

ELIZABETH GASKELL:
AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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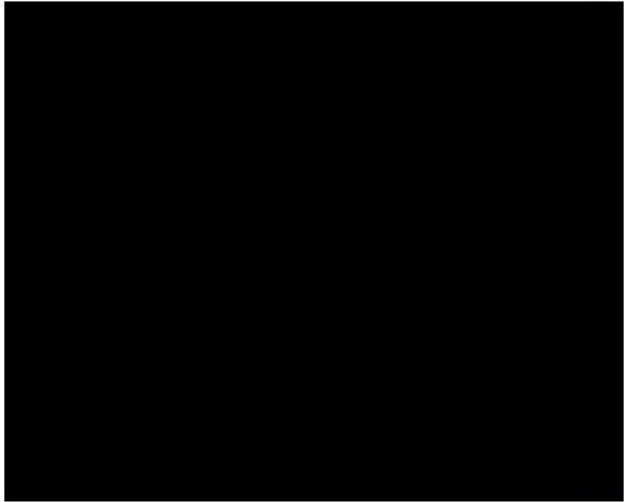
ABSTRACT

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In her novels, Elizabeth Gaskell provides a picture of what life was like in early Victorian England. The novels deal chiefly with two aspects of nineteenth century England: the effects of urban industrialism and the changing pattern of rural life. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal, to determine how well it reflects the actual history of the period.

Elizabeth Gaskell's representation of Manchester and its ethics, of the conditions of working-class life and labour, of working-class consciousness, of trade unionism, of Chartism, and of the industrial middle class when compared to the various parliamentary papers, to other official documents and to the remarks of social critics, such as Taine and Tocqueville, is accurate and comprehensive. Her portrayal of country life and the aristocratic ideal, if less grim than her picture of urban life, is no less correct within its limits. The changing role of the professional middle class, the effects of Evangelicalism and scientific farming, and the elaborate lines of social demarcation in rural England as described in Elizabeth Gaskell's novels are well documented in reliable historical source materials. Of course she could not cover all the multifarious aspects of either the industrial city or the country. Her concern is with social rather than political or economic history, and

she writes from what in the twentieth century would be called a liberal middle-class perspective. Within these boundaries, Elizabeth Gaskell's novels are a valuable source for any student of the early Victorian period.



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For Mary

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is not literary criticism, at least as it is usually written; the purpose is not to determine whether Elizabeth Gaskell was a better novelist than any of her contemporaries or whether her literary works form a coherent whole. Rather, the objective is to examine her fictional writing from the historian's perspective, to evaluate her work in terms of how well it reflects life and conditions in nineteenth century England.

Her novels focus on life in industrial Manchester in the eighteen thirties, forties, and fifties and on life in small country villages. Her first and fourth novels, Mary Barton and North and South, were praised at the time of their publication more for their authentic and accurate description of Manchester life than for their artistic merit. Even W. R. Greg, who disagreed with the purpose of Mary Barton, could not deny that the conversations in the novel approached "very nearly in tone and style, the conversations carried out in the dingy cottages of Lancashire." The Parliamentary Blue Books and other sources from the early Victorian era indicate that Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of industrialism, factories, municipal health conditions, working class consciousness, and Chartism are unexaggerated and historically correct. In some cases, her novels are actually

the best available source for the historian. For instance, the Claphams relied heavily upon Elizabeth Gaskell's depiction of a dinner party in North and South in their discussion of the new industrial middle class, and her development of the Manchester ethos is unsurpassed in either fiction or nonfiction. Her country novels, particularly Wives and Daughters, My Lady Ludlow, and Cranford, are as rich in authentic detail as her industrial novels; and again, what sources there are tend to corroborate Elizabeth Gaskell's representation of early nineteenth century rural England. She was able to perceive the very gradual forces of change that have continued to work into our century, phenomena such as the rise of the professional middle class, the decline of aristocratic privilege, and the revolution in agricultural methods.

An explanatory note on Chapters I and II is in order. Though the intent of this thesis is an evaluation of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels as historical sources, Chapters I and II do not directly bear on this subject. They have been included for several reasons. The biographical section not only places Elizabeth Gaskell in time, but also attempts to show the major influences in her life and perhaps to explain why she saw things as she did; moreover, it shows how she was connected with the two worlds (Manchester and the country) that she chose to depict. Chapter II, dealing with her major works, indicates how her work has been received by critics, both Victorian and modern. The

second chapter also provides an opportunity to discuss certain topics that do fit into later chapters. Most important, it provides an opportunity to show the sophisticated sense of historical perception demonstrated in all her major works, and her painstaking research or firsthand experience of all she wrote about.

I

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Perhaps what is most surprising about Elizabeth Gaskell and what makes her work an unusual and valuable historical source, is her perspective. Her first novel was not published until she was 38 years old, and prior to that, her life fitted into the prescribed patterns of a Victorian middle-class woman. She was raised in a small country village, was educated in a moderately good, yet not uncommon school for young girls of her class, was happily married, had six children and ran a fairly ordinary Victorian household in Manchester. Though not much interested in national politics, politically and socially she was a moderate; she was neither a Whig or Tory partisan nor a radical. Seeing the inevitability of change, [she advocated thoughtful, deliberate, and rational transition, and though a firm believer in human rights in the broadest sense, she was reluctant to become associated with a drive for the rights of married women.] The essential difference between Elizabeth Gaskell and the average Victorian housewife is that she was a writer. However, unlike the Brontë sisters or George Eliot, writing for Elizabeth Gaskell was not an all-consuming passion: it was an avocation. Because her background and experiences shaped her perception of English society in the

first half of the nineteenth century, it is important to examine her life in some detail.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell was born on September 29, 1810, in Chelsea, then a peaceful suburb of London, the eighth and last child of William and Elizabeth Holland Stevenson. Of the seven children preceding her, only a brother John survived infancy. He entered the merchant service and rose to the rank of lieutenant, but he disappeared in 1822 under somewhat mysterious circumstances on a voyage to India and was never heard from again. Thus, by the time Elizabeth was twelve, she was an only child.¹

Relatively little is known about Elizabeth Holland Stevenson though more is known about her family. The Hollands were in rather comfortable circumstances, having been landowners of some importance in Cheshire since the mid-seventeenth century.² They were also part of the great dissenting tradition. There were several Unitarian ministers in the family circle, and others of her relations were members of the professional class, being doctors and solicitors. Perhaps the most prominent in her family was Sir Henry Holland, Elizabeth Gaskell's cousin; she modestly referred to this man, who in the 1840's became physician in service to Prince Albert, as a "physician of some repute."³ The Hollands were also connected by marriage to the Darwins and the Wedgwoods. In her letters, Elizabeth Gaskell often mentioned dining with the Wedgwoods and spoke of Charles Darwin as her cousin.⁴

If biographical details about Elizabeth Holland are obscure, such cannot be said of William Stevenson, a man of mixed fortunes and wide interests. After receiving a classical education at Berwick Grammar School, he went to study theology at Daventry Academy, a Unitarian institution renowned for its liberal thought and practices.⁵ He became a tutor upon leaving Daventry, first in France and then at the Manchester Academy. Sometime prior to his marriage in 1797, he was named minister of Dob Lane Unitarian Chapel at Fallsworth, a rural community near Manchester.⁶ However, Stevenson did not remain in the ministry for long; at the age of 25 he resigned his living of £40 annually because of "scruples in regard to a paid ministry."⁷ After his marriage and under the influence of his close friend James Cleghorn (after whom his daughter Elizabeth was named), Stevenson took up scientific farming near Edinburgh.⁸ But the farming enterprise failed, and Stevenson returned to tutoring. At the same time he began to contribute articles to the Whiggish Edinburgh Review and the more radical Westminster Review, two periodicals highly respected for their scholarship and integrity.⁹ In 1803 he became an editor for the Scot's Magazine, a monthly "repository of literature, history and politics."¹⁰

In 1806 the Stevensons removed to London to make preparations for a journey to India, as Stevenson had been offered the position of personal secretary to James Maitland, eighth Earl of Lauderdale, who was to be Governor General

of India. Maitland's appointment was vigorously opposed by the Board of Directors of the East India company for political reasons, and Fox was forced to withdraw Maitland as his nominee. Maitland, who was made High Keeper of the Great Seal of Scotland and who became a member of the Privy Council, was able to secure a position for Stevenson as Keeper of the Records of the Treasury in 1806.¹¹ Soon after this appointment, Stevenson declined a professorship of technology at Kharkov University in Russia and retained his position at the Treasury until his death in 1829.¹² While Keeper of the Records, he continued to write on various and sundry topics, including agricultural commerce, travel, chivalry, and surveying, as well as a life of Caxton for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.¹³

Stevenson's competence as a writer and historian was recognized by his associates in the government. A memoir incorporated in the Treasury minutes stated that "loving knowledge for its own sake, Mr. Stevenson resembled a literary character of the last century"; his talents were also recognized in Longman's Obituary for 1830:

The literary and scientific world has sustained a great loss in the death of Mr. Stevenson William Stevenson had the true spirit of a faithful historian, and, contrary to the practices too prevalent in those days, dived into original sources for information.¹⁴

His daughter Elizabeth also had a similar approach to scholarship. That she was greatly concerned about accuracy can be seen in the lengths to which she went to get precise

information while writing her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.¹⁵ This spirit can also be seen in the correctness of factual background in novels such as Mary Barton, North and South, and Sylvia's Lovers.¹⁶

Mrs. Stevenson died when her daughter Elizabeth was only thirteen months old. The child was sent to live with her mother's sister, Hannah Lumb, in Knutsford, a small, picturesque village about twenty miles south of Manchester.¹⁷ It was on the south road to London, and so not completely isolated.¹⁸ Knutsford was favourably situated in general; it was far removed from the noise and the grime of the industrial centre; and equally distant from the poverty of much of rural England.

Elizabeth Gaskell's childhood was pleasant. Her aunt and surrogate mother loved her as her own child. Also there were several other Holland relations living in or around Knutsford who took an interest in Elizabeth. She went on calls with her uncle, Peter Holland, a surgeon and father of Sir Henry Holland, and often visited her grandfather at Sandlebridge Farm. Aunt Lumb saw to it that Elizabeth learned to sew, to cook, and to take an active part in her religion by teaching Sunday School. Elizabeth Gaskell's childhood seems to have been very ordinary and free of trauma. As Haldane wrote about the future novelist's childhood: "it was a life like a hundred others: no tempestuous youth of mental crises such as those through which

George Eliot was passing at the same time.¹⁹ It was perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell's experiences at Knutsford more than anything else which shaped her concept of what constituted an ideal society. Hollingsford in Wives and Daughters, Hanbury in My Lady Ludlow, and of course Cranford, like Knutsford, are pleasant and nearly ideal communities, something which Manchester could never be.

The only real unhappiness she experienced in these years at Knutsford was when she went to London to visit her father. Stevenson had remarried one Catherine Thomson, and it is apparent from Elizabeth Gaskell's letters that she did not care much for her stepmother.²⁰ Despite her earlier unhappy difficulties with her stepmother, by the time she had finished school and returned to London to nurse her dying father, most differences seem to have been reconciled; but Elizabeth would never be close to her stepmother. In 1855, she wrote to a cousin that she planned to see her stepmother in Glasgow and that it had been twenty-five years or more since they had last met.²¹ Molly Gibson's difficulty in adjusting to her new mother, Hyacinth Clare in Wives and Daughters, is reminiscent of Elizabeth Gaskell's own experience.

At twelve or thirteen, Elizabeth was sent to Avonbank, a school for girls, at Stratford-upon-Avon. The school was run by four young sisters, relations of William Stevenson's second wife.²² Avonbank was a cut above most schools for young ladies in the early nineteenth century, for most

ranged from the horrifying, like Jane Eyre's Lowood, to the ridiculous, as was Miss Pinkerton's Academy which Thackery satirized in Vanity Fair.²³ The annual tuition at Avonbank was £140 - £150, considerably more than at similar schools.²⁴ The curriculum was generally liberal and included the standard courses in English composition, mathematics, deportment, French, geography and music as well as special courses in ancient and modern history and Italian.²⁵ One other aspect of Elizabeth Gaskell's five years at Avonbank ought to be mentioned: though Avonbank was open to dissenters, there was no Unitarian Chapel near the school.²⁶ Accordingly, Elizabeth Gaskell attended Church of England services during her entire stay. This seemed to trouble neither her nor her family nor did it not alter her firm adherence to Unitarian principles. However, the years of frequent exposure to Anglicanism did leave some mark on Elizabeth. In a letter to her daughter Marianne in 1854, comparing the merits of Church and Chapel Elizabeth Gaskell wrote:

I quite agree with you in feeling more devotional in Church than in Chapel; and I wish our Puritan ancestors had not left out so much that they might have kept in of the beautiful and impressive church service. But I always do feel as if the Litany--the beginning of it I mean--and one or two other parts did so completely go against my belief that it would be wrong to deaden my sense of its serious error by hearing it too often My own wish would be that you should go to Chapel in the morning and to Church in the evening, when there is nothing except the Doxology to offend

one's sense of truth ... although I am so fond of the Church service and prayers as a whole that I should feel tempted as you do.²⁷

After finishing at Avonbank Elizabeth returned to Knutsford but was soon called away to London to care for her ailing father. During this time Stevenson tutored his daughter in Latin, French, and Italian, perhaps with the idea that she might have to become a governess some day, for his estate was small and he had to provide for the children of his second marriage.²⁸ Following Stevenson's death in 1829, his daughter remained in London but not with her stepmother. Initially she stayed with her uncle, Swinton Holland, who lived in Park Lane, and then moved to the home of her cousin, Henry Holland, the physician. As may be inferred from the social position of these Holland relations, Elizabeth Gaskell had a taste of fashionable society while in London. If her account of this world in North and South is to be accepted, she did not much like it.²⁹ Though she was from all accounts a pretty, vivacious, fun loving girl, she found London society rather too superficial and showy.³⁰

After leaving London, she went to stay with William Turner, a Unitarian minister in Newcastle. A popular and active minister at the Hanover Square Congregation, Turner was a man of considerable distinction. He founded the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society, the Natural History Society, and was in fact connected with almost

every benevolent and scientific interest in the town.³¹ In addition to these accomplishments, he was one of the prominent figures of the Unitarian movement in the first half of the nineteenth century.³² Elizabeth lived with the Turners from 1829-1831, and Turner doubtless had a significant spiritual and intellectual influence upon her. As Margaret Ganz has pointed out, Turner probably inspired Elizabeth Gaskell's characterization of the kind, sympathetic Thurstan Benson in Ruth.³³

Early in 1831, a serious cholera epidemic broke out in Newcastle. Elizabeth and William Turner's daughter, Anne, were first sent to Edinburgh and later travelled to Manchester to visit with John Robberds, minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel. It was at the Robberds that Elizabeth met William Gaskell, a serious young junior minister at Cross Street Chapel; less than a year later they were married.

William Gaskell, like his wife, was brought up in the ambience of Unitarianism. The eldest son of a sail-canvas manufacturer, he was born in Latchford, Lancashire on July 24, 1805. Like his father before him, he attended Warrington Academy, the most prestigious of all dissenting schools of higher education. Though Warrington was primarily a school for sons of affluent dissenters, it was ecumenical in character. A third of the students were Anglican and there were a few pupils of various religious persuasions from the West Indies and America.³⁴ Like Daventry Academy which William Stevenson attended, Warrington was a bastion of liberal thought in the late eighteenth

century. Joseph Priestley, chemist and radical religious leader within the Unitarian faith, and Gilbert Wakefield, a well-known supporter of the French Revolution had both been tutors at Warrington; and Thomas Malthus, though an Anglican, was an alumnus of the Academy.³⁵ In such an atmosphere it would have been difficult for William Gaskell to have escaped without being steeped in liberal thought.

After graduation from Warrington, he attended the University of Glasgow where he took an M.A.; upon deciding to become a minister, he then went to Manchester College, a school of Divinity in York. In 1828 he was appointed junior minister under John Robberds at Cross Street Chapel in Manchester; in 1854 he became Cross Street's senior minister, a position he retained until his death in 1884.

Besides performing his ministerial and congregational duties admirably, William Gaskell had a number of other interests. He chaired public welfare committees concerned with the problems of intemperance and sanitation.³⁶ In 1844, 1862, and 1875, he was asked to deliver the opening sermon to the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, the highest honour which a Unitarian minister could be accorded.³⁷ William Gaskell was a scholar as well. He was a private tutor, translated German poetry and hymnology, and published articles on the Lancashire dialect. On three occasions he was asked either to speak at or to present papers to the British Association of the Arts and Science.³⁸ He tutored Catherine and Susanna Winkworth,

interpreters of nineteenth century British life, and translated some poems for Catherine's Lyra Germanica.³⁹ In 1854 his "Two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect" were appended to the fifth edition of Mary Barton, and his knowledge of dialect speech must have been helpful in his wife's rendering of dialect in her novels.⁴⁰ So thorough in their treatment of the Lancashire dialect were the Gaskells that The English Dialect Dictionary relied heavily upon their work.⁴¹

William Gaskell was also a teacher of some importance in Manchester. Because of his broad background in arts and letters he was asked to become a professor of English literature at Manchester New College.⁴² In 1858 he was made a lecturer at Manchester Workingmen's College, where he taught evening classes. A former pupil described William Gaskell as "the most beautiful reader" he had ever heard, that "prose or poetry seemed to acquire new lustre and elegance when he read it."⁴³ Perhaps influenced by his own liberal training, he invited discussion and encouraged his students to write on subjects of their own choosing.⁴⁴

Gaskell's manners, his liberal, enlightened attitudes, and his penchant for scholarship can best be understood in terms of his Unitarian background. And perhaps, too, Unitarianism was the greatest single force which shaped his wife's values and attitudes, since she was, with the possible exception of her schooling at Avonbank, in the continual presence of Unitarians and Unitarianism.⁴⁵ Certainly

the social and philosophical ideas expressed in her novels are to some degree a reflection of her Unitarian heritage, and for this reason it is important to consider Unitarianism in some detail.

Unitarians were a peculiar group of dissenters. They were few in number; the great majority of their membership were affluent, intellectual middle-class people. Their theology was radical, an aberration in nineteenth century Christianity. Whereas most denominations, Anglicans not excluded, were concerned with the doctrines of damnation, original sin, human depravity, absolute predestination, or the literal interpretation of the Bible, Unitarians were not.⁴⁶ In fact, Unitarians had little use for abstract theological or metaphysical discussion, Christianity being for them a way of life rather than a system of doctrines. They were primarily concerned with the ethical and moral implications of the Christian religion, with the meaning of Christ's life. As Joseph Ashtor, the Unitarian pastor at Knutsford in 1824 wrote, Unitarianism was nothing more than a "system of doctrine which directly bears with its whole weight and force on the production of religious and moral excellence."⁴⁷ Perhaps the most succinct statement of the fundamental tenets of the Unitarian faith is to be found in the British and Irish Unitarian Almanac and Annual Reporter (1848). The Almanac asserted that Unitarians were a body of Christians who rejected the idea of the Trinity, who offered divine worship to the Father only, who were

friends of free inquiry and the use of reason to examine both doctrine and scripture, who believed in the paternal character of God, and who believed in the inherent goodness of man.⁴⁸

Certainly what most distinguished the Unitarians from the Anglicans was their denial of the divinity of Christ. Unitarians looked on Christ as an exemplary character and on his life as an inspiration to strive for perfection. In his sermon on "The Injustice of Denying Unitarians the Christian Name" William Gaskell advanced the idea that:

We [Unitarians] regard him as a Redeemer, and a saviour, only so far as through him we are quickened and strengthened to throw off the bondage of sin and saved from the domination of evil persons.⁴⁹

Like her fellow Unitarians, Elizabeth Gaskell was steadfast in her belief that God the Father and Jesus Christ were not of the same nature. In a letter to her daughter Marianne discussing the attractiveness of Anglicanism, she pointedly expressed her Arianism:

One thing I am clear and sure about is that this Jesus Christ was not equal to his Father; that, however divine a being he was not God, and that worship as God addressed to him is wrong in me.⁵⁰

Another fact separating Unitarians from other Christian bodies was their acceptance of doctrine found only in the New Testament and further, only that doctrine amenable to reason was to be regarded as a matter of faith.⁵¹ The Unitarian denial of the Trinity was firmly based on logical

and rational arguments. William Gaskell in his sermon on "The Person of Christ" (1853) asserted that it was impossible to believe in the Trinity, because such a concept was contrary to the laws of reason; it was irrational to believe that Christ was both man and God, the attributes of these two different states of being could not co-exist.⁵² He went on to say that if "reason be not competent to decide in a case like this, where it discovers such open and manifest contradiction it is not competent to decide on any question whatever" and that men might as well abandon themselves to "universal scepticism."⁵³ James Martineau, probably the most important Unitarian figure in the second half of the nineteenth century, supported Gaskell's affirmation of the competence of man's reason. [To him as to every other Unitarian, doctrine, religious or otherwise, had to be rationally as well as emotionally satisfying.⁵⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell often reflected this same attitude both in her novels and in her personal correspondence. In North and South she obliges her characters, manufacturing and working-class alike, to subject their beliefs to the scrutiny of objective reasoning.⁵⁵] Perhaps the most explicit statement of this principle is found in a letter to her daughter Marianne, who after only a short time away from home had expressed some strong opinions about the economic process. Elizabeth Gaskell writes: "Seriously, dear, you must not become a partizan in politics or anything else-- you must have a 'reason for the faith' that is in you."⁵⁶

Though Unitarians respected the power of man's reason to guide him in matters of faith, they realized that there were no absolutes. As Joseph Priestley had hypothesized, no man, no single historical period could offer an infallible interpretation of the Bible. Life was always in flux, new knowledge displaced the old, and man had to come to grips with reality in terms of his own historical background.⁵⁷ Unitarians acknowledged that mankind's lot was decidedly different in the nineteenth century than it had been during the first or second century and that men were required to find new answers to new questions. Hence, Unitarians, though notable for their tolerant attitude toward other Christian bodies, had a very low opinion of Calvinists, Methodists, or Low Church Anglicans who resisted change and who continued to interpret scripture literally without considering it in light of historical development of in respect to their own experience.⁵⁸ In North and South and Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell exhibits this same attitude, although not contemptuous of Methodists and Fundamentalists, she is at best condescending.⁵⁹

Like many nineteenth century Englishmen, Unitarians were optimists, perhaps even more than others. Their optimism arose in part from their concept of God. Because the Unitarian God was neither wrathful nor jealous but merciful, good, just, and benevolent, he was not to be feared; rather, he was to be loved. Likewise, because man was God's creation, he was basically good and what imperfections he had

were progressively being overcome.⁶⁰ Like the fifth century Pelagians, Unitarians were confident that man would eventually channel all his desires in the proper direction, that as history unfolded man became more perfect.

Unitarians and Unitarianism were regarded with mixed feelings during Elizabeth Gaskell's lifetime. Though radical theologically, they were far from radical socially or politically. Like most middle-class Victorians, they had "an intense regard for respectability and conventionality in manners."⁶¹ Catherine Winkworth, a friend of the Gaskells and authoress of a number of books on German hymnology, remarked that though an Anglican, she sought the company of Unitarians while in Manchester, who were, as a body, "far superior to any other in intellect, culture and refinement of manners."⁶² Although she enjoyed Unitarians she was less enthusiastic about Unitarianism itself. She disliked the way in which the clergy was put on the same level as the laity and felt that there was something substantially lacking in the communion service.⁶³ Others were more critical. One nineteenth century man characterized Unitarianism as "One God, no hell, and twenty shillings in the pound"; another as "a feather bed to catch a falling Christian."⁶⁴ For most Victorians, Unitarianism was too rationalistic, too prone to casuistry. William Cobbett satirized the Unitarians as "that queer sect, who will have all the wisdom in the world to themselves; who will believe and won't believe; [and] who will be Christians and who won't have a Christ."⁶⁵

Elizabeth Gaskell's Unitarianism permeated her works. She was convinced of the goodness of God and the infinite possibilities of man. In her novels there are no truly evil characters. Even Mr. Preston, the estate manager in Wives and Daughters, who causes a good deal of trouble and is somewhat of a "bad hat," is portrayed as a shallow man rather than as a bad man. Likewise, Mr. Bradshaw, the pharisee in Ruth, eventually recognizes the error of his ways and attempts to correct himself. Throughout her work Elizabeth Gaskell reiterates the Unitarian faith in the regenerative powers of man.⁶⁶ Whether depicting the problems of industrial Manchester or the English countryside her solution was always the same and typically Unitarian. Social ills were to be solved by Christian love and common sense; that is, Christianity applied in its broadest and simplest sense in conjunction with reason and intellectual rigour would bring reform.⁶⁷ Moreover, in her novels and again reflecting the Unitarian attitude, religion is presented as a way of life not as any one system of doctrines; nor is the repository of religious belief to be found in churches or in clergymen. In none of her novels is the church anything more than a physical structure and her clergymen like Mr. Hale in North and South and Mr. Ashton in Wives and Daughters are no more important, no holier than the common man.⁶⁸ In common with other Unitarians she saw religion as a conciliatory force, stabilizing matters and indicating the proper course of action.⁶⁹

Although the Gaskells' marriage was not that "perfect union of tastes as well as affections" as A. W. Ward and earlier biographers of Elizabeth Gaskell have portrayed it, it was in many ways remarkably happy.⁷⁰ It is true that Elizabeth Gaskell was often less than pleased with her husband's habit of withdrawing to his study, more so when guests were present.⁷¹ She also somewhat resented his commitments as minister and lecturer in Manchester. He was so involved in his duties that he was reluctant to leave Manchester and was infrequently persuaded to take holidays.⁷² As a result, many of her sojourns to the country were made without her husband.

William Gaskell was a more serious-minded individual than his wife. He was more of a scholar, more of an intellectual than she. He enjoyed translating German poetry and reading Niebuhr. Elizabeth Gaskell preferred society. People were important to her. She enjoyed good company, traveling and entertaining guests. Rather than causing great conflict, their differences in temperament seemed to have been complimentary.⁷³ Also it must be remembered that because of their common Unitarian background, they shared the same values and basic attitudes toward life, marriage and child rearing.

Although the Gaskells may have had dissimilar predilections, they did share a number of intellectual pursuits. They had a mutual interest in recording the peculiarities of the Lancashire dialect; they enjoyed attending concerts

given by Hallé in Manchester and even played chess together.⁷⁴ Probably the best indication of their common sympathies is their poem "Sketches Among the Poor, No. 1" which was published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1837.⁷⁵ They had meant the poem to be in the spirit of Crabbe whom they admired for his insight and compassion for the poor.⁷⁶ Crabbe's romanticism suited them. He loved the countryside, was religious, but had a distinct distaste for religious enthusiasts and like the Gaskells, he had no political predispositions.⁷⁷ Although the Gaskells meant to fashion their poem after the style of Crabbe, they wanted it to present a less grim and less severe picture than Crabbe's "Village." In the words of Elizabeth Gaskell theirs was to be in a more "seeing-beauty spirit."⁷⁸ The Gaskells originally intended to write more sketches, but as Annette Hopkins has suggested, they had sense enough to see that poetry was not their medium.⁷⁹

One thing which sets Elizabeth Gaskell apart from any of the other major Victorian authoresses, is the fact that she alone was a mother.⁸⁰ This fact may in part explain why her writing is less concerned with ideas than George Eliot's or Charlotte Brontë's and is more firmly grounded in the realities of daily life; and also helps account for the abundance of maternal affection for her characters. Her eye for quotidian detail is important to the historian: when she describes either sanitary conditions in Manchester, or starvation among the poor, or the social mores of city and country alike, hers is not only the testimony of an intelligent woman and gifted novelist, but that of a wife and

mother as well.

Elizabeth Gaskell had six children, of whom four daughters survived infancy. Her first daughter was still born. That the death of this child left a mark on her is obvious by her sincerely felt, if maudlin poem "On Visiting the Grave of My Still Born Daughter."⁸¹ In 1834 Marianne was born followed by Margaret Emily in 1837, and Florence Elizabeth in 1842. A son, William, was born in 1844 but died of scarlet fever at ten months. Another daughter, Julia, was born in 1846. The death of her son William emotionally enervated Elizabeth Gaskell. She broke down and was ill for weeks. Six years later she wrote:

That wound will never heal on earth,
although hardly anyone knows how it has
changed me ... I can give you no idea
of what a darling he was,--so affectionate
and reasonable a baby I never saw.⁸²

The Gaskells were unlike many of their contemporaries but like their fellow Unitarians in that they adopted a remarkably unromantic and unusually rational approach toward their children and their development. Elizabeth Gaskell believed in complete honesty with children; also she felt that misbehaviour was generally due to some physical cause. Moreover, children were not to be pushed and prodded but rather to develop at their own rate.⁸³ She brought these ideas to her novels as well. In Mary Barton and North and South, she implores the manufacturers to be open and forthright with their employees and to understand the defiant and often intemperate behaviour of the workingman as the

result of the many deprivations he is obliged to live with.

Rather than resenting her many duties as wife and mother which often interfered with her writing, Elizabeth Gaskell seems to have taken pleasure in running her household. Her letters are filled with the events of daily life, of lessons and clothing for the girls, of plans for meals and the like.⁸⁴ She describes the trials of her household to a potential guest thus:

Are you prepared for a garret ... with no fireplace, only a great cistern, which however we lock up for fear of our friends committing suicide. Are you prepared for a cold, clammy atmosphere, a town with no grass or beauty in it, a house full of cold draughts, and mysterious puffs of icy air? Are you prepared for four girls in and out continually interrupting the most interesting conversation with enquiries respecting lessons, work, etc.: If these delights thy mind can move, come live with me I like the house very much, though I acknowledge we have out-grown it; you shall have a bottle of hot water in bed, and blankets ad libitum.⁸⁵

As a minister's wife, Elizabeth Gaskell organized church bazaars, taught Sunday School, and visited members of the congregation.⁸⁶ She also helped to establish a day-nursery for working mothers in Manchester and was concerned with assisting unwed mothers to find refuge or to emigrate to the dominions.⁸⁷ In her letters, with their wit and breathless style, emerges the portrait of a busy, happy woman.

She resided in Manchester for the whole of her married life. Though the Gaskells were not well-off initially, they were never in financial difficulties. By 1841 they were able to have a holiday on the continent and by the next year

were affluent enough to remove to larger quarters and to acquire a housekeeper.⁸⁸ In 1849, the Gaskells took occupancy at 42 Plymouth Grove, a reasonably capacious and comfortable home. Here Elizabeth Gaskell remained until her death.

Living in Manchester provided Elizabeth Gaskell with the raw material and data which were to fill her social novels. It was from her experience in Manchester that she would know the actual temperature inside a cotton mill, of the risk of bodily harm to workingmen because of inadequate safety precautions, and of the depth of soul and feeling within the working class. In Manchester, in teaching Sunday School, in simply walking through the city streets, she encountered the people portrayed in Mary Barton and North and South. Unlike Dickens, Disraeli, or Mrs. Trollope, Elizabeth Gaskell did not have to consult Parliamentary Blue Books or make a special tour of an industrial centre in order to discover facts about life in the new towns.

Although she saw energy and strength in Manchester, the city never really agreed with her. It was always nothing more than "a town with no grass or beauty in it." She remarks in a letter how nice it is to be in the country where there were leaves on the trees and the sun shone brightly, while in Manchester the trees were bare and thick fogs hung on until late in the morning and returned in the early afternoon.⁸⁹ It is evident that Manchester's physical and moral environment had its effects on her personally.

Edgar Wright confirms this when he states that "it is difficult not to connect Mrs. Gaskell's bad health [in her later years] with a mental and physical reaction to her environment."⁹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell herself made the connexion. The healthiest characters, in body and mind, in her industrial novels, are those who live in the country or at least have access to it. It is impossible not to see the good effect that the country holiday has for the working class in Mary Barton.⁹¹ Moreover, the city, for Elizabeth Gaskell, is a place where good people go wrong, a place where men are murdered and young girls are seduced. Though she preferred the country to the city, Manchester was not an altogether bad place. After all, her husband enjoyed the city life, there were concerts and exhibitions to enjoy, and many interesting people, labourers and businessmen alike, to meet. Her preference for the country was personal; it did not reflect a deep-seated moral or ethical bias.⁹² She simply found country life more to her liking, a fact which is evidenced by the increasing amount of time she spent away from Manchester as she earned more and more money from her writing.

In 1847-48 Elizabeth Gaskell published three short stories in Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress.⁹³ In 1848 she incorporated the three stories in book form under the title of Life in Manchester under the pseudonym of Cotton Mather Mills. These were highly moral stories and she received no wide notice for them. It was with the publication of Mary Barton in 1848 that Elizabeth Gaskell ceased

to be just another Victorian middle-class woman for whom writing was an avocation. Almost overnight she became a celebrity.

As a result of the excitement caused by Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell was invited to dine with Dickens on two occasions in May 1849. There she met the Carlyles, Thackeray, Guizot, and Archdeacon Hare.⁹⁴ She was also asked to breakfast with Samuel Rogers, who, upon the death of Wordsworth in 1850, was asked to be poet laureate. Emily Winkworth described Rogers' breakfasts as "classical things."⁹⁵ An invitation to one of his breakfasts was said to be an indication that one had gained formal entrance to literary society.⁹⁶ She enjoyed her new found fame and made a favourable impression on most of the celebrities she met. Jane Carlyle described Elizabeth Gaskell upon her introduction to the literary world as "a natural, unassuming woman whom they [Rogers and Dickens] have been doing their best to spoil by making a lioness of her."⁹⁷ Many of those whom she met on that first sojourn in London were to remain her friends long afterwards. She exchanged visits with the Carlyles on a few occasions, and Dickens stayed with the Gaskells when he was in Manchester.⁹⁸

As a novelist of some note, she had frequent opportunities to meet or correspond with influential women both at home and abroad. It is unlikely that she would have known Charlotte Brontë, or stayed with the family of Florence Nightingale, nor is it conceivable that she would

have exchanged letters with George Eliot, had Mary Barton Cranford, and her short stories not met with wide acclaim.⁹⁹ She also became acquainted with a number of women's rights advocates. For example, she became the friend of Frederika Bremner, a Swedish novelist, who wished to help liberate women not by gaining entry to the political arena but rather by developing new educational programs for women and by allowing them more freedom of movement in the labour market.¹⁰⁰ She was also acquainted with Mrs. Jameson and Caroline Norton, who advocated the mother's right to her children in a divorce settlement.¹⁰¹

As Aina Rubenius has suggested, contact with the more liberated women of the day did have some effect on Elizabeth Gaskell's ideas about the proper role of women in society.¹⁰² In a letter to her friend Eliza Fox, daughter of a radical Unitarian minister, Elizabeth Gaskell discussed the question of the social and moral responsibilities of women. She wrote:

... I could say so much about ... what follows in your letter about home duties and individual life; it is just my puzzle; and I don't think I can get nearer to a solution than you have done.... One thing is pretty clear, women must give up living an artist's life, if home duties are to be paramount. It is different with men, whose home duties are so small a part of their life. However we are talking of women. I am sure it is healthy for them to have the refuge of the hidden world of art to shelter themselves in when too much pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares; it keeps them from being morbid as you say; and takes them into the land where King Arthur lies hidden, and soothes them with its peace. I have felt this in writing, I see others feel it in music, you

painting, so assuredly a blending of the two is desirable. (Home duties and the development of the individual I mean), which you will say it takes no Solomon to tell you but the difficulty is where and when to make one set of duties subserve and give place to the other. I have no doubt that the cultivation of each tends to keep the other in a healthy state....¹⁰³

The effect of her relation to various women rights advocates is even more apparent in her novel North and South. Margaret Hale is an excellent example of the "new woman" of the mid-Victorian era. She is not weak, submissive, or giddy, nor does she swoon. Rather she is strong-willed, thoughtful, courageous, and morally independent.

Perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell's reaction to the Married Women's Property Petition of 1856 is the best evidence as to what extent she had been persuaded to alter her concept of a woman's role in society.¹⁰⁴ First, [it is interesting to note that women's rights advocates did not regard Elizabeth Gaskell among their number. They sought her signature largely because her "moral standing" would help the cause.¹⁰⁵] Secondly, Elizabeth Gaskell did not endorse the petition without hesitation. In a letter to Eliza Fox she explained her reluctance:

You asked for the petition back again without loss of time ... I don't think it is very definite, and pointed; or that it will do much good.... A husband can coax, wheedle, beat or tyrannize his wife out of something and no law whatever will help this that I see. (Mr. Gaskell begs Mr. Fox to draw up a bill for the protection of husbands against wives who will spend all their earnings). However our sex is badly

enough used and legislated against,
 there's no doubt of that--so though
 I don't see the definite end proposed
 by these petitions I'll sign.¹⁰⁶

Although women's rights had influenced Elizabeth Gaskell to examine carefully the function of women in society, they had not moved her far from her original belief: the most important part a woman could play was that of a wife and mother.¹⁰⁷

Jane Carlyle's concern that Elizabeth Gaskell would be spoiled by the admiration of the literary greats of her day, proved to be unfounded. Despite her success, despite the wide acknowledgement of her talent, despite her contact with many of most important persons of her era, Elizabeth Gaskell remained fundamentally the same person she had been prior to the publication of Mary Barton. Her writing seldom, if ever, conflicted with her myriad duties as a minister's wife and mother of four children. She continued to run her household, seeing to it that William got sufficient rest, that the girls received proper instruction, that many charitable acts were performed around Manchester.¹⁰⁸ Simply put, with the possible exception of her literary efforts, Elizabeth Gaskell never ceased to be like many other Victorian women. This fact, in addition to the fact that she experienced at first-hand the two worlds she chose to write about, make her comments about the new industrial city and the changing countryside in nineteenth century England of particular interest.

¹For more detail see A. B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work (London: John Lehmann, 1952), 15.

²Ibid., 16.

³The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, eds. J. A. Chapple and A. Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 167a. Hereinafter referred to as Letters.

Sir Henry Holland (b. 1788) was the son of Peter Holland, Elizabeth Gaskell's uncle and physician in Knutsford. In 1814 he became a medical attendant to the Princess of Wales, later Queen Caroline. In 1820 he was called upon by a Parliamentary Committee to testify as to the propriety of the Queen's conduct. In 1837 he was appointed physician extraordinary to Queen Victoria, in 1840 as physician in ordinary to Prince Albert, and in 1852 as physician in ordinary to the Queen. He was also a fellow of the Royal Society and served as President of the Royal Institute of Physicians. For further details concerning his life and ideas see his autobiography, Recollection of Past Life (1872).

⁴See Letters, 99, 100a, 308, and 443a.

⁵Daventry, formerly Northampton Academy, was composed of lay and theological students. In theology, metaphysics, and ethics Daventry was superior to all similar schools. Joseph Priestley wrote that Daventry was "in a state peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth, as students were equally divided upon every question of much importance." The course of study at Daventry included shorthand, classics, Hebrew, Geography, Logic, Euclid, civil government, British constitutional government and natural philosophy. According to a Baptist minister Daventry was a vortex of unsanctified speculation and debate." For a comprehensive treatment of Daventry see H. McLachlan, English Education Under the Test Acts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931).

⁶W. A. Boggs, Reflections of Unitarianism in Mrs. Gaskell's Novels (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1950), 2.

⁷Ibid. According to Boggs, Stevenson's decision to resign his ministry was influenced by George Wicke who had written a pamphlet against preaching for money. Though Stevenson left the ministry, he did not leave the Unitarian

faith, since his argument was not with the religion itself. See also McLachlan, Education, 258-59.

⁸I have been unable to discover any further information concerning James Cleghorn except that he was an influential man in the progressive farming community of East Lothian.

⁹As E. Haldane, an early biographer of Elizabeth Gaskell, has put it: "It was no mean thing to contribute articles to the Edinburgh or Westminster Review. See E. Haldane (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1931), 9.

¹⁰Soon after Stevenson became an editor the name was changed to Scot's Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany. In 1817 it became known simply as the Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany, the name it retained until the magazine folded in 1826. The magazine was truly of general interest. Each issue contained a meteorological forecast, a business and commercial digest, an agricultural report, a foreign intelligence report, as well as an account of Parliamentary Proceedings. Of course, there were reviews of new books, poetry, and articles concerning such diverse topics as "Plans for Relief of the Poor" and the "History of Epistemology in the Reign of Charles II."

¹¹For further information concerning Maitland see Dictionary of National Biography, XI.

¹²Boggs, 4.

¹³For a complete list of Stevenson's writing see E. H. Chadwick, Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes, and Stones (London: Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1913), 14; also see Haldane, 15.

¹⁴Hopkins, 18; Chadwick, 14.

¹⁵See below, Chapter II.

¹⁶See below, Chapters II-VII.

¹⁷A. W. Ward, "Introductions" in The Works of Mrs. Gaskell (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906), II, xviii.

¹⁸Early nineteenth century topographical dictionaries indicate that Knutsford was a small market town 172.5 miles northwest by north of London, distinguished primarily for races held there each Whitsuntide. See John Gorton and G. N. Wirght, A Topographical Dictionary of Great Britain and Ireland (London: Chapman and Hall, 1832), 500-1; also see Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of England in 5 Vols. (London: Lewis and Co., 1885).

¹⁹Haldane, 19.

²⁰In Elizabeth Gaskell's published letters there are but two references to her stepmother.

²¹Letters, 255.

²²Chadwick, 65.

²³For a detailed analysis of this type of education see Peter J. Miller, The Education of the English Lady, 1770-1820 (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Alberta, 1969). Miller's treatment is thorough and he offers numerous examples of these kinds of schools and the type of education provided the pupils.

²⁴Aina Rubenius, The Woman Question Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works in Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, ed. S. B. Liljegren (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandlin, 1950), 35.

²⁵Haldane, 21.

²⁶Scholars disagree as to the length of time Elizabeth spent at Avonbank; some contend that she was there for just two years, others that she was there for five full years. Archie Whitfield and Aina Rubenius suggest that she must have been at Avonbank for five years otherwise three years of her life remain unaccounted for. See A. S. Whitfield, Mrs. Gaskell: Her Life and Her Work (London: Routledge and Son, Ltd., 1929), 8.

²⁷Letters, 198a.

²⁸Hopkins, 40.

²⁹Ibid., 41.

³⁰See below, Chapter IV.

³¹Hopkins, 41.

³²Boggs, passim.

³³M. Ganz, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), 34.

³⁴For an indepth study of Warrington Academy see H. McLachlan, Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence (London: Johnson Reprint Co., 1968).

³⁵Ibid., passim; also see Hopkins, 44.

³⁶Letters, 154; see also Memorials of Two Sisters: Susanna and Catherine Winkworth, ed. M. J. Shaen (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908).

³⁷Boggs, iii.

³⁸Letters, 96, 123, 202.

³⁹Memorials of Two Sisters.

⁴⁰Letters, 191.

⁴¹G. W. Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell in Cornell Studies in English, eds. J. Quincey Adams and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 155. Elizabeth Gaskell was greatly concerned that the rendering of dialect in her novels be accurate. In a letter to her publisher, Edward Chapman, she pointed out several instances where the dialect had been incorrectly recorded. She wrote: "In looking over the book [Mary Barton] I see numerous errors regarding the part written in the Lancashire dialect; 'gotten' should always be 'getten.'" See Letters, 33.

⁴²Hopkins, 45.

⁴³W. E. Adams, Memoirs of a Social Atom (New York: Kelly Publishers Reprint, 1967), 390-91.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Boggs, passim.

⁴⁶R. V. Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938), 279.

⁴⁷Boggs, 8.

⁴⁸Ibid., 47.

⁴⁹Ibid., 55

⁵⁰Letters, 198.

⁵¹Holt, 276.

⁵²Boggs, 45.

⁵³Ibid., 46.

⁵⁴James Martineau, Essays, Reviews and Addresses (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1891), III, 69.

⁵⁵She forces both John Thornton, the manufacturer, and Nicholas Higgins, the trade unionist, to reexamine their

positions on the "Condition of England Question" with as much objectivity as possible. See North and South, passim.

⁵⁶Letters, 93.

⁵⁷Martineau, 69; also see Boggs, 43.

⁵⁸Boggs, 43.

⁵⁹See in particular North and South and Margaret Hale's manner toward Bessy Higgins and her fundamentalist reading of the Bible. Also see her pejorative remarks concerning Methodists in Mary Barton.

⁶⁰Boggs, 59.

⁶¹Holt, 331-32.

⁶²Memorials of Two Sisters, 25-26.

⁶³Ibid., 147.

⁶⁴E. Wright, Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 27.

⁶⁵William Cobbett, Rural Rides (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967), 321.

⁶⁶See in particular Mary Barton, North and South, and Sylvia's Lovers.

⁶⁷See Holt, 276.

⁶⁸E. Wright, 32.

⁶⁹Ibid., 28.

⁷⁰Ward, "Introduction," I, xix.

⁷¹For an interesting, but somewhat extreme view of the Gaskells' marriage see Rubenius, Chapter ii.

⁷²Letters, 570.

⁷³Ganz, 37.

⁷⁴Letters, 16, 131, 141, and 144.

⁷⁵Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, as R. G. Cox relates, set the pattern for the lighter and more varied miscellany magazine in the early nineteenth century. Each issue contained short stories, verse, essays, and political and literary articles of all degrees of seriousness. The tone

was conservative and was not at all sympathetic to the Romantics. After 1830, the magazine was known for its sobriety and respectability. George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life and Adam Bede were first serialized in Blackwood's. For further details see R. G. Cox, "The Reviews of Magazines," From Dickens to Hardy, vol. 6 of the Pelican Guide to English Literature (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964).

⁷⁶Ward, "Introductions," II, xiv.

⁷⁷R. W. Harris, Romanticism and the Social Order, 1780-1830 (London: Blandford Press, 1969), 12. For further information concerning George Crabbe (1754-1832) see The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe; With Letters and Journal and His Life By His Son (London: J. Murray, 1834).

⁷⁸Letters, 12.

⁷⁹Hopkins, 60.

⁸⁰G. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970), 18.

⁸¹For the text of the poem see Ward, "Introductions," I, xxvi-xxviii.

⁸²Quoted in Hopkins, 66.

⁸³Ibid., 60.

⁸⁴Letters, 16, 101, 145, 507, 570.

⁸⁵Quoted in Hopkins, 57-58.

⁸⁶Letters, 7, 13.

⁸⁷Ibid., 32, 61, 62, 63.

⁸⁸Hopkins, 58.

⁸⁹Letters, 83.

⁹⁰Wright, 93.

⁹¹See Mary Barton, Chapter i.

⁹²Wright, 93.

⁹³I have been unable to find any information relating to Howitt's Journal.

- 94 Letters, 45a, 47.
- 95 Memorials of Two Sisters, 93.
- 96 Hopkins, 84.
- 97 Ibid., 86.
- 98 Letters, 45a, 102, 131, 158.
- 99 For details concerning Elizabeth Gaskell's relation-
ship with Charlotte Brontë see Chapter II below.
- 100 See Rubenius, 39-40; Iso see Letters, 102a, 103,
107.
- 101 Letters, 209, 217, 219, 225, 306, 372, 407.
- 102 Rubenius, 39.
- 103 Letters, 68.
- 104 In 1856 some seventy separate petitions were pre-
sented to Parliament which complained about the laws regu-
lating the property of married women. "One petition," said
an M.P., contained 3,000 signatures of the most prominent
women "remarkable in the annals of literature." The peti-
tions protested that married women had no right to personal
property, that all that was theirs legally belonged to
their husbands. The petitions requested that laws be
enacted guaranteeing to married women their right to se-
parate earnings and holdings after marriage. The peti-
tions found little acceptance in the House. T. Chambers
expressing the views of many members said to "introduce
into every household in England the principle of separate
rights, separate interests" was tantamount to destroying
the "law of marriage altogether." It was 1870 before the
first Married Woman's Property Act became law. See Debates,
V. 142, 1273-285; also see The Law Reports. The Public
General Statutes (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1870),
vol. 5.
- 105 Rubenius, 224.
- 106 Letters, 276.
- 107 See Rubenius, passim.
- 108 Letters, 186.

II

LITERARY BACKGROUND

From 1847 to her death in 1865, Elizabeth Gaskell produced eight novels, a biography of Charlotte Brontë, numerous short stories and essays, and even some newspaper articles.¹ As with most authors, the quality of her writing varied. She was not above composing a short story or an article for some ready cash.² On the other hand, she demonstrated excellent scholarship, real diligence and artistic ability in many of her works. An examination of her novels and The Life of Charlotte Bronte shows that Elizabeth Gaskell either experienced or carefully researched much of what she wrote about, thus providing greater reality to her works. Her subject matter is chiefly concerned with life in nineteenth century England which she explored personally and quietly.

Her first novel, Mary Barton, deals with the problems of industrialization.³ Though it was not published until 25 October 1848, at the end of the "hungry forties," and at the end of two decades of social strife between the working class and the established order, it was still timely. It came in the aftermath of the European revolutions and the great Chartist meeting of April 1848; it was published at a time when many Lancashire mills were closing down as a result of a poor American cotton crop.⁴ Despite the fact that some Englishmen saw the failure of the Chartist movement

in 1848 as an indication that the working class was incapable of revolution, many, such as Carlyle, Dickens, and Kingsley, realized that the problems of industrial England were far from resolved.

Mary Barton is very much in the tradition of the English "social problem novel," and, like Disraeli's Sybil and Kingsley's Alton Locke, Mary Barton represents a nineteenth century change in that genre.⁵ There was a shift away from the philosophical, rationalist, and utilitarian approach of Godwin's Caleb Williams to a more humane and realistic treatment of social conflicts.⁶ Mary Barton was a manifestation of a psychological crisis through which England was passing in the thirties and forties, the struggle between English idealism and English rationalism.⁷

Though Mary Barton was similar to other social problem novels of the forties in that it dealt with the adverse effects of industrialism, with the rationalized cruelty of the economists, and with the disparity between the "two nations," it differed in one significant way: unlike Disraeli or Kingsley, Elizabeth Gaskell "had no axe to grind."⁸ She was not, as was Disraeli, using her novel to foster the cause of Young England on the hustings, nor, like Kingsley, was she pushing Christian Socialism. Her purpose was neither political nor ideological. Like Carlyle, whose Sartor Resartus she had read, and in the English romantic and idealistic tradition, she hoped for a change in the hearts of men, not in their voting patterns.⁹

There is another difference between Mary Barton and the other social problem novels of the forties and fifties. Although the novel is aimed at the conscience of the middle class, as were Disraeli's and Kingsley's novels, Mary Barton is about working-class people and not about the aristocracy or the middle class in disguise.¹⁰ The central theme of Sybil is clearly the handling of the problems of industrialization by Lord Egremont. Moreover, in Sybil the most articulate members of the working class turn out to be actually members of the old Norman aristocracy. Disraeli's characters, particularly working-class characters, seem more like the personifications of committee reports and Parliamentary Blue Book facts than real people. It is difficult for the reader to feel any attachment for the characters; Elizabeth Gaskell's working class is much more engaging and well-rounded.¹¹ Even Disraeli's Devildust, who spent his infancy on a baby farm, who was sent out into the street to be run over, who slept with a cesspool at his feet and a dung heap at his head, and who went to work in a factory at the age of five, is treated more as a case study than a human being.¹² Elizabeth Gaskell depicts situations as grim as those depicted by Disraeli, but her characters are convincing individuals who have a reality of their own.¹³

Contemporary criticism of Mary Barton varied according to the critic's political bent. The Edinburgh Review, the British Quarterly Review, and the Manchester Guardian found

the novel a distortion of the actual situation.¹⁴ The author had done "a very great injustice to the employers."¹⁵ Some reviewers went to great lengths to deprecate Elizabeth Gaskell's presentation of Manchester's industrial problems, adducing testimony from respected Mancunians contradictory to her claims.¹⁶ These reviewers admitted that conditions such as those depicted in Mary Barton might have existed at one time or that it was even possible that they existed in 1848, but if they did, it was on a very small scale.¹⁷ In other words, they felt that Mary Barton was based on a limited and narrow perception of the facts. The British Quarterly summed up the troubles of the working class in this way: "the worst enemy which the factory population have to contend is their own improvidence."¹⁸

The Athenaeum and Fraser's Magazine had favourable reviews of Mary Barton. Like the Edinburgh and the Manchester Guardian, Fraser's and the Athenaeum also treated Mary Barton more like a document than the piece of creative fiction it was.¹⁹ They praised Mary Barton for its truth and justice, not its literary merit. The critic in the Athenaeum wrote that "we have met few pictures of life among the working classes at once so forcible and fair as Mary Barton."²⁰ Fraser's Magazine believed that Mary Barton should be "read aloud from every pulpit" in the nation because it answered the most pressing questions of the day:

Do they want to know why workingmen
turn chartists and communists? Then
let them read Mary Barton. Do they

want to know why poor men, kind
and sympathetic as women to each
other, learn to hate law and order,
Queen, lords and commons, country
party and corn law leaguer all alike--
to hate the rich in short? ... Do they
want to know what can madden brave,
honest, industrious, north-country
hearts into self-imposed suicidal
strikes, into conspiracy, vitriol
throwing, and midnight murder? ...
Do they want to know what drives men
to gin and opium ...? Let them read
Mary Barton.²¹

On one particular aspect of Mary Barton all critics could agree: this was its stark realism. From the opening scene featuring a working-class holiday in the country to the very speech of the operatives, the novel was true to life.²² W. R. Greg, who severely criticized Mary Barton in the Edinburgh Review found that the conversations in the book "approach very nearly in tone and style, the conversations carried out in the dingy cottages of Lancashire."²³

Modern literary critics have also found Mary Barton interesting as a social document, but unlike most of Elizabeth Gaskell's contemporaries, they have recognized that as a novel, the work is flawed. The story is too long, some of the characters are not well developed, and the author makes many comments that the characters might well have made for themselves.²⁴ However, the most important flaw seems to be in the character of John Barton.

The problem is that Elizabeth Gaskell is herself uncertain about John Barton.²⁵ She shows sympathetically how the horrible experiences which he has endured in industrial

society lead him step-by-step to an act of violence. Yet as soon as Barton becomes a Chartist and a communist, as soon as he opposes accepted norms and standards, she cannot condone his rebellion, no matter how natural it might be. What bothers modern critics is that Elizabeth Gaskell was unable to portray Barton as a tragic hero in the classical sense, though he probably comes as close to that guise as Victorian social conventions would allow.²⁶ Instead, the author is ambivalent toward John Barton, first showing him as a kind, generous, and honest man with high moral standards, and in another instance speaking of him as a man without a soul, like Frankenstein's monster.²⁷ John Barton's suffering is used as an explanation of his actions, but not as a justification. This ambivalence is typically Victorian. Like Dickens, Disraeli, and Kingsley, Elizabeth Gaskell could not condone violence.²⁸

Another weakness in the novel is Carson's forgiveness of Barton for killing his son, and Barton's repentance. As one critic put it, the author seems too perceptive actually to believe that such an event could have occurred.²⁹ The reconciliation motif was overworked in many of Elizabeth Gaskell's works.³⁰ But, as a Unitarian, she believed that human beings were capable of overcoming their emotions and resolving their differences through rational but sympathetic understanding.³¹

Dickens was impressed by Mary Barton. In a letter of 31 January 1850 to Elizabeth Gaskell, in which he asked her

to contribute a short story to his new journal, Household Words, he said: "I do honestly know that there is no other English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of Mary Barton (a book that most profoundly affected me)." ³² The result of this letter was that Elizabeth Gaskell agreed to become a contributor and her short story "Lizzie Leigh" appeared in the first three numbers of Household Words, 30 March to 13 April 1850. As Dickens requested, the story was about Manchester and the working class. Its aim, like the aim of Household Words, was the "raising up of those that are down and general improvement of our social condition." ³³ "Lizzie Leigh" was the first of many stories which she was to publish in Dickens' magazine.

Cranford, a series of sketches and her next major work after Mary Barton, was serialized in Household Words from 13 December 1851 to 21 March 1853. ³⁴ In 1853, with a few minor changes, these sketches were incorporated into one volume and published by Chapman and Hall. ³⁵

Cranford is about life in a small country village, specifically, about the experiences of a group of widows and spinsters in the 1830's and 40's. It is witty and charming, and, on occasion, even hilarious. The "elegant economy" of the genteely impoverished Cranfordians, their rigid sense of propriety, their spinsterish ideas about men and sex (as Miss Pole remarks, "My father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well"), are handled with an understanding

humor. Elizabeth Gaskell's contemporaries loved Cranford. Dickens called it delightful; Ruskin thoroughly enjoyed it.³⁶ Modern critics place Cranford among her best works. In it, she demonstrates one of her greatest artistic abilities, a delicate combination of humor and pathos.³⁷

One nineteenth century Englishman believed that Cranford could have been a fair representation of life in "almost any country town," but it was doubtless Knutsford.³⁸ Many have come to appreciate Cranford for its authentic detail as literary scholars have established that the buildings, the customs and traditions, and even some of the events described in Cranford had existence in fact as well as in fiction.³⁹ The dressing of a cow in a grey flannel waistcoat, the concealing of tea trays under the sofa, and the incident of the lace that was swallowed by the cat and subsequently retrieved all actually took place.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Cranford is Elizabeth Gaskell's superb portrayal of the social order in a small country town in early Victorian England. She shows how conscious Victorians were of their station in life, how fine and yet how very real were the lines dividing the various levels of the social hierarchy, and how this system was supported by the Victorian concept of propriety and good conduct.

Cranford's social system, however narrow it might be, maintains and supports itself and is, in fact, paradigmatic of how a society ought to function.⁴¹ Everyone has a place

in the social order; unlike Manchester, no one is alienated. Cranfordians, from labourer to genteel lady, understand and accept their responsibilities. There is a close association between master and servant, a relationship which goes beyond that of employer and employee. Miss Matty and Miss Jenkyns are concerned with their servants as human beings and give them as much assistance as possible. When Miss Matty's bank fails, her servant stays on without wages in appreciation of Miss Matty's kind treatment. Although Elizabeth Gaskell laughs at the primary interest of the ladies, which is not to relinquish what little gentility they possess, she also gives a kind of nobility to their sense of responsibility to each other and to their society. This sense of responsibility helps them to face adversity and to accept change. When Miss Matty is reduced to opening a tea shop, she does not become a less respected member of society, though the Cranford ladies have a great aversion to anything vaguely connected with trade. Throughout Elizabeth Gaskell's work this recurring theme appears: people must have respect for tradition and convention, but they must also be willing to accept change when the need arises.⁴²

[In January 1853, Ruth, Elizabeth Gaskell's next novel appeared in three volumes.⁴³ Although she was hardly a radical socially, politically, or artistically, Ruth was a rather bold step; it was the first novel by a female writer devoted entirely to the question of the fallen woman.⁴⁴

Like Mary Barton, Ruth was a novel with a purpose.⁴⁵ * It protested the double standard in Victorian sexual morality and demonstrated that one lapse from virtue did not necessarily mean damnation.*

Whatever were Elizabeth Gaskell's intentions, Ruth pleased few of her contemporaries and was genuinely shocking to some. For them Dr. Gregory's notions about virgin purity still held: a pure minded Victorian woman would know nothing of sex, nor would she "show such purience as to ... discuss anything connected with such a subject."⁴⁶ *Two men in William Gaskell's congregation burnt the first volume of Ruth and another forbade his wife to read it.⁴⁷ Even undergraduates at Oxford found it objectionable, and one of them at the time recorded that:

A moral lapse in a woman was spoken of as an immensely worse thing than in a man A pure woman, it was reiterated, should be absolutely ignorant of a certain class of evils in the world, albeit those evils bore with a monstrous cruelty on other women. One young man seriously declared that he would not allow his own mother to reach such a book Silence was thought to be the great duty of all on such subjects.⁴⁸

Other Victorians, while praising Elizabeth Gaskell for her assault on the double standard, for showing that the seducer was as much at fault as the seduced, if not more, and for denying the existence of an inextinguishable sin, felt that Ruth as a character should have been more alive, less simple and passive.⁴⁹ They believed that the message of Ruth would have had more impact if Ruth had been older and

had perceived the consequences of her transgression more fully.⁵⁰ *Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning regretted that Ruth had to die at the end of the novel and felt that she should have lived on as a reminder to society that one wrong does not make a woman evil.⁵¹

W. R. Greg offered some of the most perceptive criticism. He observed that Elizabeth Gaskell did not seem to be "at one with herself" in her attitude toward Ruth.

She has first imagined a character Ruth as pure, pious, and unselfish as a poet ever fancied; and described a lapse from chastity as faultless as such a fault can be; and then with damaging and unfaithful inconsistency, has given in to the world's estimate in such matters by affirming that the sin committed was so deep a dye that only a life of atoning and enduring persistence could wipe it out.⁵²

Modern critics have generally agreed with Greg's assessment, observing that Elizabeth Gaskell does not handle the scenes of passion with much depth or skill and that she too often resorts to authorial comment.⁵³

The major fault in Ruth, as noted by Greg, is very much like the major fault in Mary Barton. Elizabeth Gaskell was capable of speaking out against social abuses, but she was incapable of completely breaking with the conventions of her age. Therefore, there is the ambivalence toward John Barton and Ruth, and Ruth must repent for the rest of her life when there is a question as to whether she really sinned at all.

Aside from broaching the question of the fallen woman Ruth is interesting for several other reasons. Ruth, prior to her seduction by Bellingham, is a milliner's apprentice. Elizabeth Gaskell's depiction of the life of a dressmaker's apprentice, of the long and tedious hours, is realistic and unexaggerated. Factory work for women, when compared to the "drudgery of dressmakers' apprentices was mere play."⁵⁴

Later, when Ruth is discovered to be not a widow, but an unwed mother, and is banished from her post as governess, she becomes a sick-nurse. Unlike the typical English nurse in the first half of the nineteenth century she is neither slattern, nor drunkard, nor profligate. Ruth reads and studies medical books in order to improve her nursing techniques. The idea that nurses required special training or preparation was radical in the early 1850's.⁵⁵

Another important aspect is that in Ruth, Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates a sophisticated historical consciousness. History is more than a record of the past; it is an ever-present force. People are bound and conditioned by the customs and practices not only of their own times but also by those of the past. Ruth, Bellingham, and the Bensons cannot be completely understood in their present situations unless the reader has some idea as to what sorts of experiences they have brought to that present. In the first chapter, the author states:

The traditions of those bygone times
even to the smallest social particular,
enable one to understand more clearly

the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character. The daily life into which people are born and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains, which only one in a hundred has the moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes--when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities. Therefore, it is well to know what were the charges of daily domestic habit, which were the natural leading strings of our forefathers⁵⁶

This historical consciousness is also evident in several of her other works, notably Wives and Daughters, North and South, Sylvia's Lovers and Mary Barton. It is also to be found in her only major piece of nonfiction, The Life of Charlotte Brontë.

In September 1854, North and South began appearing in Household Words, the last installment coming in January 1855.⁵⁷ Though North and South was serialized, it was not written in a style which suited the episodic nature of a weekly publication. Dickens the editor and Elizabeth Gaskell the author bickered almost incessantly over this matter, but she overcame the former's editorial concerns and preserved the artistic unity of her work.⁵⁸ She was determined not to surrender to the demands of any particular editor as she had with Mary Barton; with North and South she became more aware of herself as an artist.⁵⁹

North and South is a social problem novel, which, like Mary Barton, deals with urban industrialism. However, unlike Mary Barton, North and South does not focus on the lives of

the working class, but rather on middle-class attitudes toward the problem of industrialization.⁶⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell chose to concentrate on the middle class in North and South for several reasons. First, she had already exposed the plight of the labourers in Mary Barton. Second, conditions in Manchester had improved somewhat since 1847-48 as the economic prosperity of the fifties began to set in, thus the hardships of the poor were not such an urgent problem as in the forties.⁶¹ Finally, she realized that if the labour situation were going to be ameliorated, the middle class would have to play a significant part in the process.⁶²

In Mary Barton Elizabeth Gaskell presents a dismal picture of industrialism but she offers no solution. Mary and Jem Wilson emigrate to Canada in the end, but the situation in Manchester remains the same.⁶³ In North and South, she attempts to provide an answer to the problems of the northern industrial cities, the poverty, the wretched living conditions, and the lack of sympathy between masters and men.

It has been suggested that in North and South Elizabeth Gaskell becomes an apologist for the northern manufacturing centres, but this is certainly overstating the case.⁶⁴ Margaret Hale, the heroine, has grown up in a rural village in southern England, but is forced to move to Milton Northern (Manchester). There she meets John Thornton, a cotton manufacturer. Margaret and Thornton, in the process of falling in love, argue about the proper relations between employer and employee, she from the standpoint of a genteel southerner

from the somewhat refined world of Cranford and Hollingford, where one has a responsibility to one's society, and he from the standpoint a self-made northern manufacturer, a laissez-faire capitalist. At first repulsed by the ugliness and squalor of the north, and by Thornton's lack of refinement, Margaret gradually comes to appreciate the creative energy of the north, its earnestness and industry. Thornton softens his laissez-faire economic doctrine, and recognizes a responsibility toward his men. Though Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates in North and South that the northern industrial city has some admirable features, her primary objective is not a defense of the north against the south but rather that north and south must learn to understand each other if a solution to England's problems is to be reached.

In no other work is Elizabeth Gaskell's perception of nineteenth century England any better than it is in North and South. The problems which Margaret and Thornton discuss are fundamentally the social and historical problems which nineteenth century England had to resolve. The clash between Margaret and Thornton is the clash resulting from an old civilization facing up to the new;⁶⁵ the classically educated, orthodox, and socially stable south is constrained to meet the self-taught, pragmatic, and socially chaotic north. North and South, as symbolized in Margaret Hale and John Thornton, are the two elements of a dialectical process.⁶⁶ North and South ultimately form a new synthesis which blends the best qualities of the industrial city, its energy and

moral earnestness, with those of the south, its wisdom and sense of social responsibility.

In North and South Elizabeth Gaskell has no illusions about country life.⁶⁷ When Higgins, one of Thornton's workers, informs Margaret that he is considering leaving Milton-Northern for the rural south, she dissuades him. She tells Higgins that the state of the agricultural workers is no better than that of the operatives in Milton-Northern. They work long hours and live a much more solitary existence. Moreover, Margaret realizes that there is no turning back to the pastoral life that she knew as a girl. When she returns to Helstone, her birthplace, she discovers that life has changed even there, that England itself is being inexorably transformed.

Just as in Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell gives an accurate account of Manchester life in North and South. The workingmen speak in "typical Manchester patois."⁶⁸ Her portrait of the working class, and of the intelligent operative Nicolas Higgins especially, is representative.⁶⁹ Many details of Manchester life presented in the novel are historically accurate, such as health hazards in the factories, the description of the nouveau riche Thorntons' unlivable drawing room, and the difficulty the Hales had in finding domestic help.⁷⁰

Both her contemporary and modern critics alike have

found North and South to be a much better novel than either

Ruth or Mary Barton. As with many Victorian novels, it was

too long, and she had difficulty in handling the romantic

relationship.⁷¹ But for the most part, North and South is

a solid work. However, one twentieth century critic is

not at all satisfied with North and South.⁷² His point is

that despite the fact that Margaret Hale is intelligent,

open, and frank in most matters, she is a mass of duplicity

when it comes to a question of sex; she seems too innocent

of any attraction between herself and Thornton. Further,

the author is guilty of bad faith with the reader by seemingly

condoning this deceit.⁷³ However, it is possible that

Margaret, as a pure-minded vicar's daughter of 1853 would

not have conscious sexual thoughts, though she undoubtedly

had unconscious ones. Even if sexual thoughts did cross

her mind, the author is well within the Victorian literary

convention in assuming that women did not deign to think

about such things, let alone admit them publicly.⁷⁴

In 1857, Elizabeth Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte

Brontë was published by Smith, Elder and Company. Three

months after the death of his daughter Charlotte, Patrick

Brontë requested that Elizabeth Gaskell write the authori-

tative biography of her.⁷⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte

Brontë had been friends since they met at the Kay-Shuttleworths

in August 1850. Prior to that, they had exchanged letters

of mutual admiration of each other's literary works.⁷⁶

Elizabeth Gaskell had travelled to Haworth parsonage on two occasions, and Charlotte Brontë stayed with the Gaskells at Plymouth Grove. In their letters they discussed family matters, outlines of their proposed new novels, Newman's sermons, and Ruskins' Modern Painters.⁷⁷

In the writing of The Life Elizabeth Gaskell did a remarkable amount of research, exhausting nearly every possible source. She studied over three hundred letters between Charlotte Brontë and her friend Ellen Nussey, between Charlotte Brontë and her editor George Smith, and between Charlotte Brontë and G. H. Lewes.⁷⁸ She also studied the strange literary endeavours of the Brontës as children. She revisited Haworth, Cowan Bridge, Bristol, Thornton, Brussels, and practically every other place associated with Charlotte Brontë. She met with Miss Wooler, Charlotte Brontë's friend and former school mistress at Roe Head.⁷⁹ She wrote letters to many of Charlotte's friends asking for such details as why Branwell did not go to the Royal Academy and how long Emily Brontë stayed at Roe Head.⁸⁰ It would appear that she met with or corresponded with anyone who might have had pertinent information, even the Haworth stationer who supplied the Brontë children with writing paper.⁸¹

In The Life of Charlotte Brontë Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrated, as she had in her preceding novels, a capacity for fine observation of detail and for sensitive and penetrating analysis. As in Mary Barton and Ruth, she stressed the effect that environment and experience have on character.

She emphasized the harsh, wild environment of Yorkshire, Charlotte's lonely, motherless childhood, Patrick Brontë's eccentricity, the severity of the school at Cowan Bridge, Branwell's long dissipation, and her sisters' deaths. Elizabeth Gaskell gives a picture of Charlotte Brontë as a courageous woman who endured great hardship and pain. She also attempts to explain how these experiences contributed to Charlotte Brontë's work, especially how parts of her writing which many Victorian critics, and even Elizabeth Gaskell herself, considered "coarse" were a product of her experience.⁸²

Many of Charlotte Brontë's friends, in concurrence with the Athenaeum, liked The Life and felt that it had been well done.⁸³ However, some people were not at all happy with it.⁸⁴ Patrick Brontë did not like the passages that made him seem unkind to his wife, Mr. Nicholls, Charlotte Brontë's husband, did not appreciate the fact that he was characterized as a less than sympathetic husband, and people in Yorkshire resented the comments about their way of life.⁸⁵ However, these grievances were insignificant compared with the difficulties over the representation of Cowan Bridge School and Branwell's affair with Lady Scott.

Carus Wilson, headmaster of Cowan Bridge School and the model for Mr. Brocklehurst in Jane Eyre, wrote letters to the Daily News, the Leeds Mercury, and the Halifax Guardian contesting statements about his school in The Life as patently untrue.⁸⁶ Some reviewers sided with Wilson in

this matter. Elizabeth Gaskell, who was tired of the controversy, escaped further altercation with Wilson by a few minor changes in the third edition.⁸⁷

The worst problem was the threat of a libel suit from Lady Scott (unnamed in The Life) if references to her relations with Branwell were not expunged. In the first and second editions of The Life, Elizabeth Gaskell recounted that the Bronte sisters believed that Branwell lost his position as tutor in the household when Lady Scott, then Mrs. Robinson, made advances to Branwell and was discovered by her invalid husband.⁸⁸ In The Life, Elizabeth Gaskell roundly condemns Lady Scott as being in a great part responsible for Branwell Brontë's degeneration. In order to avoid a libel suit, a public apology was printed in the Times, and all references to the affair were removed from the third edition.⁸⁹

There had been adverse reaction to Mary Barton and Ruth, but it was not sufficiently disturbing to stop Elizabeth Gaskell from writing about controversial matters. However, with the criticism and legal problems over The Life of Charlotte Brontë, she wrote in a letter "Oh! catch me writing another biography," and, it is interesting to note, she never again returned to contemporary problems in her writing.⁹⁰

Though The Life was painstaking in its research, and though Elizabeth Gaskell took great care to give as true a portrait of Charlotte Brontë as she could, modern critics have noted some flaws in the work. Essentially, Elizabeth Gaskell did not tell the whole story; she consciously

Witch" and "The Crooked Branch" in 1859, "The Grey Woman" in 1861, and "A Dark Night's Work" in 1863. Although there was no major novel in this period, Elizabeth Gaskell did write two important novelettes, My Lady Ludlow (1858) and Cousin Phillis (1863).

My Lady Ludlow was serialized in Household Words from 19 June to 25 September 1858.⁹⁵ It is perhaps the worst planned of all Elizabeth Gaskell's books and was probably written ex tempore.⁹⁶ It is a disjointed tale with one lengthy and unnecessary digression, a tale about the French Revolution. As the narrator warns the reader, "it is not a story with a beginning, middle, or end--it is a mass of recollections."⁹⁷

My Lady Ludlow is a study of the English aristocratic tradition facing up to a changing world. It is set in a rural village at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lady Ludlow is a dowager countess who takes her responsibilities as a landlord seriously. She cares for her tenants, according to her orthodox, traditional standards. But with the arrival of a new young parson, Mr. Gray, who wants to start a school in Hanbury, things begin to change. Lady Ludlow is very much opposed to universal education; she will not even hire a servant who knows how to read. She believes that everyone has a prescribed place in society, with certain duties, and that stepping out of this pattern leads to events such as occurred during the French Revolution. However, in the course of the story, she comes to realize

that change is inevitable, that it can be absorbed by society, and she accepts these facts gracefully, as the great lady she is. By the end of the book, a strangely assorted group of guests are gathered in Lady Ludlow's drawing room. There is Mr. Gray, who now has his school and is married to the illegitimate Bessy, whose existence Lady Ludlow had previously chosen not to acknowledge. There is Miss Galindo, a spinster with all the delightful Cranford proprieties. There is a wealthy Baptist baker, owner of a neighbouring estate, a "tradesman" and a Dissenter, and his daughter, now married to Captain James, Lady Ludlow's overseer who is experimenting with scientific farming on her estates. When the baker's daughter commits the faux pas of pulling out her red handkerchief and putting it across her knees to set her cake on it, Lady Ludlow makes a generous and symbolic gesture of noblesse oblige by taking out her own dainty white handkerchief and doing the same as the baker's daughter, as if it were her normal practice.

True kindness and generosity triumph over old prejudices and outdated proprieties, but the old aristocratic values of honour and duty are reaffirmed. My Lady Ludlow, like so many of Elizabeth Gaskell's works, shows the Cranford ethos facing up to change in the light of new ideas, attitudes, and beliefs.⁹⁸ Lastly, My Lady Ludlow like her last novel, Wives and Daughters, is a confirmation of her belief in a social hierarchy.⁹⁹

Cousin Phillis was serialized in Cornhill Magazine between November 1863 and February 1864.¹⁰⁰ Many critics consider that, as a work of art, it is nearly perfect.¹⁰¹ It is Elizabeth Gaskell's tribute to the simple, bucolic life. On a lesser scale than in North and South and My Lady Ludlow, it is also a confrontation of the old and the new. Naive, innocent Phillis, who has previously lived a peaceful, rustic life at Hope Farm, falls in love with Holdsworth, a sophisticated, worldly railway engineer, who is overseeing the laying of a new line near the farm. Holdsworth is also attracted to Phillis, but his values are different from hers, and he does not take such attachments as seriously as does she. He goes to Canada to work on a new railroad and marries a girl there. Phillis follows the traditional pattern of the Victorian heroine and goes into a decline, but recovers, and is wiser to the ways of the world.

Here again, though not as obviously as in other works, Elizabeth Gaskell uses the theme of the confrontation between the simpler "days before the railroads" and the industrial change that was taking place in England.¹⁰² Again, there is also the theme of reconciliation with change. Phillis does not die of brain fever, as she could have so conveniently, but recovers and vows to be happy again.

In 1863, Sylvia's Lovers appeared. Many critics, such as Hopkins, include this novel among Elizabeth Gaskell's highest artistic achievements.¹⁰³ It shows a finer technical control of the story and a deeper psychological realism than

in her earlier works.¹⁰⁴ It is also less didactic; the author's comments are not in as grave a tone as in Mary Barton and Ruth, and they are usually made for ironic effect.¹⁰⁵ Phillip and Sylvia's reconciliation is a major flaw in the novel. Though the reconciliation motif is overdone and is distasteful to twentieth century critics, it was a requisite in the nineteenth century. As one nineteenth century critic summed it up: "of all men, the novelist should not divide but unite."¹⁰⁶

Sylvia's Lovers is an historical novel. The action is centered around the problems created by the Royal Navy impressment gangs and, in particular, the riot in Whitby in 1793. As with The Life of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell again carefully researched her subject, though this time her primary purpose was not historical accuracy but to give the novel realism and authenticity.

In gathering data for Sylvia's Lovers, Elizabeth Gaskell used several sources. She questioned the inhabitants of Whitby as to their knowledge of the riot. She talked with Whitby's Unitarian minister, its bookseller, and with John Corney, who related to her what he had learned about the incident from an old tradesman.¹⁰⁷ She read A History of Whitby by George Young and consulted the Annual Register and the "Calendar of Felons."¹⁰⁸ She wrote to the Admiralty and asked for all information pertinent to the riot and the subsequent hanging of Lieutenant William Atkinson, who aided the rioters, and she gathered information from General

Perronet Thompson and Sir Charles Napier concerning press gang practices.¹⁰⁹ A book by William Scoresby aided her in describing the whaling ships.¹¹⁰ Again, Elizabeth Gaskell authentically reproduced the speech of the area, as she had in Mary Barton and North and South, thereby making her characters more real and less theatrical.¹¹¹ Her rendering of the Yorkshire dialect in Sylvia's Lovers was so well done that a Whitby man who had earlier published a glossary of the dialect drew heavily on Sylvia's Lovers in a revised edition of his glossary.¹¹²

Elizabeth Gaskell's last novel, Wives and Daughters: An Everyday Story, was serialized in monthly installments in Cornhill Magazine from August 1864 through January 1866.¹¹³ The novel was left unfinished as Elizabeth Gaskell died on 12 November 1865. Her editor learned from her daughters what she had intended for the closing chapter, and appended a conclusion.

Many critics consider Wives and Daughters to be her finest novel, the "crowning effort" of her career, "the most underrated novel in English."¹¹⁴ It puts Elizabeth Gaskell on a level with George Eliot and Jane Austen in her portrayal of country village life. What has impressed critics, Victorian and modern alike, is the ease and grace with which the characters are developed. There is less didacticism, less authorial comment, and a lesser restriction placed on her art by an adherence to conventional morality.¹¹⁵ There is a consensus among critics that Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia

Kirkpatrick are Elizabeth Gaskell's finest fictional characters. The vain and hypocritical Mrs. Gibson is almost a satire of middle-class refinement, yet for all her pretension and deceit, she is not consciously malicious nor altogether repugnant. Cynthia, Mrs. Gibson's daughter, is beautiful, impetuous, egocentric, hedonistic, and incapable of deep feeling or high virtue. What makes Cynthia likeable is that she is aware of her foibles and makes no pretence of being other than what she is. Moreover, she is able to recognize virtue in others, particularly, in Molly and her father. Cynthia is a breakthrough for Elizabeth Gaskell. "For the first time she boldly confronted in the intriguing Cynthia the possibility that moral laxity and moral discrimination were not mutually exclusive."¹¹⁶

Wives and Daughters, like Cranford, is concerned with life in a small country village, Hollingford, in the 1820's and 1830's.¹¹⁷ Unlike Cranford, which deals with but a limited segment of society, Wives and Daughters encompasses a complete social order. Hollingford is richly peopled with lords and ladies, shopkeepers, labourers, servants, a squire, doctors, genteel spinsters, a duchess, a governess, a land agent, and all the other members of society in a southern village. Always with an eye to detail, Elizabeth Gaskell is careful to show the differences between the various levels of society in the phrasing of speech, the furnishing of rooms, and the difference in perceptions.¹¹⁸ She gives an accurate and effective picture; as Henry James

said in his review of Wives and Daughters, "the hours given to its perusal seem like hours actually spent, in the flesh as well as in the spirit among the scenes and people described in the atmosphere of their motives, feelings, traditions, and associations. . . ."119

Wives and Daughters is a reworking of many of the themes and motifs found in Elizabeth Gaskell's other works. As in Mary Barton, Ruth, and The Life of Charlotte Bronte, character and behaviour are directly linked to upbringing and environment.¹²⁰ Cynthia is unable to love deeply because she was not loved as a child; Molly Gibson is virtuous and honest like her father. There is an adherence to the idea that a woman is not supposed to be aware of her feelings for a man until that man's declaration of love for her, and so Molly loves Roger like a brother until he asks for her hand.¹²¹ There is also the theme of the breakdown of social barriers through love and understanding; Squire Hamley learns to accept his French Roman Catholic daughter-in-law who was formerly a servant.

Again, Elizabeth Gaskell shows that society must change with the times, though in Hollingford, change is very slow. The most striking symbols of change from the traditional to the modern world are Roger and Osborne Hamley, the squire's sons. Roger is a scientist, whom Elizabeth Gaskell consciously patterned after Charles Darwin.¹²² Roger resembles John Thornton in North and South in many ways; both are blunt, earnest, decisive, and both are possessed of a

keen practical intelligence and unaristocratic features. Osborne Hamley is a gentleman of the old school. Educated in the humanities, he has perfect manners, a gift for writing verse, an aristocratic beauty that is almost effeminate. Elizabeth Gaskell shows by means of these brothers that it is the Rogers, not the Osbornes, who will inherit the new world of science and industry. Osborne is shown to be well-intentioned but morally weak. He does poorly at Cambridge, destroying his parents' pride in him, gets into debt, makes a romantically idealistic but unfortunate marriage, and dies young. Roger, on the other hand, does well at Cambridge, travels around the world on a successful scientific expedition, marries the worthy Molly Gibson, and was undoubtedly intended by Elizabeth Gaskell to have a distinguished scientific career.

Wives and Daughters, like North and South, is focused on the middle class as represented by Molly and Mr. Gibson. It is evident that Elizabeth Gaskell felt that the future of England rested with an enlightened middle class. Though they do not disregard lines of social demarcation, Molly and her father do not permit these distinctions to stand in the way of what their humanity and intellect tell them is right. They respect the social hierarchy and do not wish to alter it, but they demand that people be treated on their merits as individuals and not according to chance of birth.¹²³ In these attitudes, they are akin to Margaret Hale, to the Bensons who took in Ruth, Miss Matty in Cranford,

and Mr. Gray and Miss Galindo in My Lady Ludlow, all of which are exemplary middle-class characters.

Critics differ as to whether Elizabeth Gaskell ought to be ranked among the best novelists of the early Victorian period. She had an unfortunate proclivity toward melodrama, which in full blown fashion occurs in Mary Barton and Sylvia's Lovers, and a tendency to retreat in the face of social convention. Her works have often been praised for their wonderful humour and warmth. Perhaps her greatest quality is her attention to detail. In her novels, she not only recreates the actual living conditions in town or country, but more important, she clearly develops the ethic which permeated society. Furthermore, as well, if not better than any other writer of her day she understood and recorded the changing pattern of life in nineteenth century England. Elizabeth Gaskell's careful observation of her era is the focus of this study and the subject of the remaining chapters.

¹The most complete list of Elizabeth Gaskell's works can be found in G. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970).

²For instance, in 1858 she agreed to a republication of some of her short stories such as "The Poor Clare" (1856), "An Accursed Race" (1854), and her novel My Lady Ludlow (1858), all which had appeared in Household Words. The introductory story which explained how the following tales came to be told Round the Sofa was the only new contribution. She hoped to get £100 for the stories in order to finance a trip to the continent with her daughter Meta. She felt the trip would help to cushion her daughter's broken engagement. See Letters, 414 and 401.

³Mary Barton A Tale of Manchester Life, 2 Vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1848). It was published under the pseudonym Cotton Mather Mills, Esq.

⁴Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 205.

⁵According to Arnold Kettle, a social-problem novel focuses entirely on a societal concern and offers some recommendation as to how that concern can be mitigated or overcome. Also, in the social-problem novel there is less emotional involvement with the characters. For a detailed discussion of this genre see Arnold Kettle, "The Early Victorian Social-Problem Novel" in From Dickens to Hardy, ed. Boris Ford. Vol. 6 of the Pelican Guide to English Literature (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 169-170.

⁶Ibid., 173-174.

⁷Louis Cazamian, The Social Novel in England 1830-1850 (London: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 12-13. It is his contention that English history between 1830 and 1850 is marked by two opposing forces: the economic phenomenon of the industrial revolution and the psychological phenomenon of the idealist reaction. Cazamian goes on to point out some of the ironies of the situation. The idealists, Carlyle, Dickens, Kingsley, and Elizabeth Gaskell based their arguments on hard, concrete facts whereas one would have expected idealists to have stated their case in vague intellectual notions or in terms of some distant utopia. The further irony comes when the industrialists and the defenders of laissez-faire economics, generally men of the world and experienced in the economic process, rather than argue from that experience supported their assertions with theory rather than fact.

⁸Tillotson, 220. It is likely that Elizabeth Gaskell's concept of the "two nations," or the rich and the poor, owes

more to Carlyle's influence than to Disraeli's. In Sartor Resartus Carlyle speaks of the "two sects" who will part England between them.

⁹Aina Rubenius, The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works in Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, ed. S. B. Lilljégren (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska Bokhandlin, 1950), 221.

¹⁰John Lucas, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood," Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth Century Fiction, eds. David Howard, John Lucas, and John Goode (New York: Barnes Noble, Inc., 1964), 162.

¹¹Ibid., 154.

¹²Tillotson, 209. Further, because the case of Devil-dust is so extreme and out of the ordinary the story seems hardly plausible.

¹³Cazamian, 231.

¹⁴The Manchester Guardian prided itself in never having compromised a single tenet of laissez-faire economic doctrine. Its early editors were all Anti-Corn Law League members and the paper provided many columns for the opinions of Cobden and Bright. Needless to say it was openly hostile to the factory acts and the ten hours bill. What few lines devoted to the trade unions movement were rather disparaging and there was little mention of labour disputes. Always a defender of the manufacturer, the Manchester Guardian accused the author of Mary Barton of calumny.

The paper was founded in May 1821 and was located not far from the Gaskell's Cross Street Chapel. A weekly for more than twenty years, it was published bi-weekly from 1844-1855. With the abolition of the stamp tax in printed materials, it became a daily. At about mid-century its circulation was nearly 8,000.

For a fuller account of the history of the Manchester Guardian see: William Haslam Mills, The Manchester Guardian (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972 reprint); also see J. L. Hammond, C. P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934).

The British Quarterly Review was founded in February 1846 in London. In 1866 it merged with the Congregationalist to form the Congregationalist Review. It was certainly much less prestigious than either the Edinburgh or the Quarterly Review. If its criticisms of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels are any indication of its overall philosophy, it was a fairly conservative journal. It supported free trade and like most other nineteenth century periodicals, its commentary tended to be highly moralistic.

¹⁵Review of "Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life," British Quarterly Review, IX (February 1, 1849), 122.

¹⁶Ibid., passim.

¹⁷Ibid.; also see W. R. Greg, The Mistaken Aims and Artizan (London: Trubner and Co., 1876).

¹⁸Review of "Mary Barton," British Quarterly Review, 132.

¹⁹Tillotson, 219.

²⁰Quoted in M. Ganz, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict (New York: Twayne, 1969), 264.

The Athenaeum, aside from the Spectator, was probably the most important weekly of the Victorian era. It originated in 1828 and was closely associated with F. D. Maurice and the Apostles group. From 1830-1846 it was edited by C. W. Dilke who made the Athenaeum reknown for its integrity and independence. Under Dilke the Athenaeum was a progressive publication. It waged war against the influence of the large publishing houses; cutting the price, circulation was increased six fold to 18,000. It drew a significant portion of its audience from the Mechanics' Institutes and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

G. H. Lewes, J. A. Heraud, and W. M. Rossetti were among its more famous contributors. It assumed a role in all the progressive causes of the day. The Athenaeum protested against the stamp duty terming it "taxes on knowledge"; it encouraged popular education, public parks, prison reform, public health legislation, and the penny post. The Westminster Review, in 1838, wrote that the Athenaeum was "one of the best periodicals of its kind in Europe."

For further information see: R. G. Cox "The Reviews and Magazines" in From Dickens to Hardy, ed. Boris Ford Vol. 6; L. A. Marchand, The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture (Chapel Hill, 1941).

²¹"Recent Novels," Fraser's Magazine, XXXIX (April 1849), 430. Fraser's Magazine For Town and Country was founded in 1830. Its first editor, William Maggin, was probably the most prolific magazine writer in the twenties, thirties and forties. Fraser's was modeled after Blackwood's and was noted for its "swash-buckling Toryism" in the 1830's. It serialized the best of Thackeray's and Carlyle's early writing. It also published posthumously some works by Byron, Shelley and Coleridge. In 1847 Fraser's became more liberal in outlook. Both Kingsley's Yeast and Hypatia were serialized there. Under the editorship of J. A. Froude (1861-74) Fraser's popularity diminished.

Fraser's is famous for its "Gallery of Literary Characters." The Gallery, which contains some eighty-one portraits of literary figures from the 1830's was Maggin's idea. Although the portraits are basically caricatures, they are subtle enough to give a fairly good likeness.

For further details see: R. G. Cox op. cit.; Miram H. Thrau Rebellious Fraser's (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1934).

²²Sharps, 59.

²³Greg, Mistaken Aims, 113. William Rathbone Greg (1809-1881) was born into a family of wealthy, philanthropic cotton manufacturers. He was educated in the best dissenting schools and attended the University of Edinburgh. Like his brothers he went into business, but his heart was never really in directing a mill and in 1850 he liquidated his business interests.

Greg was more interested in politics, community service and professional writing than running a factory. While a manufacturer, he belonged to a group of civic-minded activists who promoted public education and sanitation reforms. In the 30's he became an Anti-Corn Law League advocate and stood for Parliament in 1837.

Perhaps, Greg is most remembered for his literary efforts. In 1842, the Anti-Corn Law League judged his "Agriculture and the Corn Laws" the best essay submitted to it. In 1852 alone, he contributed twelve articles to the four leading periodicals of the day. He generally wrote in politics and economics though occasionally he would touch on belle-lettres. For instance his review of Ruth remains one of the most perspicacious criticisms ever written.

Despite his criticism of Mary Barton, Greg and Elizabeth Gaskell were on friendly terms. Greg visited at Plymouth Grove on occasion and they saw each other often as they were members of the same social circle in Manchester. In a letter of introduction for Greg, Elizabeth Gaskell referred to him as a "distinguished writer."

For an idea of the scope of Greg's writing see his: Enigmas of Life (London: K. Paul, Trench, and Trubner, 1891); Essays on Political and Social Science (London: Longman, Brown and Green, 1853); Miscellaneous Essays (London: Trubner, 1882); Mistaken Aim and Attainable Ideas of the Artizan Class (London: Trubner and Co., 1876). For his prize essay for the Anti-Corn Law League see: Focal Aspects of the Industrial Revolution, 1825-42 (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971).

For further details about his life see: R. V. Holt. The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England, passim.; for his relationship with Elizabeth Gaskell see: Letters, 42, 85, 136, 186, 311, 465, 471.

²⁴Ganz, 52; also Sharps, 49-79.

²⁵It is interesting to note that she had intended to entitle her novel John Barton. In a letter to Mrs. Samuel Greg she wrote:

Round the character of John Barton
all the others formed themselves;
he was my hero, the person with whom
all my sympathies went, with whom I
tried to identify myself at the time,
because I believed from personal ob-
servation that such men were not un-
common,

From Letters, 42. It has been suggested that her publisher convinced her that a book titled after a murderer would arouse public sensibilities. Consequently, her novel was called Mary Barton.

²⁶Kettle, 181.

²⁷Ganz, 64-65.

²⁸Cazamian, 217. For Dickens' feelings about violence see H. House, The Dickens World (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) and R. J. Cruikshank, Charles Dickens and Early Victorian England (London: Pitman & Son, 1949).

²⁹Ganz, 76.

³⁰For example, see Sylvia's Lovers.

³¹A. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell (London: John Lehmann, 1952), 78.

³²Quoted in Hopkins, 88.

³³Quoted in Sharps, 93.

³⁴Household Words, IV (1851-1852), 265-274, 349-357, 588-597; V (1852), 55-64; VI (1853), 390-396, 413-420; VII (1853), 108-115, 220-227, 277-285.

³⁵Cranford (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853).

³⁶Letters, 562; also see Ganz, 274. In 1855 Charles Eliot Norton wrote to her that Cranford was loved in America "from Maine to California." John Forster, publisher, and biographer of Dickens, praised her on every episode as it appeared. Elizabeth Gaskell, herself, commented that it was the only one of her books that she could read over again.

³⁷D. Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists (London: Constable and Co., 1957), 235. Cecil felt that Elizabeth Gaskell's greatest talents gave scope to the humorous, the pathetic and the charming. This she did in Cranford.

³⁸Sharps, 126-127. Sharps is quoting from Henry Green's Knutsford, Its Traditions and History: With Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Notices of the Neighborhood (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1859).

³⁹For a detailed account of Knutsford and its presence in Elizabeth Gaskell's works see George Payne, Mrs. Gaskell and Knutsford (Manchester: Clarkson and Griffiths, LTD., 1900).

⁴⁰See Hopkins, 65 and Letters, 562.

⁴¹E. Wright, Mrs. Gaskell (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 76.

⁴²This is most apparent in My Lady Ludlow, North and South, and Wives and Daughters.

⁴³Ruth (London: Chapman and Hall, 1853).

⁴⁴Rubenius, 9-10. Of course, the discussion of the fallen woman and the double standard in sexual matters was nothing new to British life. Herbert Spencer in Social Statistics (1850) had spoken out for the rights of women and had assaulted sexual hypocrisy.

⁴⁵That Elizabeth Gaskell was writing Ruth for a purpose is evident from her letters. In a letter to Monckton Milnes, later Lord Houghton, she wrote: "I only knew how very close to my heart it had come from. I tried to make the story and the writing as quiet as I could, in order that 'people' (my great bugbear) might not say that they could not see what the writer felt to be a very plain and earnest truth" In another letter to Anna Jameson she wrote: "I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk and discuss the subject a little more than they did." Letters, 152, 153.

⁴⁶Quoted by Rubenius, p. 189. For an interesting appraisal of Dr. Gregory and his notions see Rubenius, passim.

⁴⁷Letters, 150.

⁴⁸From Josephine Butler's, An Autobiographic Memoir as cited in Rubenius, 190.

⁴⁹Anon., "The Lady Novelists of Great Britain," Gentleman's Magazine, 143 (July-December 1853), 22.

⁵⁰G. H. Lewes, "Ruth and Villette," Westminster Review, N.S. 111 (January and April 1853), 477.

⁵¹Hopkins, 123.

⁵²W. R. Greg, "False Morality of Lady Novelists," Literary and Social Judgements (Boston: Osgood & Co., 1873), 171.

⁵³See Ganz, passim. Also Cecil, passim.

⁵⁴Review of "Mary Barton" British Quarterly Review, 133. Elizabeth Gaskell was not the first to call to the reading public's attention that the life of a dressmaker's apprentice was often unpleasant. Mayhew's London Labor and London Poor had previously brought the problem to the fore.

⁵⁵Rubenius, 133. Though Elizabeth Gaskell did not know Florence Nightengale prior to the publication of Ruth, it is probable that she had read Miss Nightengale's pamphlet The Institution of Kaiserwerth on the Rhine, for the Practical Training of Deaconesses, Under the Direction of the Rev. Pastor Fliedner, Embracing the Support and Care of a Hospital, Infant and Industrial School, and Female Penitentiary. In the pamphlet she attacks the state of English hospitals and advances the notion that nurses ought to be trained, efficient, and professional women.

Elizabeth Gaskell went further than advocating professional training for nurses in a novel. She was more than willing to have one of her daughters become a nurse.

⁵⁶E. Gaskell, Ruth (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873), I, 2.

⁵⁷Household Words, X (1854), 61-68, 85-92, 109-113, 133-138, 157-162, 181-187, 205-209, 229-237, 253-259, 277-284, 301-307, 325-333, 349-357, 373-382, 397-404, 421-429, 445-453, 469-477, 493-501, 517-527, 540-551, 54-57. North and South was published in two volumes in 1855 by Chapman and Hall.

⁵⁸Dickens felt that North and South opened too slowly, that there was too much dialogue, and that Mr. Hale's decision to leave the Church of England was not a suitable subject to bring up in the story as it might offend readers. Moreover, Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell argued about dividing points in the story and who should add the concluding remarks for each episode. She was so perturbed at one point that she asked her husband to interfere. Later in 1855, after the uproar over North and South had seemingly subsided,

Dickens wrote to his sub-editor Wills: "Mrs. Gaskell, fearful--fearful. If I were Mr. G., O Heaven how I would beat her!" For a fuller account of the altercation see Hopkins, 148-152.

⁵⁹Sharps, 207.

⁶⁰Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (London: Chatto and Rindus, 1958), 92.

⁶¹As G. Kitson Clark has pointed out in his Making of Victorian England there were fewer popular disturbances in the fifties than in the fourties largely because there was less fear of things getting worse.

⁶²It has been suggested that W. R. Greg was responsible for Elizabeth Gaskell's change of attitude in North and South. However, her perception of the industrial problems had not changed that much. She meant only to show what she had neglected to show in Mary Barton, namely, that a rugged self-made laissez-faire industrialist could become an interventionist with a broad sense of social responsibilities.

⁶³Raymond Williams and John Lucas have seen Mary Barton and Jem Wilson's emmigration as evidence of Elizabeth Gaskell's romantic tendencies, as being escapist. However, escapist it might have been, emmigration was the response of not a few nineteenth century Britans. See Lucas, passim. and Williams, passim.

⁶⁴That she became a defender of the northern industrialists in North and South is Lucas' thesis. See Lucas, 175. I think rather that her purpose was to offer a solution to the problems of industrialization not to take sides.

⁶⁵Cazamian, 226.

⁶⁶I am indebted to Professor C. A. LeGuin of Portland State University for his views on North and South. It was he who first suggested to me that North and South could be analyzed in terms of the dialectic.

Elizabeth Gaskell may have been unaware of the dialectic nature of her book. Although, the novel is neatly focused on the meeting of two civilizations, she had originally intended the title to be Margaret Hale. It was Dickens who suggested the title North and South.

⁶⁷E. Wright, 137. "In North and South Mrs. Gaskell takes off the rose coloured glasses she wore in Mary Barton in talking about the countryside."

⁶⁸G. W. Sanders, Elizabeth Gaskell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), 149.

⁶⁹Sir William Fairbairn, an engineer who knew more about Manchester shops than most, said in a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell that "Poor old Higgins, with his weak consumptive daughter, is a true picture of a Manchester man. There are many like him in this town, and a better sample of independent industry you could not have hit upon. Higgins is an excellent representative of a Lancashire operative--strictly independent . . ." Quoted from Ward, "Introductions," IV, xxx.

⁷⁰Official reports of the day indicated the difficulty of finding domestic help in Lancashire and Elizabeth Gaskell had experienced this herself. See Rubenius, 159.

⁷¹E. Wright, 142; and V. S. Pritchett, "Current Literature: Books in General," New Statesman and Nation, XXI (June 1941), 630.

⁷²See P. N. Furbank, "Mendacity in Mrs. Gaskell," Encounter, XL (May 1973), 51-55.

⁷³Ibid. His point is: if the reader cannot accept what the author has to say about the small details, how is he to believe Elizabeth Gaskell in greater matters.

⁷⁴Rubenius, 116-117. Rubenius relates that in this period "under no circumstances was a woman to love before the man declared himself, nor was it proper to talk about her feelings after the engagement." Rubenius also mentions that Elizabeth Gaskell may have been apprehensive to allow Margaret a conscious love for Thornton because she had been criticized for letting Mary Barton declare her love for Jem at his trial, which actually shocked some readers.

⁷⁵Mr. Brontë wanted an authoritative biography written in order to counter many recently published articles about Charlotte which he believed to be false. Mrs. Gaskell had already determined to write a memoir of Charlotte prior to Mr. Brontë's request for the biography.

⁷⁶Letters, 75.

⁷⁷Ibid.; also see Y. Ffrench, Mrs. Gaskell (London: Home and Van Thal, Ltd., 1962), 76.

⁷⁸Hopkins, 165.

⁷⁹Ibid. 163.

⁸⁰See C. Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896).

⁸¹Hopkins, p. 166.

⁸²Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1858), XV, 182.

⁸³Hopkins, 189. There were also favourable reviews in the Economist and the New Monthly Magazine. When the formal retraction of Branwell's affair with Mrs. Robinson was made in the Times, the Athenaeum changed its mind as to the merits of The Life. On 6 June 1857 its editors wrote: "We are sorry to be called upon to return to Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' but we must do so, since the book has gone forth with our recommendation. Praise, it is needless to point out, implied trust in the biographer as an accurate collector of facts. This, we regret to state, Mrs. Gaskell proves not to have been." Quoted in Hopkins, 190.

⁸⁴The Edinburgh Review felt that Mrs. Gaskell had not been objective enough in her approach. She had relied too heavily upon Charlotte's morbid recollection of Cowan Bridge School. The Christian Observer condemned the biography, Mrs. Gaskell and her other works, as rationalistic. They also disapproved of Charlotte Brontë and her works as offensive to good taste, morality and religion. Blackwood's Magazine (July 1857) harshly criticized The Life. See Letters, 415 and Hopkins, 191.

⁸⁵Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle, 16-17.

⁸⁶Hopkins, p. 182.

⁸⁷Letters, 366.

⁸⁸For a full account of this alleged affair see Elizabeth Gaskell's The Life of Charlotte Brontë, xiii, 258-60.

⁸⁹See Hopkins, 184.

⁹⁰Elizabeth Gaskell was deeply distressed by the uproar that The Life had caused. In a letter to Ellen Nussey 16 June 1857 she wrote that she had never cried so much or more needed praise and kind words in her life than during the difficulties arising from the biography. In letter after letter she states that she only tried to tell the

truth and reasserted that she had done so. At one point she threatened to put in the preface of the third edition this comment: "If anybody is displeased with any statement in this book, they are requested to believe it withdrawn, and my deep regret expressed for its insertion, as truth is too expensive an article to be laid before the British public." She went on to say that "for the future I intend to confine myself to lies (i.e., fiction). It's safer." See Letters, 353, 354, 358, 362.

⁹¹M. Lane, The Brontë Story A Reconsideration of Mrs. Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1953), 164.

⁹²C. Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Sisters (London: Hoddes & Stoughton, 1905), VII.

⁹³See Ganz, 279. Lane, 64, 161-64, 54-55. Also see W. Gerin, Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 290.

⁹⁴Shorter, Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle, 1; also A. Pollard, Mrs. Gaskell: Novelist and Biographer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), 171.

⁹⁵Household Words, XVIII (1858), 1-7, 29-34, 51-56, 85-89, 99-104, 123-128, 148-153, 175-181, 205-211, 247-252, 277-282, 299-305, 327-332, 341-346.

⁹⁶Sharps, 277.

⁹⁷See Elizabeth Gaskell, My Lady Ludlow (Sampson Low, Son and Co., 1861), 6.

⁹⁸E. Wright, 14.

⁹⁹French, 76.

¹⁰⁰Cornhill Magazine, VIII (1863) 619-635, 688-706, IX (1864) 51-65, 187-209. Cornhill Magazine was probably the most important new periodical in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was founded in January 1860 by George Smith of Smith, Elder and Co. publishers. The Cornhill was a combination of critical reviews and new fiction. The first edition sold 170,000 copies at a shilling a piece. Though Cornhill could not sustain that large a circulation it remained one of the best-selling periodicals in the nineteenth century.

Cornhill Magazine was perhaps the most prestigious literary journal in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thackeray was its first editor. Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Wilkie Collins, Mathew Arnold,

and John Ruskin all published there. Cornhill was certainly a cut above Dickens' All Year Round. Elizabeth Gaskell was very much aware of this. She consciously tried to save her best stories for Cornhill. For further information about Cornhill Magazine see R. G. Cox, "Reviews and Magazines." Also see Letters, 451a, 442, 462.

¹⁰¹For instance see Hopkins and Ganz.

¹⁰²Quotation from Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters, i, 37.

¹⁰³See Hopkins, 261-273. Any Cruse notes in The Victorians and Their Reading (1935) that Newman believed that Sylvia's Lovers was Elizabeth Gaskell's finest effort. Lady Frederick Cavendish in 1866 wrote that it was one of the best novels she had ever read.

¹⁰⁴Ganz, 273.

¹⁰⁵E. Wright, 20.

¹⁰⁶Review of Ruth, Gentleman's Magazine, 24-25.

¹⁰⁷Ward, "Introductions," VI, vviii.

¹⁰⁸Young's History of Whitby was written in 1817. It should be remembered that William Stevenson had written and compiled much of the Annual Register in the 1820's.

¹⁰⁹Ward, "Introductions," VI, xxiv-xxv.

¹¹⁰W. Scoresby, An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a history and description of the northern whale fishery, 2 Vols. (London: Hurst Robinson and Co., 1820).

¹¹¹Sanders, 150.

¹¹²Sharps, 416.

¹¹³X (1864) 129-153, 355-384, 385-408, 583-608, 695-721; XI (1865) 65-87, 197-222, 320-345, 434-460, 564-590, 682-705; XII (1865) 1-29, 129-164, 257-295, 385-425, 513-546, 641-678; XIII (1866) 1-15.

¹¹⁴Hopkins, 278; see also Lawrence Lerner's introduction to Wives and Daughters (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1969), 27.

¹¹⁵Ganz, passim.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 181.

¹¹⁷The story begins in "those days before the railway," and prior to the "passing of the Reform Bill" of 1832 but at a time when there was "much liberal talk" taking place. Actually, she confuses the chronology somewhat, but the important thing to remember is that her point is not historical accuracy but general impression and mood. See Wives and Daughters, I, 37-38.

¹¹⁸Wright, 42.

¹¹⁹Quoted in Hopkins, 328.

¹²⁰E. Wright, 52.

¹²¹See discussion of North and South above.

¹²²Letters, 550.

¹²³Wright, 121.

III

PHYSICAL MANCHESTER

Manchester held a unique position in the second quarter of the nineteenth century: it was the first and largest fully industrialized urban area in the world. In the 1840's Manchester became the symbol of what modern life was all about. All those who were interested in witnessing the effects of urban industrialism came to Manchester.¹ De Tocqueville visited the city in 1835;² Emerson, Engels, Carlyle, Dickens, and Disraeli did so in the 1840's.³ Elizabeth Gaskell, who lived in Manchester from 1832 to her death in 1865, was also interested in the effects of industrialism. Living in Manchester for more than 30 years, having taught Sunday school at Lower Mosley Street, one of the poorer districts of Manchester, and having visited the homes not only of the working class but of many of the prominent manufacturers and merchants as well, she was able to make detailed and extensive observations of what Manchester was like in the 1840's and early 50's.

Although there were a few fine buildings, and though the Botanical Gardens were agreeable, Manchester was hardly an attractive city.⁴ As described in North and South, the main thoroughfares were marked by unimpressive warehouses and small shops, and the more opulent homes were in the suburbs.⁵ There were no great boulevards, nor were there

high hilltops from which to look out over the city. It had neither "those contrasting features which highlighted the cities of the Middle Ages nor by the regularity of post-fourteenth century capitals."⁶ Most of the houses and streets were similar, yet there seemed to be no pattern, no unity of construction. There was "no trace of the surveyor's rod or spirit-level" to be found in Manchester; it was at best a "noisome labyrinth."⁷ Manchester was nearly devoid of all beauty, all freshness. There were few trees, nor were there many flowers.⁸ Most visitors to Manchester from 1830 to 1850 would have agreed with General Napier's assessment. When, in 1839, he was sent to Manchester to command troops during the commercial crisis, he described the township as

The chimney of the world. Rich rascals poor rogues, drunken ragamuffins, and prostitutes form the moral, soot made into paste by the rain the physique, and the only view is a long chimney: what a place! The entrance to hell realized.⁹

Many Mancunians might have objected to the characterization of their city as "the chimney of the world" and "the entrance to hell," but few would have denied that Manchester was a decidedly unhealthy place to live.¹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell's description of the deleterious effects of living conditions in Manchester on the health and appearance of its citizens was similar to that of other writers in the thirties, forties, fifties and sixties. First of all, Mancunians looked different from people from other towns or from the rural districts. In the first chapter of Mary Barton,

John Barton compares Manchester women with those from the country districts:

You see them Buckinghamshire people as come to work here has quite a different look with them to us Manchester folk. You'll not see among the Manchester wenches such fresh, rosy cheeks, or such black lashes.¹¹

This difference in appearance was the direct effect of Manchester's environment. John Barton himself is below average size, "slightly made," has a "wan, colourless face," and has an "almost stunted look about him" as the result of his life in Manchester.¹² A visitor to Manchester in the early 1830's reported that he "saw no fresh, fine looking individuals among them [the factory population]," they seemed to him "a degenerate race, stunted, enfeebled, and depraved."¹³ even Queen Victoria herself remarked in 1851 that in Manchester there was a "painfully unhealthy looking population, men as well as women."¹⁴ Hippolyte Taine, on his first sojourn in England in the 1860's, wrote that the vile air, the wretched condition of the streets, and the abominable living quarters in Manchester made the citizens' faces "drawn and dismal."¹⁵

A perusal of Elizabeth Gaskell's works clearly shows that she believed that rural life was more conducive to good health than urban dwelling, and all the official reports of the 1840's indicate that this belief was well founded. The annual mortality rate from 1840 to 1843 in country districts was 1 in 55, while in town districts it was

1 in 38.¹⁶ In country districts, of every 1,000 deaths, 202 occurred at or above age 70, whereas in the town districts, less than 10 percent of the population ever reached age 70.¹⁷ One reason for this disparity between town and country was that the towns were much more susceptible to epidemics. In the Lancashire towns, epidemics were responsible for nearly 17 percent of all deaths, while in the country, epidemics accounted for less than 10 percent of all mortalities.¹⁸

Manchester in the 1840's ranked second only to Liverpool as the most unhealthy city or township in England. In London and its environs, the mortality rate was 1 in 37.38, in Birmingham 1 in 36.79, in Leeds 1 in 36.73, in Sheffield 1 in 32.92, and in Manchester 1 in 29.64. Only in Liverpool was the rate higher than in Manchester.¹⁹ The average age of death in Manchester was 20, and in metropolitan London it was 26.5.²⁰ Typhus, from which Davenport dies in Mary Barton, was both epidemic and endemic in large towns in the 1840's; it took nearly twice as many lives in Manchester than it did in Birmingham.²¹

The high mortality rate in Manchester was, in some measure, the result of insufficient light and air, lack of open spaces for recreation, ineffective drainage, and inadequate and unsanitary water supplies. Where these conditions were at their worst, death rates were the highest. It is not surprising that within Manchester itself, death rates varied considerably in different districts of the borough and

township. The Manchester Statistical Society reported in 1842 that the mortality rate per thousand in Broughton, a suburb of Manchester, was 15.8, in a district nearer the centre of town it was 28.6, and in the centre itself it was 35.2.²¹ In Broughton, a suburb not unlike Crampton in North and South, with adequate streets, water, and good drainage, life expectancy was twice that of the poorly sewered, unclean, and more crowded inner districts.²²

Mancunians were well aware of the deplorable living conditions in their city. Early in the 1830's, those who were affluent enough left the township for the suburbs, and the exodus continued through the forties, fifties, and sixties.²³ The Gaskells themselves removed in 1850 to 42 Plymouth Grove, a house at that time surrounded by open fields. In 1840, Richard Cobden, who was instrumental in the municipal incorporation of Manchester, moved from Mosley Street to the exclusively middle-class Broughton. He later wrote that he could not live in town or in the suburbs; he had to be in a "detached place" no matter how far from the exchange it was.²⁴ Nicholas Higgins, in North and South, expressed the sentiments of most Mancunians: "Folk seldom lives i' Milton [Manchester] just for the pleasure, if they can live anywhere else."²⁵

A consequence of the flight from Manchester of all those who could afford to live elsewhere was that the town was largely left to the working class. Even the petty tradesmen took asylum in the suburbs.²⁶ Therefore almost

all of the housing in Manchester was working-class. Houses vacated by the middle class were converted into warehouses, as was the case with the Cobdens' house, or were made into "gin palaces" as occurs in North and South. With the great influx of Irish immigrants in 1845-46 came a corresponding increase in the number of working-class residences.²⁷

Excluding the homes of the few merchants, manufacturers, and professional people who remained in Manchester, there were three general types of housing. First, there were the small cottages and courts in which the majority of the working class resided; John Barton's and Nicholas Higgins' houses are examples of this kind. Second, there were the small cellars or basement apartments of tenement houses or cottages in which were found the most impecunious of the working class; Alice Wilson's cellar in Mary Barton is not really indicative of this type of housing, for it is too clean and well-lighted. The Davenport's cellar in Mary Barton is more representative of a Manchester cellar, the waste water from the fetid pools in the street oozing up through the floor. Third, there were the lodging houses, occupied by the most destitute people in Manchester. They sheltered vagabonds, itinerants, and prostitutes like Esther in Mary Barton.

The small cottages and courts, although the most desirable working-class abodes, were lacking in structural quality, domestic comforts, and sanitary conveniences. A special Board of Health in Manchester, created in 1832 in response

to the cholera outbreak, found that one of the causes of the epidemic had been the bad state of housing.²⁸ The Board investigated nearly 7,000 houses and discovered that more than 2,500 required whitewashing, 960 were in need of repair, 1,435 were "uncommonly damp," 452 were ill-ventilated, 939 had deficient sewerage, and almost one in three was without a privy.²⁹ By the 1840's the situation had not improved; in fact, it had probably deteriorated, for Manchester suffered more and more from overcrowding.³⁰ Part of the problem was that much of the housing in Manchester was old and decrepit; much of it had been built before 1830, before the borough or the municipality had placed restrictions on new construction. As a result, some of the tenement houses, or courts, similar to those which John Barton and George Wilson walk past on their return from the country, rose up three stories on both sides of a four-foot-wide street.³¹

Pre-1830 housing was not the only reason for Manchester's generally bad housing situation. New construction, both in the township and in the suburbs, was less than satisfactory as late as the mid-1840's. A large proportion of the cottages, such as the one Nicholas Higgins occupied, were of the "most superficial character";³² many of them were erected by building clubs whose primary concern was to put them up as rapidly and as inexpensively as possible.³³ The suburban cottages were even less substantial than their city counterparts. Not only was the joiners' work badly executed, allowing air to pass through door jambs, window frames, and

floors, but the walls were made of "brick noggin," only half a brick thick.³⁴ Although the suburban cottages and courts had no foundations, which made them quite flimsy, they did have an advantage over the township cottages and courts-- they had no damp cellars.³⁵ Prior to the Manchester Police and Improvement Acts, 1844-45, the suburban cottages and courts, like those in the township were built back-to-back and often side-to-side.³⁶ Consequently, most dwellings in Manchester, like the Barton's, the Wilsons' and the Higgins' had just one entrance and no rear window, which precluded much ventilation. Each of the various Parliamentary Public Health Select Committees in the 1840's reported that the lack of cross ventilation in working-class housing was one of the main causes of epidemic disease and ill health in Manchester.³⁷

The interior of a typical Manchester cottage was similar to those described in Mary Barton and North and South. The cottage generally consisted of three rooms. On the ground level was the day room, which had a fireplace, and in this room the family prepared and ate their meals, entertained guests, and spent most of their waking hours outside of the factory. There were two bedrooms, one above the other. They were usually very small, contained only a bed, and were without windows. Though the cottage population in Manchester had a few domestic luxuries in the way of household furnishings which their counterparts in the country could not have afforded, the town cottage was not

more comfortable.³⁸ It was about half the size of a country cottage, more poorly ventilated, and without access to fresh air.³⁹

One of the most shocking aspects of Manchester in the 1840's was its cellar dwellings, which from the early 1830's had been regarded as a source of catarrh, rheumatic afflictions, cholera, and typhus.⁴⁰ In 1840, Richard Cobden testified before the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Health of Towns that nearly 12 percent of the working class in Manchester lived in cellars.⁴¹ A Manchester police report in 1843 stated that within its jurisdiction, whose total population was 235,000, there were some 5,529 cellars of which 4,445 were occupied by 18,217 persons.⁴² The greater part of these were Irish, who, for the most part, could afford only the most wretched habitations. However, a significant portion of the cellar population were English workers such as the Davenports and Alice Wilson in Mary Barton, who had fallen on hard times.

Elizabeth Gaskell's description of the Davenports' cellar, written from her own personal observation, is so authentic, so accurate, that it might have come out of Chadwick's Sanitary Report.⁴³ Although cellars were better in Manchester than in Liverpool, it is difficult to imagine a living situation worse than that of the Davenports. As was the case with the Davenports, cellars were generally composed of one room, nine to ten feet square, with a brick floor and a fireplace. Occasionally, there was a back room

euphemistically called a "back apartment," dirt floored, the only ventilation coming from the front room. Though most people would not allow their animals to inhabit the back room, let alone use it themselves, a rent was charged for it. In the cellars, window panes were often broken out and the windows stuffed with rags to keep out the cold; and the floors were almost always damp if not actually wet.⁴⁴ In some of the worst cellars, water from the street or improperly functioning sewers would cover the floor to a depth of several inches.⁴⁵ Chadwick's committee reported in 1842 that "more filth, worse physical suffering and moral disorder [were] ... to be found amongst the cellar population of the working people in Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds" than in the most wretched prison in England.⁴⁶

Many who wrote about the condition of the cellars were more shocked by the close, crowded living conditions than by the lack of sanitary precautions. Often as many as ten persons occupied a cellar ten feet square, and some writers were genuinely alarmed that, because so many people slept in the same room, a disintegration of common morality was occurring. Engels was horrified that men, women, and children were sleeping in the same room.⁴⁷ Chadwick's report told of several instances where a man, his wife, and his sister-in-law all slept in the same bed. The report went on to say that promiscuous living arrangements were the origin of much depravity, though many cellar inhabitants did not regard such arrangements as "extraordinary or

culpable."⁴⁸ After all, it was a fact of life that there was only one bed for every 2.6 people.⁴⁹

Even more deplorable than the cellar dwellings in Manchester were the numerous lodging houses. As a Manchester physician put it, "no description can convey anything like an accurate idea of the abominable state of these dens of filth, disease, and wretchedness."⁵⁰ If cellars were frequently crowded and cramped, lodging houses were packed like honeycombs, every square foot of space occupied by a human being. As depicted in Mary Barton, it was not unusual to find twenty to thirty people crammed into a garret.⁵¹

Charles Shaw, Chief Commissioner of the Manchester Police in the 1840's, related to Chadwick's committee that he had once visited a lodging house. There, at mid-day, in a small room devoid of any furniture, he saw three men and two women lying on the floor without straw, pillow, or blanket.⁵²

Lodging houses provided occasional shelter for those who did not even have the means to secure a cellar. They were seldom occupied by people who had legitimate employment. As Elizabeth Gaskell said of the occupants of the lodging houses, they chose "the evening and the night for their trades of beggary, thieving, or prostitution."⁵³

Lodging houses were also notorious for promiscuity. It was not uncommon to find several persons of either sex in one bed. One was probably ill, another was sleeping off the previous night's debauch, and a third was sleeping because he had nothing else to do.⁵⁴ Chadwick's report

concluded that the lodging houses were illustrative of the "moral and social disorder" which existed in large towns, and they were sources of crime and demoralization of every description.⁵⁵

The Public Health Board in Manchester and Parliamentary Select Committees recognized the lodging houses as a breeding ground for disease. After the typhus epidemic of 1837-1838, the Manchester Board of Health suggested to the churchwardens that they do something to rectify the conditions in the lodging houses, as the Board had determined that a great number of fever cases had originated there.⁵⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell recognized this situation; in Ruth the typhus epidemic originates in a lodging house. In Manchester as well as in other towns, these shelters were consistently seen as a chief source of fever and disease.

An even greater source of disease in Manchester were the many unpaved, unsewered, and uncleaned streets. Dr. Kay wrote in 1832 that of 687 streets inspected, 248 were unpaved, 53 partially paved, 112 were ill-ventilated, and 352 contained heaps of refuse, stagnant pools, and were full of holes.⁵⁷ Most of the unpaved streets were in the poorer districts. By the mid-1840's, the situation had not improved;⁶⁸ Manchester's cellars may not have been as numerous and unhealthy as those of Liverpool, but the condition of the streets was every bit as bad. No one who investigated Manchester's streets failed to link them to disease. Chadwick's committee reported that of 182 fever patients

admitted to a temporary fever hospital in Manchester, 135 at least came from an area of unpaved, or otherwise filthy, streets, courts, or alleys.⁵⁹ Davenport, who dies of typhus in Mary Barton, lived in a cellar on one of the most miserable back streets in Manchester. It is also significant that middle-class characters in Mary Barton and Northand South do not suffer from typhus or cholera. The middle class lived in well-drained, well-sewered, and well-cleaned areas, and in such areas, disease was not nearly as widespread nor as fatal as in working-class sections.⁶⁰

Travelling along some of the rutted, muddy, unsewered, excrement covered streets was at the very least unpleasant, and at times impossible. Some streets were so full of potholes and rubbish that wheeled vehicles used to take fever patients to the hospital could not be driven along them.⁶¹ Elizabeth Gaskell describes these streets as well as anyone. When John Barton and George Wilson go to the Davenports to help the sick, destitute family, their journey is described thus:

... and so they went along till they arrived at Berry Street. It was unpaved: and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. Never was the Edinburgh cry of 'Gardez l'eau!' more necessary than in this street. As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. Our friends were not dainty, but even they picked their way.⁶²

Mancunians were aware of the state of their streets. In the 1830's the Borough Police spent some 5,000 on street cleaning: first-class streets and thoroughfares were swept once a week, second-class streets once every two weeks, and third-class streets once a month.⁶³ But this plan neglected all the courts, alleys, and back streets, which were really the greatest problem. In the early 1840's, Manchester's scavenging department began to make progress under the new municipal government. One overly optimistic Mancunian remarked upon the introduction of a scavenging machine cart in 1844 that Manchester, "formerly one of the dirtiest towns in the United Kingdom is now the cleanest."⁶⁴ But in reality, a thorough inspection of Manchester's streets in 1846 indicated that in the Borough of Manchester there were accumulations of 18,000 to 20,000 tons of "night soil" and ashes.⁶⁵ The municipal government, under powers given it by the Manchester Improvement Act of 1845, began to clean not only the first, second, and third-class streets, but also the back courts, alleys, and back streets, which had not been cleaned in years.⁶⁶ The fact that in North and South there is no description of streets similar to Berry Street in Mary Barton is probably in some degree recognition of the general improvement in Manchester.

Part of the difficulty in maintaining sanitary conditions in the streets was the township's inadequate water supply. In the early 1840's, only the better districts were connected to water mains, and only slightly more than

half the homes in Manchester were supplied water through pipes.⁶⁷ There were three rivers in Manchester, but their water was so fouled by waste materials that the water was not even fit for washing down city streets. Engels described the Irk River as a "narrow, coal-black, and stinking" river which deposited "revolting blackish-green puddles of slime" along its banks.⁶⁸ De Toqueville referred to it as "the styx of this new Hades."⁶⁹ Water was so scarce in the early 1840's that there was no ready supply of water kept in the fire hydrants for fear that people would make personal use of it.⁷⁰ This often created a problem for firemen. As depicted in *Mary Barton*, because the fire mains were not constantly on, the fire plugs were either stiff from disuse, or there was no water.⁷¹ Moreover, when there was water, there was no guarantee that there would be sufficient pressure to operate the engine without resorting to hand pumping.⁷²

The first Parliamentary Select Committee to deal with the question of the health of towns in England noted that there was a "material distinction between Coventry and the towns in the South, from those in the North"; Southerners had a more complete sense of personal hygiene than Northerners. A commissioner told the committee that "the habits of the people of Coventry are remarkably superior to those of the people of Macclesfield and Manchester. Their homes are humbler but their habits of cleanliness compared with those which prevail in the North, are conspicuous."⁷³ The

insufficient water supply was at least in part responsible for the lack of personal hygiene on the part of the Mancunians. In North and South, Dixon makes Higgins go to the pump and wash before she will allow him to see the Hales. Water was not as easy to come by where Higgins lived, nor was it always very clean. In many instances, water supplied to working-class homes came from shallow springs which were contaminated by cesspools. The suburbs and better district of Manchester founded their own joint stock company to make certain that their water came from deep, clear springs.⁷⁴ The poor could not even rely on rainfall as a source of clean water. It was often "absolutely black" after having descended through the sooty air of Manchester.⁷⁵ It was 1854 before the city of Manchester took any meaningful action to ameliorate these conditions: a committee was set up to build public baths and drying areas to be available to the working class at the lowest possible cost.⁷⁶

No one who lived in or visited Manchester between 1830 and the 1860's could fail to notice the sooty air that turned rainwater black. In North and South when Margaret and Mr. Hale approached Milton [Manchester], "they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon" which they think means rain, but which they discover originates from the factories of Milton.⁷⁷ De Toqueville wrote that the sun in Manchester was a "disc without rays."⁷⁸ W. Cooke Taylor, who made a tour of the manufacturing districts in Lancashire in the early 1840's, called Manchester a "forest of chimneys"

and wrote that an "inky canopy" hung over the city.⁷⁹ A print of Manchester by G. Pickering in 1844 shows streams of smoke issuing from factories and a great layer of smoke and black air hovering over Manchester on an otherwise clear day.⁸⁰ The sun did shine in Manchester and the sky was occasionally clear but, most often, as Elizabeth Gaskell wrote in North and South, "houses, sky, people, and everything looked as if a gigantic brush had washed them all over with a dark shade of Indian ink."⁸¹

When Mrs. Hale tells Thornton in North and South that Milton is a much dirtier, smokier town than any in the south of England, she is quite correct. She tells Thornton that "it is impossible to keep the muslin blinds clean here [Milton-Manchester] above a week together; and at Helstone we have had them up for a month or more, and they have not looked it at the end of that time."⁸² Chadwick's committee reported that linen would be as soiled in two or three days in a Manchester suburb as it would be in a similar London suburb in a week, and that on the Isle of Arran a shirt was cleaner at the end of a week's wear than at Manchester at the end of a day's wear.⁸³ Not only was the polluted air hard on cloth, but it was an impediment to maintaining any kind of personal cleanliness. Margaret Hale found it necessary to wash her hands three times before noon just because of the dirt in the air; but, of course, working-class people did not generally have easy access to clean water necessary to keep themselves clean of the ever-present grime.⁸⁴

Living in such a heavily polluted atmosphere was also damaging to personal health. The smoke was injurious to the respiratory organs for the tiny particles of coal irritated the lungs.⁸⁵ Autopsies showed that persons breathed in so much polluted air that their bronchial glands were "perfectly black."⁸⁶ In North and South, the dirty, unhealthful air was thought to be partially responsible for Mrs. Hale's death.

Under the Police Act of 1844, the municipal government of Manchester had the authority to suppress smoke pollutants; this was one of the first pieces of clean air legislation in England.⁸⁷ By 1847, the municipality had appointed a special nuisance inspector to see that factory owners made the necessary changes in their furnaces so that they would consume as much of their pollutants as possible. In the year 1850, of 510 chimneys inspected, 87 firms were served notice to improve their furnaces, 231 received warnings, and 16 were fined for violations.⁸⁸ It was 1853 before Parliament finally passed a smoke consumption act. Despite the legislative action both at the national and municipal level, efforts to limit pollution were insufficient as laws were not well enough enforced to prevent an increase.⁸⁹ As Thornton remarked about Parliament's Smoke Consumption Act: "I doubt if there had been a chimney in Milton informed against for five years past, although some are constantly sending out one-third of their coal in what is called here unparliamentary smoke."⁹⁰

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of Manchester and of most large industrial towns in the 1830's and 1840's was the paucity of public recreational facilities and amusements. In the township itself, there were no public parks, no public walks, and no public square or common area until 1846. True, there were various libraries, philosophical and scientific societies, mechanics' institutes, and a couple of theatres, but these were used mainly by the middle class.⁹¹ There were also the Botanical and Zoological Gardens and a museum, but these were not free and were closed on Sunday, the workingman's only day off. In this lack of public recreational facilities, Manchester was probably more deficient "than any other town in the empire."⁹² As is indicated in Mary Barton, at the end of the 1830's, it was at least a half hour's walk from grassless, treeless Manchester to the "comparatively green fields" beyond the suburbs.⁹³ Public health investigators believed that it was both unhealthy and cruel to permit people to grow up without seeing an open field;⁹⁴ and there is no doubt that Elizabeth Gaskell firmly believed that there was something both mentally and physically beneficial in living close to nature.⁹⁵

By the mid-1840's there was a growing awareness that the municipality had some responsibility to provide recreational facilities for the general public and for the working class in particular. Mancunians like Mark Phillips, one of Manchester's M.P.'s and an alleged enemy of the working class, promoted the creation of public parks with no real concern

for the health of the operatives, but because public parks would tend to mollify the working class and divert their attention from politics and revolutionary activities.⁹⁶

This principle had been demonstrated on Queen Victoria's wedding day. The Chartists had planned a great demonstration in Manchester on the national holiday, and the magistrates were alarmed. Sir Charles Shaw, Chief Commissioner of the Borough Police, persuaded the mayor to open the Botanical and Zoological Gardens, the museum, and other public institutions free of charge. The result was that only two or three hundred people showed up at the Chartist rally.⁹⁷ In 1846, three new parks were dedicated, and they were to be open evenings and Sundays.⁹⁸ In 1850-51 the first free libraries were opened in Manchester. However, despite these innovations, the public houses and taverns remained the most popular form of recreation for a good part of the working class.

In 1832, there were 430 taverns and beer shops in Manchester and 322 gin shops or public houses;⁹⁹ by 1843, there were 769 beer shops and 498 public houses.¹⁰⁰ A public house could sell distilled liquors as well as beer, while a tavern or beer shop could sell only beer and ale.¹⁰¹ Most of these establishments were located in working-class districts or near the mill or factory, as in Mary Barton. There was incredible competition between the public houses and beer shops. The public houses would sell beer at a loss in order to get customers into the shop to buy gin,

"the blue ruin."¹⁰² Not to be outdone, the beer shops retaliated by resorting to the barter system.¹⁰³ Instead of forcing a customer to go to a pawn shop to get cash to buy beer, the beer shops would accept bread, butter, eggs, or clothing in lieu of money.

The public house in Manchester and in other manufacturing towns was more than just a place of entertainment or an escape from the factory and a small filthy cottage; it was "for the operative what the public squares were for the ancients."¹⁰⁴ The public house was the place where clubs, secret societies, and other organizations met to discuss issues and plan activities. In Mary Barton, John Barton and his unionist and Chartist friends meet in a public house and there decide to assassinate young Henry Carson.¹⁰⁵

Besides the public houses and beer shops, another conspicuous type of business in Manchester was the pawn shop; in the early 1840's, it was estimated that there were some five hundred in the city.¹⁰⁶ Probably very few working-class Mancunians were unfamiliar with the pawn shops. John Barton makes a trip to the pawnbroker where he exchanges his "better coat and silk handkerchief" for five shillings to help the Davenports.¹⁰⁷ When times were hard and work was scarce, operatives often pawned "conveniences and luxuries," but it was not unusual to find persons pawning their blankets or the very clothes on their backs. During the strike, Mary Barton is virtually forced to strip their home of dishes, ornaments, blankets, and any other

items not absolutely necessary.¹⁰⁸ The numerous pawnshops of Manchester were a constant reminder of the precarious existence of a good part of its inhabitants.

In Mary Barton and North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell accurately describes Manchester's physical character in the 1830's, 40's and 50's. The picture is not pleasant, but no one who visited Manchester in the forties found it to be pleasant. Many of the houses were small, jerry-built, uncomfortable and lacked sanitary facilities of any kind; many of the streets were narrow and filled with debris; the water supply was in many places polluted; the air was full of soot; there was a general lack of recreational facilities aside from beer shops and public houses. Like other social critics, Elizabeth Gaskell deplored this dismal environment, but she also tried to show the reasons for it. In North and South and Mary Barton, the physical character of Manchester was a product of the character of the Mancunians themselves, the Manchester ethos.

¹Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1968), 92-93.

²Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland, trans. by G. Lawrence and R. P. Mayer (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957).

³See Ralph Waldo Emerson, English Traits, Vol. 5 of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1903); also see Frederick Engels, Condition of the Working Class in England, trans. by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

⁴For various descriptions of Manchester's architectural landscape see Illustrated London News, 20 August 1842, 225-226; Briggs, Victorian Cities, 138; Tocqueville, passim; also Engels, passim.

⁵See Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969).

⁶Léon Faucher, Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects, trans. and with copious notes by a member of the Manchester Athenaeum (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 16.

⁷Tocqueville, 106.

⁸See North and South, passim; also Mary Barton.

⁹Quoted in Briggs, Victorian Cities, 134.

¹⁰Phillip Gaskell wrote in 1836 "how lamentable a condition Manchester was found in 1832, in everything having reference to health, decency and comfort of its inhabitants." This was still very true well into the forties. See Phillip Gaskell, Artisans and Machinery: The Moral and Physical Condition of the Manufacturing Population Considered with Reference to Mechanical Substitutions for Human Labour (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 214.

¹¹Mary Barton, i, 5; also see Faucher, 72.

¹²Mary Barton, i, 3.

¹³P. Gaskell, 185. This was the report of Mr. Thackeray of Leeds whose estimate was "worth the report of one hundred casual visitors" according to P. Gaskell.

¹⁴Quoted in Briggs, Victorian Cities, 112.

¹⁵Hippolyte Taine, Notes on England, trans. by E. Hyams (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), 219.

¹⁶Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers, First Report of the Commissioners for Inquiry into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts, XVII (1844), appendix, 12. Hereinafter all parliamentary papers will be cited in the following form: P.P. (year), (volume), (page).

¹⁷Ibid., 26.

¹⁸Ibid., appendix, 13.

¹⁹Ibid., 14.

²⁰Ibid., 19.

²¹E. Chadwick, Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain in 1842, with an introduction by M. W. Flinn (Edinburgh: University Press, 1965), 13. Hereinafter Chadwick's Report, 1842.

²²Ibid., 239.

²³See A. Redford, The History of Local Government in Manchester, 3 Vols. (London: Longmans and Co., 1939-40) II, 11; also see Engels, passim; Taine, 220; and Faucher, 26.

²⁴D. Read, Cobden and Bright (London: Camelot Press, 1967), 11.

²⁵North and South, Chpt. 29, 305.

²⁶Faucher, 26.

²⁷Redford, 68. Manchester's population grew from 235,162 in 1841 to 303,382 in 1851.

²⁸J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (Manchester: F. J. Morten, 1969), 30.

²⁹Ibid., 31.

³⁰Chadwick's Report, 192.

³¹See Kay, 31; also Mary Barton, i, 3-5.

³²Chadwick's Report, 343-44.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 92.

³⁵Ibid., 343-44.

³⁶With the passage of the Borough Police and Sanitary Improvement Acts Manchester created one of the earliest sanitary codes in the nineteenth century. The Borough Police Act empowered the local authorities to regulate the hours of public houses and the sale of distilled liquors. The Sanitary Improvement Act permitted the authorities to establish building codes for both new and existent housing; every new house was required to have a privy and an ash pit and all back-to-back housing was prohibited. Despite the positive legislation, amelioration of living conditions was slow. The municipality was obliged to proceed with caution since the removal of a wall, a shed, or an unsanitary privy was "tampering" with private property. For further details concerning these acts see Redford, 86, 143, 153.

³⁷See Chadwicks' Report; also see P.P. 1844, XVII; and P.P. 1840, XI.

³⁸See North and South, Chpt. 20, 212. In North and South Mr. Hale remarks: "I hardly know as yet how to compare one of these houses with our Helstone cottages. I see furniture here which our labourers would never have thought of buying, and food commonly used which they would consider luxuries; yet for these very families there seems no resource, now that their weekly wages are stopped, but the pawnshop."

³⁹Chadwick's Report, 92, 221.

⁴⁰Ibid., 92.

⁴¹P.P. 1840, XI, 107.

⁴²Faucher, 65, fn. 28.

⁴³Chadwick's Report, 70; also see Mary Barton, vi, 54.

⁴⁴Mary Barton, vi, 54.

⁴⁵Kay, 35.

⁴⁶Chadwick's Report, 276-77.

⁴⁷Engels, passim.

⁴⁸Chadwick's Report, 93.

⁴⁹Faucher, 65, fn. 28.

⁵⁰Chadwick's Report, 412. Dr. Howard went on to say that the lodging houses were the chief source of fever in Manchester.

⁵¹Mary Barton, xxxiii, 378.

⁵²Chadwick's Report, 201-202.

⁵³Mary Barton, xxxiii, 378.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Chadwick's Report, 413.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Kay, 30.

⁵⁸See P.P. 1840, XI, 136; Chadwick's Report, 12; Faucher, 67.

⁵⁹Chadwick's Report.

⁶⁰In 1845 it was reported that more than 18 percent of working-class deaths were the result of epidemic disease while less than 10 percent of middle-class deaths were linked to that cause. See P.P. 1844, XVII, 58-59; and P.P. 1845, XVIII, Part II, 218.

⁶¹Chadwick's Report, 111.

⁶²Mary Barton, vi, 54. For comparative descriptions of these streets see Tocqueville, 106; and Engels, 66.

⁶³Chadwick's Report, 125.

⁶⁴See Faucher, 70 fn. 31. The machine cart did not prove to be as useful as was hoped. Despite the fact that it could do twice the work of five to ten men, it could be used on relatively few streets. By 1851 the municipality discarded the mechanized scavenging cart and went back to hand sweeping. See Redford, 165 for further details.

⁶⁵Redford, 156.

⁶⁶Ibid., 155. The Act empowered the municipality to assume responsibility for the emptying of privies, which prior to 1847 had been emptied by private interests who were not always the most reliable.

⁶⁷P.P. 1845, XVIII, 218, indicated that of 57,238 houses in Manchester only 30,000 were provided water through pipes. Also see Engels, 67.

⁶⁸Engels, 160.

⁶⁹Tocqueville, 107.

- ⁷⁰P.P. 1844, XVII, 171.
- ⁷¹See Mary Barton, v, 47.
- ⁷²Redford, 171-72.
- ⁷³P.P. 1840, XI, 69.
- ⁷⁴Chadwick's Report, 148.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 147.
- ⁷⁶The Times (London), 14 December 1854, 8 Col. 6.
- ⁷⁷North and South, Chpt. 7, 96.
- ⁷⁸Tocqueville, 107.
- ⁷⁹W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 2.
- ⁸⁰Lancashire One Hundred Years Ago, comp. by Frank Graham (Newcastle: Frank Graham, 1968), 17.
- ⁸¹North and South, Chpt. 1, 39.
- ⁸²Ibid., Chpt. 10, 123.
- ⁸³Chadwick's Report, 385.
- ⁸⁴North and South, Chpt. 10, 123.
- ⁸⁵P.P. 1844, XVII, 212.
- ⁸⁶P.P. 1845, XVIII, Part II, 117.
- ⁸⁷Redford, 83.
- ⁸⁸Ibid.
- ⁸⁹The Times (London), 12 August 1853, 8 Col. 5.
- ⁹⁰North and South, Chpt. 10, 123.
- ⁹¹See J. H. and M. H. Clapham, "Life in the New Towns," Early Victorian England, ed. G. M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), I, 232-33.
- ⁹²P.P. 1840, XI, x.
- ⁹³Mary Barton, i, 1; this is corroborated by Redford, 215.

⁹⁴P.P. 1844, XVII, 238.

⁹⁵In Mary Barton the country is a balm for town dwellers. The fresh country air and "the delicious sounds of rural life, the lowing of cows, the milkmaid's call, and the clatter and cackle of poltry" soothe worn workers. See Mary Barton, i, 1.

⁹⁶See Briggs, Victorian Cities, 135. Briggs states that Phillips was no friend of the working class.

⁹⁷Chadwick's Report, 337.

⁹⁸Redford, 217. Sir Robert Peel donated £1,000 for the Public Park Project as did Mark Phillips. The three parks were officially opened on 22 August 1846 and were called Peel, Phillips, and Queen's Park.

⁹⁹Kay, 57.

¹⁰⁰Taylor, 256.

¹⁰¹The Times (London), 20 July 185 , 8 Col. 5.

¹⁰²Ibid.; in 1837 Walter Besant explained to a friend why gin was known as the "blue ruin." "Do you know why they call it the 'blue ruin'? Sometime ago I saw going, into a public house, somewhere near the West India Docks, a tall lean man, apparently five and forty or thereabouts. He was in rags; his knees bent as he walked, his hands trembled, his eyes were eager." And wonderful to relate, the face was perfectly blue, which made one shudder. Said my companion to me, 'that is gin!'" Quoted in R. J. Cruikshank, Charles Dickens and Early Victorian England, 161-62.

¹⁰³Faucher, 52.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁵Mary Barton, x, 108.

¹⁰⁶Faucher, 50.

¹⁰⁷Mary Barton, vi, 55.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., x, 108.

THE MANCHESTER ETHOS

Perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell's greatest achievement in her industrial novels was that, like Carlyle, she was able to see beyond the "soot and despair" of Manchester.¹ She saw and described a new social order and its corresponding system of values which together comprised the Manchester ethos. Like most early Victorians, her reaction to the Manchester social ethic was mixed. She admired the Mancunian's integrity, independence, earnestness, and ambition; she respected his pragmatic intelligence and energy. But like many social critics, she deplored his reverence of wealth, the way in which wealth was equated with virtue and success, and the abnegation of what she considered the Christian responsibility of the middle class toward the working class. Probably better than anyone, she understood how the positive aspects of the Manchester ethos were perverted in the pursuit of money.

The obvious manifestations of Manchester's energy and power, the huge factories and modern machinery, never failed to impress visitors of the city. Dr. Kay wrote in the early thirties that the "mighty" industrial system of Manchester attested to the "dignity and power of man."² A visitor in the early forties remarked that during the day, unlike in

London or Liverpool, there were no people in the streets; all one heard were "vast machines sending forth fire and smoke through tall chimneys."³ Even a romantic like Carlyle could not deny the creative power of Manchester, and he described it in almost poetic terms:

Hast thou heard ... the awakening of a Manchester on a Monday morning, at half past five ...; the rushing of its thousand mills, like the boom of the Atlantic tide, ten thousand times, ten thousand spools and spindles set humming there-- it is perhaps ... sublime as a Niagra, or more so.⁴

In North and South, Mr. Hale is dazzled by the "energy which conquered immense difficulties with ease," the "magnificent power" of the steam hammer seems so fantastic that it reminds him of the genii of the Arabian Nights.⁵ A Frenchman, Léon Faucher, who visited Manchester in the forties, felt that the "imagination can scarcely embrace" the size and magnitude of some of the cotton mills. He was truly amazed and impressed that one firm might employ 1,500 people and pay out 30,000 per annum in freight charges.⁶ He wrote that an appropriate motto for the Mancunian manufacturers might be "Let us have access to another planet and we will undertake to clothe it."⁷

Margaret Hale in North and South, finds the Manchester manufacturer's sense of his own power attractive, though at times it might "savour of boasting."⁸ He "dared to defy old limits of possibility" and wanted to make "material power yield to science," all to the end of bringing about a better

world for all mankind.⁹ John Thornton, the manufacturer in North and South, "a man of great force of character and power in many ways," sees himself as a "great pioneer of civilization."¹⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell also saw the power of English industry as having this civilizing effect; she speaks of Jem Wilson's employer in Mary Barton as "one of those great firms of engineers who send forth from out their towns of workshops engines and machinery to the dominions of the Czar and Sultan."¹¹ Margaret Hale, "if in her cooler moments she might not approve of their [the manufacturers'] spirit in all things," could find "much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time."¹² Elizabeth Gaskell's main reservation about these pioneers of civilization was similar to Mr. Hale's, who says to Thornton, "It strikes me that you might pioneer a little at home."¹³

The Mancunians were for the most part a practical, serious-minded people, pragmatic in their outlook on life. Perhaps this was because, by inclination or by necessity, they did not have time to be otherwise. Thornton is "absorbed in the work of today"; his mother says that "the time and place in which he lives seem to me to require all his energy and attention."¹⁴ The workingman, who was never quite certain where his next shilling was coming from, needed all his energy and attention just to feed, clothe, and house himself and his family. Even Thornton had to work

hard to maintain his position--a bad cotton crop, a long strike, or the failure to adopt the latest industrial techniques could ruin a manufacturer, as Thornton himself is ruined in North and South. Much of the Mancunians' pragmatism was born of necessity; in order to survive, to be competitive, they had to devote themselves to practical matters.

Pragmatism was evident in the utilitarian character of Manchester itself. There were few attractive buildings, a visitor noted in the forties, but all were devoted to business, science and religion, with but one exception.¹⁵

Margaret notices that even a country town adjacent to Milton [Manchester] appears "more purposelike" than its counterpart in the South. She also notices that the shopkeepers, when free of customers, made themselves busy in the shops, rather than lounging at their doors as in the South.¹⁶ Even people's clothing is more utilitarian; Margaret sees that the colours are grayer, "not so gay or pretty" as in the South, but "more enduring." The traditional smocks of the labourer were not to be seen here, for they "retarded motion and were apt to catch on machinery."¹⁷ All the vehicles in the streets of Milton, "every van, every wagon and truck," seem to Margaret to bear either raw or manufactured cotton; this was different from London, where the "vehicles seemed various in their purposes and intent."¹⁸

The speech of the Mancunians, like their city, also bore the stamp of usefulness and purpose. Mancunians did

not indulge in small talk or idle conversation. Margaret has a tedious time talking with Thornton at their initial meeting because he "never went on with any subject, but gave little, short, abrupt answers," but as Mr. Hale remarks, his answers are "very much to the point."¹⁹ John Barton, Nicholas Higgins, and Mrs. Thornton were all sensible, judicious, and pithy in their speech. Taine noticed this characteristic in the two Mancunian detectives he met.²⁰ Even when Mancunians relaxed from their tasks and gave "free course to their feelings," they lost nothing of their "serious and angular stiffness."²¹

Mancunians actively pursued useful knowledge; they read not for recreation, but to aid in guaranteeing a better future for themselves. The mechanics' institutes, lyceums, and scientific societies all focused on learning as self-improvement. In the forties, there were few "more emphatically reading communities" than Manchester.²² In fact, Manchester was the most "book-buying" town in the most "book-buying" county in England.²³ Reading matter tended toward "the practical side of things," dealing mainly with the material world.²⁴ In Mary Barton, Job Legh is well-versed in natural history, familiar with the Linnaen system of classification, and has studied entomology and botany.²⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell cites other examples of workingmen who studied Newtonian physics and mathematics.²⁶

The seriousness and straightforwardness of the Mancunians, though it had its own peculiar characteristics, was

part of the early Victorian trend of earnestness, a trend which had its roots in the Evangelical movement and Utilitarian philosophy.²⁷ As early as the 1830's, with the appearance of the new industrial towns and the problems they posed, the English began to feel that their society was changing dramatically, and that to deal with the new challenges, it was necessary to dispense with the "frivolous" side of life and imbue their lives with moral purpose. In 1833, Bulwer-Lytton described the change that was taking place, a change of which Manchester was the symbol.

I have said that we live in an age of visible transition--an age of disquietude and doubt--of the removal of time-worn landmarks, and the breaking up of the hereditary elements of society--old opinions, feelings--ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change To me such epochs appear as the dark passages in the appointed progress of mankind--the times of greatest unhappiness to our species--passages into which we have no reason to rejoice at our entrance.²⁸

Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Arnold, Harriet Martineau, in common with Elizabeth Gaskell, all preached that in this critical time men must soberly accept their social responsibilities and live lives conducive to the betterment of mankind.

Earnestness was also a reaction against a casual, easy-going, superficial or frivolous attitude which was associated with the Regency. George Eliot captured this attitude

in the person of "Old Leisure":

Old Leisure ... was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion,--of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves He knew nothing of weekday services and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing ... for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broadbacked like himself, and able to carry a great deal of port wine,--not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure: he fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible; for had he not kept up his character by going to church on the Sunday afternoons? Fine Old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him and judge him by our modern standard; he never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read 'Tracts for the Times' or 'Sartor Resartus'."29

For Elizabeth Gaskell, London represents "Old Leisure"; she portrays it as a sort of a bastion of intellectual, spiratual, and moral laxity, as opposed to earnest Manchester. When John Barton goes to London with the Chartist delegates, they are mocked for their poverty and provincialism.³⁰ Her Londoners do not take the workingmen seriously nor do they attempt to understand the urgency of their cause. With a very few exceptions, Elizabeth Gaskell's London characters lack depth and sincerity of feeling. In North and South, Aunt Shaw is kindly but rather foolish, and Cousin Edith is winning, silly and childlike. Margaret Hale rejects a proposal of marriage from the worldly and

sarcastic London lawyer, Henry Lennox, and later accepts the earnest Thornton. In Wives and Daughters, Cynthia Kirkpatrick, surely the least earnest of Elizabeth Gaskell's characters, very appropriately marries a London solicitor and goes to live in the Capitol. Of Cynthia's husband, Molly Gibson and her father notice his perfect manners and perfect dress, but detect his shallowness.³¹ In contrast to Elizabeth Gaskell's Londoners, almost all the Manchester characters, with the exceptions of Fanny Thornton and Sally Leadbitter, could be called earnest. When Margaret Hale lives in London, she finds life a tiresome, purposeless round of parties, shopping, and calls; Elizabeth Gaskell describes the superficial conversation at a London dinner party:

They talked about art in a merely sensuous way, dwelling on outside effects, instead of allowing themselves to learn what it has to teach. They lashed themselves up into an enthusiasm about high subjects in company, and never thought about them when they were alone; they squandered their capabilities of appreciation into a mere flow of appropriate words.³²

In contrast, at a Milton dinner party, the guests "talked in desperate earnest" about subjects that really mattered to them, questioning their ideas and values.³³ Thornton, John Barton, Higgins, and Carson, each in his own way, carefully and sincerely scrutinizes his beliefs and is willing to change, unlike complacent "Old Leisure." It is significant that when Mr. Hale decides that he cannot in good

conscience remain an Anglican clergyman, he goes to Milton and not to London; in Milton, where questioning of values is constant, he is not considered odd for having acted upon the dictates of his conscience, whereas his London relations cannot understand what could have possessed him.³⁴

Mancunians were particularly intense and serious when it came to questioning the political system. Manchester was a major stronghold of English radicalism, of the trade union movement, of the Anti-Corn Law League, and of Chartism.³⁵ The Manchester bourgeoisie attacked the landed aristocracy; they pressed for municipal incorporation not only for political independence, but also, as Cobden flatly states, to strike a blow against the decrepit, unjust, selfish, and inefficient landed elite.³⁶ The working class relentlessly pushed for higher wages, better working conditions, and a voice in government, sometimes using violence, as shown in both North and South and Mary Barton. The incorporation of Manchester in 1838 and the repeal of the corn laws in 1846 are eloquent of the earnestness of the Mancunians' political efforts.

The earnestness of the Manchester ethos was tinged with a puritan emphasis on hard work. A sense of moral purpose meant fulfilling one's mission in life, and to the Mancunians, and to many Victorians, this meant hard work, often as an end in itself. They felt, like Carlyle, that God's "mandate to man" was work.³⁷ Thornton tells Mr. Bell that Mancunians "do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment

but as a time for action."³⁸ Moreover, there was a certain nobility in doing any task. In Milton, Margaret is forced to help with the domestic chores, but she tells her mother, who laments the fact, "I don't mind ironing or any kind of work for you and papa. I am myself a born and bred lady through it all, even though it comes to scouring a floor, or washing dishes."³⁹ John Barton says that he would rather see his daughter

earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, as the Bible tells her she should do, ay, though she never got butter to her bread, than be like a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon and going to bed without having done a good turn to any one of God's creatures but herself.⁴⁰

Work, for the Mancunians, and for many Victorians was a way of life, almost an addiction. A visitor to Manchester in 1844 wrote: "Overworking is a malady which Lancashire had inflicted upon England Manchester is the seat, the concentrated focus of this malady."⁴¹ Thornton works enormously hard, his only recreation being struggling through the classics with Mr. Hale as his tutor; but he can give no explanation why or for what he works. Taine describes another self-made man not unlike Thornton. This man works nine or ten hours a day, spends the rest of his time working on "a dictionary of Greek antiquities," has also studied German, French, and music and confesses that "once, having spent two days completely idle, he almost died of boredom."⁴² When John Barton is unemployed and his daughter asks him why

he does not apply for relief, his answer is: "Damn their charity and damn their money! I want work and it is my right. I want work!"⁴³ The Mancunians took pride in their ability to run mills and factories and to spin and weave cotton. Few who observed Manchester in the forties, fifties, and sixties failed to remark that the Lancashire operative was the most diligent worker that they had ever seen.⁴⁴

Macunians, middle and working-class alike, valued their independence highly. They believed that a man should succeed by his own merit and that society should not interfere with this natural ordering of things.⁴⁵ Strength and independence of character were considered very admirable traits; two men at odds politically and socially, Thornton and Higgins, become friends through a grudging admiration of each other's independent nature.

An obvious manifestation of the independence of the Mancunians was religious preference. In Manchester, as in other northern industrial cities, there had been a diminution in the influence of the Church of England. In 1843, of 137 churches in Manchester and Salford, only 39 were Anglican; the rest were Methodist, Baptist, Independent, Unitarian, and Roman Catholic.⁴⁶ The strong dissenting influence is also seen in the burial records of 1843. Nearly two and a half times more dissenters were interred than members of the established church.⁴⁷ Appropriately, in North and South and Mary Barton there is little mention of the Anglican Church, especially in relation to the working class.

The only organized religious body which seems to reach the working class at all is the Methodist, and it affects very few.⁴⁸ Most of the working population were like John Barton, Mary Barton, and Nicholas Higgins: their religious faith was learned from an independent reading of the Bible, uninterpreted by any sect.

Manchester's working class was probably the most independent in England. Many were political radicals, and they were anything but obsequious to authority--a Manchester workingman would not doff his hat to his employer.⁴⁹ The factory worker valued his freedom; as Elizabeth Gaskell points out, domestic service, in comparison with the life of an operative was considered a "species of slavery."⁵⁰ The operative, was free to choose what clothes he wore, with whom he spoke, and what he said. In these things he could even be more independent than the agricultural labourer, who usually had to defer to the parson and the squire.

Middle-class Mancunians also had an independent spirit, but along different lines. They advocated a strong, independent local government and were opposed to any national centralization of government, particularly when it affected their borough. Thornton's reaction to the Smoke Consumption Act of 1853 is typical of the laissez-faire attitude favoured by the middle class in regard to what they considered an infringement upon their rights. Thornton says that if he had not already altered his furnaces for economic reasons prior to the passage of the bill, he would not have

made the changes at all, or he would at least have "given them all the trouble in yielding" that he "legally could."⁵¹ Efforts on the national level to regulate work hours or child labour met with similar resistance, in the name of "independence." For example, in 1848, Manchester resisted the introduction of Parliament's Public Health Bill. The Bill, which Mancunians termed "bureaucratic interference" called for a national board of health, which would appoint local boards to deal with problems of sewage, water supplies, lighting, and street cleaning.⁵² As a result of the dilatory actions of the Borough Council, a nationally controlled board of health was not established in Manchester.

The middle class also exhibited some rather self-serving attitudes regarding the preservation of the independence of the factory population. Manufacturers felt, like Thornton and even Margaret Hale to an extent, that trade unions were dangerous because they undermined the importance of "the individual character and effort."⁵³ However, the manufacturers were perhaps more concerned about their own independence than that of their employees. They knew that with the rise of effective trade union organizations, the manufacturer would lose much of his freedom to determine wages, working hours, and working conditions; he would be forced to bargain with his workmen. The manufacturer's belief in independence was self-serving in another way. When Margaret Hale suggests that the mill owner should be more like a parent to his employees, Thornton says

that a master has no right to "impose leading-strings" on his employees just because they work ten hours a day for him--to do so would be "trenching on the independence of his hands."⁵⁴ Thornton values his own independence so much that he can "fancy no degradation greater than that of having another man perpetually directing and advising and lecturing" him.⁵⁵ Thornton's employees would no doubt have agreed with that statement, but denying any responsibility whatsoever for his workmen in the name of their dignity and independence makes it very convenient for Thornton to dismiss the operatives' wretched living conditions as their own affair. The dissenting religious tradition of the middle class and their firm adherence to the philosophy of the Enlightenment encouraged them to feel that the poor were poor because of their own improvidence and that any man of ability could attain success. As Thornton says:

It is one of the great beauties of our system that a working man may raise himself by his own exertions, in fact everyone who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks⁵⁶

Although independence, industry, and pragmatism were putative virtues in Manchester, they were also a source of social alienation. Alienation was perhaps what most distinguished Manchester and the new towns from the country village, where interdependence, patronage, and a sense of Christian duty were still a part of life. Manchester had

effectively disposed of the old feudal standards, but the only standard put up to take their place was that of money. In the pursuit of wealth, in the struggle for economic survival, the same virtues that made Manchester in many ways a new, exciting, and attractive place also led to the huge gap of communication and understanding between the working class and the middle class.

When Henry Lennox, in North and South, speaks in admiration of the energy, power and sheer vitality of Milton, Margaret points out how "selfish and material were too many of the ends."⁵⁷ For Margaret, as for Elizabeth Gaskell and Carlyle, this was "the tainting sin in so much that was noble."⁵⁸ The power to harness science, to make the world better, was more often used to make money; and money was power, influence, and social status in Manchester. Cobden wrote in 1832 that there was "but one opinion or criterion of a man's ability--the making of money."⁵⁹ John Thornton measures everything by the "standard of wealth." Mr. Hale is not regarded as a gentleman or a scholar in Milton, but only as a "man who spent at a certain rate."⁶⁰ Wealth determined "who was listened to and who had to listen" in Manchester.⁶¹ For instance, when the Hales ask their Milton landlord for some changes in their house, he flatly refuses. However, when Thornton, the rich industrialist, speaks to him, the landlord decides to comply with the Hales' wishes.

The emphasis on hard work in the Manchester ethos also helped to foster this sense of alienation. Mancunians were

so involved in the competition to survive and to get ahead in a society based on the accumulation of wealth that they had had little time to care about their fellow townsmen. Everyone in Manchester had "the look of thought and the step of haste";⁶² people rushed past "each other as if they had nothing in common."⁶³ Mr. Hale is lonely in Milton because people, even workmen, were "too busy for quiet speech or any ripened intercourse of thought; what they said was about business, very present and actual."⁶⁴ In the country, "there had been perpetual occasion for an interchange of visits with neighbouring clergymen; and the poor labourers ... were always at liberty to speak or be spoken to."⁶⁵ In Manchester, time away from work was most often spent on self-improvement, perhaps at a lyceum, club, or mechanics' institute; or it was spent with some political organization, or in private study, or, for the working class, in escape at a gin palace. Engels noticed how this egocentric Manchester work ethic caused people to "ignore their neighbours and selfishly concentrate upon their private affairs ... the isolation of the individual--this narrow-minded egoism--is everywhere."⁶⁶ He saw the result, as did Elizabeth Gaskell as alienation, "the disintegration of society into individuals, each guided by his own private principles and each pursuing his own aims" rather than the general objectives of society.⁶⁷ Elizabeth Gaskell believed that hard work was a positive good, but only when it was socially as well as materially productive. In the

country, people lived at a pace of life that left time for a middle-class person like Mr. Hale to converse with a labourer, while in Manchester, there was very little communication between the classes. A mill owner like Carson is so wrapped up in his own affairs that he does not know the name of a man who has worked for him for three years.⁶⁸

The pragmatism, the tough practicality, the determined will to succeed of the Mancunians which enabled them to build Manchester into a world centre of industry and trade was carried to a dehumanizing extent in the pursuit of wealth. The Parliamentary reports clearly show that men, women, and children were sometimes treated little better than machines, beings whose sole purpose was to produce. Taine describes Manchester as a "great, jerry-built barracks, a 'work-house' for 400,000 people, a hard labour penal establishment."⁶⁹ In a factory he visited, he was struck by "the thousands of workmen, penned in, regimented, hands active, feet motionless, all day and every day, mechanically serving their machines."⁷⁰ After all, as Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, the masters referred to their workers as "hands," not as men, or even as employees.⁷¹ The Manchester ethos, with its emphasis on hard work and production, reinforced this dehumanization.

The result of the darker side of the Manchester ethos was a spiritually and physically alienated society; "two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as

opposed to his own"⁷² as Margaret Hale describes Milton in North and South. There was deep distrust and bitterness on both sides. Speaking of the depression of the early forties, Elizabeth Gaskell states that:

The indigence and sufferings of the operatives induced a suspicion in the minds of many of them that their legislators, their employers, and even their ministers of religion, were, in general, their oppressors and enemies.⁷³

As for the middle class, Margaret tells Thornton, "You consider all those who are not successful in raising themselves in the world as your enemies."⁷⁴ It was this feeling of estrangement more than anything else that gave rise to a class-conscious workingman, and impetus to working-class movements in the 1830's, 40's, and 50's.

¹See Carlyle, Chartism, in Works (Chicago: Belford and Clarke, 1890), 64.

²J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (Manchester: E. J. Morten, 1969), 76-77.

³Faucher, Manchester in 1844, trans. and with copious notes by a member of the Manchester Athenaeum (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 18.

⁴Carlyle, Chartism, 64.

⁵North and South, Chpt. 8, 108 and Chpt. 10, 121-122.

⁶Faucher, 10.

⁷Ibid., 11.

⁸North and South, Chpt. 20, 217.

⁹Ibid., Chpt. 10, 112; see also Carlyle's, Chartism, 64 and 87; and his essay "Signs of the Times," Thomas Carlyle Selected Writings, ed. Alan Shelston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971), 64; also see E. J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 98.

¹⁰North and South, Chpt. 15, 145.

¹¹Mary Barton, iv, 24.

¹²North and South, Chpt. 20, 217.

¹³Ibid., Chpt. 15, 170-71.

¹⁴Ibid., 159-160.

¹⁵W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 9.

¹⁶North and South, Chpt. 7, 195.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁹Ibid., 101.

²⁰H. Taine, Notes on England, trans. by E. Hyams (London: Thames and Hudson), 240.

²¹Faucher, 21.

²²Ibid., 22-23, fn. 7.

²³Taylor, 276.

²⁴Faucher, 3.

²⁵Mary Barton, v, 33.

²⁶With this penchant for reading and gathering useful knowledge, it is not surprising that Manchester was the first town to take advantage of the Free Libraries Act of 1850. See Briggs, Victorian Cities, 135-136.

²⁷For a detailed account of the effect of utilitarianism and the Evangelical movement on the formation of the Victorian moral code, see W. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), Chpt. 10; also see, G. M. Young, Early Victorian England: Portrait of an Age.

²⁸Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 319.

Lytton was not alone in thinking that England was entering the "dark passages." Carlyle in "Signs of the Times" (1829) wrote: "The King has virtually abdicated; the Church is a widow, without jointure; public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is fast falling to pieces; and a time of unmixed evil is upon us." See page 63.

²⁹George Eliot, Adam Bede, II, xxviii, 339-40, quoted in Houghton, 218-19.

³⁰See Mary Barton, ix. I am indebted here to Edgar Wright and his analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's contrasting of London and Manchester. See E. Wright, Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1965), 99-100.

³¹See Elizabeth Gaskell's, Wives and Daughters (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1969), Chpt. 28, 299.

³²North and South, Chpt. 48, 497.

³³Ibid., Chpt. 20, 216.

³⁴Ibid., Chpt. 6, 93-94. The London attitude toward Mr. Hale's leaving off his living in Helstone is perhaps best reflected in a letter to Margaret Hale from her cousin Edith in fashionable London; Edith writes: "I'm rather

afraid of anyone who has done something for conscience' sake. You never did I hope." See North and South, Chpt. 28, 299.

³⁵See F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1958), 273; also see Briggs, Victorian Cities.

³⁶A. Redford, The History of Local Government in Manchester, 3 Vols. (London: Longmans and Co., 1939-40), 17.

³⁷Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843), 322.

³⁸North and South, Chpt. 40, 413.

³⁹Ibid., Chpt. 9, 116. See also Carlyle, Past and Present, 20.

⁴⁰Mary Barton, i, 6.

⁴¹Faucher, 41.

⁴²Taine, 59.

⁴³Mary Barton, x, 108.

⁴⁴See Faucher, passim; and Taylor, passim.

⁴⁵Briggs, Victorian Cities, 104.

⁴⁶Faucher, 23, fn. 8.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸The Davenports in Mary Barton are "Methodees" and Bessy Higgins in North and South leaned toward Methodist belief.

⁴⁹Briggs, Victorian Cities, 107.

⁵⁰Mary Barton, iii, 21; also Faucher, 40, fn. 17.

⁵¹North and South, Chpt. 10, 123.

⁵²Redford, 187. By 1848, Manchester had already implemented many of the sanitary measures called for in the national bill.

⁵³Briggs, Victorian Cities, 104.

⁵⁴North and South, Chpt. 15, 168.

- ⁵⁵Ibid., 168-169.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., Chpt. 10, 125.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., Chpt. 49, 508.
- ⁵⁸Ibid.
- ⁵⁹See J. Morely, The Life of Richard Cobden (London: T. Fisher Anwin, 1906), 22.
- ⁶⁰North and South, Chpts. 8 and 11, 109 and 129.
- ⁶¹Briggs, Victorian Cities, 91.
- ⁶²Taylor, 9.
- ⁶³Engels, 30-31.
- ⁶⁴North and South, Chpt. 40, 422.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶Engels, 104.
- ⁶⁷Ibid.
- ⁶⁸Mary Barton, vi, 64.
- ⁶⁹Taine, 220.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 229.
- ⁷¹North and South, Chpt. 15, 166.
- ⁷²Ibid., 165.
- ⁷³Mary Barton, viii, 79.
- ⁷⁴North and South, Chpt. 10, 125.

V

WORKING-CLASS MOVEMENTS

In Mary Barton and North and South Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates that the alienation, the physical and social separation, fostered by the Manchester ethos gave rise to a class-conscious man, perhaps the most class-conscious in England. She portrays a working class which is aware of its position almost in a Marxian sense; workingmen are not only wary of anyone from the middle class and dubious of religion because it seems to serve the interest of the manufacturer too well, but also they believe that the manufacturer is the cause of their distress. In the country and in the small rural town, a "chain of connection" or "bonds of attachment" linked station with station and the labourer with his master, but in Manchester there were no such links. In Manchester the disparity in wealth and position between the employer and the employed was not mitigated by any concern or benevolence; the middle class denied responsibility for or ignored working-class conditions and was bent on exploitation for gain. Like Nicholas Higgins and John Barton, workingmen saw that to improve their circumstances, they would have to join together and fight for change. Thus, as Elizabeth Gaskell points out, piqued by deprivation and estrangement from the middle class, workers formed trade

unions, became Chartists, and created workshops and cooperative organizations in an attempt to better their condition.

Though in most cities the rich and the poor lived apart, there was probably no large town in Great Britain where there was less contact between them than in Manchester. An Irish visitor remarked that Dublin was a divided city, but not nearly to the extent of Manchester.¹ De Tocqueville wrote that the separation between the classes in Manchester was greater than in Birmingham.² According to a handbook to Manchester of 1842, "there was no town in the world where the distance between the rich and the poor was so great or the barrier between so difficult to be crossed." The handbook went on to say that "there is far less personal communication between the master cotton spinner and his workmen . . . , than there is between the Duke of Wellington and the humblest labourer on his estate."³ When Engels wrote that he could live in Manchester for years without ever coming in contact with an artisan, he was not exaggerating; there was an almost systematic physical separation of the classes.⁴ Part of Cobden's praise for Mary Barton was that it brought to the attention of many middle-class Mancunians the actual condition and circumstances of the major portion of Manchester's population.⁵ Not unlike Carlyle and the other social critics of the early Victorian era, Elizabeth Gaskell saw this separation, this lack of communication, as having an adverse effect upon the working class and upon society in general: simply put, she

believed that it deprived the working class of moral and spiritual guidance.⁶

The working class was further alienated by the wretchedness of their living conditions in comparison with the comfort and luxury of the masters, comfort and luxury gained in part by the long hours and hard work of the operative. As Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, many working-class people, especially the more intelligent and class-conscious among them, were convinced that they alone suffered during trade depression while the lives of their employers went virtually unchanged.⁷ The operatives were "aggravated" that the manufacturers' large houses were occupied during bad times whereas weavers and spinners were forced to leave their cottages and reside in uncomfortable and often unsanitary cellars;⁸ despite a slow down in trade and thousands of men on short-time, middle-class persons were to be seen in hired carriages, attending concerts and purchasing luxuries, while the workingman could only sit by and watch the health and general well-being of his family deteriorate for want of the necessities of life.⁹

Elizabeth Gaskell used dramatic and rather sensational contrasts to show how members of the working class came to the conclusion that trade recessions did not affect the manufacturers. During a depression, the Bartons' son is ill with scarlet fever, and the doctor prescribes good nourishment, but the Bartons have no money for food. Barton, hungry "almost to the pitch of animal ravenousness" is

looking into a shop window where cheeses, jellies, and meat are displayed; he sees the wife of his employer leave the shop her footman loaded with purchases for a party. Barton returns home "with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart, to see his only son a corpse."¹⁰ In another incident, George Wilson leaves the filthy, stinking cellar of the Davenports' and goes to his employer's house to ask for a fever hospital ticket for Davenport. There amid the warmth, comfort, and plenty, young Amy Carson begs her father for half a guinea to buy a rose out of season, because she loves fragrant things.¹¹

Perhaps as Elizabeth Gaskell points out, workingmen were wrong in thinking that the mill owner did not suffer at all times of economic instability, but nevertheless, she realized that the manufacturer's distress was much less severe than that of the workingman.¹² When John Barton comments that the Carsons will not be upset that their mill has burned down because insurance money will be used to replace obsolescent machinery, George Wilson informs him that Carson will have to "retrench and be very careful in his expenditure," assuring Barton that "the masters suffer, too."¹³ However, Barton is quick to ask, what could the manufacturers' suffering be when compared to that of the Davenports; he brings his point home by asking Wilson a rhetorical question: "Have they ever seen a child of their'n die for want of food?"¹⁴ Job Legh, the wisest and most intelligent of Elizabeth Gaskell's working-class characters,

does not doubt that the mill owners are affected by poor trade, but he is well aware that it is not the master who has to live on littler or no money.¹⁵ He tells Carson:

I'm wanting in learning. I'm aware; but I can use my eyes. I never see the masters getting thin and haggard for want of food; I hardly ever see them making much change in their way of living, though I don't doubt they've got to do it in bad times. But it's in things for show they cut short; while for such as me, it's things for life we've to stint.¹⁶

Elizabeth Gaskell was not alone in depicting the labourer as undergoing more duress than the manufacturer; Disraeli's Sybil and Dickens' Hard Times are full of similar contrasts. Moreover, novelists were not the only ones to perceive this situation. Dr. Kay wrote that in bad times the "bitterest dregs" were reserved for the working class and in 1839 the Times quoted a Leeds newspaper as saying that the alarming state of trade in Manchester was "a serious measure indeed, to the working class."¹⁷ As a modern historian has put it, "operatives went hungry while their employers patently did not."¹⁸ Certainly, no manufacturer was ever driven to use laudanum or opium to quiet his children's cries of hunger, as was often the case for the workingman.¹⁹ As a recent study on Chartism in Lancashire indicates and as Elizabeth Gaskell so clearly demonstrates in Mary Barton, it was this disparity in suffering during economic distress which gave Chartist leaders a leg on which to stand.²⁰ Moreover Elizabeth Gaskell saw the peculiar privation of the working class not only as a

source of animosity for the better-off middle class, but as a source of class-consciousness as well. After recounting numerous hardships experienced by operatives--sleeping by a cold hearthstone for weeks on end, fasting for days, and starving in dark cellars--she writes: "Can I wonder that many of them, in such times of misery and destitution, spoke and acted with ferocious precipitation?"²¹

What most disturbed the working class about this disparity of suffering during times of economic uncertainty was that the manufacturer did not seem concerned. He did not try to do anything about the fact that the operative might have no coal for his fire, that he might not have sufficient means for medical treatment, or that he might be reduced to starvation. A contemporary account after Peterloo reflected that the poverty of the working class "seems to madden them against the rich who they dangerously imagine engross the fruits of labour without having any concern for their welfare."²² However, it was more than imagining. The Mancunian manufacturer's espousal of laissez-faire doctrine and his firm adherence to the Manchester ethos with its stress on independence of action and with its equation of wealth and virtue and of poverty and poor character made this lack of concern appear to be both proper and natural. John Barton is angered beyond words when the middle class either refuse to or fail to come to the aid of the working class in times of need. When George Wilson attempts to dismiss one of Barton's derisive comments about

the middle class by saying that Barton never could "abide the gentlefolk," Barton retorts:

And what good have they ever done me that I should like them? If I am sick do they come and nurse me: if my child lies dying ... does the rich man bring the wine and broth that might save his life? If I am out of work for weeks in the bad times, and winter comes, with black frost, and keen east wind, and there is no coal for the grate, and no clothes for the bed, and their bones are seen through the ragged clothes, does the rich man share his plenty with me, as he ought to do ...? When I lie on my deathbed and my Mary ... stands fretting ... will a rich lady come and take her to her own home if need be, till she can look round, and see what best to do?

John Barton answers his own query as Nicholas Higgins would have, or for that matter, as almost any Manchester cotton operative would have responded in the eighteen forties: "No, I tell you, it's the poor and only the poor, as does such things for the poor."²³

For Elizabeth Gaskell the most frightening aspect of the failure of the manufacturer to ameliorate the conditions of the working class was that it spawned a deep-seated hatred in the hearts of workingmen for the middle class in general. This hatred, this bitter resentment, took place on both the social and political levels in Manchester. As Elizabeth Gaskell shows in North and South it was not uncommon for factory people to laugh or jeer at or otherwise intimidate people who appeared to be above them in station. When Margaret Hale gives some flowers to Bessy Higgins as

they meet in the streets, Nicholas Higgins is genuinely surprised. He thanks Margaret for her kindness and then comments that she was probably a stranger to Milton. Despite the kindness Margaret has shown, when she requests a visit with them, Nicholas replies that he is "none so fond of having strange folk" in his home.²⁴ It is an instinctive response; he rejects Margaret not because of the person she is but rather because of the class to which she belongs. In acting as he did, Nicholas Higgins was doing no more than the Pioneer, an important working class paper in the early thirties, had instructed the workingman to do; "Trust none who is a grade above our class."²⁵

The workingman's distrust of the middle class was apparent on the Manchester political scene as well. Workingmen felt that they had been "bitterly and basely deceived" by the middle class into believing that the Reform Bill of 1832 would benefit the worker, when actually all it had done was effect a "transfer of power from one domineering faction to another and left the people as helpless as before."²⁶ Embittered by what they believed to be the chicanery of the middle class, working-class Mancunians in the thirties and early forties vigorously resisted and attempted to obstruct all middle-class political ambitions. During the campaign for the incorporation of Manchester the working class joined with the Tories against the middle class. Posters were distributed all over Manchester which read: "Working Men Beware! The Whigs are at their Dirty Work Again. We will

have no middle-class government. No cotton-lord mayors ... no shopocracy to grind us down."²⁷ Workingmen were convinced that incorporation only meant "more odious privileges" for the manufacturer.²⁸ The Mancunian working class also opposed the repeal of the corn laws well into the forties; Chartists went so far as to disrupt Anti-Corn Law League meetings.²⁹ Workingmen were certain that cheap bread only meant lower wages. Although Elizabeth Gaskell does not deal with the movement for incorporation nor with the Anti-Corn Law League per se, she does demonstrate that the working class were disillusioned with middle-class rule and thought that through the National Petition and with the assistance of Parliament that they would render a severe blow to the power of the middle class.³⁰

For Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Thomas Carlyle, and other social critics, another disconcerting result of the manufacturer's abnegation of social responsibility for the workingman was that it tended to encourage irreligion. Most workers were probably like John Barton and Nicholas Higgins who very often feel that religion is nothing more than empty words without meaning;³¹ like John Barton they could see no connection between what was taught and what was practiced. Before he dies Barton tells Mr. Carson that when he "grew thoughtful or puzzled" he read the Bible, but it only made him more confused. He added that it was almost impossible to believe in what the Bible preached, "you'd never believe black was black, or night was night,

when you saw all about you acting as if black was white, and night was day."³² In North and South, Nicholas Higgins implies that the miserable living conditions of most working class people preclude them from accepting any faith which advances a kind and benevolent creator. He tells Mr. Hale, "I reckon yo'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here-- if yo'd been bred here."³³ An American visitor to Manchester in the early forties echoed this same feeling; he recounts the story of a fatherless family reduced to living upon what the mother and her small children could earn in the factory. She was prudent in her expenditure, she took in sewing to do after working in the factory all day, but she simply could not afford to remove from her cellar residence nor to properly feed and clothe her children nor prevent them from growing "weak, feeble, and sickly." She could not believe that a "god who would not let a sparrow fall to the ground without notice would let her children live in poverty and wretchedness."³⁴

Some members of the working class, particularly the more radical and activist among them, were antagonized by Christian precepts which asked them to bear hardships, to be meek, and to submit to their social superiors.³⁵ Not unlike John Barton they perceived religion as "a sham put upon poor ignorant folk";³⁶ like Nicholas Higgins they saw religion as a distraction; it led working people away from the real world and the immediate task at hand. Higgins explains to Margaret Hale that the world is too concerned

with intangibles, with things it can not know or do anything about; people ought to concentrate on "all things that lie in disorder close at hand" and "leave this talk of religion alone."³⁷ Besides, as he cynically relates to Mr. Hale, if salvation in the next world were true, "dun yo' not think they'd [the masters] din us wi' it as they do wi' political economy."³⁸

The working class was not only irritated with the masters for not helping the labourer out of his predicament but cited the middle class as the cause of that distress in the first place. John Barton tells George Wilson that labour is to the workingman as capital is to the manufacturer. However, not unlike actual working-class trade unionists and Chartists, he points out that the workingman earns no interest on his labour; instead the mill owners exploit the workingman, become rich by his labour, and all the while screw him "down to the lowest peg," even to the point of starvation.³⁹ As Elizabeth Gaskell indicates in North and South, not a few workingmen were convinced that there was something conspiratorial about the whole situation.⁴⁰ They believed that it was in the interest of the employer to prevent the workingman from accumulating much money--that it would make him too independent and less amenable to the dictates of the master.⁴¹ Certainly as the history of trade unionism and Chartism in the thirties and forties shows, the more radical members of the working class, not unlike John Barton and Nicholas Higgins, were not buying the idea that

the roles of masters and men were complementary.⁴² A Manchester newspaper reported in 1838 that the Chartists saw any equation of the interests of masters and men as a mockery; it was nothing more than "selfish cant that the profit of the master would benefit all society."⁴³

Perhaps one other point ought to be made before discussing the obvious outgrowths of the workingman's class-consciousness, that is, trade unionism and Chartism. There was a certain selfless quality about this working-class consciousness. As E. P. Thompson describes "by the thirties the artisan had passed beyond a desire for an independent livelihood 'by the sweat of his brow,' to a newer outlook seeking to exert the collective power of the [working] class to humanize the environment," not just for himself but for society in general.⁴⁴ Although she deplores the fact that class-consciousness must exist, Elizabeth Gaskell does lend a touch of nobility to it. John Barton is valued by his fellow workers not so much because he has the ability to articulate, organize and direct but rather because he is "actuated by no selfish motives"; he stood by his class and his order, "not by the rights of his own paltry self."⁴⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional workingmen, like their counterparts in the real world, did not wish a wholesale plundering of the manufacturing class; like John Barton, most workingmen wished only to take from the "masters' pocket what they could well afford";⁴⁶ and like Nicholas Higgins they did not want to hear about political economy but "where

were the rights o' men," rich and poor alike.⁴⁷ Moreover, they were determined to struggle for a better life for themselves and their class in spite of all odds. Like Higgins they knew when they were unjustly treated and had "too much blood in them to stand for it."⁴⁸ Both John Barton and Nicholas Higgins would have supported the regard for humanity which prevailed a declaration of cotton spinners and factory operatives which Sir James Graham read before Parliament in 1842:

... that notwithstanding the defeat of Lord Ashley upon the Ten Hours Bill ... we are resolved never to relax our exertions until a Ten Hours Bill is carried through Parliament, and that we will avail ourselves of every advantage which the constitution affords us to bring about a limitation of the labour of children and young people in factories.⁴⁹

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates in North and South and Mary Barton, workingmen realized that their only hope against what they termed the "oppression of the capitalist" was to unionize.⁵⁰ As Higgins tells Margaret Hale the workingman's "only chance is binding men together in one common interest ... in the great march whose only strength is numbers."⁵¹ By combining they hoped to compel the manufacturers to pay "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work."⁵² Of course there were some trade unionists who had more radical aspirations. Bronterre O'Brien reported that trade unionism meant to change society, an alteration amounting to a complete subversion of the social order. The

workingman was no longer satisfied to be at the bottom of society; he wanted to be on top "or rather that there should be no bottom or top at all."⁵³ However, the majority of trade unionists were like John Barton and Nicholas Higgins; all they desired were higher wages for their "daily bread, for life itself."⁵⁴ Barton describes the union membership as "Chaps who come to ask a bit o' fire for th' old granny, for a bit o' bedding and some warm clothing" for their wives, and for food for their children. He completes his description of the membership by saying that "they do not want luxuries or dainties but simply bellyfuls"; they do not seek waistcoats, only warm clothes, nor do they desire large houses but merely a roof to protect them from the elements.⁵⁵

Although Elizabeth Gaskell well understood the noble intentions of many of the trade unionists like Nicholas Higgins, who views his role as analogous to that of a soldier to his country, who fights not only for himself and his family but also for friends, associates, and even strangers, trade unionism for her as well as for many early Victorians was a dark and mysterious activity. Workingmen, like Freemasons, came together and were joined by some secret oath. The oath taken by John Barton and his comrades when they resolved to intimidate the younger Carson is portrayed as "one of those fierce and terrible oaths which bind members of Trades' Unions to any purpose."⁵⁶ Further she saw union members as desperate men with "desperate plans."⁵⁷ Like Dr. Kay, she depicted trade unions as engendering a

"gloomy spirit of discontent."⁵⁸ Perhaps, what most troubled Elizabeth Gaskell and for that matter Carlyle and the other social critics, about trade unionism was that it promoted discord rather than harmony among men. In order to produce good effects unionism had to be directed by a dispassionate wisdom. As Elizabeth Gaskell writes in Mary Barton:

Combination is an awful power. It is like the equally weighty agency of steam; capable of almost unlimited good or evil. But to be a blessing on its labours, it must work under the direction of a high and intelligent will; incapable of being misled by passion or excitement.⁵⁹

For Elizabeth Gaskell the will of the operative was seldom "guided by the calmness of wisdom."⁶⁰ In both North and South and Mary Barton the irrational gets the best of the union members.

One of the more frequent objections to trade unions in the early Victorian era concerned the manner in which unions persuaded workingmen to join their ranks. As Elizabeth Gaskell indicated, trade union recruitings often bordered on ruthless coercion. One of the milder forms of coercion was simply blackballing anyone who refused to become a member. Nicholas Higgins explains to Margaret Hale just how effective this might be: "Just you try that, miss [working in a shop and having no one with whom to talk or not receiving any sort of recognition from other workers] ten hours for three hundred days, and yo'll know abit about what th' union is."⁶¹ Higgins justifies this action by asserting that the workingman is better off inside the union than not;

it affords him an opportunity, his only one, to obtain his rights. He likens the role of the union unto that of the Government which "takes care o' fools and madmen" and restrains them doing themselves or their neighbours harm.⁶²

As a Parliamentary Select Committee reported in 1837 and as Elizabeth Gaskell depicts in Mary Barton, the means of coercion employed by the unions were not always as mild as blackballing.⁶³ Their tactics were occasionally more violent. In Mary Barton Job Legh relates that the workingman has to decide whether to join the union and starve or to remain on the job and let the union "worry you out of your life."⁶⁴ Various accounts of the activities of combinations and trade unions in the thirties and forties show that those who resisted becoming members were not infrequently threatened, abused, beaten, had vitriol thrown at them, or were otherwise intimidated.⁶⁵ Like many persons, not all of whom were proponents of laissez-faire economics, Elizabeth Gaskell had difficulty in determining whether trade unionism was a "greater tyranny to the masters or the men."⁶⁶ In North and South, Thornton, the manufacturer, is hurt by the union but Boucher, the workingman dies because of it.

The ultimate weapon of the trade unions was the strike, or as it was called in the early Victorian era, a turn-out. In both Mary Barton and North and South the operatives turn-out; and in both instances the workers fail to achieve their objectives. Although Elizabeth Gaskell is predisposed to view trade unionism as an ineffective means of settling

disputes between masters and men, she was historically correct in depicting the strike as more injurious to workingmen than mill owners. In 1833 a Parliamentary Select Committee reported that strikes as a rule did not work in favour of the men; very often, the masters themselves combined and workers not only lost their bid for a higher wage but were even forced to accept a reduction.⁶⁷ In 1838 another committee stated that "intelligent workingmen" recognized that a strike was likely to prove disastrous.⁶⁸ As late as 1860, a study on trade unionism and strikes found that because the employer could hold out longer than the workingman he could dictate the terms of any settlement.⁶⁹ However, the manufacturer did not escape unscathed. In Mary Barton, Mr. Carson and the other mill owners lose valuable time in their effort to fill a large foreign order and to retain control of the cotton market; in North and South John Thornton not only loses time and money because he must import strikebreakers from Ireland, but the strike marks the beginning of the decline of his mercantile enterprise as well.⁷⁰ In a strike at Preston in 1836-37 which lasted for nearly three months, it was estimated the manufacturers lost some £45,000. However, their losses when compared to those of the operatives were almost insignificant.⁷¹

As Elizabeth Gaskell shows in North and South, workingmen generally fared well during the incipient stages of a turn-out. On the third day of a strike in Milton, Margaret

Hale sees men "with hands in their pockets sauntering along" and "loud-laughing and loud spoken girls in high spirits." By the second week, the turn-outs spirits have been dampened. The five shillings allotted by the unions as strike pay is not enough to support the hapless Boucher and his family; he and his wife are starving and his son is close to death with hunger.⁷² Nicholas Higgins, one of the leaders of the strike, is well aware that a strike if prolonged or improperly managed can reduce the labour force to begging or even to death, as his own wife died during a previous turn-out.⁷³ Again, Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional strikes are true to the actual pattern. In the Preston turn-out of 1836-1837 there was little change in the conditions of the workers over the first two weeks. After a month the streets were crowded with beggars and hundreds had applied for relief. By the second month few operatives had anything left to pawn. Finally in the third month the union's strike fund had been exhausted and the operatives had no recourse but to return to work.⁷⁴ But not all workers could expect to be rehired. The more active turn-outs and members of the union, like John Barton and Nicholas Higgins, had little chance of finding employment.⁷⁵

Perhaps what Elizabeth Gaskell and other social critics most disliked about strikes was that they were frequently accompanied by violence. She agreed whole heartedly with Carlyle's maxim that "violence does even justice unjustly."⁷⁶ As is shown in Mary Barton and North and South, strikes tended

to proceed orderly and peacefully until strikebreakers, or, as they were known in the nineteenth century, "knobsticks," were called in. During the Lancashire Building Trades turn-out of 1846, union members assailed would be strikebreakers and pulled ladders out from under those knobsticks who had managed to go to work.⁷⁷ When strikebreakers were employed in an Oldham turn-out in 1834, the striking operatives demanded that they leave the premises of the mill on their own or else they would be forcibly removed; in the fighting which ensued, the mill was ravaged, the owners house ransacked and looted, and one man lay dead.⁷⁸ Attempts were made to safeguard strikebreakers, but despite police protection and severe penalties for their mistreatment, knobsticks were still "waylaid and beaten or had vitriol thrown on them."⁷⁹ John Barton visits a knobstick in the hospital who has been blinded by vitriol and whose face is burned beyond recognition. Understandably he is horrified by the sight of this knobstick who had "not a limb nor a bit of a limb" that "could keep from quivering with pain."⁸⁰ In North and South the friction between the turn-outs and the knobsticks was not as violent as it was in Mary Barton, but the strikers do throw a few rocks at the strikebreakers and manage to scare them out of their wits.⁸¹ Because of the threat of violence, manufacturers often had to go considerable distances to obtain men to work in the mills during strikes.⁸² In North and South John Thornton has to import Irish labourers;⁸³ and in

Mary Barton Carson and his associates advertise for strike-breakers in the more remote and rural parts of Lancashire. They are able to attract only the most destitute workers, the "foot-sore, way-worn, and half-starved" who are obliged to "steal into town in the early dawn" or late at night in order to escape the wrath of the turn-outs.⁸⁴

The more extreme tactics of trade unionism had softened somewhat by the late forties and early fifties.⁸⁵ Labour leaders were disillusioned with the aggressive, ambitious and violent unionism of the eighteen thirties which they believed had failed miserably. They felt that violent methods had gained them nothing and that if they were ever to succeed, trade unionism had to become respectable. Some unions went so far as to suggest that strikes, which they termed the "bane of Trades' Unions," be abolished because they had done nothing but alienate people from their cause.⁸⁶

Elizabeth Gaskell reflects this change in trade unionism in her industrial novels. In Mary Barton which deals with the severe depression of 1837-1842, the devices of the trade union are brutal and harsh, but in North and South which is set in the early fifties their methods are much less so. Higgins tells Mr. Hale that the union has expressly prohibited the use of violence during the strike largely because such tactics would probably turn public opinions against the operatives. The union had charged its members "to lie down and die, if need were, without striking a blow," because at the first instance of violence the public would no

longer be with them.⁸⁷ As Elizabeth Gaskell indicates by the fifties the trade unionists realized that if they were going to battle effectively with the manufacturer, public support was required, and if they were going to win the Victorian public to their side, trade unions had to be respectable, nonviolent, and reasonable.

Elizabeth Gaskell also presents a picture of the early Chartist movement, 1838-1842. In her discussion of Chartism there is no mention of universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, paid members of Parliament, or of any of the other five points, nor is there any mention of the great Chartist leaders such as Fergus O'Connor. Rather she portrays the nameless millions who supported the Charter, signed the petition and encouraged their local delegates "not to spare" Parliament in enumerating the workingman's woes. Moreover, she shows that Chartism sprang from social and economic problems: that more than a political question it was for the average workingman a "bread and cheese question."⁸⁸

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, a majority of the "life-worn, gaunt and anxious" people who signed the petitions were either too hungry or too ill-educated to comprehend the political ramifications of Chartism.⁸⁹ Accordingly, when Chartist leaders spoke before large gatherings or wrote articles intended for the typical operative they stated their case not in political jargon but in cold, hard economic terms; in fact, so much did economic issues

predominate that an Irish visitor to Manchester in the early forties could justifiably remark that in effect Chartism was little more than a cry for the "list of wages for 1836."⁹⁰ Bronterre O'Brien, one of the foremost proponents of the Chartist movement, wrote that universal suffrage meant "meat and drink and clothing, good hours, and good beds, and good substantial furniture." Furthermore it meant "suitable employment for all, as well as securing to all the full proceeds of their employment."⁹¹ Another speaker explained to his audience that the charter and its five points would insure the workingman of "plenty of roast beef, plum pudding, and strong beer, by working three hours a day."⁹² Perhaps J. R. Stephens, at a meeting on Kersal moor, just beyond Manchester, best expressed what the Charter and universal suffrage would mean to the workingman:

This question of universal suffrage is a knife and fork question, after all, a bread and cheese question, notwithstanding all that has been said against it; and if any man should ask me what I mean by universal suffrage I should reply: that every working man in the land has a right to have a good coat on his back, a comfortable abode in which to shelter himself and his family, a good dinner upon his table, and no more work than is necessary to keep him in good health, and so much wages for his work as should keep him in plenty and afford the enjoyment of all the blessings of life, which a reasonable man could desire.⁹³

It was language like this that won John Barton and the Lancashire workingman to Chartism.⁹⁴

In Mary Barton Elizabeth Gaskell shows that the workingman's support of the Charter was largely based on nonpolitical

considerations. On the evening prior to John Barton's departure for London and the presentation of the petition to Parliament, many persons came by to wish him luck. In so doing they give their reasons for their support of the Charter. Job Legh, asks John Barton to tell Parliament that "we'n been clemmed [that is, starved] long enough, and we donnot see whatten good they'n been doing, if they can't give us what we're all crying for sin' the day we were born."⁹⁵ Another visitor says to Barton: "do ask them [Parliament] to make the masters break th' machines."⁹⁶ Another cold, half-clothed, and withered man asks John Barton to speak to Parliament about the "short-hours" or the Ten Hours Bill as "flesh and blood gets wearied wi' so much work."⁹⁷ As Elizabeth Gaskell shows, women as well as men were interested in the Charter; more than 8 percent of the signatures on the 1848 petition were those of women.⁹⁸ Mrs. Davenport hopes that the Commons will do something about the Factory Act which prohibits her strong healthy son from working simply because of his age and which at the same time allows a weakly, "little pittling of a lad" to work even though it is detrimental to his health.⁹⁹ Job Legh completes the list of requests by urging John Barton to tell Parliament to set trade free." Free trade would diminish stock piles of calico, make weaving brisk, permit weavers to earn a decent wage, and enable them to buy a new shirt when the old one wears out.¹⁰⁰

Elizabeth Gaskell correctly portrays the Chartists as basically rather naive. They labour under the illusion that the national government is unaware of their misery; all they need to do is reveal their true condition and some remedy would be forthcoming.¹⁰¹ They believed that by petitioning Parliament they were overstepping the powers of the manufacturers who had failed to offer any amelioration or palliative other than patience.¹⁰² John Barton tells Jem Wilson that workingmen will not be exploited much longer and "if the masters can't do us no good ... we must try higher folk."¹⁰³ Moreover, John Barton and his friends actually think that he is going to be allowed to speak before the Commons. He is excited about traveling to London and wonders at the prospect of "speaking out his notions before so many grand folk."¹⁰⁴ Then as Elizabeth Gaskell forcefully shows, John and the Chartist supporters are quickly disabused of the illusion that Parliament will be responsive to their needs.

John Barton who goes to London with "pure gladness that he was one of those chosen to ... [make] known the distress of the people and consequently," to procure them relief, is completely disillusioned by his experience there. Not only is he unable to receive a hearing by the "grand folk" in Parliament, but he is even treated contemptuously by a London constable. On his way to the Commons Barton is struck by a policeman whose business it is to keep the Chartists from "molesting the ladies and gentlemen going

to the Queen's drawing room. When Barton asks the officer, whose business is more urgent that of the Chartists or the gentle people on their way to court, the policeman only laughs.¹⁰⁵ Certainly the discomfiture and the bitter disappointment that John Barton feels after his journey to London with the petition and its subsequent rejection by the government was not unlike that of many workingmen.¹⁰⁶ After all, their "argosy of precious hopes" had been shot out of the water.¹⁰⁷

In the original introduction to Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell states that the novel is a story "of some of the people who elbowed me daily in the town in which I reside."¹⁰⁸ This everyday closeness must account for how well in tune she was with the needs, feelings, and hopes of the working class and her moving, largely unsentimental portrayal of them. Her representation is not from a political, economic or philosophical standpoint, but from the standpoint of human sympathy.

¹W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 14.

²Alexis de Tocqueville, Journey to England and Ireland (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957), 105.

³From Barton and Love's Handbook, quoted in A. Briggs, Victorian Cities (Middlesex: Penguin, Ltd., 1968).

⁴F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 59 and 314.

⁵C. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention: A Study of Her Non-Biographic Works (Fontwell, Sussex: Linden Press, 1970), 67.

⁶For other critics views see T. Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843), 326; and L. Faucher, Manchester in 1844 (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), passim.

⁷D. Read, "Chartism in Manchester," Chartist Studies, ed. by A. Briggs (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1959), 30.

⁸Mary Barton, ii, 14.

⁹Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 31. Also see Mary Barton, iii, 20.

¹⁰Mary Barton, iii, 20.

¹¹Ibid., iv, 64.

¹²Ibid., iii, 20. Even the most avid proponents of laissez-faire were willing to concede on this point. See W. R. Greg, The Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideas of the Artizan (London: Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1931).

¹³Mary Barton, vi, 60.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., xxxvii, 372

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (Manchester: E. J. Morten, 1969), 15; see also The Times (London, 26 February 1839), 4 Col. 6.

- ¹⁸Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 30.
- ¹⁹See Engels, 118; Kay, 23' Mary Barton, vi, 53.
- ²⁰Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 30.
- ²¹Mary Barton, iv, 29.
- ²²See Briggs, Victorian Cities.
- ²³Mary Barton, i, 7.
- ²⁴North and South, Chpt. 8, 110.
- ²⁵A. Briggs, "The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England" in Essays in Labour History, ed. by A. Briggs and J. Saville (London: Macmillan, 1960), 68.
- ²⁶From the Chartist National Petition, 1837; reprinted in G. D. Cole, British Working Class Movements; Select Documents, 1789-1875 (London: Macmillan, 1951), 354.
- ²⁷From a poster reprinted in A. Redford, The History of Local Government in Manchester, 3 Vols. (London: Longmans and Co., 1939-40).
- ²⁸Ibid.
- ²⁹Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 37.
- ³⁰Mary Barton, viii, 78-79.
- ³¹Anon. Review of Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life, Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review, 51 (April-July, 1849).
- ³²Mary Barton, xxxv, 358.
- ³³North and South, Chpt. 28, 288.
- ³⁴C. F. Lester, The Glory and Shame of England, 2 Vols. (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), II, 366.
- ³⁵W. Neff, Victorian Working Women (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 60.
- ³⁶Mary Barton, xxxv, 358-359.
- ³⁷North and South, Chpt. 11, 133.
- ³⁸Ibid.
- ³⁹Mary Barton, vi, 60.

⁴⁰See Engels, *passim*.; also see Sydney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1935).

⁴¹North and South, Chpt. 15, 165.

⁴²Webb, *passim*.

⁴³Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 34.

⁴⁴E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 830.

⁴⁵Mary Barton, xv, 163.

⁴⁶Ibid., vi, 66-67.

⁴⁷North and South, Chpt. 28, 293.

⁴⁸Ibid., Chpt. 17, 181.

⁴⁹Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., 73 (1842), 1491. Hereinafter Debates.

⁵⁰Cole, British Working Class Movements, 469-474.

⁵¹North and South, Chpt. 28, 298.

⁵²See Engels, 88-89; Carlyle, Past and Present, 21.

⁵³Briggs, "The Language of Class in Nineteenth-Century England," 68-69.

⁵⁴Mary Barton, xvi, 180; also see Cole, British Working Class Movements, 469-474.

⁵⁵Mary Barton, xvi, 180.

⁵⁶Ibid., xvi, 183.

⁵⁷Ibid., x, 116.

⁵⁸Kay, 10.

⁵⁹Mary Barton, xv, 166.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹North and South, Chpt. 28, 296.

⁶²Ibid., Chpt. 36, 366.

⁶³Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional

Papers, First Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, VIII (1837-38).

- ⁶⁴Mary Barton, xvii, 190.
- ⁶⁵P.P. 1837-38, VIII. Also see Henry Ashworth, An Inquiry Into the Origin, Progress, and Results of a Strike of the Operative Cotton Spinners of Preston, From October 1836 to February 1837, in The Rebirth of the Trade Union Movement (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 4-5.
- ⁶⁶Anon., Statements of Facts Connected With the Turn-out in the Lancashire Building Trades, in Rebirth of the Trade Union Movement (New York: Arno Press, 1972).
- ⁶⁷P.P. 1833, XI, 664.
- ⁶⁸P.P. 1837-38, VIII, 258.
- ⁶⁹Cole, British Working Class Movements, 503-504.
- ⁷⁰Mary Barton, xv, 165; North and South, Chpt. 22, 232.
- ⁷¹Ashworth, 13.
- ⁷²North and South, Chpt. 19, 206.
- ⁷³Ibid., Chpt. 17, 182.
- ⁷⁴Ashworth, passim.
- ⁷⁵Ibid., 10; Also see Mary Barton, xv, 165 and North and South, Chpt. 36, 365.
- ⁷⁶Carlyle, Past and Present, 18-19.
- ⁷⁷Anon., Statements of Facts Connected with the Turn-out in the Lancashire Building Trades.
- ⁷⁸The Times (London), 17 April 1834, 5 Col. 6; and 18 April 1834, 6 Col. 1.
- ⁷⁹P.P. 1837-38, VIII, 5-7.
- ⁸⁰Mary Barton, xvi, 181.
- ⁸¹North and South, Chpt. 22, 228.
- ⁸²P. Gaskell, Artisans and Machinery (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 287.
- ⁸³North and South, Chpt. 18, 197.

⁸⁴Mary Barton, xv, 165.

⁸⁵Webb, 198-199.

⁸⁶Ibid., 199.

⁸⁷North and South, Chpt. 25, 259.

⁸⁸See "How I Became a Rebel" first printed in the Christian Socialist, II no. 59 (13 December 1851), reprinted in Dorothy Thompson, ed., The Early Chartists (London: Macmillan, 1971), 85.

⁸⁹See Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 40-41; also see Mary Barton, viii, 80.

⁹⁰Taylor, 315-316.

⁹¹From the Operative, 17 March 1839, printed in From Cobbett to the Chartists, ed. by Max Morris (London: Lawrance and Wishart, 1951), 144.

⁹²A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1959), 10.

⁹³From the Northern Star, 29 September 1838, reprinted in From Cobbett to the Chartist, 149.

⁹⁴Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 34.

⁹⁵Mary Barton, viii, 80-81.

⁹⁶Ibid., 81.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Debates, 98 (1848), 290.

⁹⁹Mary Barton, viii, 81.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 82.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 79.

¹⁰²Read, "Chartism in Manchester," 33-34.

¹⁰³Mary Barton, viii, 78.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., ix, 95.

¹⁰⁶See Dorothy Thompson's introduction in The Early Chartists.

107 Mary Barton, viii, 82.

108 A. W. Ward "Introductions," The Works of Mrs. Gaskell, 8 Vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906), I.

VI

WORKING-CLASS OCCUPATIONS

In North and South, Mary Barton, and Ruth, Elizabeth Gaskell deals in depth with the various occupations of the urban working class, but by no means does she depict a wide range of occupations. However, she does portray the lives of cotton operatives, foundrymen, fustian cutters, needle women, and dressmakers. Her focus is not on the occupations themselves; rather it is on the people who perform that particular task. She is not concerned with describing the function of a carding room worker but rather she is concerned with the conditions of his labour and his life. As is the case with Elizabeth Gaskell's representation of physical Manchester, the Parliamentary Blue Books and other contemporary sources from the early Victorian period indicate that the details of the circumstances and consequences of these occupations she describes are accurate.

The most detailed picture of working-class life in Elizabeth Gaskell's novels is that of the cotton operative. Her primary focus on the latter is not surprising since nearly three-quarters of Manchester's entire population were employed in cotton manufacture. In dealing with the mill workers, she also touches on the factory system itself, which was still a rather novel institution in the thirties,

forties, and fifties. During this period there was great controversy about the factory system and its effect on the working population. Some critics, such as Lord Ashley, Charles Dickens, and John Fielden, an M.P. and a factory owner himself, saw very little good in it at all. Others, John Bright, R. H. Grey, and Dr. Ure, were staunch supporters of the system. Elizabeth Gaskell makes no real judgment on the factory system, but rather exposes the abuses of the system which made factory work such a dehumanizing and miserable way of life for so many workers in Manchester.

Although Elizabeth Gaskell never takes the reader inside the factory itself, she nevertheless presents an accurate account of the life of an operative. Like most of her contemporaries, she describes factory work as unpleasant, hazardous to health and having a damaging effect on morals.

As Elizabeth Gaskell shows in North and South the noise level in the factory was high; it was in fact much noisier than its modern counterpart.¹ Bessy Higgins in North and South complains that the sound "made my head ache so in the mill." Sometimes the "mill-noises" make her want to "scream out for them to stop."² The din of machinery could be heard outside the factory; Fanny Thornton who lives near the mill says that the noise even inside the Thornton's house is "perfectly deafening."³

The air inside the factory was often badly contaminated with impurities, dust, and "fluff" from the cotton, which,

as Bessy Higgins describes, made the air almost white in the carding room.⁴ There were also noxious fumes from the gas lights.⁵ One person testified before a Parliamentary Select Committee that food left in the carding room for any length of time could not be eaten because of the dust.⁶ This problem was exacerbated by the fact that the factories were often poorly ventilated. Some of the mills, like Carson's in Mary Barton were old, with low ceilings and few windows. Even in newer factories with large work rooms and many windows, air circulation was at a minimum; for one reason or another windows were most often kept closed.⁷ In North and South Bessy Higgins describes a "wheel" used in some factories to draw impurities out of the air, but many masters were unwilling to spend money on something that was not profitable. As Bessy Higgins explains, workmen also resisted innovation. She states that many of the workmen objected to this device because they were so used to swallowing "fluff" that they became hungry without it.⁸

Phillip Gaskell (unrelated to Elizabeth), a surgeon and an apologist for factory working conditions, claims in Artisans and Machinery that the inhalation of polluted factory air was not deleterious to health, but the facts do not seem to bear out his opinion.⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell illustrates this health hazard in Bessy Higgins who dies of "consumption" at the age of 19 as a result of working in the carding room of a mill. Bessy Higgins is convinced

that the "fluff" has caused her illness:

They say it winds round the lungs and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're poisoned by the fluff.¹⁰

Even Phillip Gaskell acknowledged that the fluff or dust irritated the lungs and caused workers discomfort.¹¹ Carding room workers testified in reports made to Parliament that their breathing was "stuffed up," that it was difficult for them to breathe freely at night and they suffered from wheezing.¹² In 1860, a British observer noted that carding room workers were apt to be asthmatic and shortlived. This condition is now called byssinosis.¹³

Although apologists for the factory system argued that the operatives suffered fewer injuries on the job than did workers in other occupations, such as mining, the fact remains that it was not uncommon for an operative to be maimed or killed by machinery. Elizabeth Gaskell in Mary Barton describes Jane Wilson as having "cotched her side against a wheel" and that she had "never sin' her accident" been strong and healthy.¹⁴ That this occurrence was nothing out of the ordinary is borne out by clippings from the Manchester Guardian between June and August 1844. On the 12th of June, a boy died of lockjaw as a result of having his hand crushed in a machine; three days later, a youth died as a result of being caught in a machine, and on 27 July a young girl died when she fell into a blower which

should have been boxed.¹⁵ As the factory inspector's reports indicate, limbs were often mangled or crushed, flesh was torn away, or operatives' hair caught in machinery and they were scalped.¹⁶ Between 1844 and 1854 in Lancashire, factory inspectors reported 35,011 deaths or injuries resulting from factory work, and of these 34,996 were caused by machinery.¹⁷ Jane Wilson's accident occurred "afore wheels were boxed," but many manufacturers neglected to protect workers from machines. As late as 1856, Leonard Homer, a Lancashire factory inspector, served 488 notices to employers to fence off their machinery and shafts.¹⁸

Elizabeth Gaskell does not mention many other specific health problems which were blamed on factory work. Other critics cited the 80°-90° temperature of many factories as dangerous to health; and there is ample testimony that factory workers suffered from varicose veins, fallen arches, asthma, consumption, miscarriages, premature puberty and gave birth to deformed children as a result of their occupation.¹⁹ On the other side of the coin, defenders of the factory system felt that the high temperatures of the factory were healthy, that operatives were infrequently absent from work, and that they suffered no more from consumption, scrofula or other diseases than did workers in nonfactory jobs.²⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell does not really enter into this controversy. She simply notes that the Manchester factory population did not appear to be healthy or strong. Most observers were in agreement on this point, from Queen Victoria herself, to a

recruiting officer of the Royal Fusiliers who found that factory men were not as fit as other recruits.²¹

Another aspect of the factory system that troubled Elizabeth Gaskell and other social critics was that the very long, monotonous work day led to habits of improvidence, intemperance, and irreligion in the operatives. Bessy Higgins describes this situation to Margaret Hale, telling her that working people:

... long for a bit of a change - a bit of a fillip, as it were. I know I ha' gone and bought a four-pounder out o' another baker's shop ... just because I sickened at the thought of going on forever wi' the same sight in my eyes, and the same sound in my ears, and the same taste i' my mouth, and the same thought (or no thought, for that matter) in my head, day after day, forever And father - all men - have it stronger in 'em than me to get tired o' sameness and work forever. And what is 'em to do? It's little blame to them if they do go into th' gin-shop for to make their blood flow quicker and more lively²²

Although proponents of the factory system pointed out that factory work did not generally require a great deal of bodily labour, since steam did most of the work, ten or twelve hours at a tedious, repetitious task in poor working conditions was physically exahusting.²³ Bessy Higgins is "so worn and weary" from factory work that she is almost happy to die.²⁴ Dr. Kay wrote that the operative's work resembled "the torment of Sisyphus."²⁵ An American visitor observed that children were too tired to eat after working all day in a factory, and he went on to say that he would

"rather see the children of my love born to the heritage of Southern Slavery than to the doom of the operative."²⁶ Emerson felt that "the machine unmans the user," that the incessant, repetitious work of the operative deprived him of his strength, wit, and vitality.²⁷

The need for a means of escape from this monotony often compelled the factory worker to be less than prudent, to go to the gin shop, to spend his earnings on immediate pleasures. Some of the laissez-faire reviewers of Mary Barton characterized John Barton as improvident because he bought half a pound of ham, half a dozen eggs, a penny-worth of milk, a loaf of bread, and six penny-worth of rum for a social gathering at his cottage.²⁸ The inference is that he should have saved his money against the day when trade fell off and he became unemployed. Elizabeth Gaskell shows herself to be more sympathetic to Engel's view. He asked "why on earth should they [the factory population] be provident in any way?" as they knew nothing of security, and lived in squalor, so why should they forego an immediate pleasure and think of some future happiness?²⁹

Many social critics, including Elizabeth Gaskell, were concerned that the enervating work week left the operatives too tired and spent to go to church. Dr. Kay wrote that such people spent their Sundays "in supine sloth, in sensuality, or in listless activity."³⁰ De Toqueville observed that the Manchester working class either stayed in bed on Sunday or went to a public house seeking some "lively distraction"

and he stated that little else was to be expected from a population who worked sixty-nine hours per week.³¹ In Mary Barton Elizabeth Gaskell gives a kinder picture of workers enjoying the leisure of Sunday:

You might see here and there some operative sallying forth for a breath of country air, or some father leading out his toddling bairns for the unwonted pleasure of a walk with 'Daddy,' in the clear frosty morning. Men with more leisure on weekdays would perhaps have walked quicker than they did through the fresh sharp air of this Sunday morning; but to them there was a pleasure, an absolute refreshment in the dawdling gait - one and all of them had.³²

A certain coarseness of character was associated with the factory system, and even defenders of the system found this to be the case. "Indecent language" and obscene expressions were commonly used by the factory population.³³ One proponent of the factory system wrote that "so intolerable a nuisance is the unblushing effrontery of the lower class of junionr mill operatives that in Manchester ... respectable females never pass along the streets during the period of their going to and returning from work."³⁴ In North and South Elizabeth Gaskell depicts an instance of this unabashed effrontery. Margaret Hale, prior to learning the hours of ingress and egress of the mill workers, continually encounters them in the streets of Milton. The operatives laugh and jest at her; they comment on her dress and physical appearance.³⁵ However, it is important to note that no matter how "loud-spoken and boisterous" were the

young factory girls and no matter how unrestrained and out-spoken were the men, they were not malicious.

Social critics viewed the factory system as a morally corrupting influence.³⁶ They saw the close association of men and women in the mills as detrimental to the development of feminine virtues;³⁷ it led to improper relations between the sexes--to improvident and early marriages.³⁸ Engels estimated that three-fourths of the operatives between the ages of fourteen and twenty were unchaste, and a parliamentary paper in the early thirties asserted that more than half of all women employed in factories gave birth to illegitimate children.³⁹

Those who believed in the factory system correctly pointed out that no more illegitimate children were born to factory women than to nonfactory women despite the consensus in the early Victorian era that women employed in factories were less moral and more promiscuous than other segments of the working class.⁴⁰ In Helen Fleetwood, Mrs. Tonna expresses this attitude when one of her characters remarks that only one girl in fifty remains chaste after entering the factory.⁴¹ Elizabeth Gaskell is less severe in her judgment of the moral laxity encouraged by the factory system than were many other critics. However, she heartily approves of John Barton's decision not to allow Mary to work in the mill, as it could have no good effect on her, after all Aunt Esther's downfall is linked to the factory.⁴² It is also interesting that Elizabeth Gaskell

represents the factory girl of too uncertain a character to become a servant. Bessy Higgins realizes that if her sister Mary is ever to go into domestic service, she cannot have worked in the factory.⁴³ As Mrs. Tonna so bluntly put it and others often implied, there was not "a small tradesman's wife [but] would think herself disgraced to take a factory girl for a servant."⁴⁴

Perhaps the single most objection to the factory system was the effect it had on the working-class household. Critics of the system alleged that because the factory sought the labour of women, and in fact employed more women than men, it disturbed the natural and traditional unity of the family.⁴⁵ For Lord Ashley as for Elizabeth Gaskell, women working in cotton manufacturing was a "perversion ... of nature," which had "the inevitable effect of introducing into families disorder, insubordination, and conflict";⁴⁶ the "order of Providence" was violated by removing women from their "peculiar calling" and placing them in factories where they were exposed to vain and extravagant notions and where they could not possibly learn about or fulfill their domestic duties.⁴⁷

One way in which the factory system seemed to weaken family bonds was that it encouraged, to some extent, the independence of women, and of young girls in particular. Females often worked in the mill quite separated from their parents or husbands. They received their own pay, and accordingly, there was nothing to prevent them from disposing

of their income in whatever manner they chose. Ivy Pinchbeck has pointed out that in some cases it was very much a good thing that women or young girls could earn a living and be accountable to no one but themselves.⁴⁸ For instance, a young girl could withhold her earnings from profligate parents or support herself if she were on her own. Though modern historians might perceive some good in the liberating effect that factory work had on women, few writers in the early thirties, forties or fifties saw anything but evil in it.⁴⁹ The general opinion was that young women needed guidance.⁵⁰ The downtrodden Esther in Mary Barton laments the way she spent her earnings:

I might have done better with money; I see now. But I did not know the value of it then. Formerly I had earned it easily enough at the factory, and as I had no more sensible wants, I spent it on dress and eating.⁵¹

Moreover, because of the nature of the factory system and the independence it allowed to young workers, there was no one who could oblige Esther to be more careful in her expenditures. Rather than submit to the strictures of John Barton's household Esther sets out on her own. As John Barton relates:

That's the worst of factory work for girls. They can earn so much when work is plenty, that they can maintain themselves anyhow You see Esther spent her money on dress, ... and got to come home so late at night that at last I told her my mind; my Missis thinks I spoke crossly, but I meant right Says I "Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials, and

your Fly-away veils, and stepping out
when honest women are in their beds;
you'll be a streetwalker, Esther, and
then don't you think I'll have you
darken my door, though my wife is your
sister.

So says she "Don't trouble yourself, John, I'll pack up
and be off now, for I'll never stay to hear myself called
as you call me."⁵²

Elizabeth Gaskell, like other critics of the factory
system, believed that factory work for women undermined
domestic ties in another way: because so many women la-
boured so many hours in the mill, it was impossible for
them to perform their domestic chores, in particular to care
properly for their husbands and children.⁵³ Factory in-
spectors continually reported that married factory women
neglected their household duties, that they could not sew
or mend, that they could not manage expenses, and that they
kept uncomfortable, slovenly, and dirty homes.⁵⁴ Mrs. Wilson,
in Mary Barton, remembered that she made numerous blunders
for a long while after she was married largely because long
hours of factory work had precluded her from even learning
to boil a potatoe. She feels that women "oughtn't to go
at [the factory] after they're married" because they "let
their house go all dirty and their fires all ought [out]";
she adds that such a home is hardly "tempting for a husband
to stay in."⁵⁵ In fact, she knows of nine men who have
been driven to the public house for this very reason.⁵⁶
Alice Wilson explains how difficult a task it must have

been for a married woman to be employed in a factory. In one of the few humorous passages in Mary Barton Alice Wilson muses:

... Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his Missis to be from home when he comes in, tired worn, and wanting someone to cheer him; and maybe, her to come in by-and-by just as tired and down in the mouth; and how he'd like for her never to be at home to see to th' cleaning of his house, or to keep at bright fire in his grate. Let alone his meals being all haggermugger and comfortless. I'd be bound ... if his Missis served him so, he'd be off to a gin-palace, or summut o' that kind. So why can't he make a law again poor folks' wives working in factories.⁵⁷

Factory work was also seen to be detrimental to the mother-child relationship; it warped a mother's "natural instincts" toward her children and deprived children of the necessary warmth and comfort only a mother could provide.⁵⁸ Children were sometimes left to fend for themselves and more frequently they were watched over by a "nurse." As Mrs. Wilson says in Mary Barton, there was often great harm in putting "little ones out at nurse."⁵⁹ Reliable sitters were hard to come by, especially at the wages offered by most working mothers. More often than not, children were left in the care of persons not much older than themselves, who did little more than what was absolutely necessary.⁶⁰

Perhaps, as a modern historian has pointed out, critics exaggerated the extent to which married women were employed in the cotton industry and the effect that this

had on the working-class family.⁶¹ In most of the Parliamentary Blue Books dealing with the problem there is conflicting testimony as to what sort of housewives and mothers working women were.⁶² Generally speaking, manufacturers tended to extol the virtues of working women, and workingmen tended to complain that working women made poor wives and mothers. In her industrial novels Elizabeth Gaskell makes it clear that married women should not work, but in so doing she does not make the case that working women cannot cope with the demands of marriage. She simply points out that it would not be an easy task. Moreover, she does not overestimate the number of married women employed in the cotton manufacture. Statistics are few, but probably not more than one in every six female cotton operatives was married and the proportion is likelier closer to one in ten.⁶³ Appropriately, in Mary Barton and North and South none of the married females work in the mill.⁶⁴

In her social novels, Elizabeth Gaskell deals in depth not only with operatives' lives but with the lives of dress-makers and milliners' apprentices as well. As is indicated in Mary Barton and Ruth girls were usually apprenticed between the age of fourteen and eighteen.⁶⁵ Ruth Hilton is fifteen and Mary Barton is sixteen when bound. Before a young girl could be apprenticed she was obliged to pay a sizeable premium to the mistress. The Children's Commission reported in 1843 that indoor apprentices, those who were boarded and lodged during the term of apprenticeship, often paid £50 to £60 for a two- to three-year indenture. John

Bright felt that the common fee for a three-year indenture was closer to £40.⁶⁶ Ruth is apprenticed to Mrs. Mason for five years, but Elizabeth Gaskell is not precise about the sum of her premiums.⁶⁷ Whatever the usual premium, it was certainly too high for a cotton operative like John Barton. He wastes a day's work looking for a suitable shop to send Mary to; at the first-class establishments he finds that considerable premiums were demanded; even at second-rate shops he finds that a high premium is requisite to apprenticeship.⁶⁸ Mary must settle for Miss Simmond's place, where she becomes an outdoor apprentice, living at home, providing her own meals, and working for a number of years without remuneration "in the consideration of being taught the business."⁶⁹ If for some reason, such as ill-health, misconduct, or insubordination, an apprentice was unable to serve the full period of her indenture, no part of the premium was refunded.⁷⁰ When Ruth is summarily dismissed by Mrs. Mason after having served less than one year of her five-year apprenticeship, she receives no refund. Also, despite high premiums girls frequently failed to learn the trade;⁷¹ either they were kept at menial tasks or like both Ruth and Mary Barton spent a good deal of time running errands rather than practicing stitches.⁷²

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, dressmaker's apprentices worked long hours. In season, it was not uncommon for girls to sew for eighteen hours or more in a single day.⁷³ The day commenced at five or six in the morning and often

ended as late as two or three a.m. the next day. One girl testified before the Children's Commission that before a county ball she was required to work from four a.m. Thursday until ten-thirty Sunday morning without sleep.⁷⁴ In summer the day begins at six a.m. for Mary Barton and ends only when all the sewing for the day, has been completed.⁷⁵ Occasionally there is a large quantity of work to be done and she labours the entire night at Miss Simmonds.⁷⁶ The night before the Hunt Ball, Ruth sews on gowns until three in the morning.⁷⁷ Out of season, the work load was not as heavy; Mary Barton is due at the shop after breakfast in winter and generally worked twelve to thirteen hours. However, when there was a great amount of work to be done, dressmakers did not scruple about having their apprentices work all day Sunday.⁷⁸ In or out of season a statement made by a physician in 1843 about dressmakers' apprentices held true: "It would be impossible for any animal to work so continuously with so little rest."⁷⁹

Despite the long tedious day, apprentices were not well-fed; what food there was was coarse and sometimes unsavoury.⁸⁰ In Ruth, Mrs. Mason provides her "young ladies" with bread, cheese and beer.⁸¹ Mary Barton is deprived of tea in bad times.⁸² Often the last meal was put off until the day's sewing had been done.⁸³ Mary Barton has dinner at one p.m. and is sometimes required to wait past midnight for supper.⁸⁴ For indoor apprentices no meals were served on Sunday.⁸⁵ Dressmakers' apprentices like Ruth, who were alone in a

strange town and who had no money, ate even more paltry meals on Sunday than on week days.⁸⁶

The rooms in which the apprentices worked were usually small, almost always too small for the number of persons in them. Ventilation was poor and the amount of air in the rooms was inadequate.⁸⁷ Mary Barton complains of the "close monotonous workroom" at Miss Simmonds; Ruth asks herself how she is going to survive five years in "that close room" at Mrs. Mason's shop.⁸⁸ Sleeping quarters for the girls were "crowded and confined."⁸⁹ Ruth has a rather comfortable accommodation when compared with evidence given before a Parliamentary Select Committee. She shares a room with four other girls, although she has her own mattress.⁹⁰ A dressmaker's apprentice told the Children's Commission in 1843 that she shared a bed with five other girls, and another girl related that she slept in a small room with seventeen other apprentices.⁹¹

Like nearly everyone who looked into the condition of the dressmaker's apprentice, Elizabeth Gaskell found the long hours, the stifling atmosphere, and the irregular and scanty meals damaging to the apprentice's health. In fact, most Victorians believed that apprentices lived under worse circumstances than the operative. Factory inspectors reported in 1834 that the cotton operative was less adversely affected by his work than was the milliner's apprentice.⁹²

It was also widely believed that dressmakers' apprentices were prone to consumption and loss of vision.⁹³ The

Illustrated London News cited statistics from the North London Ophthalmic Institution which showed that 81 out of its 669 patients were needlewomen, many more than for any other occupation.⁹⁴ In Mary Barton, Margaret Legh, who does needlework, goes blind, but it must be observed that this is not solely caused by her occupation. In Ruth, Jenny suffers from poor health and the conditions at Mrs. Mason's only exacerbated the situation.⁹⁵

For Elizabeth Gaskell, as for most Victorians, the moral consequences of the life of the milliner and the dressmaker's apprentice was of as much concern as her physical distress.⁹⁶ Esther is worried when she learns that Mary Barton is working at Miss Simmonds. She tells Jim Wilson: "it's a bad life for a girl to be out late at night on the streets, and after many an hour of weary work, they're ready to follow after almost anything."⁹⁷ In the minds of most Victorians' Esther's fear was not unfounded. The Children's Commission stated that immorality, was "proverbial among young dressmakers' apprentices."⁹⁸ In Vanity Fair, Rawdon Crawley amuses himself by courting milliners, opera dancers; the "easy triumphs."⁹⁹

As Elizabeth Gaskell points out there were a number of reasons for the young apprentice's proclivity to moral looseness. The first was in the nature of the work itself. The girls were hour after hour, day after day, concerned only with appearance, apparel, and fashion. There was a tendency for them to spend what little they had in fine clothing and,

in the case of Mary Barton, to become vain.¹⁰⁰ Fraser's wrote that this fondness for clothing sometimes led to prostitution.¹⁰¹ Moreover the repetitive nature of the work and the unpleasant atmosphere compelled the young apprentice to escape the drudgery of their existence, even if only temporarily. The work so oppressed Ruth that she longed to be far away from Mrs. Mason's; she wanted to walk in the sun, watch people dance, or listen to a band. She yearned for "some variety to the dull, monotonous life she was leading."¹⁰² Like Ruth, Mary Barton resorts to an illicit affair with a young man, partially out of boredom. She dreads "the morrow, and the morrow beyond that, to be spent in that close, monotonous workroom with Sally Leadbitter's odious whisper's hissing in her ears"; and she loathes "the recollection of the hot summer evening, when, worn out by stitching and sewing ... she listened to the voice of the tempter."¹⁰³

Perhaps the most frequent reason given for apprentice's lack of moral rectitude was laid at the feet of the mistress. Miss Simmonds would do nothing to discourage her "young ladies" from recommending to each other novels filled with fantasy and foolish ideas as long as it did not interfere with their sewing.¹⁰⁴ Mrs. Tonna branded the books used by apprentices as "moral poison," books concerned only with murder, violence, and unbridled passion.¹⁰⁵ As might be expected the workshop was a hotbed of gossip. When Mary Barton arrives at Miss Simmonds, on the morning following Carson's

murder, the girls are frantically discussing what each one knows of the case. The moral tone of Miss Simmond's establishment is best represented in Sally Leadbitter's comments to Mary Barton:

To be sure you'll have to be in Liverpool Tuesday, and maybe Wednesday; but after that you'll surely come, and tell us all about it. Miss Simmonds knows you'll have to be off those two days. But between you and me, she's a bit of a gossip, and will like hearing all about the trial well enough to let you off very easy for your being off a day or two. Besides Betsy Morgan was saying yesterday she couldn't wonder but you'd prove quite an attraction to customers. Many a one would come and have their gowns made by Miss Simmonds just to catch a glimpse of you ... really Mary, you'll turn out to be quite a heroine.¹⁰⁶

As Fraser's stated, the apprentices; employers were interested in little but the swiftness of the girls' needles;¹⁰⁷ they were not concerned about a girls' moral character as long as it did not reflect upon their place of business. Part of the reason for Ruth's seduction is that she is left alone on Sundays with nothing more to do than to attend church services and to stare through the workshop window. Mrs. Mason never bothers to inquire how her "young people" spend their day off, because "she dreaded to hear that one or two had occasionally nowhere to go, and that it would be sometimes necessary to order a Sunday's dinner and leave a lighted fire on that day."¹⁰⁸ It is only when she sees Ruth with Bellingham that she demonstrates any concern over the activities of her apprentices.

Elizabeth Gaskell writes that "Mrs. Mason was careless about the circumstances of temptation into which the girls entrusted to her as apprentices were thrown, but severely intolerant if their conduct was ... influenced by ... these temptations."¹⁰⁹ Mr. Mason immediately dismisses Ruth without hearing any explanation in order to maintain "the character of her establishment." Elizabeth Gaskell remarks that "it would have been better if she had kept up the character of her girls."¹¹⁰

Needlewomen, shirt-makers, or slop-women, as they were called, were even worse off than the milliner or dress-maker's apprentice. Like Mrs. Davenport in Mary Barton, they were often widows with families to support or women who could find no other means of subsistence.¹¹¹ A woman who worked twelve hours a day, six days a week, could expect to make not more than 5s 6d. and frequently as little as 1s 6d.¹¹² When the economy slumped, the situation was even more grisly; everyone seemed to pick up a needle and prices fell.¹¹³ Mrs. Davenport can survive only because the local board is paying her rent; and still she must take in children to make ends meet.¹¹⁴ Although Mrs. Davenport does not turn to prostitution to support her family when she cannot earn enough from sewing, many needlewomen did. One woman told Fraser's: "I don't know any that makes a practice of walking the streets regularly at night. They only go out when they were in distress."¹¹⁵

Certainly a result of the long hours of monotonous work

under unhealthy and hazardous conditions by operatives, dressmakers' apprentices or needlewomen was a degraded working class -- a working class which, to some extent, was driven to improvidence, irreligion and crude behaviour. Elizabeth Gaskell's reason for depicting working-class occupations in such detail was not only to expose bad conditions but also to explain to middle-class people why the labouring population was coarse, unmannered, and sometimes given to immoral or violent acts. In Mary Barton, North and South, and The Life of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell tacitly puts the same question to the reader: What would you do if you had had these experiences?

¹W. F. Neff, Victorian Working Women (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 38.

²North and South, Chpt. 13, 145.

³Ibid., Chpt. 20, 214.

⁴Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers, First Report of the Central Board of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Collect Information in the Manufacturing Districts, As to the Propriety and Means of Cur-tailing the Hours of Their Labour, XX (1833), 644. Herein-after all Parliamentary Papers will be cited in the following form: P.P. (year), (volume), (page).

⁵P. Gaskell, Artisans and Machinery (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 221.

⁶P.P. 1833, XX, 644.

⁷Neff, 40.

⁸North and South, Chpt. 13, 146.

⁹P. Gaskell, 221.

¹⁰North and South, Chpt. 13, 146.

¹¹P. Gaskell, 223.

¹²P.P. 1833, XX, 645.

¹³See footnotes to Penguin Books edition of North and South (1969), 533 fn. 13.

¹⁴Mary Barton, viii, 83.

¹⁵F. Engels, Condition of the Working Class in England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 186.

¹⁶P.P. 1843, XXVII, 307.

¹⁷P.P. 1854, LXV, 497-505.

¹⁸P.P. 1856, L.

¹⁹See Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3d series, 73, 1082-1089. Hereinafter Debates.

²⁰See P. Gaskell, 218; also see R. H. Greg, The Factory Question Considered in Relation to its Effects on the Health and Morals of Those Employed in Factories, in The Battle for the Ten Hour Day Continues (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 41, 54-56.

- ²¹p.p. 1833, XX, 812-813; A. Briggs, Victorian Cities (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968).
- ²²North and South, Chpt. 17, 185.
- ²³p. Gaskell, 217.
- ²⁴North and South, Chpt. 11, 131.
- ²⁵J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (Manchester: E. J. Morten, 1969), 22.
- ²⁶C. E. Lester, The Glory and Shame of England (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971), II, 357.
- ²⁷R. W. Emerson, English Traits, vol. 5 of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1903), 167.
- ²⁸W. R. Greg, The Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideas of the Artizan (London: Trubner and Co., 1876).
- ²⁹Engels, 145.
- ³⁰Kay, 64.
- ³¹Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957), 108.
- ³²Mary Barton, xxiv, 260.
- ³³p. Gaskell, 81; P.P. 1831-1832, XV, 99-100.
- ³⁴p. Gaskell, 113.
- ³⁵North and South, Chpt. 9, 110.
- ³⁶See J. Fielder, The Curse of the Factory System (New York: Kelly, 1969), 34-36.
- ³⁷See Debates, 74, 1095-96; also Engels, 185.
- ³⁸p. Gaskell, 81; Illustrated London News, 20 Aug 1842; L Faucher, Manchester in 1844 (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 46.
- ³⁹Engels, 165; P.P. 1831-32, XV, 99-100.
- ⁴⁰See R. H. Greg, 32; P.P. 1833, XX, 102.
- ⁴¹Neff, 54.

⁴²Mary Barton, xiv, 154.

⁴³North and South, Chpt. 8, 109.

⁴⁴Neff, 54; this attitude is also reflected in Faucher, 45 and P.P. 1831-2, XV, 374.

⁴⁵See P. Gaskell, Chpts. iii and vi; Also see Kay, passim.

⁴⁶Debates, 73, 1095-96.

⁴⁷Lord Ashley, "Address of the Lancashire Shorttime Central Committee to the Right Honourable Lord Ashley, M.P. With his Lordship's Reply," The Battle for the Ten Hours Day Continues (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 8.

For Elizabeth Gaskell's views concerning working married women see Mary Barton, x, 113-114.

⁴⁸Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution: 1750-1850 (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 311-13.

⁴⁹See Neff, passim.

⁵⁰Debates, 73, 1095-96.

⁵¹Mary Barton, xiv, 153-54.

⁵²Ibid., i, 5.

⁵³Debates, 73, 1092.

⁵⁴See P.P. 1831-2, XV, 374; P.P. 1843, XXVIII, 536; Debates, 73, 1094.

⁵⁵Mary Barton, x, 113.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., x, 114.

⁵⁸P. Gaskell, 87; Kay, 69-70.

⁵⁹Mary Barton, x, 113.

⁶⁰Engels, 145; P. Gaskell, 249; Kay, 69-70. Also see Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age (1850-1875), ed. Royston Pike (London: Allen Unwin, Ltd., 1967), 202-03.

⁶¹Pinchbeck, 311-13.

⁶²See in particular P.P. 1831-32, XV, passim.; P.P. 1833, XXI, passim.

⁶³Debates, 74, 665-66.

⁶⁴See North and South and Mary Barton.

⁶⁵P.P. 1843, XIII.

⁶⁶Debates, 73, 1135.

⁶⁷Ruth's guardian manages to save eighty pounds from her father's estate, and presumedly this money covers the premium.

⁶⁸Mary Barton, iii, 22.

⁶⁹Ibid., 23; see also P.P. 1843, XIV, 555.

⁷⁰P.P. 1843, XIV, 771-72.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²See Ruth, iii; Mary Barton, passim.

⁷³P.P. 1843, XIV, 555.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Mary Barton, iv, 24.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ruth, ii.

⁷⁸P.P. 1843, XIV, 559.

⁷⁹Ibid., 556.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ruth, ii.

⁸²Mary Barton, xii, 134.

⁸³P.P. 1843, XIV, 556.

⁸⁴Mary Barton, xii, 134.

⁸⁵P.P. 1843, XIV, 556.

⁸⁶Ruth, iii.

- ⁸⁷P.P. 1843, XIV, 556.
- ⁸⁸Mary Barton, xiii, 149; Ruth, i, 6.
- ⁸⁹P.P. 1843, XIV, 557.
- ⁹⁰Ruth, iii, 27.
- ⁹¹P.P. 1843, XIV, 557.
- ⁹²P.P. 1834, XIX, 510.
- ⁹³P.P. 1843, XIV, 558, 777.
- ⁹⁴Neff, 12.
- ⁹⁵Ruth, i, 6.
- ⁹⁶Neff, 125.
- ⁹⁷Mary Barton, xiv, 154.
- ⁹⁸P.P. 1843, XIV, 559.
- ⁹⁹See Neff, 125.
- ¹⁰⁰See Mary Barton, passim.
- ¹⁰¹See Neff, 125-128.
- ¹⁰²Ruth, i, 7.
- ¹⁰³Mary Barton, xiii, 149.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., xix.
- ¹⁰⁵Neff, 127.
- ¹⁰⁶Mary Barton, xxv, 226.
- ¹⁰⁷Neff, 92.
- ¹⁰⁸Ruth, iii, 25.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹¹Mary Barton, vii, 68.
- ¹¹²P.P. 1843, XIV, 834.
- ¹¹³Neff, 131.

114 Mary Barton, vii, 68.

115 Neff, 133.

VII

THE INDUSTRIAL MIDDLE CLASS

It is a much more difficult task to evaluate Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of the industrial middle class than her description of Manchester or of the working class. First, there are no Parliamentary Blue Books with which to compare her depiction of the Mancunian manufacturer; and secondly, mill owners have not left memoirs from which to judge the accuracy of the actions, attitudes, and life style of Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional industrialists. However, as in her presentation of country life, of Manchester in the 1840's, and of the burgeoning consciousness of the industrial working class, what evidence there is tends to corroborate her characterization of the industrial middle class; in fact, in some instances Elizabeth Gaskell's novels prove to be the best source of what the life of the early Victorian urban manufacturer's life was like.¹

Although in Birmingham and in rural areas there might have been small manufacturers who were not very wealthy, in Manchester in the thirties and forties, this was not the case.² As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates in North and South and in Mary Barton, most Mancunian mill owners were fairly prosperous; they had not only large industrial establishments, but the accoutrements of wealth as well.

The Carsons in Mary Barton keep a butler, a nurse, a cook, a house parlourmaid, an outdoor servant, and a coachman.³ In North and South, the Thorntons have several servants, but their number and specific duties are not mentioned.⁴ Perhaps the most significant indication of their prosperity is the fact that both the Carsons and the Thorntons keep a carriage. There were few carriages in the Manchester-Salford area even in the early fifties, and it has been estimated that the maintenance of a carriage required an annual income of at least £550 to £600.⁵

The Carsons' and the Thorntons' homes also give evidence of their owners' wealth. As in the typical Victorian house, the Carsons have three sitting rooms, a dressing room, several bedrooms, a library, a dining room, and a conservatory.⁶ Though Elizabeth Gaskell does not take the reader through the various rooms in the Thorntons' house, it is probably similar to the Carsons'. Not unlike other Victorian homes, those of the Carsons and the Thorntons are furnished more with a desire for effect than with taste, being filled with objects which testify to their wealth and position.⁷ The Thorntons' dining room is "handsome and ponderous"; the Carsons breakfast in their "luxurious library."⁸ However, as Elizabeth Gaskell points out in North and South, just because rooms were lavishly furnished did not mean that they were comfortable. The Thorntons' dining room is devoid of conveniences "for any other enjoyment than eating and drinking"; there are no books in the room save the six volumes of Matthew Henry's Bible Commentaries which sit in

the middle of a "massive sideboard" between an expensive tea urn and a lamp.⁹ As in other early Victorian houses, the Thorntons' drawing room is decorated with mirrors, silk and white muslin draperies, light, flowered wall paper, and flowered carpets.¹⁰ The Thorntons' ostentatiously furnished, cold drawing room has come to be recognized as being representative of the taste of the nouveau riche manufacturer.¹¹ In North and South Elizabeth Gaskell gives Margaret Hale's impression of this room:

There was no one in the drawing-room. It seemed as though no one had been in it since the day when the furniture was bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava, and discovered a thousand years hence. The walls were pink and gold; the pattern on the carpet represented bunches of flowers on light ground, but it was carefully covered up in the centre by a linen drugget, glazed and colourless. The window-curtains were lace; each chair and sofa had its own particular veil of netting, or knitting. Great alabaster groups occupied every flat surface, safe from dust under their glass shades. In the middle of the room, right under the bagged-up chandelier, was a large circular table, with smartly-bound books arranged at regular intervals round the circumference of its polished surface like gaily-coloured spokes on a wheel. Everything reflected light, nothing absorbed it. The whole room had a painfully spotted, spangled, speckled look about it, which impressed Margaret so unpleasantly that she was hardly conscious of the peculiar cleanliness required to keep everything so white and pure in such an atmosphere, or of the trouble that must be willingly expended to secure that effect of icy, snowy discomfort. Wherever she looked there was evidence of care and labour, but not care and labour to procure ease, to help the habits of tranquil home

employment; solely to ornament, and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction.¹²

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates in North and South and in Mary Barton, there were few amusements for the manufacturer or his family;¹³ the new towns like Manchester did not have the recreations available in a city like London. What recreation there was usually took the form of indoor games, reading, and handicrafts.¹⁴ Like most middle-class Victorians, the Carsons and the Thorntons have a piano. In North and South, Fanny Thornton practices a "morceau de salon" of which every third note is "either indistinct or wholly missed out," and in Mary Barton, Amy Carson copies some manuscript music from a parcel of new songs.¹⁵ In an attempt to pass the time before taking evening tea, one of the older Carson girls falls asleep reading "Emerson's Essays."¹⁶ The wives and daughters of the Mancunian industrialists, like other middle-class women, spent a good deal of time doing needlework.¹⁷ In North and South, Mrs. Thornton mends an elegant table cloth. However, most of the needlework performed by these middle-class women was less practical; like the piece of cambric Margaret Hale embroiders for her cousin Edith's expected child, it was strictly ornamental, and in the words of the puritanical Mrs. Thornton, "flimsy useless work."¹⁹ But not even Mrs. Thornton would be caught sewing a shirt or a dress, for that was what working-class women did.²⁰

Not all activities were restricted to the home. Both men and women attended lectures at large auditoriums. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Carson requests that her carriage and coachman be ready at two o'clock to leave for a lecture.²¹ Also there were frequent regularly scheduled concerts.²² Musical entertainment was not as well organized or supported in Manchester as it was in Liverpool and Birmingham, but it was nevertheless an important facet of social life. In 1848, with the advent of Charles Hallé as conductor of the theatre orchestra, music was put on a new footing in Manchester.²³ Fanny Thornton attends concerts of the choral society, where one was "sure to hear the newest music" brought from London. Her only criticism of these musical events is that they are too crowded, "the directors admit so indiscriminately."²⁴ Young girls, like the older Carson girls, also attended public assemblies and went to dancing parties which lasted well into the night.²⁵

There were a number of public theatres in Manchester, but few middle-class persons were ever in attendance. As a twentieth century historian puts it, the "good people" of Manchester were shocked and even horrified at the thought of entering the door of a theatre.²⁶ This was because the theatre did "nothing to purify and elevate the taste," but rather attracted "the crowd habituated to gross pursuits."²⁷ In North and South and Mary Barton, the middle-class characters are all reasonably moral and upstanding Mancunians, and none go to the theatre or even seem cognizant of its existence.

Perhaps because of the paucity of socially acceptable amusements outside the home, the most popular events among the manufacturers were large dinner parties. Like the gathering at the Thorntons, these were formal occasions; people dined at five or six rather than the usual one o'clock dinner hour, and of course there was no shortage of food.²⁸ In an essay on life in the new towns of the 1840's, the Claphams rely heavily on Elizabeth Gaskell's description of the Thorntons' dinner party and perceive it as not untypical of this sort of activity. Before the party, the drawing-room is meticulously readied; the drugget is pulled up, the covers are taken off the lamps and chairs, and the room "blazed forth in yellow silk damask."²⁹ Everyone at the gala event is splendidly dressed; Margaret Hale wears her very best white silk gown and coral jewelry.³⁰ Because of illness, Mrs. Hale is unable to attend, but "she would have been astonished, if she had seen the sumptuousness of the dinner table and its appointments."³¹ Margaret finds the over-abundance of food oppressive and reflects that half the number of delicacies would have sufficed. However, that was not the way things were done in Manchester. Society throve there on the exchange of expensive and lavish meals.

The Mancunian mill owners and their families were no less class-conscious than the working class. Part of this consciousness, in fact the term "middle class" itself, was the product of a pride that the manufacturers began to take

in themselves in the late eighteenth century.³³ It was the result of a concentrated effort to bind themselves together as a class and to give themselves confidence in their achievement.³⁴ Like John Thornton, who prides himself on his ability to manufacture cotton goods which will be shipped all over the world, the manufacturers realized the progressive character of what they were doing and also the contribution they were making to the wealth and well-being of the national economy.³⁵ Speaking of the invention of the steam hammer, Thornton says:

and this imagination of power, this practical realization of a gigantic thought, came out of one man's brain in our good town. That very man has it within him to mount, step by step, on each wonder, he achieves to higher marvels still. And, I'll be bound to say, we have many among us who if he were gone, could spring into the breach and carry on³⁶

However, as Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, this class consciousness did not always arise from such a positive basis. It was also born of a defensive reaction to their peculiar position in society. In Coningsby, Disraeli observed "that industrial wealth was rapidly developing classes whose power was imperfectly recognized in the constitutional scheme" and who were determined to obtain retribution.³⁷ Although Elizabeth Gaskell does not mention the Reform Bill, the Anti-Corn Law League, or otherwise indicate that the middle class was seeking political power as leverage against the aristocracy, she does show that the mill owners objected strenuously to parliamentary interference

in industrial matters. When Margaret Hale asks John Thornton what his reaction is to some recent legislative action, he refers to Parliament as "a meddler with only a smattering of knowledge of the real facts."³⁸

The manufacturers were also made aware of their need to join together by what was happening with the working class. There was great fear among industrialists in the thirties and forties that the working class threatened their position in society; not a few were convinced that Chartism and trade unionism meant a wholesale plundering of middle-class property.³⁹ One observer of trade unionism in Lancashire believed that the purpose of the movement was to turn men against law and order, to overwhelm industry by sheer numerical superiority and terror tactics. In his opinion, trade unions meant to "lay the axe to the root of national resources" and to paralyze capital.⁴⁰ Mrs. Thornton's response to Margaret Hale's query of why do men strike epitomizes this attitude toward unionism and middle-class distrust of the workingman: "What are they going to strike for? For the mastership and ownership of other people's property. That is what they always strike for."⁴¹ Consequently, as in both North and South and Mary Barton, the manufacturers combine against the workers in order to protect their class interests.⁴²

Another factor which contributed to the class consciousness of the industrialist was the condescending and disparaging attitude of the more genteel elements of society toward him. Cobden wrote to his brother in 1842 that he knew of

nothing which seemed to "be considered so decided a stigma, as to brand a man a mill-owner."⁴³ Somehow the manufacturer was deemed unsuited to anything outside the factory; he was brash, ill-mannered, and for the most part "notoriously unintellectual."⁴⁴ Before she goes to Milton, Margaret Hale exhibits the characteristic prejudice of her class when she wonders what use a manufacturer could possibly have for a gentleman tutor.⁴⁵ Of course, the proud Mancunian mill owners, such as Cobden, struck back and did not conceal their contempt for the aristocracy. They attacked country gentry as idlers, landlords as slaveholders, and pronounced judgment on the country in general as the bastion of feudalism, torpor, and monotony.⁴⁶ In North and South, Mrs. Thornton scornfully tells the Hales that though her son's name is known throughout Europe, "idle gentlemen and ladies are not likely to know much of a Milton manufacturer unless he gets into Parliament or marries a lord's daughter."⁴⁷ Thornton himself tells the Hales that he would rather be an unsuccessful mill owner than lead a "dull prosperous life" in the south of England.⁴⁸ John Thornton and Margaret Hale discuss the terms "gentleman" and "man"; he states that he is weary of the word "gentlemanly" as it is often used inappropriately and its meaning is distorted. He ranks it with "the cant of the day" and prefers rather to use the term "true man," a man of endurance, strength, and faith.⁴⁹ Needless to say, for Thornton, a Milton mill owner was more likely to be a "true man" than

was a so-called gentleman.

Despite the manufacturer's contempt of the aristocracy, he sought to emulate them; he was anxious to move into the upper classes, to buy a gig, a country estate, and a title. This attitude became most apparent in the forties, as most industrialists were satisfied that the Reform Bill and the repeal of the Corn Laws had improved their status in society as far as was politically feasible. Though radicals like Cobden and Bright might rail against the aristocracy, they made little real impression on their erstwhile supporters, who, as Elizabeth Gaskell points out, were too busy acquiring the "paraphernalia of gentility" to be concerned with politics.⁵⁰ Like John Thornton, most manufacturers no longer wanted to be in opposition to the aristocracy; they simply wanted to be accepted by genteel society. In

Notes on England de Tocqueville writes:

You will find he [the middle-class manufacturer] hates some aristocrats but not the aristocracy. On the contrary, he himself is full of aristocratic prejudices. He deeply distrusts the people; he loves houses, territorial possessions and carriages; he lives in the hope of attaining all this by means of the democratic varnish with which he covers himself, and meanwhile gives a livery to his one servant whom he calls a footman, talks of his dealings with the Duke of ----- and his very distinct family links with the house of another noble lord.⁵¹

Cobden saw this middle-class desire to rise in the social hierarchy as the ultimate reason why those who had fought against aristocratic privilege would not seek further reform of the social system.⁵² He supported his

statement by recounting that almost every successful industrialist not only bought an estate but also tried perpetuate his name by producing an eldest son.⁵³ In Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell mentions that many manufacturers bought country estates after having prospered in Manchester.⁵⁴ In My Lady Ludlow, the Birmingham baker returns to the country and buys the estate on which he was born.⁵⁵ Elizabeth Gaskell's two primary industrialists, Carson and John Thornton, are not wealthy enough to purchase country estates, but they do aspire to better themselves and their social position as much as possible.

For instance, Carson, who had risen from the ranks of the working class, spares no money on the education of his daughters.⁵⁶ Doubtless, their education was not unlike Rosamond Vincy's in Middlemarch, which included the proper method of getting in and out of a carriage, some music, and correct taste in costume.⁵⁷ Carson embraces the old mercantile idea that too much schooling unsettles a young man for business pursuits and so does not send his son to a university, but he does see to it that his son is better educated than himself.⁵⁸ Thornton tries to make up for his deficiencies in education by hiring Mr. Hale to tutor him in Latin and Greek.⁵⁹ Though Elizabeth Gaskell's manufacturers do not truckle to the upper classes, they certainly want to become more like them.

Elizabeth Gaskell approves of the manufacturers' emulation of the aristocracy in regard to education and

social responsibility, but she was also aware of its harmful effects. In Mary Barton, Mrs. Carson, lacking the education and the background to contend with the life of leisure of a manufacturer's wife, suffers from frequent headaches; Elizabeth Gaskell informs the reader that these are the natural result of the mentally and physically idle life she leads. Although Mrs. Carson is without sufficient education to make good use of her wealth and leisure, as a mill owner's wife she is above making beds, rubbing tables, shaking carpets, or even taking a walk without all the "paraphernalia of gentility."⁶⁰ Worse than this, the desire to better one's social standing often took the form of snobbery and pretentiousness that Margaret Hale notices. At the Thornton's dinner party, the women speak of housemaids, under-gardeners, valuable lace, and whatever else that might testify to their wealth and position.⁶¹

The Manchester industrialist was thoroughly independent and hard working.⁶² Like Carson and Thornton, he was actively involved in his commercial enterprise; he was not a remote and passive financier who left the running of the business to others.⁶³ There were a few large corporations and combinations of manufacturing interest, but through the sixties, the individual owner-manager was the reality as well as the ideal.⁶⁴ As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, from 1830 to 1860 individual initiative was the driving force of the English economy.⁶⁵ Unlike their fictional counterparts, not all manufacturers were self-made men,

but, like John Thornton, most believed that their achievements were not the result of external factors but of individual action.⁶⁶

John Thornton and Henry Carson, in common with many other Victorians, extolled the concept which Samuel Smiles was to popularize as "self-help," that is, improving one's character and social standing through virtuous exertion.⁶⁷ Like Smiles, Thornton believes that his own success is not contingent upon any good fortune or innate talent or merit; rather it is simply his power of self-discipline which has taught him "to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned-- indeed never to think twice about them" that has allowed him to rise in the world. After his father died and left the family destitute, Thornton not only managed to care for a family of three on fifteen shillings a week, but also to put aside three of those fifteen shillings every week.⁶⁸ This saving and self-denial was the basis of his success. As a consequence of his own experience, Thornton is certain that misery and suffering of the workers in Milton "is but the natural punishment of dishonestly enjoyed pleasure at some former period of their lives."⁶⁹ As can be seen in reviews of Mary Barton, Thornton was not alone in this view. The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review suggested that the poor, if they hoped to better their condition, ought to shun luxuries in good times so as to have adequate means in bad times.⁷⁰ W. R. Greg wrote that one "fatally false" idea pervaded Mary Barton: that the poor were to look to the

wealthy rather than to themselves for the amelioration of their misery. He felt that this notion cut "at the root of all social improvement."⁷¹ Like John Thornton, he felt that the only way out for the poor was through self-help, self-reliance and prudence.⁷²

Elizabeth Gaskell agreed with the idea of self-help in principle, but like Dickens, Carlyle, and Kingsley, she realized that it was impossible for some people to raise themselves.⁷³ Perhaps what most disturbed her about the creed of self-help was that it was too closely linked with materialism; one's strength of character was too often judged solely on his material prosperity. For instance, Thornton starts his mercantile career with the idea that the measure of his self-reliance and character will be how far he advances in the world; the more successful he is the more virtuous he must be.⁷⁴ The illusion in which Thornton is caught up is typical of the early Victorian era.⁷⁵ Ruskin wrote in 1851:

The removal of the mossy bars which once separated one class of society from another, has rendered it ten-fold more shameful in foolish people's eyes, i.e., in most people's eyes, to remain in the lower grades of it, than ever it was before ... a man may make money, and rise in the world, and associate himself, unreprouched, with people once far above him ... it becomes a veritable shame to remain in the state he was born in⁷⁶

In the original preface to Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell states flatly that she knows "nothing of political economy

or the theories of trade."⁷⁷ Despite her disclaimer, she seems to know enough to present an accurate account of the economic rationale of the Mancunian manufacturer. There is no mention of Smith's views on state intervention, of Malthus' on population, nor of Ricardo's on wages, yet the laissez-faire doctrine of Thornton, Carson, and most other manufacturers is well represented.

In North and South, whenever Thornton is confronted by the Hales about the factory system, he invariably explains away their grievances "on sound economical principles." Like the dismal scientists, he believes that trade must fluctuate, that there "must always be a waxing and waning of commercial prosperity." In a depression, a certain number of masters as well as men were bound to be ruined; it was the logical outcome of industrial activity and "neither employers or employed had any right to complain if it became their fate."⁷⁸ In Mary Barton, Mr. Carson talks with Job Legh about this inexorable law. When Legh tells Carson that John Barton is angry because the masters have failed to alleviate the suffering of the workers, Carson's response is that the masters' hands are tied:

Now how in the world can we help it?
We cannot regulate the demand for labour. No man or set of men can do it. It depends on events which God alone can control. When there is no market for our goods we suffer just as much as you.⁷⁹

A pamphlet written in the early eighteen thirties and distributed by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge

expressed a similar viewpoint. The author acknowledged that workingmen were subject to occasional distress, but that this was not the fault of the manufacturers. Nothing could prevent the fluctuation of markets, changes in habits and tastes, or other disturbances in the commercial world; the suffering of the master and his men was the "lot belonging to the uncertainty of all human affairs," which no government however wise or no charity however benevolent could remedy.⁸⁰ In fact, any outside interference in the business world or in labour-management relations was likely to exacerbate the distress. In North and South, Thornton tells Mr. Hale that any assistance given to strikers would do more harm than good; it would only prolong the struggle that the masters were sure to win.⁸¹

Elizabeth Gaskell realized that the liberal competitive system of industrial manufacture involved many unknowns and that mill owners were often limited by market exigencies in their ability to meet the needs and demands of the labour force. As she points out, foreign competition was one such variable which reduced the manufacturers' range of action. In Mary Barton, workingmen turn-out because the masters refuse to increase wages. The mill owners believe that in order to effectively compete with continental industry, which was not burdened by taxes on buildings or machinery, nor had regulated hours of work, they cannot afford to comply with the workingmen's demands and the manufacturers are even sacrificing their own capital to retain possession of the

market.⁸² In North and South, John Thornton and his fellow Milton manufacturers are hard pressed because of the introduction of American yarns into the market. They hold that the only way to meet this challenge is to produce more economically, which meant not only that wages would not be raised but also that they would actually have to be cut.⁸³ Thornton relates to the Hales that if the men prove recalcitrant, the mill owners might have to "move off to some other country."⁸⁴ In the thirties and forties, such an attitude was not uncommon. An industrialist told a Parliamentary committee in the late eighteen thirties that if some restrictions were not placed on trades' unions, manufacturers would be forced to leave England and to set up shop elsewhere.⁸⁵ Many workingmen might have concurred with John Barton when he said that foreign competition was simply a "bug-a-boo" conjured up by the mill owners, but the fact was, as Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, that by the 1830's English industry was beginning to feel the effect of newly established mills in France, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States.⁸⁶ The Manchester Guardian carried numerous articles on the progress of foreign industry. In 1837, it gave an account of a manufacturing enterprise in Lowell, Massachusetts. The Guardian expressed alarm that the town had grown rapidly and was producing, economically, great quantities of spun cotton. The writer concludes that the success story of this town ought to "shake the faith entertained by some of our manufacturers, that foreign rivalry is a groundless apprehension."⁸⁷

Elizabeth Gaskell understood the complexity of industrial manufacture and that there were forces beyond the control of the individual mill owner; she believed that self-help in principle was a positive good; and she was as convinced as Adam Smith that in the long run the interests of the employer and the employee were the same.⁸⁸ However, like Carlyle and Mill, she rejected the gloomy implications of laissez-faire and self-help doctrines. In 1848 in Principles of Political Economy, Mill asked how poverty, low wages, and miserable living conditions were to be corrected; could political economy, could laissez-faire economics do nothing other than demonstrate that nothing could be done?⁸⁹ His reply, like Elizabeth Gaskell's, was that of course something could be done. With her Unitarian belief in man's basic decency, Elizabeth Gaskell was convinced that the manufacturer could be made to see his responsibility to his fellow man, and she demonstrates this idea in both North and South and Mary Barton.⁹⁰

In Mary Barton, after the murder of his son, Mr. Carson begins to reevaluate his perception of political economy. Job Legh tells him that it is the responsibility of the healthy, the happy, and the rich to help the suffering, the unhappy and the poor. When Carson replies that facts are daily proving the soundness of laissez faire and self-help, Legh exclaims "be hanged to the facts!" Like Carlyle, Elizabeth Gaskell was contemptuous of statistics when they were used to condone inhumanity.⁹¹ Legh tells Carson:

You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, given two facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are forever changing and uncertain.⁹²

He continues, saying that some men are strong and others are not; it is God's plan that the strong should aid the weak. Carson is won over by such reasoning and wants to know how he can relate it to his conduct as a manufacturer. In North and South, John Thornton is even more vehement in his endorsement of laissez faire and self-help than Carson. Yet by the end of the novel, he has mitigated his hard line stance, is implementing some programs to assist his labourers, and intends further experimentation.

Carson's and Thornton's softening of their positions is not just a mere fancy of the novelist. Though their attempt to go beyond the "cash nexus" with their employees fits Elizabeth Gaskell's notion of what a manufacturer should be, such conversions took place in the late forties and fifties. Following the shortening of the workday and enforcement of the ten hours bill, industrialists began to take an interest in the social and moral welfare of their labourers, as the Parliamentary Blue Books indicate. Cooperative night schools, libraries, and other services actually became an important aspect of the relations between masters and men.⁹³

Elizabeth Gaskell's account of the manufacturing middle class is valuable on two counts. First she is one of the

few sources for what the lives of the manufacturers and their families were actually like, and her information is based on firsthand experience. She was often a guest in the homes of these people, and no doubt attended dinner parties similar to the Thorntons' in North and South; she and her daughters attended concerts and dances with manufacturers' families and even went to chapel with them.⁹⁴

Secondly, Elizabeth Gaskell's two industrialist characters, Thornton and Carson, are not Bounderbys; they are not parodies of avarice and hypocrisy. Rather, through them, Elizabeth Gaskell presents a thoughtful and scrupulously fair picture of the ideas, problems and attitudes of the manufacturer.

¹See J. H. and M. H. Clapham, "Life in the New Towns," Early Victorian England, ed. G. M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 242.

²Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1957), 104.

³Mary Barton, vi, 61 and 64; also Ibid., xvii, 196.

⁴North and South, Chpt. 22, 230.

⁵W. C. Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1968), 9; for an estimate of the cost and maintenance of a carriage see J. A. Banks, Prosperity and Parenthood (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1965), 86.

⁶See W. L. Burn, The Age of Equipoise (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964), 269; also see Mary Barton, vi, 61 and 64 and Ibid., xviii, 194 and 196.

⁷See W. Ames, "Inside Victorian Walls" Victorian Studies, 5 Dec 1961), 162.

⁸North and South, Chpt. 10, 119; Mary Barton, vi, 62.

⁹North and South, Chpt. 9, 116 and Ibid., Chpt. 10, 119. Henry's Bible Commentaries was commonly found in nonconformist households. A complete edition was first published in 1811 and an abridged edition appeared in 1831.

¹⁰See The Early Victorian Period, eds. R. Edwards and C. G. G. Ramsey (London: Connoisseur, 1958), 25; M. Lochhead, The Victorian Household (London: John Murray, 1964), 3; North and South, Chpt. 10, 119.

¹¹Clapham, 242.

¹²North and South, Chpt. 15, 158.

¹³Claphams, 242.

¹⁴G. Best, Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 223; also Lochhead, 6.

¹⁵North and South, Chpt. 9, 116; Mary Barton, xviii, 194-95.

¹⁶Mary Barton, xviii, 194.

¹⁷Best, 223; Lochhead, 6.

¹⁸North and South, Chpt. 9, 116.

- ¹⁹Ibid., Chpt. 12, 139; Best, 223; Lochhead, 6.
- ²⁰Best, 223.
- ²¹Mary Barton, vi, 62.
- ²²Clapham, 239.
- ²³Ibid.
- ²⁴North and South, Chpt. 12, 140.
- ²⁵Mary Barton, vi, 64 and Ibid., xviii, 194.
- ²⁶Clapham, 241.
- ²⁷L. Faucher, Manchester in 1844 (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1969), 21.
- ²⁸Clapham, 242.
- ²⁹North and South, Chpt. 20, 213.
- ³⁰Ibid., 215.
- ³¹Ibid., 213.
- ³²Clapham, 242.
- ³³A. Briggs "The Language of Class in Nineteenth-Century England," Essays in Labour History, eds. A. Briggs and J. Saville (London: Macmillan, 1960), 52.
- ³⁴E. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 98.
- ³⁵See Briggs, "The Language of Class," 52-54; also North and South, Chpt. 15, 160.
- ³⁶North and South, Chpt. 10, 122.
- ³⁷Quoted in Briggs "The Language of Class," 59.
- ³⁸North and South, Chpt. 10, 125.
- ³⁹See Taylor, 21. Also see an article in the Times, 30 June 1842, 6 Col. 2 concerning Chartist activities in Manchester. In the article Chartists are portrayed as a great mass of ruffians who use "language of a very exciting kind."
- ⁴⁰Anon., Statements of Facts Connected With the Turn-out in the Lancashire Building Trades, in Rebirth of the Trade Union Movement (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

⁴¹North and South, Chpt. 15, 162.

⁴²Here again Elizabeth Gaskell is correct in demonstrating that manufacturers combined only after workmen have walked off the job. According to testimony before a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1837, this was almost always the case. See P.P. 1837-1838, VIII, 8.

⁴³J. Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), 227.

⁴⁴S. G. Checkland, The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-1885 (London: Longmans, 1964), 300.

⁴⁵North and South, Chpt. 4, 72.

⁴⁶A. Briggs, Victorian Cities (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), 67-68.

⁴⁷North and South, Chpt. 15, 160.

⁴⁸Ibid., Chpt. 10, 122.

⁴⁹Ibid., Chpt. 20, 217-18.

⁵⁰See Checkland, 285; Banks, 83; North and South, Chpt. 20, 221.

⁵¹Tocqueville, 70-71.

⁵²H. Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 374.

⁵³Morley, 561.

⁵⁴See Mary Barton.

⁵⁵See My Lady Ludlow.

⁵⁶Mary Barton, vi, 52.

⁵⁷George Eliot, Middlemarch (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), xi, 98.

⁵⁸As Elizabeth Gaskell explains in North and South if a manufacturer were to send his son to a university it would probably be to a Scottish university where he could begin his course of study at age 14. North and South, Chpt. 16.

⁵⁹Ibid., Chpt. 10, 126.

⁶⁰Mary Barton, xviii, 194.

⁶¹North and South, Chpt. 20, 215 and 221.

⁶²See Chapter IV above, "The Manchester Ethos."

⁶³Checkland, 106-107.

⁶⁴Ibid.; also see Perkin, 221. It was not until after the Limited Liabilities Acts (1856 and 1862) that this pattern began to change significantly.

⁶⁵Checkland, 103.

⁶⁶As Briggs points out in Victorian Cities many manufacturers came by their position through the "family nexus."

⁶⁷For a brief but informative account of Smiles, his ideas, and his impact on Victorian England see A. Briggs, Victorian People (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 116-139.

⁶⁸North and South, Chpt. 10, 127.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰See Anon. Review of Mary Barton, Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review, 51 (April-July 1849), 32-33.

⁷¹W. R. Greg, The Mistaken Aims and Attainable Ideas of the Artizan (London: Trubner and Co., 1876), 137.

⁷²Ibid., 138.

⁷³See H. Taine, Notes on England (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), 229, who concurred with Elizabeth Gaskell on this point.

⁷⁴North and South, Chpt. 50, 511.

⁷⁵In John Halifax: Gentleman, Mrs. Craik portrays a self-made man who has risen from the ranks of a tanner's assistant to that of a well-to-do mill owner. According to the self-help doctrine, John Halifax, because he is honest, independent and dignified, should feel confident about himself and his position. However, Halifax is unable to be secure and certain of himself until he has acquired the accouterments of the landed classes--a country estate, an aristocratic son-in-law and a carriage as good as any in the country. Like John Thornton in North and South, Halifax measures his character and self-worth in material terms.

For a penetrating analysis of John Halifax: Gentleman see Robin Gilmour's "Dickens and the Idea of Self-Help," The Victorians and Social Protest, eds. J. Butt and I. F. Clarke (London: David and Charles, 1973), 71-101.

⁷⁶From Ruskin's "Pre-Raphaelitism" Quoted in W. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 187.

⁷⁷A. W. Ward, "Introductions," The Works of Mrs. Gaskell, 8 Vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1906), I, lxxiv.

⁷⁸North and South, Chpt. 19, 204.

⁷⁹Mary Barton, xxxviii, 378.

⁸⁰Anon. "Short Address to Workmen on Combinations to Raise Wages," Trade Unions in the Early 1830's (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 10-11.

⁸¹North and South, Chpt. 20, 211.

⁸²Mary Barton, xv, 163-164.

⁸³North and South, Chpt. 18, 195.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers, First Report from the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen, VIII (1837-38). Hereinafter all parliamentary papers will be cited in the following form: P.P. (year), (volume), (page).

⁸⁶Checkland, 185.

⁸⁷R. H. Greg, The Factory Question Considered in Relation to its Effects on the Health and Morals of Those Employed in Factories, in The Battle for the Ten Hours Day Continues (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 146.

⁸⁸Mary Barton, xv, 164.

⁸⁹J. S. Mill, Principles of Political Economy (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1884).

⁹⁰See the discussion of Unitarianism in Chapter I above.

⁹¹See A. Shelston's introduction in Thomas Carlyle: Selected Writings (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971), 21.

⁹²Mary Barton, xxxviii, 373.

⁹³P.P. 1849, XXII, 186-187; also see W. Neff, Victorian Working Women (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 78-79.

⁹⁴See The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and A. Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 131, 141, 144, 175.

VIII

THE SOCIAL ORDER IN THE COUNTRY

In her country novels, Elizabeth Gaskell presents the complete range of the social order of her day in a country village. There is the great lord and landowner, the squire, the clergy, both orthodox and dissenter, the middle class of land agents, doctors, genteel spinsters, tradespeople, governesses, a servant class and farm labourers. With her characteristic eye for detail, Elizabeth Gaskell captures the flavour of life at every level: what people did, how they felt about themselves, how they were regarded by the rest of society, as well as showing their ideas and prejudices. Her novels provide a record of country life perhaps only surpassed by Trollope.

The leaders of society were, of course, the aristocracy and their powers cannot be over emphasized. Molly Gibson in Wives and Daughters, regards Lord Cumnor as "a cross between an archangel and a king."¹ Jefferies says of the Lord of Fleeceborough that he is only a peer at Westminster, but in his own village he is a prince.² Although the Reform Bill of 1832 eroded the political power of the aristocracy to some extent, they still retained their social rank, wealth, and local prestige. In fact, for the better part of the nineteenth century the great landowners

were "really the rulers of principalities."³ After all, the new Domesday Survey of 1872, the only official record of the distribution of landownership in the nineteenth century, shows that four-fifths of the land in the United Kingdom was in the hands of less than 7,000 people. Of the 363 owners of estates of more than 10,000 acres, 244 were titled, and more than half were peers.⁴

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, the great landowners expected to be accorded the respect that went along with princely estates; that is, they alone would determine what was to be done in the villages. The Cumnors "would have stood still in amazement, and with a horrified memory of the French sansculottes who were the bugbears of their youth," had anyone in the village dared to question their authority.⁵ As George Eliot relates in Middlemarch, the country gentry and aristocracy indeed lived in "a rarefied air."⁶ Lady Ludlow uses the analogy that the aristocracy is to the rest of humanity as the race horse is to the cart horse.⁷ Lady Harriet in Wives and Daughters, recounts how one of her aunts called anyone who worked for a living, be it as a professional or as a labourer, "persons" of whom she took possession by referring to them as "my woman," or "my people."⁸ Moreover, the aristocracy did not wish the lower orders to immitate them. Lady Harriet is contemptuous of people who put on a "pretence of fine manners." She cannot bear Mr. Preston, the Cumnors land agent, who gives himself "airs of gallantry toward one to whom his simple respect is all his duty."⁹

In return for this respect, village society demanded that the aristocracy be graciously patronizing and to behave as nobles were supposed to behave. In Wives and Daughters, the Countess, who is a model of "unapproachable dignity" deigns to hold an annual festivity for all the Hollingford ladies who have been visitors at her school. This event is one of the high points of the year for Hollingford and the privilege of visiting Cumnor Towers is the cause of general excitement. The Cumnors also condescend, as did most large landed proprietors, to sponsor a charity ball on the eve of the county elections, in an effort to secure political support.¹⁰ This practice is also described in Pendennis, where Lady Rockminster promotes Pynsent for Parliament. As in Wives and Daughters, all sorts of persons attend including shopkeepers, tradesmen, and farmers. Furthermore, the villagers expected their aristocrats to look and behave as objects worthy of their worship. At the Hollingford Ball, the Duchess of Mentieth and her famous diamonds are anxiously awaited by the townspeople; when the Duchess appears without a single diamond, a fat, middle-aged woman, in a very simple muslin dress, "which Farmer Hodson's daughter might have worn," there is general dissapointment and a feeling that the nobility has not performed its duty to its vassals.¹² Lady Harriet rightly recognizes that one of the aristocracy's functions is to provide "a show and a spectacle" for the common people, and that the Duchess' appearance is "like having a pantomime with Harlequin and

Columbine in plain clothes."¹³ The Cranford ladies are likewise disappointed when Lady Glenmire turns out to be very much like themselves. They are shocked to observe that £10 would have purchased every stitch Lady Glenmire wore.¹⁴ It was not merely the Cranford spinsters who delighted in all the lavish details of life in high society or who were upset if their social superiors did not look the part, it was common to the entire Victorian middle class. Thackeray's parody of the court circular is an example of this fact, describing as it does the details of aristocratic dress so dear to middle-class hearts. Lady Snobky is dressed in a "costume de cour, composed of a train of the most superb Pekin bandanna, elegantly trimmed with spangles, tin foil, and red tape."¹⁵

Generally speaking, there were two categories of aristocrats throughout most of the nineteenth century, the powerful Whigs and the old Tory families. The Whigs, like the Cumnors in Wives and Daughters, were for the most part large and wealthy landowners. Despite the fact that they exercised control of the national government throughout the first half of Victoria's reign, whiggery was "not a political creed, but a social cast ... founded on relationship."¹⁶ As Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, Whigs made up fashionable society. The Cumnors spend only a few months of every year at their country estate; the remainder of the time is spent in London or in making visits and traveling on the continent while the management of the estate is left to the agent. The

Whigs came to power at the end of the seventeenth century, the descendants of those who had opposed James II and brought about the Revolution of 1688, and in many cases, their titles and estates came into existence at that time.¹⁷ Lady Harriet embarrasses her mother by telling how the Hamleys, ancient Tory squires, have been on their land since the Conquest, while the Cumnors "only came to the country a century ago, and there is talk that the first Cumnor began his fortune through selling tobacco in King James' reign."¹⁸ Politically, the Whigs embraced liberal and progressive causes, such as the Reform Bill of 1832, but as Disraeli rightly felt they often had little real sympathy for these causes and used them as an expedient means of gaining and maintaining political power.¹⁹ Though Elizabeth Gaskell does not describe the political platform of the Whigs, she does show in the character of Lord Hollingford that Whigs often allied themselves with the advancement of science, a liberal position in the early nineteenth century.

The Tories were, in broad terms, the smaller landowners, the lesser nobles, and the squirearchy. Their most outstanding characteristic was their innate conservatism. Lady Ludlow, with her horror of democracy, universal education, evangelicalism, and change of any kind, is the archetype Tory aristocrat. Tory landowners, not unlike Lady Ludlow, usually remained on their land and devoted their time and energy to managing their estates. In Framley Parsonage, Lady Lufton, a dowager much like Lady Ludlow,

forces herself to go to London for two months every year out of duty since she dislikes it.²⁰ Lady Ludlow prefers to run her estate rather than to travel; she personally hears the requests and grievances of her tenants. Like Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell respected and believed in the paternalistic and benevolent despotism of the Tory aristocracy; she shows in *Lady Ludlow* how the apparently genuine concern of the Tories for their tenants allows them to overcome their old prejudices and set about bettering conditions.

The gentry, the nontitled landowners, are represented in Elizabeth Gaskell's works by Squire Hamley, the embodiment of the traditional old English squire, romanticized by the Victorians into a bowdlerized edition of Squire Western, unrefined, hot-tempered, politically reactionary and conservative, unintellectual, but possessing a heart of gold.²¹ As agriculture became more and more a technical business, the squirearchy, like the Hamleys, did not prosper but rather decayed, first because they did not have the capital necessary for the new kind of farming and secondly because their conservatism prevented them from doing things any differently than their fathers had done. Elizabeth Gaskell's description of the Hamleys is recognized as one of the finest portraits of the squirearchy of the early nineteenth century:

... the Hamleys were a very old family, if not aborigines. They had not increased their estate for centuries; they had held their own, if even with an effort, and had not sold a rod of it for the last hundred years of so. But they were not an adventurous race. They never traded, or speculated

or tried agricultural improvements of any kind. They had no capital in any bank, nor what perhaps would have been more in character, hoards of gold in any stocking. Their mode of life was simple; indeed Squire Hamley, by continuing the primitive manners and customs of his forefathers, the squires of the eighteenth century, did live more as a yeoman, when such a class existed, than as a squire of this generation. There was a dignity in this quiet conservatism that gained him an immense amount of respect both from high and low; and he might have visited at every house in the country had he so chosen. But he was very indifferent to the charms of society He was imperfectly educated, and ignorant of many points, but he was aware of his deficiency, and regretted it in theory. He was awkward and ungainly in society, and so kept out of it as much as possible, and he was obstinate, violent-tempered, and dictatorial in his own immediate circle. On the other side, he was generous, and true as steel, the very soul of honour in fact. He had so much natural shrewdness, that his conservatism was always worth listening to, although he was apt to start by assuming entirely false premises, which he considered as incontrovertible as if they had been mathematically proved²²

Squire Hamley is much like Squire Brown in Tom Brown's School Days, who as a magistrate, "dealt out justice and mercy in a rough way, and begat sons and daughters, and hunted the fox, and grumbled at the badness of the roads and the times."²³ Like Squire Hamley, he is kind to his tenants and a Tory to the core, and seldom travels from home.²⁴ Of course, all the Browns' "opinions are downright beliefs."²⁵ Like Squire Brown, Squire Hamley sends his sons to Rugby; his younger son Roger is remarkably similar to Tom Brown in being a manly, muscular Christian and is definitely the nineteenth century son of an eighteenth century father.

Squire Hamley has the typical prejudices of his kind. Not unlike Lady Ludlow, he hates the French, regarding them as "tumultuous, brutal ruffians who murdered their king," and he hates them even more because they are Catholics; Elizabeth Gaskell writes that to mention Catholic emancipation to him was tantamount to "shaking a red flag before a bull."²⁶ He has strong feelings against the Whigs, and in common with Lady Lufton he views them as immoral villains.²⁷ He will not accept the invitations of the Cumnors, the "mere muck of yesterday," for to do so would be to desert the principles of his family.²⁸ When Roger Hamley is asked to Cumnor Towers to meet a French scientist, Squire Hamley calls the invitation "a palpable Whig trick" designed to subvert the Hamleys and is incensed at the idea of his son "meeting these foreigners at a Whig house."²⁹ However, in the end, Squire Hamley is made to temper his bias and give way to new ways of thinking. Like Lady Ludlow who backs away from her firm stance against education for labourers and servants, Squire Hamley not only realizes that change is ineluctable but that it can also be for the better.

As Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates, the clergy, like the Tory aristocracy and squirearchy, were being transformed in the first half of the nineteenth century. In her country novels, she portrays two kinds of clergymen: the old-style worldly eighteenth century parson, and the dedicated, conscientious evangelical minister, who brought new ideas and concepts of religion to the country.

The old-style clergyman was "a kindly respectable person, but certainly not alive to the greatness of his calling."³⁰ Jane Austen portrays this kind of clergyman well; he is "an agreeable young man with no obvious vocation for the priesthood and no obvious parish duties."³¹ The intellectual attainment of these parsons was minimal; they either concerned themselves with "crabbed theology" or with Tory politics.³² Mr. Ashton, the vicar of Hollingford in Wives and Daughters, is a good man and kind in his own way but is "without an original thought in him"; he has an "indolent mind" and a "habitual courtesy" which permit him to agree with almost any opinion "not palpably heterodox."³³ He lives the life of a refined bachelor, is rather remiss in his parish duties but is always ready with money for those in need. He tells Mr. Gibson, the village doctor, that he has a hard time making conversation with "poor folk," and, rather than visit the cottages, he would rather just give some money to Gibson for the needy; at one point, he entreats Gibson to let him "purchase the privilege of silence" by a ten pound note.³⁴ Mr. Mountford, the rector of Hanbury before Mr. Gray in My Lady Ludlow, is the epitome of the eighteenth century clergyman. He was chosen by the late Lord Ludlow because, of all things, his horsemanship.³⁵ But he was not a bad clergyman "as clergymen went in those days."³⁶ He does not drink to excess, but he cannot resist good food and is extremely stout. He is kind to the poor after his fashion; he cannot bear to see suffering, and is never easy until it is relieved. So "afraid of being made

uncomfortable," is he, that he avoids seeing anyone who is ill or unhappy.³⁷ He abhors dissenters, particularly Methodists, "because John Wesley objected to his hunting." Sporting the Tory contempt for the French, he is "true blue ... to the backbone" and could hardly drink a dish of tea without giving out the toast of "'Church and King, and down with the Rump.'"³⁸ George Eliot in Adam Bede depicts yet another old-style clergyman. Mr. Irvine, like Mr. Mountford and Mr. Ashton, is a kind-hearted man, but he is not very diligent, less than generous in his alms giving, and lax in his theology.³⁹ When de Tocqueville questioned Lord Radnor on the state of religion in England, Lord Radnor said that clergymen fulfilled their duties "lazily and without zeal."⁴⁰

This easy-going secularism of the English church in the early part of the nineteenth century is not surprising when the character and training of its clergyman are taken into account. Prospective clergy at Oxford and Cambridge received virtually no theological or intellectual preparation for their vocations. Any theological examination of candidates was usually a mere formality.⁴¹ Young men often entered the church for reasons other than religious motivation: the church, like the army, was a convenient way of disposing of a younger son of a good family.⁴² Squire Hamley intends that his second son become a clergyman; Miss Matty's father hopes that his son Peter will become a clergyman like himself, though Peter is totally unsuited for that occupation.

Part of the responsibility for the worldliness of the church lay in the nature of the church itself. There were many secular ties; many clergymen had relationships in the gentry and aristocracy, and many were actually landowners themselves; moreover bishops and archbishops were chosen as much for political as for religious reasons.⁴³ In half of the parishes in 1820, the vicar was chosen by the landlord, and out of 11,700 benefices in England, only 1,500 were under the patronage of the bishops or the cathedral chapters. Thus, the livings in most parishes were distributed on the basis of influence, nepotism, and money. It was not unusual for benefices to be sold at public auction to the highest bidder.⁴⁴ Also many clergymen occupied several livings at once, were negligent in their duties, or were habitually absent from their living, employing curates as did Mr. Causabon in Middlemarch for a pittance. De Tocqueville recorded that Lord Radnor knew of a clergyman who lived in a neighbouring town and left the care of the parish to a "poor devil encumbered with a young wife and six children and to whom he gives perhaps only a tenth of his stipend."⁴⁵

Existing alongside the worldly, indolent Mr. Mountfords and Mr. Ashtons were a growing body of zealous, earnest dissenters. Unlike most church of England ministers, these men often lived lives not far removed from those of their followers. In the Reverend Ebenezer Holman in Cousin Phillis, Elizabeth Gaskell describes a self-educated,

intelligent, independent minister who has a small farm. Five days a week he rises at three in the morning to work in the fields and devotes Saturdays and Sundays to religious duties.⁴⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell is careful to point out Holman's closeness to the domestic interests of his congregation; he sings psalms in the field with his men and at the end of a day's work, and prays for a sick cow.⁴⁷ Flora Thompson describes the similar appeal of the Larkrise Methodists. They hold their meetings not in a church or chapel but in a labourer's cottage; the preachers were ordinary labourers or small cottagers, not the sons of influential persons. Like their counterparts in Cousin Phillis, the brethren prayed for the health of their pigs or for rain for their gardens.⁴⁸

This kind of religion was gradually having an effect on the Church of England. Though John Wesley was forced out of the Church, he left a rearguard behind him which attempted to carry out his concepts of reform which meant not the creation of a new sect but the regeneration and the revitalization of the Church itself.⁴⁹ This remnant became the Low Church party, the Evangelical wing of the Church of England. In the words of a pamphlet of 1801, the Evangelicals sought to expel from the parsonage Parson Dolittle and Parson Merryman, and replace them with Parson Lovegood. As a result of the actions of the Evangelicals, legislation was passed between 1795 and 1817 which was directed at rectifying clerical abuses; it discouraged nonresidence,

enforced the employment of properly paid curates, and limited the size of clergymen's farms.⁵⁰ The Evangelicals also aroused an interest in overseas missions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a movement inspired by the messianic zeal of the Methodists and other dissenters.⁵¹ The nonconformist interest in popular education spurred the Anglicans on to found the National School Society in 1811, whose object was education according to the principles of the Church as an alternative to the British and Foreign Society, an educational society backed largely by dissenters.⁵² The school in Cranford is a National school.

Mr. Gray in My Lady Ludlow is Elizabeth Gaskell's representative of the Evangelical clergymen of the early nineteenth century. He embodies most of the attitudes of the Low Church and serves as a catalyst of change in Hanbury. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Mountford, Mr. Gray is "very zealous in all his parish work," calls Sunday the Sabbath, and desires to establish a school in Hanbury. True to the Evangelical creed, he perceives ignorance as a source of brutality and sin.⁵³ He also holds prayer-meetings in the cottages, which Lady Ludlow deplores as encouraging the democratization of society which, of course, is anathema to her Tory ideology. She reasons that if a man prays in his own house instead of in church, he will come to think one place as good as another, and soon will think one person as good as another, or more to the point, that the labourer

will be put on the same level as the aristocrat.⁵⁴

Mr. Gray teaches the small children of Hanbury about the salvation of their souls as well as promoting Bible reading among the elderly.⁵⁵ His Evangelical vigour even wins over Miss Galindo's ill-tempered hump-backed servant, Sally, who begins to neglect her duties for prayer, much to her employer's consternation. Like the typical Evangelical, Mr. Gray carries on an anti-slavery campaign in Hanbury; he "leaves little pictures of Negroes about, with the question printed below 'Am I not a man and a brother?'"⁵⁶

As in the clergy, changes were taking place in the middle class, but they were less apparent. As Elizabeth Gaskell shows middle-class occupations were becoming increasingly professionalized. While doctors and land agents were gaining in status, the yeoman farmer was being squeezed out. Also the middle class was losing its rural character as the railroads brought London refinement to the country. Elizabeth Gaskell's country middle class is represented by doctors, estate agents, small farmers, idle women, such as the Cranford ladies, and governesses who, though technically of the servant class, generally came from the middle class.

In the first half of the nineteenth century there was a revolution in estate management, in large part a consequence of scientific farming. As William Howitt observed in 1838, farming had become a science which required "a first-rate education to prosecute it to full capability."⁵⁷ In the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth,

"estate stewards" as they were then called, were chosen from the ranks of retired military officers, respectable solicitors, or small farmers.⁵⁸ Captain James in My Lady Ludlow is a retired naval officer, and Mr. Horner, his predecessor, had been an attorney's clerk. These men, as Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, had little practical knowledge of estate management, but were selected rather for their trustworthiness and good character.⁵⁹ In the nineteenth century, land management became "a skilled profession" composed of specially trained men who possessed a good deal of technical expertise.⁶⁰ A land agent was required to be a good farmer and a man of business, a person equally suited to the supervision of agricultural and commercial affairs.⁶¹ The great estate offices became the training grounds for land agents.⁶² Concomitant with the change in the requisite qualifications of the land agent came a shift in the terminology of the profession; the term "steward" with its servant connotation gave way to the more professional sounding "agent." It is interesting to note in Wives and Daughters that Mr. Sheepshanks is generally referred to as a steward while his successor, Mr. Preston, is referred to only as an agent. Salaries rose also; the "steward" of £150 to £300 per annum became the "agent" of £750 to £1,000 a year.⁶³

By virtue of their salaries and the respect accorded them as managers of large estates, agents became more and more eminent in country society.⁶⁴ In 1881, an observer could write that "estate management had become a profession"

and that the younger sons of noble families were not above seeking employment in that field.⁶⁵ In fact, the agent often assumed a position more important than the lesser squire.⁶⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates this point by having Mr. Preston, the new breed of agent, take a superior attitude in his confrontations with Squire Hamley. Mr. Preston is also socially ambitious; his polish, his excellence at games and private theatricals, and his good looks have gained him entrance into society. In contrast, his predecessor Mr. Sheepshanks, "a crabbed crusty old bachelor" kept very much to himself and his job.⁶⁷

Doctors also became more professionalized and gained in social status. In Middlemarch, Lady Chettam remarks that she prefers the old-style tradesman-like physicians "coarse and butcherlike" and "on a footing with the servants" to the gentlemanly Lydgate, the new kind of doctor.⁶⁸ The situation is similar in Wives and Daughters. Mr. Gibson is definitely refined and genteel; it is rumored in Hollingford that he is the illegitimate son of a Scottish duke.⁶⁹ Mr. Gibson is even invited to Cumnor Towers to dine with an eminent, titled physician.⁷⁰ Mr. Hoggins, the doctor in Cranford is the old kind of country doctor, with his patched boots, "want of refinement and manner," and a name that is unforgiveably coarse in the eyes of the Cranford ladies (though as one of them remarks, "if he changed it to Piggins it would not be much better").⁷¹

The elite of the medical profession was the Royal College of Physicians, whose associates had to be graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, though licentiates, a subordinate rank, did not.⁴² This body, along with the Royal College of Surgeons were the only organizations that were concerned with anything like a systematic education for doctors at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As the membership of these bodies were closed, the vast majority of practitioners were educated by apprenticeship or "even sketchier methods."⁷³ However, men interested in a better sort of medical education often attended Scottish universities, which had a high reputation in the field.⁷⁴ Though Elizabeth Gaskell does not explicitly state the fact, it can be safely assumed that Mr. Gibson, with his high professional qualifications and Scottish accent, attended a Scottish university.⁷⁵ Concern for the establishment of general qualifications for doctors and for some kind of uniform education increased in the early nineteenth century. In 1815 was passed the Apothecaries Act which provided for mandatory examination and licensing of apothecaries by the Apothecaries Society.⁷⁶ These better trained and more qualified apothecaries, who were often also licentiates of the Royal College of Surgeons, became known as "general practitioners."⁷⁷ After this Act became law, numerous private medical schools sprang up all over England as did voluntary medical associations; however, there was still no single licensing authority nor no general standard. In

fact, as late as 1858, there were twenty-one such authorities.⁷⁸ Finally, in 1858, the passage of the Medical Act completed the professionalization of medical doctors. The Act abolished apprenticeship, established some uniform standards of education and the Medical Register, and placed some restrictions on unregistered physicians.⁷⁹

As Elizabeth Gaskell shows, the early nineteenth century saw the decline of the imperfectly educated tradesman-like doctors such as Mr. Hoggins and the various practitioners of Middlemarch; it also saw the rise of the scientifically inclined, well-trained, doctor like Mr. Gibson and Lydgate in Middlemarch, doctors who were also "gentlemen" and more socially acceptable in higher circles than their predecessors. In comparison with land agents, as doctors became more professionalized their social prestige increased.

However, another section of the middle class, the small farmer was on the decline; in fact, his kind was becoming extinct. Writing in 1864, Elizabeth Gaskell describes Squire Hamley as living more a yeoman "when such a class existed."⁸⁰ The yeoman or the small farmer was a casualty of agricultural capitalism. With the increasing demands for greater food supplies and the advent of new farming techniques, farming was most profitable when carried out under a system of large land holdings. The small farmer who did not have the necessary capital or was not willing to adopt new methods, could not absorb the rapid fluctuation

of prices in the open market, and so was gradually bought out by the large landowners.⁸¹ The process of enclosure, which ended the open field system, also worked in favour of the larger farmers as the owners of smaller allotments could not compete with the big producers.⁸² In addition to the enclosures and the growth of agricultural capitalism, the Napoleonic wars with their attendant heavy taxation and post-war collapse of prices, dealt a serious blow to the small farmer.⁸³

Mr. Holbrook in Cranford and Reverend Holman in Cousin Phillis are representative of the yeoman class of farmer. Mr. Holbrook is something of an anachronism even in the backwater of Cranford; his manners, habits, and house are all recognized as old-fashioned. Holman in Cousin Phillis farms fifty acres, but also has an income from his congregation. Elizabeth Gaskell's description of the homes of these farmers, with the oak dressers, flagged floors, the pewter and brass, the great fireplace and the spotless interiors recalls the descriptions of George Eliot in Adam Bede and Jefferies in Toilers of the Field.⁸⁴

Much has been written describing the life of middle-class women, for there are countless examples in literature. In the country, as ideas about refinement sifted down to the village from high society in London, women became less occupied with household tasks and more and more aped the gentry and the aristocracy. The railways brought the world of fashion much closer; Elizabeth Gaskell writes in Wives

and Daughters of the great excitement caused by the charity ball in Hollingford, an event which took place "before railroads were, and before their consequences, the excursion trains, which take everyone up to London now-a-days, there to see their fill of gay grounds and fine dresses."⁸⁵

Young girls were taught music, French, fancy needlework, and other "refined" studies. They were often educated by governesses like Miss Wirt in the Book of Snobs or like Mrs. Gibson, whom Lady Harriet describes as a good governess for anyone not too particular about education.⁸⁶ There were also ladies' seminaries, such as the one in Cranford, to which all the wealthier trades people sent their daughters to be educated in those "solid branches of an English education--fancy work and the use of Globes."⁸⁷ The parliamentary investigations of education for women determined that parents were often convinced that what was "showy and superficially attractive" was what was really essential in an education.⁸⁸ As a result, girls generally emerged from schools or from their sessions with their governesses in a state of "unfathomable ignorance."⁸⁹ In reaction to this trend, the sensible Mr. Gibson tells Molly's governess: "Don't teach her too much; she must sew, and read and write and do her sums, but I want to keep her a child."⁹⁰ Despite the move toward the superficial, rural middle-class women were still not above doing plain sewing, as were their urban counterparts.⁹¹ Mary Smith in Cranford sews her father's shirts and Cynthia Kirkpatrick in Wives

and Daughters makes her own dresses.

However, the mania of the middle-class woman was to emulate her betters. Richard Jefferies laments the passing of the unpretentious farmer's wife and daughter who used to work in the pantry or the dairy. In the eighties, he sees only the "fine lady farmer" who wears silk and satin and plays Beethoven.⁹² Likewise Mrs. Fitz-Adams in Cranford remembers how, when she was a girl, her father though well-to-do, made her go to market with butter and eggs.⁹³ Women received, on the whole, little knowledge in household management, and in fact, learned very little of anything except how to catch a husband. Marriage was about the only accepted career for middle-class women although many women remained unmarried or were left widows like the ladies of Cranford and Miss Galindo in My Lady Ludlow.

These women were part of a body of surplus women. The census figures for 1851 show that there were many more unmarried women than men, that there were ninety-six males of all ages to every one hundred females, and that at age thirty-five almost eighteen percent of all women were without spouse.⁹⁴ There were several reasons for such a large number of unmarried women in a society where marriage was strongly believed to be the ideal state for women, and where there was a dearth of alternatives for women who did not marry. Forty thousand British soldiers died in the Napoleonic wars and thousands of unmarried men left England every year for the colonies. Also, as Elizabeth Gaskell

indicates, significant pressure was placed on people to marry into some wealth or position or not at all; Miss Matty and Miss Galindo lost their chance to marry because their families disapproved of their suitors' prospects. Moreover the financial confusion following the Napoleonic wars caused many men to think twice about matrimony.⁹⁵

People waited for the "proper" time to marry. As a recent writer has put it, as the century wore on, "this became the theme of the middle classes, until the words 'prudence' and 'postponement' became the two most hackneyed in their vocabulary."⁹⁶ Thackeray deplores this attitude which permits young men to swell into "bloated old bachelorhood" and "tender young girls" to "wither into shrunken decay, and perish solitary."⁹⁷

For middle-class women who were not married, about the only respectable employment was governesses, and Elizabeth Gaskell knew well the trials of that occupation. In the Life of Charlotte Brontë she shows that it was for the most part unrewarding and difficult work; she makes use of one of Charlotte Brontë's letters which explains that "a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living, rational being, except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfill."⁹⁸ Mrs. Gibson who has spent a good deal of her adult life as a governess for the Cumnors regards young girls as the "plagues of her life."⁹⁹ Not only were governesses frequently mistreated by their employers but by household servants as well. Molly Gibson's

governess (interestingly enough named Miss Eyre) suffers all kinds of unwarranted attacks from Molly's old nurse, who is jealous of her position.

When Miss Matty goes into trade as a tea agent and Miss Galindo becomes Lady Ludlow's steward's clerk, though these actions ran contrary to the Victorian ideal, Elizabeth Gaskell demonstrates that such work for women was not entirely bad. Although Elizabeth Gaskell agreed with the majority of her contemporaries that the best role for a woman was as a wife and mother, she firmly believed that if a woman could not pursue that end, she could and should be happy and successful in other work.¹⁰⁰ Her feelings about work for unmarried women were similar to those of Charlotte Brontë. When Caroline Helstone in Shirley is asked whether she wishes that she had a trade or a profession, she answers:

I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into this world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts.¹⁰¹

When asked if she does not think labour or a profession would make women masculine, coarse, or unwomanly, she responds that there is no need for an unmarried woman and a "never-to-be married" woman to be attractive or elegant. They have only to be "decent, decorous, and neat, it is enough."¹⁰² Certainly, as Elizabeth Gaskell shows in her novels, it was better to be doing something than to remain idle. For instance, Miss Matty enjoys selling tea for it brings her into contact with all the people of the area.¹⁰³

It was almost unknown for a woman to be a clerk in an office in the first half of the nineteenth century, but Elizabeth Gaskell anticipated the distant future where millions of women found their livelihood in their secretarial skills. Miss Galindo acts as Mr. Horner's clerk. The test of her abilities comes when a lawyer is called to inspect the books after Mr. Horner's death, and Miss Galindo sets out to impress him with her business acumen. In the interaction between Miss Galindo and Mr. Smithson, the lawyer, Elizabeth Gaskell advances the idea that a woman could perform men's work as well as any man, and, that indeed Miss Galindo is one step ahead of Mr. Smithson. As Miss Galindo relates, Smithson feels that he must inspect the office as

a form to be gone through to please my Lady, and, for her sake, he would hear my statements and see my books. It was keeping a woman out of harm's way, at any rate, to let her fancy herself useful. I read the man. And, I am thankful to say, he cannot read me. At least only one side of me. When I see an end to be gained, I can behave myself accordingly. Here was a man who thought that a woman in a black silk gown was a respectable, orderly kind of person; and I was a woman in a black silk gown. He believed that a woman could not write straight lines and required a man to tell her that two and two made four. I was not above ruling my books, and had Cocker a little more at my fingers' end than had he. But my greatest triumph was holding my tongue. He would have thought nothing of my book, or my success, or my black silk gown, if I had spoken unasked. So I have buried more sense in my bosom these ten days than ever I have uttered in the whole course of my life before. I have been so curt,

so abrupt, so abominably dull, that
I'll answer for it he thinks me worthy
to be a man.¹⁰⁴

The only other group of working women that Elizabeth Gaskell deals with in her country novels are servants. She depicts only one kind of servant, and this type is repeated in several books. This is the maid-of-all-work, the household's sole servant, who is a crusty, plain-spoken, loyal and goodhearted country woman who remains for many years a faithful servant. This is the Holmans' Betty in Cousin Phillis, the Hales' Dixon in North and South, and Miss Matty's Martha in Cranford, who, though she is young, fits the mold. It is interesting that Tabby, the real-life servant of the Brontes, as described in the Life of Charlotte Brontë, also belongs to this type. The women of the household all work alongside this servant, and she is considered almost one of the family.¹⁰⁵ It was not unusual for the daughters of agricultural labourers to go into domestic service at an early age. In Larkrise, the girls when they reached age thirteen were put into service, usually in the houses of middle-class people, tradesmen, schoolmasters, and farm bailiffs. If girls were so inclined they moved up into "gentlemen's service" after a year or so, but all Elizabeth Gaskell's fictional servants became attached to their position and stayed on. A servant's life was often not a bad position for a girl; she generally had better food and was better clothed than when she was at home.¹⁰⁶ However, for a maid-of-all-work the duties could be staggering. A book on

household management of 1861 reports that the maid-of-all-work is "the only one of her class deserving of commiseration for her long hours and numerous responsibilities."¹⁰⁷

At the bottom of the social ladder in the country was the agricultural labourer, and it is perhaps more difficult to make valid generalizations about his caste than it is about other groups in village society. As can be seen from a perusal of Elizabeth Gaskell's country novels, the actual living conditions of the farm labourer differed considerably throughout England and even within a single county, depending upon the benevolence of the landlord, the availability of fuel, the amount of rent, or whether the labourer had his own garden or if he were able to keep a cow or pig.¹⁰⁸ However, by twentieth century standards the living conditions of the rural poor were nowhere good. Even the agricultural workers in North and South and Wives and Daughters, who are well-treated by their masters, live in small cottages and enjoy no luxuries. The great majority of cottages were two-room affairs, the floors were dirt or made of stones, often insanitary, and the labourer usually subsisted on a meagre diet. As Disraeli explains in Sybil, much of the beautiful and serene English countryside was an illusion, "behind that laughing landscape, penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population."¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Gaskell was not blind to this situation; she was aware of the wretched dwellings of many rural workers and of the brutalized and pauperized state of many of these farm workers.

In My Lady Ludlow she describes the poorest of these cottages, "rude mud houses" surrounded by "yellow pools of stagnant water" in which children play; the cottages, consisting of wattle and clay, are thatched with sod.¹¹⁰

Unlike their counterparts in the new urban centres, the agricultural labourer was hardly class-conscious. As Elizabeth Gaskell indicates, this was not because there was insufficient reason for him to be so. In North and South Margaret Hale tells Nicholas Higgins of the degraded existence of the farm workers who struggle to keep body and soul together on ten shillings a week. She tells Higgins that country labourers soak in

...stagnant waters. They labour on from day to day, in great solitude of steaming fields--never speaking or lifting up their poor bent, downcast heads. The hard spade-work robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination They go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest.¹¹¹

Kingsley also noticed the debased condition of the agricultural labourer. In Yeast, Lancelot Smith encounters workers at a village fair who are reduced almost to animals by severe and incessant labour, without any sort of hope for improvement, made "slaves and humbugs" by charity.¹¹²

Despite this situation, agricultural workers prior to 1872 did nothing as a group to protect themselves from exploitation by the landed interest or to ameliorate their position.¹¹³ Appropriately in Elizabeth Gaskell's several country novels which are set before 1850, there is no mention of the rural labourer attempting to organize.¹¹⁴

There were many reasons why the agricultural labourer was so long in unionizing: the Hammonds have suggested that the "assuaging influences of brook and glade and valley" softened the brutal realities of the labourer's life;¹¹⁵ Joseph Arch, the leader and the mainstay of the agricultural union movement, felt that the rural worker failed to organize sooner because he did not fully realize his predicament. But perhaps on this point, Elizabeth Gaskell has offered the most cogent argument. She shows agricultural labourers living in a community which ostensibly cared about them, one which would not stand by and watch them starve, one that would do its best to see to it that they received assistance during hard times. Thus, when Squire Hamley is forced to let three of his labourers go, he permits them to gather all the firewood they require from his land and has three cows fattened and butchered to help the labourers through the winter.¹¹⁶ As Elizabeth Gaskell shows, under a good landlord such as the Cumnors, Lady Ludlow, or Squire Hamley, labourers did not have the pressing physical needs or unsteady employment which prompted the Manchester workingman to organize. Of course, the paternalistic system also served to keep the labourer in his place. Though certainly it was not always operative, the aristocratic ideal made the case that if everyone was doing his best, was acting out of human kindness to make life as easy as possible for all of society, there was no need for any one class to organize.

The most remarkable aspect of Elizabeth Gaskell's portrayal of country society is the way she combines an attention to the smallest details with an ability to perceive the broad view and the trends that were reshaping life in rural England. She faithfully records specifics of manners, dress, and speech, and at the same time traces the rise of the professional middle class, incipient changes in the status of single women, the decline of aristocratic barriers, and the effect of Evangelicalism on the clergy. Elizabeth Gaskell was able not only to recognize the evidence of transition, but to put it into historical perspective as well.

¹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 39.

²R. Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1890), 166.

Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) was an essayist of some importance in the mid-Victorian era. His essays focused primarily upon rural life and the changing pattern of the English countryside, and he composed numerous articles for the Times, Fraser's, the Fortnightly Review and the Pall Mall Gazette. Perhaps his most significant works are Hodge and His Master (1880) and Toilers of the Field (1892). A modern critic has suggested that for a "comprehensive view of the English countryside" in the eighteen-seventies and eighties "there is no more reliable guide than Richard Jefferies." For further details concerning Jefferies and his writing see W. J. Keith, Richard Jefferies: A Critical Study (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

³Lord Ernle, English Farming Past and Present (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1961), 25.

⁴F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 27-29.

⁵Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 37.

⁶See George Eliot, Middlemarch (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

⁷See My Lady Ludlow.

⁸Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 14, 197.

⁹Ibid., 196-197.

¹⁰Ibid., Chpt. 26, 335.

¹¹W. M. Thackeray, The History of Pendennis (London: Bradberry and Evans, 1849), I, xxvi, 255.

¹²Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 26, 337.

¹³Ibid., 332.

¹⁴Cranford, viii, 61.

¹⁵. M. Thackeray, The Book of Snobs and Sketches and Travels in London (London: Henry Froude, 1904), iv, 19.

¹⁶O. F. Christie, The Transition from Aristocracy, 1832-1867 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 161.

¹⁷Ibid., 144.

- ¹⁸Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 63, 663.
- ¹⁹See B. Disraeli's Sybil: Or the Two Nations (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., no date) and Coningsby.
- ²⁰See A. Trollope, Framley Parsonage, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie and Co., 1900), passim.
- ²¹See E. Wingfield-Stratford, The Squire and His Relations (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1956) for an interesting portrayal of the typical English squire.
- ²²Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 4, 73.
- ²³T. Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1895), 16.
- ²⁴Ibid, 16-17.
- ²⁵Ibid., 3.
- ²⁶Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 23, 299.
- ²⁷See Trollope, Framley Parsonage.
- ²⁸Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 27, 394.
- ²⁹Ibid.
- ³⁰From R. W. Church's, The Oxford Movement quoted in G. Kitson Clark's, Churchmen and the Condition of England, 1832-1885 (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd, 1973), 3.
- ³¹Ibid., 40; see also Trollope's description of Mark Roberts in Framley Parsonage.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 4, 71.
- ³⁴Ibid.
- ³⁵My Lady Ludlow, i, 17.
- ³⁶Ibid.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸Ibid., 17-19.
- ³⁹See George Eliot's Adam Bede (New York: Rhinehart, 1966).
- ⁴⁰Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957), 57.

⁴¹E. Halévy, England in 1815 (London: Ernest Benn, Ltd., 1960), 391.

⁴²Ibid., 395; see also Tocqueville, 76.

⁴³Halevy, 393.

⁴⁴Ibid., 394.

⁴⁵Tocqueville, 57.

⁴⁶Cousin Phillis, 10.

⁴⁷Ibid., 21, 34.

⁴⁸See Flora Thompson, Larkrise to Candleford (London: The Reprint Society, Ltd., 1948), 204-206.

⁴⁹Halévy, 433.

⁵⁰G. Kitson Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England, 45-46.

⁵¹Halévy, 446.

⁵²G. Kitson Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England, 48; Halevy, 530-531.

⁵³My Lady Ludlow, i, 17, and x, 115.

⁵⁴Ibid., x, 110.

⁵⁵Ibid., 111.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷See W. Howitt, The Rural Life of England, 2 Vols. (London: Longmans, 1838).

⁵⁸F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 158.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ernle, 151.

⁶¹J.H.S. Escott, England: Its People, Polity and Pursuits (London: Cassell, Pelter, Galpin, and Co., 1881), 30.

⁶²F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 157.

⁶³Ibid., 162.

⁶⁴Ibid., 162-163.

- ⁶⁵Escott, 31.
- ⁶⁶F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 162-163.
- ⁶⁷Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 31, 387 and Chpt. 13, 188.
- ⁶⁸George Eliot, Middlemarch, x, 93.
- ⁶⁹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 3, 61.
- ⁷⁰Ibid., 62.
- ⁷¹Cranford, vii, 50.
- ⁷²Halévy, 55.
- ⁷³See W. J. Reader, Life in Victorian England (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1964), 129.
- ⁷⁴Halévy, 553.
- ⁷⁵Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 3, 61.
- ⁷⁶A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, The Professions (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1964), 78.
- ⁷⁷Ibid., 80.
- ⁷⁸Reader, 129.
- ⁷⁹Ibid., 129-30.
- ⁸⁰Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 3, 62.
- ⁸¹Halevy, 220.
- ⁸²Ibid., 218.
- ⁸³Ernle, 326.
- ⁸⁴R. Jefferies, Toilers of the Field (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), 10-12.
- ⁸⁵Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 26, 322.
- ⁸⁶Ibid., Chpt. 8, 124.
- ⁸⁷See Cranford, passim.
- ⁸⁸See W. F. Neff, Victorian Working Women (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966) on the education of Victorian women.
- ⁸⁹See P.P. 1867-68, XXVIII, Part IV, 223.

- ⁹⁰Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 3, 65.
- ⁹¹See Chapter VII above.
- ⁹²R. Jefferies, Hodge, 138-139, 143.
- ⁹³Cranford, xiv, 111.
- ⁹⁴Neff, 12.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., 13.
- ⁹⁶J. A. Banks, Prosperity and Parenthood (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 36.
- ⁹⁷Thackeray, Book of Snobs, xxxiii, 152.
- ⁹⁸See The Life of Charlotte Brontë.
- ⁹⁹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 11, 159.
- ¹⁰⁰See Cranford, 119.
- ¹⁰¹See Charlotte Brontë's Shirley, xii.
- ¹⁰²Ibid.
- ¹⁰³Cranford, 119.
- ¹⁰⁴My Lady Ludlow, xxii, 136.
- ¹⁰⁵See Isabella Beeton's, Beeton's Book of Household Management (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), 1001.
- ¹⁰⁶F. Thompson, Larkrise, 148.
- ¹⁰⁷I. Beeton, 1001.
- ¹⁰⁸G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1962), 115.
- ¹⁰⁹See Disraeli's, Sybil, iii, 68.
- ¹¹⁰My Lady Ludlow, ii, 27.
- ¹¹¹North and South, Chpt. 37, 382.
- ¹¹²See Charles Kingsley's Yeast, xiii.
- ¹¹³For an interesting, if biased account of the agricultural unionist movement see Joseph Arch, The Autobiography of Joseph Arch (London: MacGibbon and Vee, 1966), 53-63.

114 See Wives and Daughters; My Lady Ludlow; and North and South.

115 J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer, 1760-1832 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920), 214.

116 Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 30, 384.

IX

THE CRANFORD ETHOS

The Cranford ethos, for want of a better term, is the spirit described by Elizabeth Gaskell which actuated the manners and social system of the small English villages in the first half of the nineteenth century. Wives and Daughters, Cranford, My Lady Ludlow, and to a lesser extent, North and South and Cousin Phillis show the village to be a complete, self-sufficient society, stable, cohesive, and able to deal with change. Elizabeth Gaskell did not view the village as an ideal society, although she recognized certain admirable principles which differentiated the Cranford world from Manchester and made the Cranford world a healthier climate for social transition.

The Cranford ethos was for Elizabeth Gaskell a manifestation of the best parts of a modified feudalism which still existed in the eighteen-fifties and sixties. In Hollingford, the village in Wives and Daughters, homage is paid in various ways to Lord and Lady Cumnor, or "the earl and the countess as they were always called by the inhabitants of the town."¹ As Elizabeth Gaskell explains, "a very pretty amount of feudal feeling still lingered in Hollingford: and "showed itself in a number of simple ways."² The Cumnors expected

to be submitted to, and obeyed; the simple worship of the townspeople was accepted by the earl and the countess as a right But, yielded all that obeisance, they did a good deal for the town, and were generally condescending, and often thoughtful and kind in their treatment of their vassals.³

Lord and Lady Cumnor and their household "were fed, doctored, and to a certain measure, clothed" by the townspeople; in return they were good landlords and charitable patrons of good works.⁴ In short, the relationship between the classes is harmonious in Hollingsford.

Taine also noted the essentially paternalistic character of village society. The lady of a house he visited calls on the cottagers, is warmly received, and graciously offers her hand to them. He observed that it was evident that there was no distrust or hostility between the classes. Rather than coveting the position of the rich gentry the cottager was inclined to view them as "his protectors." He took pride in the local gentlemen, especially if the gentleman belonged "to an old family long established in the neighbourhood."⁵ This is the pattern of life, which Elizabeth Gaskell first experienced in Knutsford during her childhood and later depicted in the villages of Cranford, Hollingford, and the Hanbury of My Lady Ludlow; this is the pattern by which, as Taine has put it, "the suzerain provided for his vassal, and the vassal was proud of his suzerain."⁶

Hollingford's social system was "no unusual instance of the great landowners over their humbler neighbours."⁷

Much of England's population was similarly distributed.

Taine wrote in the sixties that

Everywhere the cottages are grouped about one or two 'county seats,' modern country houses in the place of former castles and whose masters, albeit in new towns, play the part of the old barons. In every parish, even the most remote, you find two, three, five, six families whose hereditary estates and chosen residence are there, and whose patronage is both accepted and active.⁸

Of course, village society was more complex than just lord and labourer. Elizabeth Gaskell's novels show all the gradations in between: squires, yeoman farmers, clergy, servants and a growing middle class. More importantly, her novels also demonstrate an historical sense and sociological perspective of nineteenth century country life and of the inroads made on it by a changing world.⁹

There are two components of the Cranford ethos, both of feudal vestige; one is stability, a deeply entrenched social order controlled by the concepts of propriety and aristocratic authority; the other is a sense of social responsibility for those in need, a feeling shared by all classes, which because of personal contact led to a degree of sympathy and understanding between the different levels of society.

Stability and permanence were in large part a product of primogeniture, which helped to insure a territorial and hereditary stability among the land owning classes which dominated village society. The hereditary nature of property conferred continuity on the family who owned it and created

generations of time honoured tradition and precedent.¹⁰ In Wives and Daughters, Squire Hamley and his predecessors have been squires "as long back as local tradition existed"; an inhabitant of Hollingford asserts "that there have been Hamleys of Hamley afore the time of the pagans."¹¹ The Cumnors are a little suspect as the family only dates from the time of Queen Anne.¹² Primogeniture tended to keep estates intact, and the territory itself was a tangible and visible domain giving the owner defined boundaries of authority; the estate was viewed as a permanent entity, and its owner saw himself as the temporary steward of an almost sacred trust, the fruit of his ancestors' labours. It was the landowner's duty to preserve and protect this trust for posterity.¹³ Thus Lady Ludlow struggles to pay off a mortgage on the Hanbury estate for the sake of her son. She "shall die happy in leaving the land debt-free."¹⁴ Likewise, Lady Lufton is pained when she is forced to sell a part of her estate in Trollope's Framley Parsonage.¹⁵

Stability was also fostered by the idea that one's social position was determined by birth, that it was a person's duty to do his best in that station, and that discontent was almost sinful. As Lady Ludlow says people, particularly of the lower orders have duties

to which they are called by God; of submission to those placed in authority over them; of contentment with that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, and of ordering themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters.¹⁶

This philosophy seems to have been a frequent theme for sermons.¹⁷ Country people tended to remain in the same locality and work at the same occupation as their fathers before them. As Richard Jefferies says of the mythical village Fleeceborough "men marry in the place, find employment in the place Their families well-to-do and humble alike--have been there for so many, many years."¹⁸

The social order was rigidly observed in all its little proprieties. Joseph Arch, a leader of the agricultural trade union movement, remembers from his childhood in the 1830's that villagers went to the communion rail in order of social precedence, first the squire, then the farmers, the tradesmen, shopkeepers, the wheelwright and blacksmith, and finally the labourers in their smock frocks, by whom no one else could kneel.¹⁹ There were even hierarchies within the hierarchy: de Tocqueville recounts how, when he was staying at a great house, the servants filed in for family evening prayer in order, with the women servants first, led by the governess, followed by the housekeeper, and so on, until the men entered, the butler first and then in descending order down to the grooms.²⁰

Elizabeth Gaskell was a sensitive observer of all the nuances of social distinction. In Cranford Miss Matty cannot marry Mr. Holbrook because she is a clergyman's daughter and he is only a farmer, though a substantial one.²¹ When Miss Jessie Brown is left penniless and considers finding a position as a housekeeper or a saleswoman, Miss Jenkyns objects

and talks to herself about "some people having no idea of their rank as a Captain's daughter."²² Squire Hamley exhibits this attitude when he considers Molly Gibson, because she is a doctor's daughter, unworthy of marrying either of his sons.²³ Again in Cranford, Mrs. Jameson, though a stupid dull woman, prone to fall asleep at social gatherings, is the acknowledged leader of Cranford society because she has an "Honourable" in front of her name; she is accorded the best seat at a Cranford party, and Mrs. Forrester, the impoverished descendent of a once-great family is given the second best, "a seat arranged something like Prince Albert's near the Queen's--good, but not so good."²⁴ When Mr. Gibson in Wives and Daughters wants to remarry, he has a hard time finding a wife because of the scarcity of women of his own class; as a prosperous doctor, he is above marrying a farmer's daughter but below marrying into the gentry.²⁵ Mrs. Fitzadams remembers that when she was a girl, it was an honour for her as a rich farmer's daughter to be addressed by Miss Matty, a poor clergyman's daughter. In My Lady Ludlow Margaret Dawson wonders what would happen if Lady Ludlow's carriage met the carriage of another countess on one of the very narrow roads near Hanbury; Mrs. Medlicott, Lady Ludlow's companion has the answer, the "latest creation must back for sure."²⁶

This carefully observed social order was further reinforced and upheld by the strong identification of each class with the class above it; Lady Cumnor recalls the days of her

grandmother, when "servants did not ape tradespeople and tradespeople professional men, and so on."²⁷ The middle class was perhaps the most involved in revering the gentry and the aristocracy and imitating its manners, thereby reinforcing the hierarchy. This is perhaps because the greatest mobility in the class structure was between the middle ranks and the country gentry; there appear to have been frequent opportunities for forming such connexions.²⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell provides numerous examples of marriages between the different ranks of society. In Wives and Daughters a doctor's daughter marries a squire's son; in North and South a manufacturer marries a clergyman's daughter; in My Lady Ludlow Captain James and the Baptist baker's daughter are wed; and in Cranford, the doctor marries into the aristocracy. As Thackeray relates in his Book of Snobs

We say to any man of any rank--get enormously rich, make immense fees as a lawyer, or great speeches or distinguish yourself and win battles and you, even you, shall come into the privileged class, and your children shall reign naturally over ours.²⁹

If it was not unusual for the sons and daughters of professional people or clergymen to marry into the gentry, it was no more unusual for second sons of the gentry to establish themselves in the professions.³⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell illustrates this point in Wives and Daughters when Roger Hamley, the squire's second son, finds a career as a scientist.³¹

The fluidity between the landed interest and the middle class gave the middle class aspirations to gentility.³²

De Tocqueville was somewhat surprised that the privileges of the aristocracy rather than making the aristocracy more hated actually made them more valued "as everybody had the hope of being among the privileged."³³ Thus Mrs. Gibson, with her close contact with the aristocracy as a governess at Cumnor Towers, and her hopes of marrying her daughter or her stepdaughter into the Hamley family, is, of all Elizabeth Gaskell's women characters, the most conscious of class distinctions and is forever "aping the manners of the aristocracy as far as she knew them."³⁴ She makes a pretence of "bringing out" Molly and Cynthia at the Easter Charity Ball, "which she regarded as something of the light of a presentation at court," although the two girls had been "out" in Hollingford society for some time. As Miss Browning observes, in her day "there was no talk of 'coming out' ... for anyone under the daughter of a squire."³⁵ Mrs. Gibson loves being at the beck and call of Lady Cumnor, "the dear countess," is "highly gratified" to receive calls from the county families, and reads Burke's Peerage avidly.³⁶ The Peerage is likewise one of the three books displayed on Mrs. Jameson's table, the prayer book and the Bible being the other two; and of course the St. James Chronicle is read with great interest in Cranford.³⁷ Mrs. Gibson even practices a genteel "semblance of ill health," and small appetite.³⁸ She also does away with the midday dinner at the Gibson household and institutes the more refined six o'clock dinner. Not unlike other aspiring middle-class

women, she imitates the aristocratic taste for French cuisine, with almost disastrous results;³⁹ the Methodist cook, who objects to cooking Papist food, leaves and Mr. Gibson sits down to dinners of "badly made omelettes, rissoles, vol-au-vents, croquets, and timbales, never being exactly sure of what he is eating."⁴⁰

Jefferies also comments upon the social aspirations, the pretension, of middle-class women. He describes how farmer's daughters and wives, once content to help in the dairy, now see themselves as nothing less than fine ladies; the country girls bemoan their rosy complexions and are desirous of having etiolated skins which are "more lady-like, i.e., thin and white."⁴¹ He concludes with the remark that young farm girls hold their heads above anyone who actually handles a fork at haymaking time--"nothing less thanⁿ the curate is worthy of their smile."⁴²

In Cranford, a premium is put on refinement, yet the town's inhabitants are not as socially ambitious as Mrs. Gibson. Vulgarity is the greatest sin in Cranford. For instance, the impoverished gentlewomen exercise "elegant economy" rather than necessary thrift; Dr. Johnson is without reproach, but Dickens is simply vulgar;⁴³ the Jenkyns sisters will not suck oranges in each other's presence since the operation is too reminiscent of a similar one performed by infants;⁴⁴ and Miss Matty and Miss Pole cannot bring themselves to eat peas with a knife when there is no alternative at Mr. Holbrook's, which brings to mind Thackeray's

question to his readers in The Book of Snobs, "to examine in his mind solemnly and ask, 'Do I or do I not eat peas with my knife?'"⁴⁵ The upper classes could be more eccentric in their manners; as a modern historian has remarked "the starchy idolization of ~~et~~ etiquette belongs to the aspirants, the new genteel, somewhat uncertain of their position."⁴⁶

The social order, with all its minute proprieties and its "noble emulation" was firmly controlled and directed by its leaders, the nobility and the gentry who were constantly reiterating the ideas of stability and permanence. In Fleeceborough, aristocratic authority dictates that no matter what subject is a matter of discussion, "the question is always heard--'what will "he" do, what will "he" say to it,'" and, of course, when "he" determines his course of action, the lesser gentry "many of whom live, perhaps, in his manor houses, follow suit."⁴⁷ Miss Galindo tells Lady Ludlow that the parishoners of Hanbury "will follow your ladyship's lead in everything."⁴⁸ Lady Cumnor owns that she likes people to have opinions, but that it is only proper deference for others to allow themselves to be convinced by herself; she asks anxiously, "I am not a despot, I hope?"⁴⁹ Lady Ludlow, who is a thorough Tory, freely admits that a benevolent despotism by the aristocracy is the best form of government. For her the power of the landed interest in Hanbury is absolute; she asks of Squire Lathom, "who makes the laws?" and answers,

Such as I in the House of Lords--
 such as you in the House of Commons.
 We, who make the laws in St. Stephen's
 may break the mere forms of them, when
 we have right on our side on our own
 land and amongst our own people.⁵⁰

As Lady Ludlow would have had it, in religious, educational and political matters the authority of the landed magistrate generally prevailed.

In Hollingford politics, the oldest son from Cumnor Towers was invariably returned to Parliament in every election. Despite some liberal talk in the village, the populace followed the "ancestral track" and "every man-jack in the place gave his vote to the leige Lord, totally irrespective of political opinion."⁵¹ Similarly, Jefferies recounts how in agricultural districts one often found men of opposite political persuasion to the candidate in the election voting for the local landlord "simply and solely because 'he' was the local man."⁵² Jefferies attributed this to tradition and ancestry and to the fact that the local man, born and raised in the neighbourhood knew its wants and ideas and his interests were necessarily the same as those of the populace.⁵³ As Taine noted in the sixties, in order to represent a constituency, it was necessary to be attached to it, "to have been involved in it for several generations."⁵⁴ Thus as Elizabeth Gaskell indicates in her country novels, the local aristocracy usually controlled rural society politically, a fact which helped to provide a continuity and stability of leadership over generations.

The upper classes also exercised control over religious matters. It was often the local lord or squire who appointed the parish clergyman, tying the clergy irrevocably to the landed gentry.⁵⁵ This very often created a "fine confusion of lay and clerical interest."⁵⁶ Lady Lufton in Framley Parsonage chose Mark Roberts because he was a friend of her son; and Mountford, the Hanbury rector, won Lord Ludlow's favour by his excellent horsemanship.⁵⁷ Lady Ludlow did not demur to show who really controlled religion in Hanbury; when "indisposed for a sermon" she simply stood up in her pew at that point in the service and said "Mr. Mountford, I will not trouble you for a discourse this morning."⁵⁸ When she discovers that this stratagem is ineffective with her new rector, Mr. Gray, and that his sermons often express views which differ from her own, she has her pew glassed in, with a window that could be opened or closed; whenever Mr. Gray ventured to preach on a subject distasteful to Lady Ludlow, she merely closed the window "with a decided clang and clash, "thereby rendering Mr. Gray inaudible to those in the Hanbury pew. Kilvert's Diary records the struggle of Kilvert and his father, the rector, with the squire over the purchase of a new harmonium for the church. Kilvert chafed under the squire's "tyranny"; he believed it would not be a bad thing if the squire made them forfeit the living; at least they would then be able to regain some independence and self-respect.⁵⁹ The squire also objected to a fire to warm the church in winter. Kilvert recounts

how upon entering the church and smelling or seeing the first fire on a cold November Sunday, the squire turned around "and went hastily out again."⁶⁰

If there was one, the village school for the farmer's and labourer's children was run under the patronage and direction of the landlord or the squire.⁶¹ An American visitor at the Duke of Northumberland's estate in 1850 relates how the Duchess had established a school for their tenantry and even helped with the teaching.⁶² Kilvert writes that Squire Ashe ordered that three windows and the door of the school room always be kept open, though the children might cry with cold; one day on visiting the school he found that his orders were not being followed; he reprimanded the schoolmistress and concluded with: "this is my school and I'll have my word attended."⁶³ There was a feeling among the upper classes, as Elizabeth Gaskell indicates in My Lady Ludlow, that education "if given indiscriminately" unfitted the lower orders for their role in life, and could possibly lead to revolution.⁶⁴ Lady Ludlow was so adamant about this that she would not hire a servant who could read; she considered a knowledge of the creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten commandments as adequate.⁶⁵ Joseph Arch, writes that the motto of the typical village school might have been "much knowledge of the right sort is a dangerous thing." A village boy was given a "few scraps of rudimentary knowledge" and was left to himself to determine if he even wanted these.⁶⁶

Great emphasis was placed on educating girls in the domestic arts. Lady Cumnor and her daughters start a school in Hollingford, where girls were taught to sew, "to be capital housemaids, and pretty fair cooks" and where curtseys and "please ma'ams" were "de rigueur."⁶⁷ When Lady Ludlow finally established a school in Hanbury, she desires that boys be taught to read and write as well as "the first four rules of mathematics"; the girls were to learn only to read and "to add up in their heads," and were to spend the rest of the time sewing, knitting, and spinning. Lady Ludlow goes so far as to request that a rule be made whereby a girl must have spun a certain amount of flax and knitted a certain number of stockings before being taught to read at all.⁶⁸ A writer who grew up in the 1880's remembers how the squire's wife visited the local school, not to see how the pupils were progressing academically but to inspect the girls' needlework.⁶⁹

The Cranford ethos meant a stable society and a fixed social order, presided over by benevolent gentry and aristocracy. Codes of behaviour were generally accepted by all classes and the rule of the upper classes was reinforced by imitation and respect, particularly from the middle orders. In contrast to the Manchester of Mary Barton and North and South, where there are strikes and murder, where the life of the workingman and the manufacturer alike is uncertain, Elizabeth Gaskell shows in Cranford, Wives and Daughters, and My Lady Ludlow a world where there is little social confusion

and uncertainty. Though she laughs at the ridiculous proprieties of village life, the self-assured dictatorship of the landed interest, and weeps for the plight of the agricultural worker, she believed that a society in which people felt relatively secure in their places not only provided a healthier climate in which to live but also one which fostered change and reform. In Manchester, change too often comes through violence, suffering, and bitter struggles; in the country village, it is peaceful and gradual.

The other principle of the Cranford ethos was the concept of social responsibility. Like stability, this too was in some measure a product of the hereditary nature of landownership, landowners being of necessity firmly and permanently attached to a certain locale and exposed to public life. Paternalism and philanthropy made for good feeling and for an absence of friction in the community, both of which were to the landlord's advantage. Also, the view of the land as a trust and responsibility encouraged the landowner to subordinate personal whims to duty and to the traditional code of behaviour.⁷⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell in My Lady Ludlow describes examples of this feeling. Lady Ludlow is always acutely aware of her "duty to God," to the land and to her labourers; she is always careful to maintain the societal equilibrium in Hanbury and never seeks to disrupt the lifestyle of the community simply to further her own ends.⁷¹ Following the traditional codes of behaviour meant to act as a gentleman or gentlewoman, as the case may be;

and to act as a gentleman meant much more than possessing certain trappings of refinement. As Taine put it, a gentleman was a "conscientious man" of "generous instincts," a man who feels a responsibility for other people."⁷² In My Lady Ludlow Miss Galindo tells how she is sure that Captain James is a gentleman:

Captain James is a gentleman; I make no doubt of that ever since I saw him stop to pick up old Goody Blake (when she tumbled down in the slide last winter) and then swear at a little lad who was laughing at her.⁷³

A sense of duty manifested itself most visibly throughout village society from the lord of the manor, who was "patron of local societies, of schools, of charitable institutions beyond number."⁷⁴ W. H. Prescott, the American historian, remarked that the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland were devoted to their tenants' interests, to their education and comfort, and were constantly visiting their cottages.⁷⁵ In Middlemarch Sir James Chetham also takes a good deal of interest in his labourers, seeing to it that they are well-provided for.⁷⁶ Lord Cumnor enjoyed talking with his workers, giving pennies to children and snuff to old people. Lady Ludlow shows great kindness to the parish poor and provides special food for sick people. She also held "levees" where she met with her tenants, listened to their requests, and invited them to dine in the servants' hall.⁷⁷

Lesser landowners demonstrated similar considerations. Flora Thompson in Larkrise to Candleford tells how the Squire's

wife, Mrs. Bramwell, is "generous out of all proportion to her means." She kept two old pensioners, doled out soup in winter, and gave a children's party every Christmas, all because she had been taught that she had a duty towards the cottagers.⁷⁸ In Wives and Daughters, Squire Hamley is forced to lay off some workers because of lack of money. This action weighs on him heavily and he lies awake all night thinking about it. He does his best to make it up by giving the men wood for fuel and by killing three of his cows and giving them the meat. Also he stays by the death-bed of Old Silas, his gamekeeper, just as his father had come to see Silas' father when he lay dying.⁷⁹

Of course, there were landowners and nobles who showed little concern for their tenantry, and many cottagers lived in utterly wretched conditions. But the ideal was paternalistic charity to the unfortunate, which was far removed from Manchester, where as Elizabeth Gaskell shows the accepted ideal was independence and self-help. Michael Sadler, who chaired a number of Parliamentary Select Committees on children's labour, factory conditions and the health of towns, termed this paternalistic conception of life in the country "the aristocratic ideal." The ideal required the rich to be charitable to the poor out of prudence and benevolence, and instilled in them the belief that protection and maintenance were the right of the poor and a duty of the rich implicit in the privilege of property.⁸⁰

Charity, in the country, was naturally the official province of the clergy. Elizabeth Gaskell's clergymen all reflect varying degrees of social conscience. Mr. Gray in My Lady Ludlow is almost saintly in his unselfish devotion to the interests of the cottagers of Hanbury; his predecessor, Mr. Mountford, though less conscientious, was always ready with food and money when applied to, as is Mr. Ashton in Wives and Daughters. Kilvert's Diary shows Francis Kilvert as a concerned curate visiting the sick and the aged, giving comfort, reading aloud, and distributing food.⁸¹ Like Kilvert, clergymen often taught in the village school as does Mr. Gray in Wives and Daughters. Mr. Hale in North and South, and Mr. Ellison in Larkrise to Candleford. As G. Kitson Clark has pointed out, many clergy organized clothing and savings clubs and pushed for sanitary reform and a system of allotments all for the benefit of the agricultural poor.⁸²

A clergyman's wife or daughter also involved herself in assisting the poor. Margaret Hale devoted much time to her father's parishioners; she "nursed their babies, talked or read with slow distinctness to their old people, carried dainty messes "and intended to teach at the parish school until her father gave up his living."⁸³ Margaret regrets leaving Helstone because she will not be able to visit Old Simon; she wonders what he will do now that there will be no one to read to him or to bring him little porringers of broth or good red flannel.⁸⁴ Mrs. Hale also busies herself

devising "little plans for bidding some small comforts to the lot of the poorer parishoners."⁸⁵ In Larkrise to Candleford, the rector's daughter assiduously visits the cottages, gives food to the sick, and lends a layette, made by her own hand, and a christening gown for the farm labourers' new babies.⁸⁶

The concept of Christian duty also sifted down to the village middle class. The Cranford ladies and Miss Galindo in My Lady Ludlow give money and food to the poor to the extent that their limited means permit.⁸⁷ Moreover, the ladies feel a duty to one another. When Miss Matty's bank fails, her friends hold a meeting and each pledges an annual sum to assist her. In this incident, Elizabeth Gaskell depicts the acknowledged interdependence and cohesion that was so much a part of life in the village, and so absent in Manchester.

The poor, rather than being intensely alienated from the other classes, as was the case in Manchester, felt that they had a meaningful place in society. They had personal contact with the middle and upper classes and they received some measure of consideration and concern. Because of this there was a degree of sympathy between the classes. In My Lady Ludlow, when Lord Ludlow dies, though he has not been in the village for years, the entire village goes into mourning out of compassion for Lady Ludlow's grief. All the tenants spoke in hushed voices for more than a week. Even the local public house closed its front door, "and those who needed

stole in the back, and were silent and maudlin over their cups" instead of displaying their usual rowdiness.⁸⁸

Kilvert recounts that when the rector's wife had a baby, the whole village joyously celebrates the event.⁸⁹ When Kilvert has to leave the village, the cottagers are sincerely sad, as are the cottagers when Margaret Hale leaves Helstone.⁹⁰

In Cranford, Miss Matty remembers how the country women brought flowers for her father's funeral. When Miss Matty loses her money and goes into business, the country people often bring a little ripe fruit or a bunch of flowers "for the old rector's daughter."⁹¹ Lady Ludlow's villagers make her offerings of lavender, of which she is particularly fond.⁹² When Molly Gibson is ill in Wives and Daughters "the kind doctor's humblest patients, the cottagers, bring the earliest cauliflowers they could grow in their gardens with their 'duty for Miss.'"⁹³ Hollingford's reaction to Molly's illness is, in fact a symbol of the cohesion of village society. Not only do the poor bring vegetables, but Cumnor Tower sent books, forced fruit, and "new caricatures and strange and delicate poultry," the Miss Brownings, Cranford-type spinsters, prepare "dainty messes" for Molly, and Squire Hamley rides to the Gibson's every day for news.

Charity and social responsibility were admirable ideals, but like Kingsley, Elizabeth Gaskell did not see them as the ultimate remedy to the situation of the agricultural poor. Charity often debased the receiver and only served to perpetuate the system of oppression. Kingsley observed that when the upper classes saw hunger and sickness before their

eyes, they were quick enough to pull out their purses, but they generally ignored the day-to-day misery of the farm labourer.⁹⁴ The fact was that many labourers had to rely on charity in order to subsist. Their wages were simply inadequate, as Taine noted.⁹⁵ Well aware of the brutalized condition of the agricultural poor, Elizabeth Gaskell was perceptive enough to see that the answer to their plight could not be measured solely in flannels, jellies, and coal doled out by the more fortunate.⁹⁶ Rather, the solution lay in giving the poor the opportunity to better themselves as well, a sort of synthesis of Manchester self-help and Cranford paternalism. In My Lady Ludlow Harry Gregson, son of a miserably poor poacher, is taught to read by Mr. Horner, Lady Ludlow's estate steward; the boy is intelligent and capable and rises mainly on his own merit, but with some financial help, to be rector of Hanbury. This is certainly an unusual and even unheard-of success story for a Victorian village, but it does demonstrate that Elizabeth Gaskell, like other social critics in the forties and fifties, was in favour of giving the labourer a chance to rise out of his poverty, rather than tying him down to a demeaning system of starvation wages and charity.

In the world outside Cranford, Hollingford, and Hanbury, many changes sparked by the industrial revolution, were taking place and Elizabeth Gaskell, living in Manchester, was well aware of what was happening. She saw that these changes were beginning to make themselves felt even in small rural

villages and that they were contributing to the long, slow decline of country society as it had existed for centuries. In the country there is no violent change such as there is in Manchester, but there is a gradual breakdown of social barriers, old prejudices, and a widening contact with the outside world. Rather than destroying the entrenched social order, new elements are absorbed into it. The generally harmonious cohesion and good feeling between all classes are not disrupted; people adapt to new ideas rather than let them produce antagonism between the classes. The Cranford ethos is not eradicated by the impingement of the Manchester world; rather the Cranford ethos makes it possible for change to come peacefully.

The railways created a communications revolution in village life. The outside world was now much more accessible; England would never again be the same. Like Elizabeth Gaskell, Thackeray saw the railroad as dividing the old world from the new; "they have raised those railroad embankments up and shut off the old world behind them," he wrote.⁹⁷ In Wives and Daughters and My Lady Ludlow Elizabeth Gaskell talks of another world, "those days before the railways."⁹⁸ In My Lady Ludlow, Margaret Dawson, the narrator, remembers how people once "traveled in coaches, carrying six inside, and making two days' journey out of what people now go over in a couple of hours with a whizz and a flash" and with a whistle whose scream is "enough to deafen one." She also recalls how the post used to come three times a week, but now

comes twice a day. She says that all this may be an improvement, but "you could never meet with a Lady Ludlow in these days."⁹⁹ The railways also created change by ending some of the isolation of the gentry and the aristocracy. W. H. Prescott noted how at one time a certain landed proprietor went to London with his family to attend Parliament in three coaches and four:

But nowadays he is tumbled in with the unwashed, in the first class it is true--no dirtier than ours, however--of the railway carriages; and then tumbled out again into a common cab with my lady and all her little ones, like any of the common pottery.¹⁰⁰

In Sybil, Lady Vanilla talks with two gentlemanly men on a train only to discover that the pair are chained together.¹⁰¹

The early part of the nineteenth century also saw an agricultural revolution in farming techniques. An era of prosperity in the first thirty years of Victoria's reign was brought on by scientific farming, which included new methods of crop rotation, better fertilization materials, "better bred, better fed, and better housed stock," improvements in farm equipment, the division of fields into convenient and workable sizes, and by the construction of roads.¹⁰³ In My Lady Ludlow, scientific farming comes to Hanbury with Captain James, the new estate steward. Lady Ludlow's land is in poor condition, but she is reluctant to break with tradition and try out new methods of farming, but she acquiesces to Captain James out of consideration for his feelings. Captain James, who had read Arthur Young, has

several failures until he consults with Lady Ludlow's neighbour, Mr. Brooke, the successful Baptist baker turned farmer. Brooke, who applies some of the principles of industry to farming, helps Captain James to achieve successful results and a new prosperity comes to Hanbury. In Wives and Daughters, conservative Squire Hamley with the assistance of his more progressive son Roger, drains a part of his land and thus increases his estate's productivity. Elizabeth Gaskell saw this technical revolution in agriculture as a sign of the times, an agent of transition from the traditional to the modern world. The estate was evolving from a feudal institution to a scientifically managed, factory-like producer of food, in the words of Taine, "a complicated industry based on theory and experiment."¹⁰⁴

The most significant change, in Elizabeth Gaskell's eyes, was the breakdown of class barriers. She shows this as coming about through kind feelings for others, a sense of social responsibility, and a desire not to upset the social order by putting the various elements of society into adversary roles, as happened in Manchester. Squire Hamley learns to love his Roman Catholic ex-servant daughter-in-law and his half French, Roman Catholic grandson. Also in Wives and Daughters, "Science," a vaguely defined field of endeavor which hints at a modern world beyond Hollingford, is the social leveling force allowing Lord Hollingford, Squire Hamley's son Roger, and Mr. Gibson, the surgeon, to converse as equals. Lord Hollingford invites scientific

acquaintances--"all sorts of people"--to Cumnor Towers without regard to rank.¹⁰⁵ This recalls Prince Albert, also interested in science, who invited "four weighty omnibuses filled with scientific men" to Balmoral, as the Queen noted in 1859.¹⁰⁶ In Cranford Miss Matty's friends overlook the shocking fact that she is "in trade," after some soul searching, simply because they love her and want her to remain part of their community. Perhaps Lady Ludlow, of all Elizabeth Gaskell's characters, makes the greatest adjustments. She accepts the illegitimate Bessy, though previously "she neither saw nor heard nor was in anyway cognizant of the existence of those who had no legal right to exist at all."¹⁰⁷ Even Mr. Brooke, "the dissenter, the tradesman, the Birmingham democratic," is absorbed into the social order when his daughter marries Captain James; as Miss Galindo says to Lady Ludlow, "Let us be humble Christians, my dear lady, and not hold our heads too high because we were born orthodox quality."¹⁰⁸ Despite a relaxation, and in some instances a breakdown in class barriers, the shared values of permanence and duty to others continued to dominate in the countryside and to temper the effects of social transition.

In spite of the various changes which came to the rural England in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the basic values of the aristocratic ideal or the Cranford ethos remained the same. As Elizabeth Gaskell shows, in the character of Lady Ludlow, landowners, gentry, and aristocracy alike learned that innovations from the outside

did not necessarily mean a replay of the French Revolution (only on English soil this time). On the contrary, because of this Cranford ethos, with its twin concerns for human kindness and stability, change was able to come to the village peacefully and to eliminate the narrow and debilitating aspects of rural life without rendering inoperative the social hierarchy or the sense of community. Perhaps more than any other novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell depicted the village as a society in transition and as having a place in the historical perspective of change in nineteenth century England. Finally, probably as well as anyone, she described the admirable features of the aristocratic ideal and how they effected village life.

- ¹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 36.
- ²Ibid.
- ³Ibid., 37.
- ⁴Ibid., 36.
- ⁵H. Taine, Notes on England (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), 140.
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 37.
- ⁸Taine, 140.
- ⁹For a penetrating sociological analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's country novels see E. Wright, Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- ¹⁰F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 6; also S. G. Checkland, The Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-1885 (London: Longmans, 1964), 285.
- ¹¹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 4, 72.
- ¹²Ibid., Chpt. 6, 107.
- ¹³F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 6; of course, strict laws of entail made it very difficult for a landowner to do anything other than keep the family estate intact.
- ¹⁴My Lady Ludlow, xii, 142.
- ¹⁵A. Trollope, Framley Parsonage, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: Gebbie and Co., 1900), passim.
- ¹⁶My Lady Ludlow, x, 113.
- ¹⁷Flora Thompson, Larkrise to Candleford (London: The Reprint Society, Ltd., 1948), 201.
- ¹⁸R. Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1890), 172.
- ¹⁹Joseph Arch, The Autobiography of Joseph Arch (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1966), 25.
- ²⁰Alexis de Tocqueville, Journeys to England and Ireland (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1957), 52.

- ²¹Cranford, vii, 23.
- ²²Ibid., ii, 22.
- ²³Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 6, 88-89.
- ²⁴Cranford, vii, 52.
- ²⁵Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 9, 135.
- ²⁶My Lady Ludlow, ii, 22.
- ²⁷Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 50, 590.
- ²⁸F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 20-21.
- ²⁹W. H. Thackeray, The Book of Snobs and Sketches and Travels in London (London: Henry Froude, 1904), iii, 15.
- ³⁰F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 21.
- ³¹See Wives and Daughters.
- ³²W. J. Reader, Life in Victorian England (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1964), 14.
- ³³Tocqueville, 59.
- ³⁴Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 21, 274.
- ³⁵Ibid., 275.
- ³⁶Ibid., Chpt. 15, 215 and Chpt. 25, 315-316.
- ³⁷Cranford, v, 60.
- ³⁸Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 29, 368.
- ³⁹See F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 193.
- ⁴⁰Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 18, 214.
- ⁴¹Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters, 143.
- ⁴²Ibid., 145.
- ⁴³Cranford, i, 7.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., iii, 21.
- ⁴⁵Thackeray, Book of Snobs, i, 7.
- ⁴⁶F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 15.

- ⁴⁷Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters, 173.
- ⁴⁸My Lady Ludlow, xi, 126.
- ⁴⁹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 57. 664.
- ⁵⁰My Lady Ludlow, ii, 30.
- ⁵¹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 36-37.
- ⁵²Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters, 53.
- ⁵³Ibid.
- ⁵⁴Taine, 154.
- ⁵⁵F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 5.
- ⁵⁶Ibid.
- ⁵⁷My Lady Ludlow, i, 17.
- ⁵⁸Ibid., 16.
- ⁵⁹F. Kilvert, Kilvert's Diary 1870-1879: Selections From the Diary of the Rev. Francis Kilvert, ed. by William Plomer (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 264.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., 270.
- ⁶¹F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society.
- ⁶²See an excerpt from G. Ticknors, W. H. Prescott in The English Ruling Class, ed. W. L. Guttsman (London: Weidenfeld and Micolson, 1969), 66-68.
- ⁶³Kilvert, 269.
- ⁶⁴My Lady Ludlow, i, 17.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 15.
- ⁶⁶Arch, 28.
- ⁶⁷Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 37-38.
- ⁶⁸My Lady Ludlow, xiii, 155-156.
- ⁶⁹Flora Thompson, Larkrise to Candleford, 184.
- ⁷⁰F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society, 16.
- ⁷¹My Lady Ludlow, iii, 41.

- ⁷²Taine, 145.
- ⁷³My Lady Ludlow, xiv, 162.
- ⁷⁴J.H.S. Escott, England: Its People, Polity and Pursuits (London: Cassell, Pelter, Galpin and Co., 1881), 48.
- ⁷⁵See W. L. Guttsman ed., The English Ruling Class (London: Weidenfeld and Micolson, 1969), 66-68.
- ⁷⁶George Eliot, Middlemarch (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), passim.
- ⁷⁷My Lady Ludlow, i, 16 and iii, 39.
- ⁷⁸Flora Thompson, Larkrise to Candleford, 184.
- ⁷⁹Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 30, 384, 388.
- ⁸⁰H. Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 242-43.
- ⁸¹Kilvert, passim.
- ⁸²G. Kitson Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England, 1832-1885 (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1973).
- ⁸³North and South, Chpt. 2, 48.
- ⁸⁴Ibid., Chpt. 5, 75.
- ⁸⁵Ibid.
- ⁸⁶Flora Thompson, Larkrise to Candleford, 124-25.
- ⁸⁷Cookbooks of the day often included some recipes on cooking for the poor. Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management contains the recipe for a "Useful Soup for Benevolent Purposes," which the authoress herself has distributed to the village poor.
- ⁸⁸See My Lady Ludlow.
- ⁸⁹Kilvert, 177.
- ⁹⁰North and South, Chpt. 6, 91-92.
- ⁹¹Cranford, 119.
- ⁹²My Lady Ludlow, iii, 36.
- ⁹³Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 54, 642.

⁹⁴Charles Kingsley, Yeast (New York: Co-operative Publication Society, 1899), iii, 13-14.

⁹⁵Taine, 137.

⁹⁶North and South, Chpt. 37, 382.

⁹⁷Thackeray, Roundabout Papers (London: The Gresham Publishing Co., no date), 98.

⁹⁸Wives and Daughters, Chpt. 1, 37.

⁹⁹My Lady Ludlow, i, 7.

¹⁰⁰See Guttsman, The English Ruling Class, 66-68.

¹⁰¹See Disraeli's Sybil.

¹⁰²Lord Ernle, English Farming Past and Present (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, Inc., 1961), 349.

¹⁰³Ibid., 352.

¹⁰⁴Taine, 32.

¹⁰⁵See Wives and Daughters.

¹⁰⁶G. F. Christie, The Transition from Aristocracy, 1832-1867 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 206.

¹⁰⁷My Lady Ludlow, xiii, 153.

¹⁰⁸Ibid, xiv, 157.

CONCLUSION

The scope of this thesis is limited to the range of Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, to the ideas and reflections of reality she presents therein. Her novels deal chiefly with two aspects of nineteenth century England: the effects of industrialism and the changing pattern of rural life. Of course, she does not cover all the diverse elements of either aspect. In some instances, she is limited by her own experience, and, in others, she chooses not to deal with certain areas because they are not relevant to her purpose. For example, in Mary Barton and North and South, she does not discuss her middle-class characters' religious or political leanings, nor the Anti-Corn Law League, nor the Chartist leaders or Chartism's five points. Elizabeth Gaskell, like Dickens, did not see the problems of Manchester as a political matter but rather as a matter of conscience. Her presentation of industrialism is on a personal level, where solutions are found in direct individual confrontation rather than in party or platform.

Elizabeth Gaskell does not deal with the political power structure in her country novels, either, and the criticism might be made that her aristocracy is too benevolent, that she paints a too rosy picture of village life. However,

it is important to remember that My Lady Ludlow, Wives and Daughters and Cranford are written in a completely different vein than Mary Barton and North and South. The three country novels are intended as social comedies mainly about the middle class, *not* exposés of the plight of the agricultural worker. North and South and Mary Barton are written in a very serious, earnest tone with the purpose of calling attention to certain issues, and they are almost devoid of humour. In the country novels, Elizabeth Gaskell writes humourously and ironically, more with the intention of entertaining than instructing. This is not to say that she was unaware of rural problems; indeed, as previously mentioned, there are several places where she discusses these problems, but it was not her purpose to deal with them as she dealt with the dilemmas of industrialism.

Within these limitations, Elizabeth Gaskell covers a great deal of ground in depicting urban and rural life in forties and fifties, and the main thrust of this thesis is to test the accuracy of her representations. In North and South and Mary Barton, Elizabeth Gaskell describes the living and working conditions of the labouring class and the manufacturing middle class, the rise of class-consciousness, and she also develops the ethos of the new industrial city. As the various parliamentary papers and the notes of Taine, Faucher, Toqueville, Taylor, and other visitors to Manchester indicate, her portrayal is accurate. Similarly, sources on Victorian village life, fictional and otherwise, tend to

corroborate her work. What makes her picture of rural life especially interesting to the historian is her perceptive grasp of the changes in country life, changes then in their incipient stages, the importance of which would not be felt until much later. Elizabeth Gaskell was aware of the rise of the professional middle class, the breakdown of social barriers, the changing role of the clergy, and the importance of new scientific developments, such as the railways and the transformation of agriculture. Moreover, she gives a detailed and charmingly humorous account of middle-class manners and aspirations in Cranford and Wives and Daughters, and she also shows the aristocratic ideal coming up against the modern world in My Lady Ludlow.

Perhaps what makes Elizabeth Gaskell most valuable as an historical source is her point of view. Consistent with her Unitarian background, she held truth and rational thought precious. She researched thoroughly or actually experienced what she wrote about, and she never presumed to write on topics in which her knowledge was limited, such as politics or economics; nor, with the exception of Mary Barton, did she write from any other standpoint than that of the middle-class woman she was. She also had a gift for seeing both sides of a question; she was generally scrupulously fair. This is evident in My Lady Ludlow and especially in North and South. In My Lady Ludlow, she sees what is fine and noble in the aristocratic ideal, but also shows how it could lead to the stagnation of village life. Unlike most social

critics, including Dickens, Disraeli, and Carlyle, who condemned the manufacturers as cold-hearted worshippers of Mammon who espouse laissez-faire only so they can grow richer, Elizabeth Gaskell does not make caricatures of her industrialists. John Thornton in North and South embraces laissez faire as the best possible course, as did Elizabeth Gaskell herself. Like Adam Smith, whom she admired, she felt that the enlightened manufacturer would naturally better the conditions of his employees if he could be made to see that it was in his own best interests to do so. Although she sympathized emotionally with the misery of the working class, she recognized that manufacturers could be decent, well-meaning men like Thornton and Carson.

Too often fiction is overlooked in the study of history, and too often Elizabeth Gaskell is dismissed as just another Victorian lady novelist. To ignore literary accounts of an era and to study only factual and statistical evidence may make the task of the historian easier and lessen the chance of error. However, novels can, and often do, better convey the ethos of a period as well as providing a wealth of detailed information. Elizabeth Gaskell's novels in particular, regardless of their artistic merit, are thoughtful and accurate accounts of her era. North and South and Mary Barton are the best literary sources on Victorian industrialism by virtue of their accuracy and fairness, and the country novels are important not only for their representation of manners and society, but also because of the author's recognition of change versus tradition in rural Victorian England.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

In researching this thesis I have attempted to examine as much of the relevant material as possible. I have used government and official documents or primary sources wherever feasible. In dealing with industrialism, Manchester and the working class in the early Victorian period there are numerous documents and primary sources with which to compare Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novels, Mary Barton and North and South. However, when it comes to judging her representation of the industrial middle class or the country, documents and nonfictional primary sources are in short supply.

From the historian's standpoint, there is a need for a definitive biography of Elizabeth Gaskell. Haldane's Mrs. Gaskell and Her Friends and Chadwick's Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories, are interesting but lack sufficient documentation. Hopkins' Elizabeth Gaskell is the best available biography and is particularly informative about Elizabeth Gaskell's and Charles Dickens' author-editor relationship. Boggs' Reflections of Unitarianism in Mrs. Gaskell's Novels is an excellent study of the influence of Unitarianism on her works. Perhaps the most interesting source is The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell. From her letters emerge the image of a busy wife and mother, a kind and intelligent woman.

Many critical works deal with Elizabeth Gaskell's writing. Three of the best are Ganz's Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict, Sharps' Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention, and Wright's Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment. Wright's study is from a sociological perspective and is particularly helpful in regard to the Manchester and Cranford ethos. Rubenius' The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works is an interesting study of Elizabeth Gaskell's attitudes toward her own sex. Lane's The Brontë Story and Gerin's Charlotte Brontë provide a close analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's biographical work. W. R. Greg's remarks about Mary Barton and Ruth were also useful, not only for their critical perspicacity but also for the attitudes they evince.

There is no paucity of sources when it comes to evaluating Elizabeth Gaskell's Manchester. Only a few parliamentary papers are specifically concerned with the new towns of the eighteen-thirties and forties. Sadler's committee report, The Health of Towns (P.P. XI, 1840) adduces a good deal of testimony but fails to draw any conclusions. The State of Large Towns and Populous Districts (P.P. XVII, 1844; XVII, 1845) is more comprehensive than Sadler's report. Perhaps the best government study on the industrial towns is Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain in 1842 (ed. E. M. Flinn) in which testimony is analyzed and recommendations for the correction of insalubrious conditions are put forward. One finds also many

notes made by visitors to Manchester, among the more useful and reliable being Kay's The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester, Taine's Notes on England, Tocqueville's Journeys to England and Ireland, and Faucher's Manchester in 1844. Another valuable work is Engels' Condition of the Working Class in England, especially in the critical edition by W. O. Henderson and W. R. Chaloner. The editors have succeeded in showing that Engels was not above misrepresenting a source to buttress his own bias, but their scrutiny shows Engels' work to be to a remarkable extent accurate and free from error. Briggs' Victorian Cities offers a comparative picture of Manchester and other industrial towns in England; Redford's The History of Local Government in Manchester is an extremely detailed and thorough record of Manchester's efforts to govern itself and come to grips with the myriad problems it has faced throughout its history.

In writing Chapter IV, I found Wright's Mrs. Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment helpful in regard to Elizabeth Gaskell's comparison of London and Manchester. Also of considerable assistance were Taine, Tocqueville, Kay, and Faucher. Taylor's Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire contains many comments about the character and social fabric of Manchester. Of course, Carlyle's Chartism, Past and Present, and "Signs of the Times," both in essence and tone, describe the predominate value system in Manchester and the new industrial towns.

Briggs' Chartist Studies, including Read's "Chartism in Manchester" and Cole's British Working-Class Movements: Select Documents, 1789-1875, are excellent sources depicting working-class consciousness and its outward manifestations. Thompson's The Early Chartists, a collection of documents, also develops the depth of feeling and the basic issues behind class-consciousness, as does Briggs and Saville's Essays in Labour History. The First Report From the Select Committee on Combinations of Workmen (P.P. VIII, 1837-38), Ashworth's Inquiry into the Origin and Progress and Result of a Strike ... in Preston, and Statements of Facts Connected with the Turn-out in the Lancashire Building Trades provide important first hand information pertaining to strikes and trade unionism.

Concerning working-class occupations in the thirties and forties there are several pertinent parliamentary papers. As a general rule, the earlier papers tend to be less reliable than those of the mid-forties onward. All the reports by factory inspectors are full of relevant material and the later reports offer comprehensive statistical data. A perusal of the parliamentary Debates between 1842 and 1850, especially with respect to the various ten-hours bills, provides much information. Phillip Gaskell's Artisans and Machinery is important for its views on the effects of factory labour on working-class morals. R. H. Greg's The Factory Question is perhaps the most cogent defense of the factory system written in the early Victorian era. For the

role of women workers, there are two excellent secondary sources: Neff's Victorian Working Women examines literary as well as documentary sources; Pinchbeck's Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution is a more objective study than Neff's although not as thorough in its treatment of women employed in factories.

There are few primary source materials on the industrial middle class. Tocqueville, Taine, and Faucher are probably the only ones worth noting. The Claphams' essay, "Life in the New Towns" in Young's Early Victorian England is useful in explaining the day-to-day existence of the entrepreneurial class as is Best's Mid-Victorian England. Checkland's Rise of Industrial Society in England, 1815-1885 deals well with the changing role and pattern of capitalistic enterprise in society, showing that the active owner-manager type prevailed over the corporate system prior to the 1870's.

In writing the eighth and ninth chapters, Taine's keen perception of the social ethic in country society was invaluable. Flora Thompson's Larkrise to Candleford, a superb evocation of village life, is especially informative concerning the life of the agricultural worker. Jefferies' Toilers of the Field and Hodge and His Master describe the growing sophistication of country manners; The Book of Snobs is a scathing look at manners and title-worship. Lord Ernle's English Farming is a comprehensive source for the revolution in agriculture in the early nineteenth century. F. M. L. Thompson's English Landed Society in the Nineteenth

Century contains an excellent treatment of the functions and rationale of the aristocracy and gentry as well as covering the evolution of professional estate management. The changing role of the clergy is best delineated in Kitson-Clark's Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-1885 and Halévy's classic England in 1815; Kilvert's Diary is also informative. Carr-Saunders' and Wilson's The Professions was useful in describing the professionalization of doctors. Kingsley's Yeast is worthy of mention as one of the very few works in the first half of the nineteenth century to deal with the plight of the agricultural worker. Eliot's Adam Bede and Middlemarch, Trollope's Framley Parsonage, and Hughes' Tom Brown's Schooldays were all valuable in describing the general tenor of country life.

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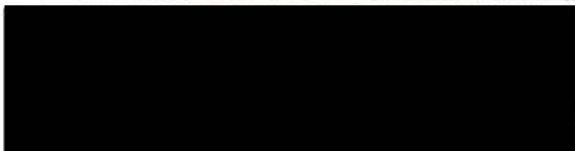
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ELIZABETH GASKELL: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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