the previous decade, he continued the tradition of seeking to influence, and at times working with, men whose ideas were often more radical than his own.

We next consider radical ideas on land in the 1830s and '40s.

## IX

The illegitimate son of a Frenchwoman and Robert Norris of Manchester, Rowland Detrosier (or Detroisier) made a short but significant impact on radical politics in the late 1820s and early 1830s.<sup>2</sup> Like Francis Place, he married at nineteen,

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1. Mill to Leigh Hunt, 20 November, 1837, Letters, p.359.  
2. The short account of Detrosier's life by Gwyn A. Williams, Rowland Detrosier: A Working-Class Infidel (1800-34), (Borthwick Papers No. 28, York, 1965), is admirable and largely supersedes the brief sketch by W.E. Styler, "Rowland Detroisier", Adult Education, vol. 21, (1949), pp.133-138.

endured poverty, worked as a tailor, and due to irregularity of employment was able to study books. From these efforts, he became a lecturer at first on scientific topics and later on a wider range of subjects. As his reputation developed, Bentham was amongst those who took an interest in him and presented him with some books. When Detrosier came to London from Lancashire in 1831 he was, as a capable and promising young thinker, lionised by a number of middle class radicals. John Mill befriended him, and, finding him "eager, ardent, and indefatigably laborious", told Carlyle that Detrosier would "thrive best under my teaching just now".<sup>1</sup> Although his background was working class, and it was on behalf of this class that Detrosier campaigned, he was a moderate who spurned physical force, and emphasised the importance of knowledge. Largely self-taught, he became a gifted teacher and lecturer. Speaking at Saville House to the members of the National Political Union, on 26 March, 1832, he stressed the need for education among the people; for, without it, arising from distress:

The fury of a day might destroy the labours of a century - the madness of an infuriated people, level with the dust the very property paid for by their labours, and which they ought to defend, and which they will defend, wherever they shall become capable of acting on the conviction that national property is the people's property.

2

In this lecture, he quoted from the "excellent article" in the Westminster Review on Bentham's Fallacies, and took a

1. Mill to Carlyle, 5 October, 1833, Letters, p.183. According to George Jacob Holyoake, John Stuart Mill as some of the Working Class Knew Him, (1873), p.8, Mill came to know Detrosier through Place.
2. Rowland Detrosier, Lecture on the Utility of Political Unions, for the Diffusion of Sound Moral & Political Information among the People; on the Necessity for that Information, and on the Political Influence of Scientific Knowledge, (1832), p.6. Similar ideas can be found in Detrosier's An Address on the Necessity of an Extension of Moral and Political Instruction among the Working Classes, with a memoir of the author, (n.d., ?1834). The memoir was written by John Shuttleworth; the copy in Manchester Central Library has MSS notes added by Shuttleworth.

utilitarian approach in favour of free trade, which he preferred to a policy of home colonization as this would mean dear food. Towards the end of his life, Detrosier was moving from the working class politics of the provinces towards a more orthodox and respectable position on the fringe of the Benthamite coterie. His Malthusianism, together with a rejection of Owenism in favour of the new political economy, foreshadowed this departure, but unfortunately for Mill's plan to convert him into a protégé and a philosophic radical, Detrosier died from a chill received after giving a public lecture in November, 1834. Like Bentham, he left his remains to science.

Mill made similar overtures to another promising young radical, William Bridges Adams, (1797-1872). Adam's first wife was Francis Place's daughter, Elizabeth, and his second, whom he married in 1834 was Sarah Flower, a ward of W. J. Fox. It was for Fox's Monthly Repository that Adams became a prolific contributor between 1832 and 1836.<sup>1</sup> His work was signed "Junius Redivivus", and under this pseudonym, Adams wrote other tracts which were published by Effingham Wilson.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these urged the people to make use of the concessions gained by the passing of the Reform Act. It was a custom of the English people, Adams stated, to talk of "Rights", yet only a very small proportion of them in fact possessed any.<sup>3</sup>

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1. The Mechanics Magazine, the Tatler, the True Sun, the New Monthly Magazine, and the Examiner were other journals to which Adams contributed on a variety of subjects in the early 1830s.

2. Wilson, (1783-1868) was responsible for many radical books and pamphlets; Wade, Howitt, and Ensor also had works published by him. He did not, however, go beyond "respectable" radicalism, while another of his publications was a cheap pamphlet to discredit "Captain Swing": R.K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848, (1955), p.108. Frederick Boase, Modern English Biography, (1901), vol. 3, column 1408 gives a short notice of Wilson.

3. Junius Redivivus, What the People Ought to do, in Choosing Their Representatives at the General Election, after the Passing of the Reform Bill, (1832), p.3.

Agitation for the restoration of these rights had led the Tories to use opprobrious terms against the reformers:

Levellers, Jacobins, Republicans, Radicals have been the terms of abuse bestowed upon them in turn; and those who did not know the meaning of the words, took it for granted that they must be something very horrible - a kind of horrid devil at the least. 1

Adams developed his polemic by saying that while the pickpockets might cry "stop thief", they could not repeatedly, for "the schoolmaster was abroad". After trying to stop the education of the people, they sent out "sham schoolmasters; a species of Tories in disguise, called Whigs".<sup>2</sup> After making what was amongst radicals, the almost customary reference to the "glorious band of patriots" of the Protectorate,<sup>3</sup> Adams went on to list the pledges which should be sought. These were typical of the demands put forward by the fairly advanced reformer of the time, but stopped short of the ultra-radical programme. Included amongst the pledges Adams demanded were an extension of the suffrage; the ballot; annual or biennial parliaments; provision of schools at public expense; an end to the standing army; taxes to be raised only on property; the abolition of monopolies; import duties to be removed; jurisdiction over colonies abandoned, and free access to, and reports of, parliamentary debates.

Like many others who shared his political convictions, Adams was disappointed with the results of the Reform Act, which,

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1. Ibid., p.8.

2. Ibid., pp.8-9.

3. Ibid., p.12. Pym, Hampden, Marvel, and Elliot were the individuals named. The inspiration gained from the English Revolution by nineteenth century radicals was considerable, and has been but slightly documented; see the note on "Nineteenth-Century Cromwell", Past & Present, No. 40, (1968), pp.187-191.



he declared, "has not produced the good effects which were generally expected from it".<sup>1</sup> Employing the form of questions and answers, a popular device which T. P. Thompson used with particular effect in his Corn Law Catechism, Adams advocated such reforms as annual parliaments, payment of M.P.s, and the abolition of the property qualification. Although urging that the "Tory bully and Whig pickpocket...are beginning to join their forces, for the sake of retaining the possession of irresponsible power for sinister purposes",<sup>2</sup> Adam's ideas were not very far from those held by Bentham, to whom he paid a warm tribute, (p.52). He did not favour immediate universal suffrage, proposing instead some form of literacy test. While at times looking to the past, Adams was essentially a believer in progress and anticipated a happy future providing political reform was fulfilled. Although political means were emphasised by him, his economic opinions, too, were developed, particularly a belief in the right of the workman to receive the produce of his labour. Writing in 1833, he expressed his conviction that, "the dawn of hope is at length brightening the political horizon of Great Britain", for, although rick-burning had been the instrument, the people had secured the Reform Bill: "the giant has now learned his strength".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Junius Redivivus, The Political Unionists' Catechism: A Manual of Political Instruction for the People, (1833), p.v.

2. Ibid., p.vi.

3. Junius Redivivus, The Producing Man's Companion; an Essay on the Present State of Society, Moral, Political and Physical in England..., (2nd ed., 1833), pp.11-12. In the preface to the 2nd edition, Adams noted that members of the S.D.U.K. had expressed indignation that his first edition was similar in appearance to their Rights of Industry. This, however, was not to smuggle the work into circulation as one of their's, but because "it was in direct opposition to their own", (p.3). Charles Knight's Rights of Industry (1831) was a reply to the "labour theory of value" ideas of writers like Hodgskin. Adams believed "the value of all commodities is the amount of human labour it would take to produce them", (p.20).

As an opening to the main part of The Producing Man's Companion, Adams advanced the proposition:

There is a principle of sound and enlarged morality, "that the whole raw material of the whole globe is the property of the whole human race as tenants in common, and of this RIGHT no individual can be divested not withstanding the actual possession may be taken from him or her, either by force or chicanery."

1

Whatever Mr. Malthus may say to the contrary, wrote Adams, a human being born into the world had a right to live in it and to share in its raw materials which were necessary for survival. Because food was procured through the agency of the soil, "the strong and the cunning" had sought to possess the land as private property.<sup>2</sup> The small number of individuals who held the land and raw materials and called them their private property, in fact only held them in trust. Landed proprietors used entails to preserve their estates, continued Adams, and they claimed the right to do with the land as they wished, often tracing back their claims to William the Conqueror:

He took it by force from the Saxons. Be it so! and the law of force rules equally well now as it did then; therefore a greater force than holds it may legitimately retake it.

3

It is significant that it was on the issue of landed property that Adams was most outspoken and came nearest to advocating extreme action. It was considered to be one of the most clear-

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.13.

3. Ibid., pp.22-23. In a note, on page 230, to this discussion of land, Adams declared, "A holder of landed property is an appropriator, but so is a highwayman, and they hold by the same tenure - power". Primogeniture was "most mischievous, because it serves to heap up in the hands of the imbecile a large portion of that property from which the community draw their food", (p.180).

cut of issues, and was one that tended to rouse warm indignation amongst radicals. However, although the implications of Adam's proposals were great, his means of execution were not. When it came to the mechanism of reform, a certain vagueness is apparent. Reform was to be achieved through a constitutionally elected parliament, made, in some undefined way, more democratic by the insistence of the people. Adams was too much a utilitarian to have any patience with schemes based on co-operation or smallholdings. In the case of the latter, the Irish example was cited; there the people were on the edge of starvation, and men like Sadler, "deeply immersed in his twelfth century patriarchal notions", would "reduce England by their two-acre cottage-system, which would - must - eventually make large nurseries of beggars and wretches".<sup>1</sup> While the "co-operative system of Mr. Owen, and the St. Simonists, cannot possibly hope for success", as the individual's self-interest held sway.<sup>2</sup>

Although he believed England to be over-populated, Adams, unlike many contemporary moralists and commentators, argued that living standards were rising, for,

in spite of this constant struggle of population against food, human happiness and human refinement have much increased, and continue daily to increase, because human drudgery is constantly lessening, through the agency of machinery, which thus affords leisure for devising and accomplishing many things tending to the benefit of the human race.

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Anticipating later controversies, Adams urged that such factors

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1. Ibid., p.30.

2. Ibid., p.203.

3. Ibid., p.44. Cf. Mill in 1848: "Hitherto it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment, and an increased number of manufacturers and others to make large fortunes". Principles, pp.756-757. Mill retained this opinion in all future editions, including the last revised during his lifetime, (1871).

as better clothing, a higher quality of food, medical improvements, and the decline of drunkenness, were evidence of a higher standard of living. "The amelioration of the condition of the people at large must be going on", he reasoned, "or who is it that consumes manufactures which are produced by the agency of machinery?"<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as intelligence and comfort increased, so too would prudence and self-control, thus alleviating the population problem. The benefits of progress might, however, be reaped more quickly and more fully if certain reforms were obtained of a political nature.

In later years, Adams directed his energies toward achieving improvement in a more practicable way, becoming a successful inventor, especially in the field of railway engineering.<sup>2</sup> But during the 1830s, it was his writings which attracted attention. J. S. Mill was among those who were highly impressed by these publications, although Mill found some of Adams's ideas rather too advanced. He regarded Adams's letters in the Examiner as tending "to put the very worst possible interpretation upon any fault, whether of act or omission, and therefore to carry his censure to a pitch of severity often greater than the facts... appear to justify".<sup>3</sup> This criticism appeared in a review of The Producing Man's Companion, and we may assume that, though he had reservations about some of Adams's writings, Mill was largely sympathetic to the ideas expressed in this book, for he

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1. The Producing Man's Companion, op.cit., p.46.

2. See his Roads and Rails and Their Sequences, Physical and Moral, (1862), in which Adams discursively mingled railway developments with a variety of social issues, placing an emphasis on the progress brought by mechanical inventions.

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Writings of Junius Redivivus", Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. 3, (1833), p.347.

appears to have read and approved at least a part of it in manuscript form.<sup>1</sup> Mill proposed to Adams that a friendship between them would be to the advantage of both, for each could learn much from the other: "We are", wrote Mill,

almost as much the natural complement of one another as man and woman are: we are far stronger together than separately, & whatever both of us agree in, has a very good chance, I think of being true. We are therefore made to encourage and assist one another. Our intimacy is its own reward, & we have only to consider in what way it may be made most useful to both of us. 2

As well as encouraging a private association, Mill endeavoured to make Adams's work better known and towards this end reviewed The Producing Man's Companion for both Tait's and the Monthly Repository. For his notice in Fox's Repository, Mill stated that he intended to relate his remarks to the qualities of the author, rather than the contents of his books. Declaring that: "It is men the world lacks now, much more than books", Mill found that in his "penetrating, sagacious, and enlarged understanding", Junius Redivivus was such a man.<sup>3</sup> While there was little disparaging to be said of him as an individual, Mill could not describe him as a great writer, but, if The Producing Man's Companion was not a "connected or systematic treatise", it could be recommended for its radical ideas.<sup>4</sup> These ideas were examined in more detail by Mill in Tait's, where his remarks were again enthusiastic, although tempered by qualifications at

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1. On 20 October, 1832, Mill wrote to an unnamed correspondent returning a MS. From internal evidence, F.E. Mineka identifies the recipient as Adams; the correctness of such an attribution is more than probable; see Letters, pp.123-124.

2. Letters, p.124.

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Writings of Junius Redivivus", Monthly Repository, vol. 7, (1833), p.264.

4. Ibid., p.268.

points where he believed Adams was exaggerating his case. The treatment by Mill of Adams's discussion of landed property well-illustrates the manner in which, while adopting some of Adams's assumptions, Mill fitted them in with his own opinions. Noting that The Producing Man's Companion argued that:

private property in land will one day cease to exist, a reasonable compensation being made to bona fide possessors; and that the land will then be administered (as it is in India and other countries of the East) for the benefit of the community generally,

Mill urged that this, "without further explanation, is somewhat vague, and susceptible of being practically misapplied". He went on, therefore, to offer his exposition of what Adams meant, by examining those other opinions in the book as, "this doctrine... might easily have misled a less expanded mind than our author's into the vagaries of Spenceanism or Owenism". According to Mill, Adams believed that the original appropriation of the globe was wrongful, and the result of force or fraud. "He might", continued Mill,

easily have been led, like so many well-meaning persons before him, into the notion that it is proper to redress this wrong by some of the innumerable modes, direct or indirect, of taking from those who have, to give to those who have not.

1

Mill suggested that Adams had avoided reasoning thus because of his awareness of the tendency of population to tread upon the verge of subsistence. He quoted from Adams at length to show that if, by taking some food from the better off, an equal division was made, those who had been but half-fed would breed very rapidly, thus soon reducing the whole population to a half-

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1. "Writings of Junius Redivivus", Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, loc.cit., p.352.



allowance. Mill concluded from this, that what Adams looked for as the means of improving the physical condition of the people was "an increase of prudence and self-control, as to the multiplication of their numbers".<sup>1</sup> By putting the emphasis on population in this way, radicals such as Mill and Adams, while agreeing that landed property was unjustly distributed, avoided making any immediate proposals for its redistribution, other than the abolition of entails and primogeniture. Reforms were made to wait upon the primary need to solve the population question.

It may, however, be reasonably asserted that Mill understated Adams's radicalism, which was more sweeping than that of the utilitarians. In his letter to Adams, Mill suggested, "I require to be warmed, you perhaps occasionally to be calmed".<sup>2</sup> And writing to Carlyle, Mill declared Adams's articles on radical personalities were, "good for very little; but the man has great worth in him".<sup>3</sup> Carlyle agreed, noting that, "Junius Redivivus is an effectual kind of fellow, of good radical stuff; drives the nail home, sees not what it will split in its course".<sup>4</sup> In sending his review to William Tait, Mill described Adams as "the very best popular writer whom the enlightened radicals count in their ranks".<sup>5</sup> A writer of such vigour and industry would have been a useful addition to the group of philosophic radicals, and no doubt Mill hoped to teach Adams his own ideas. However, the

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1. Ibid., p.354.

2. Letters, p.124.

3. Mill to Carlyle, 2 February, 1833, ibid., p.140. Also Mill to Carlyle, 9 March, 1833, where Adams was described as a, "true believer...so far as his faith has yet reached", ibid., p.146.

4. Carlyle to Mill, 13 June, 1833, Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, John Sterling and Robert Browning, (ed.) Alexander Carlyle, (1923), p.60.

5. Mill to Tait, 23 January, 1833, Letters, p.137.

direction of such influences was not entirely one way, and the more outspoken views of Adams's had some effect on Mill. This tendency can be distinguished in his "Notes on the Newspapers" which appeared in the Monthly Repository during 1834: referring the editor, W. J. Fox, to his contribution, Mill observed, "William Adams will like my notes this time - at least the first five. There is much of 'the devil' in them".<sup>1</sup>

An individual of great energy and practical ability, Adams eventually established a large railway carriage works at Bow, where, as a captain of industry, he was visited by Carlyle. Able to get on in the expanding economy of early Victorian Britain, his fiery contributions to popular journalism burnt out, although Adams's "epoch of volcanic activity had been long enough to do the Repository considerable harm."<sup>2</sup>

## X

Whereas Adams's career in journalism was relatively short, to some radicals it was a life-long profession and their main source of income, as well as a means of propaganda. Unlike J. S. Mill, who received a good income from the East India Company and whose writings were designed to spread his ideas rather than make a living, many had to combine the two motives. Not all were Cobbetts who could write as they pleased, but their work was instead often of a hack nature. James Mill had been in this position at the start of his career in London. William Howitt for

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1. Mill to Fox, 26 June, 1834, ibid., p.227. This series of articles, which showed Mill's day-to-day attitudes to contemporary issues, is discussed below, pp.284ff.

2. Richard Garnett, The Life of W.J. Fox: Public Teacher & Social Reformer 1786-1864, (1910), pp.117-118. E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, (1955), p.428n. mistakenly identifies Adams as a member of the Socialist League in 1885. Adams died in 1872; the obituary notice in The Times of 25 July makes no mention of his early radicalism.

many years derived a precarious living from a succession of literary efforts, mostly innocuous, but with a radical edge sometimes showing through.<sup>1</sup> Hodgskin was another who spent a large part of his career in journalism, at times slipping his theories into columns generally reserved for less radical views.

Another radical journalist, whose writings, if ever identified and collected, would fill many volumes, was John Wade. We have noted above Wade's support for improving the condition of the working class by raising wages through family limitation, but this was one of many causes popularised by his pen. As an anonymous contributor, he wrote for the Spectator under R. S. Rintoul's editorship during the period 1828-1858. His major contribution to radicalism was the Black Book, or Corruption Unmasked, the purpose of which was to "show the manifold abuses of an unjust and oppressive system".<sup>2</sup> It comprised a mass of details, to which comments were added, concerning the vested interests of the time, particularly institutions such as the Church, the Bank of England, and the East India Company, and the salaries of sinecurists and placemen. For a couple of decades centering on the agitation for the Reform Bill, the book was widely circulated, sales totalling around 50,000 copies.<sup>3</sup>

One part of the system examined by Wade was the Aristocracy. Of it, he noted that:

For the last ten years a great deal has been written and said, and justly too, on the evils of monopolies; but hardly any one has touched upon the monopoly of land...what is the right of primogeniture and the law of entail, but a monopoly as grievous and pernicious as that of the Bank of England and East India Company?

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1. For Howitt, below, pp.329-334.

2. /John Wade/, The Extraordinary Black Book..., (1831), pp.iii-iv. The book first appeared in periodical numbers in 1820, when it was published by John Fairburn, who brought out further editions in 1823 and 1826. Later publication came into the hands of Effingham Wilson, who was responsible for the editions of 1831 (to which the present references are made), 1832, and 1835.

3. "John Wade", by G.C. Boase in D.N.B.

4. /Wade/, Black Book, op.cit., p.200.

Wade went on to note that a "landed interest", distinct in its interests from those of the community, had been perpetuated, and that the aristocracy had "usurped many advantages over their fellow citizens".<sup>1</sup> These privileges included restriction on the import of foreign agricultural produce, the game laws, and the low Land Tax which ought instead to be "a direct tax on rent".<sup>2</sup> However, Wade made his essentially moderate position clear, and, in order to disavow any part in extremist proposals, conjured up Spence's ghost that he might exorcise it:

We are not partizans of Agrarian laws, and we believe the number of political reformers of any sect is extremely diminutive who wish to see or ever expect to see a Spencean division of property. Industry, perseverance, sobriety, and prudence will mostly acquire wealth, and deserve to acquire it, and to enjoy it, and to transmit the enjoyment, after death, to those they most esteem.

3

Wade insisted that his demand was for political reforms to end public abuses, and approvingly quoted Bentham's maxim that government should involve "the greatest happiness of the greatest number".<sup>4</sup>

In his History of the Middle and Working Classes, Wade again cited Bentham to justify his argument for private property. A state of society with equal possessions at first sight appeared fascinating, Wade noted, but it was "pregnant with misery". If each man tilled his own land, all would be engaged in spade husbandry:

people would hardly be better off than the cotter peasantry of Ireland, or the pauper colonists of Holland; and the whole of society would be literally brought under the primitive curse inflicted on our first parents.

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1. Ibid., pp.200-201.

2. Ibid., p.206.

3. Ibid., p.212. Similarly, Wade noted that the "veteran placeman Croker, "resorts to the old bugbear of property being in danger!" He dismissed any assertion that radicals intended such a thing, ibid., p.435.

4. Ibid., p.561.

5. /John Wade/, History of the Middle and Working Classes, op.cit. p.483.

Against the ideas of Owen, Godwin, Paine, and Rousseau, Wade set Bentham's argument in favour of the institution of private property.<sup>1</sup> In 1862, on the representations of Effingham Wilson, Wade, who had made a reputation by exposing placemen and pensioners, received from Lord Palmerston a civil list pension of £50 per annum. Behind the melodrama of the Black Book, Wade reflected the middle class demand for a greater share of political power. The means used to obtain this were to be strictly constitutional, as they had no intention of destroying that part of the system which they designed to take over.

## XI

The strife amongst Whigs, Tories, and parliamentary radicals might at times have been turbulent, but it took place within well-defined channels. Most middle class radicals in the 1830s saw the Whig Government as the vehicle upon which they would travel the road to reform, although perhaps taking over the reins at the point where the Whigs would go no further. It was a position not without ambiguity. Some, like Fonblanque, became identified with the Ministerial interest.<sup>2</sup> Others were highly critical of the Whigs, as Roebuck was in his Pamphlets for the People.<sup>3</sup> Mill, as we shall see, defended legislation such as

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1. Ibid., pp.438-439.

2. Mill complained of Fonblanque that, while at first keeping up the fight for radicalism against the Whigs, "after 1834 he sank into little better than their supporter & panegyrist", Autobiography, Early Draft, op.cit., p.156.

3. Appearing in 1835, the reforms they advocated included abolition of the property qualification, the ballot, extended suffrage, and equal electoral districts. The Pamphlets seem to have grown out of an unsuccessful project, supported by Mill, Place, Grote, Hume, and others, to establish a Society for the Diffusion of Moral and Political Knowledge; see Mill to John Pringle Nichol, 10 July, 1833, Letters, pp.165-166.

the amended poor law, and ended in 1841 "heart and soul" with the Whig Ministry, but at other times worked to establish a party of philosophic radicals.<sup>1</sup> Even those associated with the Government might be as outspoken as any middle-class radical; in the semi-private Political Economy Club, James Hume, Secretary to the Board of Trade, proposed for discussion the question, "Ought a compulsory provision against destitution to exist wherever there is exclusive property in land?" Mallet recorded an account of the debate:

Mr. Hume is a man of sense and talent; and who disavows any opinions in common with the Schools of Godwin or Owen, but whose abhorrence of the aristocracy and landlords and monopolisers of property often brings him on the confines of those wild regions.

2

Another outspoken politician was Brougham, who had held a high post under the Whigs as Lord Chancellor from 1830 to 1834, but was excluded from office in Melbourne's second administration. This made his criticisms of aristocracy more explicit, and led him to put forth "pamphlets & articles of very decided radicalism to the extreme annoyance of his former associates".<sup>3</sup> A pseudonymous pamphlet written by him trenchantly attacked the reactionary influence, privileges, and decadence of the aristocracy which used its political power to prevent reform.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not concerned with redistributing property; Brougham made clear

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1. Below, pp.297ff.

2. Diary entry for March, 1835, Proceedings, op.cit., p.266.

3. Mill to Aristide Guilbert, 8 May, 1835, Letters, p.261.

4. Isaac Tomkins, Gent. and Mr. Peter Jenkins, A Sketch of the Aristocracy of England, (1835).



his intention when reviewing his own tract in the Edinburgh. He here referred to it as:

very small, but very sharp, - indeed bitter...  
The aristocracy will say it is exaggerated...  
but the middle classes, in whose favour it is  
very warmly...will no doubt exceedingly enjoy  
it.

1

It was the middle class to whom Brougham looked; he was not a democrat, and firmly believed in the sanctity of property. Those who said, "all property is henceforth to be in common", were, he wrote in a letter of 1831, "violent felons who desire to seize all they can".<sup>2</sup> James Mill appears to have shared the secret of Brougham's authorship as he was shown the pamphlet in manuscript form, the contents of which, he wrote, "I could almost believe... were written by myself".<sup>3</sup>

The pamphlet, passing through eleven editions in 1835, was much talked of, one rejoinder coming from "Timothy Winterbottom". Winterbottom's main concern was the maintenance of hereditary fortunes by the aristocracy and the harmful effects of their power on other sections of the community. Although a plea was made on behalf of the yeomanry, it was again the rising middle classes who had found a spokesman:

The crown alone of all dignitaries should be hereditary. An hereditary peerage, and the clan-like aristocracy supported by primogeniture, form a kind of artificial scum on the surface of society, and unworthily usurp the

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1. /Henry Brougham/, "Thoughts upon the Aristocracy of England", Edinburgh Review, vol. 61, (1835), p.64.

2. Arthur Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party, (Manchester, 1927), p.251.

3. James Mill to Brougham, June, 1835, Bain, James Mill, p.380. In his letter, Mill kept up the pretence by making reference to "Issac Tomkins", rather than Brougham.

place which, according to the natural order of things, would be occupied by more deserving and useful objects, taken from among our wealthy and intelligent merchants and manufacturers, who are thus depressed below their proper station.

1

### XIII

With the establishment of the Anti-Corn Law League, much radical propaganda against the landed interest became centred on the issue of the Corn Laws. This was the cause which mobilised the merchants and manufacturing class in efforts to achieve their "proper station". Similarly, in the late 1830s and during the 1840s, working class energies were centred on the struggle for the People's Charter. Much has already been written about these two movements, and it is not proposed to examine them in any detail here. The Corn Laws provided the landed interest's most vulnerable point, but as conservatives such as Croker realised, the majority of the League's members not only wanted to see repeal, but also the break-up of the social and political power of the landlords. They sometimes drew the distinction between the landed and the agricultural interest.<sup>2</sup> The tenant farmer was seen by the League as the rural equivalent of the urban middle class, both sharing grievances against the

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1. A Letter to Issac Tomkins and Peter Jenkins on Primogeniture, (1835), pp.9-10.
  2. Asa Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England", in Asa Briggs and John Saville, (eds.), Essays in Labour History, (1960), p.60.

aristocratic landlord.<sup>1</sup> But, in fact, the farmer, working to small margins, was "terrified at what might be the result if repeal were passed."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, landlords still assumed their tenants shared their political commitments. There was always the threat of eviction and in the years after the Reform Act it was still not uncommon for tenants to receive written advice from the landlord's agent at election time suggesting the candidate who ought to be supported.<sup>3</sup> The League thus made little headway with the tenant-farmer class.

Attempts were also made to win working class support by reaching an accommodation with the Chartist movement. Here again the League met antagonism.<sup>4</sup> Class divisions were by this time intense and explicit. Place, who took the task of spreading League propaganda in the metropolis, without much success, regretfully explained to Cobden that the London working class leaders,

call the middle class 'shopocrats', 'usurers' (all profit being usury), 'money mongers', 'tyrants and oppressors of the working people', and they link the middle class with the aristocracy under the dignified appellation of 'murderers of society', 'murderers of the people'. 5

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1. For the League's attempt to gain farmers' support by agitating against the game laws, Chester Kirby, "The Attack on the English Game Laws in the Forties", Journal of Modern History, vol. 4, (1932), pp.18-37.

2. G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England, (1962), p.8.

3. Norman Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel, (1953), p.181.

4. Lucy Brown, "The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League", in Asa Briggs, (ed.), Chartist Studies, (1959), p.342; Norman McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838-1846, (1968 ed.), pp.38, 75, et seq.

5. Place to Cobden, 4 March, 1840, B.M. Add. MSS 35,151, IV, f.230. See also Place to T.P. Thompson, 10 March 1840, for an account of a League lecture held the previous evening at the Finsbury Hall of Science. Chartists had attempted to wreck the meeting with "Hetherington and others leading the violence and directing it". B.M. Add. MSS 35,151, IV, f.234b.

A number of London-based middle class radicals had reservations about the League, and in its earlier period gave support to Lovett's brand of Chartism, which emphasised working class education. Some preferred to stay with the Chartists; Howitt was one such when he wrote in 1846:

My opinion & yours is identical as to Cobden  
and all the Millocrats, and the Millocrats  
know it since I declined acting with them in  
the League.

1

The Chartists themselves, however, were seriously divided. Conventionally, this division has been explained in terms of the "physical force" and "moral force" factions, but in their concepts of land there were perhaps deeper and wider differences. As E. Eldon Barry has noted, "the land question was a key part of the economic background to Chartism from the first".<sup>2</sup> The six points demanded in the Charter were the means of achieving political democracy, but once this had been won, the repossession of the land for the people would follow. There remained, however, the question of how "the people's farm" would be managed.<sup>3</sup> J. B. O'Brien was the strongest protagonist in favour of nationalization while O'Connor fixed upon a form of peasant proprietorship. The nationalizers feared that small farmers would adopt reactionary attitudes. That peasants were a socially stable class was

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1. William Howitt to G.J. Harney, 16 August, 1846, The Harney Papers, (ed. Frank Gees Black and Renee Métivier Black), (Assen, 1969), pp.24-25. The editors suggest "Millocrats" is a reference to J.S. Mill, but Howitt was more likely using it as a generic term for the manufacturing, mill-owning class; cp. "shopocrats".

2. E. Eldon Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics: The Historical Background, (1965), p.31.

3. The land was referred to as such by Harney in the Northern Star, 30 August, 1845, quoted by Joy MacAskill, "The Chartist Land Plan", in Asa Briggs, (ed.), Chartist Studies, (1959), p.340n. This essay is a good factual account of O'Connor's Land Scheme. See also, Alice Mary Hadfield, The Chartist Land Company, (Newton Abbot, 1970).

frequently asserted by writers who had studied them in Europe, and the Leeds Mercury, under the editorship of Edward Baines came to view O'Connor's scheme in this light. Possession of land by Chartists would:

give them an increased interest in the tranquillity and good order of society, and make them anxious to preserve whatever is valuable in the government and institutions of the country.

1

In the face of such a possibility, O'Brien campaigned against the scheme: those who joined it were betraying their own order; he wrote that O'Connor's "land scheme is a government plot to stifle in embryo our movement for the nationalisation of land and property".<sup>2</sup> O'Connor for his part made no concessions and within the movement he had much support, as the land plan appealed to the land hunger and nostalgia for a rural past of many Chartists.<sup>3</sup> It was an issue unresolved until the collapse of O'Connor's freehold schemes confirmed the remaining Chartist leaders in their belief of the desirability of land nationalization. Probably the "home colonizers" tended to drift in Owenite directions while the remaining hard-core leaders, such as O'Brien, Harney, Jones, and Linton, put public ownership of the land in first place.<sup>4</sup>

Anti-Corn Law League supporters, too, once their campaign

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1. Leeds Mercury, 23 September, 1843, quoted by W.H.G. Armytage, "The Chartist Land Colonies 1846-1848", Agricultural History, vol. 32, (1958), p.88.

2. National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 14 May, 1847, quoted ibid., p.92.

3. O'Connor's ideas are discussed in Donald Read and Eric Glasgow, Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist, (1961), esp. ch. 11.

4. For example, see Barry, op.cit., pp.31,40; A.R. Schoyen, The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of George Julian Harney, (1958), p.197; John Saville, Ernest Jones: Chartist, (1952), pp.152-157; Linton wrote in 1850: "Raise the cry of a land tax in place of all other taxes; and rouse the whole empire to contest with landlordism. This is the true way in which the People may repossess the land", W.J. Linton, The People's Land, and an easy way to recover it, (1850), p.6.

had been successful, in looking for another issue, turned again towards the landed interest. It was some years before Cobden made his Rochdale speech calling for a League for Free Trade in Land,<sup>1</sup> but by 1848 the essential idea had been stated:

The existing entail and primogeniture laws would be more properly described as bills to restrain draining and sub-soil ploughing. They have retarded the progress of this country far more than ever did the corn-laws themselves. The fact is certainly not yet generally admitted, but its existence is not more doubtful on that account. The many thousands families who have sought homes in the colonies, the many thousands more at home now without work or bread, might all have been employed here, except for laws that are maintained at the cost of eight or nine million acres of improvable land wasted; and twice the number indifferently tilled. Free-trade in land would remove this great calamity; and in all the instances we have named, the sufferings of the people originate not with freedom but with monopoly.

2

Radical reform pamphleteers continued to beat the drum of the Norman Yoke and lost rights. A tract published by Effingham Wilson declared:

The original hoard that came over with William the Conqueror was a hoard of vagabond adventurers, - mercenaries collected from all parts of Europe by the hope of plunder, - and of all classes of men, certainly none is so stained with plunder and with blood.

3

Noakes, who pronounced himself to be no leveller, but an admirer of Cromwell, referred his readers to Cobbett's History of the

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1. See below, p.397. In the late 1840s and the early '50s Cobden was optimistic about the power that could be gained by establishing forty-shilling freeholders in the country areas. The Anti-Corn Law League had organised a scheme for obtaining the property qualification in this way, but Cobden hoped that many more electors might be created by the agency of freehold land societies. For a time, success seemed possible, but gradually the societies lost their political motivation and became simply building societies; see E.J. Cleary, The Building Society Movement, (1965), pp.51-53.
  2. "The Monopoly of Land", Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. 15, (1848), p.418.
  3. John Noakes, The Right of the Aristocracy to the Soil, considered, (1847), p.30.



Reformation, Howitt's The Aristocracy of England, and Bright's Covent Garden Speech.<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet was fairly typical of the appeal to historical evidence made by many radicals. As noted earlier in this study, the tradition of harking back several centuries to good King Alfred and Saxon liberties, was a resilient one, originating before our period, continuing through it, and surviving until at least the turn of the century.

This, then, was something of the background against which J. S. Mill formulated his ideas on landed property. On the one hand, there was the entrenched and largely-conservative landed interest, but which, nevertheless, was slowly losing its grip on the levers of power. On the other, a host of radical opinions were being pressed at all levels. Behind the blanket-term the "land question" lay a wide range of ideas. Against the natural desire of the landed interest to preserve its position, some wished only to see what they considered to be artificial provisions, such as primogeniture and entails, removed; it was for "free trade in land" against the "land monopoly" that they spoke. Others urged these changes in inheritance as a prelude to the break-up of large estates, with a consequent disappearance of the economic and political power of the aristocracy. Some wished this break-up to continue until small farms became the norm, with the impoverished agricultural labourer converted into a prosperous yeoman, and society thus regenerated. Schemes were put forward

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1. During 1843-44, the League was organising weekly meetings at Covent Garden, addressed by leaders such as W.J. Fox and Bright. On one occasion, Bright drew the analogy between their conflict with the landed interest and the ancient struggle against the Crown by their ancestors, asking: "If they refused to be the bondmen of a King, shall we be the born thralls of an aristocracy like ours?", The Diaries of John Bright, (ed.) R.A.J. Walling, (1930), p.79.

for waste reclamation, sometimes with a view to easing the population problem, or to found co-operative communities, or set up peasant proprietors. The provision of allotments and the establishment of cottage gardens were policies often advocated. Agricultural tenures were less important to those who wished to see the manufacturing sector of the economy obtain fuller political rights and saw the landowning class as an obstacle to this. Where radical reformers were concerned, concepts of natural justice were at the fore, based upon the theft of the land to which all men had a right. Again, to some this was a right to possess land, while others argued that the land should be held by the state on the people's behalf.

Commonly, many of these motives were interlinked. Mill came to support changes in the law of inheritance, co-operative schemes, peasant proprietorships, and the use of waste land. He was also a severe critic of aristocratic influence, but at the same time showed more sympathy with certain conservative ideas than with some radical notions of reform. These developments in Mill's thought will be the subject of the following chapters.

P A R T        T W O

CHAPTER VII:

THE EARLIER IDEAS OF JOHN STUART MILL

Little Mill makes more observations than almost any child I ever saw who was crammed, but they are always in slow measured terms, and deliver'd with the air of a person who is conscious of his superiority, and if you hazard an observation in return you are perhaps assured that "the authorities will not bear you out in what you have asserted."

Lady Anne Romilly to Maria Edgeworth, 6 October, 1817, quoted in S.H. Romilly (ed.), The Romilly-Edgeworth Letters, 1813-1818, (1936), pp.178-179.

By 1848, M'Culloch had arrived at a largely opposite view to that which J. S. Mill had adopted by this date on the question of landed property. Yet there was a number of similarities in their early intellectual development. Although M'Culloch was the elder by seventeen years, Mill's remarkable education gave him, he claimed, a start of a quarter of a century over his contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> It is arguable, therefore, that both were passing through a mentally formative period at roughly the same time, and were exposed to similar influences. In the field of political economy, Ricardo made a great early impact on both men. As we had seen, M'Culloch gave the Principles a laudatory review in the Edinburgh and became a strong Ricardian; on Ricardo's death, James Mill felt an affinity with M'Culloch based upon

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1. Autobiography, p.21.

their common economic convictions. It was through this system of political economy that James Mill took his son on a complete course in 1819. Firstly, James Mill based his instruction on his own ideas of the subject, which closely corresponded to those of Ricardo. John made a written outline of his father's teaching, which was later used by James Mill in writing his Elements of Political Economy, with the son again making an abstract of its contents. A detailed examination of Ricardo's Principles was then undertaken, with the young Mill daily explaining to his father the arguments which it contained.<sup>1</sup>

John Mill's early view of his fellow-Ricardian, M'Culloch, was a highly favourable one. With the collaboration of William Ellis, he reviewed in 1825 M'Culloch's Discourses for the Westminster, and took the opportunity to observe:

Were it possible to trace any portion of the improvement in the public mind within these few years to the labours of particular individuals, we think that much might be traced to those of Mr. M'Culloch. In him are united a profound knowledge of the principles of the science, a most uncommon degree of skill in illustrating and expounding them, a complete mastery of all the errors and sophisms which have hitherto prevailed, and of the arguments by which they are to be met, with an apostolic zeal in communicating his knowledge to others. 2

This praise closely echoed Mill's assessment in the third volume of the Westminster. Here he contributed an article answering a critical review in the Quarterly of M'Culloch's essay on "Political Economy" (which had appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica). The Quarterly's reviewer was Malthus who was at odds with most of Ricardo's doctrines. But Mill, although aware of the reviewer's

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1. Ibid., pp.19-20, 44.

2. /William Ellis and J.S. Mill/, "M'Culloch's Discourse on Political Economy", Westminster Review, vol. 4, (1825), p.90.

identity, feigned ignorance of the fact. He began by eulogising M'Culloch, describing his essay as:

among the ablest productions of one of the first political economists of the age; and which, from the soundness of its principles, the aptness of its illustrations, and the perspicacity of its style, is one of the best elementary treatises of which the science has yet to boast.

1

The rest of Mill's article was a clever irony at Malthus's expense. He noted that the style of the Quarterly reviewer was similar to that of Malthus, and declared that it was a malignant joke by a witty writer who was imitating Malthus and, while pretending to express his opinions, was misrepresenting them, in order to make them appear ridiculous and discredited. The adolescent Mill thus adopted his father's high opinion of M'Culloch which James Mill held at this time. We have noted how the elder Mill altered his opinion as M'Culloch became increasingly Whiggish and abandoned his moderately radical position of the early 1820s.<sup>2</sup> Just as M'Culloch changed his ideas, J. S. Mill's life, too, was one of transition and he also moved away from his Benthamite background in a number of respects.

From the first, John Mill had been intended as a Benthamite, the first of the second generation of through-going utilitarians. This role was soon marked out for him. John was six when his father wrote to Bentham expressing the fear that he may not live to see his son's education completed. In his reply, Bentham offered to act as John's guardian, and to teach him "how to make

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1. /J.S. Mill/, "Quarterly Review - Political Economy", ibid., vol. 3, (1825), p.213n.

2. Above, p.130. J.S. Mill, too, severely downgraded his opinion of M'Culloch in later life, referring to him as "both prejudiced and inaccurate", Mill to Carl Heinrich Rau, 20 March, 1852, The Letters of John Stuart Mill, (ed. Hugh S.R. Elliot), (2 vols, 1910), vol. 1, p.169.

Codes and Encyclopedias and whatsoever else may be proper to be made".<sup>1</sup> An offer which James Mill accepted:

I am not going to die, notwithstanding your zeal to come in for a legacy. However, if I were to die any time before this poor boy is a man, one of the things that would pinch me most sorely, would be, the being obliged to leave his mind unmade to the degree of excellence of which I hope to make it. But another thing is, that the only prospect which would lessen that pain, would be the leaving him in your hands. I therefore take your offer quite seriously, and stipulate, merely, that it shall be made as good as possible; and then we may perhaps leave him a successor worthy of both of us.

2

James Mill's vigorous programme for making his son's mind excellent has been described by the pupil in his Autobiography. Not only did this instruction include courses on Greek, Latin, mathematics, and so forth, but also the contribution to knowledge which James Mill himself was making. In addition to political economy, the young Mill had for a teacher the historian of India. It has been noted that James Mill wrote much more than an account of Indian history; it was also a work drawing heavily upon the eighteenth century tradition of Scottish learning and scholarship, and upon a Benthamite analysis of society and government. The young Mill literally grew up with this work: his father began writing it in the year he was born, and father and son sat at the same table, while James Mill was working on his history and John Mill preparing his lessons. In the year before its publication, when it was passing through the press, John read the manuscript to his father who was correcting the proofs. Of James Mill's History,

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1. Bentham to James Mill, 25 July, 1812, quoted by F.E. Mineka, Letters, p.3n.

2. James Mill to Bentham, 28 July, 1812, quoted Bain, James Mill, pp.119-120.



the son wrote:

The number of new ideas which I received from this remarkable book, and the impulse and stimulus as well as guidance given to my thoughts by its criticisms and disquisitions on society and civilization in the Hindoo part, on institutions and the acts of governments in the English part, made my early familiarity with it eminently useful to my subsequent progress.

1

Before going back to trace J. S. Mill's relationship with Bentham, another literary collaboration with his father might be mentioned here. This was the efforts made by the Mills in the establishment of the Westminster Review in 1824. They were responsible for many of the articles which appeared in it during its early years, and made a particularly important contribution to the first number. This was James Mill's notorious examination of the Edinburgh Review which he charged with catering for the aristocracy. According to John Mill, who assisted his father by reading through the early numbers of the Edinburgh, the article was "the chief cause of the sensation which the Westminster Review produced at its first appearance".<sup>2</sup> In the course of his article, James Mill noted that the powers of government were centred in the House of Commons, whose members were principally influenced by the owners of great estates. A majority of the Commons were "chosen by somewhat less than two hundred great families".<sup>3</sup> A continuation of this article, developing similar themes, was written by John Mill.<sup>4</sup> A sequel appeared in the second volume of the Westminster attacking the position adopted by the Quarterly Review.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Autobiography, p.17.

2. Ibid., p.65.

3. /James Mill/, "Periodical Literature. Edinburgh Review", Westminster Review, vol. 1, (1824), p.232.

4. /J.S. Mill/, "Periodical Literature. Edinburgh Review", ibid., pp.505-541.

5. /James Mill/, "Periodical Literature. Quarterly Review", ibid., vol. 2, pp.464-503. Bain, James Mill, pp.265-284, gives a long precis of these articles.

Other articles for the Westminster by John Mill included an attack on the Corn Laws, which, he argued, injured the rest of the community for the benefit of the landlord alone, while even the farmers' interests were "diametrically opposite" those of the landlord.<sup>1</sup> In a criticism of another law designed by and for the landowning class, the Game Laws, Mill offered a definition of property rights which he continued to hold in a largely unmodified form for the remainder of his life when discussing the question:

The end of property, as of all other human institutions, is, or ought to be, no other than the general good. If the existence of any particular kind of property be contrary to the general good, that kind of property ought not to exist. 2

The Mills were not altogether satisfied with the Westminster under the editorship of John Bowring.<sup>3</sup> This was one reason why they gave their support also to a periodical that lasted for only three years, the Parliamentary History and Review. His own contributions to this journal, John Mill believed, were "no longer mere reproductions and applications of the doctrines I had been taught", but represented "original thinking".<sup>4</sup> He contributed a major article to the first number, which, while favouring Catholic emancipation, saw it would be no solution for the country's ills, which were due to economic evils. It is interesting to note, however, that Mill's original thinking had not yet attracted him towards peasant proprietorship; in Ireland, he wrote,

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1. /J.S. Mill/, "The Corn Laws", Westminster Review, vol. 3, (1825), p.397.

2. /J.S. Mill/, "The Game Laws", ibid., vol. 5, (1826), p.9.

3. Autobiography, p.64. Also, G.F. Bartle, "Jeremy Bentham and John Bowring: a Study in the Relationship between Bentham and the Editor of His Collected Works", Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, vol. 36, (1963), p.30.

4. Autobiography, p.83.

a better system of cultivation was being introduced by landlords uniting numbers of small farms into one large farm, while small farmers were the result of insufficient capital.<sup>1</sup>

## II

In addition to these and other writings, Mill was active in establishing a Utilitarian Society during the winter of 1822-1823.<sup>2</sup> This was not the only means by which Mill sought to meet and possibly influence promising young men. At a suggestion from M'Culloch, he helped to found the London Union Debating Society in 1825.<sup>3</sup> Mill spoke at the second debate organised by the Society, on 9 December, 1825, on the influence of the aristocracy. His speech showed clearly how close Mill was to the views expressed by his father in the first number of the Westminster. The influence of the aristocracy in government, declared Mill, was "not only no benefit, but a positive evil".<sup>4</sup> Through their monopoly of political power, the aristocratic few ruled at the expense of the many. They were able:

to enact corn laws in order to raise their rents, game laws to protect their amusements, and vagrant laws to punish those who, being guilty of poverty, obtrude the spectacle of their misery upon the delicate senses of the few.

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This power was totally unchecked, so that about 180 families, most

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1. /J.S. Mill/, "The Game Laws", ibid., vol. 5, (1826), p.9.

2. Autobiography, p.56. Mill believed he coined "utilitarian" from a phrase in James Galt's novel Annals of the Parish (1821); however, as early as 1802, Bentham had written to Dumont suggesting the term.

3. Ibid., p.88. See also, Karl Britton and John M. Robson, "Mill's Debating Speeches", Mill News Letter, vol. 1, (1965), pp.2-5

4. J.S. Mill, "Speech on the Influence of the Aristocracy", Archiv für Socialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, vol. 62, (1929), p.241.

5. Ibid., p.244.

of them great landed proprietors, were able to choose a majority of the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> His other speeches at this time, of which several survive, were consistent with Benthamite principles, and, as well as taking on established interests, opposed the ideas of radicals like Owen and Cobbett.<sup>2</sup>

A fellow member of the Debating Society, J. A. Roebuck, and a close friend of Mill's until they quarrelled, wrote that Mill had at this time much learning, but "was, as might have been expected, the mere exponent of other men's ideas, those men being his father and Bentham".<sup>3</sup> We have examined aspects of James Mill's thought and the ways in which he may have influenced his son. Bentham, although it was not necessary for him to become John's guardian, regarded himself as having a close interest in his development.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as a disciple of Bentham, James Mill was in close contact with his master, for some time renting from

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1. Ibid., p.247. Mill lost the division 17-63, but had the satisfaction of carrying in the Society's third debate the motion, "That the Law and Custom of Primogeniture are Detrimental to Society", Karl Britton, "J.S. Mill and the Cambridge Union Society", Cambridge Review, vol. 76, (29 October, 1955), p.92.

2. Cobbett was described as "a man who upon almost every subject has been found upon all sides except the right, and who has tried all varieties of opinion except common sense, and all kinds of morality except common honesty", "Two Speeches on Population", Journal of Adult Education, vol. 4, (1929), p.56. H.J. Laski, who prepared this speech for publication, stated that a note on the flyleaf of the MS shows Mill re-read it before writing the section on population for the Principles, (p.38n.).

3. Robert Eadon Leader (ed.), Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck, P.C., Q.C., M.P., (1897), p.28.

4. Though Bentham was fifty-eight years older than John Mill, he thought of him, as he did most of his young associates, in fatherly terms; see John M. Robson, "John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, with some Observations on James Mill", in Millar MacLure and F.W. Watt (eds.), Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age, (Toronto, 1964), p.249.

him a house at No. 1 Queen's Square, and as a visitor to Ford Abbey. There can be little doubt that the young Mill sat at the philosopher's feet and heard ideas, which because of his father's espousal of them also, would soon become highly familiar to him. He would in this environment, too, have come into contact with other Benthamite radicals, such as Place, who has left an account of the regime at Bentham's Devonshire home, Ford Abbey, describing how the Mills rose between 5 and 6 a.m. and spent each day writing, teaching, and discussing.<sup>1</sup>

Bentham played a part also in arranging John Mill's visit to France in 1820, asking his brother, Sir Samuel Bentham of Pompignan to accommodate the young Mill and "manufacture him into a French boy".<sup>2</sup> As a fourteen-year-old, Mill took the conventional view of the effects of the French law of inheritance: near Toulouse, he recorded, the division of landed property was carried very far, each peasant had his piece of land, but had "neither knowledge, nor capital sufficient to introduce any good system of cultivation".<sup>3</sup> A little later, he spoke to two workmen, and reflected that, though intelligent, they had to gain a living by cultivating the ground, an "instance of the evil effects of the law which compels every father to divide far the greater part of his property equally among his children".<sup>4</sup> Opinions such as these were no doubt approved by his father and Bentham, from whom Mill probably learned them in the first place.

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1. Wallas, op.cit., pp.75-76.

2. J. Bentham to S. Bentham, 14 July, 1820, quoted by Anna J. Mill, op.cit., p.xiii.

3. Ibid., p.17.

4. Ibid., p.24.

Bentham, if his writings were often difficult, could be a lively talker when he overcame his shyness, and must have stimulated the young Mill further by enthusiastic discussion of his theories. Like James Mill, Bentham set himself against the aristocracy, asking, "be it pot or be it kingdom, that which occupies the top of it, is it not the scum?"<sup>1</sup> But he halted his attacks short of overturning the landed property that was the basis of their power. Rather did Bentham rely upon political means of reform, and was more concerned with ending the economic inefficiencies arising from the possession of the land by an aristocracy, than to get rid of the system. Thus he opposed the law of primogeniture.<sup>2</sup> But he argued against it mainly because of the burdens it placed on agriculture, not on egalitarian grounds, for "the establishment of equality is a chimera: the only thing which can be done is to diminish inequality."<sup>3</sup> From this followed Bentham's comment in "Of the Levelling System":

But what can not admit controversy is, that in a multitude of instances, farms, large or small, would suffer much in value by being broken down into smaller ones.

4

Bentham's argument was based upon the economies of scale: each fragment would require separate buildings and other fixed stock, and such duplication would destroy wealth. Where estates were very great, Bentham agreed, proprietors cared little about improving their domains, while smaller proprietors would be animated by a different spirit, but, he continued, "let it not

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1. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 9, p.57. Bowring remembered an exchange with Bentham in 1822: "'What are you doing now?' said I. 'I am dragging nobility through the dirt'," Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring, (1877), p.343.

2. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 9, pp.17-18; Stark, op.cit., vol. 1, pp.328-332.

3. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 1, p.311.

4. Ibid., p.359.



be supposed that I recommend agrarian laws and forced divisions: this would be to cut off an arm, in order to avoid a scratch".<sup>1</sup> Ironically, at just the time when Arthur Young had been converted to peasant proprietorship from his former position of advocating large farms, Bentham wrote to him with the proposal that he was the person best fitted to prove the comparative advantages possessed by extensive properties:

You may have observed, or not observed, in my Principles of Management, as given in my Poor papers in the Annals, the advantages of the large scale principle, as applied to buildings, and vessels, and other implements in manufactories. I should like to see an application of it to agricultural establishments, to which nobody is so competent as yourself.

2

As an economist, however, Bentham probably had a good deal less influence on John Mill than either his father or Ricardo. Although he appears not to have greatly changed these earlier views, Bentham's post-1804 writings were largely concerned with other subjects than economics and he evinced little interest in the work done during the Ricardian era.<sup>3</sup> It is to the wider problems considered by Bentham that we must look in an attempt to establish the general qualities of Benthamism with which the young Mill came into contact, particularly Bentham's views of the motives upon which human nature was based.

### III

John Mill had first read Bentham in the winter of 1821.<sup>4</sup>

The following year he engaged in a controversy with Torrens in

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1. Ibid., vol. 3, p.69.

2. Bentham to Young, 8 July, 1801, ibid., vol. 10, p.374. Bentham went on to suggest that such an investigation would provide an argument in favour of General Enclosure.

3. T.W. Hutchison, "Bentham as an Economist", Economic Journal, vol. 66, (1956), p.289.

4. Autobiography, p.45.

the Traveller newspaper on the question of value, and continued during the next few years to be active as a debater and writer for the utilitarian cause.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the beginning of what may be called Mill's public career coincided with his study of Bentham's publications. Not yet an adult, Mill must have appeared to be the perfect utilitarian. He had involved himself with a great number of public issues and by the mid-1820s his written work was considerable. In 1825, most of what Mill called his leisure time was spent in editing a mass of manuscripts that had been prepared over many years by Bentham, and which, once condensed and simplified by Mill, still amounted to five large volumes when published in 1827 as the Rationale of Judicial Evidence. Though Bentham was an individual who suffered, particularly in later life, from a strong sense of personal vanity, and who normally expected his translators and other literary assistants to be self-effacing and anonymous, he insisted in this case, despite John Mill's attempts to persuade him otherwise, in placing the name of his editor on the title page.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the major intellectual effort of preparing Bentham's manuscripts for publication had the effect of straining Mill's mind, for in the autumn of 1826 he began to be troubled by a sense of dissatisfaction with the life that had been engineered for him. Although he continued with his usual occupations,

I went on with them mechanically, by the mere force of habit. I had been so drilled in a certain sort of mental exercise, that I could still carry it on when all the spirit had gone out of it.

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1. For Mill's writings see the list he drew up which has been edited by N. MacMinn, J.R. Hains and J.M. McCrimmon as Bibliography of the Published Writings of John Stuart Mill, (Evanston, Illinois, 1945). Chapter 4 of the Autobiography, "Youthful Propagandism" deals with his work as a utilitarian.

2. Ibid., p.81; also J.S. Mill to Bentham, April, 1827, Letters, pp.18-19.

3. Autobiography, p.98.

During this period of dejection, the young Mill questioned his education and the effects of this upon his opinions and character. As he felt that there was no one to whom he could turn for assistance, this self-examination was highly introspective, and it would seem that the experience through which Mill was going went largely unnoticed by those around him. Although this crisis has been subject to a number of interpretations,<sup>1</sup> it is not necessary to discuss it here, other than to attempt an outline of its importance in the process by which Mill questioned that corpus of ideas with which he had been brought up.

One of the fundamental ingredients of Bentham's social philosophy was his principle of self-regarding interest and the emphasis that was placed by him upon selfishness as one of the basic springs of human action. It was his belief that:

Man, from the very constitution of his nature, prefers his own happiness to that of all other sensitive beings put together: but for this self-preference, the species could not have had existence.

2

John Mill before the outset of his "mental crisis", had many times employed these ideas in developing his arguments. He now reacted against them. While to outward appearances he remained a model Benthamite, two marked changes, he recorded, took place in his attitudes. Firstly, he adopted "a theory of life, very unlike that on which I had before acted".<sup>3</sup> This, while it contained strong echoes of Bentham's "greatest happiness" principle, and reaffirmed "the conviction that happiness is the test of all

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1. One of the best known appraisals is the Freudian one advanced by A.W. Levi, "The 'Mental Crisis' of John Stuart Mill", Psychoanalytic Review, vol. 32, (1945).

2. Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.80.

3. Autobiography, pp.99-100.

rules of conduct, and the end of life", developed an idea the kernel of which Mill expressed in a well-known sentence:

Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. 1

This statement can, in many respects, be regarded as the anti-thesis of Bentham's belief in individual selfishness. It was a distinct break from the dominant concept in political economy which stressed personal self-interest and the striving of each member of society to maximise his economic well-being.<sup>2</sup>

The second change in Mill's opinions which he dated from this time concerned what he held to be "among the prime necessities of human well-being...the internal culture of the individual".<sup>3</sup> Here again Mill reaffirmed a belief in the essential truth of the "intellectual culture" that had been instilled into him from his earliest years, but came to see that other kinds of cultivation had to be joined with it: "the cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points of my ethical and philosophical creed".<sup>4</sup>

By adopting these two tenets, Mill tempered the utilitarian thought that he had until then known with an altruistic and warm-hearted concern with the quality of the individual's character and the means of improving it. These themes recur throughout Mill's subsequent writings. Their most elevated

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1. Ibid., p.100.

2. For a discussion of the laissez-faire social harmony doctrine Paul P. Streeten, "Keynes and the Classical Tradition" in Kenneth K. Kurihara (ed.), Post-Keynesian Economics, (1955), pp.345-349.

3. Autobiography, p.100.

4. Ibid., p.101.

statement is perhaps in On Liberty, but they are also represented in the Principles of Political Economy, where Mill's endorsement of peasant proprietorship was one facet of these ideas.<sup>1</sup> The working out of these newer beliefs and the modification of older influences, as well as ideas which were to subsequently present themselves, took many years. Indeed, Mill's opinions developed throughout his life, and go some way to explain the inconsistencies which are to be found in his thought.

#### IV

In emerging from the period of mental crisis, Mill began to cultivate intellectual pursuits far removed from those suggested to him by his father. He began to discover the importance of poetry and art as instruments of human culture. To James Mill, "the intense", was a "bye-word of scornful disapprobation".<sup>2</sup> Bentham observed that "ledgers do not keep well in rhyme" and made the well-known comment that to the utilitarian, other things being equal, push-pin was as good as poetry.<sup>3</sup> In the autumn of 1828 John Mill read Wordsworth whose poems exactly suited his dejected condition. The poet addressed himself to "the love of rural objects and natural scenery", one of the strongest of Mill's "pleasurable susceptibilities".<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that "The

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1. One reviewer of the Principles, Hodgskin, thought Mill had been sentimental on this point and blamed it on Sismondi's influence; above, p.200.

2. Autobiography, p.34.

3. Thomas Woods, Poetry and Philosophy: A Study in the Thought of John Stuart Mill, (1961), p.34.

4. Autobiography, p.103. Mill stated that he read Wordsworth for the first time at this date. He had earlier made a judgement later to be modified: "To most of our readers Mr. Southey is probably known only as the warm advocate of every existing abuse...He and the other Lake poets, however, commenced writing with higher objects", "Periodical Literature. Edinburgh Review", loc.cit., p.516.

Brothers" and "Michael" were the poems which had the greatest influence on Mill when he first came to Wordsworth.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, it is significant that almost thirty years previously, Wordsworth had drawn the attention of Charles James Fox to these two poems. The poet had written to Fox in 1801, and, although "utterly unknown" to the Whig politician, sent the volume containing "The Brothers" and "Michael".<sup>2</sup> In his letter Wordsworth spoke of the "most calamitous effect" of the changes that had recently taken place in society, and had attempted in his two poems,

to draw a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist among a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England. They are small independent proprietors of land here called statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties.

3

If Fox, who did not answer Wordsworth's letter, remained unmoved in the face of such sentiments, Mill did not. Through reading Marmontel's Memoires he had been released from the "oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me... I was not a stock or a stone".<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth's poetry sustained this emotional uplift that was being experienced by Mill, who spoke enthusiastically of his discovery at the London Debating Society in February, 1829.<sup>5</sup> It also implanted in him both a romanticized

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1. Emery Neff, Carlyle and Mill: An Introduction to Victorian Thought, (New York, 2nd. ed., 1926), p.243.

2. Wordsworth to Fox, 14 January 1801, in Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805, (2nd ed., Oxford, 1967), p.313. The letter had been composed by Coleridge on Wordsworth's behalf, (p.312n.)

3. Ibid., p.314. For a later account by Wordsworth of these small agriculturalists, see his book, A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England, (4th ed., 1823), esp. pp.42-58.

4. Autobiography, p.99.

5. Karl Britton, "J.S. Mill: A Debating Speech on Wordsworth, 1829", Cambridge Review, vol. 79, (8 March, 1958), pp.418-423.



sense of country life and a permanent attachment to the poetry of Wordsworth.<sup>1</sup>

Mill was soon to meet Wordsworth personally. In the summer of 1831 he toured the Lake District where he was able to visit and spend a deal of time with Wordsworth and Southey.<sup>2</sup> Mill's reaction against utilitarianism became stronger: reporting on his visit, he confided to John Sterling:

Wordsworth seems always to know the pros and cons of every question; & when you think he strikes the balance wrong, it is only because you think he estimates erroneously some matter of fact. Hence all my differences with him, or with any other philosophic Tory, would be differences of matter-of-fact detail, while my differences with the radicals & utilitarians are differences of principle; for these see generally only one side of the subject.

3

Even Southey, whom Mill earlier called the warm advocate of every existing abuse and Bentham had described as the "ultra-servile sack-guzzler",<sup>4</sup> might have been a democrat, "had he lived before radicalism & infidelity became prevalent".<sup>5</sup>

Mill may have been particularly sympathetic towards these philosophic Tories, as his correspondent, Sterling, was, like another of Mill's friends, Frederick Maurice, a disciple of Coleridge. As we have seen, Coleridge was unhappy with the changes that were taking place within society, preferring instead

1. In 1832, he referred to him as "the greatest English poet of our own times", "Use and Abuse of Political Terms", Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. 1, (1832), p.164n. Harriet Taylor's favourite poet was Shelley, whom Mill also came to admire; see John M. Robson, "J.S. Mill's Theory of Poetry", University of Toronto Quarterly, vol. 29, (1959-60), pp.420-438.

2. Anna J. Mill, "John Stuart Mill's Visit to Wordsworth, 1831", Modern Language Review, vol. 44, (1949), pp.341-350. Mill had met the two poets some months earlier at Henry Taylor's.

3. Mill to Sterling, 20-22 October, 1831, Letters, p.81.

4. Bentham to Samuel Parr, 17 February, 1823, Works, (ed. Bowring), vol. 10, p.536.

5. Letters, p.83. It is arguable that Southey did not abandon all the earlier beliefs derived from Godwin, but continued to hope for human progress through the subordination of private to public interest: an idea which would appeal to Mill at this time; cp. William Haller, "Southey's Later Radicalism", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, vol. 37, (1922), esp. pp.283f

a stable hierarchy held together by a system of duties and responsibilities: a national church, concerned for its parishioners, and enlightened landowners, who treated the peasantry well and were in turn well-respected. Although he had several times met Coleridge, studied his writings, and discussed them with men like Sterling, Mill never became an adherent. In economic matters there was a wide disagreement, Mill stating that on political economy, Coleridge wrote "like an arrant driveller".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Mill was attracted by Coleridge's philosophical beliefs, considering him to be the "most systematic thinker of our time".<sup>2</sup> Coleridge's concept of the social structure interested Mill, especially as it provided a counterpoise to Bentham's. His treatment of landed property, with Coleridge's emphasis upon the trust inherent in ownership, Mill agreed with, while he also looked with favour on the notion of a clerisy.<sup>3</sup> In two essays for the Westminster, Mill examined the seminal minds, as he saw them, of Coleridge and Bentham, and treated the poet the more favourably of the two. But Coleridge's importance in Mill's thought was limited mostly to the decade beginning in 1830, while his Benthamism was to remain with him, to a degree, for the remainder of his life.

However, during the years in which Mill became attracted towards other schools of thought, there was also a movement away from Benthamism. In 1828 the Mills had quarrelled with Bowring

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1. /J.S. Mill/, "Coleridge", Westminster Review, vol. 33, (1840), p.293.

2. Mill to J.P. Nichol, 15 April, 1834, Letters, p.221.

3. Mill introduced these concepts into his essay on Corporation and Church Property; below, pp.281-283.

over the acquisition of the Westminster Review by Colonel T. Perronet Thompson and this gave John Mill an excuse for refusing to contribute further to that quarterly. After several years of busy literary activity, Mill published nothing between October 1828 and July 1830. Instead he was using the period to examine and re-form many of his attitudes towards life. Early in 1829, Macaulay's attack on James Mill's Essay on Government appeared. Brilliantly written, it was the Edinburgh's belated retort to James Mill's criticisms in the first number of the Westminster, and counter-attacked the assumptions of utilitarianism. Macaulay declared:

We think that the theory of Mr. Mill rests altogether on false principles, and that even on those false principles he does not reason logically.

1

He went on to characterise James Mill's writings as dry and the utilitarians as mostly dunces: their philosophy was a poor occupation for grown men, but,

they may as well be Utilitarians as jockeys or dandies...it is not much more laughable than phrenology, and is immeasurably more humane than cock-fighting.

2

Macaulay's invective, and James Mill's failure to meet it, caused J. S. Mill to think that there was something "fundamentally erroneous in my father's conception of philosophical method" as applied to politics.<sup>3</sup>

This estrangement from the ideas with which Mill had grown

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1. /T.B. Macaulay/, "Mill's Essay on Government. Utilitarian Logic and Politics", Edinburgh Review, vol. 49, (1829), p.160.
  2. Ibid., p.189. A rejoinder by T.P. Thompson and Bentham followed in vol. 11, (1829) of the Westminster, on which Macaulay commented in the next number of the Edinburgh, a further reply came from Thompson, provoking another article from Macaulay in vol. 50 of the Edinburgh. Thompson had a last word in the Westminster, vol. 12, (1830).
  3. Autobiography, p.111.

up was true of his approach to Bentham as well as his father. Up to the time of Bentham's death, John Mill was on good personal terms with him and contributed a panegyrical obituary to the Examiner of 10 June, 1832. The following year, however, Mill wrote "Remarks on Bentham" which Edward Lytton Bulwer published as an appendix to his England and the English. In this Mill was highly critical towards his old teacher, particularly in respect of Bentham's theory that selfishness was the predominant principle of human nature. By promulgating such views, wrote Mill, "I conceive Mr. Bentham's writings have done and to be doing very serious evil".<sup>1</sup> Their tendency was to prejudice enthusiastic and generous minds, and the effects upon those who believed Bentham's writings,

must either be hopeless despondency and gloom,  
or a reckless giving themselves up to a life of  
that miserable self-seeking; where they are there  
taught to regard as inherent in their original and  
unalterable nature.

2

Mill did not allow his authorship to become public; the appendix was unsigned: "It is not, and must not be, known to be mine",<sup>3</sup> he insisted, for James Mill still exercised some control over his son's opinions. In 1835 Mill reviewed Adam Sedgwick's A Discourse on the Studies of the University for the newly-acquired Westminster Review, and was still unable to speak his whole mind "without coming into conflict with my father". Accordingly, he had to omit "two or three pages of comment on what I thought the mistakes of utilitarian moralists, which my father considered as an attack on

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1. /J.S. Mill/, "Remarks on Bentham", reprinted J.W.M. Gibbs (ed.) Early Essays of John Stuart Mill, (1897), p.403.

2. Ibid., p.405.

3. Mill to J.P. Nichol, 14 October, 1834, Letters, p.236; see also Autobiography, pp.138-139.

Bentham & on him".<sup>1</sup>

James Mill died in June 1836. For almost ten years, John had been developing an independent approach but was still in awe of his father, despite defying him during their serious disagreement arising from John's association with Harriet Taylor. In 1838 Mill wrote his essay on Bentham which was more sympathetic than the Bulwer appendix, and in 1843 in the System of Logic, Mill had attained what was to be his mature verdict on the adequacies of the Benthamite school.<sup>2</sup> Also in 1843, an independent observer noted Mill's departure from that school:

While Mr. John Mill, who had been presented to him/i.e. Bentham/ by his father as an heir of promise, to whom the rising generation of Utilitarians were to look, has broken away from their narrow training, and asserted his philosophical independence.

3

Many years later David Masson recalled a conversation that took place in the summer of the same year at Mill's home. The discussion turned to Bentham and his influence; one or two disciples were mentioned, "when Mill smilingly struck in: 'And I am Peter, who denied his Master'. Though smilingly uttered, it was not all a jest".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Jack Stillinger (ed.), The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, (Urbana, 1961), p.158 and n.

2. Robson, "John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham", loc.cit., p.260.

3. /William Empson/, "Jeremy Bentham", Edinburgh Review, vol. 78, (1843), p.516. Ironically, this article by quoting remarks unfavourable to James Mill (from Bowring's edition of Bentham's Works), led J.S. Mill to defend his father in a letter in vol. 79, (1844), of the Edinburgh Review.

4. David Masson, "Memories of London in the 'Forties - III", Blackwood's Magazine, vol. 183, (1908), p.553.

V

By the early 1840s, then, Mill had come to terms with the philosophies of his father and Bentham. A great deal of their teaching he continued to carry with him, but before considering this period in further detail, it is necessary to return to the 1830s in order to examine some of the other intellectual influences on Mill while he was a young man. As J. M. Robson has noted, Mill was generous in acknowledging those to whom he felt he owed any debt in the formation of his ideas.<sup>1</sup> It may be that the influence of other thinkers was in fact fairly limited; certainly they comprise a diverse collection of individuals, and perhaps Mill at most selected from the corpus of their writings only those ideas at which he was arriving by his own reasoning powers. It is always difficult to estimate a quality such as intellectual influence, and this is particularly true of Mill, but, it is noteworthy that, once he had broken away from the narrow utilitarianism of Bentham and his father, Mill remained anxious to preserve his independence, and would not become subservient to any of his new-found associates. These individuals had, however, one important trait in common: they were all critics of the state of society as it existed. It is therefore worth briefly considering their ideas, particularly on the question of property relationships, with a view to recording some of those theories that were passing through Mill's mind.

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1. John M. Robson, The Improvement of Mankind; The Social and Political Thought of John Stuart Mill, (Toronto, 1968), p.vii.



Referring to Mill's work in the 1840s, Bain wrote that he had "worked himself into sympathy with everything French...He always dealt gently with her faults, and liberally with her virtues."<sup>1</sup> This interest in the culture and politics of France was of long-standing. As a youth, he learned how the principles of democracy had, thirty years previously, borne all before them and been the creed of the nation; "the most transcendent glory" Mill could conceive, was that of figuring "as a Girondist in an English Convention".<sup>2</sup> He studied the Revolution in detail in the 1820s, and reviewed Mignet's History of the French Revolution in volume five of the Westminster, and Scott's life of Napoleon in volume nine. The revolution of July 1830 in France also had an important effect on Mill: "it aroused my utmost enthusiasm, and gave me, as it were, a new existence".<sup>3</sup> Accompanied by Roebuck, Mill travelled at once to Paris, where he met Lafayette and several leaders of the popular party, during a visit of about four weeks.<sup>4</sup> After his return he began to publish his views, principally in the Examiner, which had recently come under the ownership of Albany Fonblanque, who was also editor. Mill contributed most of the articles on French subjects, including a weekly summary of French politics, in addition to articles on general politics and other matters in which he interested himself, as well as reviews.<sup>5</sup> In this manner, Mill's output which had dried up in

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1. Bain, J.S. Mill, p.78.

2. Autobiography, p.45. Mill remained attached to the ideas of the Girondist party, especially in the 1830s when he saw his party of philosophic radicals as a modern equivalent.

3. Ibid., p.121.

4. F.E. Mineka, "John Stuart Mill: Letters on the French Revolution of 1830", Victorian Studies, vol. 1, (1957-58), p.137n.

5. Autobiography, p.122.

1828, re-commenced in a way that was to continue for most of his life, and from this time he was probably one of the best informed of Englishmen on French affairs. Understandably, then, this, and his fluent knowledge of the French language, soon led him to study in detail the writings of the French social philosophers.<sup>1</sup>

During his first stay in France, the fourteen-year old Mill had seen Henri St. Simon (1760-1825), who was then, as the Autobiography records, "not yet the founder of either a philosophy or a religion, and considered only as a clever original".<sup>2</sup> Of Mill's introduction by Gustave d'Eichthal to St. Simonian writings in 1828, and of the reception which he gave them, a number of studies have been made.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, the St. Simonian school believed in a purposive organization of society with a clearly defined object: the greatest possible physical and moral well-being of every member. The institution of private property was an obstacle to this aim, but it could be surmounted by the confiscation of property by the State, which would distribute income to individuals in proportion to their contribution to society.<sup>4</sup>

Mill found such ideas unacceptable; their principle of property inheritance seemed to him "a great heresy", and he held

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1. It is, of course, true to say that Mill took a life-long interest in France and the ideas of her thinkers; as he told Brandes in 1870; "I cling to my old conviction that the history of France in modern times is the history of all Europe", George Brandes, Creative Spirits of the Nineteenth Century, (1924, trans. Rasmus B. Anderson), p.199.

2. Autobiography, p.43.

3. See in particular Iris Wessel Mueller, John Stuart Mill and French Thought, (Urbana, 1956), ch. 3, passim; also Richard K.P. Pankhurst, The Saint Simonians, Mill and Carlyle: A Preface to Modern Thought, (n.p., n.d. /1957/), and Robson, Improvement of Mankind, op.cit., pp.76-80.

4. Neff, op.cit., pp.211-213.

onto his earlier ideas: "I myself think, with Mr. Bentham, that property ought to escheat to the state in preference to collateral heirs, where there is no testamentary disposition", but should not, Mill implied, be taken by the state under normal circumstances.<sup>1</sup> In this letter he mentioned that he was about to begin reading Comte, whose book had been written while he was a pupil of St. Simon. Some months later, in his next letter to d'Eichthal, Mill declared that he was "perfectly astonished at the shallowness" of the Opinions Littéraires, Philosophiques et Industrielles,<sup>2</sup> but on reading Comte, he was no longer surprised at the high opinion which d'Eichthal had expressed of the book and writer.<sup>3</sup> Mill was to make personal contact with Comte, but not until 1841, by which time the Frenchman no longer considered himself to be an adherent of St. Simon.<sup>4</sup> Despite the efforts of d'Eichthal in his correspondence, Mill, while conceding the merits of the St. Simonian case and suggesting how it might be made more widely known in Britain,<sup>5</sup> remained unconverted. He was attracted by some of their ideas, such as their sympathy with the poor and

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1. Mill to d'Eichthal, 15 May, 1829, Letters, p.34. d'Eichthal (1804-1886), who had been introduced to the writings of St. Simon by Comte, was taken by Eyton Tooke to a meeting of the London Debating Society at which Mill spoke in May 1828. Recognising Mill's ability, d'Eichthal set about recruiting him as a member of the St. Simonian school.

2. Mill to d'Eichthal, 8 October, 1828, ibid., p.35. This book was written by various authors including St. Simon.

3. Ibid., Comte's book was Système de politique positive.

4. During the 1840s, Mill engaged in a long correspondence with Comte, who came to see him as a disciple. Though providing financial assistance, Mill resisted any such role, just as he had earlier with the St. Simonians, and eventually spoke severely against aspects of Comte's system. The main importance of Comte in Mill's development was probably in the application of sociological and scientific method as tools of inquiry; see Mueller, op.cit., ch. 4.

5. E.G., Mill to d'Eichthal, 6 December, 1831, Letters, pp.90-92, where he suggested the names of several individuals to whom the St. Simonian newspaper, the Globe, might be sent.

the emancipation of women, but other aspects, not least the attack on private property, made it impossible for Mill to join them.<sup>1</sup> By 1832 he was declining to write a series of letters on St. Simonism for the Morning Chronicle with the observation:

St. Simonism is all in all to you, St. Simonians; but to me it is only one among a variety of interesting and important features in the time we live in, & there are other subjects & other occupations which have as great a claim upon me as it has, in themselves, & a much greater from being, just now, more in season.

2

The movement had little more to offer him, and he never again considered it in depth. His most "St. Simonian" publication was The Spirit of the Age, and it was this series of articles which led to one of Mill's "other occupations": his friendship with Thomas Carlyle.

In five essays appearing in the Examiner between January and April, 1831, Mill put forward some of his new ideas. He began by discussing the period which he designated as one of transition: mankind was outgrowing those old institutions which may have been good for earlier generations, but were bad for the present. In earlier times, power belonged to a wealthy class, as, "for many centuries the only wealth was land, and the only wealthy were the territorial aristocracy".<sup>3</sup> But times had changed, and their successors no longer had a right to political power. The system

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1. Robson, Improvement of Mankind, op.cit., p.78. At the period he was most sympathetic to their ideas, Mill wrote that he agreed with the St. Simonians, "partially on almost all points, entirely perhaps on none", "Comparison of the Tendencies of French and English Intellect", Monthly Repository, vol. 7, (1833), p.800.

2. Mill to d'Eichthal and Charles Duveyrier, 30 May, 1832, Letters, p.108.

3. The Spirit of the Age, (ed.) Frederick von Hayek, (Chicago, 1942), p.44.

of hereditary monarchs and aristocrats belonged to an age of violence and insecurity; with civilization, natural leaders could emerge.<sup>1</sup> Mill further argued that in such a transitional state, unlike the natural state previous to it, there were no persons to whom the uninstructed mass habitually referred.<sup>2</sup> The people were more sensitive to the abuses of the irresponsible few: their intelligence had developed, while that of the higher classes declined as they became more lazy.<sup>3</sup> The reform movement was an indication that the ruling class had been found unsatisfactory and Mill proposed to consider the sequel to this transition after the Reform Bill had been passed.<sup>4</sup>

Although echoing some St. Simonian assumptions about the organization of social power, in many respects Mill's discussion was little more than the standard utilitarian argument against the territorial aristocracy, the case for the political representation of the middle classes, and a statement of his belief in the progress of civilization. His theories were, however, cast in such a way that Carlyle on reading them declared, "here is a new mystic".<sup>5</sup> In this judgement he was mistaken, as he was also in his belief that Mill might be cultivated into a disciple. Their philosophies were fundamentally different. It is difficult, therefore, to find any lasting aspects of Mill's thought, the development of which

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1. Ibid., p.56.

2. Ibid., p.76.

3. Ibid., p.91.

4. Ibid., p.94. Mill's proposed sequel never appeared.

5. Autobiography, p.122. It has recently been suggested that Mill's account is inexact: Edward Spivey, "'Here is a new Mystic'", Mill News Letter, vol. 5, (Spring, 1970), pp.5-6.

might be attributed to Carlyle's influence, and the importance of the latter was probably in helping to widen the narrow beliefs of Mill's early creed. Significantly, it was in a number of letters to Carlyle that Mill referred to the narrowness of thought found among utilitarians such as Grote and Thompson.<sup>1</sup>

Carlyle's opinion of Benthamism was more hostile than Mill's had ever been. In his lecture on "The Hero as Prophet", given on 8 May, 1840, Carlyle spoke of:

Benthamee Utility, virtue by Profit and Loss;  
reducing this God's-world to a dead brute Steam-  
engine, the infinite celestial Soul of Man to a  
kind of Hay-balance for weighing hay and thistles  
on, pleasures and pains on: - If you ask me which  
gives, Mahomet or they, the beggarlier and falsier  
view of Man and his Destinies in this Universe, I  
will answer, It is not Mahomet!--

2

According to Carlyle's biographer, Mill, who was among the audience, at the word "beggarlier" rose to his feet with a cry of "No!"<sup>3</sup> For a while, though, Mill agreed with many of Carlyle's judgements on social questions, even if he did not express them with the same vehemence. On the issue of landed property at this time, the following, from Past and Present (1843), is typical of Carlyle's prophet-like pronouncements:

Properly speaking, the Land belongs to these  
two: To the Almighty God; and to all His  
Children of Men that have ever worked well on  
it, or that shall ever work well on it.

4

If not the rhetoric, Mill probably accepted the sentiment.

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1. E.g., Mill to Carlyle, 2 August, 1833, Letters, p.170; 12 January, 1834, ibid., p.204; 2 March, 1834, ibid., p.216.

2. The Works of Thomas Carlyle, (30 vols, 1897), vol. 5, p.76.

3. Richard Garnett, Life of Thomas Carlyle, (n.d., /1887?/), p.171

4. Carlyle, Works, op.cit., vol. 10, p.175.



VI

It has sometimes been suggested that Mill needed a strong personality on whom to depend.<sup>1</sup> At first his father had occupied such a role, but from the early 1830s, Harriet Taylor took the central place in Mill's life.<sup>2</sup> He probably first met Mrs. Taylor at the home of John Taylor, a wholesale druggist of radical sympathies, in 1830. He enjoyed her close friendship, and married her in 1851, two years after her husband's death. Harriet's place in Mill's mental life has been the subject of much discussion, which need not be repeated here.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say, that while Mill greatly overstated her qualities, he undoubtedly attached - even if unreasonably - considerable importance to her opinions. She fulfilled the role of an intellectual confidant, and, as her beliefs were close to his, she may have had the effect of excluding some notions, while at the same time encouraging him to follow more radical directions.<sup>4</sup>

Harriet, who had little liking for Carlyle, may also have helped to temper the relationship between Mill and Tocqueville. At first Tocqueville was one of the French writers most admired by Mill. The two met in the spring of 1835 and from the middle of that year corresponded regularly until the early 1840s. Mill began reading the "excellent" first part of Tocqueville's Democracy in

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1. E.g., by Ruth Borchard, John Stuart Mill the Man, (1957), p.63.

2. The definitive study of their relationship is by F.A. Hayek, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Friendship and Subsequent Marriage, (1951).

3. H.O. Pappé, John Stuart Mill and the Harriet Taylor Myth, (Melbourne, 1960), while sceptical of Harriet's influence, summarises the earlier literature; for a more recent treatment, Robson, Improvement of Mankind, op.cit., chapter 3.

4. See the comments of Georg Brandes, op.cit., p.190, and Knut Hagberg, Personalities and Power, (1930, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge & Claude Napier), p.196. When the second edition of the Principles was being prepared, Harriet urged Mill to remove the objections to Communism, see Packe, op.cit., p.313.

America in April 1835;<sup>1</sup> he reviewed this part in the London Review, and later part two in the Edinburgh.<sup>2</sup> Tocqueville, who was accompanied on his visit to England by de Beaumont, placed great emphasis on the importance of land ownership, which he believed played a greater part in the formation of social and political habits than other forms of ownership. This point he argued in detail with Nassau Senior who put forward the conventional English view that great properties were necessary for the improvement of agriculture, while Tocqueville stressed the significance of small properties in a democratic society.<sup>3</sup> An eye-witness account of Tocqueville's exchange with Senior has been recorded by Cavour:

I found Mr. Senior walking in the garden with M. Tocqueville and M. Beaumont, discussing the great subject of the division of property. An extraordinary thing was that the radical Englishman was in favour of large ownership and the legitimist Frenchman of small ownership. Mr. Senior thinks that the small proprietor has neither security nor comfort, and that it is much better for him to be in the employ of a large proprietor and have nothing to fear from bad luck or bad seasons. M. de Tocqueville refuted his argument very well both on moral and material grounds.

4

Tocqueville's preoccupation with landed property is also a notable feature of his visit to England two years previously.

1. Mill to Joseph Blanco White, 15 April, 1835, Letters, p.259.
2. /J.S. Mill/, "De Tocqueville on Democracy in America", London Review, vol. 2, (1835); /idem/, "Democracy in America", Edinburgh Review, vol. 72, (1840).
3. See the discussion by Seymour Drescher, Tocqueville in England, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), esp. pp.57-61; also Jack Lively, The Social and Political Thought of Alexis de Tocqueville, (Oxford, 1962), pp.46f. Senior at about this time was advocating for Ireland the consolidation of small farms and capitalistic farming; see Marian Bowley, Nassau Senior and Classical Economics, (1937), p.247.
4. Diary entry for 24 May 1835, quoted in A.J. Whyte (ed.), The Early Life and Letters of Cavour, 1810-1848, (Oxford, 1925), p.122. At about the same time, another proselytizing foreigner was visiting Richard Jones at Haileybury and trying to shake the English economist's criticisms of small farms: F. von Raumer, England in 1835..., (3 vols. 1836, trans. S. Austin & H.E. Lloyd), vol. 2, p.140. See also below, p.346.

He then recorded a belief that the number of paupers was increasing at an alarming rate, and that,

the first and permanent cause of the evil is the way landed property is not divided up. In England the number of people who possess land is tending to decrease rather than increase, and the number of the proletarians grows ceaselessly with the population.

1

Here Tocqueville was expressing very much the conventional view held by informed opinion on the other side of the English Channel, for, although there was some support in France for the English system of landownership, it was voiced only by a small and conservative minority.<sup>2</sup> Most writers viewed with disapproval the concentration of land in relatively few hands, and frequently connected England's social problems with this restricted ownership.<sup>3</sup> In Democracy in America, too, Tocqueville considered the way in which the distribution of landed property affected the nature of society. He expressed surprise that writers had not attributed greater importance to the laws of inheritance, which had an "unbelievable influence on the social state of peoples".<sup>4</sup> These laws he maintained gave men great power over the future of their fellows; if drafted in a certain way, the mechanism "assembles, concentrates, and piles up property, and soon power too in the hands of one man; in a sense it makes an aristocracy leap

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1. Note dated 7 September, 1833, in Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland, (1958, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence & K.P. Mayer), p.72.

2. Theodore Zeldin, "English Ideals in French Politics during the Nineteenth Century", Historical Journal, vol. 2, (1959), pp.49-50.

3. For a later example, Ledru Rollin, The Decline of England, (2nd ed., 1850), p.22.

4. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (New York, 1966 ed., ed. J.P. Mayer & Max Lerner, trans. George Lawrence), p.44.

forth from the ground".<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, where the law required landed property to be divided into equal shares, power was spread and this wide distribution provided the foundation for democracy.

As in the case with all those persons with whom Mill had intellectual exchanges, there is much room for discussion as to importance of the part they played, if any, in the development of his thought. One authority, H. O. Pappé, has minimised Tocqueville's influence on Mill and, while emphasising that their similarity of views arose from the fact that both stood largely in the same Bacon-Newtonian tradition, suggests that Tocqueville was Mill's pupil, rather than vice-versa.<sup>2</sup> Pappé also maintains that Harriet, who had strong reservations about Tocqueville, was probably successful in impressing her objections upon Mill. In 1849 Harriet declared:

Tocqueville is a notable specimen of the class which includes such people as the Stirlings Romillys Carlyles Austins - the gentility class - weak in moral, narrow in intellect, timid, infinitely conceited & gossiping.

3

While Mill may have later cooled towards Tocqueville's views, on the specific question of landed property, the Frenchman's ideas must have struck a responsive chord in Mill whose opinions were

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1. Ibid., p.45. Tocqueville appeared to qualify these views in an essay in Mill's London and Westminster Review, vol. 3 and 25, (1836), "Political and Social Condition of France". Here, while stressing that there was "nothing...more favourable to the reign of democracy, than the division of land into small independent properties", (p.155), he also averred that if "human passions" operated in a contrary direction, entails could retard but not prevent the ruin of the nobles, (p.147).

2. H.O. Pappé, "Mill and Tocqueville", Journal of the History of Ideas, vol. 25, (1964), pp.217-234.

3. Harriet Taylor to J.S. Mill, 9 July, 1849, Hayek, op.cit., p.156; cp. Pappé, loc.cit., p.221.

already running in a similar direction. Recalling Tocqueville's contribution in general to his development, Mill noted that he was well-prepared for speculations such as those found in Democracy in America. There are, then, good grounds for suggesting that Tocqueville's emphasis upon the relationship between democracy and small properties would have been particularly persuasive, insofar as it nurtured a seed already implanted in Mill's mind. English radicals had long realised the power conferred on a small class by extensive landownership, and despite the objections of orthodox political economy, Tocqueville's belief in a wide distribution of property to end this power was one that Mill tended to share.

As Gertrude Himmelfarb has remarked, "Mill cannot be understood except in terms of his intellectual and personal history".<sup>1</sup> His attitude towards questions concerning landed property also needs to be related to this context, and it has therefore been necessary to sketch some account of his early life. In Mill's understanding of land, there are traces of most of these early influences. Especially those originating with his father and Bentham, those of conservatives like Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the ideas cast about by a number of Frenchmen. While Mill was absorbing and evaluating these various intellectual forces, he was also, during the 1830s, politically active, principally in trying to organise a party of philosophic radicals.<sup>2</sup> Partly towards this end, Mill wrote a considerable amount. Not all of his efforts in this direction consisted of ephemeral journalism,

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1. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds, (1968), p.xii.

2. This side of Mill's career has been examined by Hamburger, Intellectual in Politics, op.cit., passim.

written only to accommodate a temporary set of circumstances. In his published work during this period, Mill was considering ideas which stretched over a long time-scale and which he intended should survive for more than a few months. Much of the work undertaken by him was either directly or indirectly concerned with the institution of landed property. In the next chapter, these writings and Mill's attempt to transmit the ideas which they contained into political action are examined.



CHAPTER VIII:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF J.S. MILL'S THOUGHT, 1833-1845

What does seem to me essential is that society at large should not be overworked, nor over-anxious about the means of subsistence, for which we must look to the ground source of improvement, repression of population, combined with laws or customs of inheritance which shall favour the diffusion of property instead of its accumulation in masses.

Mill to John Austin, 13 April, 1847, Letters, p.713.

Although Mill wrote extensively after the "Spirit of the Age", particularly for the Examiner on French affairs and contemporary politics, his next major article for our purpose was on corporation and church property in the Jurist for February, 1833.<sup>1</sup> Again, this essay reflects earlier influences, rather than the more recent opinions which Mill was examining. James Mill had at one time intended his son for a career at the bar and had arranged for the philosophic radical John Austin, later Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of London, to tutor him in Roman law.<sup>2</sup> In the first place, the essay demonstrates Mill's grasp of legal matters which he owed to this early training. Moreover, the principle on which his arguments were based throughout the essay was the Benthamite one of utility.

Mill began by examining the system whereby property - most commonly in land - was assigned in perpetuity or some long period

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1. Reprinted in Dissertations and Discussions, vol. 1 (2nd ed. 1867), pp.1-41, as "The Right and Wrong of State Interference with Corporation and Church Property". The following references are to this source.

2. Autobiography, p.45.

as an endowment for such institutions as the Church and the universities.<sup>1</sup> He went on to reject the case for absolute non-interference with property, especially when it was based upon the wishes of the dead. Because of the common law maxim that "the law abhors perpetuities" the last four hundred years had seen a narrowing of the power of landed proprietors to entail land in favour of a particular descendant to a more moderate term of years.<sup>2</sup> In a lucid style, Mill dismissed arguments such as any changes would amount to robbing the Church of England, and expressed indifference to some of these so-called rights. "The only moral duties which we are conscious of", he wrote, "are towards living beings, either present or to come".<sup>3</sup> He suggested that the legislature should modify endowments and apply them to a more useful purpose, preferably connected with the original intention. He ended his article by discussing Coleridge's notion of a national clerisy, which could be a "grand institution for the education of the whole people".<sup>4</sup> However, even in this generous acknowledgement, Mill insisted that such a system of education must be free from the vices of the Established Church: a proviso which identifies him more closely with utilitarian secularism than with Coleridge's combination of a benevolent Church and State.<sup>5</sup> This, plus a willingness to argue in favour of modifying, but not drastically upsetting, the rights of

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1. "Corporation and Church Property", loc.cit., p.3.
  2. Ibid., p.6. Mill failed to point out that by making a strict settlement the landowner still had considerable powers of entail.
  3. Ibid., p.21.
  4. Ibid., p.38.
  5. Compare James Mill's pamphlet of 1812, Schools for All, in Preference to Schools for Churchmen Only.

property, suggests that in many respects the child was still the father of the man.

Any sort of interference with property was viewed with great alarm particularly by conservatives and - especially where the Church was involved - by Anglicans.<sup>1</sup> But Mill's proposals were carefully qualified and in fact he opposed the widely-advocated tax on property.<sup>2</sup> He wrote that the Times was "at the head of that class of brawlers for a property tax, who mean by it a tax on other people's property, exempting their own."<sup>3</sup> Such a proposal, to tax landed or monied capital, Mill termed "audaciously unjust", for, as it was partial taxation which excluded certain classes, it was confiscation. Schemes of this type ought to be resisted lest those who advocated them, "by their stupidity and rapacity...succeed in weakening the security of all property; but let them rely upon this, that they will not be permitted to make scape-goats of any particular class of its possessors."<sup>4</sup> Mill later described this period of his life as a time when he had:

become much more indulgent to the common opinions of society and the world, and more willing to be content with seconding the superficial improvement which had begun to take place in those common opinions,...Private property and...inheritance, appeared to me...the dernier mot of legislation: and I looked no further than to mitigating the

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1. J.L. Mallet referred to Archbishop Whately's declaration "against agitators and despoilers of church property" at the Political Economy Club; diary, 9 March, 1833, Proceedings, p.248.

2. Mallet, ibid., p.249, 12 April, 1833, observed that "twenty pamphlets on a property tax have appeared within the last month."

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Confiscation Schemes of 'The Times'," Examiner, 5 May, 1833, p.275.

4. Ibid. Cp. Mill's article "Westminster Review - Landlord's Claims" in Examiner, 6 May, 1832, p.295 which insisted that although the state had a right to purchase land, the proprietor was entitled to its full pecuniary value.

inequalities consequent on these institutions, by getting rid of primogeniture and entails.

1

During 1834, Mill contributed an important series of articles to Fox's Monthly Repository under the general title of "Notes on the Newspapers". These consisted of Mill's commentary on current political events, rather than a discussion of the contents of the press. They first appeared in March and continued each month until September, 1834, and may be regarded as "a kind of political diary, and are perhaps the best extant record of Mill's day-to-day application of his political philosophy".<sup>2</sup> Each month the form of these articles was similar, with Mill commenting on five or six topics of contemporary interest and generally dealing with each in a few sentences or a couple of pages. No pretence to impartiality was made; Mill usually assumed his readers were well-informed of the facts and that his purpose was to offer opinion. His intention was, he told Carlyle, "to present for once at least a picture of our 'statesmen' & of their doings, taken from the point of view of a radical to whom yet radicalism in itself is but a small thing".<sup>3</sup>

In his first contribution, Mill set the tone by urging the Whigs to support reforms. "Ministers," he declared, "are ignorant of the very first principles of statesmanship. The one maxim of a wise policy, in times of trouble and movement, is that which Madame Roland recommended to the Girondists:- 'Take the initiative!'"<sup>4</sup> Established institutions such as the landed

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1. Autobiography, p.161.

2. Francis E. Mineka, The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838, (Chapel Hill, 1944), p.280.

3. Mill to Carlyle, 2 March, 1834, Letters, p.218.

4. Monthly Repository, vol. 8, (March, 1834), p.161.

aristocracy, the Church, the magistracy, and Oxford University were dealt with in scathing terms and Mill wrote with an almost reckless confidence that great changes were about to occur.

The landed interest was a particular target. Referring to a recent debate on agricultural distress, Mill suggested that as the landowners controlled the legislature yet still complained of distress, they "must be either very unskilful or remarkably conscientious, if they do not contrive to make some other people distressed instead of themselves." In fact, he continued, they had tried to make others bear their burdens by enacting laws to force people to buy their produce at their prices; by securing for themselves the advantage of a low rate of interest; by exempting their land from several taxes; by deciding the county rate and administering the poor law, while,

the army, the navy, and the civil patronage of the State belong to them almost exclusively. The lay-tithes are theirs for their own use, the ecclesiastical tithes for the use of their younger children. When new land has been inclosed, it has usually been distributed, not among the poor, but among the landlords.

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Mill's polemic ended, however, on a note of anti-climax. After comparing the landed interest to a spoiled child, which was always dissatisfied, he insisted that "their property must be protected because all property must be protected."<sup>2</sup> Given his adherence to such a principle, Mill could only end weakly by admonishing them for complaining that the riches provided by an accident of birth were less than they expected. Mill had no difficulty in understanding that the political strength and influence of the aristocracy was based upon the possession of extensive landed property.

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1. Ibid., (April, 1834), p.234.

2. Ibid., p.235.

Angrily he declared of the Corn Laws, "we must tax ourselves to give them salaries for being a landed Aristocracy. We thank them for nothing. Their creditors will do it gratis." He went on to point out that "Land is power; and power cannot be more fatally placed than in the hands of spendthrifts by station".<sup>1</sup> But the means of curbing this power were not made explicit although Mill was confident that reforms would be achieved; in some way, the radical fringe in Parliament might leaven the Whig administration. With such hopes, Mill was able to see advance where it hardly existed and in this frame of mind welcomed the Poor Law Report. Its foundation, he wrote,

is the principle on which all good government, and all justly-constituted society rest; that no person who is able to work, is entitled to be maintained in idleness; or to be put into a better condition, at the expense of the public, than those who contrive to support themselves by their unaided exertions. Any infringement of this principle, whether by rich or poor, is not only immoral, but nine-tenths of the immorality of the world are founded on it.

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The naivety of such a belief does little credit to Mill, for while he accepted the principle that neither rich nor poor should benefit from idleness, he disregarded the fact that the rich were well-secured from the danger of coming under the regulations of the poor law and could continue to enjoy their comforts. Fearful of any proposal which smacked of confiscation, Mill was obliged to advocate reform through existing mechanisms. Yet the Whigs continued to disappoint in most respects, even exercising, in the case of the Dorchester Labourers, "Government by brute force".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.244.
  2. Ibid., (May, 1834), p.360.
  3. Ibid., p.364.



The radical party in the Commons was small and ineffectual, despite the efforts by Mill during the 1830s to reorganize it into a stronger body. Nevertheless, in view of formidable obstacles, he maintained an optimistic attitude that success was imminent, as when, in a criticism of magistrates, he insisted that the "magistracy of England, with the rest of our aristocratic institutions, will, in a few years, have ceased to be."<sup>1</sup>

## II

At other times, Mill took a more balanced view. He wrote to Nichol of the "extreme desirableness of banding together the English Gironde", and noted it "has been often thought of by almost all the leading philosophic reformers here, never more than lately", but explained that the "lamentable truth is that our Gironde, like the other Gironde, are a rope of sand" who would not become organized without leaders.<sup>2</sup> In calmer moments he realised, too, that the Whigs were likely to introduce little of the advanced legislation he wished to see. As he wrote to Guilbert in 1835, "I fear the whigs will do as little for the people as they possibly can."<sup>3</sup> Even so, Mill continued to cherish hope that democratic pressure might be effectively applied. To rally the forces of progress, he launched, with financial support from Sir William Molesworth, the London Review early in 1835 which was merged with the Westminster the following year. Molesworth

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1. Ibid., (August, 1834), p.598.

2. Mill to John Pringle Nichol, 10 July, 1833, Letters, p.165.

3. Mill to Aristide Guilbert, 8 May, 1835, ibid., p.261.

(1810-1855) was a Cornish baronet whose character, according to Mrs. Grote, was injured by matrimonial disappointment: he became an opponent of aristocracy when Lord Lyttleton refused him the hand of Miss Julia Carew and "exclaimed....'I vow to pull down this haughty aristocracy of ours, or perish in the attempt!'"<sup>1</sup> Though sympathetic towards Molesworth's personality, Mill noted he had "a natural tendency to be intolerant" and to "bluster".<sup>2</sup> Whatever the basis of his animus, Molesworth was sufficiently wealthy to enter Parliament and work with much energy in radical campaigns. By supporting the London Review, Molesworth made a particularly important contribution in enabling Mill, who always valued the opportunity for propaganda provided by journalism, to use it as a platform. Mill exercised considerable editorial control over the Review, even if in some respects, he occupied a somewhat ambiguous position. In the Autobiography, he recorded that he was at variance with the philosophic radicals, whose views the Review was to represent, "on many essential points".<sup>3</sup> It may be that he exaggerated these differences; certainly in his first article for the Review he managed to combine a discussion of newer influences and the approval of James Mill for what he had written.<sup>4</sup> This was his essay on "Civilization". In it, he noted with approval that a large proportion of English landlords were "so overwhelmed with mortgages, that they have ceased to be the real owners of the bulk of their estates."<sup>5</sup> The working-classes, meanwhile, had

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1. /Harriet Grote/, The Philosophical Radicals of 1832. Comprising the Life of Sir William Molesworth, and some incidents connected with the Reform Movement from 1832 to 1842, (1866), p.6.

2. Mill to Robert Barclay Fox, 23 December, 1840, Letters, p.453.

3. Autobiography, p.140.

4. Ibid., pp.141-142.

5. Dissertations and Discussions, op.cit., p.169. Reprinted from the London and Westminster Review, (April, 1836).

learned the habit of co-operation in benefit societies and trade unions, but Mill believed that to gain the full advantage of the collective will into which the masses were forming themselves, greater education was needed.

However, until democracy became more advanced, and in despair of the Whigs, Mill favoured the formation of a party of political radicals. As the nucleus of such a new party, he anticipated he would gain the support of such Members of Parliament as Molesworth, Roebuck and Grote. But, though Mill's wishes were slow to crystallise and in terms of parliamentary representation the philosophic radicals were never more than a stage army, he remained sanguine. When Place declared in 1837, "I have no present inclination to waste my time with men who are infirm of purpose",<sup>1</sup> Mill wrote to Fonblanque that he intended to keep Place's letter "as a memorial of the spiritless, heartless imbecility of the English radicals".<sup>2</sup> His article on "Parties and the Ministry" in October, 1837, argued that the "Radicals in Parliament are committing the same blunder as the Whigs...they are not putting themselves at the head of the working classes",<sup>3</sup> and ended with a call for all reformers to combine for action.

The following year Mill was still confident that the Whigs might be replaced as the progressive party - a party not merely of radicals, but of philosophic radicals, the name given "to the thinking radicals generally, to distinguish them from the demagogic

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1. Wallas, op.cit., pp.351-352.

2. Mill to Fonblanque, 13? February, 1837, Letters, p.327.

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Parties and the Ministry", Westminster Review, vol. 28, (1837), p.16.

radicals, such as Wakley & from the historical radicals of the Cartwright school, & from the division of property radicals if there be any."<sup>1</sup> His hopes, however, were not fulfilled, and as the Whig government struggled on, the radical wing was no more potent. In 1839 Mill therefore made what was to be his last major attempt to create an effective party of reform. Only three years after contemplating the debts under which the country's landlords were being crushed, Mill wrote a full-blooded article demonstrating the strength of the landed interest. In this essay, Mill drew upon many of his earliest opinions in addition to those formed during the 1830s. Further, his treatment of landownership and the question of peasant proprietorship foreshadowed many of the opinions put forward in the Principles.<sup>2</sup> It must therefore be examined in some detail.

### III

"The Radicals", Mill's essay began, "have hitherto exhibited the spectacle of a great body of men without policy, leader, organization, concert, or simultaneous efforts."<sup>3</sup> It was possible, he continued, for there to be many coteries in a country, but only two parties, one was the "great Conservative party" which must be opposed by the whole Liberal party - "a phalanx, stretching from

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1. Mill to Fonblanque, 30 January, 1838, Letters, p.370. Cp. /J.S. Mill/, "Fonblanque's England Under Seven Administrations", Westminster Review, vol. 27, (1837), p.67.

2. The article must have been written late in 1838, as in December of that year Mill, under the orders of his physician, left England to spend six months on the Continent. By the time it appeared in the April, 1839 edition of the Westminster, the situation had greatly changed, and Mill, on 6 April, 1839, wrote from Rome to John Robertson, his editor, regretting the appearance of the article, Letters, p.397.

3. /J.S. Mill/, "Reorganization of the Reform Party", Westminster Review, vol. 32, (1839), p.475.

the Whig-Radicals at one extremity...to the Ultra-Radicals and the Working Classes on the other."<sup>1</sup> These forces had come together in order to support Grey's Ministry at the passing of the Reform Bill and, given a popular leader, they might again. Without a strong and united Reform party, argued Mill, no reforms of any importance would be realized.

He next considered who were the natural Radicals that might belong to such a party, and who were the natural opponents of Radicalism: the former were the Disqualified Classes while natural Conservatives could be designated as the Privileged Classes.<sup>2</sup> Mill then proposed to make an inventory of these classes, beginning with the Conservatives:

At the head of the Privileged, or in other words, the Satisfied Classes must be placed the landed interest. They have the strongest reason possible for being satisfied with the government; they are the government...the English government is an oligarchy of landholders. They compose the House of Lords exclusively. In the House of Commons they possess the representation of the counties, and of most of the small towns. On all questions which interest them as landholders, and on which the Whig and Tory portion of them are united, their majority in the House of Commons is irresistible.

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To support this contention, Mill wrote a strong invective against the landed interest. On the question of the Corn Laws their's was an "insulting claim" to monopoly, "their fancies go before all other people's most substantial interests".<sup>4</sup> Not only on this issue did "the whole course of legislation...run wholly in their favour"<sup>5</sup>: the usury laws, abolished for the trading classes

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1. Ibid., pp.475-476.

2. Ibid., p.478.

3. Ibid., p.479.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p.480.

were retained for the benefit of the landholders, yet if they were creditors they had the power of distraining for rent when all other people had first to go to law. By holding Anglican endowments, they had converted

the cure of souls into a family property, have made the Christian ministry the provision for the fool or profligate of a family, - for those who, being too stupid, or too idle, or too vicious to work, are fit only for an "easy life". 1

The government of the rural districts was altogether in their hands - they were the justices at quarter sessions and magistrates at petty sessions.

As a class the landlords were generally unqualified Tories. But even at this, their weakest point, the Reformers were not altogether unsupported: on all issues other than the Corn Laws, the small proprietors belonged to the natural Radicals: "wherever any considerable number remain of what were once the pride of England, - her yeomanry; wherever the multiplication of large fortunes, and the eagerness of men of fortune to buy land, has not yet extinguished the class of small proprietors, there the county elections return Liberals".<sup>2</sup> In France the Liberal deputies were returned mostly by the small proprietors in the agricultural departments:

In every country in which landed property is much divided, the land will be on the side of democracy; as they well know who fight for primogeniture and entail as the bulwarks of Toryism, the main stay of an aristocratic constitution.

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As well as these small proprietors, Mill believed there to

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1. Ibid.
  2. Ibid., p.481.
  3. Ibid., p.481.



be another class connected with the land to whom the Reformers might look for support: the prosperous farmers with long leases. Though rare in the South of England, where most farmers were tenants-at-will, this class was more common in the North, and almost universal in Scotland. Where the farmer was sufficiently independent of the landlord to be able to declare his real sentiments, he was usually Liberal. Mill also included in the ranks of the Reformers those who owned or occupied land connected with towns but were county electors, a class which was increasing with the rapid growth of towns, and which identified its interests not with the agriculturalists, but with the town population.<sup>1</sup> Even among the landowners there were individuals of fortune and consequence who, though belonging by their interests to the Conservative side, were attached by sentiment to the Liberals. Lord Durham was such a man. So were Lord Fitzwilliam and Lord Radnor. In the present Ministry there were men who might take part in the formation of a Liberal Party such as Mill wished to see.<sup>2</sup>

Although the landowners formed the main strength of the Conservatives, to them must be added nearly the whole class of very rich men, continued Mill's analysis. The man of great wealth often became a landholder himself, and so cherished the privileges of such a class. The heads of three other professions - the army, the navy and the bar - were also ranked with the aristocracy. The two former consisted largely of landowners' sons and brothers and feared retrenchment from reformers whose ideas were hostile to war, while the lawyers were afraid of law reform. To these professions,

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1. Ibid., p.482.

2. Ibid., p.483.

Mill added the beneficed clergy of the Church of England, "no other of the privileged classes is so intensely Tory."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the natural Radicals, according to Mill, consisted of the bulk of the middle classes, for "their most essential interests are made to give way to the idlest fears, the most silly prejudices of the landowners."<sup>2</sup> Among these Mill included manufacturers, who lost their overseas markets when other nations retaliated against the Corn Laws; the non-aristocratic professions; the Dissenters and the Church Reformers; while last, but not least, was the effective political strength of the working-classes, who were "deeply and increasingly discontented".<sup>3</sup>

Mill went on to consider some of the problems arising from the various shades of Radicals co-operating with each other, but concluded that the right leader would know what measures to bring before his supporters to ensure unity. For this task, Mill nominated Lord Durham as "the man most fitted to be the popular leader".<sup>4</sup> Mill went on to state that he did not believe universal suffrage should be attempted, but the franchise could be extended to the whole of the middle class. The grievances of the working classes should also be redressed. Among these grievances Mill listed such things as the inequality of the law between rich and poor and the vagrancy acts and game laws. He referred to conditions in the Royal Navy ("the long years between the press-gang and Greenwich Hospital")<sup>5</sup> and the closing of foot-paths - "by which for centuries the labourer had shortened his way to his work and tasted the breath

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1. Ibid., p.484.
  2. Ibid., p.485.
  3. Ibid., p.488.
  4. Ibid., p.492.
  5. Ibid., p.495.

of fresh air" - and commons, "to give an additional rood of ground to the Squirearchy".<sup>1</sup> "Could these things be," asked Mill rhetorically, "if the working classes had a voice in the state?"<sup>2</sup>

The working-classes, however, were not in Mill's opinion so much interested in the issue of the Corn Laws, as in the question of the relation between labourers and employers. For the sentiments of the intelligent leaders of the working classes, it was necessary to look not to the Oastlers and Stephenses, who represented "only the worst portion of the Operative Radicals,"<sup>3</sup> but to the Working Men's Association in London where the People's Charter was framed. While Mill could not accept many of their notions of political economy, which were Owenite, he did not believe that they implied any war against property. These men ought to be given the opportunity to try out their Co-operative schemes by removing the obstacle of a restrictive partnership law. Mill called on working class leaders like Lovett to put aside their call for Universal Suffrage in favour of Equal Justice; were they to do this, the working and middle classes could work together. He further called for an end to religious disputes between Dissenters and Catholics, for a Radical Party needed the support of both. The article concluded by affirming that the time was ripe for the formation of such a party. But if the next general election was between Peel and Melbourne, the Whigs would not have any chance,

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1. Ibid. These sentiments foreshadow the foundation in 1865 of the Commons Preservation Society, of which Mill was an early member; see Lord Eversley, Commons, Forests and Footpaths, (1910 ed.), p.27.
  2. "Reorganization of the Reform Party", loc.cit., p.495.
  3. Ibid., p.497.

but

if it were between Sir Robert Peel and the leader of the party we have sketched; between the representatives of the two great principles, - not only between two men whose politics differ from one another only by the shadow of a shade, - we should look with confident hopes to a very different result.

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Mill's hopes for a reformed Radical party never materialised. Lord Durham died in July 1840 and, in any case, it is doubtful whether a person of his vanity and arrogance would have proved to be the popular leader Mill wanted. Durham had, moreover, decided to give his support to the Whigs.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Mill was optimistic to the point of unreality. The Whig government felt no desire to work with the Radicals; Melbourne thought the Benthamites "all fools", and told Queen Victoria in 1839 that the Radicals had "neither ability, honesty, nor numbers".<sup>3</sup> The working class leaders on the other hand were unlikely to abandon their demand for universal suffrage and support men who approved of the detested new poor law - Mill himself had been "actively engaged in defending important measures, such as the great Poor Law Reform of 1834".<sup>4</sup> In addition to glossing over these divisions, Mill altogether under-emphasised the attachment of those farmers whom he classed as natural radicals to the Corn Laws, and hence the Conservatives.

But for the farcical proceedings known as the Bedchamber

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1. Ibid., p.508.

2. See Mill's letter to Robertson, 6 April, 1839, Letters, pp.396-397.

3. Quoted by Sir Llewellyn Woodward, The Age of Reform 1815-1870, (Oxford, 1962 ed.), p.96. Mill's quarrel with Roebuck, perhaps the ablest of the radical M.P.s, prevented them working closely together, see Francis E. Hyde, "Utility and Radicalism, 1825-1837: A Note on the Mill-Roebuck Friendship", Econ. Hist. Rev., vol. 16, (1946), pp.38-44.

4. Autobiography, p.135.

crisis during May 1839, Peel might have come to power instead of having to wait for two years before forming his second cabinet. During this period of grace, the Whigs languished, embarrassed by Chartist activities, and unable to take up the Corn Law agitation because of vested interests within their ranks. It is all the more surprising, therefore, to read Mill's approving remarks made about the defeated Ministry in a letter to Fonblanque dated 17 June 1841:

I am quite as warm a supporter of the present government as you are...I have seen nothing in their conduct since the last remodelling of the ministry two years ago, but what is highly meritorious;...a radical, unless he be a chartist, must be worse than mad if he does not go all lengths with them...The moderate radical party, & moderate radical ministry, which I so much wished for & of which I wished that poor Lord Durham would have made himself the leader, were merely a party & a ministry to do such things as they are doing, & in the same manner. They have conformed to my programme, they have come up to my terms, so it is no wonder that I am heart and soul with them. 1

It may be that Mill having decided there was no room for a fourth political party, had resolved to make the best he could of the situation by associating with the Whigs.<sup>2</sup> Possibly he also wished to keep on good terms with Fonblanque, who edited the Examiner, to which Mill had access. Perhaps his letter simply represents a more extreme swing at the end of what had been a period of mental fluctuation.

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1. Mill to Fonblanque, 17 June, 1841, Letters, pp.478-479. On June 4th, Peel had obtained a majority of one on a vote of no-confidence.

2. See Mill's letter to Macvey Napier, 22 April, 1840, Letters, p.430: "I...am compelled to acknowledge that there is not room for a fourth political party in this country - reckoning the Conservatives, the Whig-Radicals, & the Chartists as the other three."

IV

The 1830s had been an eventful decade for Mill. He had begun by seriously questioning utilitarianism and opening his mind to the ideas of such men as St. Simon, Comte, de Tocqueville, Carlyle, Sterling and Coleridge. At times, when his reaction against Benthamism was at its strongest, to some Mill appeared to be on the point of embracing Carlylean mysticism, French socialism, or Coleridgean conservatism. In fact, his thought, at least on economic and social questions, remained solidly underpinned by the principles with which he had been raised. His support of the Westminster Review paralleled closely the purpose for which it had been intended at its foundation by James Mill and Bentham in 1824: to provide a platform for attacks upon vested interests - especially when they were aristocratic - and as a means of putting forward the ideas of reform. Just as Bentham and the elder Mill had sought to encourage and influence men like Brougham and Place, John Mill wanted to act as oracle to Durham and Lovett. In the spring of 1840 Mill severed his connection with the Review and handed it over to William E. Hickson. Before doing so, he contributed a final article, on Coleridge to complement his essay on Bentham which had appeared in 1838.

In short, Mill had experienced some fifteen years of mental stimulation. He had, like his father, developed from a relatively restricted background, and in doing so had sampled a variety of new ideas. We can substantially accept Mill's remark that by 1840 the process of mental change - though not mental progress - was complete.<sup>1</sup> Because Mill's Autobiography places emphasis on the

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1. Autobiography, p.155.



intellectual changes he experienced, much of the continuity of his life in these years is often overlooked. He continued to pursue a successful career with the East India Company. His closest companion and, he believed, his greatest inspiration, Harriet Taylor, kept, in essentials, to the outlook of her unitarian and utilitarian background, and maintained a suspicion of men like Carlyle and the French social philosophers. Mill always affirmed that he was a Ricardian in economics and, of course, his hopes for effective political action were based on middle-class reformers who would gain the support of the working classes to overturn aristocratic privilege. This had been the strategy of James Mill and Jeremy Bentham who had endeavoured to leaven the Whig party; Mill was to maintain the tradition, even to the point of sustaining the Westminster Review as the organ of radical ideas. Gradually, he made a partial return to Benthamism, and when in 1843, it appeared that his father's reputation would suffer from an article in the Edinburgh on Bowring's edition of Bentham's Works, in which the reviewer quoted remarks unfavourable to the elder Mill, John Mill hastened to insert a vindication.

One aspect of Mill's critical reassessment of utilitarianism was his willingness to view all other ideas with an open mind. In a sense, he had acquired this characteristic from his early education. As a teacher, James Mill was not a precursor of Dickens's Mr. M'Choakumchild; he did not seek to cram his son with mere facts, but to place an emphasis on understanding,<sup>1</sup> although some

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1. Autobiography, p.22. But for two views linking Mill and Hard Times, see G.D. Klingopulos, "Notes on the Victorian Scene", in Boris Ford (ed.), The Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol. 6, (Harmondsworth, 1966 ed.), pp. 35-36, and F.R. Leavis, Mill on Bentham and Coleridge, (1950), p.35. See also K.J. Fielding, "Mill and Gradgrind", Nineteenth Century Fiction, vol. 11, (1956), pp. 148-151.

contemporary observers, such as Lady Anne Romilly, did not appreciate this. John Mill, therefore, was always encouraged to question whatever might appear to be the conventional wisdom and, conversely, to consider seriously new approaches to the issues of the day. Because he carefully weighed the opinions that came before him, it sometimes led others to conclude - as Comte was to - that they had gained a convert, when in fact Mill was clarifying his own thoughts by practising the "collision of adverse opinions" which he was to discuss in the second chapter of On Liberty. Moreover, because Mill was more than generous in acknowledging the works of other writers, it has often appeared that their influence on him, and the debt he owed to them, is greater than it in fact was. Even with opponents it was not Mill's habit merely to dismiss their arguments; it was one aspect of his eclecticism that he adapted their notions towards his own ends. Kate Amberley recorded in her journal a somewhat striking metaphor which Mill used to express this:

he said the great thing was to consider one's  
opponents as one's allies; as people climbing  
the hill on the other side.

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This last point warns us particularly against attaching opinions to some of the authorities referred to by Mill without rechecking the original source. While no more so than many of his contemporaries, Mill was sometimes selective in the use of quotations, although he was never prone to distorting the original meaning to the extent practised by, for example, M'Culloch. This tendency will be one of the aspects discussed in connection with Mill's

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1. Bertrand and Patricia Russell (eds.), The Amberley Papers: The Letters and Diaries of Lord and Lady Amberley, (2 vols, 1937), vol. 1, p.373, entry for 20 February, 1865. Cp. On Liberty: "Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites", (Thinkers' Library ed., 1929), p.57.

Principles of Political Economy.

During the first half of the 1840s, Mill remained aloof from public life and activity in practical politics. This can be partly explained by problems arising from his relationship with Harriet, who was now living, for most of the time, apart from her husband. Even judging by the standards of his time, Mill became inordinately sensitive about this personal matter and the "false interpretations"<sup>1</sup> likely to be made by others, and consequently withdrew from taking part in the issues of the day. That the principal political agitation among the middle classes concerned the propaganda of the Anti-Corn Law League, may also have contributed to this detachment. He was profoundly out of sympathy with the increasingly powerful class of businessmen and factory masters. Although Mill noted that the agriculturalists' descriptions of the suffering and degradation of the factory people had been repaid by the League with interest, "by sending emissaries into the rural districts, and publishing the deplorable poverty of the agricultural labourers",<sup>2</sup> the charge that the industrialists were only interested in cheap food so wages could be kept low must have appeared highly plausible. Mill's economic morality extended beyond the maxim of buying cheap and selling dear; after setting himself against Bentham's insistence on selfishness as a central motive of human action, he was unable to support the self-interestedness of prosperous entrepreneurs who

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1. Autobiography, p.160.

2. /J.S. Mill/, "The Claims of Labour", Edinburgh Review, vol. 81, (1845), p.504.

were likely to measure:

the merit of all things by their tendency to increase the number of steam engines, & make human beings as good machines & therefore as mere machines as those.

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Such was the brashness of the northern leaders of the anti-Corn Law agitation, that London based radicals prepared to take an active role, like Grote, Bowring, Joseph Hume, T. P. Thompson, Molesworth and Roebuck, were unable to get along with them.<sup>2</sup>

Mill's ideal of society was a good distance removed from those who were dedicated to the establishment of a rapidly advancing system of production in which competition was unfettered. As he was to affirm in the Principles:

I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.

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Thus, while Mill had on many occasions argued in favour of free trade and against the aristocratic prejudices of the landed interest, he choose not to become involved with the League. It has been argued that he feared the effect of cheapening the price of bread would be to raise real wages which would in turn encourage larger families, thus making worse the problem of over-population, which with Mill was "almost an obsession."<sup>4</sup> Such an explanation, however, does not account for Mill's general support for free trade, which presumably would have tended to advance wages. It is also at variance with Mill's idea that poor economic circumstances

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1. Mill to Sarah Austin, 26 February, 1844, Letters, p.662.

2. William D. Grampp, The Manchester School of Economics, (Stanford, 1960), p.8.

3. Principles, p.754.

4. Grampp, op.cit., p.35.

encouraged excess population, while the labourer who had an opportunity to improve his situation would act with restraint and prudence. Mill, in fact, was quite opposed to the Corn Laws. When John Sterling described these duties as an "iniquity", Mill replied, "I need hardly say how earnestly I feel with you about the Corn Laws."<sup>1</sup> He wrote to Chapman in 1844: "The Corn Law must go, and very soon."<sup>2</sup> His admittedly curious silence, then, apart from some activity in his own neighbourhood during 1841,<sup>3</sup> can be explained in terms of his disapproval of attitudes common amongst the repeal lobby, plus the difficulty raised by Mill's private life.

Further light is thrown on Mill's attitudes during this period by the Autobiography. On the whole, Mill's account of his own life is accurate, but it is not quite the transparently honest story implied by the simple and lucid way in which it is written. It was written for the most part in the 1850s with Harriet's assistance and considerable trouble was taken with it. Not only were a number of over-revealing passages omitted,<sup>4</sup> but the Mills also contrived to give a selective impression in a number of instances.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, even when these provisos are borne in mind, the Autobiography is a central document for the study of Mill and his thought. Mill's account of his withdrawal from society provides one of the few pompous, not to say conceited,

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1. Mill to John Sterling, 5 January, 1841, Letters, p.463.

2. Mill to Henry S. Chapman, 8 November, 1844, ibid., p.641.

3. Mill to Fonblanque, 17 June, 1841, ibid., p.478.

4. Jack Stillinger (ed.), The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's Autobiography, (Urbana, 1961), introduction, pp.15ff. Also

John M. Robson, "Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill: Artist and Scientist", Queen's Quarterly, vol. 73, (1966), p.174.

5. For a short discussion, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds, (1968), pp.115-116.

passages in the book. Having given up the Westminster, Mill considered himself released "from any active concern in temporary politics, and for any literary occupation involving personal communication with contributors and others", and so was able to limit his contact to a very few persons.<sup>1</sup> General society, he declared, was an "insipid" affair, which, to "any but a very common order" of persons, was "supremely unattractive", most people "of any really high class of intellect, make their contact with it so slight, and at such long intervals, as to be almost considered as retiring from it altogether. Those persons of any mental superiority who do otherwise, are, almost without exception, greatly deteriorated by it."<sup>2</sup>

In short, as society had frowned upon Mill and Mrs. Taylor, they in turn rejected it. But more important than this personal alienation, was the way in which Mill began to place an emphasis on the working class as the major direction of reform. This had been foreshadowed in the essay on the reorganization of the radical party. As Mill again took up Benthamite ideas, he became more committed to far-reaching reforms, whereas in the period of reaction he was indulgent towards the common opinions of society and "content with seconding...superficial improvement."<sup>3</sup> However, whereas in the days of his early utilitarianism, Mill had seen "little further than the old school of political economists into the possibilities of fundamental improvement in social arrangements,"<sup>4</sup> latterly his opinions were much more advanced. In the

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1. Autobiography, p.159.

2. Ibid., pp.159-160.

3. Ibid., p.161.

4. Ibid.



earlier period, he looked no further than the abolition of primogeniture and entails as a means of reducing inequality, but by the 1840s he believed it was possible to go further than this to remove the injustice of the fact "that some are born to riches and the vast majority to poverty."<sup>1</sup> Although concerned about the uneducated condition of the mass, Mill saw himself as a democrat, and while his father had seen the middle class as the main component of the social system and repository of political power, the son now based his hopes on the potential of the working class, although most of them had first to be raised from a state of ignorance. This, then, provides a third reason why Mill did not become associated with the predominantly middle-class agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League.

Such democratic opinions were not in the event promulgated unequivocally until the third edition of the Principles,<sup>2</sup> and in the meantime Mill only hinted at such notions. One instance took the form of his approval of William Lovett's National Association for Supporting the Social and Political Improvement of the People. He offered a gift of books along with the observation:

I have never yet met with any associated body of men whom I respect so much as I do your Association, or whom I am so desirous of aiding by every means & to every extent, consistent with my individual opinions.

Although, "even if I were a public man", he would not join Lovett's movement, Mill did express his willingness to give the Chartists a good name, and invited Lovett and one or two friends to visit his house, when "we might make a good deal of progress."<sup>3</sup> In offering

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1. Ibid., p.162.

2. Ibid., p.164.

3. Mill to William Lovett, 27 July, 1842, Letters, pp.533-534.

approval of this sort, however, Mill's actions were not greatly exceptional, as among Lovett's early supporters were Brougham, Grote, Joseph Hume, Lord Radnor and "virtually all the intellectual liberals".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Mill continued to be in sympathy with Lovett's political position, and sent a subscription for his testimonial in 1847.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, Mill gave a conditional approval of the Chartist Land Scheme.<sup>3</sup>

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Having withdrawn from contemporary society, of which he thought so little, Mill appears to have spent much of his time when not at work for the East India Company - and here his duties were not too arduous - in reading and authorship. In these fields, the 1840s were a period of very great intellectual activity: Mill's reading was extensive and covered a wide range of subjects; he published two major books, the System of Logic in 1843 and the Principles five years later; he continued to contribute essays to the Westminster Review and wrote several leading articles for the Morning Chronicle. He was also able to place his work in the Edinburgh Review, having approached Macvey Napier in 1840 after he had given up ownership of the Westminster. In his letter to Napier, Mill noted that by writing for the Edinburgh he would have the opportunity of addressing a wide audience, and stressed the need for unity among the Reformers, for, despite his efforts to

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1. Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement, (1920), p.160.
  2. Mill to J.F. Mollett, December, 1847, Letters, p.727.
  3. Below, p.385.

"induce the Radicals to maintain an independent position," he had come to believe that he could only do good "by merging in one of the existing great bodies of opinion."<sup>1</sup>

Although Mill had assured Napier that he did not expect to be allowed to commit the Edinburgh "to opinions which would be obnoxious to its other writings & its supporters",<sup>2</sup> after several years without difficulty, Napier rejected part of Mill's article on "The Claims of Labour". Mill had canvassed Napier to allow him to write on this "fashionable subject", upon which speculations were made that forgot the "fundamental principles which one did think had been put for ever out of the reach of controversy by Adam Smith, Malthus, and others."<sup>3</sup> But while assuring Napier that he knew "no reason for thinking that the manner in which I should treat the subject would be unsuitable to you",<sup>4</sup> Mill confided in Sarah Austin his hope of committing the Edinburgh to "strong things", unless they frightened Napier who might "not dare to print them unmodified".<sup>5</sup> Mill was ostensibly writing a review of Arthur Helps's well-intentioned book The Claims of Labour: An Essay on the Duties of the Employers to the Employed,<sup>6</sup> but as was often the case among contributors to the reviews in this period Mill used the book as a peg, and gave the proposals contained in Helps's book only a cursory mention. What he wrote, in fact, was an essay embodying his own opinions on

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1. Mill to Macvey Napier, 27 April, 1840, Letters, p.430.

2. Ibid., p.431.

3. Mill to Macvey Napier, 9 November, 1844, ibid., p.643; see also pp.645-646.

4. Ibid., p.644.

5. Mill to Sarah Austin, 18 January, 1844, ibid., p.655.

6. The book was published anonymously in 1844.

the subject, and as Mill half-expected, Napier was too timid a man to risk offending the Edinburgh's owners, writers and readership. Mill had included a discussion of emigration to the colonies and small holdings as solutions to the problem of poverty. On both issues Napier told him that the Review was already committed to different principles than those put forward in his article. Surprisingly, in view of twenty years of M'Culloch's articles, Mill replied that he did not know or had forgotten this, and regretted that "the great power of the Edinburgh Review is engaged on what appears to me the wrong side of two of the most important questions which political economists or statesmen have to do with..."<sup>1</sup> However, Mill expressed his willingness to strike out all he had written on colonization, but could not "think it even possible to pass over the subject of allotments."<sup>2</sup> He had therefore, he told Napier, attempted to retain as much as possible of this discussion, without expressing his approval of small holdings, but while still making it clear "that one may be in favour of small holdings, under some institutions & in some circumstances, & yet disapprove of allotments."<sup>3</sup>

It appears that by sacrificing the discussion of colonization, Mill was able to preserve his treatment of small holdings and allotments - the issue in which he was more interested - in a substantial form. Written about a year before he commenced the Principles, "The Claims of Labour" contains several features also embodied in that treatise. The article, revised in order to obtain Napier's assent, was published in the April, 1845 issue of the Edinburgh Review.

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1. Mill to Napier, 17 February, 1845, Letters, p.660.
  2. Ibid., p.661.
  3. Ibid.

Mill began by noting that many were asking whether there was an improvement in the condition of the mass of people corresponding with the improvement among the middle and upper classes, and finding the answer an unsatisfactory one. In consequence, conscience and philanthropy had been stirred. Mill proposed to trace back this movement to its small beginnings: he dated its origin to the appearance of Malthus's Essay on Population, as "only from that time has the economical condition of the labouring classes been regarded by thoughtful men as susceptible of permanent improvement."<sup>1</sup> Mill agreed that this appeared to be a paradox, for the first inference drawn from "the truth propounded by Mr. Malthus...gave a quietus to the visions of indefinite social improvement which had agitated so fiercely a neighbouring nation." Because it bore such an implication, Malthus's principle was "indebted for its early success with the more opulent classes, and for much of its lasting unpopularity with the poorer."<sup>2</sup> But, asserted Mill, when the truths brought to light by Malthus were correctly understood, the possibility of improving the position of the majority of mankind became clear: prudence and conscience was the alternative to starvation. Mill next discussed some of the manifestations of unrest among the working classes and the response to them. A multitude of small channels were flowing, on issues such as shorter hours and better dwellings, while in rural districts, "the movement towards the 'allotment system' is becoming general".<sup>3</sup>

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1. "The Claims of Labour", loc.cit., pp.499-500.

2. Ibid., p.500.

3. Ibid., p.505.

For the next step in his argument, Mill examined the duties of the middle and upper classes and gave the warning that the rich might find, if the present course continued, the bursting asunder of society "by a Socialist revolution."<sup>1</sup> To combat this, he stressed at length the need for wider education among the working classes, and his hope that "'cash payment' should be no longer 'the universal nexus between man and man'."<sup>2</sup> He also criticised unjust legislation, such as the Corn Laws which taxed the poor's bread to swell the rents of the rich,<sup>3</sup> and the "legalized spoliation" which took the common from the poor cottager.<sup>4</sup> Until the upper classes amended these grievances, Mill observed, they could not expect the labourers to appreciate attempts at philanthropy.

Of the more ambitious plans to relieve poverty, he continued, there were principally two: the Allotment System and Colonization. In deference to Napier's editorial control, Mill had to pass over the latter by saying that as it was such a complicated subject, it required separate treatment. The remainder of his review was devoted to a consideration of the Allotment System, which, according to Mill, was brought forward in two different shapes. In one, it consisted of attaching a small patch of garden ground to every labourer's cottage. Of this he approved, providing the ground was not given in alms, but paid for at a fair value. This done, the garden would be "a badge of comfort" and "an ornament".<sup>5</sup> It might be made available not only to the rural population but also to the

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1. Ibid., p.509.
  2. Ibid., p.513.
  3. Ibid., p.517.
  4. Ibid., p.519.
  5. Ibid., p.521.



mechanics of towns: Mill subjoined a description by William Howitt which described labourers' allotments in Nottingham. When so operated, the system provided a means of enjoyment. Very different was the proposal of those:

who urge allotments as a great measure of social improvement. They mean that the grounds are to be cultivated as a source of profit, to eke out the scanty wages of the agricultural labourer. And they bring a cloud of witnesses to vouch for the benefits of the system in stimulating industry, reforming vagrant habits, and keeping unemployed labourers off the parish.

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Such a plan, he conceded, might do some temporary good; any pet project of the great man of a neighbourhood usually succeeds for some time. But Mill objected to it on the ground that it would tend to lower wages, while there was nothing in the plan which would raise the standard of living of the people, thus causing them to maintain a higher level of comfort; instead it would enable them to live on still lower wages. "What," asked Mill, "is Ireland but the allotment system made universal?"<sup>2</sup> As population increased, so wages would fall, with the consequence that more and more the labourer would depend on his allotment for support, "and the land will be delivered up to a cottier peasantry and their Irish potato-gardens."<sup>3</sup>

Mill regretted the disappearance of the yeoman farmer, who provided an intermediate class between the labourer and the large farmer. He believed such a class to be essential to the wellbeing of a state:

We believe them to be among the happiest portions of the human race. Calling no man master, and free from all anxiety about a livelihood, they

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1. Ibid., p.523.

2. Ibid., p.524.

3. Ibid.

keep constantly before the eyes and minds of the other peasantry a superior status, into which, by frugality and good conduct, any of them may expect to rise.

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It was not possible, Mill noted, to discuss the grave questions of the size of holdings and the tenure of farms in the present essay, but he went on to suggest that in France small holdings did not produce over-population, for the small holder was generally the proprietor who had inducements to prudence and forethought, which the holder of an allotment had not. Moreover, in Lombardy and Tuscany, small holdings were not incompatible with good agriculture. There the métayer system operated, where the labourers were really partners with the landowner, and had the feelings of joint ownership: "The more they work the more they gain."<sup>2</sup>

He ended by stating that the allotment plans being introduced by philanthropists tended not towards the French or Italian system, but towards the Irish. This did not have the effect of encouraging industry, but brought the population principle to bear upon rent, rather than wages. It was to the evil example of the allotment system in Ireland that statesmen, struggling "to find some new contrivance for keeping society together," should look for the lesson of experience.<sup>3</sup>

These opinions, cleverly worked into the reluctant pages of the Edinburgh Review, Mill was to develop at greater length in a remarkable series of leading articles for the Morning Chronicle and in the Principles. But before going on to examine these writings, it is necessary to consider a whole range of publications on landownership, population, peasant proprietorship and related

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.525.

3. Ibid.

questions, which were not only challenging received opinion on these issues, but which were, in many cases, known to Mill and skilfully employed by him when marshalling his arguments for the ensuing discussion.

CHAPTER IX:

THE DEBATE ON PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP

The fate of empires, and the fortunes of their peoples, depend upon the condition of the proprietorship of land to an extent which is not at all understood in this country. We are a servile, aristocracy-loving, lord-ridden people, who regard the land with as much reverence as we still do the peerage and baronetage. Not only have not nineteen-twentieths of us any share in the soil, but we have not presumed to think that we are worthy to possess a few acres of mother earth. The politicians who would propose to break up the estates of this country into smaller properties, will be looked upon as revolutionary democrats aiming at nothing less than the establishment of a Republic upon the ruin of Queen and Lords.

Cobden to Bright, 4 November, 1849, in  
John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden,  
(2 vols, 1896 ed.), vol. 2, p.54.

A major source of the material employed by Mill was the descriptions of Continental life as reported by a variety of travellers to Europe. This was the great age of the Continental tour and all too often the traveller on his return would seek to publish a narrative of his experiences. Though many of these accounts were of little consequence, they provided a popular class of literature, and each year publishers' lists announced a considerable crop. As a reviewer satirised them:

The most pernicious class of book-makers are your travellers - they waste more of their own time, and of their readers, than any set of idlers in society...These worthless authors mob their readers like the stage-coachmen about town. Holland! Paris! - Switzerland! - Germany! the Lower Rhine, Sir!

Not infrequently, these travellers carried with them many of the prejudices of the Englishman, and we may quote the same reviewer as he ridiculed this tendency:

it is lamentable to think how many of these land-surveying gentlemen, without tact and without talent

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1. "Tennant's Tour", Westminster Review, vol. 2, (1824), p.403.

may be at this moment scouring all over the continent; furnishing abundant exhibitions of what are termed abroad, English ignorance, English vanity, English obstinacy and absurdity; and contemplating on return to record them in their own country.

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As might be expected when this was the case, not only did different writers contradict each other, but frequently a traveller was inconsistent in his own descriptions of Continental life. Accordingly, some of these accounts must be treated with scepticism, and, although political economists tended to refer to the more reliable of these itinerants, they did not always resist the temptation to quote selectively. We have noted how M'Culloch supported his arguments in the "Cottage System" by partial extracts from Young and Birkbeck, and it is no surprise to find that Mill was also able to call upon Young's writings for support. In examining some of these travellers, therefore, Arthur Young provides an appropriate starting point.

The contradictory nature of much of what Young wrote has already been illustrated. It would be unusual if an author so prolific as Young, and who wrote on such a wide variety of topics over a period of some fifty years, did not appear at times inconsistent. Given Young's tendency to base his opinions on practical observation rather than theoretical concept, it becomes apparent that discrepancies in his thought abound. Nevertheless, Young was a writer of some ability, and by his pen earned himself not only renown, but a certain amount of influence. Mill was familiar with Young's Travels in France by the time he was fourteen. In June, 1820 he wrote to his father that he had had, "a very fine view of the plain of the Garonne, which Arthur Young thought, in

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1. Ibid., p.409.

point of cultivation, the finest in the world".<sup>1</sup>

Young's reputation endured for many years after his death. For example, the Earl of Lonsdale said of him in 1849:

I am a worshipper of Arthur Young's...He was the only man of eminence of my time that I unfortunately was not acquainted with...His agricultural tours in France and Italy I consider the only work that give an intelligible account of those countries.

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His Travels in France became a classic. Subsequent travellers were frequently - whether or not with acknowledgment - to base their own tours on Young's. Its findings were regularly quoted, and, if it is not improbable that the possibility of extracting a suitable illustration, expressed in Young's vivid and dogmatic style, for whatever argument an author was pursuing, contributed to its popularity, it could also stand upon intrinsic merit. Of all the travellers to France, Young is perhaps the one that may still be read with the most pleasure.

Young undertook three journeys to France. The first from May to November in 1787, followed by a second visit during August - October, 1788. Deciding that his survey had not been completed in the previous two years, he set out on a third expedition which lasted from June 1789 to January 1790.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, Young's account took the form of a journal in which he recorded from day to day his observations and impressions, but, following his third journey, Young added to his diary a long essay, "On the Revolution of France."

Though Young did not hesitate to scorn the "nonsensical customs" of the French court,<sup>4</sup> and the "stupidity and poverty" of provincial Frenchmen who did not bother to provide newspapers for

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1. Mill, Mill's Boyhood Visit to France, op.cit., p.24.

2. Earl of Lonsdale to J.W. Croker, 4 September, 1849 in The Croker Papers, op.cit., vol. 3, p.201.

3. The Autobiography of Arthur Young, op.cit., p.175.

4. Young, Travels in France, op.cit., p.15; entry for 27 May, 1787.



news of events in Paris,<sup>1</sup> his temper was on the whole impartial.<sup>2</sup> He noted with approval the liberties gained from the Revolution by the small landed proprietors; listing the "tortures of the peasantry", which took the form of feudal dues and "almost exterminated" the industry of the people.<sup>3</sup> The removal of these taxes had freed the farmer of a great burden:

Go to the aristocratical politician at Paris, or at London, and you hear only of the ruin of France - go to the cottage of the métayer, or the house of the farmer, and demand of him what the result has been - there will be but one voice from Calais to Bayonne.

4

He also commended the action of peasants working on a piece of land by the roadside who had declared, "that the poor were the nation; that the waste belonged to the nation" and had taken possession. Young stated that to leave waste uncultivated in such a way was a public nuisance, and the peasants were, "wise and rational, and philosophical, in seizing such tracts: and I heartily wish there was a law in England for making this action of the French peasants a legal one with us."<sup>5</sup>

As we have seen, Young soon followed his friend Burke in decrying the French Revolution for which no term of disapproval became too strong. But the account of his Travels remained: a variegated and energetic description of France on the eve, and at the beginning, of the Revolution, full of information and opinion, and liable to confirm a variety of prejudices to which the reader may have been disposed: one is reminded of J. H. Clapham:

Thirty years ago I read and marked Arthur Young's Travels in France, and taught from the marked

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1. Ibid., p.229, 7 August, 1789, also p.193, 4 July, 1789.
  2. See the discussion by John G. Gaxley, "Arthur Young, British Patriot", in E.M. Earle (Ed), Nationalism and Internationalism, (New York, 1950), pp.161-167.
  3. Young, Travels in France, op.cit., "On the Revolution of France" p.319.
  4. Ibid., p.332.
  5. Ibid., pp.291-292; entry for 6,7,8 January, 1790.

passages. Five years ago I went through it again, to find that whenever Young spoke of a wretched Frenchman I had marked him, but that many of his references to happy or prosperous Frenchmen remained unmarked.

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Despite Young's voluminous writings, it was to the Travels only which Mill referred in his Principles. Mill cast Young in the role of a hostile witness. Exaggerating somewhat, he introduced him into the discussion as "the inveterate enemy of small farms, the coryphaeus of the modern English school of agriculturalists."<sup>2</sup> Mill then proceeded to give several extracts from Young which illustrated the industriousness of the peasants in certain districts of France and their well-ordered farms. Typical of the instances quoted were gardens near Dunkirk, where, "the magic of PROPERTY turns sand to gold"<sup>3</sup>; cultivated terraces on a mountain side in the area of Gange, which led Young to remark "Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock, and he will turn it into a garden; give him a nine year lease of a garden, and he will convert it into a desert"<sup>4</sup>; and at Bearne where "each peasant has the fowl in the pot."<sup>5</sup> From this evidence Mill concluded that:

The experience, therefore, of this celebrated agriculturalist, and apostle of the grande culture, may be said to be, that the effect of small properties, cultivated by peasant proprietors, is admirable when they are not too small:...

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and that Young recommended a limit to sub-division to be fixed by law.

Criticisms by Young of too minute sub-division and the métayer system were approached by Mill differently. He argued

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1. J.H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, vol. 1, (1964 ed.), p.x.
  2. Principles, p.273.
  3. Young, Travels in France, op.cit., p.109; entry for 7 November, 1787.
  4. Ibid., p.54, 29 July, 1787.
  5. Ibid., p.61, 12 August, 1787.
  6. Principles, p.276.

that such evidence was derived from France before the Revolution and that, since that time, conditions had changed: "the situation of French métayers under the old regime by no means represents the typical form of the contract."<sup>1</sup> Thus, Mill reaped a double harvest from Young: where the Travels favoured his own opinions he quoted from them, in much the same way as M'Culloch had done; where Young's evidence was unfavourable, Mill argued that this was the result of the old regime in France, and that since then the situation had changed.

In fact, as we have seen, Young's views were by no means uniformly hostile to allotments and small farms and in stating that they were, Mill misrepresented him. Indeed, Young's plan of 1801 for using waste land for the maintenance of the poor has similarities with Mill's proposals for Ireland. But, having squeezed what juice he could from the Travels, Mill went on to develop his argument about the changes which had taken place following the Revolution, and the other authorities to whom he made reference belong to this later period. From them Mill built up a picture of rural life in Western Europe which portrayed the peasant proprietor more favourably than Young had ever observed him. And perhaps the industrious, prudent, and contented individual that emerged may have been recognised only with difficulty by some of the travellers in post-Napoleonic Europe.

## II

Born in Edinburgh, Henry David Inglis (1795-1835) is a lesser example of the whole tribe of industrious and ambitious Scotsmen

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1. Principles, p.302.

who were leaving their homeland during this period in order to seek advancement in England. A prolific author during his fairly short life - the brief Dictionary of National Biography notice suggests that his death was due to overwork - Inglis described the visits which he made to several European states in half a dozen volumes. These books, some of which appeared under the pseudonym of Derwent Conway, were written in an amiable style, were anecdotal in character, and often were preoccupied with Inglis's own adventures. Yet while their nature is not that of a systematic description of the institutions and social organisation of the countries visited, they do contain a good deal of incidental information.

In that debate which set the contentments of country life against the attractions of dwelling in towns and cities, Inglis sided with the former. In his first book he compared the simple and hospitable countryside with the corruptions of urban life,<sup>1</sup> and his subsequent writings evidence his preference for a rural existence. In considering such authors as Inglis, therefore, some allowance must be made for this tendency to romanticise the virtues of the countryside and its inhabitants.

Although the majority of his works contain scattered references, the fullest account of land tenure may be found in the book of which Mill made use, Switzerland, the South of France, and the Pyrenees, in M.DCCC.XXX.<sup>2</sup> Dispersed through its two volumes are numerous observations on the condition of the peasantry, which, on the whole gave a favourable impression, though with qualifications Mill neglected to mention. Frequent testimony was made to the

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1. "Derwent Conway", Tales of the Ardennes, (1825), p.78.  
2. Edinburgh, 1831.

industry of the peasant proprietors, such as the "extraordinary industry of the inhabitants" in the neighbourhood of Zurich.<sup>1</sup> The peasants of the Engadine "look with horror on a state of dependence", and if there were too many children to receive support from the family patrimony, one or two would sacrifice themselves for the general good by going to work in Paris or Lyon.<sup>2</sup> At one stage of his journey, Inglis contrasted the healthy and robust ~~people~~ country people of Berne with "the half-starved population of the great manufacturing cities of England and France, and almost begot a doubt in my mind whether England be in reality the happiest country in the world."<sup>3</sup>

However, Inglis's approval was not complete. In the canton of Zurich life was austere, and leave to dance had to be asked of the authorities.<sup>4</sup> To a stranger, the use of fertiliser on the gardens was - though proof of industry - particularly unpleasant "on the olfactory nerves."<sup>5</sup> Among the Grisons, "every man's object is to cheat you,"<sup>6</sup> while some peasants encouraged their children to beg, though not in need of alms, and the traveller who refused to give risked being pelted with stones.<sup>7</sup> In Catholic cantons the inhabitants neglected the soil to pray, or attend feasts, or observe other religious occasions.<sup>8</sup> Nor was the Swiss peasant invariably prosperous; at Glarus those labouring in their little gardens were poorly dressed,<sup>9</sup> near Ciamut their houses were

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1. Ibid., p.32.
  2. Ibid., p.118.
  3. Ibid., p.211.
  4. Ibid., p.34.
  5. Ibid., p.46.
  6. Ibid., p.137.
  7. Ibid., pp.63, 139.
  8. Ibid., pp.61, 140, 160-161.
  9. Ibid., p.72.

"mere hovels."<sup>1</sup> The richer peasant did not belong to the class of thinking persons, matters such as political freedom did not occupy his mind: "he never thinks, except of himself, his family, his cottage and his apple-trees."<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, Inglis ended his tour by noting that the female peasantry of Touraine had not the good looks of their English counterparts, and by affirming that, pleasant though foreign travel may be, England was the only country in which to live.<sup>3</sup> No attention was paid by Mill to Inglis's qualifications concerning the continental peasant, though he did state that he was referring to "the more intelligent Cantons of Switzerland",<sup>4</sup> and agreed that in Berne, because of a badly-regulated poor-law administration, there was a serious pauper problem, while in some areas subdivision of land was too minute.<sup>5</sup> Nor was he guilty of such flagrant selectivity as shown by M'Culloch. While Mill may have given a slightly false impression, Inglis's account was on the whole favourable to peasant proprietorship, and was only a relatively minor part of the case that Mill was constructing. For the major part of his arguments, he relied more on authors whose accounts were less diluted with reservations, and who were not, like Inglis, in the tradition of the sentimentalizing Parson Yorick.

### III

Inglis, compared with Samuel Laing (1780-1868), provided but a sketchy account of European life. Although both men were born

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1. Ibid., p.148.
  2. Ibid., p.271.
  3. Ibid., pp.296, 307-8.
  4. Principles, p.256. By this, Mill almost certainly meant the Protestant ones.
  5. Principles, p.258.



in Scotland and by virtue of this fit into that tradition of observing and recording, it is Laing who qualifies as being more typical of solid Scotch learning. His three volume translation from the Icelandic of the Heimskringla, a chronicle of the kings of Norway which appeared in 1844, was an important work of scholarship. While Inglis wrote in a light and agreeable style aimed at the general reader whom he was seeking to entertain rather than instruct, Laing's intention was to collect material on those new social elements springing up in Europe after the French Revolution, for the use, he suggested, of the future historian or philosopher.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, Laing included his own social philosophy and frequently put the narrative aside in order to reflect on some aspect of European life or expound his opinions concerning British society. This tendency, combined with Laing's empiricist approach, may help to explain some of the contradictions which were at times displayed in his works.

During 1834 Laing had travelled in Norway and Sweden, of which he published an account in two works which were widely read at the time.<sup>2</sup> In 1842 Notes of a Traveller appeared. His description of Scandanavian society had praised highly the industrious and enterprising qualities of its peasant proprietors. Now Laing came out diametrically opposite the conventional view of the effects on farming from a wide sub-division of the land. France, he

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1. Notes of a Traveller..., (1854 ed.), p.iv. (A reprint of the 1842 ed., but with a different pagination.) Cp. Laing's preface to Observations on the Social and Political State of the European People in 1848 and 1849..., (1850), p.vii.  
2. Journal of a Residence in Norway..., (1836) and A Tour in Sweden..., (1839).

declared, was "in the midst of a great social experiment...the opinions of all our political economists are adverse to it."<sup>1</sup> Laing proceeded to quote some of these criticisms, which were clearly derived from M'Culloch's work and dismissed them with this counterblast:

Alas, for human wisdom! Alas, for the predictions of Arthur Young, Mr. Birbeck, /sic/ and the Edinburgh Review! ...their homemade prophecies were of no value - were framed upon narrow local views, and prejudices.

2

Next Chalmers' remarks on primogeniture were censured. A quotation was given in which Chalmers had made a proposal to allow younger sons £1,000 per year with a position in the Church, law or a college, in order to appease the father's natural affection when he had to make over the landed property to his eldest son. This suggestion to give a public subsidy to the younger children in order to make easier the inheritance of the eldest, Laing attacked vigorously. He condemned the rich landowner who wought to abandon his parental duties as being just as culpable of "an immoral and criminal act" as "in the case of the wretched strumpet" who abandoned her child.<sup>3</sup>

In further dissent from received opinion, which held that both countries had a similar system of land tenure, Laing brought out the contrast between Irish poverty and the good state of French society; for, in the latter, one farmer did not depend upon another's surplus for his own needs. Moreover, the French system carried with it a check against over-population, as a man

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1. Laing, Notes of a Traveller..., op.cit., p.24.
  2. Ibid., p.25.
  3. Ibid., p.27.

asked himself whether he had sufficient land to support a family. There were therefore, claimed Laing, fewer improvident marriages. The view that small farms were incompatible with a high state of cultivation because they had not as much capital as large, was also challenged. Against such an opinion was set the argument that capital was just the means of purchasing labour, and the small farmer's self-interest meant that he could use his labour with such great efficiency that a garden-like cultivation was obtainable.<sup>1</sup> In England, stated Laing, the condition of the labouring classes had altered for the worse. Their French counterpart was better off due to the social effects of the partition of the land:

France owes her present prosperity, and rising industry, to this very system of subdivision of property, which allows no man to live in idleness, and no capital to be employed without a view to its reproduction and places that great instrument of industry and well being, property, in the hands of all classes.

2

Having possession, the Frenchman showed a greater respect for property and was more honest than the Briton. Further, the division of property had had a democratical tendency by doing away with a privileged feudal aristocracy.

When Laing went on to consider Swiss society, he came to conclusions similar to those which he had described in France. He accounted for the low birth rate by the postponement of marriage by the peasant to later in life, an action "entirely conformable to the moral restraint inculcated by Malthus and Dr. Chalmers."<sup>3</sup> The small proprietors enjoyed a high standard

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1. Ibid., p.33.
  2. Ibid., p.38.
  3. Ibid., p.157.

of living which encouraged them to be prudent as well as industrious. From the experience gained by living among them, Laing could aver that they "would no more think of marrying, without means to live in a decent way, than any gentleman's sons or daughters in England."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the wage labourers modelled themselves on the prudence and restraint of the peasant proprietor. This example, wrote Laing, was:

proof that a division of property by a law of succession different in principle from the feudal, is the true check upon over population.

2

It was, he continued, false to call for moral restraint when the marriage between the sexes was not immoral; but a wider diffusion of property would restrain imprudence and lack of forethought. But if, as in Ireland, the peasant saw no prospect of being better off at thirty years of age than at eighteen, it was natural that he would marry early in life; "the rough untutored common sense of all men of the lower classes" would reject the morality of Malthus, as its purpose was "to support an artificial feudal division of property, originating in the darkest and most barbarous of ages."<sup>3</sup>

Further instances were quoted from Tuscany as well as France and Switzerland to illustrate the industrious and prudent habits of the peasantry. These were directly attributed to the wide distribution of land. Laing urged that a similar diffusion of property would be a benefit to Britain and dismissed as absurd the dogma of political economists who claimed that small farms were

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1. Ibid., p.159.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid., p.163.

incompatible with good husbandry. However, British travellers on the Continent seemed almost incapable of not finding some faults with the countries visited by them; their patriotic emotions were never quite subdued. We have seen Birkbeck's paradoxical statements, and Laing was no exception. In his later works he was to move away from his warm support of peasant proprietorship; some hint of early disapproval is found in his Notes of a Traveller, where on the last page he decided, in spite of what he had just written, that:

If we fairly consider the social condition of the Continental man of whatever class, whatever position, or whatever country,...we find him, body and soul, a slave.

1

One of Laing's readers was Mill, who referred John Sterling to the two books on Norway and Sweden in 1840.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after the publication of Notes of a Traveller, Mill offered to obtain a copy for Sarah Austin,<sup>3</sup> and later gave her his considered opinion of the work:

There is a real faculty of observation & original remark about Laing which is likely to give his book considerable influence here, whenever his prejudices coincide with the common English ones, which in spite of many appearances to the contrary, they generally do. It is strange to find a man recognising as he does that the Norwegian, & German, & French state of society are much better for the happiness of all concerned than the struggling, go-ahead English & American state.

4

These sentences well-illustrate the appeal that Laing's account had for Mill. In the first place, the Notes of a Traveller provided evidence of the felicity of a simple rural existence when set against the impersonal relationships of industrial society. Secondly, Mill was in sympathy with any discussion which served

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1. Ibid., p.284; see also below, p.
  2. Mill to Sterling, 3 December, 1840, Letters, p.450.
  3. Mill to Sarah Austin, 22 August, 1842, ibid., p.541.
  4. Mill to Sarah Austin, 26 February, 1844, ibid., p.622.

to discredit the extensive territorial domains of a feudal aristocracy. A third element of importance was the way in which Malthusian objections were capable of being resolved: the possession of land would encourage prudence, not fecklessness. Fourthly, a clear distinction was made between Irish conditions and those of the European peasantry. Finally, there can be little doubt that Mill found pleasing the vindication of those egalitarian principles which the French Revolution had initiated. Warmly sympathetic to French society, and, like Comte, convinced of its civilizing mission, Mill responded favourably to Laing's observations.

It is not suggested that Mill was drastically converted by reading Notes of a Traveller. Rather it was a case of Laing's work reflecting ideas which he already had, and confirming him in these opinions, and at the same time providing evidence which could be employed in the propagation of these views. Mill made use of two of Laing's books in the Principles: the account of Norway and Notes of a Traveller. He extracted from them details to show that small farms were just as compatible with good husbandry as were large. In Norway, where there was no custom of primogeniture, after a thousand years of dividing the land among children, farms were not over-minute, for the division of property acted as a check on population. By quoting in this manner, Mill made telling use of Laing's observations, and continued to do so after Laing had in 1850 revised his opinions following a tour of Europe during 1848 and 1849. When he published an account of this, the treatment of peasant proprietorship was much less favourable. In the third edition of the Principles, Mill declared it was "a book devoted to the glorification of England, and the disparagement of everything elsewhere which others, or even he himself in former works, had thought worthy of praise", and rejected it in favour of Laing's



earlier judgements.<sup>1</sup>

IV

As we have seen, in his "Claims of Labour" essay, Mill made use of an extract from a book by William Howitt (1792-1879) to demonstrate the desirable effects of cottage gardens in Nottingham. A prolific author, William Howitt shared with his wife Mary a long literary career which yielded a voluminous and mediocre output. His biographer describes him as being, after Cobbett's death, "the foremost partisan of the traditional rural life of England."<sup>2</sup> This claim is not untenable, and, while Howitt had nothing like the stature of Cobbett, he shared, and probably in part derived from him, a belief in the ideality of independent free-holding farmers and a link between enclosure and borough-mongering.<sup>3</sup> Howitt is one of a number who may have been active radicals had not the threat of government interference obliged them to join the middle-class moderates and follow a more politically innocuous career. Accordingly, the Howitts turned their hand to writing on a variety of subjects, often ones with a rural flavour, and, if much of what they produced was ephemeral and undistinguished, its great quantity must have ensured a wide readership. Both Quakers, they were sentimentalists and humanitarians, who provided a Victorian middle class with pleasant reading.

England, they wrote, was "a land which it would be difficult to pronounce more blessed in its literature, its religious spirit,

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1. Principles, p.294.

2. Carl Ray Woodring, Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt, (Lawrence, Kansas 1952), preface (not paginated).

3. Ibid., p.126.

or in the splendid dowry of its natural beauty."<sup>1</sup> Town life was mentioned mainly to assert the superiority of agriculture over the squalid aspects of manufacturing with its mechanical tyranny.<sup>2</sup> However, while the forte of the Howitts was in providing a romanticized version of country life, they were aware of the changes that were taking place, and were full of criticism of them; the trouble lay in false notions of improvement and high rentals and:

the detestable doctrine of political economy, by which a dozen moderate farms are swallowed up into one overgrown one, - a desert, from which both small farmers and labourers were compelled to depart, to make way for machinery and Irish labour at fourpence a day.

3

In pursuing this argument, Harriet Martineau's claim that the labourer was better fed and clothed than the small farmer was considered, Howitt retorting that to create two distinct classes would remove the path of progress which small farms provided.<sup>4</sup> In a discussion of the peasantry which made typical reference to their simple pleasures a note of opposition to the New Poor Law - with its "Poverty Prison" - was sounded.<sup>5</sup> This is fairly typical of Howitt's writings, for the most part bland but not entirely bereft of the occasional outspoken remark. A few of his books were also controversial; Colonization and Christianity, (1838) was an attack on imperialism, and in A Popular History of Priestcraft, Howitt declared that priestcraft was "one of the greatest curses which has afflicted the earth...till its hydra heads are crushed there can be no perfect liberty" and launched a long

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1. William Howitt, The Rural Life of England, (2nd ed. 1840), p.615.

2. Ibid., for example, pp.410, 550.

3. Ibid., p.101.

4. Ibid., pp.104-105. Howitt defined a small farm as 50-100 acres in size.

5. Ibid., p.406.

assault on the abuses in the Anglican Church.<sup>1</sup>

But for the most part, the class of literature in which the Howitts specialised obliged them to avoid undue controversy. Their chronic financial problems must also have influenced their subject matter and its treatment. Deference to a polite reading public would seem to be the purpose behind the pseudonym John Hampden Junr. which William Howitt adopted when The Aristocracy of England appeared in 1846. Published by Effingham Wilson, it was in the best traditions of "radical reform" and the "Norman Yoke". In the Preface, Howitt declared that "this work has been the favourite subject of his thoughts for these ten years past, and has for six years occupied his pen."<sup>2</sup> The aristocracy were said to owe their origin to the Norman Conquest, when England was invaded by the bastard king and his lawless adventurers.<sup>3</sup> With a nostalgic glance at the "immortal brotherhood" of Pym, Hampden, Cromwell and Milton,<sup>4</sup> Howitt went on to predict eventual ruin, which might only be avoided if the people reclaimed their heritage - by obtaining the franchise and repealing the Corn Laws. Yet Howitt's radicalism could be ambiguous; at times he appeared to believe that the dispossessed might be compensated by no more than allotments. In his article "Stepping Stones in Our Progress towards the Great Christian Republic", he emphasised, with reference to the Labourers' Friend Society, how allotments reduced poaching and drunkenness. These plots of land were to be restitution for lost commons "now gone to swell huge rent rolls".<sup>5</sup> Howitt insisted that

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1. William Howitt, A Popular History of Priestcraft..., (1833), p.v
  2. /William Howitt/, The Aristocracy of England: A History for the People, (2nd ed. 1846), p.v.
  3. Ibid., p.21.
  4. Ibid., p.126.
  5. Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. 2, (1835), p.738.

he did not envisage change "by any Agrarian law - by any Utopian schemes of equality of property".<sup>1</sup>

Following a period of residence in Heidelberg, Howitt produced an account of German life which appeared in 1842. It was from this volume that Mill borrowed. He had referred to Howitt, without enthusiasm, in a letter of 1837,<sup>2</sup> but this work impressed him with its evidence relating to peasant agriculture. Mill implied that Howitt's testimony was all the stronger by referring to him as a "writer whose habit it is to see all English objects and English socialities en beau,"<sup>3</sup> although this judgement clearly does not apply to all Howitt's work.

The qualitative estimations by contemporaries have, by many modern economic historians, been dismissed as ineligible evidence in the "standard of living" debate, but it is, nevertheless, remarkable that most of the authors here under consideration believed there had been a worsening in working class living standards. Howitt was no exception. In noting the industriousness of the German peasant proprietors, he wrote that it might be thought a hard life in England:

But hard as it is, it is not to be compared with the condition of labourers in some agricultural parts of a dear country like England, where eight or nine shillings a week, and no cow, no pig, no fruit for the market, no work in the winter, but dependence for everything on a master, a constant feeling of anxiety, and the desperate prospect of ending his days in a Union workhouse, is too commonly the labourer's lot.

4

This sympathy with the landless labourer echoed that found in the Rural Life in England. As a means of exciting "a spirit of activity and economy" the allotment system was put forward, which

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1. Ibid., p.742.

2. Mill to John Robertson, December, 1837, Letters, p.363.

3. Principles, p.263.

4. William Howitt, The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany, (1842), p.41.

had by many gentlemen, been "introduced with excellent effects. The farther this can be carried, the more shall we see a return to the contented spirit of past days."<sup>1</sup> On this point, Mill disregarded Howitt's appraisal, for he was not a supporter of allotments on these terms. Moreover, Howitt went on to present evidence directly opposed to Mill's case. This concerned the effect of sub-division of property which in parts had brought so much poverty that it had been necessary to check it by a law making the land descend to the eldest son.<sup>2</sup>

Howitt had other qualifications about the desirability of peasant proprietorships, which Mill omitted. These included the complaint that "the higher and more refined classes" had, due to the general possession of the soil by the peasant, been driven into towns leaving the peasantry to their "unmixed native rudeness and ignorance".<sup>3</sup> While in contrast to the "sweet little peasant-nests which are scattered all over England", the huts of the German bauer were "dingy, and dirty, and cheerless!"<sup>4</sup>

Two long extracts from Howitt's book on Germany were quoted by Mill, mainly to illustrate the great industry of the German peasantry.<sup>5</sup> For his leading articles in the Morning Chronicle Mill also employed Howitt's testimony, where he described him as, "as much of a John Bull as is at all reconcilable with a fair share of modern ideas."<sup>6</sup> There is some truth in this; Howitt as a sentimental mourner for lost rights and a rude peasantry was some distance from selfish utilitarianism or aristocratic privilege.

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1. Ibid., p.43.

2. Ibid. In some German states a variation decreed that only the youngest son could inherit the land. Laing, too, had noted a concern with over-population; in 1836 a Professor Weinhold of Prussia had proposed the infibulation of both sexes, Notes of a Traveller, op.cit., p.160.

3. Rural and Domestic Life of Germany, op.cit., p.44.

4. Ibid., p.46.

5. Principles, pp.263-264.

6. Morning Chronicle, 30 November, 1846.

Yet, despite Mill's reputation as the logic-chopping "saint of rationalism", he shared with Howitt a tendency to romanticise peasant virtues set in an idyllic countryside.<sup>1</sup>

V

At this point, a number of other authorities may be mentioned, most of whom were cited by Mill, and those who were not, were probably known to him. All were, in different degrees, part of the movement against the prevailing dogma of large farms, and indicate that small proprietorships were being seriously considered as a viable form of agricultural tenure. These writers, moreover, often combined their support for small farms with criticism of the social organization as it existed in England.

While France naturally attracted much attention, evidence concerning peasant agriculture was also forthcoming from Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. The latter region was the subject of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge publication, Outlines of Flemish Husbandry, which appeared in 1840. This "elaborate and intelligent treatise", as Mill referred to it,<sup>2</sup> though not bearing the author's name, was written by William Lewis Rham, (1778-1843). Rham, an Anglican clergyman, was recognised as an authority on agriculture and ran a school for fifty boys and fifty girls, in his parish at Winkfield, Berks, which placed an emphasis upon acquiring agricultural skills.<sup>3</sup> The S.D.U.K. had many detractors: Peacock in Crotchet Castle satirised

1. For example, in 1840 Mill wrote that "our agriculturalists... ought to be the counterbalancing element in our national character; they should represent the type opposite to the commercial, - that of moderate wishes, tranquil tastes, cultivation of the excitements and enjoyments near at hand, and compatible with their existing position. Review of Tocqueville's Democracy in America, reprinted in Dissertations and Discussions, (2nd ed., 1867), vol. 2, p.75.

2. Principles, p.145.

3. "William Lewis Rham", by J.R. MacDonald in D.N.B.



it as the Steam Intellect Society; its publications for working men were usually written in a patronising and superior tone; radicals such as W. B. Adams and Thomas Hodgskin were critical of its role, and even Mill suggested the knowledge proffered by it was "Useless".<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, despite the Society's shortcomings, it gained a reputation as a vehicle for education and many celebrated public men were associated with it.<sup>2</sup> Rham's treatise appeared in the British Husbandry series of the Library of Useful Knowledge. At the beginning of his account, he asserted that "the cultivation of a poor light soil, on a moderate scale, is generally superior in Flanders to that of the most improved farms of the same kind in Britain", and, accordingly, there was something to be learned from the Flemings.<sup>3</sup> Rham went on to emphasise the painstaking industry of the peasant who laboured indefatigably to improve his holding. Mill extracted several of these details in order to incorporate them in his Principles.

For the case of Italy, where métayer cultivation was common, Mill relied on a number of illustrations provided by the work of a French traveller, Jacob Frederick Lullin de Chateaufvieux. Chateaufvieux's book consisted of a series of twenty three letters, mostly concerned with farming, written by the author from various parts of Italy in 1812-13.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that, as Italy was under French control at that time, the author was predisposed to

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1. Mill to d'Eichthal, 15 May, 1829, Letters, p.33. Mill, however, offered a treatise for the Society to publish, Mill to Thomas Coates, 23 January, 1829, ibid., p.742. It never appeared; possibly he had been encouraged to submit it by his father, as James Mill was a supporter of the S.D.U.K.: see his letter to Brougham, 3 September, 1832, quoted Bain, James Mill, p.366.

2. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, op.cit., p.67.

3. Outlines of Flemish Husbandry, p.3.

4. The edition cited by Mill was, Edward Rigby, (trans.), Italy, its Agriculture, &c. from the French of Mons. Chateaufvieux, being letters written by him in Italy, in the years 1812 & 1813, (Norwich, 1819).

giving a good account of that society, but Mill regarded him as an accurate authority,<sup>1</sup> and quoted examples of the advantages gained by cultivators from the métayer system. When writing his letters, Chateaufvieux had been aware of the controversy between supporters of small and large farms. He contradicted Young's opinion that large farms could supply the greatest quantity of provisions, saying that the métayer system of Piedmont disproved it.<sup>2</sup> Chateaufvieux's translator, however, was of a different opinion, and added a footnote reasserting the advantages of the large farm.<sup>3</sup>

Some qualifications were, however, made by Chateaufvieux which Mill tended to dismiss with a passing reference. These largely related to the poverty which sometimes existed among the métayers and were taken up by an earlier writer, Archibald Alison, (1792-1867). Alison had become successful as an advocate in Edinburgh before turning his hand to history. In 1833 his two-volume History of Europe during the French Revolution appeared and met a scathing review from Mill, who wrote "a more useless book than this of Mr. Alison's, one which approaches nearer to the ideal of absolute inutility, we believe we might go far to seek".<sup>4</sup> A frequent contributor to Blackwood's, Alison was a Tory of the old school, and was, again according to Mill, "quite inconceivably

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1. Principles, p.303.

2. Italy, its Agriculture, &c., op.cit., p.23.

3. Ibid., p.24n. Also p.46n. for Rigby's "unanswerable argument against the system of small farms"; that there was no hope of rising to a superior class.

4. /J.S. Mill/, "Alison's History of the French Revolution", Monthly Repository, vol. 7, (1833), p.510.

stupid and twaddling".<sup>1</sup> Alison is of interest, however, because although his views were usually diametrically opposite to Mill's - the causes he supported included American slavery and protection - there was some similarity between his opinions in The Principles of Population and Mill's thought.

Alison's main purpose was to refute Malthus's theory of population. The book began, he explained, in 1810 when he wrote a draft which was rewritten after reflection and extensive travel in Europe; though by 1828 it existed in the form in which it eventually appeared, publication had been put off, but he now believed that such was the situation, that a remedy was called for to end the evils which had befallen the labouring classes and the dangers of the "misdirected passion for change so unhappily prevalent in the manufacturing districts".<sup>2</sup> The effect of the principle of population, argued Alison, was to impel mankind "into those charnel-houses of mortality - great cities - where the human race, constantly pressing on, is still unable to maintain its numbers".<sup>3</sup> Alison's solution was to maintain the labourers in the countryside, which, if cultivated like a garden, could support double the present population. A frugal, industrious peasantry would, moreover, act prudently to prevent a rapid rise in numbers, while those who suffered misery had no position to maintain, and no incentive to avoid having many children. The teeming masses of the cities presented a vision that concerned Alison, as he saw the growth of manufacturing bringing with it intoxication, licentiousness, and depravity.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, rural life could mean

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1. Mill to Carlyle, 18 May, 1833, Letters, p.155.

2. Archibald Alison, The Principles of Population, and Their Connection with Human Happiness, (2 vols. 1840), vol. 1, p.ix.

3. Ibid., p.4.

4. Ibid., p.94.

prosperity and contentment, and this would be more easily achieved if the labourer was allowed to possess landed property. A number of Continental countries were mentioned in evidence; Alison referred to his personal observations in Switzerland:

The political state of the country sufficiently explains the causes of the extraordinary degree of public prosperity which is conspicuous in its inhabitants. Switzerland is the land of peasants. With a very few exceptions, the whole country is cultivated by the proprietors of the soil... No rapacious landlord or steward, as in the Irish plains; no grinding taxgatherer, as in the French monarchy, prior to the Revolution...whatever he earns, he earns for himself and his family, and transmits in peace to his prosperity.

1

In Flanders and Holland, too, the peasantry was prosperous and industrious and the whole country resembled a vast kitchen garden; Sweden and Norway were further examples of abundance and contentment cited by Alison, where "population, notwithstanding the universal subdivision of landed property, advances with very slow steps".<sup>2</sup> In Italy, however, there was much want and indigence arising from a rapid advance in population due to the system whereby the land was relet by middlemen. It was at this point that Alison found a quotation from Chateaubvieux's Letters to the peasantry sometimes married without reflecting how they would be able to maintain a family. Spain and Portugal consisted mostly of large farms from which indolence and other evils generally resulted, but in Catalonia, Valencia, and Asturia, where the peasantry had property of their own, Alison wrote that "their industry is eminently conspicuous".<sup>3</sup> Similarly in Germany, where

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1. Ibid., p.420.
  2. Ibid., p.430.
  3. Ibid., p.465.

there was a variety of conditions, Alison linked contentment amongst the peasantry with possession of land. Prosperity was widespread in America, noted Alison, and quoted from Tocqueville that every man was the proprietor of the soil which he cultivated. It was an illustration of:

the vast and unbounded blessings which, in all ages and parts of the world, have been found to attend the acquisition of landed property by the labouring classes.

1

Alison went on to argue that the poor should be encouraged to acquire landed property. His beliefs were, he stated, opposite to Rousseau's opinion that misery arose from private property. But Alison, while arguing for the possession of property by the labouring classes, did not advocate anything approaching the equal division of property. Rather was his ideal that of a hierarchical and stable social structure. With typical orotundity, he expressed his support for the acquisition of property, in order to:

increase the individual intelligence of the labouring classes; to check the disposition to sensual enjoyment which uniformly belongs to those to whom no higher object of ambition is permitted; to raise the lowest in proportion to the exaltation of all the superior classes of the community: to prevent, in fine, the vilifying influence of political grandeur upon individual character, and to give a sufficient degree of strength and solidity to the great base on which the pyramid of society is supported.

2

Even those authors most hostile to the distribution of land among the labouring classes, admitted that it had beneficial effects on individuals to whom it was distributed. Malthus had allowed this point, Alison observed, and Young had admitted the industry of the French peasant. Young's apparent volte face in 1800 for which

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1. Ibid., p.550.
  2. Ibid., vol. 2, p.10.

Malthus had criticised him was alluded to by Alison, who, however, did not see it as a contradiction: in the case of France, Young had been referring to an arbitrarily ruled state, whereas England was a free country.<sup>1</sup>

With the discussion centring on England, Alison began to shift his ground somewhat away from the tenor of his examination of the European peasantry. In England, he claimed, allotments had replaced the question of a peasantry living on its own produce, and the most industrious and trusty labourers were those who had a holding insufficient to support themselves but enough of a consideration to give them an interest in order and tranquility. Moreover, it would be too great a sacrifice if, through the poor acquiring property, the stability of the hereditary aristocracy was endangered.<sup>2</sup> The right of primogeniture was indispensable, Alison believed, as it indicated that property was not regarded as a mere temporary possession; but entails were ruinous as they prevented the wider acquisition of land. The transfer of small properties of land ought to be made as simple as conveying Government stock. Returning again to his theme of the evil influences of great cities, Alison suggested that amongst them was the absence of the opportunity for the frugal poor to invest in land. This would be the best means of accumulation, as savings banks were an inadequate alternative.<sup>3</sup>

Alison's work presented a mixture of ideas which at times verged on the eccentric. Taking his deep-bred Toryism as a starting point, he detested manufacturing and urbanisation. An alternative to this was a contented peasantry whose desire to maintain their comforts would avoid over-population. In support

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1. Ibid., p.25. Young's conversion was deeper than Alison allowed; see above, pp.51ff.

2. Ibid., p.50.

3. Ibid., p.159.



of this view, Alison took the example of the Continent, while explaining Irish poverty in terms of political oppression and a landed system based upon sub-letting and absenteeism.<sup>1</sup> It was Alison's view that the poor became reckless and dissipated when their position was hopeless; by encouraging them to obtain property this condition could be avoided. There was thus some similarity between Alison's thought and the opinions of liberal economists such as Thornton and Mill. Alison's Principles of Population was, however, to have little influence: it was often obscurely argued and written in a formidably inflated style. His relevance lies in the fact that he detailed at length the relationship between the possession of land and population control, and that he did this - if his claim is accepted that the book was written many years before publication - earlier than most other social philosophers.

As we have seen, Mill regarded Alison with contempt and appears to have paid no attention to the work, either in his published writings or what survives of his private correspondence. But he was almost certainly aware of it, even if he did not choose to refer to it. No doubt partly because of his connections with periodical literature, especially during his ownership of the London and Westminster Review, Mill was highly informed on recent published works, and to judge by allusions contained in his letters, appears to have read extensively on a broad range of subjects. Moreover, one of the books used by Mill in his discussion of peasant proprietorship contained a reference to Alison's work. This was Samuel Laing Junior's National Distress.

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1. Ibid., vol. 1, pp.494-513, vol. 2, p.40.

VI

The son of Samuel Laing, whose contribution to the debate has been considered above, Laing Jr. (1810-1897) was born in Edinburgh and educated at Cambridge where he was second wrangler in 1831. After some years as a Fellow of St. John's College, he was called to the bar in 1837. In later life, Laing became a Liberal M.P., sitting in Parliament during the periods 1852-57, 1865-68, and 1875-85, and a railway director. In 1842, the Atlas newspaper offered a prize of £100 for the best essay on the subject of the causes of, and remedies for, the existing distresses of the country. Laing was the successful competitor. By the time his entry was published in book form, Laing apologised for its appearance "under a completely altered state of circumstances", but nevertheless, he believed the greater portion of his work related "to questions of permanent interest" and he did not wish to retract his general views on the "fundamental positions and principles of the 'Condition of England' problem".<sup>1</sup>

The economic troubles of the early 1840s, centring around the crisis of 1842, produced a crop of social panaceas. Mill was to discuss some of them in his "Claims of Labour" article, and Laing, in the course of his essay, touched upon most of the explanations and proposals popular amongst contemporaries. The first part of Laing's book consisted of an examination of the nature and extent of existing distress. One chapter was devoted to the condition of the agricultural labourer, whose financial situation was computed from figures in reports drawn up for the poor law. From this evidence Laing concluded, that in the words of an assistant poor law commissioner: "The English agricultural

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1. Samuel Laing Jun., National Distress; its Causes and Remedies, (1844), pp.v-vii.

labourer, even if he has transcendant abilities, has scarcely any prospect of rising in the world, and of becoming a small farmer."<sup>1</sup> And while the labourer had little chance of rising in the world, added Laing, he might well fall, to become one of the 1,072,978 paupers receiving parish relief under the harsh conditions of the new poor law. Here a long extract from Alison's Principles of Population was appended, to give a picture of a family compelled to leave the country to take up their abode in a great city.

Laing believed that agricultural improvements had been enforced without regard to moral obligations, and on this ground he condemned the large-farm system. Although more produce was raised, few hands were necessary, due to the introduction of the manufacturing system, which was defined as "the system of considering land simply and solely as a machine for the production of wealth".<sup>2</sup> Laing, whom Marx quoted as an authority in Capital, took a gloomy view of the existing distress; he did not believe it to be a purely temporary phenomenon, but thought there was evidence,

independent of that afforded by the increase of pauperism, and the extensive migration to the manufacturing districts, which tends to show that the condition of the English agricultural labourer has sensibly deteriorated in the course of the last half century.

3

It was now rare, Laing continued, to find a labourer with a cow or a plot of land, while his real wages had fallen. As the situation of the English agricultural labourer had got worse, the same class in France had risen from the position of feudal serfs to that of independent owners of property.

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1. E. Twisleton, quoted ibid., p.31.
  2. Ibid., p.36.
  3. Ibid.

To meet the evils which threatened society, something far more was needed than letting things to themselves and the "terrible application of the principle of laissez-faire, as developed in the writings of Malthus".<sup>1</sup> Laing emphasised that, as continental political economists pointed out, it was the distribution of a nation's wealth that was significant, rather than the absolute amount. He believed that many evils could be traced to the worship of Mammon; and took the landed aristocracy as an instance asking how they had performed their duty:

Is it not notorious that the old kindly relations between landlord and tenant, between farmer and labourer, have, to a great extent, disappeared? Has not cash payment come to be the sole bond between man and man in country as well as in town? Do not many landlords look practically upon their estates as machines for producing income? Nay, do they not avow, by the practice of letting their farms at rack-rent to the highest bidder, that all moral considerations of kindness, old connection, and the like, go simply for nothing.

2

In turn, the farmer when treated as a money-making machine, treated the labourer in the same way. Thus, according to Laing's analysis, things went on until the Swing riots of 1830 revealed "by the light of blazing cornstacks, that misery and black mutinous discontent smouldered" under the surface of agricultural England.<sup>3</sup>

Laing examined the theory derived from Malthus that the rise in population was a cause of the distress which existed. Rather was it a case, he argued echoing Alison, "that misery, up to the extreme point of famine and pestilence, instead of checking, tends to increase population".<sup>4</sup> The example of France showed that although property was widely diffused, population increased at a very moderate rate. The latter part of his book consisted of Laing's remedies

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1. Ibid., p.58.

2. Ibid., pp.61-62.

3. Ibid., p.62.

4. Ibid., p.69.

for distress. Here he considered several of the more commonly advocated solutions, while putting an emphasis on free trade and financial reforms, coupled with emigration and alterations in the poor law.

Laing's book caught many of the concerns and anxieties felt by himself and his contemporaries. After a lifetime of economic change, the standard of living of the mass of the people appeared to many to have actually fallen. Laing, rather like Helps and Thornton, was a well-meaning member of the middle class who reflected on the problem and put his ideas into writing. None of his proposals was in any way startling or deeply radical, and, despite his criticisms of Malthus, the premises on which he built his arguments were not unorthodox. This approach was common also to Mill, who always incorporated his writings within a mainstream of contemporary thought. Laing's book was noticed by Mill in the Principles, when the latter extracted from it an example of co-operation in the Cornish mines.

Two continental writers whose work appeared in England in the 1830s were also known to Mill. With one, Gustave de Beaumont (1802-1866), a friend of Tocqueville, Mill was in regular correspondence although his letters unfortunately do not appear to be extant. Beaumont's Ireland, Social, Political and Religious was published in England in 1839 and included support of peasant proprietorship as a remedy for Irish agriculture. A similar proposal was made by Frederick von Raumer, a Prussian historian, whose work Mill had referred to while Sarah Austin was translating it.<sup>1</sup> Raumer recommended the abolition of the system of tenants at will and the conversion of peasants into proprietors, although

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1. Mill to Sarah Austin, 9 January, 1836, Letters, p.292.

he realised the controversial nature of his suggestion:

On reading this, the Tories will throw my book into the fire; and even the Whigs will be mute with astonishment. The whole battery of pillage, jacobinism, dissolution of civil society, is discharged at me.

1

Nevertheless, he insisted, good results could be accomplished by such a system, as the instance of Prussia illustrated. In the Principles, Mill referred to these two "enlightened foreigners", who, realising what the disease of Ireland required, "have some difficulty in comprehending how it is...not yet done".<sup>2</sup>

These, then, were some of the travellers, writers, and thinkers whose works appeared in the 1830s and 1840s. They cannot be said to represent any one "school of thought". Although some were aware that other writers had formed similar notions, this was not always the case. At times their ideas were contradictory. And the various works mentioned above varied in quality and importance. Their significance is derived from the fact that, when taken together, they suggested a number of conclusions. These included a demonstration that continental agriculture had not been ruined by the sub-division of property and peasant proprietorship; that population had not increased rapidly in those countries where the means of subsistence had risen; that in the case of Ireland, a different set of circumstances accounted for the existence of misery and poverty, and that the condition of the English agricultural labourer had, relative to his European counterpart, deteriorated.

The arguments thrown up by these authors and some others, were systematically brought together by Mill in the Principles. But before this work appeared, another writer, W. T. Thornton,

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1. Von Raumer, England in 1835, op.cit., vol. 3, p.199.  
2. Principles, p.995.

derived similar conclusions from several of the books discussed above. Before going on to examine Mill's statement, it is necessary to consider Thornton's contribution.

## VII

Like J. S. Mill, W. T. Thornton (1813-1880) combined a career at the East India House with advocating means for the "improvement of mankind". In later life, he claimed that from the age of about twenty-five, he had devoted himself to the search for a cure for human destitution.<sup>1</sup> His first major attempt to publically advance this aim was the appearance in 1846 of Over-Population and its Remedy, which was intended to present the ideas of himself and others on the problem of distress amongst the poor.<sup>2</sup> In the present discussion, the importance of Thornton's work is two-fold. Firstly, he came to know Mill well and in later years was one of the few privileged enough to visit Mill at Avignon. It will be necessary to consider the relationship between Thornton's treatment of small farms and related problems with Mill's attitude to the question. Secondly, Thornton was one of the foremost advocates of peasant proprietorship writing in this period. His works provide detailed arguments and discussion concerning the topic and may be regarded as the definitive case for small farms. For these reasons, it is desirable to examine Thornton's treatment of the issue at some length.

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1. See preface to Thornton's On Labour, (1869), p.v. He added that his performance had been insignificant.  
2. William Thomas Thornton, Over-Population and its Remedy; or, an Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of the Distress prevailing among the Labouring Classes of the British Isles and into the Means of Remedying it, (1846), pp.iii-iv.



Thornton, from the outset, accepted the principles of Malthus's theory of population as being "self-evident"<sup>1</sup> but went on to suggest that population was promoted by misery, for, whereas a half-starved wretch had little dread of increasing his misery, a person of some property would be reluctant to risk his comforts. This had been shown by the peasantry of Europe, for, where a piece of land sufficient for his maintenance was possessed by the peasant, he behaved in a prudent fashion. Supporting his case with a quotation from Howitt's Rural and Domestic Life of Germany, Thornton observed that "throughout Germany, the peasantry are exceedingly industrious, they labour busily early and late, but they feel that they are labouring for themselves, and their toil is rewarded by the substantial comforts they enjoy".<sup>2</sup>

The peasantry of other European states was also referred to by Thornton, who cited Inglis's account of Switzerland and Laing's Notes of a Traveller among his authorities for showing the extent of the well-being amongst the peasant class. In the case of Switzerland, he declared, even M'Culloch had to acknowledge the superior position enjoyed by the peasant in comparison with the agricultural labourer in most parts of Britain.<sup>3</sup> It had been true, continued Thornton, that, in the eighteenth century, the French peasant had lived in a wretched condition, as travellers such as Arthur Young bore witness. Then, it was usual to make comparisons "between the ragged, half-starved French peasantry and the stout, sturdy, well-clad, and well-fed yeomanry" of England.<sup>4</sup> But since the Revolution, the French had become much better off and the old picture was exceedingly inaccurate, for, given the means of support

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1. Ibid., p.117.

2. Ibid., p.128.

3. Ibid., p.139.

4. Ibid., p.152.

in France, subsistence was no longer out-stripped by population. This, argued Thornton, showed that where there was the incentive of owning property, there was self-restraint, but when this was absent, "misery is the great promoter of over-population".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, according to Thornton, while the French peasant was improving his lot, the condition of the English labourer had deteriorated. Thornton attempted to show how, from Saxon times, the peasant had enjoyed good circumstances. But after the middle of the eighteenth century, the poor laws, instead of strengthening the impediments to marriage, stimulated population and created an enormous amount of pauperism. Other causes aggravated the evil: the enclosure of common land had also contributed to the degradation of the English peasantry. Offering some characteristic lines from Goldsmith's Deserted Village, Thornton went on to show how the cottager had been deprived of waste land. While enclosure had brought great benefits to the country as a whole, they had been obtained "at the expense of one unfortunate class, and that the one least able to afford it".<sup>2</sup>

Thornton, however, did not propose remedies which sought to re-establish the old conditions of society as he had described them. He reasserted his belief in the principles of Malthus, despite critics, amongst whom Thornton named Southey, Sadler, M'Culloch, Archibald Alison, and Samuel Laing.<sup>3</sup> He defended the new Poor Law even to the extent of claiming that reports arising from the conduct of the Andover workhouse had been "greatly exaggerated and overcoloured".<sup>4</sup> Emigration on a mass scale would

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1. Ibid., p.160.

2. Ibid., p.211.

3. Ibid., pp.268-269.

4. Ibid., p.274n. The storm over the "Andover bones scandal" broke in 1845 when reports appeared that the paupers of Andover Workhouse, while carrying out their task of bone-crushing, had, through hunger, been reduced to eating scraps of gristle and marrow. For an account of the incident, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government: English Poor Law History: Part II. The Last Hundred Years, (1927), pp.170-180.

be a solution to over-population, although Thornton saw great difficulties in operating such a scheme. Other proposals which were considered included agricultural improvement and the adoption of free trade. If the corn laws were repealed, Thornton reasoned, one result may be the disappearance of the large capitalist farmer who would be replaced by small farmers holding not more than fifty acres each. He noted that eminent writers had contended that such a change would be highly detrimental to agriculture, for large farms and large capitals were held to be essential to good farming, as without them "it is said there cannot be effectual drainage, nor sufficient manure, nor judicious rotation of crops, nor can expensive implements be procured, or labour properly husbanded".<sup>1</sup> However, the fact that small farmers were able to pay higher rents per acre than large, showed that they had a large surplus, while the evidence provided by Flanders and Lombardy, was proof that small farms had certain advantages. Thornton went on to argue that the small farmer gained by cultivating his land more intensively, while mutual co-operation between him and his neighbours gave most of the advantages possessed by his wealthy rivals. The labourer, too, would benefit, for, as land was tilled more intensively, the demand for his services would increase thus raising his wage. If he was in addition allowed a cottage allotment, the labourer's condition would be further improved.

"In opposition to these assertions", wrote Thornton, "the misery of the Irish peasantry will probably be urged".<sup>2</sup> As he remarked, the example of Ireland was commonly cited as proof that small farms led to over-population which, in turn, caused further sub-division of the land. Thornton pointed out that on the Continent this had not been the result, rather had the effects been

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1. Over-Population, op.cit., p.329.

2. Ibid., p.335.

directly opposite. The truth was that, in Ireland, the peasantry had always been over-rented and the heavy dues exacted by the landlords had kept them in poverty. But by augmenting the incomes of the poor, it was possible to cure them of improvidence, for the more they had to lose, the more they would be afraid of losing it. For this reason, Thornton supported allotments which he considered would encourage prudence. In so arguing, he noted that "a distinguished political writer" had maintained allotments would lead to a reduction of wages, but Thornton could not accept such a conclusion.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, he rejected M'Culloch's contention that where land was divided amongst all the children of a farmer, it would become so sub-divided as to condemn them to perpetual poverty. The possession of land would, Thornton claimed, encourage foresight as small farmers would wish to continue to enjoy the comforts which they had known. This had been shown by the example of the European peasantry and also in certain parishes in Rutland and Lincolnshire, where the allotment system had successfully kept down poor rates.<sup>2</sup>

#### VIII

In Over-Population and its Remedy, Thornton thus put forward the case for small farms and emphasised the well-being of Europe's peasantry. In doing so, he rejected the widely-accepted view of those authorities headed by M'Culloch. He further made the important distinction between the exploited Irish peasant and the independent farmer as found in France, Italy, and Flanders, and suggested the reasons for Irish misery. In all these directions, he was close to Mill, but on the issue of allotments he adopted an

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1. Ibid., p.338. The writer in question was Mill, and his "Claims of Labour" no doubt the article which Thornton had in mind. See above, pp.311f.

2. Ibid., p.348.

opposite position. It has sometimes been supposed that Mill's sympathy for peasant proprietorship was derived from Thornton. Mill's first biographer, Alexander Bain (1818-1903), appears to have been responsible for originating this view, when he wrote: "I believe that it was his friend W. J. /sic/ Thornton that first awakened him to the question of Peasant Properties".<sup>1</sup> Bain's testimony must be given some weight, for he had known Mill for many years. They had first corresponded in September, 1841, and met the following spring when Bain visited London.<sup>2</sup> Bain claimed that from this time, all his knowledge of Mill used in his biography was first hand.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the fact that for ten years previous to the publication of Over-Population, Thornton and Mill had shared the same place of employment, would further suggest that some cross-fertilization in their ideas took place. Thornton's tribute to Mill as a "distinguished political writer" might also be thought to imply some degree of friendship. Finally, it is known that Mill and Thornton were in later life on close terms, and that the latter was responsible for Mill's retraction of the wage-fund theory.<sup>4</sup>

However, there are grounds for rejecting the view that their attitudes had been formed jointly, and for suggesting instead that by 1846, the two men had arrived at their ideas on small farms and related issues independently. It must be borne in mind that Mill's relationship with Harriet Taylor, together with the failure to establish a party of philosophic radicals, led him to become increasingly withdrawn after 1840.<sup>5</sup> These reasons, it may be

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1. Bain, J. S. Mill, p.86n.

2. See Mineka's note in Letters, p.487n.1.

3. Alexander Bain, Autobiography, (1904), p.341.

4. Blaug, Ricardian Economics, op.cit., p.119. But as Bain pointed out, in later life Mill and Thornton differed "in a great many things", J.S. Mill, p.174.

5. See Mill's comment in the Autobiography of his "inclination... for limiting my own society to a very few persons", p.159. Also Packe, op.cit., pp.320f.

surmised, help to explain why Mill did not become friendly with Thornton until 1846. Thornton has left a short account of the circumstances of their friendship. Because of "mutual shyness" they seldom spoke to each other for a period of many years, until, Thornton recalled:

Early in 1846, however, I sent him a copy of a book I had just brought out, on 'Overpopulation': a day or two afterwards he came into my room to thank me for it, and during the half hours' conversation that thereupon ensued, sprang up, full grown at its birth, an intimate friendship...From that time, for the next ten or twelve years, a day seldom passed without, if I did not go into his room, his coming into mine.

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It becomes clear, therefore, that if this statement of Thornton's is accepted, Mill had formulated most of his ideas on peasant proprietorship and small farms before the period of their intimacy. This view also follows from the examination which the present writer has conducted of the development of Mill's thought on these matters. From his earliest years, Mill had been taught to distrust the aristocracy and to oppose the power of the landed interest. Perhaps since the "mental crisis" of the late 1820s, he had been sympathetic to the "statesmen" of the Lake District as pictured by Wordsworth. During his political activities of the 1830s, he had come to regard small farmers as a potential radical force. Mill's interest in European society in general, and in France in particular, meant that he was well aware of the changes that were taking place on the Continent. As well as travelling abroad himself, we have seen that he was familiar with the works of men like Samuel Laing and William Howitt. In the case of the Irish peasantry, Mill, like Thornton, viewed the situation as being

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1. W. T. Thornton, "His Career at the India House", in H. R. Fox Bourne, (ed.), John Stuart Mill: Notices of His Life and Works, (1873), p.22.

different from the peasantry in other parts of western Europe. He analysed the problem in terms of a misruled economic system, and was to employ the term "cottar" to describe the Irish peasant as a further means of distinguishing the Irishman from the small farmer on the Continent.

It is likely that the effect of Thornton's Over-Population on Mill was to confirm the ideas that he had already developed, rather than in any way alter them. Mill was not persuaded to accept the allotment system, although he did cite Thornton's work as an authority in the Principles. Another book by Thornton, appearing in 1848, also had similarities with Mill's position. This was his Plea for Peasant Proprietors. In this study, the closeness with the sections on peasant proprietorship in the Principles is evident both in the arguments Thornton developed and the illustrations he employed. Mill's Morning Chronicle articles had appeared during 1846-47, and Thornton referred to the support which they gave to his case in his preface.<sup>1</sup>

## IX

The Plea for Peasant Proprietors was a detailed examination of the arguments for a large, as compared with a small, farm system. It covered again some of the issues raised in Over-Population, but put the emphasis more strongly upon the remedy of peasant proprietorship. In his first chapter, Thornton compared the two systems in terms of productiveness. He began by stating that when the doctrine of large farms came into fashion sixty or

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1. William Thomas Thornton, A Plea for Peasant Proprietors; with the Outlines of a Plan for Their Establishment in Ireland, (1848), p.vii; at the same point Mill was described as "assuredly, whether as a dialectician, or as a political economist, without any living superior".



seventy years previously, farms of 1,000 or 1,500 acres were not unknown. It was on these farms that agricultural improvement was the most remarkable. Meanwhile, up to the first thirty years of George III's reign, the English peasant was in a better position than in the preceding century, but it had been argued that:

the occupation of the land by the lower class of peasants was a mark or relic of serfdom and barbarism, and that their deprivation of land and conversion into labourers for money-wages, was an indispensable step in their progress to freedom and civilisation.

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Accordingly, large farms worked by landless labourers were associated with improvement, while from the small farms of Ireland the inference was drawn that this system meant the multiplication of a debased and miserable cottar peasantry.

Thornton went on to show how the case for the large farm had developed by quoting extracts from M'Culloch's "Cottage System" article which claimed that small farms were badly cultivated and encouraged habits of idleness in the farmer. That these were the results of the small farm system, Thornton denied, and went on to give numerous authorities to testify to the industriousness of the continental peasant and the high yields obtained by him. Among these authorities were H. D. Inglis, Rham's Flemish Husbandry, William Howitt, and M'Culloch, whom Thornton was pleased to find had flatly contradicted himself.<sup>2</sup> Having argued that there was a strong case for the small farmer in economic terms, Thornton devoted his second chapter to the social aspects of the question. He developed the argument that when the farmer was the owner of his

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1. Ibid., pp.3-4.

2. See ibid., pp.19-20, where Thornton juxtaposed an extract from M'Culloch's Statistical Account of the British Empire which stated that the small farmer was "incapable of continuous and vigorous exertion" and did not accumulate capital "in one case out of a hundred", with a remark from his Geographical Dictionary testifying to the "indefatigable industry" of the Flemish farmer, who "with fifteen acres of good light land brings up his family in decent independence, and in the course of his life accumulates sufficient means to put them in possession of a little farm of their own".

land, he had the strongest motive for improving it, as any investment he made resulted in increasing the value of his land. Taking as he did, all the fruits of his labour, the peasant proprietor had the strongest possible incentives to diligence. He would undertake operations which yielded no profit until after a long lapse of time or only a very small annual profit: as Young had exclaimed, "in spite of himself", the "magic of property turns sand to gold".<sup>1</sup>

However, continued Thornton, small properties had been subject to an accusation, "which, if well-founded, would completely neutralise all their advantages, and would indeed justify their unqualified condemnation as one of the greatest curses with which a country can be afflicted".<sup>2</sup> This was the alleged tendency of small properties to become sub-divided, with an increasing multiplication of proprietors and an excessive agricultural population. After a few generations, the peasantry become reduced to the lowest depths of misery and the whole country could justly be described as a vast pauper warren. Against such arguments, Thornton maintained, firstly, that, on the death of the proprietor, it would not necessarily follow that the land would be divided amongst all of the children. Nor were large estates usually divided up; but on this point, noted Thornton, M'Culloch had asserted that the peasant's sons would wish to continue the agricultural life and regard the possession of even a small amount of land as providing him with security. There was in this reasoning, agreed Thornton, "great force" and facts were needed to test the validity of M'Culloch's hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> Beginning with a historical discussion, Thornton proceeded to bring forward numerous examples from Norway, Switzerland

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1. Ibid., p.44.

2. Ibid., p.46.

3. Ibid., p.51.

and the Channel Islands, based upon authorities such as Inglis, Howitt, and Laing, to illustrate the industry and prudence of the peasantry.

To the case of France, Thornton devoted a whole chapter, which he began by stating that the evidence with respect to France was ambiguous and inconsistent, and had provided proofs for both the supporters of peasant proprietorship and its opponents. Arthur Young, whose honesty Thornton described as unimpeachable, had drawn a picture of the misery of the French peasant. But this could be accounted for by the feudal and fiscal oppression under which the peasantry groaned, and Thornton went on to argue that, "peasant proprietorship did not obtain a fair deal in France until the worse abuses of tyranny and feudalism were swept away at the Revolution".<sup>1</sup> Several writers, however, doubted that conditions had changed since the time when Young wrote his Travels in France. These included "a smart writer in the most dignified of English periodical works",<sup>2</sup> who had adopted the arguments published in a book by Mounier and Rubichon.<sup>3</sup> Thornton proposed to examine their conclusions and the statistical tables upon which they had been based and, if these most recent of representations could be shown to be true or false, they would confirm or refute the statements of their predecessors. He went on to suggest how many of the statistics quoted by Mournier and Rubichon, and those which Croker had derived from them, were misleading, and that to present a

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1. Ibid., p.120.

2. Ibid., p.123. Thornton's reference was to J.W. Croker's article in vol. 79 of the Quarterly Review; see below, pp.375-378. He commented that it had met a "masterly" answer from J.S. Mill, who, Thornton noted, p.123n., "will be found to have anticipated many of the remarks in the text". This is a further indication that Mill arrived at his opinions independently of Thornton.

3. This was De l'Agriculture en France, d'apres les Documents officiels. Par M.L. Mounier, avec des Remarques par M. Rubichon, (Paris, 1846, 2 vols).

picture of increasing sub-division of the land and impoverishment of the peasantry was the opposite of the truth. Thornton quoted other authorities to show that, although French agriculture had its shortcomings, the prediction made by M'Culloch in 1823 that in half a century France "would certainly be the greatest pauper warren in Europe, and along with Ireland have the honour of furnishing hewers of wood and drawers of water for all other countries in the world", was incorrect.<sup>1</sup> He pointed out that M'Culloch's witness, Morris Birkbeck, was against him in the greater part of his account of France. But M'Culloch had recently produced a novel argument, wrote Thornton, referring to the Treatise on Succession to Property. This was the assertion that the dearth of the year 1846-7 had been confined to those countries in which sub-division had been carried to excess: France, Ireland, parts of Belgium, and Rhenish Prussia. He denied the truth of such a statement, claiming that the dearth had extended over almost the whole of Western Europe, and that England had escaped it because, although the potato failed, there had been an abundant wheat harvest. The peasant proprietor in France had not suffered greatly in the period of shortage, for, argued Thornton, it had been the urban areas that had made the greatest clamour and it had been wrongly assumed that distress had been national. In Flanders, he agreed, there had been great hardship among small proprietors. But it was explained by the fact that many occupiers depended on spinning and weaving for part of their earnings. The rivalry of steam and factory production was the cause of their difficulties, and the possession of land meant, in fact, that they were saved from utter destitution.

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1. Thornton, A Plea, op.cit., p.139.

Thornton then considered the moral effects of peasant proprietorship. High among these was honesty which signified respect for the rights of property, "and none are so likely to pay such respect as those who have property of their own which they wish to see respected."<sup>1</sup> Although honesty was a national virtue of the English, it was no longer a characteristic of the poorest classes. The day-labourer, wrote Thornton, scarcely ever having experienced ownership, did not appreciate the wrong of violating the property of others. A common objection to allotments was based upon farmers' claims that, "it would be impossible to distinguish between the produce which an allotment-holder had raised, and that which he had plundered."<sup>2</sup> This situation was compared with the honest and industrious attitudes of the peasant proprietor on the Continent. Moreover, the wretched English day-labourer regarded his employers as oppressors and "is ever ready to listen to the harrangues of seditious demagogues", while the peasant proprietor was disposed to join with the owners of large estates to repel "any attack on their common rights; he is deeply interested in the preservation of tranquility, and proportionably fearful of civil convulsions, in which he might lose his all".<sup>3</sup>

Another argument brought forward by Thornton related to the education of the children of small proprietors who, being brought up to tend plants and animals, quickly learned the habits of frugality and industry. At this point, he was close to taking up the ground of the typical advocate of allotments, who looked primarily to the advantages to be gained from, rather than for, the labouring class. And on reaching his next argument, Thornton fully

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1. Ibid., p.167.

2. Ibid., p.169.

3. Ibid., p.175.

reflected middle-class self-interest in the form of that perennial Victorian concern, the Servant Question; small farms would help to answer it, for, the "present race of domestic servants", he wrote, was inferior to those servants once drawn from the class of persons "who partook more or less in the character of cottage farmers".<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the main problem, Thornton conceded that the European peasantry was not without certain faults: frugality sometimes passed into meanness as some peasants would only feed themselves poorly, while as Inglis had mentioned, others encouraged their children to beg from travellers. These niggardly habits, however, might be prevented if the peasants came into contact with other classes of society, for Thornton did not advocate that all farms should be small. "All peasants should be landholders", he wrote, "but all landholders should not be peasants"; the interests of all members of society was "best promoted by a just gradation of ranks".<sup>2</sup>

In the fifth and last chapter of his book, Thornton discussed Ireland. He began by noting that the example of Ireland was given, even more commonly than France, as evidence against small farms. Nor could it be denied that in no other part of Europe was the agriculture more defective or the peasantry more idle, miserable, and ill-disposed. The complete explanation, wrote Thornton, was found in a single phrase, for the occupiers of the soil were not landowners, or even leaseholders, but "rack rented tenants at will".<sup>3</sup> The competition for land was so great, that the peasantry had to

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1. Ibid., p.178. See above, especially pp.159-160, 172-174, for similar views to those of Thornton, as expressed by conservative writers.

2. Ibid., p.185.

3. Ibid., p.187.

submit to unreasonable terms, and, as farms were generally too small to afford employment for hired labour, the possession of land was the only chance to gain a livelihood. Thornton estimated that, from the land already under cultivation, 750,000 families could obtain a competent livelihood if modes of tenure were to be reformed. This left a redundant population of 200,000 families, which, he argued, could not be removed by emigration or by occupations in towns. To the question of where they could be provided for, there was but one answer: "they must be transferred to the waste lands".<sup>1</sup>

Thornton went on to calculate the amount of waste land available for this purpose and to suggest how it might be reclaimed. The cost of providing implements and materials and of maintaining 200,000 families for many months until the land could be cultivated, would be great. But large sums were already being spent on these destitute families, and this was an annual tax, while, if resettled, they would eventually be able to provide for themselves. Nor did he see any problem in Parliament acquiring the proprietary rights over the waste lands, for already "on the slightest pretext of public convenience" railway projectors were permitted to obtain possession of the individual's property.<sup>2</sup> Thornton elaborated upon the way in which he envisaged the scheme working, bringing in examples to show that the Irish peasant might be converted to the same level of industry and comfort as found among the Belgian peasantry. Once progress was initiated, tranquility and contentment would follow, and capital would flow into Ireland, thus further advancing national prosperity. Thornton urged that such a scheme should not be rejected on the grounds that it was visionary, but

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1. Ibid., p.217.

2. Ibid., p.220.



hoped instead that great statesmen would consider it as the cure for Ireland's ills.

Thornton's plea for a solution to Ireland's troubles based upon the virtues of peasant proprietorship went unanswered by the Government. Although it was a remedy which had the support of many individuals,<sup>1</sup> it was felt to be too ambitious a project, and one that failed to overcome the elementary free-market objections of Ministers that, if reclamation was profitable, it would already have been undertaken by proprietors without the need for encouragement from public agencies.<sup>2</sup> One of the most active propagandists amongst those who favoured a scheme of reclaiming Irish wastes was J. S. Mill. In the next chapter, it is proposed to examine his arguments as expounded in a long series of articles for the Morning Chronicle, which later were incorporated in the Principles, as an aspect of his treatment of landed property.

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1. Referring to the Plea over twenty years later, Mill suggested that "the total absence, at the time of its publication, of any general interest in its subject, can account for it not having achieved a high repute and a wide circulation", "Thornton on Labour and Its Claims", Fortnightly Review, vol. 11, (1869), p.505. This judgement fails to take account of Mill's own interest, as well as that of the numerous authorities referred to by himself and by Thornton, the latter noting that during the 1840s, "the avowed dissenters from the established creed became numerous enough to constitute a sect", see A Plea, (2nd ed.), pp.vi-vii.

2. Cp. Black, op.cit., pp.179ff.

CHAPTER X:

J. S. MILL, THE IRISH FAMINE AND THE PRINCIPLES  
OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

The moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned, the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence, and common sense, and to act with the barbarity of tyrants, and the fatuity of idiots.

Rev. Sydney Smith

We have, then, examined the treatment of land from the end of the eighteenth century to almost the middle of the nineteenth, particularly as it concerned a loosely-associated collection of political economists and social philosophers. In order to provide a focal-point for such a study, particular attention has been paid to the development of J. S. Mill's ideas on the subject, together with various influences (or possible influences) on his thought. Although still embodying certain principles derived from Bentham and his father, by the mid-1840s, Mill had been able to consider a variety of other philosophies, including those associated with Coleridge and Wordsworth as well as certain French schools. France's agricultural development after the Revolution was known to Mill and his conclusions reinforced by travellers to that and to other countries. His political activities had further convinced him of the deep conservatism of the English landed interest and its supporters, and of the potentially radical nature of small farmers. Anxiety about the effects of over-population had caused him to look for ways of lessening the rapid increase of numbers.

The crisis in Ireland brought these opinions together. By late autumn in 1845 it was clear that Ireland was confronted by a great shortage in the supply of food than had ever been recorded previously. Peel's Government in November, 1845, purchased £10,000

worth of Indian corn from the U.S.A. and made it available at low prices.<sup>1</sup> By assisting local public works, the Government also provided the means for the people to purchase food. The Corn Laws were repealed on the grounds that it was essential to obtain a large amount of food as cheaply as possible. By the summer of 1846, it appeared that the crisis had been met, but the potato blight again struck, ruining almost the whole of the crop, and presenting Russell's Government with the prospect of an Irish famine. Their policies were the provision of relief works, and non-interference with the market price of foodstuffs. These actions were inadequate, and following starvation and disease, deaths were extensive. As prices had risen, partly due to profiteering, the wages paid by the public works became insufficient for the poor to buy an adequate quantity of food. Although the Government's policy was not working, they persisted with it through the winter of 1846-47, until mounting criticism helped to bring about a different approach.

It was against this background that Mill developed his proposals to meet the crisis in a series of articles for the Morning Chronicle. The Mills had had a long association with the Chronicle which was among the leading London daily newspapers. Although it had lost ground with the phenomenal rise of The Times, it was still influential.<sup>2</sup> Liberal in politics, the Chronicle had printed occasional leaders written by Mill, who for some years had possessed

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1. Black, op.cit., p.114. This paragraph is largely based upon Black's study.

2. Its circulation was about 3,500 copies per day, while that of The Times was nearing 30,000; see A.P. Wadsworth, Newspaper Circulations, 1800-1854, (Manchester Statistical Society, 1955), pp.8-9.

facilities for making such contributions.<sup>1</sup> The first of Mill's leaders on Irish affairs appeared in the Morning Chronicle on 5 October, 1846, and the last of the series on 7 January, 1847. During this three month period, Mill published forty-three articles in which he expounded his own proposals and argued against schemes with which he disagreed.<sup>2</sup>

## II

In his first leader, Mill began by taking a wide view of the situation. He noted that Ireland had reached a crisis that had converted a chronic disease into an acute one. Up to that time, he argued, the English had failed in Ireland, for after five centuries of English government, the country contained eight million "persecuted innocents" whom the English disparaged as "lazy, lawless savages". The evils of Ireland, Mill continued, sat lightly on the English conscience and the only remedy proposed with any vigour, and which The Times supported, was the "insane" one of a poor-law with extensive outdoor relief to the able-bodied. Having in his next leader returned to criticising proposals for a poor law, which Mill declared would be demoralising, he followed this by examining the "baneful system" of cottier tenancy. This was described as the "grand economical evil of Ireland". It was often wrongly confused with small holdings, but the two were

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1. See Mill's letter to Bain, November, 1846, Letters, p.705. Early in 1848, the proprietor of the Morning Chronicle, Sir John Easthope, who had sat for many years as an M.P. in the liberal interest, suggested Mill might take a share in the paper, which, partly due to competition from the Daily News, was in difficulties. At that time, its sale was about 3,200; see the letter from Harriet Taylor to John Taylor, 18 January, 1848, quoted by Hayek, op.cit., pp.119-120.
  2. For a list of these 43 articles, see N. MacMinn, et al., op.cit. pp.60-67.
  3. Morning Chronicle, 5 October, 1846.

separate. Under the cottier system, Ireland suffered because it was over-peopled, which caused too much competition between labourers for land, and because there was no considerable outlet for labour other than agriculture. In India, as in Ireland, population was superabundant, but there the Government did not leave the matter to competition, and did not ask for more than the tenant could pay. This contrasted with the rapacity of Ireland's landlords, some of whom enjoyed the power which they held over their tenant. In turn, Mill continued, the tenants had no incentive to work for more than a bare subsistence, as the landlord would take everything beyond this. In England, the labourer came into direct collision of interest only with the farmer, who was using his own capital, as was the English landlord whose former capital had enriched his land. But, as a general fact, stated Mill, the Irish landlord gave nothing for his rent, he took it and appropriated it, while he only held the land because it had been seized by his ancestor.<sup>1</sup>

Returning again to the cottier system, Mill proposed its abolition. It had been suggested that the introduction of English capital would lead to a system of English farming with landlords, farmers, and labourers maintained by wages. This fitted in with the notion of the English cottager as enjoying the "rustic felicity which is even now held to be by those lady-travellers, and gentlemen-travellers also, who favour the world with printed narratives of their first continental tour".<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Dorsetshire labourer was not much better off than the Irish potato-

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1. Ibid., 10 October, 1846.

2. Ibid., 13 October, 1846.

digger, while, moreover, to establish large farms, the peasantry would have to be cleared away without there being a proportional increase in the demand for labour. The reverse of such a "clearing system" was the introduction of fixity of tenure, which Mill pronounced "a real and thorough remedy".<sup>1</sup> It would convert the indolent and reckless Irish into provident, careful, and industrious people like the peasant proprietors of France, Switzerland, and Norway. Mill noted that to establish fixity of tenure would be classed by some as spoliation of property, but he could not accept this about land left as waste while upon it a large class of small landowners could be established. With references to authorities such as Gustave de Beaumont, von Raumer, and W. T. Thornton, Mill elaborated his proposals. He argued that of six million acres of waste, four million were improvable. They were "a mine of wealth" still remaining to be worked.<sup>2</sup> By reclaiming this land, the starving could be given productive employment, and at the same time a start would be made in effecting a permanent solution.

Having in this manner established the main lines of his argument, Mill continued his leading articles in order to keep up the campaign. Thus, on Wednesday, 21 October, he answered a letter to the Morning Chronicle which accused his proposals as amounting to spoliation. On the 22nd he quoted from the Dublin Freeman's Journal part of an article supporting his schemes. And on the 23rd commented on Poulett Scrope's plan, which while seeking to reclaim waste lands, wished to see the farms so established rented at a profit, a suggestion unacceptable to Mill.<sup>3</sup> Another article noted

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1. Ibid., 14 October, 1846.

2. Ibid., 17 October, 1846.

3. "Pamphlet" Scrope sat as the M.P. for Stroud from 1833 to 1868 and was among the foremost advocates of extending public works in Ireland. Later he became much more sympathetic towards Mill's proposal for waste reclamation. For a discussion of his ideas, Redvers Opie, "A Neglected English Economist: George Poulett Scrope" Quarterly Journal of Economics, vol. 44, (1930), pp.101-137.

thereof; but we demur to as admitting as much concerning the six millions, which have never yet produced any fruits susceptible of the same honourable destinations.

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In a style still tinged with sarcasm, Mill insisted that the State should take from these distinguished gentlemen the land they had failed to use, paying them only the shillings that it was worth.

After a couple more leaders, one recommending a prize essay by William Blacker which favoured reclamation of wastes, and the other criticising The Times, Mill returned to the question of the landlords' position. As a large amount of public money was to be spent, argued Mill, it would either be squandered on useless public works, or used to improve land for the benefit of landlords. The temporary crisis should be made the means of permanent improvement, and this could be done by the Government making the rule, "that no landlord shall receive its aid in improving his land, except on condition of giving to the tenants of the land so improved a permanent proprietary interest in the soil".<sup>2</sup> The landlord would gain by having his land greatly increased in value and so could afford, reasoned Mill, to grant a perpetual lease to his tenants. This theme, that landlords were benefitting through the expenditure of public money, Mill returned to in his next leading article. He argued that it would be "a crime" to bestow wealth on landlords, without exacting an equivalent in the form of landlords agreeing to fixity of tenure.<sup>3</sup>

Once these basic arguments had been established, Mill continued to drive them home by taking the problem from different angles.

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1. Ibid., 20 October, 1846.
  2. Ibid., 5 November, 1846.
  3. Ibid., 6 November, 1846.



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1. Ibid., 20 October, 1846.
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  3. Ibid., 6 November, 1846.

He asserted that, as Thornton had showed, the English yeomanry were ruined in the Tudor period, but "by some unaccountable illusion" their continued existence was pretended. The yeomanry was the equivalent of a peasant proprietary, and the surviving Statesmen, as described by Wordsworth, were "happy and independent peasant proprietors".<sup>1</sup> By replying to a letter from Poulett Scrope, Mill was again able to reiterate his case. Scrope had put forward a suggestion for waste reclamation combined with a poor law, against which Mill argued that the latter would prevent the former, as the labourer would prefer low wages for work which he knew to be nominal.<sup>2</sup> Another leader blamed "the spirit of routine" which stood in the way of introducing a peasant proprietary, the principle of which "had many approvers, but few zealots". But the example of France had disproved the "croakers on this side of the Channel respecting the destiny of France to become a 'pauper-warren'".<sup>3</sup> Such a system ought to be given an opportunity to work in Ireland. In these articles, Mill used several of the authorities who were to be quoted in the Principles, such as Thornton, Arthur Young, de Sismondi, and William Howitt. Extracts were reproduced from the latter's account of Germany with the purpose of illustrating the diligence and prudence of the peasantry.<sup>4</sup> A further leading article was based by Mill upon Karl Heinrich Rau's account of the agriculture of the Palatinate. From this source, Mill argued that the system of peasant proprietorship not only encouraged industriousness and skill, but was progressive in its nature and stimulated

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1. Ibid., 9 November, 1846.

2. Ibid., 11 November, 1846.

3. Ibid., 16 November, 1846.

4. Ibid., 30 November, 1846. See also Mill's leader of 9 December, 1846, which quoted extensively from the work of an "established authority" on Switzerland, H. D. Inglis.

intelligence among its participants. If extended to Ireland, these virtues:

would be not merely a sovereign remedy for Irish listlessness and indolence, but would do much to correct the still deeper seated and more intractable malady of Irish improvidence.

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As the winter drew on, Irish distress became deeper, with, by the beginning of December, 300,000 able-bodied Irishmen receiving relief in the form of wages from public employment. Mill argued that this form of support would have to continue for a further eight months until the next harvest and that meanwhile distress would become more acute. But worse than this prospect, was the demoralization setting in amongst the Irish who would only work for Government wages, which paid higher than any other for a nominal amount of work. So accustomed were the people becoming to this mode of existence that it may become difficult to end, Mill thought that: "There may be a Jacquerie, or another ninety-eight, in defence of the rights of sturdy beggary".<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the eleemosynary system should be promptly ended, and work on reclaiming wastes, as the basis of land for a peasant proprietary, begun.

A common approach adopted by Mill when producing these leading articles was to take the proposals of other authorities and to fit them in with his own theories. This he did with Scrope, and a similar method was employed with Smith O'Brien, M.P. O'Brien, a Protestant and nationalist who sat for Limerick before being transported for high treason in 1849, had for many years been concerned with the problem of Irish poverty.<sup>3</sup> A more moderate proposal from

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1. Ibid., 3 December, 1846. Cp. Mill's leading article of 11 December, 1846, for a similar statement of his case, based upon excerpts from de Sismondi.

2. Ibid., 7 December, 1846.

3. Black, op.cit., pp.106-107.

him concerned the use of waste lands; Mill congratulated him for entering the subject and thought his opinions "just and rational".<sup>1</sup> He went on, however, to chide O'Brien for being too indulgent towards landlordism, and also to suggest that farms of ten, rather than of twenty acres, would be large enough. He concluded by urging O'Brien to find others in Parliament of a like mind to bring forward a proposal for reclaiming the wastes. In the leading article that followed, Mill returned to the controversy with Scrope who had again put forward the solution of an extended poor law system in the form of public works. Such a programme, Mill argued, would lead to demoralization, and, as Senior had remarked, in the Irish situation such a demoralization would be accomplished within five years rather than the two centuries it had taken in England.<sup>2</sup>

This rebuttal of Scrope was followed by counter-arguments against the Repeal Association, which had suggested auctioning off reclaimed wastes, and against the Spectator's proposal to extend the poor law. Next, Mill dealt with a letter which accused the Morning Chronicle editorials of advocating spoliation. The writer, who had questioned whether interference with landed property was intended, was easily despatched by Mill, who wondered whether he had never heard of land being acquired by bills for a railroad, a turnpike, or a new street. Each year land was compulsorily taken for these purposes. Moreover, the relief of destitution was in comparison more important. Nor had the landlords attempted to make any use of this waste land, although Mill did not wish to see

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1. Morning Chronicle, 8 December, 1846.

2. Ibid., 12 December, 1846. See also Mill's leader of 19 December, 1846, for a further rejoinder to a letter of reply from Scrope, and that of 23 December for Mill's comments on a recent pamphlet of Scrope's.

violation of property without compensation. Although his opponent had put forward stuff "destitute of any glimmering of sense", Mill replied because, he said, of the superstitions shown by the writer, which were commonly held by men of general good sense. He went on to explain that:

the idea of property, especially landed property, calls up associations in many minds which partake of the solemnity of a religious feeling, and quite come up to the most superstitious forms of religion in the incapacity of reasoning which they generate. 1

By this stage, Mill believed that the colonization of Irish wastes was "becoming a practical question".<sup>2</sup> Over the previous weeks he had advanced most of the arguments in favour of this remedy and dealt with the case against it. He had often been responsible for encouraging opponents to put their objections into print, as for instance in his penultimate leading article, which replied to criticisms of his view advanced by the Globe. This newspaper, by arguing that support should be given to the landlords, provoked Mill to declare:

Can any one wonder at Socialism, or Communism, after this? Can we be surprised that men should be found who passionately reject and denounce the principle of property, when we see into what a base superstition the worship of it has grown. 3

The last of this series of articles from Mill's pen appeared on 7 January. But other Morning Chronicle writers continued to advance similar arguments based on his doctrines; "I have", he wrote to Bain, "so indoctrinated the Chronicle writers with my ideas on Ireland, that they are now going on very well and spiritedly without me".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., 17 December, 1846.

2. Ibid., 24 December, 1846.

3. Ibid., 6 January, 1847.

4. Mill to Bain, 27 January, 1847, Letters, p.707.

### III

Despite Mill's efforts, little came of his proposals. At the beginning of 1847, Lord John Russell introduced a Bill for the reclamation of waste lands. Peel opposed it on the ground that private enterprise could do the job, while other M.P.s insisted, despite Mill's attempts to distinguish the two, on confusing small proprietors with small tenants. The Bill, which proposed to spend £1,000,000 on waste reclamation, was eventually dropped in favour of an advance to Irish railway companies.<sup>1</sup> Mill believed that Peel's sneers had led timid Ministers to "give up at a single sarcasm from him."<sup>2</sup>

The leading articles, however, are of great significance in the development of Mill's thought, as they are contemporary with the writing of the Principles.<sup>3</sup> Since April, 1844, if not earlier, Mill had intended to produce a systematic study of political economy.<sup>4</sup> On completing the System of Logic, and bringing out the Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy (1844), which had been written in the early 1830s, Mill was able to turn to this project. He commenced writing in the autumn of 1845.<sup>5</sup> By early autumn of the following year, Mill was on the point of completing the third book.<sup>6</sup> This was "Exchange", and meant, if

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1. Black, op.cit., p.36.

2. Mill to Harriet Taylor, 31 March, 1849, quoted Hayek, op.cit., p.147. See also Autobiography, p.165, where Mill wrote that, "the profound ignorance of English politicians and the English public... made my endeavours an entire failure".

3. According to the Autobiography, pp.164-165, the Principles was laid aside to enable Mill to concentrate on the leading articles; but see his letter to Bain (?), 28 December, 1846, Letters, p.705, where Mill said he was carrying on with both projects.

4. Mill to Augustus Comte, 3 April, 1844, Letters, p.626.

5. Autobiography, p.164.

6. Mill to Bain, September, 1846, Letters, p.704.

the chapters of this first draft were similar in length to the published version, that Mill had two-thirds finished his study. The Principles consisted of five books: "Production", "Distribution", "Exchange", "Influence of the Progress of Society on Production and Distribution", and "On the Influence of Government". Most of Mill's discussion of landed property and related problems extended over about one half of book two, "Distribution". This would suggest that the illustrations of peasant proprietorship given in the Morning Chronicle were drawn from a largely-completed draft of the Principles, rather than it being a case of Mill incorporating the leading articles into his book.<sup>1</sup> Such a hypothesis is confirmed by the appearance as an appendix in the Principles of four leading articles contributed to the Morning Chronicle by Mill on 9, 11, 13, and 16 January, 1847 in answer to an article in the Quarterly. We have already noted Thornton's reply to this article and to the authorities upon which it was based.<sup>2</sup> Mill's counter-arguments were not incorporated in the main text of the Principles, as was his treatment of the Irish problem, but he felt his case to be of sufficient importance to merit reprinting in a modified form as an appendix.

The article was written by J. W. Croker, who, as a through-going Tory spoke out for the landed interest and attacked any sign of liberalism.<sup>3</sup> It has been suggested that Croker was the original of the character Rigby in Disraeli's Coningsby. Rigby, who "had massacred a she liberal", was famed for his "slashing articles" on

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1. Unfortunately, Mill's early draft has disappeared, see J.M. Robson, Textual Introduction to Principles, p.lxvi.

2. Above, pp.357f.

3. Above, p.148. For a sympathetic treatment of Croker, Myron F. Brightfield, John Wilson Croker, (1940), which unfortunately is deficient on the economic aspects of Croker's thought.



behalf of the Tory interest.<sup>1</sup> Only a part of the article here under consideration might be said to fall into this category. Croker began by quoting extensively from the work by Mounier and Rubichon which he was reviewing to show the extent to which land had become sub-divided, and that under the laws regulating the distribution of landed property, French agriculture was rapidly deteriorating. While general advantage resulted from the division of personal property on death, land had to be kept together. If this was not done, declared Croker, referring to the testimony of Malthus and Burke, the result would be "small allotments, which can neither employ nor repay capital, and which would substitute for a landed interest - the only solid foundation of good government and national prosperity".<sup>2</sup> Croker went on to express his belief that the French system would lead to a race of pauper proprietors. But, while he gave numerous statistical illustrations to show that the French farmer had become poorer, his main concern was the effect upon the large landlord of a wider distribution of land. It was on this note that he completed his jeremiad against the small farm system, with a warning to the landowning class which is worth giving at some length to show the manner in which Croker lumped together in condemnation all proposals for land reform:

The landed interest of England cannot but have observed the activity with which this destructive principle has of late been promulgated in various quarters and in many shapes, from the heavy tomes of free-trade economists to the incendiary sheets of Chartists, Leaguers, and Levellers...The press teems with propositions and schemes, some absurd, some plausible, most of them insidious, and all

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1. B. Disraeli, Coningsby or the New Generation, (1844), chapter 2.  
2. /J.W. Croker", "Agriculture in France - Division of Property", Quarterly Review, vol. 79, (1846), p.208.

revolutionary. A compulsory extension of allotments, - fixed tenant rights, - charges to be shifted from occupiers to landlords, and with nothing like reciprocal security, - disruption of entails, and disregard of family settlements, - facilities to mortgagees and incumbrancers, - cheap law to get rid of landed property, - increased difficulties in protecting it, - in short, under a hundred forms, the great French maxim of confiscation.

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Mill, who was aware of the identity of the Quarterly's reviewer,<sup>2</sup> largely confined his answer to a refutation of the facts stated by Croker. MM. Mounier and Rubichon, noted Mill, appeared "to take their ideas of a wholesome state of society from the institutions and practices of the Middle Ages", and suggested they had used an array of official details to give weight to their study, "which it could not claim from any correctness of information or capacity of judgement shown by its authors".<sup>3</sup> Before going on to examine the statistical treatment in any detail, Mill cast doubt on Croker's competency by pointing out the "extraordinary slip" made by him in equating the rated value of a small proprietor's land with the value of its whole produce.<sup>4</sup> Croker's case was subverted on several other points. Mill produced statistics to show that the population of France was increasing at a very slow rate, and this rise could be absorbed by non-agricultural employment. Morcellement, Mill asserted, was making no progress. It had been computed that the average holding was eight and a half acres, and farms of this size were "consistent with agriculture equal to any on the face of the earth".<sup>5</sup> He was willing to concede

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1. Ibid., pp.237-238.

2. See his letters to Bain, 27 January, 1847, and to Chadwick, 19 November, 1847, Letters, pp.707, 724.

3. Principles, p.433. Mill's reply to Croker appeared in four articles for the Morning Chronicle, on 9, 11, 13 and 16 January, 1847, and were incorporated in the Principles as an appendix. This latter source is quoted here.

4. Principles, p.434.

5. Ibid., p.440.

that equal division of property often led to a proprietor holding many parcelles, or fragments of land, scattered in several different places. This was an evil that retarded those improvements which were taking place. But it was the only criticism he was able to allow, and Mill denied the assertion that the general condition of the mass of the people had been deteriorating since the time of Louis XIV.

#### IV

Having made this reply, Mill turned again to the Principles, and from March to December, 1847, his published work was, by Mill's standards, slight, as he concentrated on revising and re-writing. During this time, he was able to read in proof Thornton's A Plea for Peasant Proprietors,<sup>1</sup> to which he paid generous tribute, although it is problematical whether the work was responsible for suggesting new channels of thought to Mill.<sup>2</sup> He had great ambitions for the Principles as "a book to replace Adam Smith", in which he could not only embody the abstract science, but also introduce "a great number of opinions on incidental matters, moral and social".<sup>3</sup> Although Mill saw his pure political economy as being based on Ricardo's doctrines,<sup>4</sup> he believed that his role ought not to be confined to delineating the theory of political economy, but that he should make value-judgements in order to associate "the principles with their applications".<sup>5</sup> He accepted the idea of the

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1. Bain, J.S. Mill, p.86n.

2. Above, pp.353ff. He described the Plea as "a book which by the excellence both of its materials and of its execution, deserves to be regarded as the standard work on that side of the question", Principles, p.272.

3. Mill to Henry S. Chapman, 9 March, 1847, Letters, p.708.

4. Mill to John Austin, 22 February, 1848, ibid., p.730.

5. Principles, preface to 1848 edition. The full title of the work also indicates Mill's intention.

St. Simonians that economic generalisations depended on the existing arrangements of society, and with social improvement, these generalisations would be altered.<sup>1</sup>

This desire to interlink all the branches of social philosophy was of long-standing, and is well-illustrated by his treatment of land in the Principles. Almost all Mill's arguments had been put forward by him before their appearance in 1848, but in a scattered form and often concealed by anonymity. It was not Mill's intention to write merely a text-book, but to present his ideas on many of the social and economic questions of the day. By doing this, he expected the work to have a great impact, and to "offend and scandalize ten times as many people as I shall please".<sup>2</sup> Particularly, he expected a great outcry against his doctrines on property.<sup>3</sup> In this he was to be disappointed, but before going on to suggest the reasons for this, it is necessary to summarise his discussion of land ownership and related problems.

A surprisingly large proportion of Mill's appraisal had appeared in essentials before its incorporation in the Principles. Although he was to make significant changes in later editions, in the first edition Mill came to no conclusions which were very original when compared with what he had already stated. Rather did the book consist of a more systematic and detailed exposition of his ideas, and took the form of a statement that was closely related to the theoretical arguments which were also developed by Mill.

As Mill noted in his preface, the Principles was different from any treatise on political economy since the work of Adam Smith.

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1. Autobiography, p.175; see also pp.165-166.
  2. Mill to Chapman, loc.cit., p.708.
  3. Bain, J.S. Mill, p.89.

And although both adopted a similar approach in associating principles with their applications, not unnaturally after over seventy years of rapid economic change, the contents of Mill's book were considerably different to Smith's. One of the most pronounced dissimilarities was the emphasis which Mill placed on Malthusian arguments; it would not be an exaggeration to say that parts of the Principles are drenched with Mill's concern over population growth. A second area of interest strongly represented by Mill was the nature of landed property and agricultural tenure. Compared with Mill's study, these issues were but briefly dealt with by Smith, and even the text-book of M'Culloch, who, as we have seen, wrote very freely on questions concerning landed property, did not enter into the problems in anything like the same detail as Mill did. These topics were mostly treated by Mill in book two, "Distribution", although scattered references may be located in other parts of the work. Distribution, he believed, depended on "human will" rather than the "real laws of nature" which determined the production of wealth.<sup>1</sup>

However, in discussing "Production", Mill had cause to consider the advantages of the large-scale system compared with the small scale. In the case of manufacturing, he favoured the large unit, but farming "stands, in many respects, on different grounds".<sup>2</sup> Noting that he would consider the social aspect of the question at a later point, Mill argued that the division of labour brought little benefit in agriculture, while the small farmer, who owned his land or had permanent tenure, was highly industrious. The petite culture of France, some authorities believed, was more productive than the large farms of England,

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1. Autobiography, p.175.

2. Principles, p.142.

and he thought that the question could not be looked upon as decided. Having stated that it was by no means clear that on economic merits, the small farms of Europe were inferior to the typical large English farms, Mill was able to claim in his next section that social and moral considerations favoured the continental practice.

Before entering this discussion, however, Mill critically examined the assumptions on which the institution of landed property was based. Whereas the owner of property in moveables should have absolute power in using them, provided that no positive evil resulted to society, the owner of property in land should not possess the same right. In England, landed property was very far from fulfilling the conditions which rendered its existence economically justifiable, Mill stated, for its owners were not improving it as they should. If they failed, the time to make new arrangements had arrived. Mill believed the ownership of property in land was based on expediency and should be allowed only if public benefit resulted, an idea he expressed in the following terms:

When the "sacredness of property" is talked of, it should always be remembered, that this sacredness does not belong in the same degree to landed property. No man made the land. It is the original inheritance of the whole species. Public reasons exist for its being appropriated. But if those reasons lost their force, the thing would be unjust. 1

To be excluded from what others had produced was no hardship, but there was some hardship "to be born into the world and to find all nature's gifts previously engrossed, and no place left for the new-comer". People could only be reconciled to this if they were persuaded that the exclusive appropriation was for the good of mankind on the whole, themselves included. In Ireland, "no sane

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1. Ibid., p.230.

human being" could be persuaded that this was the case.<sup>1</sup> By moving the discussion at this point to Ireland, Mill avoided making any direct reference to English landlords. His general strictures, however, clearly applied to them also, if only by implication. Where the "bulk of the community have been disinherited", he continued, and the land had become "the exclusive attribute of a small minority", the claim of the landlords to the land was "altogether subordinate to the general policy of the state".<sup>2</sup> But after coming close to the radical language of lost rights and disinheritance, Mill qualified his position. For, although the principle of property gave no right to the land, it did entitle its owners to full compensation, either its full pecuniary value or an annual income equal to what they derived from it. In the terms of this last remark, Mill's opinions were much less radical than they first appeared. An absolute right to the possession of land, even if claimed by a few conservatives, was not generally recognised, and railway companies, for example, were allowed to compulsorily purchase land from owners reluctant to sell.

V

There exists a certain amount of ambiguity, too, in Mill's attitude to peasant proprietorship. Certainly, he had great sympathy for the system but, as we shall see, he was imprecise and contradictory on whether the establishment of such a tenure ought to be encouraged in England. Two chapters were devoted to

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.



examining peasant proprietors,<sup>1</sup> another to métayers,<sup>2</sup> and two chapters to cottiers, including one upon how the system might be abolished.<sup>3</sup> There is no need to examine these five chapters in great detail, as most of the arguments and illustrations have already been discussed above in the context of Thornton's books and Mill's long series of articles in the Morning Chronicle. It is perhaps significant that the first authority to whom Mill referred was Wordsworth's account of the "statesmen" of the Lake District, "unfortunately a very small part" of England, "where peasant proprietors are still common".<sup>4</sup> Then followed the now-familiar examples of the peasantry of Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Belgium, the Channel Islands, and France, based upon authorities such as Inglis, Howitt, Laing, de Sismondi, Young, Rham, and Thornton. Mill skilfully marshalled his evidence to demonstrate how peasant proprietorships stimulated industry, trained intelligence, and promoted forethought and self-control. He paid particular attention to the effect on population, and referred to the "well known" opinion of M'Culloch that small farms discouraged prudence.<sup>5</sup> Against this view, Mill sought to demonstrate that countries with peasant populations increased in numbers much more slowly than was the case in England. Nor, as some political economists had insisted, did the land become minutely sub-divided. Similarly, the métayer system had "met with no mercy from English authorities".<sup>6</sup> Again Mill examined the system as

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1. Ibid., Book 2, chapters 6-7, pp.252-296.

2. Ibid., chapter 8, pp.297-312.

3. Ibid., chapters 9-10, pp.313-323, 988-1002.

4. Ibid., p.252.

5. Ibid., p.283.

6. Ibid., p.301.

found in Italy, and decided that where the tenant enjoyed a permanent tenure, it worked well in practice.

Next Mill turned to the cottier tenant who was to be found principally in Ireland. Here the labourer had to compete in the rent he was willing to pay in order to obtain possession of land. It was again seen by Mill as a situation determined by excess population, for the competition for land was so great that the peasantry became sunk in misery, so that, a "cottier family, however prudent and self-restraining, may have the rent raised against it by the multiplication of other families."<sup>1</sup> An analogy to the Irish cottier, continued Mill, was the ryot tenancy of India; the two might be instructively compared in terms of their similarities and differences. Quoting from his father's History of British India, Mill showed that the English rulers, "accustomed to great estates and great landlords...took it for granted that India must possess the like" and appointed to this role the zemindar class.<sup>2</sup> The measure was a failure, for the new landed aristocracy were like Irish instead of English landlords: "They did nothing for the improvement of their estates, but everything for their own ruin."<sup>3</sup>

Having defined the faults of the system, Ireland's cottier tenancy, wrote Mill, "must cease to be".<sup>4</sup> This might be achieved by using the waste lands for the settlement of a large body of peasant proprietors, a plan which had "been strongly pressed upon the public by several writers", but first brought prominently forward by W. T. Thornton.<sup>5</sup> Mill suggested how the wastes might

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1. Ibid., p.316.

2. Ibid., p.320.

3. Ibid., p.322.

4. Ibid., p.989.

5. Ibid., p.997.

be used for such a scheme and went on to propose means for making already existing areas of cultivation available for small proprietors. Here he referred to the Chartist colony near Rickmansworth, an experiment which there was "no reason to believe" would prove unfavourable,<sup>1</sup> and envisaged that the Irish peasantry might be stimulated to similar efforts.

In these five chapters, Mill had restated the case for establishing peasant proprietorship in Ireland and strongly defended the system as found on the Continent. These lengthy arguments on the advantages of small farms, together with his nostalgic remarks about the "statesmen" of Westmorland and Cumberland, might have led the reader to assume that Mill wished to see a similar form of land tenure broadly occurring throughout England. Indeed, at a later point, Mill sketched out a plan for "raising up a class of small proprietors" on common land newly brought into cultivation. It had, he wrote,

long enough been the practice to take these lands from public use for the mere purpose of adding to the domains of the rich. It is time that what is left of them should be retained as an estate sacred to the benefit of the poor.

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This could be done through the existing machinery of the General Inclosure Act. Although Mill wrote that he had "small hope" of his plan being adopted, he suggested that enclosed land should be divided into sections of about five acres, "to be conferred in absolute property on families of the labouring class who would reclaim and bring them into cultivation by their own labour".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.1001. If it was ultimately a failure, wrote Mill, it would be "in the details of management, not in the principle". On Mill and the Chartist Land Plan, see the note by John Saville, "The Chartist Land Plan", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 3, (1961), pp.10-12.

2. Principles, p.377.

3. Ibid.

After having given further details of how these small farms could be established and expressing hopes that they would act as inducements to prudence and economy, Mill appears to have changed his mind on the subject. In book 4, chapter 7, "On the Probable Futurity of the Labouring Classes", he wrote:

The opinion expressed in a former part of this treatise respecting small landed properties and peasant proprietors, may have made the reader anticipate that a wide diffusion of property in land is the resource on which I rely for exempting at least the agricultural labourers from exclusive dependence on labour for hire. Such, however, is not my opinion.

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Although he believed small properties to have been "groundlessly decried"; to be preferable, in terms of happiness, to hired labour; to check population by prudential means; to be suitable for introduction in Ireland, and would regret to see them abolished, he did not see sufficient reason why, once the large system of production in manufactures or in agriculture, had been adopted, it should be receded from. Having said this, Mill did not try to explain the disparity of what he had written, but passed on to other matters.

Marx's comment that Mill was no stranger in the realm of flat contradiction, was not without justification. Can the contradiction brought out above be explained? Towards this end, we might begin by examining a recent commentary on Mill's views. In it, it is suggested that the

peasant holdings advocated by him are intended for the Irish peasants, who...need to be stung into life by the crude stimulus afforded by practised self-interest. Their brutal, lazy, and servile habits must be eradicated by giving them something to work for, most simply by giving them land on long and secure tenure. Then, when they have learned to be men they may be ready, like the

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1. Ibid., p.767.

English to be good men and co-operative. In England, on the other hand, the lesson of selfishness has been well and truly learned. 1

This interpretation, however, while cleverly attempting to reconcile the various strands of Mill's thought, is not altogether satisfactory. In the first place, it does not adequately clear up another underlying contradiction in Mill's opinions: his sympathy for both the independent small proprietor and for schemes of co-operation and even communism. A similar issue divided the Chartists, as land nationalizers such as O'Brien saw O'Connor's land plan as making their object more difficult.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Mill appears to have believed the two were not incompatible; thus, he suggested small farmers might co-operate in the use of machinery, and expressed the hope that the Irish might promote similar schemes to that of the Chartist National Land Company. But how a co-operative or communistic system was to emerge from the jealously individualistic peasant agriculture he had outlined, Mill failed to make plain. Secondly, it is not obvious that Mill intended peasant holdings only for the Irish, for the condition of the English labourer was also much in need of improvement. His major article on "The Claims of Labour" made this clear, as did the Principles itself. There was considerable evidence that the circumstances of the English agricultural labourer had, "more than once in our history sustained great permanent deterioration", believed Mill.<sup>3</sup> His position was such an unenviable one that the "Irish potato-digger" might pause before changing places "with the anxious, care-worn,

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1. Robson, The Improvement of Mankind, op.cit., pp.255-256.

2. Above, p.243. In later life, if not earlier, Mill realised this: see his article, "Advice to Land Reformers", Examiner, 4 January, 1873.

3. Principles, p.341.

and not much better fed Dorsetshire labourer".<sup>1</sup> In certain English counties, labourers with large families received, when in full employment, wages of seven or perhaps eight shillings a week and their condition was "painful to contemplate".<sup>2</sup> Although these labourers were objects of compassion, Mill thought that common sense ought to be applied also, for by restriction of their numbers, the labourers might be able to raise their wages. Again the example of population control cited by Mill was that to be found among the European peasantry. This desire to see prudence and economy practised by the English labourer was part of the argument used by Mill when proposing that newly enclosed land should be divided up into small farms. It appears, then, that Mill believed in the value of such a system for England as well as Ireland, at least in the earlier part of the Principles.

One possible explanation does exist which might partially account for such equivocal statements as those quoted above. As we have seen, Mill attached enormous weight to the assistance given him by the woman who eventually became his wife, Harriet Taylor. Most writers have tended to dismiss the idea that she made any significant contribution and to argue that Mill's praises of her were almost wholly exaggerated. The matter is one that can never be conclusively decided, but one of the influences claimed by Mill for his wife was the chapter on the Probable Future of the Labouring Classes. This, Mill wrote, was "entirely due" to her:

in the first draft of the book, the chapter did not exist. She pointed out the need for such a chapter, and the extreme imperfection of the book without it: she was the cause of my writing it; and the more general part of the chapter, the statement and discussion of the two opposite theories respecting the proper condition of the

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1. Morning Chronicle, 13 October, 1846.
  2. Principles, p.351.

labouring classes, was wholly an exposition of her thoughts, often in words taken from her own lips.

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This, however, even if not an instance of Mill claiming more for Harriet than was justified, does not remove the fact that Mill let her opinions go forward under his name and kept them in later editions of the Principles after her death.

It is perhaps, to the wider context of Mill's ideas on reform that we should look for an explanation. Statements by Mill which on a first reading appear sweeping, when looked at again are often subtly qualified. This is so with his strictures on landed property; although no absolute right to ownership was allowed, Mill insisted upon full compensation for any dispossessed landlords. His treatment of inheritance shows similar reservations. Mill expected that his remarks on the subject would prove highly controversial, but in reality he had little to contribute that had not been said before him by others.

## VI

Towards the beginning of his book, Mill noted that it was "eminently desirable" that the law of primogeniture should be broken down, but could not agree to a compulsory equal division of property among all the children.<sup>2</sup> He suggested that a maximum amount might be fixed beyond which no individual could receive part of an inheritance. Mill returned to the question in detail in the second volume. He began by considering the law and custom of primogeniture, for which he noted there were two economic

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1. Autobiography, p.174.  
2. Principles, p.224.



arguments used in its favour. The first had been expressed by Dr. Johnson, who recommended it on the grounds that it "makes but one fool in a family", while younger children were stimulated to industry and ambition by the need to make their own future. To this Mill replied that it was unnecessary to inflict such an evil on the eldest son, "from sheer want of knowing what else to do with a large fortune". Other critics had looked to the contrast to the children as a source of stimulating industry, "thinking it indispensable to the activity and energy of the hive, that there should be a huge drone here and there to impress the working bees with a due sense of the advantages of honey".<sup>1</sup> M'Culloch, in his Principles of Political Economy and his treatise on the succession to property vacant by death, had put forward this kind of argument, Mill noted. But in America where hereditary fortunes were few, industrial energy and the ardour of accumulation were "not supposed to be particularly backward".<sup>2</sup>

The second argument favouring primogeniture on economic grounds, had special reference to landed property, wrote Mill, as it was contended that equal division among children promoted too great a sub-division of land. This argument was, he retorted, "entirely at variance" with the supposition on which the theories of political economy were founded, as it "assumes that mankind in general will act in a manner opposed to their immediate and obvious pecuniary interests".<sup>3</sup> Instead, the coheirs would adopt other arrangements rather than see a diminution in the productive power of the land. As the system of primogeniture was condemned by the general principles of justice, Mill continued, there was no need to "make out any case of economical evil against primogeniture".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.889.

2. Ibid., p.890.

3. Ibid., p.891.

4. Ibid., p.892.

Even so, a strong case could be made out, for great landowners were generally improvident, and, while spendthrifts in other classes were ruined and disappeared from society, the spendthrift landlord usually held onto his land. The same desire to keep up the splendour of the family which gave rise to primogeniture, led to expenditure beyond the landlord's real means and so estates were deeply mortgaged instead of providing capital for improvements.

Next Mill turned his attention to entails, which he described as the means employed by landowners to avoid the impoverishment of successors by the existing representative of the family. It was still likely that the possessor would have difficulty in improving the property. He would probably have to provide for younger children. Nor could the estate pass to a person who would be an improver, as the entail precluded alienation. The heir of entail, however undeserving, being assured of succession, "has much more than the ordinary chances of growing up idle, dissipated, and profligate".<sup>1</sup> As a landowner could settle his property on any number of persons successively who were living, and upon one unborn person to the age of twenty one, and as entails were rarely allowed to expire without being resettled, large properties were seldom free from strict settlement. From an economical point of view, this desire to keep land together in large masses meant that efficiency and increased productiveness were hindered. However, a law such as that of the French, narrowly restricting the power to bequest, Mill also declared to be very seriously objectionable as there ought to be no interference with the owner's liberty of gift. After making these several strictures, Mill's conclusion was vague and mild. It was that owners of land should have power to dispose of every part of it by will, but not to determine the succession of heirs still unborn. Here Mill appears to disregard

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1. Ibid., p.893.

the fact that entails could be, and frequently were, resettled long before they were in danger of running out. The question relating to bequeath for the lifetime of a person, to be passed on to another person after his death, Mill did not attempt to answer, noting that it belonged "to general legislation, not to political economy".<sup>1</sup> Knowing that "general legislation" was still very much influenced by the desires of the landed class, Mill could not have had much hope that the laws of inheritance would soon be changed. It is not difficult to agree with Bain's observations on the matter:

The whole speculation seems to me inadequately worked out. The question of the existence of large fortunes is necessarily a very complex one; and I should like that he had examined it fully, which I do not think he ever did. 2

In searching for reasons why the Principles failed to prove as controversial as Mill expected it to be, we might begin with Bain's suggestion that people thought it "the dream of a future too distant to affect the living; or else that the views were too wild and revolutionary to be entertained".<sup>3</sup> There is certainly a quality of remoteness about much of what Mill wrote, which together with ambiguities of expression, lessened the impact of his proposals. It has been suggested by Viner, that, in order to present difficult ideas without destroying them by too great a logical clarity, Mill deliberately resorted to ambiguity and inconsistency. Viner further argued that the Principles owed much of its success to the "platonic" nature of the proposals for radical change; for "in no major concrete instance did Mill actually commit himself to the desirability of a specific drastic change". The work was thus a combin-

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1. Ibid., p.895.

2. Bain, J.S. Mill, p.89.

3. Ibid.

ation of "hard-headed rules and utopian aspirations" which suited "Victorians of goodwill" exactly.<sup>1</sup>

Reasoning such as this has a good deal of validity. Mill's reputation was already sufficiently great by 1848 to guarantee attention would be paid to what he wrote. The magisterial style of the Principles, which, as Ashley noted, was "conceived and executed on a lofty plane, and breathing a noble spirit",<sup>2</sup> ensured a wide acceptance. On the other hand, that which may have appeared utopian or related to the distant future, contained little to surprise contemporaries. Much of what Mill wrote in 1848 had already been said by others and often in a more outspoken manner. Mill himself had contributed to this debate for some years before writing the Principles, and by the time this work appeared those likely to read it had already become familiar with ambitious schemes of social change. As Mill wrote in a letter of 1844, such were the changes taking place within society that "things never seemed to tend so rapidly to a complete bouleversement of our social system". It was to comment on these developments that he intended to write a treatise on political economy.<sup>3</sup>

By the time this study appeared, events had begun to make commonplace some of its observations. The revolution in France helped to ensure that Mill's treatment of socialism in the Principles, which he believed to be sympathetic, could be regarded as an argument against socialism.<sup>4</sup> But before the events of 1848

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1. Jacob Viner, "Bentham and J.S. Mill: The Utilitarian Background", American Economic Review, vol. 39, (1949), p.381.

2. W.J. Ashley, Introduction to 1909 edition of Mill's Principles, p.xxiv.

3. Mill to Chapman, 8 November, 1844, Letters, p.642.

4. See Mill's letter to John Jay, November, 1848, Letters, pp.740-741, where he makes this complaint against a reviewer, adding that if the chapter had been written after the revolutions on the Continent, he would have done socialism "much more justice". By the 3rd edition (1852), Mill had made his position less equivocal. Cp. Autobiography, p.164.

on the Continent, changes in opinion were taking place in Britain. There was the middle-class triumph of corn law repeal. Working class problems were widely discussed; revolving particularly around the "Condition of England" question, a great variety of schemes and programmes were put forth. There is a case, as G. M. Young wrote, for acknowledging 1847 as the turning point of the age;<sup>1</sup> and by that date most of the political, social, and economic arguments of the nineteenth century had been stated. They often still had, however, as in the case of the "Land Question," to work themselves out. Nevertheless, few aspects of what, despite its complexities, was to become known by that simple term, originated after the middle of the century.

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1. G.M. Young, "Portrait of an Age", in G.M. Young (ed.), Early Victorian England 1830-1865, (2 vols, 1934), vol. 2, p.453.

EPILOGUE

Lady Bracknell: ...between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties extracted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, (1899)

Though Mill's views on property did not lead to the controversy he had expected, his first edition of the Principles had had its critics. One described the Principles as "the most consistent, as well as the most recent" exposition of the ideas of those who advocated the systematic restriction of the rights of landowners.<sup>1</sup> In an article on Ireland, Nassau Senior reiterated the conventional case against peasant proprietorship and took Mill and Thornton to task for their heresies.<sup>2</sup> Mill was not deterred by such criticisms, although in the 1850s the controversy about land was less debated while in those years he played little part in public life.<sup>3</sup> However, within a few years of Harriet's death and his retirement from India House - both events occurred in 1858 - Mill's interest in public affairs again took an active form. He wrote more for publication and in 1865 was elected Member of Parliament for Westminster, a seat he held until 1868. Land reform was one of his chief interests during these years and he threw himself into the campaign for

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1. George Makgill, Rent no Robbery: An Examination of some Erroneous Doctrines Regarding Property in Land, (1851), p.9.

2. /N.W. Senior/, "Relief of Irish Distress", Edinburgh Review, vol. 89, (1849), pp.262f.

3. Packe, op.cit., p.387; for the land question in this period, Joy MacAskill, "The Treatment of Land in English Social and Political Theory, 1840-1885", (Oxford B.Litt. thesis, 1959).

reform, especially through the agency of the Land Tenure Reform Association, the programme of which he advanced not only in his lifetime, but after in the form of a £500 bequest.<sup>1</sup> As part of this campaign he also helped to sustain the case for peasant proprietorships. In the Principles he continued to revise the sections on the subject, including, even, his strictures upon Croker and the Quarterly Review: Mill's reply continued to appear in the form of an appendix in all the editions published during his lifetime, the last one being in 1871, by which time the controversy was distinctly dated.<sup>2</sup> In some of his writings that appeared in the 1840s, Mill touched upon those aspects of the land question which were to become the subject of debate twenty years later, but the advent of the L.T.R.A. placed the controversy within a more formal and closely defined context.

In 1869 the note-paper sent out by the L.T.R.A. inviting radical elements to an inaugural conference had at its head Richard Cobden's phrase calling for a league for free trade in

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1. See the copy of Mill's will at Somerset House. Mr. Peter M. Jackson has kindly shown me his unpublished (June, 1971) article on Mill and the L.T.R.A.; on this neglected issue, Packe, op.cit., pp.490-492, gives only a brief treatment; Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881, (1965), ch. 5, provides a useful account of the relationship between the L.T.R.A. and the Land and Labour League; E. Eldon Barry, op.cit., ch. 2, also provides a discussion.

2. Mill's letters also give some indication of his interest in the subject: see especially his letters to Thornton on 28 January 1862 and 23 October 1869, Elliot, op.cit., vol. 1, pp.256-258, vol. 2, pp.219-220. In his preface to the second edition of A Plea for Peasant Proprietors, (1874), p.vii, Thornton wrote that Mill "strongly urged" him to republish the work.



land.<sup>1</sup> Cobden had used this expression in a speech to his Rochdale constituents in November 1864 and the suggestion had created a good deal of interest.<sup>2</sup> Although as with the Anti-Corn Law League such an argument had an element of political opportunism, it also reflects Cobden's laissez faire convictions. Cobden believed that the removal of hindrances to cheap and simple land transfer would lead to a wider distribution of ownership; this would be well and good, and if it also involved an erosion of the political and economic power of the landed aristocracy, then so much the better.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach to land reform, like other reform movements in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, sprang from libertarian beliefs.<sup>4</sup> And just as the Chartists had been divided between the land nationalisation ideas of Bronterre O'Brien's faction and O'Connor's scheme of peasant proprietorship so too were the radicals of the 1860s and '70s, with the Land and Labour League insisting upon the common ownership of the land.<sup>5</sup>

This was not the only feature of the post-1850 land reform movement that was common also to the first half of the century.

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1. I am indebted to P. M. Jackson, for pointing out this fact to me.

2. John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden, (1896 ed. 2 vols), vol. 2, pp.456f. In a sympathetic editorial the Rochdale Observer expressed doubt that any material alteration would be effected "by a House of Commons which is practically but little more than the political whispering gallery of a territorial aristocracy", Rochdale Observer, 10 December, 1864.

3. For an exposition of Cobden's views on the land question, James E. Thorold Rogers, Cobden and Modern Political Opinion, (1873), ch. 3.

4. Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis, "Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery", English Historical Review, vol. 82, (1967), esp. pp.524-526.

5. Harrison, op.cit., pp.214f. See also Harrison's article, "The Land and Labour League (Some new light on Working Class Politics in the Eighteen Seventies)", Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History, vol. 8, (1953), pp.169-195.

By the 1840s the expression "free trade in land" was current,<sup>1</sup> while the attack on primogeniture, entails and strict settlement can be traced back before the nineteenth century. The landed class still possessed great social and economic influence; according to Mill in 1871 the "landlords had had the command of Parliament" up to the last reform act, "and still wielded enormous power".<sup>2</sup> From time to time radicals attempted to estimate the degree to which land was in the hands of a relatively small number of individuals. In 1872 the Earl of Derby had moved in the Lords that a return be made on the owners of land in Britain. Derby's intention had been to disprove the claim arising partly from figures in the 1861 census, that some 30,000 landowners possessed the soil of the country. But when the return was published in what became popularly known as the "New Domesday Book", it gave further ammunition to the radical cause.<sup>3</sup> This unprecedented compilation prompted a number of studies that attempted to estimate the degree to which ownership was concentrated. One of the first was by Joseph Kay (1821-78). Kay, whose study of continental peasantry had been cited by Mill in later editions of the Principles,<sup>4</sup> reckoned that 10,207 persons owned two-thirds of England and Wales.<sup>5</sup> Arthur Arnold (1833-1902), who in 1880 was elected Liberal M.P. for Salford, computed that four-fifths of the soil of the United Kingdom was in the hands of

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1. An interesting item from the literature is, A Landed Proprietor, /Robert Strong?/, The Emancipation of the Soil, and Free Trade in Land, (Edinburgh, 1845).

2. Times, 17 May 1871. Mill made this observation on 15 May to a public meeting of the Land Tenure Reform Association.

3. The Return of Owners of Land, P.P. (1874), XX-XXII.

4. Principles, pp.26Off. Kay's book, The Social Condition of the People in England and Europe; Shewing the Results of the Primary Schools, and of the Division of Landed Property, in Foreign Countries, appeared in 2 vols. in 1850.

5. Joseph Kay, Free Trade in Land, (1879), p.17. The book had a preface by John Bright.

some 5,000 individuals.<sup>1</sup> And in a more careful analysis, Bateman, himself a landowner and a Conservative, estimated that over half the land in England and Wales was owned by some 4,000 persons.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Of course, the complaint against a "land monopoly" was of long-standing; Paine, for example had used the expression in the 1790s. The compilations of Kay, Arnold and others - the more sophisticated successors to Wade's Black Book - often had a markedly historical aspect. Perhaps more than any other controversy, the land question was debated with an insistent appeal to the evidence provided by the past. One such popular account of history was Our Old Nobility in which the seats of power were examined and in most cases found wanting.<sup>3</sup> By the time this study appeared, however, the land question had begun to alter in character. In the first place a wider section of the Liberal Party took up the idea of land reform. Although it has been argued that Gladstone shared the attitudes of the large landed proprietor,<sup>4</sup> many of the prominent members of his party were adopting an

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1. Arthur Arnold, Free land, (1880), p.6. George C. Brodrick, English Land and English Landlords, (1881), p.165, estimated that half the enclosed land in England and Wales was held by 2,250 owners.

2. John Bateman, The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland, (1883 ed; reprinted New York, 1970), p.515.

3. Our Old Nobility by "Noblesse Oblige" (Howard Evans) which appeared in a number of editions in the 1880s was a radical's Debrett; in a style that tempts extensive quotation, Evans surveyed Britain's titled families from the Graftons ("a fair sample of the bastard peerages") to the Norths ("the history of this remarkable family should be studied by every worshipper of ignoble success"). A journalist, Evans was also associated with the L.T.R.A. and Arch's union; see his Radical Fights of Forty Years, (1913). Another notable radical whose contribution to the debate on landed property was strongly historical was J. Morrison Davidson; H.M. Hyndman reprinted Spence's essay of 1775 in 1882, while Robert Blatchford referred to the land as having been taken from the Saxons, e.g. in Britain for the British, (1902), pp.53f.

4. John Vincent, The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868, (1966), pp.212f.

increasingly anti-landlord position. Mundella, for example, had early realised that the agricultural labourer was a potential force for radicalism and had accordingly supported Arch's union in 1872.<sup>1</sup> So had Joseph Chamberlain who in that year coupled his criticisms of the Liberal leadership with a call for "Free Land".<sup>2</sup> Thenceforth, Chamberlain regularly attacked the landlord class, most outspokenly in his "ransom" speech of 1885, but also in The Radical Programme, to which Jesse Collings contributed a chapter on the agricultural labourer.<sup>3</sup> Collings and Chamberlain were also associated with the "three acres and a cow" slogan - an expression that was at first used contemptuously by opponents only to be adopted by the radical-liberals.<sup>4</sup> It was an appeal that was felt to be politically rewarding: "Is not the cow working wonders for us? Next time we must have an urban cow", wrote Labouchere to Chamberlain after the Liberal successes in rural areas in 1885.<sup>5</sup>

The departure from the Liberal Party of the bulk of the old Whig element in the Home Rule split of 1886 enabled, and to some degree obliged, the Liberals to become more radical.<sup>6</sup> Though Chamberlain also left the Party, he still cast a shadow, although

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1. W.H.G. Armytage, A.J. Mundella, 1825-1897: The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement, (1951), pp.119-120.

2. J.L. Garvin, The Life of Joseph Chamberlain, (1932), vol. 1, pp.149-150.

3. Ibid., p.546.

4. According to Frederic Impey, Three Acres and a Cow: Successful Small Holdings and Peasant Proprietors, 1886, p.20n., Lord Tollemache originated the term which was quoted derisively by Michael Hicks-Beach.

5. Labouchere to Chamberlain, 3 December 1885, quoted by Algar Labouchere Thorold, The Life of Henry Labouchere, (1913), p.245.

6. The Introduction to Michael Hurst, Joseph Chamberlain and the Liberal Reunion: The Round Table Conference of 1887, (1967), briefly discusses the split.

probably not until the advent of Lloyd George did an individual match him in stature as the radical voice of Liberalism.<sup>1</sup> Apart from electoral considerations, there was a widespread concern amongst reformers as well as other sections of society about the condition of the agricultural labourer. This aspect has been touched upon for the earlier part of the century, and in its last decades there were the equivalent of men like the Rev. David Davies and Edward Edwards who spoke on behalf of the rural worker.<sup>2</sup> The hastening of the rural exodus and the impact created by trade unionism amongst the labourers also helped to draw attention to the conditions of rural life. And the nostrums were remarkably similar. There could still be found the complaint that farmers were too concerned with their own comforts and disregarded those of their labourers,<sup>3</sup> and the remedy of allotments was widely canvassed, albeit in a somewhat different form to the campaign of the Labourers' Friend Society in the 1830s.<sup>4</sup> Parliament did provide legislation to allow the supply of allotments and smallholdings, although it has been argued that by the time they became available the demand for them no longer existed to the degree that it had previously.<sup>5</sup> There was also a concession to land reformers in the form of the Settled Estates Act of 1882, which limited the operation

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1. E.g. Lloyd George's speech at Newcastle in 1909 echoed Chamberlain exactly: "who ordained that a few should have the land of Britain as a perquisite, who made 10,000 people owners of the soil and the rest of us trespassers in the land of our birth?", The Times, 11 October, 1909.

2. The occasional progressive clergyman was still to be found, such as Canon Girdlestone who gave guarded support to Arch's union.

3. Just as to Arthur Young and William Cobbett the piano was the epitome of conspicuous consumption, so it was to Joseph Arch in the 1890s: "But the modern farmer must hunt and shoot, he must go to evening parties, play cards and smoke and drink with his friends, while his wife dresses in silks, reads novels, and plays the piano." J. Arch, "Lords and Labourers", New Review, vol. 8, (1893), pp.133-134.

4. The movement is summarised in N.R. Smith, op.cit., chs. 2-4.

5. Henry Pelling, Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain, (1968), pp.6-7 and sources there cited.

of restrictive entails.

But these concessions carried little weight. The radical wing of British politics had been stimulated by Henry George. While it is possible to exaggerate George's importance, his appeal was undoubtedly both eloquent and persuasive and did much to define the issues surrounding land radicalism.<sup>1</sup> There has been but limited modern discussion about the importance of the many-sided and complex "Land Question" in late Victorian social and political thought. In the 1880s many believed that, in the words of a popular exposition of the question, "'Land' is the subject of the day",<sup>2</sup> but its relevance has yet to be fully weighed.<sup>3</sup> It may well be found that most of the arguments employed by the land reformers of the late nineteenth century had been anticipated by their precursors before 1850. In the case of George, a similar point was made by Marx, who attacked the American not only for "the repulsive presumption and arrogance that distinguish all such panacea-mongers", but also for being theoretically "total arrièrè" in putting forward an idea that originated with "the earliest radical disciples of Ricardo".<sup>4</sup>

If land reformers continued to be preoccupied with similar arguments for the whole of the nineteenth century, the counter-claims of conservatives remained perhaps even more unchanging.

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1. The question of George's influence has been discussed by John Saville, "Henry George and the British Labour Movement, Science & Society, vol. 24, (1960), pp.321-333; see also the same author's "Henry George and the British Labour Movement: A Select Bibliography with Commentary", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 5, (1962), pp.18-26.

2. James Platt, Land, (1886), p.7.

3. Some aspects are briefly touched upon by Thompson, "Land and Politics in England in the Nineteenth Century", loc.cit., pp.23-44; A.J. Peacock in an unpublished thesis, "Land Reform 1880-1919: A Study of the Activities of the English Land Restoration League and the Land Nationalisation Society", (Southampton M.A., 1961), provides the best discussion and includes the rapid decline of the movement after 1914.

4. Marx to Frederick Sorge, 20 June 1881, in Alexander Trachtenberg (ed.), Letters to Americans 1848-1895, (New York, 1963 ed.), pp.127-129.



To the historian Prendergast it was axiomatic that:

Of all the possessions in a country Land is the most desirable. It is the most fixed. It yields its returns in the form of rent with the least amount of labour or forethought to the owner. But, in addition to all these advantages, the possession of it confers such power, that the balance of power in a state rests with the class that has the balance of Land.

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Palmerston in the year of his death and while Prime Minister opposed changes in the law relating to land ownership by contending that:

according to our social habits and political organisation the possession of land in this country is directly or indirectly the source of political influence and power.

2

As mentioned, the "New Domesday Book" owed its origin to Derby's attempt to refute radical claims, and in the following decade the Duke of Argyll was among the leading critics of Henry George.<sup>3</sup> The controversy continued unabated until the outbreak of war in 1914 but after the war the issue faded rapidly in importance.<sup>4</sup> What had been, in the broadest terms, a conflict between Land and Capital gave way in the twentieth century to that between Capital and Labour.

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1. John P. Prendergast, The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland, (1865), p.iii. This reference was brought to my attention by D.M. Woodward.

2. Palmerston to Westbury, 1865, quoted Thomas Arthur Nash, The Life of Richard Lord Westbury formerly Lord High Chancellor with selections from his correspondence, (2 vols, 1888), vol. 2, p.94.

3. See especially Argyll's article, "The Prophet of San Francisco", Nineteenth Century, vol. 15, (1884), pp.537-558.

4. Perhaps the last major contribution to the conservative case was Facts about Land: A Reply to "The Land", the Report of the Unofficial Land Enquiry Committee, (1916). Of it, R.E. Prothero, its author, noted, "Neither the Report of the inquirers nor the anonymous Facts about Land survived the Great War", Lord Ernle, Whippingham to Westminster, (1938), p.208.



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Note: This bibliography includes only those sources referred to in the text or in footnotes and is not a complete list of all the materials that have been consulted. As in the footnotes, the place of publication, where not stated, is London. The periodical literature of the nineteenth century has been given a new dimension by the publication of the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, and this has been the source of author identification for most of the articles used, although G.L. Nesbitt's book and F.W. Fetter's articles (listed in section 7, below) have also been of value. As chapter four was written before the appearance of J.R. McCulloch: A Study in Classical Economics, (1970), it was not possible to use D.P. O'Brien's excellent account. A large proportion of the extant contemporary material is in published form, and the present writer is glad to acknowledge a particular debt to the scholarship that has gone into the making of the ten volumes of Ricardo's Works and Correspondence and the Toronto edition of J.S. Mill's works, which is still in progress.

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