The social and economic background for the literature of the English "hungry forties"

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Thesis

The Social and Economic Background for the Literature of the English "Hungry Forties"

by

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PART I: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Just one hundred years ago England was undergoing an ordeal, which, if not as serious as the present crisis, threatened her internal security and domestic happiness no less than the onslaughts of an invader. Today, England presents a united front to ward off the enemy; then, the enemy was in her midst, dividing class from class, party from party, man from man. Jealousy, discontent, unrest in politics, greed, combined with Nature's failure to produce adequate crops, to make this for the poor, one of the unhappiest periods in English history. The term "Hungry Forties" is doubly apt, for there was hunger of the soul as well as of the body. The working man wanted rights which he thought should be undisputably his, rights of self-government, of fair play from the employers, of self-expression, as well as the opportunity to do a "fair day's work for a fair day's wages" in order to clothe and house and feed his family. Many of the principles for which the working man struggled so ardently in the 1840's are the same principles, now completely embodied in England's national heritage, for which she is fighting in 1944.

The "Hungry Forties" as an actual period of time would probably be represented at its height from 1840 to 1844, with periods of unrest and distress in 1838, again in 1846 and 1848. This ten year period, from 1838 to 1848, then, includes four definite economic fluctuations through which the common people,
especially, had to endure privation and misery. Within these years, also, the movement for political reform known as "Chartism" rose and fell, the controversy over the Corn Laws came to a head, agitation for trade unions was renewed, Socialism gained new converts, great scientific and religious movements shook the smug foundations of English thought, an awakening to the social condition of the poorer classes of Britain brought forth new champions in literature and legislation.

These years are included in the transition period when the Industrial Revolution found itself making complete use of the machinery and power inventions which had been developed during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and the early part of the nineteenth, but before modern improvements in steam and electricity had been perfected. The struggle between men and machinery was still going on, and the miserable hand-loom weavers, trying to compete with the all-powerful machine, were losing ground, inch by inch. A cumulation of abuses, in the factory and trades had made the workingman's lot almost unbearable before new legislation for better working conditions, shorter hours, improved housing, was passed. The reign of the young queen had not yet crystallized into "Victorianism;" with the turn of the century the selfishness of the upper classes which had been so prevalent under the Georges resolved itself into self-conscious pride in their new social and humanistic views. Railroads, and telegraph, were offering new modes of travel and communication, but these were still in their infancy.
at this time.

To cover every phase of activity in these ten years would be impossible within the scope of a short paper. Even one industry or one locality presents innumerable opportunities for study. In this paper, therefore, investigation has been limited to the economic and social conditions of those engaged in textile factories, and the movements to which they were particularly exposed. And yet because workers in potteries, mines, agriculture, railroads, dockyards, all were influenced by the same conditions and agitations, and were as eager in their desire for reform as those engaged in factory work, the study of one group reflects the aspirations of all.

The complications with European politics, the pressing Irish Question, the expansion of world horizons through colonization in Australia, New Zealand and other British possessions, relations with the United States, all played important parts in the domestic struggles of England, but these will not be dealt with here.

On the literary side, no attempt has been made to consider the "polite literature" of the day, the pleasant world of Barceherter, the leisurely antiquarianism of Pompei or Hastings, the light essays and poetry—only works which have a definite meaning for the workingman's problems, or the portrayal of his condition, have been studied.

In literature, too, this was a period of transition. The Romantic era was past, the Victorian just beginning, and this in-between period saw the rise of the social novel, a new form
not before realized in English Literature. Wrongs suffered by
the working classes were suddenly exposed in the literature of
the day, and the voice of the worker himself was rising above
the more polished tones of the literary profession.

Certain great economic and social trends had begun to
develop earlier in the nineteenth century, which, renewed or
intensified in the "Hungry Forties," added to the general un-
rest and eagerness for reform. Among these trends, clearly
traceable throughout the century were:¹

1. The revival of trade unions and the growing
   strength of Socialism.
2. The rise and fall of Chartism.
3. The struggle over the Corn Laws.
4. The "Ten Hours" movement.
5. The reorganization of the Poor Law.
6. The shift in population, and the economic
crises which lowered standards of living.

These trends overlap and interact upon one another to such an
extent that treatment of one necessarily includes consideration
of the others, so that it is with these six topics I have been
primarily concerned.

Each one of these subjects has been treated thoroughly by
expert historians, and so much material has been published that
little new remains in the field for investigation. Contemporary
newspaper files, periodicals, and manuscript material, the
primary sources from which new light may be obtained on these
topics were not locally available to me, so that secondary

sources had to be mainly relied upon. A correlation of some of the existing material, with reference to the short period of the "Hungry Forties" can produce little original creative work, but in a simplified form may offer a fresh picture of that day.

Similarly, the important social novelists of the period have been the subject of many analyses, so that complete coverage of the literary field would also be impractical. A representative work of each of the "big four," Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, and Kingsley,¹ has been studied, as well as one novel by Mrs. Trollope, and as many of the lesser pieces of workmen's literature as were available.

A further limitation has been set on the literary study of the period by using only material published within that period. It is the immediate reaction of the social forces on the literary which have proved far more interesting than later works written on that period.² Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquility" would be too mild to express the burning fervor of the oppressed and struggling worker, and if contemporary writers lapsed at times into sentimentality, it was merely the fashion of the day for cloaking true feeling.

The problem of workingman's literature: what he thought when he first began to think, what he read when he first learned to read, and what he wrote when he first learned to write, offers the greatest challenge to the investigator, for,

¹. Gazamian, Louis, Le Roman social en Angleterre.

². note: Alton Locke, by Kingsley was first published in 1849, but is so close to the period as to be validly included. Likewise Dickens' Hard Times, published in 1854.
save a few of those such as Thomas Cooper, Ebenezer Elliott, and Samuel Bamford, the voice of the workingman is still unheard. There must be a lower strata still, clumsily articulate, yet with ideas desiring expression. By the fifties, the workingman had been brought so much into the limelight, that education, public libraries, Workingmen's Improvement Associations, and similar organizations had started him well on the way to strong and vigorous self-expression. Of his early attempts, however, there is still room for study, when conditions for travel and research make it possible.
CHAPTER II

A Retrospect

Although it is not proposed to deal with the earlier development of the Industrial Revolution and the problems it involved, a brief explanation of some of the events which preaced the period of the "Hungry Forties" is needed for a clearer understanding of those important years. With reference to each of the trends cited in Chapter I, (p. 4), a short summary of the principal facts will bring us to the threshold of the "Hungry Forties."

For many years trade unions had been considered illegal. As far back as 1799 and 1800 Combination Acts had been in effect which prohibited workmen from joining together to obtain increases in wages or decrease in hours; even holding a meeting to discuss these problems was forbidden. In 1834 these acts were repealed, and small organizations of workers immediately formed to attempt collective bargaining. They were not successful, nor were the Grand General Union of all the Operative Spinners in the United Kingdom, formed in 1829, or the National Association for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1830. There was a General Trades Union founded in 1830 which had a brief popularity.\(^1\)

Robert Owen was the most influential member of this early group of trades-union advocates. In 1833 he established the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. It "soon had a half million members, and it was believed that the Trade Unionists in the

\(^1\) Woodward, \textit{Age of Reform}, 122.
country all told, numbered twice that figure.\textsuperscript{1} The Grand National, in spite of its popularity, failed because of lack of organized leadership, which could not compete with the employers and the government. It lasted only a little more than a year, and was broken up by the action taken against the Dorchester labourers, who were transported because they were charged with violation of an old decree against swearing oaths.

"The revolt was inspired by men who had larger ideas than those of the ordinary Trade Union leader. This was true of Doherty, of Owen, and of the men who edited the papers of the cause. The working class was stirred by the belief that society might be radically changed; that life need not wear so hard and ungenerous a face; that the poor might have their share in the civilisation of their age. The movement, then, is significant because of its scale, its character, and its ideas. It is remarkable also for something else. Its failure did not mark the end of the revolt. The Owenite revolt was followed by the revolt of Chartism."\textsuperscript{2}

Robert Owen was also connected with the early Socialistic movement:

"Owen was known as a Utopian socialist, after the book Utopia by Sir Thomas More, and believed that individuals, acting upon their own initiative, could create model co-operative enterprises. Like other highly idealistic Utopians, of whom there were many in France, he hoped to create in this way such an ideal community that the rest of the world would copy it and that competition would thus give place everywhere to co-operation in a transformed world."\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} Hammond, \textit{Age of the Chartists}, 267.
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Hall and Albion, \textit{History of England}, 588.
\end{itemize}
Another type of Socialism which had many followers took for its maxim the theory of the political economist Ricardo, who believed that a system of private property, including property in land, produced better results for all concerned than any other mode of ownership; on the other hand he gave his high authority to the view that the value of commodities was determined 'almost exclusively' by the 'relative quantity of labour' employed in their production. To the labouring class the bare assertion of fact was sufficient to raise the question: What reward does labour receive for the commodities which it has produced? ¹

This Ricardian theory that labour should share the value of the work it has helped to produce, was carried further into Marxian socialism and was fostered during the "Hungry Forties" through the Chartist movement. The trade union movement did not reach its real strength until after the forties, but the activities of that period were instrumental in its later powerful development. Likewise, modern Socialism and Communism were outgrowths of the radical movements started in trade-unions and Chartist. ²

From the unstable foundations of trade-unionism and the resentment of the workingmen against the unfairness of the Reform Bill of 1832 arose another movement which now is almost identified with the discontent of the "Hungry Forties." The actual Chartist movement did not begin until 1838, so that it will come under consideration in a later chapter, but the principles of reform which it advocated had been demanded earlier, and a few were finally embodied in the Reform Bill of 1832.

¹. Woodward, Age of Reform, 123.
². Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 255-257.
This Bill was a milestone in Parliamentary reform, because it broke up aristocratic control, but, although earnestly sought by the working class, as a cure-all for many of their ills, it resulted in anything but benefit to the workers. It was only after the Reformed Parliament was seated that the omissions and inadequacy of the Bill were apparent:

"It's one main defect... was the manner in which it left the great body of the working classes entirely outside what was called the pale of the constitution. It redeemed the political power of the State from being the monopoly of one great class, and made it the partnership of two great classes. That was an advance in itself, and it established the principle which made further advance possible. But it disappointed those who found themselves not better off but even worse off as regards the franchise than they had been before."¹

The Bill redistributed the seats, and extended the franchise to £10 householders, and £10 copyholders and £50 leaseholders and tenants-at-will, and the forty-shilling freeholder still had his rights. The disadvantage to the labouring class was obvious: they did not pay £10 rents; "in cities such as Leeds they were too poor to occupy £10 houses. They lived in houses with rents from £5 to £8, and only about ten percent of the artisan class received votes."² Only by getting higher wages, and being able to afford a more expensive household, could the vote be obtained by an individual without further extension of the franchise. To cellar-dwellers, such a thing would seem

¹ McCarthy, Epoch of Reform, 77.
² Hall and Albion, History of England, 613.
impossible. Since the passage of the bill gave the franchise to only one man in every thirty of the whole population, there were still many who felt aggrieved and sought redress through the struggles for the Charter.

A third movement which had its culmination during the "Hungry Forties" was the agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws. These Corn Laws had been in effect for many years, but in 1815 they had taken on a sterner aspect by prohibiting importation of corn when the price was below 80s. a quarter. In 1828 this was modified by Wellington with a sliding scale, which supposedly was a compromise between protection and repeal. The only persons who were protected, however, were the landlords, and they did not pass on to their poor tenants the profits obtained by protection. They kept their rents high, and the farmers and agricultural labourers not only had to pay dearly for their homes, but dearly for their bread, when they could get it. The manufacturers favored the repeal of the Corn Laws, because they realized that if the price of bread were lower, they would be able to pay a lower wage to their operatives. This was the theory of the members of the "Manchester School" of which Richard Cobden and John Bright were leaders.\(^1\) This group grew up just before 1838, and their activities are identified with the Anti-Corn Law League, which had its growth and climax in the forties.

The Factory Acts occupied the thoughts and energies of a wide group of reformers during the forties. Agitation for

\(^1\) Hall and Albion, History of England, 636.
shorter hours resolved itself into what was called the "Ten Hours" movement. Up to 1838, there had been various acts and proposals, beginning as far back as Sir Robert Peel's Factory Act of 1802. This was primarily concerned with the regulation of parish apprentices.¹ In 1813, another act put through by Peel further regulated the labour of children, and the acts of 1825 and 1831 advocated by Hobhouse limited work to twelve hours a day for all persons under eighteen. In 1830, Richard Oastler became the champion of the "Ten Hour" day,

"Oastler's first step was to write a series of letters to the Leeds Mercury and afterwards to the Leeds Intelligencer, headed 'Slavery in Yorkshire,' denouncing the factory system, and demanding, on the grounds of humanity, a ten hours day for all under twenty-one years of age."²

but it is to be noted that he only limited his efforts to those under twenty-one years of age. The theory that "free" men should not have their hours of labour regulated kept back any attempts to limit the hours of the adult male workers. The workingmen advocated this reform, hoping that with the hours of children limited, it would automatically affect the hours of adults. They also hoped that limiting child labour would allow adult workers to get employment again.³ This movement was not, as the trade-union movement and Chartism were, a fight between different classes of society, for workingmen, honest manufacturers, and certain members of the House of Commons and House

¹ Hutchins and Harrison, History of Factory Legislation, 16-19.
² Ibid., 45.
³ Ibid., 49.
of Lords, regardless of party, were all interested in it. Their opponents were the petty capitalists who tried to screw every penny out of the workers in order to compete with large manufacturers, and those misguided persons who believed that shorter hours of work only led to dissipation and vice on the part of the worker.\(^1\)

Michael Sadler, one of the most ardent "Ten Hours" movement workers, introduced in 1831 a modification of Gastler's ideas by proposing a bill limiting hours in all mills to ten, for persons under eighteen. The bill was referred to a committee, which collected evidence from many factories, and the report of this evidence, familiarly known as the "Sadler Report,"\(^2\) revealed many evils. After Sadler lost his seat in the Reformed Parliament, Lord Ashley took up the cause, but an amendment by the Whig government, appointing inspectors, was added to the bill as passed in 1833. This appointment of inspectors was violently opposed by the Ten Hours advocates. Their different groups, known as "Short Time Committees" were afraid that the inspectors would be the tools of the manufacturers, and they advocated strikes.\(^3\) These did not materialize, however, and for several years the act was tolerated. Agitation soon began anew, when the act did not restrict hours, as it was intended to do, but by various loopholes, such as the spurious relay system, the manufacturers were able to avoid its rules.\(^4\)

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4. Ibid., 80.
and at the beginning of 1838 the Ten Hours Movement still had a struggle before it.

There was yet another factor in the unrest and misery of the people during the "Hungry Forties" which had its beginnings in the early thirties. This was the passing of the New Poor Law, in 1834. Before this time, the Poor Laws had been those established during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and they had grown, through the years, into a system which degraded the poor, and further demoralized the lazy. There was in practice a custom called the "Speenhamland system," which made the wages up out of the rates, and further, it subsidized the farmer by hiring the paupers out to them, paying two-thirds of the pauper's wages, while the farmer paid only one-third. This benefitted the farmer, and also encouraged a man, if he could not get regular employment, to apply for relief, when he would be put to work again under this subsidy plan. These practices of fostering greed and indigence were exposed when the Royal Commission investigated the situation in 1833. They decided that the only way to abolish this unhealthy custom was to make the poorhouses so very unattractive that people would suffer any lengths of poverty rather than apply for aid. This was done through the passage of the New Poor Law in 1834, which not only imposed strict regulations on the conduct of workhouses, but put an end to "outdoor relief," the system described above. The working classes were very much against the law, as it made

no distinction between the honest, upright men who might temporarily be out of work, and those idlers who sought an easy berth inside the workhouse doors. The acceptance of the new law in the South, and the riots and disturbances in the North, form part of the story of the "Hungry Forties."

These elements in the make-up of the "Hungry Forties" all dealt with problems to which the people could point a finger, and say, "There is the evil. Let us attack that," which they would proceed to do, through movements such as Chartism, or the Ten Hours movement. There were still further great forces at work which caused the people much suffering, but against which little could be done by them without Government aid. These were the forces of a shift in population, and a series of economic crises which lowered the wages of the poor, and both together lowered their standard of living to the point of brutishness. The shift in the population from rural areas to the cities was due to the establishment of factories in the towns, since mills were no longer dependent upon water power alone. There was also, during the first half of the nineteenth century a rapid rise in population, for, according to the census of 1801, there were in Great Britain 10,942,646 inhabitants, while in 1841 there were 18,720,394.1 Porter also gives a table showing the growth of population in two of the largest manufacturing centers:

1. Porter, Progress of the Nation, 8.
"The population of the townships of Manchester and Salford, at each of the decennary enumerations, was found to be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>94,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>115,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>161,635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>237,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>353,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increase 22 percent  
Increase 39\(\frac{1}{2}\) percent  
Increase 47 percent  
Increase 48\(\frac{1}{2}\) percent

The increase during the whole period of forty years being 258,514, or 273 percent upon the population of 1801. Much of this increase has arisen from continual immigration to a town of such growing manufacturing prosperity."

This was one of the greatest developments in manufacturing centers, but was typical of smaller manufacturing towns all through the country. The Hammonds cite the 1840 Health of Towns Committee:

"About the year 1840 those responsible for the government of England became painfully aware that during the preceding fifty years, in the course of an amazing growth of population, the proportions between town and country dwellers had completely changed; that whereas in 1790 the country labourers were about double the town workmen, the town workmen were now nearly double the country labourers."

Naturally the housing problem became acute, and landlords tried to get as high rents as they could for their wretched tenements without consideration for their sanitation or habitability. Bad conditions grew with the population, and were not opposed or combatted until the forties. The other misfortune of which the poor had to bear the brunt was the excessive variation between

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1. Porter, Progress of the Nation, 26.
2. Hammond, Age of the Chartists, 79.
prosperity and want from year to year. Just previous to the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 there was a severe depression which lasted two years\(^1\) and crises followed in regular succession throughout the forties. These smaller depressions may have made up part of a larger cycle which took an upward turn towards prosperity about 1850.\(^2\) Bank crashes, poor harvests, food famines, all figured in the fluctuations of trade and employment during the forties, contributing their full share of misery to the poor.

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CHAPTER III

General Picture of the "Hungry Forties"

Historians and writers universally agree in describing this period in terms of illness, or disease. It seems the most appropriate of metaphors with which to portray the insidious inroads of its discontent and misery. Carlyle gives us his picture of the times:

"Glasgow Thuggery, Chartist torch-meetings, Birmingham riots, Swing conflagrations, are so many symptoms on the surface; you abolish the symptom to no purpose, if the disease is left untouched. Boils on the surface are curable or incurable, - small matter which, while the virulent humor fester deep within; poisoning the sources of life; and certain enough to find for itself ever new boils and sore issues; ways of announcing that it continues there, that it would fain not continue there."¹

The Hammonds, attributing one cause of the illness to the poor man's inability to escape from everyday ugliness into "a peace and beauty that belong to a larger world," say,

"The man who can never so escape is like the man described by Lucretius, who dashes from his home to the country, and from the country to his home, restless and weary, a sick man who knows not the cause of his complaint.

To make a society out of men who are sick is to make a sick society."²

Cole and Postgate also characterize this period as one of grave disease:

"Psychologically, the great majority of the

British working class was, in those years 1832-57, and for fifteen more years to come, diseased; as it had indeed always been in a greater or lesser degree since the eighteenth century. Equilibrium had been broken up. Unable to find any rational methods of escape it turned to irrational. It demanded sure promise of happiness - of food, rest from overwork, clothing, and what delights it could imagine - within its own lifetime.¹

That their mental illness was aggravated by the wretched physical condition of the people through unusually severe depressions, and famines, factors over which they had no tangible control, is obvious. And it is also obvious that the disease was coming to the surface; that the working people, as well as the governing classes were beginning to feel the need of some specific which would wipe out the infection. This gnawing discontent which ate at the heart and mind of the working man could not be attacked without proper instruments, which he blindly supposed would cut out the evil: the six points of the Charter, and other demands for fairness and justice.

The difference between this era and the years preceding it was in the awakening of a sense of "conscience" in the upper classes. The Utilitarian idea of individual happiness producing the greatest social benefits had given full sanction to the rapacity of the get-rich-quick-to-be-happy capitalists. Their cruelty and injustices to the factory workers had had no curb, until the poor could no longer suppress their agonies, and until the upper class began to see that perhaps "all was

¹. Cole and Postgate, British Common People, 245.
not for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Only then did improvements in education, public entertainment, housing, social security for the masses, take precedence over the glorification of individual self-advancement.

Another view of the "Hungry Forties" which entirely opposes the foregoing descriptions is given by Hall and Albion. They describe it thus:

"For more than thirty years after the Reform Bill of 1832 England enjoyed one of the most prosperous and fruitful periods in her whole history. The era is intimately associated with the name of Queen Victoria, constituting as it did nearly half of her long reign, which commenced in 1837. England was enjoying the fruits of the Industrial Revolution at their richest; for material growth continued, and outside competition was as yet negligible. There was a growing realization of the manifold problems, social and economic, arising out of the Industrial Revolution; and upper-class England, while warding off democracy for the time being, made a moderate effort to adjust the nation to the new conditions."

The latter part of their "thirty years" may perhaps have overshadowed the earlier trying period in their estimation, but all of England was not enjoying the "fruits at their richest" during the "Hungry Forties." The workingman's richest fruit was often a dry crust, and the farm worker was thankful for a few frozen turnips. The "moderate effort" made by the upper-class was certainly moderate indeed in comparison with the titanic struggles of the lower class to achieve even the beginnings of reform.

CHAPTER IV

The Major Events of the "Hungry Forties" Year by Year

There are some who would agree with the description in the foregoing chapter of England as a prosperous and fruitful country at this time. Too close scrutiny shows up imperfections in even the most perfect appearing object, so that it may not be wise to analyze these years minutely. The truth perhaps lies in thinking of the period as one little part of that long road towards the happiness and security for all which is even now only being visualized by men like Sir William Beveridge. In this respect they were perfect years, because they laid bare all the evils which needed correction, and tried to make a start towards their amelioration. Any breach in the wall will look harsh and jagged until it can be filled up, smoothed over, and looked at from a little distance. The breach made by the working classes in the strong defenses of upper and middle class apathy during the "Hungry Forties" was well worth the sacrifice of hunger and discontent if it will some day be cemented solidly together into a society beneficial for all. Only with this in mind can we look at the events of the "Hungry Forties" with an optimistic mind.

A little glimpse into the future with an anonymous writer of 1837 may seem somewhat ironic in the face of its forthcoming events, but his glowing description of the powers of the new queen is too amusing to pass over:

"It will be the good fortune of the future historian of her reign to be able to open
his labours with a statement that no British Monarch ever ascended the throne amidst such a galaxy of propitious circumstances. But a few months before the demise of her Predecessor, the commerce of the country had been arrested in its career by one of those maladies which seem to be of periodical recurrence, paralysing all its energies, seizing the heart of the nation with despondence, diffusing calamity far and wide, and threatening the greatest of her monetary institutions with ruin. A winter of unprecedented length and severity—the phenomenon of a springless year—filled the stoutest heart with apprehensions for the young seed committed to the bosom of the earth—famine and disease amounting almost to pestilence, swept over the country like a destroying angel.

But the Queen scarcely stepped upon the throne when the whole face of nature changed... The harvest, contemplated with so much fear, has burst forth with a luxuriance seldom exceeded in this country... The reports from all the manufacturing districts are cheering. Peace reigns throughout the three kingdoms. The hum of industry is everywhere heard. The factory chimneys, lately looking so idle in the clear atmosphere, send up again their volumes of smoke. The anvils resound on all sides, and the furnaces shed around them the blaze so gladdening to the heart of every Englishman."

This is a pretty compliment to pay to a lady, but, like many compliments, not adhering strictly to fact! In the following pages, the Queen’s Speech at the opening of Parliament each year refutes his remarks. The contrast is even more striking since her words are written by ministers of the party in power who emphasize favorable events whenever possible. The speech, phrased to reduce

friction in the debates, gives a brief summary of the state of the country in the previous months, and recommends Parliamentary action on the most pressing affairs of the nation. It is around the Queen's speech, then, that a discussion of yearly events can be woven most succinctly, for it was very often not what the Queen said, but what she left unsaid that made the members of Parliament rouse up in defence of their pet projects.

The young Queen's very first Parliamentary speech, in November of 1837, was a generalized and noncommittal report on the state of the country, which, as Lord John Russell said, was designed,

"on this first day, when Queen Victoria was to meet her Parliament ... to avoid bringing forward questions upon which it might be necessary for Gentlemen, in vindication of their own consistency ... to raise angry discussions ..."  

The "Gentlemen" in the House of Lords responded gracefully to the remarks from the throne, but Mr. Wakley, in the House of Commons was not to be deterred by any delicate scruples:

"I have the Speech in my hand, and I must say more, that I never read a speech from any Sovereign of this country more vague, more general, or less precise."  

He then went on to move three amendments to the speech:

"That this House embraces the earliest opportunity of respectfully assuring her Majesty that it will, in the present session of Parliament take into its consideration the state of the representation of the people in this branch of the

2. Ibid., 37.
Legislature, with a view to ensure by law an equitable extension of the elective franchise.

... the necessity of protecting the people in the free exercise of their elective franchise by enacting a law to establish a system of secret voting by means of the ballot.

... the propriety of repealing the Septennial Act."1

It was an accepted fact in Parliament that unless a measure had been specifically included in the Opening Speech, it was not apt to be allowed to come up for discussion during the session, so that Mr. Wakley’s eagerness to include these reforms in the speech was well founded, although tactless. He brought the House to a division, which resulted in a show of 20 Ayes to 509 Noes.2 This was certainly great odds to struggle against! Out of five hundred and twenty-nine of those who were to make the laws for the people, only twenty were willing to have the people themselves share in their legislation! Not a very cheerful prospect, but this extract from the 1837 Speech shows what the representatives of the lower classes who were in office wanted to do for the masses. Already the agitation for the people’s rights was growing, and the events of the next year show what progress had been made.

1838

1838, the first full year of Victoria’s reign, was not a prepossessing start towards complete harmony of the people. The crisis which had occurred in 1836 and its results in 1837, were

1. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, XXXIX, 47.
2. Ibid., 81.
still evident:

"The worst sufferings of the working classes were in the years between 1838-42, when widespread unemployment existed side by side with low wages. In the main factory areas, especially in Lancashire, wages were definitely lower in this period than they had been ten years before, whereas the cost of living was markedly higher."\(^1\)

This unemployment, together with the decisive activities of the advocates for the Charter, was enough to set the whole working class aflame for an expression of their rights. What did the Queen say about the year 1838? She spoke on February 5, 1839, the day after the first Chartist convention had assembled in London, and when a long series of outbreaks had just been witnessed:

"I have observed, with pain, the persevering efforts which have been made, in some parts of the country, to excite my subjects to disobedience and resistance to the law, and to recommend dangerous and illegal practices. For the counteraction of all such designs, I depend upon the efficacy of the law, which it will be my duty to enforce - upon the good sense and right disposition of my people - upon their attachment to the principles of justice, and their abhorrence of violence and disorder."\(^2\)

"Their attachment to the principles of justice" was exactly what had caused the people to hold meetings, demand representation, draw up a Charter, and try to make themselves heard. For in May, 1838, the actual \textit{People's Charter} was published. It had been drawn up by members of the \textit{London Working Men's Association},

\begin{enumerate}
\item Cole and Postgate, \textit{British Common People}, 275.
\item Hansard, \textit{Parliamentary Debates}, XLV, 5.
\end{enumerate}
and was soon spreading all over the country, as a doctrine to which the poor could fasten their hopes.

"Missionaries were sent out into the provinces, and this programme gradually drew together the different Radical movements of the time, including the passionate agitation that had been provoked in the North by the new Poor Law. The Charter thus became the rallying flag for a number of different discontent."1

The Charter's well known Six Points: Annual Parliaments, Universal Manhood Suffrage, Payment of M. P.'s, Vote by Ballot, Equal Electoral Districts, and the Abolition of the Property Qualifications for Members of Parliament, seem reasonable enough now, but not a single point was put through during this whole period of the "Hungry Forties."

The Scotch and Welsh were among the fiercest advocates for reform, and the first great meeting at which the people heard the Charter was held in Glasgow, on the twenty-first of May. Mass meetings were also held on the Newcastle Town Moor, and on the twenty-fifth of September a great meeting was held on Kersal Moor, near Manchester. Groves says, "Reliable estimates give the attendance as 300,000."2 This meeting was a gathering of all those hungry, unemployed, wretched weavers and operatives, whose pent-up feelings of hatred and resentment were loosed in roars of cheering for the Charter, shouts for the Radical speakers whose words were music in their ears, and mass parading with banners and singing. Soon, however, the meetings were held at night, because day-time meetings caused the workers to lose their

2. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 57.
pay. These were more alarming in appearance than the day-time processions:

"Lit by the glare of hundreds of torches; attended by thousands of hand-loom and factory workers marching with shouts and songs, or, more ominous still, in complete silence, to the place of meeting; applauding physical force speeches with passionate cheering; waving pikes and firing shots - such meetings must have seemed to the property owners like assemblies of the damned." 1

It is no wonder that the Government, in response to the urgent appeals of these property holders, forbade the torch-light parades, and called the militia into readiness to disperse any crowd that might become riotous.

From the very first, the chartists became divided into two groups, which caused much dissention in their midst, and was the reason for much of their weakness. Briefly, these groups were called "physical force chartists," and "moral force chartists." The former were mainly responsible for the violent demonstrations which called down government condemnation, and which, of course, gave the movement a bad name, and the stigma of "insurrectionist." The "moral force chartists" were all for peaceful means for obtaining their rights, and tried persuasion and talk, but this side did not have strong enough leaders to outweigh the appeal to the emotions and mass feeling made by the "physical force chartists." Before the end of 1838, the government had arrested Joseph Raynor Stephens, a dissenting minister who had

1. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 58.
been expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion in 1834, had since taken up various radical movements, and had become a prominent Chartist.\textsuperscript{1} This time he was released on bail, but later imprisoned for eighteen months.

It is not surprising, then, that the Queen was impelled to speak about the "disobedience and resistance to the law." What was the attitude of the House towards these movements? The usual reply of the upper classes to any of these demands from the lower class was typified in Mr. Buller's speech:

"He much regretted the excitement which had been so industriously kept alive in various parts of the country upon different projects, upon which he could not refrain from expressing his firm conviction that if the professed objects of the parties were fully obtained, they would not in the least conduce to the benefit of the country. He was perfectly satisfied that neither universal suffrage nor vote by ballot would have any such results as their advocates seemed to expect."\textsuperscript{2}

This haughty tone, this complete unwillingness to open his mind to the possibility of even giving the proposals a fair trial, was a reflection of most upper-class minds of the day. In 1839, the Reverend Sydney Smith published a short pamphlet which went through at least eight editions in that one year, in which he scornfully attacked one point for which the people were working so hard, the secret ballot. His argument rested mainly on the base supposition that dishonesty of the lower classes would undermine the power of the government as soon as they were allowed to vote by secret ballot:

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Cole, Chartist Portraits, 63-79.
\item[2.] Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, XLI, 53-4.
\end{itemize}
"If there is ballot, there can be no scrutiny, the controlling power of parliament is lost, and the members are entirely in the hands of returning officers."¹

His attitude, further, was that of "let well enough alone," and this clinging to the old form of open ballot was hard for the Chartists to combat, since his words had a powerful effect on many of the middle class:

"To institute ballot is to apply a very dangerous innovation to a temporary evil: for it is seldom but in very excited times, that these acts of power are complained of which the ballot is intended to remedy. There never was an instance in this country where parties were so nearly balanced; but all this will pass away, and in a very few years, either Peel will swallow Lord John, or Lord John will pasture upon Peel: parties will coalesce, the Duke of Wellington and Viscount Melbourne meet at the same board, and the lion lie down with the lamb. In the meantime, a serious and dangerous political change is resorted to for the cure of a temporary evil, and we may be cursed with ballot when we do not want it and cannot get rid of it."²

Thomas Duncombe tried to introduce amendments to the Queen's speech just as Mr. Wakley had tried in November, 1837.³ Middle class indifference was exposed again in the voting against amendments for reform. The Ayes totaled 36, and the Noes 426, compared with Wakley's 20 Ayes to 509 Noes, a small gain for a whole year of such earnest and eager demonstration.

And what of some of the other events of 1838? It was said that Chartist demonstrations were cheered by those who had been provoked into passionate demonstration against the Poor Law in

¹. Smith, Ballot, 18.
². Ibid., 17.
³. See p. 23.
the North. These unemployed weavers, factory workers, and farm labourers did not submit as peacefully as the South had done to the restrictions of the Poor Law against outdoor relief. They simply could not get employment in the mills, so that they refused to accept the verdict "no outdoor relief." At Huddersfield in May, at Dewsbury in August, and at Todmorden in November, there were riots against the Poor Law. There were "Chartists" taking part in these riots, and the sympathies of the Poor Law opponents were easily drawn into Chartist channels.

Another significant occurrence of 1838 was the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League. Richard Cobden and John Bright were the two famous leaders of this movement. They were both manufacturers, and had considerable difficulty persuading the Chartists that they were personally really interested in the welfare of the poor. The intentions of the Anti-Corn Law League were simply to abolish the Corn Laws and establish Free Trade in England. The middle class, especially the capitalists, were willing to back this movement, and it became one of the richest and most powerful of popular agitations. After its formation, the Chartists were invited to join forces with it, but the two groups could not agree on a united platform. The League did not emerge in full force until 1842, but its founding in 1838 established a basis for their future battles.

2. Hammond, Age of the Chartists, 64.
4. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 124.
The year 1839 did not dawn very brightly for domestic peace and happiness. Again there was felt the pinch of unemployment, many were receiving relief, and the restless spirit of Chartism was growing stronger. In answer to the Queen’s speech on February 5, 1839, Mr. Duncombe had tried to stir up some response to the insensibility of Mr. Buller and others by saying:

"He would ask the Government and the House whether they did not know that there were at that moment two additional Parliaments sitting in this very town? Was there not, in the first instance, a sort of Corn-Law Parliament, composed of delegates sent up from the great manufacturing districts of the country to stimulate the languid regards of that House to the people? Was there not also a Chartist Parliament assembled within a stone’s throw of that House, representing upwards of three millions of the working classes, and sent up for the sole and express purpose of telling the House of Commons that the great body of the industrious classes of the people had no confidence in its councils?"

This was very true, but it had no effect on the "languid regards" or the action of the House.

The first Chartist Convention had met the day before, and continued its sessions in London until May 13, when it removed to Birmingham. The delegates first planned to draw up a petition which would state all their aims and desires, and include the six points of the Charter. They would present this petition, when ready, to the House, and would surely gain some recognition! It took them a long time to agree on the Petition,

there were many arguments and discussions, the people grew impatient, and when the charter was entrusted to Thomas Attwood, M. P., in May, to be presented in the House, the working class was in a state of uncontrollable excitement. Then came the first repulse — the Petition was not accepted for consideration by Parliament. The delegates thought it best to move to Birmingham, but it was a move into the fire. The "physical force" Chartist had taken over the lead, and the public meetings in the city were demonstrative of their violent ways. The mayor of Birmingham forbade their gatherings; his ruling was disregarded, and the "Bull Ring" riots resulted.

"At Holloway Head a vast assembly swore vengeance on the police and marched back to the Bull Ring. Reaching St. Thomas's Church, they tore down the railings and the masonry to provide weapons. Some seventy feet of railings were thus torn down and the large iron gates of the church were wrenched off. Armed with these spikes and with stones, the crowd were about to march to attack the police and soldiers, but were with great difficulty, dissuaded from doing so."

This was typical of their action throughout the North all the rest of that summer, while the Convention delegates argued amongst themselves, and could not decide on any firm action.

Then followed the first really important attempt of the Chartists to rebel against the government, the "Newport Rising." In November plans for a wholesale insurrection were forestalled by the poor timing of a scheme to take over the town of Newport, near Wales. The fierce Welsh miners were caught in a trap by

1. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 75.
the militia; in the firing which was exchanged several were killed, and many injured. The leader of the band, John Frost, fled with the remainder of the men, and the insurrectionist activity throughout the rest of the country subsided. The rebellion resulted in the sentencing to death of John Frost, Zephania Williams, and William Jones, together with five other Chartists who were involved. It was only by much effort on the part of the Convention leaders that their sentences were commuted to transportation to Botany Bay for life.

The Queen had cause to lament these rebellious acts in her Speech on January 16, 1940:

"I have to acquaint you, with deep concern, that the spirit of insubordination has in some parts of the country broken out into open rebellion, which was speedily repressed by the firmness and energy of the magistrates, and by the steadiness and good conduct of my troops."

The Chartist uprisings dominated the working class scene throughout 1839. There was plenty of unemployment to keep their tempers high and give their idle hours a turbulent tone. The depression which had started in 1838 in earnest, had now become more severe, and was enough to call forth the comment of the House of Lords in reply to the Queen's statement:

"I learn with great sorrow that the commercial embarrassments which have taken place in this and other countries are subjecting many of the manufacturing districts to severe distress."

Lord Seaforf thought it:

2. Ibid., 4.
"... a matter of the deepest concern to know that in a district where such distress seemed to have existed, where there was no want of employment, no deficiency of food, no substantial grievance, a spirit of insubordination should have prevailed among so large a portion of the population ... in an outbreak so lawless and so violent as that which had lately taken place in Monmouthshire."1

Earl Fitzwilliam praised his "Noble friends" for turning their thoughts to the distress of the poor, for,

"Having been long acquainted with the state of the country ... he would say that he had never seen them, at any period, in equal distress to that existing at the present moment."2

The most sympathetic speech of all those read in this connection was given at this debate by Lord Brougham. He was especially interested in educational reforms, and in this speech he attributed as causes of the people's distress, their distrust of the leaders of the country, the lack of universal suffrage and the lack of universal education.3 His forthright statement of the people's troubles must have been received with welcome by those who had struggled to gain a sympathetic ear in the House of Lords.

"I observe now, for the first time, a universal alienation of one great class of the community from all that stands above it. The great labouring population of the country are no longer knit in the bonds even of affinity, even of neutrality with the other classes. Wild doctrines have been spread ... which sap the foundations of civil society.

2. Ibid., 19.
3. Ibid., 21-37.
itself."

"The great body of the people of England are excluded, and they know and feel that they are excluded from the political privileges of the constitution."

"If, following that sacred principle of our Constitution, which holds that no man ought to be called upon to obey laws in which he had no hand directly or indirectly in making, that no man ought to be taxed who is not represented ... you were to throw open the door wider than it is now of our political constitution ..., believe me, you would see a great change. You would see an end to what I now regard as the most frightful of all the portentous sights that of late years have been displayed to the view of statesmen, that of the people separated into classes, irreconcilable, hostile to each other ..."1

Quite different in tone is this speech from that of Mr. Buller the year before! But it was not universally felt that any action could be adopted beyond taking into consideration measures for the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor.

The activities of the trade unions were not conspicuous in this year, and the Ten Hours movement had been temporarily thwarted by the imprisonment of both Stephens and Castler. The Government tried to introduce a Factory Act amendment, but was not supported.2

1840-41

There was a lull in the storms of Chartism and other popular agitations during the years 1840-41. As a result of the Newport Rising, and the other local disturbances of 1839, many

of the strongest leaders of Chartism were in prison. William Lovett, the leader of the "moral force" group was released in July, 1840, but Kearns O'Connor, who had been sentenced in May of that year to eighteen months, did not come back into the movement until September, 1841. Bronterre O'Brien also spent part of that time in prison; Dr. Taylor, an outstanding Scotch Chartist died in 1840; and many of the other local leaders were either imprisoned or their efforts were being diverted into other reforms.

The Chartists now began to realize that without some definite organization beyond mass meetings and sporadic attempts at arousing the people they could not hope to compete with the strongly united middle and upper classes. Before O'Connor went to prison he began advocating, in his paper, the Northern Star, some form of organization, and during his detention in York Castle, he was constantly sending out suggestions for their unification. In Manchester, during 1840, a group of delegates assembled to draw up a national organization. This resulted in the National Charter Association, membership in which was secured by a small weekly payment. This association set up an administrative council, and sent paid representatives to the different communities.

"The National Charter Association was an important stage in the history of the working-class movement. Although its effectiveness as an organization was greatly impaired by the legal restrictions of the time, which necessitated many changes in the original constitution, it lived for twelve
years and was the first organized Labour Party in the world.\textsuperscript{1}

The condition of the poor was becoming more and more acute. The slump in trade had spread through all the factory districts and utter misery was prevalent. It did not reach its heights until 1842, but was growing steadily. Unemployment was universal in the manufacturing towns. J. Cobden Unwin, in his fascinating book, \textit{The Hungry Forties}, has collected anecdotes and reminiscences of people who actually remembered the wretchedness of these years. Some of these reminiscences are rambling, diffuse accounts, but all agree on the hardship which they endured. One letter, from Mr. A. S. Ashton, of Belmont Park, Leeds, gives facts about the state of trade in Lancashire in 1841-2:

"There were 2,000 houses empty in Preston in 1841, and in spite of the Corn Laws the farmers were badly off; the labourers were so poor that they were driven to desperation, so that there were in one and a half years 300 to 400 incendiary fires, destroying corn and hayricks. In Leeds, in 1841, there were 20,000 persons whose average earnings were under 1/- a week. In Birmingham one fifth of the population were in receipt of parochial relief. In Birmingham many of the masters were near ruin. The state of Paisley was a source of alarm to Sir Robert Peel. In Manchester 12,000 families, after having pawned every article of furniture and of dress with which they could possibly dispense, were supported by voluntary contributions. In the winter of 1842 the state of things in Bolton was terrible. As many as 1,500 houses in the borough were unoccupied. The earnings of 1,000 families averaged only 1/2 per head per week; more than half the beds in their possession were filled with straw, and they had among them 466 blankets - not quite one to every ten persons -

\textsuperscript{1} Groves, \textit{But We Shall Rise Again}, 115-116.
whilst only one-half could boast the humble luxury of a change of linen."1

These were not extreme examples; they were representative of the conditions of many communities.

The curious fact that the Queen's speeches covering both these years contain little reference to the troubles of the people must be considered in the light of pressing foreign affairs at that time, which occupied much of Parliament's time. In 1841 she

"observed with deep regret the continued distress in the manufacturing districts of the Country. The sufferings and privations which have resulted from it have been borne with exemplary patience and fortitude."2

The Queen's only recommendation for domestic attention was the reappointment of the Poor Law Commissioners, whose first term of seven years was just expiring. In 1841 the reappointment was made, first for a term of six months, and then for five more years.3 The three commissioners, "the Hashaws of Somerset House," were hated for their stern interpretation of the regulations of the amended Poor Law, while their secretary, Edwin Chadwick, became notorious for his inquisitions, and his squabbles with the commissioners. The poorhouses were called Bastilles, a well-deserved epithet. The degradation of human beings into starving wretches, fighting for the decaying gristle on the bones they were set to pounding up, was too shameful to

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"the inhumanity, unchristianity, injustice and political and social danger of the continued administration of the New Poor Law Amendment Act in England and Wales."¹

In 1841, during the summer, Lord Ashley toured the manufacturing districts to talk personally with the workers.² Later that year the Short Time Committees started their work again. Castler had been imprisoned for refusal to pay a debt, but went right on encouraging their endeavors towards the "Ten Hours Bill" in his Fleet Papers. A delegation of the Short Time groups went to London to plead the cause of the Ten Hours Movement, and was favorably received. They were not having great success with limitation of children's hours in affecting adult working hours, so they approached it now from the "feminine angle" by urging regulation of women's working hours. They also had another plank in their platform which they advocated from time to time: the recommendation to limit the running time of the machinery. Instead of working long hours each day, or working in relays, they thought that if the manufacturers were ordered to run their machinery only a certain length of time each day or week, that it would automatically aid the workers. They attributed the glut in the market, and the commercial crises to this cause. No bill

was introduced into Parliament, but the advocates of Factory Reform were gathering fresh arguments for their cause.

The trade-union movement also was quiet during these two years. The suppression of most of the working-men's organizers by the government had slowed the movements down considerably, so that it was not until later that they gathered enough strength to carry on again.

In 1841 there was a General Election, which resulted in the fall of the Whig government, and reinstated the Tories, or Conservatives, with 367 members, against the Liberals' 286. Peel became Prime Minister, and the next year new proposals for reform were made under his leadership.

1842

A gloomier retrospect cannot be imagined than that in which the Queen surveyed the year 1842. The height, or perhaps better, the depths, of the depression had been reached. Everywhere in the manufacturing districts starvation, illness, cold and misery afflicted the poor. Unemployment was universal, and the desperation of the workers was at the breaking point. By renewed incitation to mass revolt, the leaders of the popular movements easily gathered the hungry hordes into demonstrations against their oppressors:

"Her Majesty regrets that in the course of the last year /1842/ the Public Peace in some of the manufacturing Districts was seriously disturbed, and the Lives and Property of Her Majesty's Subjects were endangered by tumultuous assemblages and Acts of open Violence."\(^1\)

\(^1\) Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, LXVI, 4.
The General Strike of August, 1942, was the focussing point for these "tumultuous assemblages and acts of open violence." It was the culmination of all their pent-up emotions, expended in bitter rioting, attacks on property, and conflict with the militia. Strangely enough, this strike was not started by the Chartists. They had not yet made thorough plans for another uprising such as that of 1839, but as soon as this strike broke out, they tried to mould it into some kind of unified action. They were the scapegoats who received the blame; but the actual cause of the beginnings of the strike was the drastic cut in wages given by the manufacturers of Lancashire and Yorkshire during the slack season that summer.¹ The wages were already so low that they were below subsistence level, and the workers would stand for no more reductions. They left the factories in great crowds, not with any clear idea of what they would gain by leaving their work, but resolved to show their indignation and resentment at such treatment. Groves describes the scene:

"Great processions of strikers marched from factory to factory, from town to town, securing or compelling the stoppage of work. The strikes which had begun at Stalybridge and Ashton were now sweeping through Lancashire and Yorkshire. Hungry bands of strikers invaded the towns, carrying such banners as 'They that perish by the sword are better than they that perish by hunger.'"²

Mr. George Oldfield, of Norton Malton, another contributor to Unwin's book on the "Hungry Forties," describes in quaint, but

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¹ Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 127.
² Ibid., 130.
vivid language his eye-witness experience of this strike, still clear in his mind after sixty-four years!

"It was about 1842. Things were simply appalling. There was disquiet in Lancashire, bread rioting, and hundreds of people came down the two dales leading to Huddersfield, stopping mills from working by drawing the shuttles, letting off the water supply, knocking out steam plugs to put out the fires. Both men, youths, and girls, with handkerchief on their head, came into the market place at Huddersfield. The cavellery were called out. Some feind of a brute called a magistrate, after making the cavellery drunk, and gave the order to put the hungry people between the devil and the deep sea — a work that required feinds to do, to their eternal shame."

The Strike was violent throughout the month of August, 1842. The Chartists had long contemplated a "Sacred Month" during which no one would work; everything would come to a complete standstill until the government came to terms with the demands of the workingmen. This strike caught the Chartists unprepared, but they soon were in the midst of it, taking advantage of the situation. Riots with the soldiers, burning of houses and shops put the middle class into a state of great alarm. Unfortunately, the idea was put forth by Feargus O'Connor that the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers had been the cause of the strike, and he started a bitter feud against them. It divided the forces of the people into those who would not join with the "moral force" Chartists, now united in a common thought with the Leaguers, and those who were willing to join them. The strength of the people was again split, and their uncoordinated efforts were soon being quelled by the numbers of soldiers sent into the district to restore order. At

1. Unwin, Hungry Forties, 198.
"there had been a serious conflict with the soldiers, whose appearance was greeted with a hail of stones. When the Mayor attempted to read the Riot Act, a well-aimed stone knocked it out of his hand. Women filled their aprons with stones and carried them to the men who pelted the soldiers. The troops opened fire, four strikers were shot dead, many were wounded."

This could not go on indefinitely, however, without some real plan of action by the workmen, and before the month was over the soldiers and police were restoring peace. Many of the workmen could not hold out very long against their employers, because the scanty wages they had received were not enough to enable them to save money towards such an emergency. They had to go back to the mines, mills and potteries poorer than before, with nothing gained for the alleviation of their grievances. By the end of the year there were very few who were still resisting, and the government had taken complete control. They arrested many of the Chartist leaders and in subsequent trials they sentenced fifty-four men to transportation. It was only through a legal flaw that the important men such as O'Connor escaped the same verdict. Groves places much importance on this strike,

"the largest strike in England in the nineteenth century, the first General strike in the capitalist world, the first test of the much proclaimed 'Sacred Month.'"\(^3\)

But this was not the only important event of that eventful

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2. Ibid., 140.
3. Ibid., 129.
year. It had begun with another National Convention of the Chartists to plan the presentation of their next great Petition. This was to be much larger than the Petition of 1839, and the actual phraseology of the second Petition was more moderate than that of the first. The first Petition had over a million names; the second had over three million. In spite of the fact that the National Charter Association had helped the growth of the movement, and should have unified its action, there were still too many different points of view represented at the convention to preserve firm accord. It took much longer than it should have to prepare the Petition, but it was finally presented to the House of Commons on Monday, May 2, 1842. For the second time the Petition, containing the six points for which all the working classes had undergone so much sacrifice, was rejected. The House would not consider the appeal of over three million Englishmen for equal rights with those who sat there, and the working classes were again sorely disappointed. Their despair of ever obtaining a fair hearing in Parliament was one of the incentives to their violence during the August strike.

The discussion of the Corn Laws had at last received Royal attention, for the Queen recommended in 1842 the consideration of the existing laws on imports. Immediately the suggestion was taken up, and Peel proposed it for prompt action. In this way, the Anti-Corn Law League was helped in its efforts by official sanction. Its members had been issuing thousands of pamphlets and making speech after speech. The rich manufacturers who favored Free Trade were willing and able to give large sums for
the support of the movement. "By 1842 they had spent a hundred thousand pounds."¹ That was not all, for each year the sum was increased by free contribution. The clergy were soon ranged on the side of the League, and added the moral arguments that man should not interfere with the free provisions of Nature for mankind, and that the rich should not put prohibitive prices on the food of the poor. Peel was becoming more convinced that Free Trade was probably the better course to take, and this led him to urge the reduction of import duties on corn, although he did not as yet advocate complete repeal. He also put through Parliament this year a downward revision on the tariff on many other commodities. The movement for repeal which Villiers proposed almost every year, was defeated as usual, but the minority was gaining strength. The discord with the Chartists caused the efforts of the Complete Suffrage branch of the League to break down. With this side-issue, the League had hoped to draw in a great number of the poorer people who were theoretically Free-Traders.

The reinstatement of the Income Tax created another cause for the hatred of the poor towards the Government in this year. There had been no income tax since 1816, when it was withdrawn after the Napoleonic Wars, but decreased commerce, and lowered consumption during the depression had curtailed the revenues so much that a specific tax was deemed necessary. Again the poor had to bear the burden, for the proportion upon them was greater

than on the rich, and unemployment made it hard for them to meet their obligations.

The greatest advancement in the amelioration of the working classes this year was the passage of the Mines Act, which forbade women and children to work underground. It meant a step forward in the efforts of the Ten Hours movement, because it was in line with the principles for which they were working. The atrocities inflicted on women and children described in the Report of the Committee on Labour of Women and Children in Mines were enough to send the Act through Parliament without opposition. An American author, John C. Cobden, in an impassioned re-tort to the English for a criticism of slavery in the United States, gathers all kinds of evidence in *The White Slaves of England* which shows the conditions in the mines and factories. The illustrations in the book, designed to bring out the worst situations of the workers are pathetically realistic; women dragging heavy cars of coal, by means of straps wound around their waists, tiny children sitting all day in the dark ready to swing the trap doors open as the cars pass through - these were facts, not merely the artist's fancy.

The exponents of better working conditions in the textile industries were equally glad to see an improvement in the mines, because the conditions under which the men, women and children labored in the factories were almost as cruel as those in the mines. The long hours, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours a day, were hard to bear, but when the stifling rooms, the close quarters between the machinery, the humid air filled with flying
cotton dust, the noise of the machines, and above all, the harsh "overlookers" who punished with strap or fine the least flagging of the worker's energy—these were the conditions which made life unbearable, weakened health, and often led to diseases and death.

William Dodd had the opportunity of visiting many of the factories and agricultural districts upon an investigatory tour for Lord Ashley, and his descriptions give a simple picture of factory conditions, good and bad.¹ In a series of letters he relates in a narrative form many facts found in reports on factory conditions. He tells of cripples, such as he himself was; he describes the low-ceilinged, crowded, dirty rooms in which workers were made to spend their whole day and most of the night; he tells the story of pauper apprentices shipped off by the cartload to northern parishes where they were kept in barn-like dormitories, made to eat worse than pig-food, and worked until they dropped. The great mills, six or seven stories high, were not as bad offenders sometimes as the tiny shops, made by throwing together two or three cottages, installing machinery, and calling the shed a factory. Their heat in summer, and cold in winter, with dirt and refuse never cleaned up, made them even less desirable as working quarters than the large establishments.

The misery inflicted upon children was the worst to contemplate, and the only wonder is that legislation to wipe this all away was ever contested by human beings. Mr. George

¹ Dodd, Labouring Classes of England.
Oldfield, who contributed a description of the Strike of '42 to Unwin's book, also gives a picture of the cruel life of a child factory worker in his own quaint prose:

"My eldest sister went to work in the factory very early. I soon had to follow, I think about nine years of age. What with hunger and hard usage I bitterly got it burned into me--I believe it will stay while life shall last. We had to be up at five in the morning to get to factory, ready to begin work at 6, then work while 8, when we stopped 1/2 an hour for breakfast, then work to 12 noon; for dinner we had 1 hour, then work while 4. We then had 1/2 an hour for tea, and tea if anything was left, then commenced work again on to 8.30. If any time during the day had been lost, we had to work while 9 o'clock, and so on every night till it was all made up. Then we went to what was called home. Many times I have been asleep when I had taken my last spoonful of porridge--not even washed, we were so overworked and underfed.

"I used to curse the road we walked on. I was so weakly and feeble I used to think it was the road would not let me go along with the others. We had not always the kindest of masters. I remember my master's strap, 5 or 6 feet long, about 3/4 in. broad, and 1/2 in. thick. He kept it hung on the ginney at his right hand, so we could not see when he took hold of it. But we could not mistake its lessons; for he got hold of it nearly in the middle, and it would be a rare thing if we did not get two cuts at one stroke. I have reason to believe on one occasion he was somewhat moved to compassion, for the end of his strap stripped the skin of my neck about 3 in. long. When he saw the blood and cut, he actually stopped the machine, came and tied a handkerchief round my neck to cover it up. I have been fell'd to the floor many times by the ruler on top of the carding, about 8 or 9 feet long, iron hoop at each end. This was done as a change for the strap. For a time I could not tell whether living or dead."1

1. Unwin, Hungry Forties, 196-201 passim.
A kind master, indeed, to take such pity on one of the factory brats! And this was a better mill than some, where the children had to spend most of their meal times cleaning the machinery. (The "ruler" he describes is the dreaded "billyroller" of the Story of Michael Armstrong.)

Contrast these pictures with the description quoted by Baines of the light and easy work of children in the cotton factories:

"Three-fourths of the children so employed are engaged in piecing at the mules, which when they have receded a foot and a half or two feet from the frame, leave nothing to be done; not even attention is required from spinner or piecer, but both stand idle for a time, which if the spinning is fine, lasts in general three-fourths of a minute, or more. Consequently in these establishments, if a child remains during twelve hours a day, for nine hours he performs no actual labour."

"The scavengers, who have been said to be constantly in a state of grief, always in terror, and every moment they have to spare stretched all their length upon the floor in a state of perspiration, I have seen idle for four minutes at a time, and certainly could not find that they displayed any symptoms of the condition described in this extract from the Report of the Factory Committee."

* A footnote says: "A piecer however, generally attends two mules, whose motion is alternate, and then his leisure is six hours instead of nine."

Imagine the leisure gained in three-quarters of a minute by a child whose eyes must have had to be trained on the machine ready to spot the next broken thread, and who had to watch first

one and then the other mule, walking back and forth, or standing the whole time. Imagine the idleness of the little scavengers, lying on the floor for four whole minutes at a time, doing nothing—except waiting for their next dash under the rumbling machinery to pick up the cotton discard, perhaps to get heads or shoulders injured as they wormed their way under moving carriages and wheels!

This picture of child labour was true for this year and for many years before and after the "Hungry Forties."

1843

The harvest in the fall of 1842 was better than the last two or three had been, and by 1843, the conditions in the country were beginning to improve a little. The long-continued siege of low wages and unemployment had been too firmly established to allow quick recovery, so that the country scarcely had recuperated by the time the later depression of 1847 had descended upon the people. It is only relative to these two greater periods of depression, then, that the improved conditions of 1843-44 must be considered. The evils of poor housing and sanitation, working hours and taxation went on, and the struggle against them still had to be continued. The Chartists were suppressed, with most of their leaders either imprisoned again because of their activities in the General Strike, or diverted into other channels whereby they might gain their ends. The trade unions were gaining new recruits steadily and their efforts to establish sounder relations with the manufacturers were proceeding.¹

¹ Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 149-50.
The Queen's speech for 1843 was full of optimism for the upward trend:

"I congratulate you on the improved condition of several important Branches of the Trade and Manufactures of the Country. I trust that the increased demand for Labour has relieved in a corresponding Degree, many Classes of My faithful Subjects from Sufferings and Privations, which at former periods I have had occasion to deplore."1

to which Lord Hill made the proper reply that

"He was happy to say that the state of the country was more satisfactory than it had been for some years past ... and that many branches of our trade and manufactures were in an improved condition. He wished he could say as much for agriculture ..."2

A peculiar situation, with a great deal of debate came up when Mr. Crawford of the House of Commons tried to prevent an acceptance of the Queen's budget recommendations, without an amendment to them that measures should be taken to alleviate the miseries of the poor before expending large sums for the upkeep of the Royal Household.3 Needless to say, even though Mr. Crawford forced the house to a decision, this suggestion drew only 29 Ayes to 285 Noes. But it showed how easily the least bit of improvement in general condition would make the House set aside any consideration of the condition of the poorer classes.

It was in 1843 that Carlyle published his famous work Past and Present. This had even greater effect in stirring up the social sympathies of his admirers than his previous work on

2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid., 79.
Chartism had done. He exhorted the thinking people of England to turn their thoughts to helping the poor, to repenting of the evil ways of Mammonism:

"Yes, were the Corn Laws ended tomorrow, there is nothing yet ended; there is only room made for all manner of things beginning. The Corn Laws gone, and Trade made free, it is as good as certain this paralysis of industry will pass away. We shall have another period of commercial enterprise, of victory and prosperity; during which, it is likely, much money will again be made, and all the people may, by the extent methods, still for a space of years, be kept alive and physically fed. The strangling band of Famine will be loosened from our necks; we shall have room again to breathe; time to bethink ourselves, to repent and consider! A precious and thrice-precious space of years; wherein to struggle as for life in reforming our foul ways; in alleviating, instructing, regulating our people; seeking, as for life, that something like spiritual food be imparted them, some real governance and guidance be provided them."

This was indicative of the great change in thought which had been gradually been making itself felt throughout the upper classes, that even if they did not sympathize with the radical outbursts of the working classes, demanding suffrage and ballot and equal electoral representation, they at least should consider their physical and intellectual and spiritual needs. Education for the masses had been violently opposed for years by the middle classes because they feared that education of the poor was dangerous. The spiritual life of the lower classes was little calculated to improve their lot. They had to pay pew rents to worship in the Church of England, and the Non-Conformists preached a forbearance of this earth’s miseries rather than

a rebellion against them. As yet the intellectual opportuni-
ties offered through concerts, lectures, art museums, etc., were
not within the range of the poor. These matters are too broad
in scope to be included here, but it will be seen that the acts,
reports, and endeavors of the upper classes from this period on
are evidence of the awakened conscience of the rich toward the
poor.

Sir James Graham's educational clauses attached to a Govern-
ment factory bill proposed in 1843 were strongly contested by
some, and the bill was not passed until 1844. Lord Ashley,
speaking in Parliament in February, 1843, had been profoundly
affected by the reports of the Children's Employment Commission,
and the Report of the Factory Inspectors which had just been
issued. He summoned up all possible evidence against the evil
conditions prevailing in large manufacturing centers such as
Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, etc. He quoted Horne, one
of the Factory Inspectors, who said,

"Among all the children and young persons I
examined, I found, with very few exceptions
that their minds were as stunted as their
bodies; their moral feelings stagnant ... The
children and young persons possess but
little sense of moral duty towards their
parents, and have little affection for them."2

Edward Baines, an ardent champion of the glories and benefits of
the industrial system, immediately took exception to Lord
Ashley's speech, rounded up a great many facts from question-
naires sent out to clergymen, teachers, etc., in manufacturing

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2. Ashley, Speech in the House of Commons, Feb. 28, 1843.
   (Pamphlet reprint) 8.
areas, and compiled a booklet of elaborate tables to prove that far from being in a neglected state, the children of these communities had been liberally provided with means for education and spiritual development.

Carlyle said that it did him no good to look at statistics, that it was no good to have facts without a wise head:

"Tables are like cobwebs, like the sieve of the Danaides; beautifully reticulated, orderly to look upon, but which will hold no conclusion. There are innumerable circumstances, and one circumstance left out may be the vital one on which all turned." 2

and it certainly was true in the case of Baines' book. His contention was that the factory inspectors' reports and Children's Education reports showed up the worst dregs of the working class as representative of the whole, and that the majority of the children were at work rather than roaming the streets. He set about showing the brightest side possible to offset the dark picture of the reports. Among his conclusions, drawn from these tables, he found that religious instruction had increased 219 per cent over the year 1800, and the population had increased only 127 per cent in that time; that the standard for accommodation of church-goers all over the country was 50 per cent of the population, and that in many other districts there was very little accommodation, whereas the manufacturing districts surveyed showed a very creditable 45 per cent average. 3 These and

2. Carlyle, Chartism, 9.
many other figures are given to prove his side of the argument. In spite of his cheerful and benevolent attitude, "the missing circumstance" in this case was that these efforts were not enough. However many seats available in churches, however many children were enrolled in Sunday Schools, all these did not prevent young people from falling into crime and degradation for lack of education and a sympathetic religion. His marshalling of facts was only a balm to that middle class selfishness which was pricked by Carlyle's vituperation:

"O Heavens, if we saw an army ninety-thousand strong, maintained and fully equipt, in continual real action and battle against Human Starvation, against Chaos, Necessity, Stupidity, and our real 'natural enemies,' what a business were it! Fighting and molesting not 'the French,' who, poor men, have a hard enough battle of their own in the like kind, and need no additional molesting from us; but fighting and incessantly spearing down and destroying Falsehood, Nescience, Delusion, Disorder, and the Devil and his Angels!"  

1844

Thus the way was paved for several reforms which came in 1844. In this year the first major step forward towards the Ten Hours Bill was taken, in the Government Bill which fixed the hours of young persons and women at twelve a day, within certain periods designed to forestall the "relay system" which had been so difficult to control. An argument in the House confused the issue and there almost resulted from the tangle a vote for a ten hour day, but again this was diverted, and the Ten Hours Bill

1. Carlyle, Past and Present, 358.
advocates had to make the best of the Government Act as it went through. They did not cease their efforts, and the feeling began to prevail at last that perhaps it was right for the state to interfere with the hours of work in the interests of the health of the children.

Another improvement which was made this year was the loosening of the restrictions of the Poor Law. The opposition to the limitation of outdoor relief and appeals, such as that of Baxter in the Book of the Bastiles, for softening the rulings, finally resulted in the relaxation of the law. Edwin Chadwick had also been removed from the secretaryship, which was advantageous to both the people and the commissioners. ¹

The greatest event of 1844 was the first report of the Royal Commission on Health of Towns. There had been a series of reports which aimed at improving town life conditions— the Report of the Health of Towns Committee of 1840, the Committee on Town Housing and the Sanitary Commission of the Labouring Population Report of 1842, the Smoke Abatement Committee of 1843— each of these had represented a little step forward in the living conditions of the working class. They have not been treated separately here, as the great work by Engels covering the condition of the working class as he saw it in 1844, has included every type of information from these reports, from personal investigation, and from interviews with working people. Engels came to England to work in Manchester late in 1842. He associated with the poor, and was equally acquainted with the

¹ Hammond, Age of the Chartists, 58.
"bourgeoisie." He formed many of his socialistic theories during this period.\(^1\) From his studies, he compiled the important book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, which has since become almost the first source for description of the poor of this period. It has the advantage of being an eye-witness account, which, although colored by Engels' youthful scorn, and his sympathy for the working class in general, is truthful and perceptive. His enthusiasm for exposing the worst of the conditions is extreme, but it was only the very worst conditions which could arouse the interest of the upper classes and the State into activity for their improvement. Almost any page in the book could be quoted for a description of the horrible conditions which prevailed in cities like London and Manchester, and the localities inhabited by the Irish, the worst of all. The special evil in town housing in that period was the custom of having whole streets of houses built back-to-back, so that the inner rooms of a house had no windows and no ventilation whatsoever. Strip-housing, such as that of the old streets on Beacon Hill, Boston, or the modern developments in apartment house design, lack windows or ventilation at each side, but the rooms are so planned as to have adequate light and ventilation from either back or front. This was not the case in the back-to-back houses. They had windows only on the front, but these were small and very few, because the Window Tax, which rated a house according to the number of its windows, was still in effect at that time. Certainly, a landlord would not allow

\(^1\) Groves, *But We Shall Rise Again*, 141-6.
many windows if they were the cause of higher taxes. Another system of arrangement was around courts, still with back-to-back formation, but instead of streets, small courtyards in the center, reached from the outside by a narrow alley or passage-way, similar to an arcade of the present day. The great influx of population into the towns caused such a tremendous demand for housing that every available piece of land was built up, streets were filled in with extra rows of houses, leaving only narrow alleys, and cellars were called into use as dwelling places. This shortage of housing as well as the proportionately high rents, caused two or three families to live in the same rooms, and the reason for great numbers of unoccupied houses during times of unemployment such as that described by Mr. Ashton's letter on page 37 was that the poor families doubled up more than ever, to obtain shelter and divide the cost of the high rents. The deplorable practice of using cellars as living quarters led to further disease and misery. These "holes" were below the street, or court level, often with nothing more than the doorway to light them; the walls and floor were always damp with the seepage of rainwater and slops from the house above. Added to this the fact that it was an advantage to have numerous canals, and streams in a mill locality, into which the oils and dyes from the factories could be discharged, the condition of these cellars, and oftentimes the ground floors, of houses built along the canals can be imagined. Engels figured the number of persons living in cellar dwellings, in Manchester and its suburbs,
in this year as between forty and fifty thousand. He described the following as the "most horrible spot in Manchester,"

"In a rather deep hole, in a curve of the Medlock [River] and surrounded on all four sides by tall factories and high embankments, covered with buildings, stand two groups of about two hundred cottages, built chiefly back to back, in which live about four thousand human beings, most of them Irish. The cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall chimneys. A horde of ragged women and children swarm about here, as filthy as the swine that thrive upon the garbage heaps and in the puddles."

If this was the most horrible spot, there were plenty which rivalled it. Of course, the self-respecting workman, who had to live in such places only because of direst poverty, often did his utmost to preserve some elements of cleanliness and order, within his home. The fact that the women often spent the whole day in the factory, coming home too tired at night to do more than prepare a meagre meal and go to bed, while the housework was left undone, or left for those children of the family who were not yet working in the mill, accounts for a great deal of their slack home life.

Their housing conditions were indicative of the rest of their lives. Clothing was hard to get, because the shoddiest quality was foisted off on the poorer classes at high prices,

2. Ibid., 60.
and since there were at that time no regulations for the purity of food, most articles, such as sugar, cocoa, flour, were adulterated with chalk, dirt, or other materials.¹

1845

These conditions had been exposed by the first report of the Royal Commission, and in the Queen's speech at the beginning of 1845, she stated:

"The Health of the Inhabitants of large Towns and populous Districts ... has been the subject of a recent Inquiry before a Commission, the Report of which shall be immediately laid before you. It will be highly gratifying to Me if the Information and Suggestions contained in that Report shall enable you to devise the means of promoting the Health and Comfort of the Poorer Classes of my Subjects."²

The Queen also congratulated Parliament on the increased activity of trade and commerce, and that there was "generally prevalent a Spirit of Loyalty and cheerful Obedience to the Law."³

This was true of the first half of the year 1845. The Chartists were still in obscurity. The Trade Unions were organizing, peaceably, and steadily. Early in the year all the printing trades organized into the National Typographical Association, and another over-all type of organization formed this year was the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour.

¹ Engels, Condition of the Working Class, 62.
² Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, LXXVI, 4.
³ Ibid., 4.
A scandalous situation was exposed at the Andover Workhouse, which aroused the wrath of the poor anew against the imposition of the Poor Law. This was the place where the starving paupers struggled for the marrow and gristle from their bone-pounding, and when these atrocities were disclosed at Andover, an inquiry was instituted into the whole Poor Law administration.\(^1\) The ruthless carrying out of the strict letter of a strict law had made common decency and humanity an unknown factor in their administration, so that by the following year, when a new government came into power, a change had to be made in the set-up of the Poor Law administration.

The Health of Towns Committee made their second report, as indicated by the queen's speech, and plans were made for new legislation concerning housing and public health.

In April, Feargus O'Connor, whose Chartist activities had turned to new ideas and plans, started his famous Land Plan.\(^2\) He wanted to settle tenants on plots of land purchased on the instalment plan from a Chartist Land Co-operative Society, which he organized. This wild scheme appealed to many workers who would have been glad to escape from their city hovels back to a country cottage again, so that many contributed. This movement, with its first settlement named "O'Connorville," (opened in 1847) continued for some years, in spite of a lawsuit in which it was proclaimed illegal, but it finally died out, and many workers lost the small amounts they had been able to put into


\(^2\) Groves, *But We Shall Rise Again*, 157-60.
the plan.

One more step was made in 1845 towards complete repeal of the Corn Laws. The Anti-Corn Law League, whose tractarian and other efforts had been carried on intensively the last few years, had succeeded in gaining a most important convert--Sir Robert Peel himself. He had made a start in the direction of Free Trade in '42 when he had had the tariffs reduced on a great number of articles. In 1845 he also made a revision; more tariffs were taken off, and others were lowered. Then the news of the failure of the Irish potato crop brought further pressure, until his decision was made to advocate total repeal of all duties. This was a complete change of policy, and the party would not stand for it. Several breaks and crises came in the cabinet before Peel was able to assure success for the repeal. The following year saw further struggles before its completion.

1846

1846 was an important year in the commercial history of England. It marked the passing of Protection, and the beginning of the period of Laissez Faire in trade. The opening of Parliament was a stormy session, in which the queen barely mentioned the Corn Laws, but almost everyone else talked at great length about them. The queen's greatest concern was over the failure of the potato crop and the consequent distress among the poor. Peel felt it necessary to explain his action in terms of the potato failure:

"the immediate cause which led to the dissolution of the Government in the early part of last December was that
great and mysterious calamity which caused a lamentable failure of an article of food on which great numbers of the people ... depend mainly for their subsistence. 1

Many heated arguments were carried on in Parliament during the spring, and the day the Corn Law repeal was accomplished, June 25, Peel's power was over. He resigned on June 29, and a new cabinet was formed, with Lord John Russell as Prime Minister.

The new government was faced with the prospect of relieving the miseries of the second year of the potato famine. There had been good harvests in 1843 and 1844, but the second successive failure of the staple food was too much for the country to bear. Government relief had to be speedily organized, for some districts in England, as well as all of Ireland. Peel had imported American "maize" to help the first year of famine. Russell followed a plan of outdoor relief. 2 The famine in Ireland was so acute that it was estimated the number of deaths in five years was almost a million. 3

Other elements in the country were beginning to feel the slackening of trade and lowering of wages which prefaced the banking crisis of 1847, plunging England into another depression. The Chartist movement was beginning to feel new life, especially with the addition of Ernest Jones, an ardent follower from that time onwards. The Factory movement was also ready for its final attempt to put through a Ten Hours Bill.

2. Woodward, Age of Reform, 340.
3. Ibid., 340.
A General Election was held in July, 1847, a new Parliament came into office at the end of the year. The Queen's speech was read by Commission and it was deeply criticized for its optimistic tone:

"The abundant Harvest with which this country has been blessed has alleviated the Evils which always accompany a Want of Employment in the manufacturing Districts."\(^1\)

She did not refer to the bank crisis which had just swept over the country, and Lord Stanley remarked about the discussion of the Speech:

"... not a single topic has been alluded to on which Her Majesty could found those hopes which she entertains of a speedy return of the country to prosperity. All is regret and lamentation throughout."\(^2\)

Mr. Heywood, who was to move the Address to the Speech pronounced it

"out of his power to congratulate the House upon the prosperity of the country. The commercial towns of this country had ... for some time past been afflicted by an extreme depression. The majority of the mills in the manufacturing districts of Lancashire were working short time, and a considerable number were stopped altogether."\(^3\)

This set the tone for the year 1847, in which the effects of all these disasters were felt by the poorer classes. Again the descriptions of hungry workers, of dissatisfied mobs, of agitation for popular movements could be repeated. In the Election

1. Hanserdt, Parliamentary Debates, XCV, 12, 14.
2. Ibid., 24.
3. Ibid., 64-5.
several Chartists had gained seats:

"With the Land Plan then at the peak of its success; with O'Connor elected to Parliament; with growing unrest and militancy throughout the country; with much talk and preparation for a general strike in the cotton districts; new hopes arise among the Chartists."

The only movement which attained its culmination in this year was that of the Ten Hours Bill. It was easier to argue for limiting labour to ten hours when the manufacturers could not argue back that they could not afford it. Many mills were already closed down part of the time, and the Short Time Committees contended that it was better to even up the hours of work so that all who could, would get a share. In March, 1847, only 92 out of Manchester's 179 mills were working full time. Only 22,000 of the 41,000 employees of these mills were working full time, 13,500 were working short time, and 5,500 were out of work entirely. The average number of hours they were working per day in Manchester was seven.

The Ten Hours Bill became law in June, 1847, but was not put into full effect until May, 1848. During that time many manufacturers tried to prevent its enforcement, and tried to influence the workers by reducing wages. Soon the "relay system" was even more intensively practiced again, and the results of the long agitation for factory reform were nullified by this evil custom. It was not until 1854 that a "normal day" was

1. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 172.
established for women and young people, and it must be remembered that this Act of 1847, still did not apply to men. Legislation which directly affected them did not come until many years later, but the actual fact of a "Ten Hours" day was supposedly accomplished by this Act of 1847.

That this act had some good effect for a while cannot be denied, and another quotation from Mr. George Oldfield's reminiscences tells us:

"So as the Factory Act came in force we did not work so late at nights. I joined the evening mechanics' class at Huddersfield to improve myself a little. After a time he [my father] sent me to a free school at Seed Hill, Huddersfield, to get polished in my schooling."¹

1848

1848, the last year of this survey, inherited all the unhappy consequences of the famine years and the commercial crisis. There was a cholera epidemic which was due to the unsanitary conditions in the slum districts, and probably to the weakened condition of the poor after the meagre years of depression. In London there were 14,789 deaths, and over 55,000 for the whole of England and Wales.² This resulted in the speeding up of legislation on cleanliness of towns, and the passing of the Public Health Act the same year, with a General Board of Health also established.

The effects of the commercial panic were beginning to abate, and trade was somewhat better. Agitations outside England were

¹. Unwin, Hungry Forties, 201.
². Slater, Growth of Modern England, 384.
beginning to alarm the country, and a further addition to the Income Tax was proposed to pay for additional defense, to which both the lower and middle classes objected.\footnote{Groves, \textit{But We Shall Rise Again}, 172.}

Soon the agitating forces of the lower classes were in full motion again, and the Chartist movement saw its last great uprising. This event was the most important one of that year, and marked a turning point in the revolutionary approach to political reform. The French Revolution was not accomplished without bloodshed, and great as were the preparations for violence in England, it was by a mere chance that the whole Chartist uprising did not follow in the way of France. There were mass meetings again, in which the principles of the Charter were rekindled, a Convention was planned, and another great Petition was to be presented to Parliament. An interesting approach to the story of the great meeting of April 10th is told through the pen of a London correspondent to the Boston paper "The Atlas."

On the tenth of March he wrote:

"In England, the lower classes are very uneasy and riotous. In London large meetings have been held to discuss the question of the Income Tax. These have led to immense mobs, and great destruction of property. Thousands of panes of glass, as well as lamps, have been broken in the principal streets; some of these panes cost 90 apiece.

"Serious riots have also taken place at Glasgow and Edinburgh. On Monday last, the sixth, a Chartist mob paraded the streets of Glasgow with muskets, and cried 'Down with the Queen.' They broke into
several shops and took away guns, powder and ball.

"In Manchester there have been disturbances and it is feared that thousands of unemployed operatives will form in a body and do much mischief." 1

The Chartist decided to present their Petition with a great procession of a Grand National Convention of all the Chartists of England on the tenth of April, 1848. Such a mob, loosed upon London, would cause apprehension at any time, and in this year of revolutions, it was enough to cause the Government to take extreme measures. It barricaded Government buildings, it swore in hundreds of special constables, it provided them with guns and ammunition, it even laid in siege supplies in some of the buildings. The Atlas' correspondent, writing on Friday, April 7, reported:

"Looking at the revolutionary state of all Europe, there is certainly cause for alarm in London, not only in London, but Dublin, in fact, the whole kingdom.

"Cabinet councils are held daily and I am assured that ministers scarcely know how to act. At one council there was a great difference of opinion as to whether the Queen and her family should remain in London, or leave before Monday next. It was finally decided that it would not be prudent (in another word, safe) for her to remain. The Queen left Buckingham Palace today for the Isle of Wight." 2

The Petition was ready for presentation, the Chartists had gathered from all parts of the kingdom to join in the procession.

2. Ibid., April 7, 1848.
and they hoped at last that they could carry through their desire to be accepted for a hearing in the House. The Government forbade the Procession; the Chartists refused to obey. They claimed it legally proper to walk peaceably to a hearing of their rights, and promised that it would be a peaceable gathering. On Monday, April 10th, the crowds were urged to maintain order, the Petition was borne along, and the great gathering on Kennington Common took place. The disillusionment of the people when they were forced to abandon their scheme to walk right up to the House, and when the Petition was taken off in a cab, to be presented by a few instead of by the whole mighty band was enough to make any crowd angry. There were a few fist-cuff skirmishes at the bridges, but by afternoon the crowd had dwindled away, the constables and police were withdrawn, and again the Chartists were stamped as "insurrectionist." Moreover, their petition was discovered to be full of fictitious names, which lost its total power with the Parliament, and O'Connor in presenting it, was slandered:

"Mr. Crips said he would never more believe a word Fergus O'Connor would say. Hereupon O'Connor left the House, supposed for the purpose of getting up a duel. He was brought back by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and disclaimed any such purpose."¹

Personal recrimination was all that resulted of the glorious hopes of the Chartist movement! No arrests were made for participation in the London procession, but soon other more

violent meetings were being held throughout the country. Shortly, many of the leaders, including Ernest Jones, were in prison, or transported, and the forces of Chartism were dispersed into radical, communistic agitation, or into Lovett's "People's League" and similar projects.

The Queen's speech in February, 1849, looking back over this same year seems particularly serene:

"I observe with Satisfaction that this Portion of the United Kingdom has remained tranquil amidst the convulsions which have disturbed so many parts of Europe.

"The Condition of the Manufacturing Districts is likewise more encouraging than it has been for a considerable period." ¹

This was true, to a certain extent, and, while unemployment and misery were still prevalent, conditions were not as bad as in the years previous. The "Hungry Forties" were over and a new era of improved reforms, with greater consideration for the happiness and welfare of the working class slowly emerged.

¹. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, CII, 4.
PART II: THE LITERATURE OF THE "HUNGRY FORTIES"

CHAPTER V

The "Purpose Novels"

The period between 1838 and 1848 was one of new ideals and new techniques in English literature. The rise of the working class into public notice, if not into power, gave writers an unexplored field of work. The emergence of realism set the style for accurate portrayal of the workman's life and thought. The agitations and revolts of the "Hungry Forties," the strikes, depressions, and great meetings were fresh dramatic material. The development of the great factories and the changes in the agricultural worker's lot were new aspects of English life which demanded description, required exposure. The sudden realization of the working man as a rational being, with aspirations and aims of which the upper classes had taken little heed, called for a championship of his cause.

Champions did not come forward first from his own class, however. The workman himself was untutored and inarticulate. His long hours of toil gave him no time to study or write when he was grown, if he had been lucky enough to be able to learn to read when still a child. The workman would not have been able to get his writings published without the help of a wealthy patron, so that literary effort was beyond the thoughts of the poor factory hand. Not until some of the reforms for which he had struggled physically were effected did the workman have

opportunity to express himself in literary effort.

Those who first pled the cause of the poor were considerably above them in station. Dickens was the closest to the poor, sometimes joining their ranks from necessity. Mrs. Trollope wrote assiduously to maintain herself and her family in their middle class circle. Mrs. Gaskell, the wife of a clergyman, and Charles Kingsley, himself a clergyman, were of the upper middle class, while Disraeli represented an aristocratic interest in the welfare of the oppressed. These writers emerged as supporters of popular reforms, at least as denouncers of prevalent evils. Their novels had this purpose in common, that they wished to show up the unhealthiness of a system in which inequality of mere monetary wealth made unbridgeable gaps between man and man.

Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* follows very closely the events of the years just described. It was written during the latter part of the "Hungry Forties," 1845-7, and published in 1848, but deals with the earlier years from 1838 to 1844. Her sympathies with the Manchester poor were deep and her pictures of their troubles during strikes and unemployment are sincere. A "lady-like" quality pervades the work which makes it lack some of the authenticity of a real workman's story, but the earnestness of her desire to befriend the oppressed workers atones for her "nicety." Her descriptions of the homes of the self-respecting poor of Manchester give a more favorable idea of that city than the factual account of Engels, and perhaps is a true picture of another large portion of the community which Engels neglects.
Contrast his portrayal of the indifferent poor, living in dirt and filth, with her "old Alice" whose cellar room

"was the perfection of cleanliness; in one corner stood the modest-looking bed, with a check curtain at the head ... The floor was bricked, and scrupulously clean, although so damp that it seemed as if the last washing would never dry up. As the cellar window looked into an area in the street, down which boys might throw stones, it was protected by an outside shutter. In one corner was a sort of broad hanging shelf, made of old planks, where some old boards of Alice's were kept. Her little bit of crockery-ware was ranged on the mantelpiece, where also stood her candlestick and box of matches. A small cupboard contained at the bottom, coals, and at the top her bread and basin of oatmeal, her frying-pan, teapot, and a small tin saucepan ..."1

Dickens, too, gives the picture of a respectable factory-worker in *Hard Times*. His Stephen has to work long hours, and support a dissolute wife, but his lodging, over a small shop was

"as neat, at present, as such a room could be. A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean."2

In the story of *Sybil*, Disraeli's workingmen's homes show many contrasts. The neat cottage of Gerard, the bleak cheerless room of the hand-loom weaver, the cottage dwellings in the "laughing landscape of the rural town of Marney":

"These wretched tenements seldom consisted of more than two rooms, in one of which the whole family, however numerous, were obliged to sleep, without distinction of age, sex, or suffering. These swarming walls had neither windows nor doors

sufficient to keep out the weather, or admit
the sun, or supply the means of ventilation
... The dwelling-rooms were neither boarded
nor paved; the ground was at no time better
than so much slay ..."1

The worst dwelling place imaginable is that of Jemmy Downes, in
Kingsley's Alton Locke. In spite of Jemmy's desertion of his
fellow tailors for the less upright but supposedly more profit-
able slop-shop tailor trade, he finds he cannot deal with the
sweaters, cannot make a living, and takes to drink as the only
escape. In his last frenzied rush back to his "home," he takes
Alton Locke into his room:

"And what a room! A low lean-to with wooden
walls, without a single article of furniture;
and through the broad chinks of the floor
shone up as it were ugly glaring eyes, staring
at us. They were the reflections of the rush-
light in the sewer below. The stench was
frightful -- the air heavy with pestilence."2

Three of the heroes of these novels are Chartist.
Eager-
ness to participate in the presentation of the Petitions, to
uphold the integrity of the working poor, to find a link of com-
mon kinship with the upper classes which would create a bond of
unity with them, these are the purposes for which they strive.
John Barton went as a delegate to London, when the first Peti-
tion was carried through the streets by "a set of thin, wan,
wretched-looking chaps,"3 and could not express his bitter dis-
appointment at the rejection of their plea. He soon let the
hate which grew in his mind from that time on overshadow every

1. Disraeli, Sybil, 61.
other feeling until the murder of the manufacturer's son in retribution for the wrongs done to the poor around him was the culmination of his resentment.

Alton Locke told what made "folks turn Chartists" in the story of his own "conversion." His fellow workman Crossthwaite, whose "wild gray eyes gleamed out from under huge knitted brows," put fear into young Alton when he first went into the tailor shop to work:

"I shrank from him at first when I heard him called a Chartist, for my dim notions of that class were that they were a very wicked set of people, who wanted to kill all the soldiers and policemen and respectable people, and rob all the shops of their contents." 1

But when Alton Locke himself began to feel the pressure of the slop-shop methods in the tailor trade, his indignation at the injustices to which the workers were made to submit made him change his mind quickly:

"From that night I was a Chartist, heart and soul, and so were a million and a half more of the best artisans in England -- at least I had no reason to be ashamed of my company. Yes: I, too, like Crossthwaite, took the upper classes at their word -- bowed down to the idol of political institutions, and pinned my hopes of salvation on 'the possession of one-twentieth part of a talker in the national palaver.' True, I desired the Charter at first as a means to glorious ends -- not only because it was the path to reforms -- social, legal, sanitary, educational -- to which the veriest Tory -- certainly not the great and good Lord Ashley -- would not object." 2

2. Ibid., 135.
Stephen Gerard's reasons for becoming a Chartist were not so much to relieve his present miseries, for he had obtained a fairly good position in the model factory of Mr. Trafford. Gerard felt that the people had lost their inheritance as free men when the industrial system set them to work like slaves with overlookers and grasping employers constantly wearing the heart and soul of a man down to dumb submission. Gerard had had the advantages of self-education, although he admitted that he could "manage a book well enough, if it be well written, and on points I care for; but I would sooner listen than read any time." His listening ability was equalled by his speaking ability, however, which made him one of the foremost leaders of his community. He swayed the thoughts and emotions of the people when they had their meetings out on the moor, just as strongly as the Chartist leaders in the smoky halls of London, where it surprised Alton Locke to hear

"men of my own class -- and lower still, perhaps, some of them -- speak with such fluency and eloquence. Such a fund of information, such excellent English -- where did they get it all?"

Before the workers wrote down their arguments, their self-taught abilities in oratory had given them a good foundation for their later journalistic attempts.

The trade union movement of the period, as we have seen, was one of very slow progress at this time. Many workers had not yet begun to realize the power that lay in collective bargaining.

1. Disraeli, Sybil, 198.
but if they did try to bargain, they were often hoodwinked by false promises of employers, and were not strong enough to overcome the latter by force of argument. Stephen Blackpool, the power-loom weaver in *Hard Times* represents many of those solid, plodding workers who did not believe in the trade unions, who tried to work the "muddle" out for themselves, and who were crushed by the might of the Mr. Bounderby's and the scorn of the trade union orators like Mr. Slackbridge. Stephen Blackpool

"might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable 'Hands' who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things. He held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates. Thousands of his comrades could talk much better than he at any time. He was a good power-loom weaver and a man of perfect integrity."

He declared, in answer to the cunning delegate of the "United Aggregate Tribunal,"

"I'm th' one single Hand in Bounderby's mill, o' a' the men theer, as don't coom in wi' th' proposed regulations. I can na' coom in wi' 'em. My friends, I doubt their doin' yo onny good. Licker they'll do yo hurt."2

Certainly there were many slick talkers who earned a good salary rousing up the workers in mill towns, then going on to another locality, leaving behind them discontented and violent men who had to bear the consequences of their revolts. The

2. Ibid., 173.
Blackpools did not realize the importance of logical and united action, and individual bargaining with a manufacturer resulted in nothing but a discharge. Bounderby, after drawing out of Stephen all his reasons for the unhappiness of mill workers, dismisses him peremptorily:

"Now it’s clear to me," said Mr. Bounderby, "that you are one of those chaps who have always got a grievance. And you go about, sowing it, and raising crops. That’s the business of your life, my friend."

"Stephen shook his head, mutely protesting that indeed he had other business to do for his life."

"You can finish off what you’re at," said Mr. Bounderby, "and then go elsewhere."

"Sir, yo’ know wel," said Stephen expressively, "that if I canna get work wi’ yo, I canna get it elseweer."

"The reply was, "What I know, I know; and what you know, you know. I have no more to say about it.""

A second stage of trade union bargaining is shown in *Mary Barton* with the well-known meeting of the masters and workmen. There was on the one hand, the "delegation of five wild, earnest-looking men," and on the other, the group of some twenty gentlemen, some of whom "were not immediately concerned in the settlement of the present question, but who were sufficiently interested to attend." The delegates’ demands were met by the meagre compromise of a raise of one shilling a week. Compromise was scorned, and the full power of the manufacturers was loosed:

"They were firstly withdrawing the proposal just made, and declaring all communication between the masters and that particular Trades' Union at an end; secondly, declaring that no master would employ any workman in future, unless he signed a declaration that he did not belong to any Trades Union; and thirdly, that the masters should pledge themselves to protect and encourage all workmen willing to accept employment on those conditions, and at the rate of wages first offered."

What method did there seem to be left for the workers, if their strikes were met with such results, and their delegates were treated with such inhumanity? Only insurrection planned by men like Stephen Gerard in secret meetings, or wild riots such as that in which Newbray Castle was looted and burned by the maddened mob. It remained for a later day to see the trade unions wield enough power without violence to influence the mighty industrialists.

These stories glorify the "strong grown men" whose powers of endurance, of argument, seeing the right, and working for it, form the main theme of the books. There are other pictures of the poor, however, which reveal further aspects of this period of the "Hungry Forties." The young factory people, whose moral state was so deplored by Lord Ashley, are vividly pictured by Disraeli, in Sybil. Dandy Mick, whose flair for smart dress, pretty girls, and complete independence at the age of sixteen certainly does not show affection for his mother:

"I should like to know what my mother ever did for me, but give me treacle and laudanum when I was a baby to stop my tongue and fill my stomach; by the token of which, as my gal says, she stunted the growth of the prettiest.

1. Gaskell, Mary Barton, 212.
2. See p. 55.
figure in all Mowbray."1

Harriet and Caroline, loved town life, and wanted nothing better than to be taken to the "Temple" at night, where bright entertainment, food and drink, made the evening pass gaily in the company of Dandy Dick and Devilsdust. Harriet had left her family, keeping all her wages to set up housekeeping with Caroline, while her father's wages could not provide food and shelter for the rest of the family. Caroline could not stand the schools and singing classes provided at Trafford's model factory, and preferred to work for Wiggins and Webster's, "where they cleaned the machinery at meal-time." Devilsdust, at seventeen, was deeply involved in trade unions, and the "Shoddy-court Literary and Scientific Institute." They were akin to Sally, in Mary Barton, whose cheap scheming led Mary into unhappy acquaintance with Harry Carson. Sally's morals were not to stand in her way if she could get a little entertainment out of her "matchmaking," and a bit of money from the mill-owner's son for doing it. None of these young people were really wilfully doing wrong, but they wanted enjoyment as a counter-action against the hard conditions of labour under which they worked all day.

The young people, and the radical workmen have their place in these novels as examples of their class, but what of the children? Their sad plight was made known in fictional form to the upper classes by Mrs. Trollope's Life and Adventures of 1. Disraeli, Sybil, 108.
Michael Armstrong, published in 1840. Through the spite of a wealthy mill-owner, Michael was separated from his invalid mother and crippled brother, and sent to one of the worst establishments of child labour in all of England, the "Deep Valley" mill, where pauper children were made to live and work under horrible conditions. Only by accident did Michael live through the terrible infection which ravaged the factory. Michael endured the starving and beating which killed most of the children at an early age, until he had the good fortune to make his escape. His later adventures were as extravagantly happy as his childhood had been miserable, but there is no doubt that the picture of child labour in the cotton factories is authentic.

All that factory construction in the 'forties was not, is idealized by Disraeli in a curious picture of Mr. Trafford's factory in Sybil. Dodd, Baines, Hutchins, and other writers on factory conditions, as well as the official reports, describe the factories, even the model factories, as very different from that of Mr. Trafford:

"... a single room, spreading over nearly two acres, and holding more than two thousand workpeople. The roof of groined arches, lighted by ventilating domes at the height of eighteen feet, was supported by hollow cast-iron columns, through which the drainage of the roof was effected. The height of the ordinary rooms in which the workpeople in manufactories are engaged, is not more than from nine to eleven feet; and these are built in stories, the heat and effluvia of the lower rooms communicated to those above, and the difficulty of ventilation insurmountable. At Mr. Trafford's, by an ingenious process, not unlike that which is
practised in the House of Commons, the ventilation was also carried on from below, so that the whole building was kept at a steady temperature, and little susceptible to atmospheric influence. The physical advantages of thus carrying on the whole work in one chamber are great: in the improved health of the people, the security against dangerous accidents to women and youth, and the reduced fatigue resulting from not having to ascend and descend, and carry materials to the higher rooms. ¹

This would have been an ideal place in which to work, if there had been a counterpart of it in reality, but it is to be feared that it still was a creation of fiction in the forties.

Poverty and want, the threat of the "Bastille," the last stand against disease and death, the hopeless despair of the starving worker with his wailing family around him—these are all described in the "purpose novels" too often to need quotation. The sorrow, the misery of the whole lower class is summed up in the speech of the game-keeper Tregarve in Kingsley's Yeast:

"... the oppression that goes on all the year round, and the filth, and the lying, and swearing, and the profligacy, that go on all the year round, and the sickening weight of debt, and the miserable grinding anxiety from rent-day to rent-day, and Saturday night to Saturday night, that crushes a man's soul down, and drives every thought out of his head but how he is to fill his stomach and warm his back, and keep a house over his head, till he daren't for his life take his thoughts one moment off the meat that perisheth — oh, sir, they [the rich] never felt this, and, therefore, they never dream that there are thousands who pass them in their daily walks who feel this, and feel nothing else."²

1. Disraeli, Sybil, 211.
2. Kingsley, Yeast, 61.
CHAPTER VI

Workmen's Literature

Between the novels by well-known writers such as those just discussed, and the first writings of the workmen themselves, there is a wide gap. Woodward says,

"For the first time a revolutionary movement in English politics produced no literature of importance. The poetry of chartism is bad, and the prose is inferior to the writings of Cobbett. It is more remarkable that there should have been little good prose and practically no verse about machinery ..."1

Helen Lockwood, in her searching study of French and English working men's literature of this period comes to the same conclusion:

"The worker struggling to speak in England met no such sympathetic and general religion of the people, no such challenge to them to free themselves. No great novel, no prophetic gospel called the workers to rise and free themselves."2

There is a certain group of poets, usually connected with the Chartist movement, who are considered the "working men" of the period: Thomas Cooper, whose Purgatory of Suicides was very popular upon its appearance in 1845, Ebenezer Elliott, whose Corn Law Rhymes were heated tirades against the wrongs suffered by the workers, and Ernest Jones, whose Chartist verses are more lyrical than Cooper's or Elliott's. Cooper was truly a workman, a cobbler by trade, and it is his story that Kingsley

1. Woodward, Age of Reform, 512.
2. Lockwood, Tools and the Man, 153.
tells in **Alton Locke**. Elliott was a cotton manufacturer, and Ernest Jones was the son of the Equerry to the Duke of Cumberland, afterwards King of Hanover. Jones was educated in Germany, and lived a fashionable life before he was "converted" to Chartism. These men did much to call the attention of the public to the literary expression of the workingman, but since Cooper has been thoroughly analyzed as a workman-poet in Helen Lockwood's study, and since Elliott and Jones had had education and experience beyond that of the ordinary workman, it is necessary to look further for examples of the workingman's thoughts and ideas.

It must be remembered that education for the masses had long been opposed by the upper classes, and the instruction which some of the workers obtained in factory schools and Sunday Schools was most elementary. A check on the numbers of persons who could write was made through the registry of marriages. In 1844, this check showed that over thirty-two per cent of the men, and over forty-nine per cent of the women married in England and Wales that year could not so much as sign their names in the register.

The Mechanics Institutions, and the Mutual Improvement Societies were the best sources of education, but these were not supported by Government aid, and the quality of the libraries and lecturers they could afford was often not high enough to inspire tired workmen to spend their few leisure hours

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gleaning instruction. As late as 1849, Thomas Cooper, in his
Letters to the Young Men of the Working Classes gave his advice
on how to learn to read, write essays, practice public speaking
in small groups, and good habits of logical thinking. The
material produced by the self-taught workingman is thus all the
more remarkable for its clarity and ease of style.

There are two sources for the earlier workmen's writings;
which appeared at first under author lines such as "by a Man-
chester operative," "by an artizan," or simply anonymously, with
no attribution. These are the early workingmen's newspapers,
and short pamphlets.

Every one of the famous Chartist either contributed to
newspapers, edited one or more, or owned a paper. The best
known was Feargus O'Connor's Northern Star; others were The
English Chartist Circular, The Labourer, The Operative, The
London Democrat, The Red Republican, and The Social Reformer. There is an amusing description of a Chartist editor given by
Kingsley in Alton Locke:

"Mr. O'Flynn, editor of the Weekly Warwhoop, whose white slave I now found myself, was, I
am afraid a pretty faithful specimen of that
class, as it existed before the bitter les-
on of the 10th of April brought the Chartist
working men and the Chartist press to their
senses. Thereon sprang up a new race of
papers, whose moral tone, whatever may be
thought of their political or doctrinal
opinions, was certainly not inferior to that
of the Whig and Tory press. The Commonwealth,
the Standard of Freedom, the Plain Speaker,

1. Cooper, Plain Speaker, March 31, 1849, 1.
were reprobates, if to be a Chartist is to be a reprobate; but none except the most one-sided bigots could deny them the praise of a stern morality and a lofty earnestness, a hatred of evil and a craving after good, which would often put to shame many a paper among the oracles of Belgravia and Exeter Hall. But those were the days of lubricity and O'Flynn. Not that the man was an unredeemed scoundrel. He was no more profligate, either in his literary of his private morals, than many a man who earns his hundreds, sometimes his thousands, a year, by prophesying smooth things to Mammon, crying in daily leaders 'Peace! peace!' when there is no peace, and daubing the rotten walls of careless luxury and self-satisfied covetousness with the untempered mortar of party statistics and garbled foreign news."

Stephen Morley, in Disraeli's Sybil was a typical picture of the journalist of the day who sympathized with the working classes, went to their meetings, and encouraged them to express themselves. Thomas Frost, the journalist who wrote Forty Years Recollections: Literary and Political, tried various cults, societies, and movements, including Chartist, because he had "ideas of the reconstruction of society and the perfectionation of human nature working in his mind." He was a hack writer for various papers and magazines, and had great sympathy with the workmen.

Because of the inaccessibility of these English papers, no examples other than those extracts found in books have been studied, so that an adequate estimate of their value as workingman's literature cannot be given. It is clear, however, that these newspapers are the first means through which the worker had self-expression. Later on, journals such as Howitt's Journal printed contributions from workmen. The following poem

is an example, upon which the editor (William Howitt) makes the comment:

"Our operative is severe, but perhaps his sufferings are, and for misery we must make ample allowance. At all events, he is a poet, and poets 'learn in suffering.'"

**Just Instinct and Brute Reason**

*by A Manchester Operative*

"Keen Hawk, on that old elm-bough gravely sitting,
Tearing that singing-bird with desperate skill;
Great Nature says that what thou dost is fitting—
Through Instinct and for hunger thou dost kill.

"Rend thou the yet warm flesh, 'tis thy vocation;
   Mind thou hast none — nor dost thou torture mind:
Nay, thou, no doubt, art gentle in thy station,
   And when thou killest art most promptly kind.

"On other tribes the lightning of thy pinion
   Flashing descends — nor always on the weak,
In other Hawks, the mates of thy dominion,
   Thou dost not flesh thy talons and thy beak.

"O, natural Hawk, our lords of wheels and spindles
   Gorge as it grows the liver of their kind;
Once in their clutch both mind and body dwindle —
   For Gain to Mercy is both deaf and blind.

"O, instinct there is none — nor show of reason,
   But outrage gross on God and Nature's plan,
With rarest gifts in blasphemy and treason,
   That Man, the souled, should piecemeal murder man."

Two more poems which are part of the "bad chartist poetry" mentioned by Woodward are also given here. They are unattributed by Groves who quotes them, and were rallying songs used at their meetings:

Welsh Chartist Song

"Uphold those bold Comrades, who suffer for you, Who nobly stand foremost, demanding your due, Away with the timid - 'tis treason to fear- To surrender or falter, when danger is near, For now that our leaders disdain to betray 'Tis base to desert them or succour delay.

'Tis time that the victims of labour and care Should reap for reward what is labour's fair share, 'Tis time that these voices in council be heard The rather than pay for the law of the sword; All power is ours, with a will of our own We conquer, united - divided we groan.

"Come hail brothers, hail the shrill sound of the horn, For ages deep wrongs have been hopelessly bourne; Despair shall no longer our spirits dismay, Nor wither the arm when upraised for the fray; The conflict for freedom is gathering night- We live to secure it, or gloriously die."

Groves, But We Shall Rise Again, 63.

Chartist Song

"I have seen the poplars flourish fast While the humbler briars bound them, I have seen them torn up by the blast Of elements around them. The lightning flashes through the sky, The thunder loud roars after, O scorch, burn the oppressors! Why? Because they withhold the Charter.

"The labourer toils and strives the more While tyrants are carousing; But hark! I hear the lions roar The British youths are rousing, The rich are liable to pain, The poor men feel the smart, Sir; But let us break the despot's chain, We soon shall have the Charter."
"Then rouse, my boys, and fight the foe,
Your weapons are truth and reason,
We will let the Whigs and Tories know,
That thinking is not treason,
Ye lords oppose us if you can,
Your own doom you seek after;
With or without you we will stand
Until we gain the Charter."

Groves, *But We Shall Rise Again*, 95.

The other early method of producing a workingman's writing was by pamphlet, often sponsored by someone of the upper classes. For example, the two following factual accounts of conditions in mills were published by patrons, but given expression of the authors' own opinions. The first of these, written in 1844, "by a Manchester operative," fell into the hands of William Rashleigh, who, as he said in the preface, decided to publish it because it gave such excellent information. He addressed it

"To the working classes of England! Read the following pages. They are written by one of your own order."

The pamphlet is called *Stubborn Facts from the Factories*, and gives figures, statistics, and arguments on cotton manufacture. It is also very strongly against the Free Traders. Engels recommended it highly and revealed the name of the "Manchester operative":

"a book from the pen of James Leach, one of the recognized leaders of the Chartists in Manchester. The author has worked for years in various branches of industry, in mills and coal mines, and is known to me personally as an honest, trustworthy, and capable man. In consequence of his political

1. Leach, James, *Stubborn Facts from the Factories*, preface.
position, he had at command extensive
detailed information as to the different
factories, collected by the workers them-
selves."

After many of the facts from the factories have been discussed,
the workman author allows himself a short exhortation against
the members of the Anti-Corn Law League:

"As friends to justice and social order, we
would advise you [Messrs. Free-Traders] to
give up your plotting, scheming, and conspir-
ing against the wages of the labourer, for you
may rest assured that there is no foundation
for a nation's prosperity but that which is
laid in the well-being, the happiness, and
contentment of the industrious classes, with-
out whose labour and skill your own property
can have no valuable existence, and for which
you have no right to claim respect or protec-
tion, but take every opportunity of deprecat-
ing the value of the working man's only prop-
erty--his labour."2

Another paragraph shows the bitterness he feels against the
practice of having the magistrates in the power of the mill
owners:

"These men are sworn to administer justice
equally between rich and poor, and the
stipendiary magistrates are well paid for
that purpose; if there be one duty they owe
to their country of a more sacred character
than another it is that of protecting the
weak oppressed against the strong oppressor;
but so far from performing that duty, in
many cases they are found on the side of
oppression, and in giving sanction to the
masters' cruelty trample under foot all
rational Law and the spirit of the British
Constitution itself."3

2. Leach, Stubborn Facts from the Factories, 36.
3. Ibid., 41.
A second piece of workman's writing is that of William Dodd, The Labouring Classes of England, published in 1847. This work was the result of an investigation made for Lord Ashley, and is written in the form of separate reports, or "letters." The author was a workman who had become crippled as a child in the factory, and after some years was no longer able to work. His survey, as a result of this, dwells largely upon the conditions of safety to the workers, and the causes of their handicaps, but gives a vivid picture of the interior of factories, the homes of workers, and conditions in agricultural communities. He, like Leach, finds in it an opportunity to express some of his own opinions, and discusses the pending Ten Hours Bill, makes a comparison between slavery in the colonies, and slavery in the factories, as well as giving an explanation of taxation and wages of the worker. He makes a plea to the middle classes:

"You are legislators as well as manufacturers—evidence that capital has served your end, but pray how are we benefited, either by your capital or legislation? You are elegantly clothed, and sumptuously fed, whilst we are in rags, and struggling against difficulties to support existence. Luxuries and comfort await you in your mansion. A poisonous atmosphere and cheerless poverty await us in our miserable abode. You are a new order, influential from your wealth. We are an old order, who have become beggared and exhausted in giving birth to you. You are the patrons of charity. We are the recipients of it. Contemporaneous with the extension of your magnificent factories, is the establishment of a new system of parochial relief; new modes of punishment; and enlarged conveniences for the reception of felons. Capital may have given the soft pillow to your head, and a flowery path to your footsteps; to
us it has made an easy transition from the factory to the prison and the poorhouse!"  

It is hard to realize that this was written by a man who reminds the reader "that the author is a working man, that he never went to school."  

Another specimen of workingman's prose has already been quoted—that of Mr. Oldfield in a letter to J. Cobden Unwin. Although he tells us that he was sent to a free school to get polished in his schooling, it is obvious that he has never attained the fluency which Dodd and Leach, self-taught, could command. 

Samuel Bamford, remembered for his autobiography, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, was a Lancashire hand-loom weaver who wrote verses popular at the time. The best known of these is his *God Help the Poor*, of which the last stanza is:

"God help the poor, who in lone valleys dwell,  
Or by far hills where whin and heather grow;  
Theirs is a story sad indeed to tell;  
Yet little cares the world, and less 'twould know  
About the toil and want men undergo.  
The wearying loom doth call them up at morn;  
They work till worn-out nature sinks to sleep;  
They taste, but are not fed. The snow drifts deep  
Around the fireless cot, and blocks the door;  
The night-storm howls a dirge across the moor;  
And shall they perish thus—oppressed and lorn?  
Shall toil and famine, hopeless, still be borne?  
No! God will yet arise and help the poor!"  

A Scottish counterpart of Samuel Bamford was William Thom, author of *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver*. He was a

2. Ibid., 12.  
factory cripple, like Dodd, but was not badly disabled. In the prefatory note, his biographer describes him as a "man who was extolled in his day as second only to Burns."¹ It is true that he enjoyed a short popularity, and was fortunate in having a very generous patron who invited him to London and Paris, where he was feted by society. Thom's poems are lyrical but slight songs, mainly suggested by incidents in his own life or current happenings. There is more of interest as "social writing" in his introductory note to the reader, in which he sets forth his philosophy:

"I have long had a notion that many of the heart burnings that run through the SOCIAL WHOLE, spring, not so much from the distinctiveness of classes, as their mutual ignorance of each other. The miserably rich look on the miserably poor with distrust and dread, scarcely giving them credit for sensibility sufficient to feel their own sorrows. That is ignorance with its gilded side. The poor in turn, foster a hatred of the wealthy as a sole inheritance—look on grandeur as their natural enemy, and bend to the rich man's rule in gall and bleeding scorn. Shallows on the one side, and Demagogues on the other, are the portions that come oftnest into contact."²

One of the best of his poems which depicts the unhappiness of the poor was written just after his wife had died. He was unemployed, and his little boy, from lack of food and care became ill and was taken to the hospital:

"Thy father's board is too narrow, my child,  
For ills like thine to be there;  
The comfortless hearth of thy parent is cold,  
And his light but the light of despair.

¹ Thom, Rhymes and Recollections, vii.  
² Ibid., xi.
"Has God disown'd them, the children of toil?
Is the promise of Heaven no more?
Shall Industry weep!—shall the pamper'd suppress
The sweat-earned bread of the poor?

"Alas, and the wind as it blew and blew
On the famished and houseless then,
Has blighted the bud of my heart's best hope,
And it never may blossom again."

There is another type of workman's literature of which few examples date from this period. This is the autobiography, which had a greater popularity later, when interest in the working poor grew more widespread. Samuel Bamford's *Passages in the Life of a Radical* appeared in 1844, and in 1847, Christopher Thomson's *Autobiography of an Artisan* was published. This is an entertaining and delightful account of a man who tried many different types of work; he was apprenticed to a ship-builder, went to Greenland as a sailor, cast his luck with some strolling players, and finally returned to his native village near Sherwood Forest to establish himself in the trade of a painter. Here he helped to organize a "Mutual Improvement Association," and here, with his wife and seven children around him in his one-room cottage, he wrote the story of his adventures. He dedicated it "To the artisans and labourers of England, fellow workmen in the holy cause of self elevation, and to the friends of the industry of England, of whatever rank or station." In a preface, and in the first chapter, he addresses the workingmen of England, telling them that their only hope is in education. He writes vehemently against the upper class idea that education

makes the poor dangerous, and asserts that strike riots and Chartist demonstrations would not be of the "physical force" type if the people only had education enough to understand the issues involved. He tells the upper class, "The safety valve is education."  

He says it is a bold step which he has taken:

"The time is not distant when it was thought extremely presuming in an artisan to intermeddle with anything except that which was considered to be, exclusively, the whole business of his life -- to work -- to endure, without a murmur, unceasing physical toil, leaving refinement in everything, to the conventionally ordained professors of thought."  

The upper class will say when they learn of its publication:

"What! a labouring man to think of writing books! Shocking, truly! What next? La!"

The book does not need apologies for its "natural roughness"; its humor, brisk style and human interest offset any inclusion of material not quite up to middle class priggishness. It won high praise in Howitt's Journal:

"Some years ago, and the lives of artizans, soldiers, and sailors were written by gentlemen and ladies, as pleasant and amusing works of fiction; knowing at the same time but little of what they wrote. Now times are changed: the artizan, the weaver, the common soldier read and write and think, and a new class of literature has sprung up amongst us, valuable as truth itself, because it is the simple genuine reflex of truth. One of these works now lies before us and we know not when we have read anything with greater interest. ... many passages ... might have been written

2. Ibid., preface.
3. Ibid., 26.
differently: but first-rate literary
polish is not to be expected from such
a work, and looking beneath these... we
find its heart sound and throbbing
with a healthy life stream."

Other autobiographies which followed Christopher Thomson's
were Alexander Somerville's *Autobiography of a Working Man*, 1848;
Mary Merryweather's *Experience of Factory Life*, 1862, and
Thomas Cooper's *Life, Written by Himself*, 1872.

From these samples of workmen's poetry and prose, it is
clear that they all have sentiments and qualities in common.
Their most outstanding characteristic is bitterness toward the
upper classes. Thom's explanation of their mutual ignorance is
the only exoneration of upper class indifference and lower class
hate. In the "purpose novels" there was usually some "rapport"
established between the classes by a figure such as Egremont,
Launcelot, Louisa, or Lady Ellerton. For the workingman, there
was no go-between. His appeal was brutal, direct, and scathing.
In his early writing, as in his early action, the worker knew no
halfway method of dealing with the upper classes.

There was little imagination shown in the workman's writing.
The instruction given at the Mechanics Institutions was avowedly
designed "to improve the mind," and it was greatly deplored
when works of fiction began to be included in their libraries.2
The only subject upon which the worker was qualified to write,
in that early period, was his work, or the ills and injustices
resulting from labour conditions, so that the sight of a hawk,

---

or poplar trees, or a storm, instead of arousing his imagination served merely as a comparison with his own restless lot.

Their literary quality is of little merit. They probably would not survive today if they did not also have some value as descriptions or manifestations of the social life of the day. But as the first small voices of a new class, they are strong and vigorous, giving promise of far greater things to come.

Carlyle struck the keynote when he prophesied in 1843:

"Much there is which cannot yet be organized in this world; but somewhat also which can, somewhat also which must. When one thinks, for example, what Books are becoming and becoming for us, what Operative Lancashires are become; what a Fourth Estate, and innumerable Virtualities not yet got to be Actualities are become and becoming, — one sees Organisms enough in the dim huge Future; and 'United Services' quite other than the redcoat one; and much, even in these years struggling to be born!"  

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions

The period of the "Hungry Forties" marked a turning point in the history of the British working class. A combination of the injustices of the industrial system with commercial crises and agricultural failures during these years was more than the people could bear. If these misfortunes had occurred singly, or gradually, the workers might have submitted to them without complaint, but together they provided cause for concentrated effort against an economic and social system which had long ground them down.

It is remarkable that the working class, with little education, and few strong leaders, saw so clearly the way to redress their wrongs, through the six points of the Charter, through trade union organization, through regulation of working hours. In spite of years of tyranny by the industrialists, the workers did not become enslaved in spirit. Their action paved the way for the incorporation of democratic ideals into the British aristocratic order, and laid the foundation for many of the reforms which are today part of British law.

The result of the revolt of the working class was to expose to view the evils which they had so long endured. The awakening of a "social conscience" gave rise to a new group of writers, through whose stories the middle and upper classes were made aware of the miseries of the poor. The effort of the workman towards self-expression was also an indication of his
new, independent attitude.

The final effect of the violence and hatred loosed in the "Hungry Forties" was one of benefit to both society and literature. Literature advocated reforms, while society inspired new forms of literature. In this way, the crises of the "Hungry Forties" were not suffered in vain.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The era known as the "Hungry Forties" in England is considered as approximately the years 1840-1844, but to thoroughly understand the events of these years, the longer period 1838-1848 has been studied. The investigation is limited to the social and economic changes which affected workers in textile manufactures, especially those in cotton mills. The literary results of this period are studied in terms of one representative "purpose novel" of each of the following writers: Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Trollope, Dickens, Disraeli, and Kingsley, and a selected group of workingmen's pamphlets, poems, and autobiographies. Works published within this ten-year period have been used as often as possible.

Six definite social and economic trends of the nineteenth century are considered, which manifested themselves during this ten-year period, with a brief survey of their appearance before 1838, and a more detailed description during 1838-1848. These movements were (1) Trade Unions and Socialism, (2) The Chartist Movement, (3) The Struggle for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, (4) The Ten Hours Movement, (5) The Poor Law Amendment, (6) The Shift in Population and Economic Crises.

Some writers like Carlyle, considered the "Hungry Forties" a diseased period, although it marked the beginning of upper class social conscience, while others, such as Hall and Albion thought it part of the prosperous Victorian age. An analysis of the major events of the period leaves little doubt that the
people suffered serious wrongs which called for immediate reform.

The events of the "Hungry Forties" are keynoted by the Queen's Speech at the opening of Parliament each year, with its survey of the year just past, and her recommendations for ensuing Parliamentary action. During the "Hungry Forties" there were severe economic depressions, the first beginning before 1838, and growing worse until 1842, another in 1845-6, with the failure of the potato crop, and still another in 1847 after the banking crisis. The Revolution in France in 1848, caused great unrest in England, with threats of similar revolt from the working class.

The efforts of the workers to achieve representation through universal suffrage and other points of their Charter resulted in the Petitions of 1839, 1842, and 1848, all of which were rejected by Parliament. Trade Unions and Socialism showed marked growth during this time, while the steady hammering for factory reform had results in the passage of the Ten Hours Act in 1847. The New Poor Law of 1834 which had imposed such stringent restrictions upon granting relief to the poor was modified because of the undue hardship it inflicted during these years of unemployment. The bad housing conditions and sanitary laxity of large manufacturing towns were exposed, and legislation was started to wipe out these evils. The policy of Free Trade was established in 1845 with the abolition of the Corn Laws.

The awakened social conscience of the upper classes soon
gave rise to an interest in those who were less fortunately situated. The condition of the poor was brought to public attention not only by official reports, but also through fictionalized accounts. The novels of the "purpose writers" of the day truly portrayed the bad housing, the Chartist leaders, the struggles of Trade Union members with the industrialists, factory construction, the young peoples' morals, the children in factories, and many other facets of the life of the poor. These sympathetic descriptions were of great value in the creation of better understanding between the classes and represented a new type of realistic literature.

At the same time, the worker was beginning to express himself, first through the aid of workingmen's and Chartist newspapers, then through pamphlets and articles. These were usually on technical matters of factory conditions, but gave a little opportunity for the worker to express his own opinion on current matters. Since most of the workers were self-taught, their writings cannot be considered "polished literature." Their chief characteristic was bitterness toward the upper classes, while a lack of knowledge of anything beyond their own sphere of life made their writing unimaginative. Not until workers like Christopher Thomson had realized the value of education did further efforts of the working class towards literary expression develop types such as the workingman's autobiography.

It must be concluded from this analysis of the sufferings and privations of the working class during the "Hungry Forties" that although the price they paid in misery was great, it was
worthwhile because it laid the foundation for many of the great social reforms of the latter part of the nineteenth century, and even those still being put into effect today. It also caused the emergence of two new types of literature, the purpose novel, and the self-expression of the workingman. In this way the "Hungry Forties" was an important period in English history.
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