

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, AS A SOCIAL AND A  
POLITICAL EDUCATOR  
HIS NOVELS AND THE BLUE-BOOKS

Robert A. Shields, B.A. (Honours)

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## PREFACE

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CHAPTER  
1  
INTRODUCTION

"In his preface to Sybil itself, Disraeli stated, with regard to his pictures on industrial life, that 'the descriptions generally were written from his own observation;' he said nothing of his great indebtedness to the reports of the Children's Commission, partly, no doubt because these reports were very widely read, and still more, perhaps, because a confession that a novel was formed on a Blue Book would not have been alluring." (1)

The purpose of this thesis will be to assess, regardless of the wide circulation of the Blue Books, and of his reluctance to admit of their aid, Benjamin Disraeli's use of the reports of the Children's Employment Commission, in order to give the readers of Sybil an accurate and an unbiassed picture of industrial life in England in the 1840's. At the same time, a study is made of Disraeli's earlier novel, Coningsby, in order to illustrate how the author, through the medium of two novels, was trying to educate the Tory party and the electorate of Great Britain, to the duties that were incumbent upon all classes of society.

To carry out this research, an evaluation of industrial England was of course necessary. Of particular help in this task was Frederick Engels' The Condition of the English Working Class in 1844. Engels gave an excellent picture of labour working under the worst possible conditions. His work was of interest also, in as much as

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(1) W. F. Monypenny, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli  
Vol II (New York: The MacMillan Co. 1913) Footnote 2, p. 251.

he was indebted to the various Blue Books, as was Disraeli. The information necessary to form a picture of a developing labour class in England during the early nineteenth century was obtained from the many works of J. L. and Barbara Hammond. These include The Village Labourer, The Town Labourer, The Skilled Labourer, The Age of the Chartists and Lord Shaftesbury.

In the preparation of this topic, it was felt necessary to conduct a survey of the attitude, in many cases calloused, of the governing classes of England toward the labouring classes. To obtain this material reference was had to the following official publications and contemporary periodicals. Between the years 1830 and 1848 The Edinburgh Review, The Quarterly Review, The Westminster Review, The Debates of the House of Lords, and The Debates of the House of Commons. Between the years 1841 and 1850 the magazine Punch was studied, and between 1845 and 1850 The British Quarterly Review was referred to. In addition to these sources, a study was made of the political opinions and motivations of the leaders of the parties in Parliament. To do so involved references to the three volume edition of the Papers and Diaries of John Wilson Croker, secretary to the Admiralty from 1809 to 1830. This source was of use in revealing the attitudes of the men who advanced and made Conservative policies. Parallel with this, a study was made of the memoirs of Sir Charles Greville, an independent and an astute political observer of the day.

For a background to the development of Disraeli as an author and as a politician, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli by W. F. Monypenny

was invaluable. The first two volumes of this work, which were the most pertinent to the topic, afforded excellent material in the form of Disraeli's letters, diary, and speeches. (2)

The two volume edition of Disraeli's speeches, edited by T. E. Kebbel was useful as a touchstone to the development of his political views before and after entering Parliament in 1837.

The major portion of the research was of course confined to Disraeli's two novels and to the two reports of the Children's Employment Commission. Without the mass of evidence contained in the latter source, any research upon this topic would have been next to impossible.

As Disraeli was a contemporary of several leading figures in the political field, notice was taken of the biographies of such men as Sir Robert Peel the younger, Lord Grey, Richard Cobden, Robert Owen, and Lord Ashley. The standard guides to the history of nineteenth century England were utilized: G. M. Trevelyan's British History in the Nineteenth Century, E. L. Woodward's The Age of Reform, and Elie Halévy's History of the English People. The late Elie Halévy's six volume edition, incomplete as it is, appears to be the best all-inclusive work upon this period. (3)

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- (2) The later volumes of the series on Benjamin Disraeli were written by George Earl Buckle, after Mr. Monypenny's death. Mr. Monypenny was the author of the first two volumes.
- (3) Volume six of Halévy's work was completed after his death in 1937 by his wife and Paul Vaucher. It covered the period between 1841 and 1852. As it follows chronologically after volume three; it is referred to in the bibliography and in the footnotes as volume four.

These are the main sources from which the material for this topic was obtained. A complete list of the titles of the primary and secondary sources is given in the bibliography.



CHAPTER  
II  
THE BACKGROUND OF DISRAELI'S ENGLAND

By the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain had entered upon the period in which industry was to be the prime factor of her economy. From 1793 on, that industry had been stimulated by production for the needs of war, and had expanded and developed to such a degree, that the whole of society was being reshaped by the change. By 1830 the English social order bore little, if any, resemblance to that of the eighteenth century.

The development of industry was, of course, brought about by many agents. New inventions removed manufacturing from the home to the factory, from the hearth to the water-wheel. Water power was followed by the introduction of steam power to work the new and ever multiplying machinery. Because of this development, it was no longer necessary to build mills at sources of water power, and industry moved back into the towns. (1) Population had increased at a rate never before equalled. Rich resources of raw materials were laid bare for exploitation and use. The industrial revolution gave rise to a growing working class, in which the worker was divorced from the land, and separated by his poverty, status, and living conditions, from the ruling classes. The new proletariat in its misery and its strength was to form its own vigorous movement to win a better lot from the masters of society, the new capitalists who were at once the creation and the beneficiaries of the new order.

The creation of a proletariat and the rise of a capitalist

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(1) J.L. and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer: 1760-1832. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1933) p. 57.

class is not a phenomenon to be attributed completely to early nineteenth century England alone. Certain characteristics of an industrial society had been developing long before. But it was in this age that the evolution of a labouring proletariat, and of a propertied capitalist class was effected. As the Hammonds remark : "The new classes and the new institutions were not new in the sense in which the spinning-jenny was new or the power loom was new. The atmosphere of a capitalist class had already crept over certain industries, but ..... The view that the English ~~peo~~ people were less the same in 1830 as in 1760 would be rejected as no less contrary to reason than the view that English manufactures were the same, or that they still travelled along the same roads, to the same markets, to reach the same customers." (2) X

This change affected agriculture and industry in such a manner as to alter completely what in industry had been known as the "domestic" or "putting out" system, and in agriculture to complete the elimination of the small farmer, which had been commenced with the Elizabethan enclosure movement.

Because of the consolidation of the new manufactories at sources of water power and raw materials such as iron and coal, large factory towns sprang up. To these towns came the pauper labourers of the enclosed villages, the jobless workers who saw their home industries fast disappearing, and the thousands of immigrant Irish. "These causes explain the rapid redistribution of population that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, ...." (3)

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(2) J.L. and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer: 1760 - 1832. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1932) p. 4.

(3) Ibid. p. 13

Furthermore, factory towns could look also for a labour market in the steadily increasing population of the British Isles. In 1811 the population had been approximately 12,000,000, by 1851 it had almost doubled, reaching the figure of 21,000,000. This increase was mainly attributed to a decline in infant mortality. Clapham noted that : "The conquest of small-pox, the curtailment of aguish disorders through drainage, the disappearance of scurvey as a disease of the land, improvements in obstetrics leading to a reduction in the losses both of infant and of maternal life in childbed, the spreading of hospitals, dispensaries, and medical schools, all had helped to save life." (4)

Because of these various factors, industrial towns soon dotted the face of northern England. Cotton mills, woollen mills, iron foundries, lead works, and collieries employed thousands of labourers. The towns these labourers lived in left much to be desired in the way of <sup>a</sup> healthy, orderly life.

After spending perhaps twelve to fourteen hours a day in hot, ill-ventilated factories, men, women and children returned to dwellings that were often mere cellars in the ground. If they were fortunate enough to live above the surface, they were crowded together in single rooms, in courts, and tenements into which daylight rarely penetrated, and fresh air made infrequent visits. Engels decried this situation, remarking : "If the totally planless construction is injurious to the health of the workers by preventing ventilation, this method of shutting them up in

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(4) J. H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain: Vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press 1926) p. 55

courts surrounded on all sides by buildings is far more so.

The air simply cannot escape ... (5)

Without proper accomodation, with more than half the day occupied in tedious labour, it is little wonder that the workers in the "new industry" of Britain were subject to various diseases, had little time for leisure, lacked even an elementary education, and generally sank into a squalor from which society tried to hide its eyes. More than ever the public house became the sanctuary of the poor after working hours. (6)

That society did not recognize the terrible conditions existing in such towns as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Stockport, or Bolton is apparent from the fact that health commissions were continually submitting reports on town welfare which never failed to shock, for the moment at least, members of Parliament, and others who bothered to read such reports.

There were inspected in all, 6951 houses - naturally in Manchester proper alone, Salford and the other suburbs being excluded. Of these, 6565 urgently needed white-washing within; 960 were out of repair; 939 had insufficient drains; 1435 were damp; 452 were badly ventilated; 2221 were without privies. Of the 687 streets inspected, 248 were unpaved, 53 but partially paved; 112 ill-ventilated, 352 containing standing pools, heaps of debris, refuse, etc. To cleanse such an Augean stable before the arrival of cholera was, of course, out of the question. (7)

Still, these conditions were not exceptional in early nineteenth

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- (5) Frederick Engels, The Condition of the English Working Class in 1844. Translated by, Florence K. Wischnewtzky (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1920) p. 55.
- (6) J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Bleak Age: Based on the Chartists (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1934) p. 129.
- (7) Engels, op. cit. p. 64

century England. There was not a sufficient awareness that a new class numbering millions, had been relegated to a life of labour under conditions that would have appeared unbearable to West Indian slaves.

It is not to be thought that all labour lived under such appalling conditions. There were the skilled artisans and mechanics who were, "... the (elite) of the Industrial Revolution and its true bodyguard. They were better paid than their fellow workers, they were on the average more intelligent, and they took the lead in educational movements. They were respected by their employers, who had to consult them and to bow to their technical knowledge." (8) These, however, formed but a small part of England's labouring class.

The agricultural labourer, as noted, was part of this mass movement into industry. Before the development of a machine economy, the rural labourer enjoyed a small plot of land to cultivate, grazing <sup>area</sup> for his cattle, fuel rights in the forest, and some leisure time for himself. With the enclosure movement of the eighteenth century, this pattern of life was rudely changed. The small cultivator could not combat an enclosure act which affected him, for what influence and resources had he compared to a wealthy neighbour; possibly the local landlord, whose influence at Parliament and with local justices of the peace was such, as to assure the enclosure of a particular area.

It is clear then, that it was only the pressure of powerful interests that decided whether a committee

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(8) G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries.  
(London: Longmans Green & Co., 1942) p. 479.

should approve or disapprove of an Enclosure Bill. It was the same pressure that determined the form in which a Bill became law. For a procedure that enabled rich men to fight out their rival claims at Westminster, left the classes that could not send counsel to Parliament without a weapon or a voice. And if there was no lawyer there to put his case, what prospect was there that the obscure cottager, who was to be turned adrift with his family by an Enclosure Bill prompted by a Member or a group of Members, would ever trouble the conscience of a committee of landowners. (9)

Enclosure meant simply that an area would be enclosed for the purpose of large scale cultivation under new techniques and methods. This meant that many tenants could be forced to vacate their holdings, although recompensed at a sum to be decided upon by the particular enclosure committee concerned.

If the committee gave the small tenant a share in the common fields, the expense of having to enclose these areas by order of the act, and the debt entailed by assuming part of the legal cost involved, was often enough to drive him off the land anyway. (10)

Enclosures progressed steadily, as the Napoleonic wars, and after Waterloo, the growing industrial towns, created a demand for larger and larger supplies of agricultural produce.

There were, in 1820, only half a dozen English counties of whose areas more than three per cent remained to be enclosed from the open field state by Act of Parliament; and in these a fair part of the remaining work was done before 1830. (11)

The result of this movement was to break a class of peasant proprietors that had formed the backbone of England's agriculture. (12)

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(9) J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer: 1760-1832. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1932) p. 28.

(10) Ibid. p.p. 73-74.

(11) Clapham, op. cit. I p. 19.

(12) Ibid. p. 81.

Enclosure had added to the thousands of agricultural labourers, who, like the farmer, now enjoyed no vestige of economic independence. "All his auxiliary resources had been taken from him, and he was now a wage earner and nothing more. Enclosure had robbed him of the strip that he had tilled, or the cow he kept on the village pasture, of the fuel that he picked up in the woods, and of the turf that he tore from the common. And while a social revolution had swept away his possessions, an industrial revolution had swept away his earnings. (13)

Such a class became mere day labourers, working for a wage on the farm of a large landowner, or, they migrated to the great industrial towns where the demand for labour had attracted others who had lost their position in society.

The classes we have noticed were of course not reconciled to a complete change in their mode of living overnight. Wrenched from the soil and torn from the home industry, England's labouring classes protested against circumstances they could neither control nor alter. They became convinced of their position as a depressed class, and by petition, organization, union, and rebellion, tried to focus the attention of the government upon their plight.

Unions or societies of working men had existed in Britain long before the advent of the industrial era. These, however, were mainly friendly and benefit societies that sought to provide for their fellow worker some fund when ill, a fraternal body with which he could spend his leisure time, or at the end, provide him

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(13) Ibid., p. 82.

with a decent burial. The type of union that developed in the nineteenth century was far removed from its predecessors, the craft guilds, and the societies of journeymen and apprentices. The modern union came into being with the rise of industry on a large scale. "Trade unions in Yorkshire began with the erection of factories and the use of power" (14) Trade unionism developed along parallel lines with the cotton industry in 1780 when factory methods were extensively applied. (15)

It was not only large scale industry operating with wide financial backing and employing thousands of hands that caused trade unions to arise but also the acceptance by the government of a policy of laissez faire with regard to industry. (16) By 1815 the government had shown its acceptance of this policy by abolishing all statutes introduced in the Elizabethan era to regulate the wages and the labour of apprentices. "It was the change of industrial policy on the part of the government that brought all trades into line, and for the first time produced what can properly be called a Trade Union Movement." (17) To the misery of the worker and his eventual combination in unions, the triumph of laissez faire, and Adam Smith's economic views, had made no small contribution.

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(14) Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1907) p. 34.

(15) Ibid., p.p. 34-35

(16) Engels, op. cit., p. 80.

(17) Webb, op. cit. p. 41



As industrial society became more and more divided horizontally, , with a class of propertyless workers and wealthy masters emerging, the old medieval safeguards which had existed when society was divided vertically or trade by trade, disappeared. The working class thus formed new organizations, through which a protest against high prices, low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions would be registered. (18)

It is not to be imagined however, that combination along the new lines was to be quickly and effectively achieved. A primary obstacle was the opinion in the governing classes that a combination was necessarily a subversive organization and a conspiracy. The Webbs note that "the common law doctrine, of the illegality of proceedings 'in restraint of trade;' as subsequently interpreted by the judges, of itself made illegal all combinations ~~whatever~~ whatsoever ... to regulate the conditions of their work." (19)

This fear and distrust of the working classes was put into effect by the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 which made illegal all combinations of working men. Even here Parliament was not breaking new ground. "... prior to the general Acts of 1799 and 1800 against all combinations of journeymen, Parliament was, from the beginning of the eighteenth century perpetually enacting statutes forbidding combinations in particular trades." (20)

Such events occurred particularly during the period of the war

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(18) Ibid., p. 39.

(19) Ibid., p. 60.

(20) Ibid., p. 61.

with France, when British society actually felt the need for legislative measures to prevent any outbreaks of "Jacobinism", such as it had witnessed in France during the Terror. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended, and parallel with the Combination Acts, the corresponding societies which had sprung up, were declared to be illegal. (21)

The French Revolution gave to British radicalism a philosophy and because of this radical philosophy based upon Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, repressive measures were taken against trade unions, the London Corresponding Society, and the Society for Constitutional Information. The Annual Register for 1801 gives us an idea of what this sentiment was as regards unions, societies and working class organizations.

It appeared that one of the principal objects of their leaders had been to work upon all persons whose religious opinions differed from those of the establishment: for which purpose the general executive had recommended it in the strongest manner to their followers, to mix as much as possible with such persons, and, by concealing their own sentiments, which were averse to all religion, and seemingly adopting those of the persons with whom they should communicate, to gain proselytes to their political designs, and thus promote the execution of their determined purpose to overthrow the constitution. In the confidential meetings of the initiated, however, they endeavoured to turn the people against religion, in order to overthrow the state through the church, observing that, if there were no church, there would be no king ... in those confidential meetings of the initiated, were plans of insurrection to be excited on pretext of the high price of provisions, but directed to the subversion of government; and the means of procuring arms of the most dangerous species." (22)

This attitude, reflected in the acts was directed at the new ~~max~~

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(21) Elie Halévy, A History of the English People. Vol. II. (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd. 1926) p. 23.

(22) p. 176 n. 176

mass of workers who were rising up in the woollen, cotton, and coal industries of the north, and not so much against the skilled workers of the long established trade clubs and friendly societies who could be more easily kept in hand. "So lax was the administration of the law that George White, the energetic clerk to Hume's committee, asserted that the Act of 1800 had 'been in general a dead letter upon those artisans, ... namely, the shoemakers, painters, papermakers, shipbuilders, tailors, etc., who have had their regular societies and houses of call as though no such Act was in existence' . (23)

Trade unions finally received legal recognition by the repeal in 1824 of the Combination Acts. This was mainly due to the untiring efforts of Joseph Hume, who safely piloted the repeal through Parliament.

With this survey of the growth of a purely labouring and propertyless class we can proceed to note what the attitude of various social reformers was to this new England prior to the reform era of 1832.

One of the nineteenth century's most interesting reformers, both for his creations and for his ideas was Robert Owen, often regarded as the father of modern Socialism. A successful manufacturer, Owen was farsighted enough to see what the results of factory life were upon his workers. A moral and a physical weakness was usually the state of those whose labour extended over twelve hours or more. Domestic life was broken up by the employment of women and children, and education was rarely heard

of for the labouring masses.

Owen developed the view that if the environment of a factory were changed, the lives of its inhabitants would be changed also. G. D. H. Cole notes : "He acted from the outset on the principle that was the foundation of his social creed. The environment, material as well as moral, must be made good, if good men were to be developed, or good material or moral results secured." (24)

To effect this, Owen introduced at his New Lanark Mills several reforms, which were new for that age. (Owen entered upon the managership of New Lanark in 1799). Here, he dispensed with paupers apprenticed from the local parishes, (25) improved housing conditions, (26) reformed the conduct of his workers in the factory, (27) and what is perhaps most important, he started a system of education for the children of factory workers; a scheme almost unheard of in England at that time.

Education at New Lanark included, for children of all ages, a large element of recreation and amusement. For the younger children, it was wholly of this kind. The New Lanark children were not admitted to the school until they were at least five years old, ... the playground, with its open and covered spaces, was there for them to use and enjoy ... The young child is not to be taught directly; but he or she is to be surrounded by an atmosphere of mutual consideration which will provide a right basis for the teaching that comes later. Owen's system of instruction for the young is, on its moral side, chiefly one of precept and communal example. (28)

Robert Owen went on to head later an organized Trade Union movement in the 1830's, which was called the Grand National

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(24) G.D.H. Cole, Robert Owen (London: Ernest Benn Ltd. 1925) p.74

(25) Ibid., p. 73

(26) Ibid., p.p. 77-78

(27) Ibid., p.p. 78-79

(28) Ibid., p. 101

Consolidated Trades Union; an attempt to encompass within one body the workers of all trades. Owen is noted also for his development of villages run upon a collective basis. Thus, sharing of production and distribution was his answer to the growing pauper population of the countryside. These communal villages were established in England and as far away as New Harmony in Indiana. Perhaps Owen's most durable contribution to the amelioration of the working class was the cooperative movement which took its beginning from his villages of cooperation.

At first Owen secured the attention of leading members of Parliament and prelates of the Church of England for his schemes, but when he made public his rejection of organized religion this support rapidly dwindled. One of his last contributions to the working class was the creation of "Labour Exchanges" in which labour power was to be the unit of account, and currency expressing this value and called "Labour Notes" was to be issued. "If the average physical power of a man or a horse can be calculated, so, he urged, could average human labour-power; and the correct way of valuing commodities, ... was by calculating the amount of average human labour-power incorporated in each commodity offered for sale. This principle he ... sought to express in practice through the Labour Exchange. The new currency of "Labour Notes", which he issued from the Exchange, was the expression of the new measure of Value." (29) Needless to say the experiment proved to be a failure.

Despite the rejection of Owen's communal villages, labour exchanges, and all-inclusive trade unions by English society, he

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(29) Ibid., p. 198

did show an awareness of the social problem posed by a vast, inarticulate, working class. His attempts at collectivism did foreshadow the development of a later socialism, though in a very different form from what he had envisaged. The Webbs remark that "... the Socialism of Owen led him to propose a ... scheme which was not even socialistic, and which, if it could have been possibly carried out, would have simply, arbitrarily redistributed the capital of the country, without altering or superseding the capitalist system in the least." (30)

Social reform also caught the eye of William Cobbett, a fiery radical in early nineteenth century England. Cobbett had noticed the degradation of Britain's once strong peasant class, he himself being purely peasant in origin. (31) He was shocked at the sight of the factory replacing the medieval church, and he campaigned for a return to the medieval England of a former age. Because of this approach he was at once a radical and a conservative. (32)

In the reform of existing institutions, Cobbett and the utilitarians had a common point. But Cobbett's reforms were to be those in which all sections of society were to be given representation; and to this end he opposed equality, free trade and cheapness, and in fact the philosophy of the utilitarians. "To protect the common people, to restore them to what he imagined

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(30) Webb, op. cit., p. 143.

(31) Dictionary of National Biography, vol. III p. 600

(32) Ibid.

had been their old status, he is willing to use any possible method." (33)

Cobbett's descriptions of the village labourer during an age of enclosure and eviction bear notice: "Go down into the villages ... and then look at the miserable sheds in which the labourers reside: Look at these hovels, made of mud and straw; bits of glass, or old cast-off windows, without frames or hinges frequently, but merely stuck in the mud wall. Enter them and look at the bits of chairs or stools; the wretched boards tacked together to serve as a table; the floor of pebble, broken brick or the bare ground; look at the thing called a bed, and survey the rags on the backs of the wretched inhabitants." (34)

Cobbett the real conservative could not adapt himself to the changed conditions and because of his failure to salvage what was left of a bygone era, his conservatism was blended with radicalism. To this extent he anticipates Benjamin Disraeli. "But he showed a genuine and ardent interest in the welfare of the poor, especially the agricultural labourer; and in many ways as in his opinions about the Reformation, anticipated the doctrine of the Young England party as led by Disraeli." (35)

Social reform in the pre-reform era was also the objective of that group known as the philosophical radicals. However,

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(33) Crane Brinton, English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century. (London: Ernest Benn Ltd. 1933) p. 69.

(34) William Cobbett, Rural Rides (London, 1830) p. 348 as quoted in J. H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol. I. (Cambridge University Press. 1926) p. 28.

(35) Dictionary of National Biography. Vol III. p. 601.

their philosophy differed from that of both the Owenites and the romantic Tories like Cobbett. Taking their lead from Jeremy Bentham, a group of the philosophical radicals known as the utilitarians evolved a creed which had a considerable effect upon English society and gained a large number of adherents. They argued that the enlightened self-interest of individuals and therefore of the community leads to a maximum of pleasure and a minimum of pain. The community could reach this ideal point by assessing existing institutions in the light of their usefulness. This principle became known as the philosophy of utility. If an institution did not possess this attribute, it had to be either done away with or reformed. The philosophy of the utilitarians, of course, could not accept the approach Cobbett advocated, which sought a return to older institutions. Objects of attack for the Benthamites were the established church, the restrictive tariffs on imports, the poor laws, and the unrepresentative House of Commons.

The Benthamites' philosophy first appealed to the middle class but later gained working class support. However, as labouring societies lost their freedom under the "Jacobin" legislation of 1799 and 1800, Benthamism became more and more the mouthpiece of an unrepresented middle class. "He wished to sweep away precisely all those things that stood in the way of the English industrialist - feudal law, primogeniture, the tariff, apprenticeship, the old poor law, sinecures, and extravagant government generally, nepotism in Church and State,

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the lack of enterprise characteristic of a landed aristocracy." (36)

This philosophy, though middle class, and seeking the liberty of the individual, did secure for the working man the right to combine in 1824. The repeal that year of the Combination Acts secured by Joseph Hume, was mainly the work of a group of Benthamites who had approached the problem with the principle of "utility" in mind. (37) On questions of church reform, financial reform, parliamentary reform, civil and criminal law reform, Bentham and his followers presented an approach to social change that certainly deserved attention in the pre-reform era.

With the development of conditions that obviously needed reform in industry, it might be asked what measures the government took or did not take before 1832. One of the first steps taken to protect operatives in industry was the Act of 1802, introduced by the first Sir Robert Peel, for the regulation of hours of labour of children in the cotton trade. The mills of Sir Robert had been notorious for their poor working conditions and long hours.

Faced with this situation, he determined to remedy the problem, and by such an attitude anticipated the future conduct of his son who turned reformer on subjects he had formerly

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(36) Brinton, op. cit., p. 26

(37) Halévy, op. cit., II. p.p. 202-203.

defended or had been unaware of. "With an intellectual honesty that is rare, he disowned the illusion with which most millowners satisfied their consciences, that the victims of this system were really the gainers by it." (38)

The Act of 1802 limited the hours of labour of apprentices in factories where more than twenty persons were employed to twelve hours a day, exclusive of meal times. (39) The gradual elimination of night work was also provided for. (40) A form of inspection was also provided for, to see that the regulations of the Act were carried out. Two inspectors unconnected with the mills were appointed; one a clergyman, and one a magistrate. This particular point did not trouble the mill owners much. "The bark of the Act was worse than its bite; the magistrate and the persons appointed as visitors did not push matters to uncomfortable extremes, and at most places it was left to the employers to decide whether or to what extent they should obey the law." (41)

It should be noted that not all factory owners and manufacturers sweated their employees because they were merely calloused and brutal. Many of them no doubt wished to grant higher wages for shorter hours. The desperate nature of industrial competition forced such industrialists to adopt measures that worked to the disadvantage of their labourers, if they were to hope to

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(38) Hammond, The Town Labourer, p. 150.

(39) Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. 42 George III. c. 73. Hereinafter - Statutes

(40) Ibid.

(41) Hammond, The Town Labourer. p.p. 152-154.

stay in competition with their many opponents in industry. )42)

The next step taken by the state to enact legislation for the protection of workers in industry that merits attention, was the Cotton Factories Regulation Act of 1819. (43) This bill was the mutilated result of a measure the first Sir Robert Peel had pressed for in June of 1815, which would have provided for regular and paid inspectors of factories, to see that the regulations of prescribed legislation were carried out.

The act applied to cotton mills and factories only and provided that no child under nine was to be employed, children between nine and sixteen were to work thirteen and a half hours ~~xxxy~~ a day, allowing an hour and a half for meals. This act provided for inspection under the system the Act of 1802 had set up, which was obviously a major defect. "The great blemish of the Act was that it left the old arrangements for inspection by a magistrate and a clergyman unchanged, thus destroying its whole efficacy." (44)

However, the act of 1819 must not be dismissed as wholly ineffective. It did provide for a specification of the number of hours of labour ~~for~~ children should work, and it did acknowledge the state's right to protect those whose position was such as made it impossible for them to protect themselves. "The Act of 1819, like the Act of 1802, remained to a great extent a dead letter; but it was of inestimable value, for

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(42) Engels, op. cit., p. 81

(43) Statutes, 59 George III. c. 66

(44) Hammond, The Town Labourer, p. 169.

it asserted clearly and for the first time the great principles, that it is the duty of the State to protect from industrial exploitation those who cannot protect themselves, and that the theory of freedom of contract cannot apply to a child." (45)

The last important piece of industrial legislation for our purposes in the pre-reform era was the Bill of 1825 introduced by John Cam Hobhouse, a Whig with radical leanings. (46) This act provided for the reduction of working hours for children in cotton factories from twelve to nine hours on Saturdays, and forbade factory owners, their fathers and sons, from sitting as magistrates to try offenders against factory act regulations. (47)

This act was much watered down from what Hobhouse had originally desired. He had argued for the reduction of the working hours of children from twelve to eleven, but on account of opposition in Parliament, he had to be content with the reduction of hours on Saturday alone.

The condition of the agricultural labourer received little effective aid from the government during the pre-reform era. Driven from the village, he migrated to the industrial towns or he remained as a day labourer on wages that were kept at a low level, partly as a result of the Speenhamland system introduced in 1795. By this policy wages were supplemented by rates from the parish authorities; regulated on a sliding scale as the price of bread rose or fell. The net result of this relief was that for

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(45) A. A. W. Ramsay, Sir Robert Peel  
(London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1928)

(46) Dictionary of National Biography. Vol. IX p.p. 941-944

(47) Statutes, 6 George IV. c. 63.

forty years, till the Poor Law Reform of 1834 was introduced, the village or rural labourer was forced into pauperism. "The importance of these years is that though the governing classes did not then introduce a new principle, they applied to the normal case methods of relief and treatment that had hitherto been reserved for the exceptions. The Poor Law which had once been the hospital became now the prison of the poor. Designed to relieve his necessities, it was now his bondage. ... This was the basis on which the governing classes rebuilt the English village." (48)

In brief, this has been a survey of expanding Britain up to the era of reform which commenced in 1832. It was, as has ~~be~~ been noted, an age during which industry and agriculture were so transformed and revolutionized that they bore little if any resemblance to the economy of a former time. The first three decades of the nineteenth century had witnessed the rise of new classes, whose plight and misery had gone unrecognized by society, save for a few whose efforts were generally regarded as either ludicrous, or revolutionary <sup>and</sup> ~~or~~ subversive.

The role played by the state in this period was generally a minor one and of little avail, as is shown by the attempts to protect child ~~labor~~ labour in the factories. The years 1800 to 1830 had seen the rise of a powerful middle class which had grown wealthy from the profits of industry. It was conscious of its wealth and power, and aware of its exclusion from political power at Westminster. The territorial <sup>aristocracy</sup> ~~autocracy~~ had also gained in wealth, its landed holdings yielding a revenue

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(48) Hammond, The Village Labourer, p. 15.

that had been increased by enclosures and by the rising demand industry had created for agricultural produce. It held the power of government, and admitted the middle class to government only when a revolution threatened in 1832. The class of labourers had also multiplied. In mine, factory and in the country they had increased in numbers. No profits or gains had been secured by this group, except for the skilled artisan of whom note has already been made. The labourer was the victim of the new order in industry and agriculture; he remained inarticulate, unenfranchised, and depressed. The state had done little for him, for it was unaware of the problem posed by the "new" industry and did not quite know how to cope with it. "The treatment of social and economic questions was more haphazard and empirical than Englishmen were ready to acknowledge. If a practical solution suggested itself, if a tentative experiment could be made, the doctrine of laissez faire would be thrust aside, only to be used again after another failure to discover the way out of a difficulty." (49)

It is now necessary to turn to the period in which Britain subjected herself to a scrupulous self examination, and to note what the attitude of the governing classes and government was towards the "other" England whose misery was so well revealed by the Commissions of Enquiry of the reform era. This was to be the age in which social critics like Lord Ashley, Michael Oastler, Richard Sadler, and Benjamin Disraeli were to place Commission of Inquiry evidence before an apathetic society.

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(49) E. L. Woodward, The Age of Reform  
(Oxford University Press, 1938) p. 15.

The birth of the working class has now been sketched, a class drawn in many instances from former rural 40/- freeholders who had possessed the county vote. Their descendants, both urban and rural, were now voiceless in the government of the country. In village and town they could only watch, without influencing the direction of affairs by the ruling classes above them. It is to these ruling classes and their attitude to the worker that we must now turn.

A spirit of humanitarianism had developed during the eighteenth century, and had carried over into the nineteenth. Thus far it had done splendid work for the negro, and by a vigorously conducted campaign had abolished the Slave Trade in 1807. For the white worker of England it had accomplished considerably less. The factory acts of 1802, 1819, and 1825 have been noted in some detail in Chapter II, and it is evident that they did very little for the working class. The repeal of the ~~Combination~~ Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, which took place in 1824, was also referred to in that chapter. It was an advance for the working class, in that it permitted them to organize to fix the rate of wages, the daily hours of work, and the amount of work to be performed. (1) But that part of society which was articulate and held political power feared the new weight of the working class, and considered the repeal an ill-advised step. (2)

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(1) Halevy, op. cit., II. p. 205

(2) Ibid., p. 206.

Another reform of the pre-1832 period was made in the religious sphere. In Ireland, agitation directed by Daniel O'Connell and emphasized by the Catholic Association had reached a point at which the government had either to grant Catholic Emancipation, or suffer the possibility of another rebellion in that country. In 1829 the measure was carried by Sir Robert Peel and the Duke of Wellington.

Catholic Emancipation, strictly speaking, was not social legislation. But in connection with the different classes of English society and their attitude towards reform it deserves notice. The passage of Catholic Emancipation proved that reform was possible even before that major reform of 1832, the changing of representation in the House of Commons. It also emphasized a point worthy of notice in the reform era, that party labels, such as Whig, Tory, and Radical were not all inclusive. Catholic Emancipation was strongly opposed by the ultra-Tories who regarded the measure as tantamount to destroying the landed interest in Ireland and wrecking the established church there. J. W. Croker referred to this group remarking : "Winchelsea has declared that he will never come into the House of Lords again, and the D. of C. (Duke of Cumberland) I am told, declares that as soon as the Bill shall be law, he will leave England for ever." (3)

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(3) Letter of John W. Croker to Lord Hertford, April 9, 1839.  
Croker Papers II. p. 13.



This issue marked the cleavage between the moderate conservative and ultra conservative views of the Tory party.

On the emancipation problem, the Whigs were nominally not in opposition for it had long been a plank in their platform. (4) Nevertheless a large section of Whig support came from the middle class. This group, which included Dissenting sects of all forms and shapes, was opposed to what was considered a concession to Romanism. Halevy remarks that "... The Methodists, ... remained obdurate, and their views were shared by all those among the older sects who had been imbued with the spirit of the evangelical revival. There was many a prejudice - violent instincts deeprooted in the national past - hatred of Ireland, hatred of France, hatred of Roman interference - ..." (5)

The middle class, though usually Whig, was Protestant enough to support Tory opposition to Catholic relief. It took a Tory leader with Whig support to pass the measure. (6)

Thus, before 1832 reform of institutions was possible, though in no great degree. Humanitarianism had achieved little in the way of beneficial legislation for the working classes. Furthermore, no one party could lay claim to a monopoly on reform, for no one definitive party existed as the Catholic Emancipation problem had so well illustrated.

The most important reform which shook British society in

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(4) H. W. C. Davis, The Age of Grey and Peel, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1929) p. 197.

(5) Halevy, op. cit., II. pp. 270-271.

(6) Ramsay, op. cit., p. 121.

the 1830's, and perhaps in the whole nineteenth century was the alteration of the system of representation in the House of Commons. With the growth of manufacturing towns, to which had come vast numbers of workers, there arose a demand that these areas be given representation in Parliament. Parallel with this cry was the denunciation of the borough system, in which the franchise was confined to a select few, granted to those who held residence in a town, which was known as a burgage vote, or in more open boroughs where freemen could vote. The whole system however, was open to bribery, corruption, and intimidation. (7) It had become evident that Parliament had not changed with the change in the country's economy, and that some reform was needed. (8)

Accordingly, the administration of Lord Grey, formed in 1830, introduced a measure into Parliament in March of 1831 to meet this demand. We need not go into a too intimate study of the legislation but have only to note how far representation was to be changed.

The proposals were as follows: to disfranchise sixty boroughs of less than two thousand inhabitants that returned 119 members, take one member from forty-seven boroughs with a population of between two thousand and four thousand, give 97 new seats to England, 16 to Wales, 5 to Scotland, 3 to Ireland; give two members each to seven leading industrial towns including Manchester and Birmingham; give an additional twenty towns one

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(7) Ibid., p. 142.

(8) Ibid., p. 141.

member; and double the representation of twenty six counties. The franchise was granted in boroughs to householders rated at an annual rental of £10 or over, and allowed the vote to county inhabitants who were rated as £10 copyholders or £50 leaseholders. The 40/- freeholder retained his vote, while the freeman in the boroughs lost his.

This Whig measure which was finally accepted with important modifications in 1832 was an excellent barometer for the views of the various classes of English society. The Tory attitude was generally one of fear and trepidation that a revolution would engulf the country if once a concession were made. Croker felt that : "... In this state of the public mind, nothing more is wanted than any unhappy vacillation or weakness of the Government, to break down the dikes and floodgates, and lay the whole country under the wave of reform. What would rise out of that deluge neither you nor I nor any man can know or guess, and having convinced myself that no human power can control the flood if once let loose, and that no human sagacity can foretell what are to be its consequences, I am obliged to say that we are bound to resist it altogether." (9)

The Radical group within Parliament and in the country felt that the measure was not sufficient and still left much to be desired. Sir Charles Greville called the Bill :  
"... - a sweeping measure indeed; much more so than anyone had imagined, because the Ministers had said it was one which

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(9) Letter of John W. Croker to Sir Robert Peel. Feb. 1, 1832.  
Croker Papers II. p. 53.

~~(10) Greville Memoirs, II. p. 123.~~

would give general satisfaction, whereas this must dissatisfy all the moderate and will probably just stop short enough not to satisfy the Radicals." (10)

The unrepresented middle classes, those who had attained power, prestige, and wealth during the development of a machine economy, welcomed the new Bill. For them it would mean political voice which they had not previously had in Parliament to the extent that the territorial aristocracy had. The Edinburgh Review welcomed the reform with the comment that "The reasoning part of the community, - the most important and respectable portion of the people; those in the middle ranks, - will give the present Ministers credit for these principles; and to that part of the country they will, beyond all doubt, wisely make their appeal, - fleeing to them for an honest, a conscientious, a steadfast support, at once against the bigots of alarm and abuse, who would have nothing repaired, and against the zealots of innovating reform, who would have everything torn down." (11)

Though the Tory view was that reform would endanger the ancient institutions of England, and the Whigs that the middle class, commercial and industrial groups should receive representation, there was a general fear that franchise extension meant an upheaval of society. This approach was more prominently put forward by the Tories: "... that against a system of reform we are pledged and fixed; that any

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(10) Greville Memoirs, II. p. 123.

(11) "The Results of the General Election",  
The Edinburgh Review LII (Oct., 1830) pp. 536-537

step, however otherwise innocuous or even beneficial, which is part of a system, must be opposed as such - ... and finally that the question is not Reform, but in fact Revolution" (12)

The whole question of reform of Parliament shook the nation during 1831 and 1832. As noted, the Tory landed interest was opposed to Reform, the Whig middle class group in favor of Reform and the working classes in a state of agitation for fear the Bill would be rejected, although they were to receive nothing from it. In fact it was partly due to the agitation of the labourer that the Bill was received, for the middle class relied to a good extent upon their protests and petitions. "Both the middle class and the proletariat were represented in the ranks of the reformers." (13)

Elie Halevy contended that although the industrial and commercial ~~middle~~ middle class had gained a victory over the landed aristocracy, the victory had been attained only with the aid of workers organized in political unions, and whose potential strength had intimidated the House of Lords.

"The object ... was to bring home to the Tories the absurdity of their schemes, and the radical weakness of their position by organizing throughout the country a species of political strike ... Against a universal movement of this kind, a mere handful of aristocrats supported by 11,000 mercenaries ... were powerless." (14)

(12) Letter of John W. Croker to Lord Dover, Nov. 7, 1831  
Croker Papers, II p. 97.

(13) Halevy, op. cit., III p. 44

(14) Ibid., p. 57.

The Reform Bill as it affected the working classes, the "other" England, is of special importance to this study. It proved that since Parliament could be reformed, any reform was possible. It opened the floodgates which introduced an era, during which England was forcibly impressed with the picture of another nation it had formerly disregarded.

The labourer, though he was to force the Bill through the Lords by his latent strength and power in the country, was to receive nothing immediately from it. In fact in the boroughs where freemen were allowed to vote, he was disfranchised. (15) Working class leaders by petitions, mass meetings, and organization had contributed greatly to the 1832 triumph of the middle class. (16) So obvious had labour's strength become, that the middle class was accepted in lieu of what could have been a revolution. "The Aristocrats provided those who believed Reform was a preceeder of revolution with a strong argument, of which full use was made during the final debates on Reform." (17)

The labouring class, though politically unrepresented, had participated in the opening of an era of reform during which it was to receive a fuller recognition by English society.

After 1832, there followed in rapid succession a series of government appointed commissions of enquiry. These commissions

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(15) G. M. Trevelyan, Lord Grey of the Reform Bill.  
(London: Longmans Green & Co. 1920) p. 250.

(16) Ibid., p. 285.

(17) Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement  
(London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1920) p. 59

and their reports dealt with topics that included child labour in industry, adult labour in industry, municipal elections, the poor laws, and sanitary conditions in towns. Rarely had a nation been subjected to such close scrutiny and investigation as during the reform era. Such commissions of enquiry were not an innovation; but the Whig Government of the post Reform Bill period did ~~not~~ give them a prominence they had not enjoyed for years. (18) The reports submitted by these committees were the basis for the Municipal Reform Act, the Factory Act, and the New Poor Law, that were put into the statute books of the 1830's. (19) The evidence submitted by the many commissions of enquiry were to be a most potent method of reform. The theory behind such investigations was to provide a more adequate information on a subject and to dispel ignorance. (20) The commissioners, authors of the innumerable Blue Books, presented to English society a mass of evidence concerning the "other" England about which it knew too little.

As these reports gave descriptions of working class conditions, it is necessary to refer to a few of the more important ones.

One of the most important commissions of inquiry was that appointed in 1831 to investigate conditions in factories. During 1830 agitation had developed among the industrial workers of Yorkshire for a legal regulation of conditions and hours of work.

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(18) H. McDowell Clokie and J. William Robinson, Royal Commissions of Inquiry (Stanford University Press: 1937) p. 99

(19) Ibid., pp. 99-100

(20) Ibid., p. 97

This was of little avail for the manufacturers of Scotland, fearing any interference with their industry, prevented any remedial measures being taken. (21) The agitation was renewed by a coalition of workers whose protests were organized by Robert Oastler. In Parliament the agitation was stoutly conducted by Michael Sadler, a Leeds Banker, and a Tory of radical leanings. "The movement quickly assumed the aspect of a Radical Tory coalition." (22)

Sadler's efforts led to the appointment of a Select Committee to survey labour conditions in the factories. He was also appointed chairman of the committee. Sadler deserves recognition for through his energy an inquiry was conducted into industrial life and evidence was presented that another nation existed in England of which few knew and of which even fewer cared to know.

From the data collected, a Bill was submitted to Parliament in 1833, calling for the abolition of child labour under nine years of age, the reduction to ten hours labour for all under eighteen, and the elimination of night work for all under twenty-one. This end of the proceedings was handled by Lord Ashley, another philanthropic Tory, Sadler having lost his seat in the Commons in 1832. Lord Ashley's commission of enquiry into factory conditions had succeeded Sadler's Select Committee and was the real basis for the Factory Act of 1833. It was upon the evidence submitted by the commissioners that Ashley

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(21) Halevy, op. cit., III p. 110.

(22) Ibid., p. 111.



founded his proposed legislation.

Despite the description of child labour in factories that the commissioners had presented, they as a group opposed Ashley's measure. Being strong disciples of Bentham, they were averse to any interference with the rights of the individual, and because of this opposed Ashley's proposed regulation of laws. "They objected to Lord Ashley's Bill that it was a dishonest measure which while professing to be a bill to protect children was in reality intended to secure the legal restriction of the working day of the adults." (23) The House of Commons from which legislation had to come, was of the same frame of mind, and would not be convinced of the conditions factory workers laboured under. "The average Member wanted his mind set at rest about the children in the mills, he wanted at the same time to be assured that profits would not suffer, nor the country's industries collapse. This desire was accompanied by a deep dislike and mistrust of trade unions and of working class agitations of every kind. The average Member was enough in earnest to support Ashley if he were given no effective alternative." (24)

This was the attitude of the House of Commons to which the wealthy middle class had just recently gained increased representation. As a result, Ashley's Bill was dropped, and

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(23) Ibid., p. 114

(24) J. L. and Barbara Hammond, Lord Shaftesbury (London: Longmans Green & Co, 1936) pp. 30-31.

Lord Althorp succeeded in passing a measure, which while it regulated child labour up to thirteen years of age, did not interfere with the hours of labour over that age. (25) The 1833 Factory Act was a defeat for a shorter working day for the labourers and a victory for the manufacturers. "In this matter Althorp followed the findings of the Commissioners... who were not the creatures of the ministry, but very able exponents of the views of middle class radicalism." (26) Nevertheless, the commission's findings had convinced English society sufficiently, that some form of protection for child labour was introduced. Mills employing children were subjected to inspection. (27)

As the factory commission had slowly turned the eyes of the country towards the working class, the manufacturing element in self defence looked to the restrictive Corn Laws as a reason and an excuse for low wages, long hours, and bad working conditions in industry. "Mr. Fryer denied, that the avarice of the manufacturers had anything whatsoever to do with the question. The excessive labour of children in factories was occasioned by the Corn Laws, and other such impositions on the labour of the people. When those taxes were repealed, he would cordially support any measure for

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(25) Halevy, op. cit., III pp. 114-115

(26) Davis, op. cit., pp. 244-245.

(27) Ibid., p. 245.

diminishing hours of labour ..." (28)

Unlike the manufacturing class Sadler, who had originated the 1831-32 commission of inquiry, recognized the duty of the state towards those who were unable to protect themselves. ~~He stated~~ He stated that "... it was the especial duty of the legislature to endeavour to secure the happiness and ameliorate the moral condition of these poor and unprotected children. Ten hours a day to work ... was as much as the constitution of children would bear, indeed it was too much, ... If there was any one subject that deserved the serious attention of the House, this was it, when neither the parents nor the sufferers themselves were free agents, but were the victims of an unjust and odious system." (29)

Unfortunately, as noted, Sadler's views were not held by the government, the manufacturer, or by a majority of society. The Edinburgh Review in commenting upon factory regulations in 1833 could see only conspiracy, dissension, and even revolution in a measure that was one of the first taken by society to care for millions who had heretofore received little or no recognition. In reference to the Factory Act of 1833 it remarked that,

... while the philanthropists promoted it from principle, and conservative politicians hoped to break up the influence of the Whig party in the manufacturing districts, there is ~~no~~ reason to suppose, that "canny Yorkshire" saw in the consequences of a hopeful scheme

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(28) Debates of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Hereinafter referred to as Debates . Feb. 26. 1833, p. 1159.

(29) Debates, Feb. 7, 1832, p. 22.

for obtaining equal pay for less labour. Its chief agents were, therefore, loudly cheered on by all that designing class among the operatives, who have undertaken the great experiment of forcibly raising wages. By them it was considered as only one mode of effecting what the Trade Unions seek to obtain by other means - the absolute destruction of the capitalists, or their complete subjection to the committees of their workmen. (30)

From the evidence cited it is obvious that society, despite the findings of a royal commission, did not yet appreciate its duties towards the "other nation". Even so, any law that would protect labour, in addition to running into opposition from the factory owners, often met with opposition from the parents of child labourers. Lord John Russell stated in the House that "It was, however, very difficult to enforce the law...against the short-sighted interests both of the factory proprietors...seeing, also, that the interests of the manufacturers and the parents were likely to work against the operation of any law on the subject, he could not promise ...that any such law would be carried into effect without its frequent violation both in tenour and in spirit." (31)

Thus with the Whig cabinet proceeding cautiously, with the manufacturing element bitterly hostile, and with the leader of the opposition, Peel, being rather taciturn, (32) the labouring class by the Act of 1833 had received a recognition of their

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(30) Terrens, R. "On Wages and Co,binations" The Edinburgh Review, LIX (Oct. 1834) p. 354.

(31) Debates, June 22, 1838. pp. 970-971.

(32) Ramsay, op. cit., p. 172.

plight but not an amelioration of it, except insofar as the hours of the adult were dependent upon the hours of the child. Under the regulation of the Act, a manufacturer who broke any law would not suffer any loss as the fine usually imposed was insignificant compared to the profit gained by the infraction. (33)

The next major reform resulting from the commissions of enquiry appointed by the Whig administration was the Poor Law of 1834. This reform was designed to meet the problems of an increasing pauper population and an increasing poor rate. The prevailing theory among the governing classes was that public relief for destitution had a degrading effect upon the recipient. This view was heightened by the philosophy of the Reverend T. R. Malthus, who held that as population increased the sustenance to be received from agriculture to provide for this population would not expand at the same ratio. This situation would thus lead to an over-populated Britain and a declining level of wages. Following from this it was argued that any relief to the poor was useless and actually harmful, as it encouraged idleness and contributed to an increase in population. Behind these arguments too, lay the fact that the cost for poor relief which fell on landed property had been increasing steadily during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This and the theories of Malthus persuaded the landed aristocracy that a reform of the old Elizabethan poor laws was necessary. "Malthus is the

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(33) Debates, July 20, 1838, p. 390.

~~(34) Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Poor Law History, Part II.  
(London: Longmans Green & Co., 1929) p. 25~~

father, not only of the new Poor Law, but of all our latter-day societies for the organization of charity." (34)

To meet this problem a Commission of Inquiry was appointed in 1832 to investigate the poor laws. It was a non-partisan body, but its members were faithful to Bentham and the utilitarians. As the Webbs noted: "the Poor Law Inquiry Commission of 1832 became...essentially an organ of the 'enlightenment' in Political Science that was in these years emanating from Bentham, and his immediate followers." (35)

The detailed results of the report need not concern us. It did point out to the government the poverty and destitution of thousands of rural labourers. The New Poor Law of 1834 achieved what the landed interest had desired. It made relief granted by parish authorities to the pauper extremely difficult to obtain. Through the medium of parish workhouses, paupers were persuaded that employment in industrial areas or on farms as day labourers was perhaps the lesser of two evils. The parish workhouses were certainly not centres of idleness and luxury. So detested were they, that rural labourers often revolted against the imposition of poor law regulations, being led by such radical orators as Robert Oastler and John Rayner Stephens. "Oastler and Stephens founded in every locality Anti-Poor Law Associations, which were finally federated in

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(34) Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Poor Law History, Part II. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1929) p. 25

(35) Ibid., p. 51.

one Association. They held mass meetings at which they influenced the popular indignation against the...workhouse. (36)

The Tory interests in the counties, representing the landed aristocracy, welcomed the reform, for despite its harsh treatment of a class of rural labourers, it did remove from property a heavy charge. (37) The strongly Tory Quarterly Review took what can be called a harsh approach to pauper relief:

The simple act of lowering the diet of the poor house to at least the level of the independent labourer's fare, would, we believe, without any other assistance, be sufficient,...to correct almost every disorder to which our late poor-law system has subjected us; for as soon as the poor house shall cease to be attractive, the whole of the physical as well as moral machinery for repelling applicants must at once become useless lumber, and if a healthy reluctance can only be created among the indolent...to enter the parish gates, it must...follow that a manly desire to support themselves will instantly burst into being. (38)

Further reference to contemporary opinion indicates that the pauper class was not to receive much consideration from either the landed interest or the rising middle class. The Whig Edinburgh Review which espoused the cause of the industrious middle classes gave as its opinion on the new Poor Law that: "The effects of the measure so far as it has hitherto been carried, have fully answered the most sanguine

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(36) Halévy, op. cit., III pp. 293-294.

(37) "English Charity" The Quarterly Review, LIII. (April 1835) p. 490.

(38) Ibid.,

expectations of its proposers. ...The effects of the progressive discontinuance of the allowance system, and the entire cessation of outdoor relief to the able-bodied, has been to cause the absorption of almost the whole of the surplus of able bodied labourers." (39) In condemning the old poor laws the Edinburgh Review lauded the industrious classes that could care for themselves. It seemed to overlook the fact that there were those who because of age, sickness, and infirmity could not look after themselves, and were not those to whom the discipline of the poor law ought in justice to have been extended.

The poor hard-working rate payer, it has been well described, rises early, and retires late to his rest; he works hard, and he fares hard, to provide subsistence for his family. He would feed them better, but the prodigal must first be fed. He would purchase warmer clothing for them, but the children of the prostitute must first be clothed. He would, from what he has to spare of his hard earnings, give greater comforts to his own offspring, and to his own aged parents, but the parents of the pauper and of the criminal must first be comforted. It is too frequently seen in these so-called local self-governments, a few overlooking the toils of the industrious and provident, indulge themselves in misplaced sympathies, and gratify their love of ease and love of false popularity, whilst they distribute the produce of others frugality, in corrupting the laborious and fostering the rapacity of the profligate. (40)

The attitude of that part of society which was articulate held no brief for the pauper labourer, and the Poor Law reform of 1834, put his feelings into effect. This Poor Law measure

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(39) "The New Poor Law". The Edinburgh Review LXIII (July, 1836) p. 506.

(40) Ibid., p. 523.



though designed to relieve the drain upon the pockets of the middle class and the gentry did have a good purpose behind it. Under the administration of the old Poor Law, the wages of rural labourers had been supplemented by grants from the parish authorities. The labourer was deprived of any lack of incentive and desire to better himself, when he could live on parish support. That the Poor Law of 1834 intended to remove this is all to its credit. But its manner of doing so was bad. Society took a calloused attitude to the rural pauper, forgot the sensibilities of its fellow countrymen, and created parish workhouses which were "... neither school, infirmary, penitentiary, prison, place of shelter, or place of work, but something that comes of all these put together." (41)

Parallel with society's indifference to the working class was the rise to power of the middle class. It has already been noted how this group had achieved political power in 1832. In 1835 this power was to be consolidated and extended. A commission of inquiry appointed to investigate municipal corporations made its report in that year, and the Whig government under the leadership of Lord Melbourne prepared to put the recommendations of the report into effect.

Most of the municipalities of England and Wales were usually self-elected, and irresponsible, and were the preserves of privilege and property. (42) To eliminate corruption and to permit of a wider body having a voice in municipal government,

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(41) Webb, English Poor Law History, p. 139.

(42) Ramsay, op. cit., p. 193.

the Municipal Corporations Bill was introduced. Briefly, the bill provided that all corporate boroughs have a uniform constitution and a uniform franchise. The franchise was to be held by all those who paid the poor rate, while town councillors and aldermen were obliged to prove certain property qualifications. (43) The effect of the bill was to give even more political expression to the middle class that had received representation by the reform of 1832. (44)

Tory spokesmen were of the opinion that "If any additional proof were necessary that the Reform Bill was - and by some at least, of its framers was intended to be - a revolution, or overthrow of all the ancient institutions of England, it would be afforded by the plan of Municipal Reform with which the present Cabinet has found itself obliged to follow up that primary measure..." (45) In fact, so strong was Tory opposition in the Lords to the Corporations Bill, that political observers of the day felt that such resistance would possibly menace the future of that second chamber. On this point Sir Charles Greville remarked: "It is, I think, exceedingly probable that a majority of those who return members to Parliament, and in whom collectively the supreme power really resides, though they might be content to retain the House of Lords, if it could be made to act in harmony with, and therefore necessarily in

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(43) Davis, op. cit., p. 248.

(44) Ibid.,

(45) Croker Papers II, p. 231

subordination to the House of Commons, would not hesitate for an instant to decree its downfall if it became clear that there was no other way of crushing the Tory faction that now rules triumphant in that House." (46)

The proposals of the Corporations Bill were designed to give representation to the householders of municipal corporations. It was essentially a middle class measure as opposed to the interests of a landed aristocracy, and for our purposes the interests of the working class. Political writers recognized that the Bill enfranchised the middle classes at the expense of Tory privilege. "The principle of the Bill was, however, in accordance with public opinion, for it transferred the control of boroughs from wealthy landowners to the people themselves. It was a change which could not have been deferred much longer, and which was imperatively called for by the spirit of the time." (47)

As for the disfranchisement of the labourer, the views of Peel on the matter are of interest :

See what the Corporation Bill does. It assumes that the right of voting for municipal offices ought to be co-extensive with the payment of rates; it gives a franchise much more popular than the Parliamentary franchise; nay, it sanctions universal suffrage on the part of the householders...It...rejects... the doctrine that poor men are not fit to exercise political power - when that doctrine aids democratic influence - but this same Bill disfranchises other poor men who have been guilty of the crime of supporting Conservative principles. (48)

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(46) Greville Memoirs, III. p. 235.

(47) Croker Papers, II. p. 279.

(48) Ibid., A letter of Robert Peel to John W. Croker, July 2, 1835. p. 280

From the major reforms already cited, it can be seen that middle class aspirations were being steadily met at the expense of the territorial aristocracy and by the rejection of the working classes. The latter had lost what representation they had held in Parliament and in boroughs, and became more inarticulate than before. The 1833 Factory Commission had tended to dispel ignorance concerning labour but it was merely a small beginning. Firmly in power, as a result of the Reform Bill of 1832 and the Municipal Corporations Bill of 1835, the class of the exploiters was going to learn more of the condition of the exploited, by other commissions of inquiry.

In 1840 Lord Ashley obtained a Royal Commission to inquire into the status of child employment in mines and other industries outside the scope of the 1832 Commission, which had dealt only with the textile industry exclusive of the silk and lace trades. In 1842 the House received the first report of the Children's Employment Commission, dealing with labour in mines, collieries, lead and iron works. This report in detail gave descriptions of working conditions that shocked the legislature and those outside of Parliament who happened to read them. This particular report is commented upon at greater length in a succeeding chapter, as it related to Disraeli's novel Sybil. Here it need only be remarked upon as the evidence from which Lord Ashley secured the Mines and Collieries Act of the same year. (49)

Sections of contemporary opinion upon the first report indicated an understanding and sympathy for the men, women, and

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(49) Statutes, 6 and 7, Vict. c. 99.

children who worked under conditions which, to say the least, were semi-barbarous. The Quarterly Review remarked, "Here, by three ponderous folios, we have disclosed to us - in our own land, and within our own kin - modes of existence, thoughts, feelings, actions, sufferings, virtues, and vices, which are as strong and as new as the wildest dreams of fiction. The earth seems now for the first time to have heaved from its entrails another race, and to astonish and move us to reflection and to sympathy." (50)

This comment by the Quarterly Review shows an awareness of the sufferings of the industrial labourer, which it would not exhibit at an earlier period for the agricultural labourer. (51)

Ashley's Act called for the exclusion of all children under thirteen years of age, and all women, from the mines. It also made it illegal for minors to be put in charge of machinery, and abolished the apprenticing of children from local workhouses to mines and collieries. The Lords reduced the age limit to ten and permitted apprenticeship for surface labour. (52)

Because coal mines were often the property of the landed Tories, the Act was regarded as a victory for the manufacturers behind the Corn Law League, and the Chartists, and as a defeat for Toryism and agricultural protection. In connection with this act Elie Halevy notes that "The free traders gave the Bill

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(50) "Colliers and Collieries" The Quarterly Review, LXX. (Sept. 1842) p. 159.

(51) "English Charity" (April 1835) LIII p. 490.

(52) Halevy, op. cit., IV, p. 21.

an enthusiastic welcome...We have seen how anxious the League was at this juncture in its campaign to win the sympathy of the working class. Its members were delighted to denounce the abuses of capitalism when the exploiters were not Lancashire mill owners, but for the most part Tories and Protectionists." (53)

It has been noted how certain sources of contemporary opinion were educated and enlightened by the commission's report. This is of credit to the inquiry for it did dispel a great amount of ignorance. Other sections of society were still unconvinced as to the terrible lot of the working class. Some members of the House were able to defend apprenticeship to the mines even when the brutalities of the system had been exposed to those who cared enough to notice them. Thus one member remarked "It was generally supposed that no apprenticeship was necessary, and that nothing was to be taught or learned by mining; but the truth was that the act was one of great difficulty as well as of great importance. It was most important that the boys should go into the mines at an early age, and if they did not they never would be able to work with skill and efficiency." (54)

The Edinburgh Review, ever ready to defend capital at the expense of labour, found a way to deride the facts about mining conditions even when they had been attested to by worker and proprietor alike. It stated : "It is however but fair to state

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(53) Ibid., p. 221.

(54) Mr. R. Scott, Debates, June 22, 1842. p. 425.

that many competent and most respectable owners declare, that though the facts stated by the Commissioners may be perfectly true, yet that the tone and spirit of the Report bears token of material exaggeration." (55)

Lord Ashley's Mines and Collieries Act did mark a step forward, for it placed under protection a definite group of labourers, and had aroused the sympathies of classes who quite sincerely did not know that such conditions existed. The lack of effective inspection for mines, however, showed that a socially conscious administration had not yet been formed which would protect equally both worker and proprietor. "The bill was adopted, but has remained a dead letter in most districts, because no mine inspectors were appointed to watch over its being carried into effect. The evasion of the law is very easy...In single cases the employment of women may have been discontinued but in general the old state of things remains as before." (56)

In attempting to ameliorate the condition of the working classes, the government of the day often believed that a system of education would be a means of raising the level of intelligence and the living conditions for factory children. This had been attempted by the Factory Act of 1833, but as it applied only to children in textile mills and allowed but two hours for instruction a day it had been of little or no use.

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(55) "Juvenile and Female Labour", The Edinburgh Review, LXXIX. (Jan. 1844) p. 134.

(56) Engels, op. cit., p. 251.

In 1843 the government of Sir Robert Peel introduced a factory act, to extend educational facilities in industry to those not covered by previous measures. A similar proposal had been made earlier by Peel in 1841. (57) The 1843 measure was introduced by Sir James Graham. It proposed that schools should be set up in connection with local workhouses to which children other than just paupers would come. Ministers of different sects were to be allowed to give religious instruction to those who desired it. Coincident with the educational clauses, it was proposed to abolish child labour under eight years of age in factories and to reduce the labour of those between eight and thirteen to six and a half hours a day. Attendance at educational courses was to be compulsory. The administration of these schools was to be placed under seven trustees - the local clergyman, two churchwardens, and four others nominated by the justices at petty sessions. (58)

From all appearances this was a great advance for the working classes. Their right to and need for education had been realized. But this step was to be defeated, not by the factory owners oblivious of their duty towards labour, but by religious dissension unwilling to see the established church hold a monopoly over education, which it would by virtue of its

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(57) Halevy, op. cit., III. p. 226.

(58) Halevy, op. cit., IV., pp. 54-55.



control of the school committee. "Petitions against the Bill received almost two million signatures." (59) Even Lord Ashley, the champion of labour opposed the Bill as he saw in it signs of concession to Dissenters. (60)

The following remarks of a member of Parliament give an example of how strong Dissenting opinion was against the educational clauses of the 1843 Factory Act.

But he objected to the educational clauses of the bill, because they were conceived in unfairness towards a large portion of the community. He referred more particularly to that part of the bill which invested in trustees and councils the control of the provisions to be made...for education... to this the dissenters had the strongest objection. ... Thus each board was to consist of seven persons, no one of whom would necessarily be a dissenter; and he begged to ask whether, consistently with the position of the dissenting body, this was an arrangement which could be deemed to be sanctioned by justice or fairness ? (61)

In the face of such opposition the educational clauses of the act were dropped. It seemed as if "The Church was anxious to educate the people, but the Church was still more anxious to get the better of the sects; the sects were anxious to have popular education, but the sects were still more anxious than this to overturn the Church." (62) The bill was reintroduced in February of 1844 minus its educational clauses. Lord Ashley now concentrated upon achieving a ten hour day for labour by

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(59) Ibid., p. 55.

(60) Ramsay, op. cit., p. 302.

(61) Debates, March 24, 1843, pp. 1442-1443.

(62) Lord Brougham. Debates in the House of Lords.  
(May 5, 1843, p. 1247.)

piecemeal methods. Thus, in winter labourers would work ten hours a day, in summer twelve. For miners he proposed an eleven hour day dating from October 1844, and a ten hour day dating from October 1845. Ashley had excellent reasons for such proposals: "The education both of males and females is such that domestic economy is almost wholly unknown to them; and it very rarely happens that they have the foresight to accumulate savings during the period at which they can work to subsist upon in the days of their old age. It will also be remembered that their strength is so wholly exhausted that they are unable to enter into any different active occupation when discharged from the mill;..." (63)

In addition to the lack of domestic training that factory workers experienced, Ashley gave details of how labour affected the constitution and the physique. (64)

Despite Ashley's eloquent appeals for the industrial labourer, Peel's government was against what was considered to be too drastic a reduction of the hours of labour. Peel, who had supported the factory acts of 1819, 1825, and 1833, (65) could not now support Ashley's measure. As Ramsay notes: "Peel was determined to make neither concession nor compromise on this point. ... He believed that the shortening of the working

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(63) Debates, March 15, 1844, p. 1085.

(64) Ibid

(65) Ramsay, op. cit., p. 302.

day by two hours - involving, he calculated the loss of seven weeks in the year - would mean a heavy loss to industry,..." (66)

This fear of destroying or of injuring the nation's industry is well exemplified by the attitude of Sir James Graham, whose own factory act was adopted in lieu of Ashley's proposals. He stated :

The question then arises, whether you shall create in the manufacturing districts one sudden fall of wages to the amount of 25 per cent ? I believe that the motion of my noble friend would produce that effect. Though I am most anxious to take every precaution with regard to infant labour - though I am firmly resolved as my noble friend to urge upon the House to put a limit upon female labour, still, upon the whole, I cannot recommend the House to adopt an enactment which limits the labour of young persons to a shorter period than twelve hours. (67)

With Graham's factory act law, a twelve hour day was the accepted period of labour for all workers, the government forbidding employers to interrupt these hours and so keep workers at the factory all the time it was open. This would seem to be a progressive step, but it was effective only on paper. "The courts refused to enforce the provisions of the Act of 1844 prohibiting interruption of labour and they enabled mill owners to keep all their workers in the factory till closing time." (68)

At this date, 1844, society still refused to recognize the conditions the "other" England laboured under. The preceding summary of inquiry commissions, legislation, and attempted legislation indicates how shallow a picture British society had

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(66) Ibid., p. 303

(67) Debates, March 15, 1844, p. 1109.

(68) Halevy, op. cit., IV, p. 226.

of the millions who made up the working class. Inquiry commissions were admittedly a great step forward, for they produced evidence which should have dispelled ignorance. But how many people bothered to read them, or further, who could be bothered to read dry parliamentary papers? Certainly champions of labour such as Michael Sadler and Lord Ashley were untiring in their efforts to ameliorate such conditions, but their efforts continually met with the opposition of laissez faire manufacturers, Dissenting opposition to the Church of England, and a government's fear of injuring a nation's industry and alarming a nation's industrialists.

The period from 1832 to 1844 appears to have been one in which all classes save the poorest received some benefit. This is not to imply that the labourer was completely unrecognized, but the advances in reducing his hours of work, in making his place of work better, in keeping his wife and family at home and not in the mills and factories, in giving him a decent standard of living, in allowing him a voice in the direction of affairs that most affected him were all of such a small and a minor nature that one cannot help observing that the working classes did not even have a chance to have their cake, let alone eat it.

This chapter has summarized the various attitudes and views of British society in what has been called the reform era. As for the condition of the labouring classes in this period, perhaps the most prominent point of contention was the question of the state interfering in industry to help those who could not help themselves. Such action was objectionable in the light of

the principle of laissez faire. To deal more fully with this topic it has been reserved for a later chapter. Having seen that the worker had gained little in this era, it is now necessary to turn to his bizarre spokesman, Benjamin Disraeli, who, unlike most of society, was to appreciate the value of commissions of inquiry, and was to present their harsh evidence in a more popular form, that of the novel.

To understand just how Benjamin Disraeli became the social critic he was, it is necessary to note the factors that influenced his life before the publication of Coningsby in 1844 and Sybil in 1845. His life up to this period was, to say the least, unusual and not of the type that the average young man of well-to-do parents followed.

Disraeli was born in London on December 21st. 1804. He took his early educational training at a school in Islington, and from here he progressed to an institution of a higher grade at Blackheath. (1) His father, Isaac D'Israeli, ceased to be a practising Jew about 1813, and in July of 1817 Benjamin was received into the Anglican Church. (2)

Nevertheless, the fact that Disraeli was born a Jew is of importance. For one thing, it marked him out as an individual apart from his fellow-subjects, and no matter where he went, or to what position he rose, it would always be remembered that he was of a Jewish background. This characteristic no doubt contributed to his obvious abundance of individualism.

At this period in his life, Disraeli proceeded with his studies at a school in Epping Forest. Here he spent his time studying the classics. In all he spent about nine or ten years at school. After some time spent at other institutions, Disraeli

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(1) W. F. Monypenny, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Vol. I, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916) p. 19.

(2) Ibid., pp. 23-24.

completed his education at home. (3)

This early education is also of interest as a picture of the young Disraeli. It is evident he had no university education. (4) If he had proceeded to Oxford or Cambridge he would have been influenced by an environment "... destined to educate side by side the ruling aristocracy and the clergy of a christian nation." (5) As it was, he could claim neither aristocratic birth nor the Christian religion by inheritance, and so avoided being cast in this mould. It is possible that the absence from these institutions allowed Disraeli to escape a process of standardization, and so develop an individuality and an approach to society that was not of the ordinary type.

In 1821 he was articled to a firm of solicitors in London, and he remained there for three years. During these years, Disraeli through his father met John Murray the publisher. In 1824, he left for a trip on the continent with a young friend from Oxford. He was greatly impressed with what he saw. Of interest was his appreciation of the Roman Catholic religion, whose decline in England he later lamented in Coningsby and Sybil. "Cathedral High Mass. Clouds of incense and one of Mozart's sublimest masses by an orchestra before which San Carlo might grow pale. The effect inconceivably grand. The Host raised, and I flung

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(3) Ibid., pp. 25-26.

(4) Ibid., pp. 24-31

(5) Halévy, op. cit., III. p. 172.

myself on the ground." (6) This admiration for an institution with a background of tradition and ceremony was always back of Disraeli's later plans for England's social rejuvenation.

During 1825 Disraeli lost heavily in speculation on the London Stock Exchange, and incurred debts which were not paid till thirty years later. (7)

The same year, he and John Murray, publisher of the Quarterly Review, planned the establishment of a periodical for the purpose of extending Conservative principles. As editor of this proposed journal, Murray chose J. G. Lockhart, the brother-in-law of Sir Walter Scott. To arrange the details, Disraeli was chosen as intermediary, besides being given an interest in the project. Murray's appraisal of Disraeli at this point is of interest for it gives us a contemporary reference of the future statesman. "He is a good scholar, hard student, a deep thinker, of great energy, equal perseverance, and indefatigable application, ...His knowledge of human nature, and the practical tendency of all his ideas, have often surprised me in a young man, who has hardly passed his twentieth year,..." (8)

To persuade Lockhart to give his aid and assistance, Murray

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(6) Disraeli's Diary. August 1, 1824, Monypenny I, p. 45.

(7) Monypenny I, p. 56.

(8) Letter of John Murray to J. G. Lockhart, Sept. 25, 1825. Monypenny I, p. 67.



gave him the editorship of the Quarterly Review, which was then vacant. (9) This appointment was criticized by a group of contributors to the Review, led by John Wilson Croker, Secretary to the Admiralty, whom Disraeli was to satirize later as "Mr. Rigby" in Coningsby. The financial crash of 1825 caused the new journal, The Representative, to decline, and Disraeli soon detached himself from the concern. (10)

In 1826 Disraeli's first major work, Vivian Grey, appeared. Briefly the story deals with the learned, precocious son of a man of letters, looking for some means whereby his ambition could be satisfied. Finding a patron in a noble lord, the hero, "Vivian Grey", attempts to form a new political party out of his patron's circle of friends. A mission to Wales succeeds in bringing into the group a political ally who was formerly opposed to the lord. A woman on the scene poisons the mind of the lord against "Vivian Grey", and leads to the hero's killing in a duel the friend brought from Wales. (11)

Disraeli's biographer suggests that the story partially refers to his early, youthful experience with John Murray and the founding of the New Representative. The voyage to Wales being the journey to secure the offices of Lockhart, the project to form a political party being the attempt to establish the new

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(9) Monypenny, I. p. 68.

(10) Ibid., p. 73.

(11) Ibid., pp. 86-87.

periodical.<sup>(12)</sup> That the hero, his achievements, and his failures are all a portrayal of Disraeli himself, Monypenny accepts, but he does not accept it as a complete picture of the author or of the course he was to follow later. "If it is ridiculous on the one hand to pretend that Vivian Grey is a confession written in a fit of penitence and remorse, it would be no less ridiculous to pretend that Disraeli was unconscious of or indifferent to the moral obliquity of his hero, or that he deliberately set him up as an example which he afterwards meant to follow."<sup>(13)</sup> Nevertheless one point in connection with Disraeli's novels does stand out. That is, that in Coningsby and Sybil there are continued references to the hero of events and incidents that dovetail with the author's life. There is certainly much of Disraeli's own personal life in both of these novels.

There followed this novel a trip through Italy in 1826. The scenery, architecture, works of art, and the ruins all influenced Disraeli greatly. This affection for medieval institutions is well expressed in Sybil where the decline and ruin of the old churches and abbeys is mourned. "To one so deeply imbued with historic feeling and with an innate love of the gorgeous East it could not be otherwise."<sup>(14)</sup>

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(12) Ibid., pp. 89-91.

(13) Ibid., p. 89.

(14) Ibid., p. 105.

In 1828. Disraeli had published The Voyage of Captain Popanilla, a satire on the society of England in his day. It is of importance for its attack upon Bentham and the utilitarians, and is really his first political essay. (15) "Insofar as his political faith in the form which it ultimately assumed was the product of temperament, its main features are already visible; on the one hand, the deep seated popular sympathies and the essentially liberal outlook; on the other, the instinctive aversion of a mind imbued with the historic spirit and full of an imaginative sense of the romance and mystery of life from the hard...dogmatism, the cramped philosophy, and somewhat repellent ideas of the school of thought which was becoming dominant in England." (16)

In 1830 Disraeli finished the Young Duke. It was not published till a year later. The novel dealt with personalities in English political life and with sketches of that life, of which Disraeli as yet knew little. It is important for his views on Catholic Emancipation, towards which he was favourable. (17) It is also consistent with his appreciation for the Catholic religion, which has been cited previously. (18)

Between 1830 and 1831 Disraeli went abroad, visiting Spain, Malta, Corfu, Albania, and Turkey. He was greatly affected by

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(15) Ibid., p. 119.

(16) Ibid., pp. 128-129.

(17) Ibid., pp. 128-129.

(18) See ~~pages 49x~~ pp. 59-60.

the languid, easygoing society of Spain, its excellent climate, the Moorish ruins, and the influence of the Church. His visit to Turkey also influenced him, a fact which in some way accounts for his later pro-Turkish policy. "I confess to you that my Turkish prejudices are very much confirmed by my residence in Turkey. The life of this people greatly accords with my taste, ..." (19)

The next two novels Disraeli wrote were Contarini Fleming and Alroy, appearing in 1832 and 1833 respectively. The former deals with the rise to power and fall of a brilliant young man in the service of a northern court, the latter with the exploits of a young Jew in the Caliphate during the twelfth century. The latter novel shows the influence of his voyage to the East. (20)

In 1832 Disraeli first entered actively into politics, He became a candidate for election to the reformed House of Commons in the borough of High Wycombe. In his campaign, Disraeli received the support of the Radical Joseph Hume and also Daniel O'Connell. Thus he appeared on the hustings as a Radical candidate; though more opposed to the Whigs than to the Tories. (21) In the ensuing election he was unsuccessful. The defeat did not disillusion Disraeli, it only gave him an opportunity for castigating the Whigs; whose candidate was successful. (22)

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(19) Letter of Benjamin Disraeli to E. Lytton Bulwer, Dec. 27, 1830. Monypenny I, p. 170.

(20) Monypenny I, p. 194.

(21) Ibid., pp. 214-215.

(22) Ibid., p. 215.

Before his next campaign at High Wycombe, Disraeli issued an address which indicated his developing concern for the labouring class. "...I shall withhold my support from every Ministry which will not originate some great measure to ameliorate the condition of the lower orders - ..." (23) Though campaigning as a Radical, Disraeli's sympathies were with the Tories. "I am a Conservative to preserve all that is good in our constitution, a Radical to remove all that is bad." (24) He was also in favor of the ballot, which for those days was an extremely radical proposal. "But if you will change, if you will give a constituency to every town returning members to Parliament, and if you will give to that constituency the legitimate right which the constitution contemplates, and which is a freeman's claim, you must add to the elective franchise vote by ballot." (25) Disraeli's speech indicates that he realized a change in representation had occurred which could not be revoked, and so followed logically to the proposition that a change must also follow in the manner of voting. As the ballot allowed the small man to vote without fear, Disraeli's support of it is characteristic of that sentiment of friendship and feeling for the lower orders which he demonstrated in Coningsby

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(23) Ibid., p. 217.

(24) Selected Speeches of the late Rt. Hon. The Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol. I, ed. T.E. Kebble, (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1882), p. 8.

(25) Ibid., pp. ~~7-8~~ 7-8.

and Sybil. The first High Wycombe campaigns also evidenced Disraeli's growing conception of a Tory-democracy. "What is really of interest now is the undoubted fact that in this ... election he succeeded in effecting an alliance between Radicals and Tories, between the popular elements of the constituency and the supporters of privilege and tradition." (26)

The second election at High Wycombe on December 12th. 1832, was equally ~~successful~~ unsuccessful, Disraeli finishing last in a field of three. Throughout the election he drew closer to Toryism. During this first year in political life Disraeli often criticized both Whig and Tory parties. (27) For this he was attacked as being without political principles. Such a condemnation was not too serious, for his later break with Peel over Corn Law repeal showed him to be allied with no real party. "But it was not in his nature to accept a political creed or program ready made or to stifle the instinct of criticism which was so strong within him. He was a political free-thinker at the beginning of his career as he remained a political free-thinker to the end." (28)

In 1834 with the formation of Peel's government, Disraeli was again anxious to obtain a seat. Even at this date his party affiliations were undecided, for he had approached both the

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(26) Monypenny, op. cit., I, p. 215.

(27) Ibid., p. 225.

(28) Ibid., p. 228.

Radical Lord Durham and the Tory Lord Chandos to help him receive a place. Sir Charles Greville made note of this, observing : "...if, therefore he is undecided and wavering between Chandos and Durham, he must be a mighty impartial personage." (29) However, he entered upon a third contest at High Wycombe where he gave his listeners his attitude upon the major problems of the day. He was wholeheartedly in favor of aiding the agricultural interest, which sentiment led him to head the party that rallied to agriculture's protection in 1846. "As to Financial Relief, I am of the opinion that the agricultural interest, at the present moment, is more entitled than any other class to whatever boon the minister may spare." (30) He was equally determined to see the Church of England administration and discipline reformed, remarking that "I deem it absolutely necessary that pluralities should be abolished, and that the great and consequent evil of non-residence should be terminated for ever." (31) His attitude on Ireland, which had been a continued problem for every British administration, recognized that one of the major obstacles to peace in that country was the predominant position held by an alien church - the Church of England. "Twelve months, therefore, must not pass over without the very name of tithes in that country being abolished forever; nor do I deem it less urgent that the

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(29) Greville Memoirs, III. p. 117.

(30) Selected Speeches. p. 11.

(31) Ibid., p. 12.

Protestant Establishment in that country should be at once proportioned to the population which it serves." (32) This contest took place during a general election as had the previous one; Disraeli's first attempt to secure a seat in 1834 was a by-election. Here once more he was unsuccessful, again finishing third in a field of three.

In his fourth campaign in 1835 for a by-election at Taunton, Disraeli was defeated by the Whig candidate. In this election contest he appeared as a Tory, being sponsored by that party. (33) At Taunton he gave examples of the invective and oratory for which he was later to become famous. His remarks upon the Whig-O'Connell alliance are worth noting in this respect. "I cannot understand the principle by which the Whigs would reform, as they style it, the Church of Ireland. It appears to me that they have offered a premium to the White Boys to destroy the Protestants. If forty nine souls are not worthy to be saved whilst fifty are, I think we shall soon have no congregations in Ireland which exceed the Popish tariff of salvation." (34)

In the Taunton campaign Disraeli presented his first public outline of the program of Tory democracy. His biographer refers to the Dorset County Chronicle of June 4, 1835, for a

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(32) Ibid.,

(33) Monypenny, op. cit., I, p. 280.

(34) Selected Speeches. 27.



resumé of a speech made by Disraeli in which this philosophy is expounded.

He had told them once before that the Conservative party was the really democratic party in the country who surrounded the people with the power of the throne to shield them from the undue power of the aristocracy. ...The point to which they were arrived in the history of the country was this; whether the establishments of the realm should be supported or destroyed. The question was between an hereditary monarchy on one side and an elective executive on the other. ...He was in favour of an hereditary monarchy because a King whose power and authority were so judiciously limited as those of the King of England was in effect the great leader of the people against an usurping aristocracy. (35)

This same election contest brought Disraeli to blows with Daniel O'Connell. He had condemned O'Connell and the Whigs to the electors of Taunton by remarking that "...it was the ambition of that weak aristocratic party in the State, who could only obtain power by leaguings themselves with one whom they had denounced as a traitor." (36) O'Connell, feeling he had been termed a traitor, replied in a biting speech at Dublin which savagely castigated Disraeli's ancestry. It is worth noting:

He has just the qualities of the impenitent thief on the Cross, and I verily believe, if Mr. Disraeli's family herald were to be examined and his genealogy traced, the same personage would be discovered to be the heir at law of the exalted individual to whom I allude. I forgive Mr. Disraeli now, and as the lineal descendent of the blasphemous robber, who ended his career beside the Founder of the Christian Faith, I leave the gentleman to the enjoyment of his infamous distinction and family honours. (37)

These passages and the quarrel they are related to, have been

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(35) Monypenny, op. cit., I, p. 285.

(36) Selected Speeches, loc. cit.

(37) Monypenny, op. cit., I, p. 288.

noted, for they indicate that Disraeli was rapidly becoming a popular figure. The O'Connell affair certainly gained the recognition and attention of the leading papers of the day. (38)

Following this defeat, Disraeli spent the next two years mainly on political writings. In December of 1835 there appeared the Vindication of the English Constitution. This political treatise laid out in full his political philosophy and gave him a place in society as a political thinker and writer. (39) In it, he attacks the utilitarians, praises tradition, the past, and the House of Lords. In general he derides all that the Reform Bill of 1832 has introduced. His attachment to the glories of an older England before the Reform Bill, and before the aristocratic Whig party is clearly evident. (40) The Vindication added to the recognition and fame Disraeli had received because of his earlier works; even Peel expressed his appreciation for it. (41)

During 1836 the author's reputation was enhanced even more by a series of anonymous letters to The Times over the signature of "Runnymede". They were directed against the Whig administration of Lord Melbourne, and gained much attention. "The Letters of Runnymede are still making a great sensation. ... Peel told

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(38) Ibid., p. 292.

(39) Ibid., p. 306

(40) Ibid., p. 325

(41) ~~ibid~~ Ibid., p. 317.

Lyndhurst the last letter was the most powerful of all; so it is generally esteemed." (42)

In 1836 and 1837 the public was offered two more of Disraeli's novels. The first was Henrietta Temple, the second, Venetia. These novels are unique for the complete absence of political character and were probably written not so much from any creative desire, but by the sheer need for funds to pay off the many debts incurred in election campaigns. (43) These novels were not considered very good in comparison with Vivian Grey, but they nevertheless kept the public's eye upon a developing Disraeli. Indeed, recognition had already been achieved, "...for we suppose it is now needless to treat the author as an anonymous novelist..." (44)

This process of continually giving the reading public an edition every so often is not to be overlooked as a means of keeping society aware of a rising politician. Theodore Roosevelt with such works on naval warfare and big game hunting, as a History of Naval War 1812 (New York 1882), Hunting Trips of a Ranchman (New York 1883), and Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail (New York 1888), was a well known figure before he reached the pinnacle of American political life in 1901 by gaining the Presidency. (45)

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(42) Letter of B. Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli Feb. 5, 1836. Monypenny I, p. 320.

(43) Monypenny, op. cit., I, pp. 347-348.

(44) "Disraeli's Novels", The Edinburgh Review, LXVI (Oct. 1837) p. 59.

(45) Appleton Cyclopoedia of American Biography, vol. V. ed. G. Wilson and J. Fiske (N.York: Appleton Century 1888)pp 318-9

In 1837 a general election was precipitated by the death of William IV. Disraeli, by now a stalwart member of the Tory party, received offers from several constituencies to run as a candidate. They included Ashburton, Derby, Chichester, Dartmouth, Taunton, Barnstaple, and Marylebone.<sup>(46)</sup> This in itself indicates Disraeli was extremely well known and appreciated as a leading politician. The seat chosen by him was Maidstone, and on July 27 he finally achieved success, being elected with another Tory member, Mr. Wyndham Lewis.<sup>(47)</sup>

The remarks made by Disraeli immediately after election indicate his growing awareness of that "other" England, when he defined Conservatism as "...the splendour of the Crown, the lustre of the peerage, the privileges of the Commons, the rights of the poor....that harmonious union, that magnificent concord of all interests, of all classes, on which our national greatness and prosperity depends." <sup>(48)</sup>

The year 1839, that saw Disraeli's maturing views on the "condition of England" question, was also the year in which he married Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, the widow of his running mate at Maidstone, Mrs. Lewis certainly could not offer Disraeli entry into a family that had its roots in the aristocracy for she was

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(46) Monypenny, op. cit., I, p. 372.

(47) Ibid., p. 375.

(48) Monypenny II, p. 16.

of a common farming family in Devon. (49) However, she could offer him a good income of £4000 a year, <sup>and</sup> a permanent home in London. (50) Despite these material advantages to be gained by marrying a woman his elder by twelve years, Disraeli's devotion towards her, for over thirty years, was such that even his most violent opponents could make no political capital out of it. (51)

The year also was an important milestone in the development of Disraeli's appreciation of the condition of the working classes. A "National Petition" had been submitted to the House of Commons by the Chartists calling for those famous six points; universal suffrage, protection of the ballot (which Disraeli had favoured as early as 1832), annual Parliaments, equal representative districts, the abolition of property qualifications for members of Parliament, and finally, payment of members. (52) The discussion of these demands, submitted under the signature of perhaps a million members of the working class, (53) revealed a new Disraeli.

Speaking on the Petition in Parliament he did not condemn the movement as a subversive or a seditious one, remarking that "He could not believe, that a movement which, if not national,

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(49) Ibid., pp. 36-37.

(50) Ibid., pp. 37.

(51) Ibid., p. 70

(52) Halévy, op. cit. III, p. 302.

(53) Ibid., p. 319

was yet most popular, could have been produced by those common means of sedition." (54) He appreciated a fundamental cause of working class discontent: "The real cause of this, ...was an apprehension on the part of the people, that their civil rights were being invaded." (55)

During this speech, Disraeli, in addition to noting how the rights of the lower classes had been violated, referred to the ideal achieved in an earlier age, where the class with power protected the class without.

All would admit this - the old constitution had an intelligible principle, which the present had not. The former invested a small portion of the nation with political rights. Those rights were entrusted to that small class on certain conditions - that they should guard the civil rights of the great multitude. It was not even left to them as a matter of honour; society was so constituted that they were entrusted with duties which they were obliged to fulfil. ... Great duties could alone confer great station, and the new class which had been invested with political station had not been bound up with the great mass of the people by the exercise of social duties. (56)

These remarks are of importance for they foreshadow Disraeli's philosophy of a benevolent, paternal society, and they indicate how his social consciousness was increasing. With the working class and their claims to recognition he did not disassociate himself, observing that "... he

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(54) Debates, July 12, 1839. p. 246.

(55) Ibid., p. 247.

(56) Ibid., pp. 247-248.

sympathized with the Chartists. They formed a great body of his countrymen, nobody could doubt they laboured under great grievances." (57) These great grievances that Disraeli was now aware of, were to be even more fully emphasized in Sybil.

It was such an attitude and approach as this that linked Disraeli with the older Radicals like Cobbett, who exhibited a sincere sympathy for the working classes. He was not associated with the philosophical radicals of the Benthamite school whose theories of "utility" had produced the Union Workhouse. Referring to the former connection, Disraeli's biographer remarks that: "...when he entered Parliament there were still a few Radical members of the older...type-...who inherited the traditions, half Radical and half Tory...and were inspired not by abstract theories, but by natural sympathy with the people and an active interest in their welfare." (58)

Because of this approach, Disraeli was accepted as a friend of the Chartists. He further indicated this sympathy in a letter to Charles Attwood, (59) a popular leader of the Chartists, as follows: "I entirely agree with you, that a union between the Conservative party and the Radical masses offers the only means by which we can preserve the Empire. Their interests are identical, united they form a nation;..." (60) This again was

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(57) Ibid., p. 251.

(58) Monypenny, op. cit. II, pp. 76-77.

(59) West, op. cit., p. 94.

(60) Monypenny, op. cit. II, p. 88.

but an extension of those views upon Tory-democracy which were to receive a full treatment in Coningsby.

With the election to power in 1841 of the Conservatives under Sir Robert Peel, Disraeli was returned as a member for Shrewsbury. As part of his program to remedy budget deficits, Peel reduced the tariff on many items. This gradual move towards free trade of course encouraged the "free trade" bloc in Parliament to agitate for the abolition or at least the reduction of duties on foreign corn. This development is of importance in connection with Disraeli. In reply to attacks upon the landed interest for not fulfilling its duties, Disraeli remarked. :

Let me tell those gentlemen who are so fond of telling us that property has its duties as well as its rights, that labour also has its rights as well as its duties; and when I see masses of property raised in this country which do not recognize that principle;... when I hear of all this misery and all this suffering; when I know that evidence exists in our Parliament of a state of demoralization in the once happy population of this land which is not equalled in the most barbarous countries - I cannot help suspecting this has arisen because property has been permitted to be created and held without the performance of its duties. (61)

This speech indicates that Disraeli was aware of the evidence in the form of reports from commissions of inquiry into industry, that had been created during the past years. His remarks about property not fulfilling its duties are obviously directed against the new capitalist classes that unlike the propertied landed gentry, cared little for the welfare of those who could not provide

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(61) Ibid., pp. 141-142.



adequately for themselves. The speech, given in 1843 marks the fruition of Disraeli's gradual recognition of "another" England. It anticipates Coningsby and Sybil. Heretofore his attention had been directed to the status of the "Poor Law" victims of southern, corn growing England. Then in 1839, it has been noted how quickly he rose to defend in Parliament the industrial worker and his Chartist petition, how he sympathized with them, and demanded their recognition. His 1843 speech merely shows that his knowledge of this class had widened.

The young Disraeli had at this point in his career been well prepared for the role of social critic. His fame as a novelist, his reputation as a campaigner and an orator, his sympathy for such disregarded subjects as Catholic emancipation and labour relief, had all combined to give him an ability to understand that "other" England. If people had recognized him earlier because of his unusual abilities and characteristics, they would surely pay attention to his social criticisms.

That Disraeli was aware of England's vast industrial class and had studied their condition is indicated by his voyage to the northern manufacturing areas in 1843 and 1844, (62) and is exemplified by his hero in Sybil; "Charles Egremont", a young Tory M.P. who entered Parliament the same year Disraeli did. "Egremont" is described as "...seated in his library with writing materials, books, and letters. On another table were

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(62) Ibid., p. 250.

arranged his parliamentary papers, and piles of blue books." (63)

The parliamentary papers and blue books of the reform era gave particular attention to conditions in industrial areas. Of these blue books it can be said that if the supporter of the working classes, "Charles Egremont" had access to them and had studied them, the same can be applied to the author of Sybil and Coningsby; Benjamin Disraeli.

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(63) Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil  
The Hughenden Edition (1919-1927)  
London, 1926, p. 264.

CONINGSBY - DISRAELI'S POLITICAL MANIFESTO

When Benjamin Disraeli entered Parliament in 1837, political society was engaged in a struggle between the advocates of state interference in the country's economy, and the protagonists of laissez faire, who agreed that the economy was better off when left alone.

Men of both political parties had insisted that it was the government's duty to protect and subsidize agriculture, and to care for factory workers. Others, perhaps in a majority, had made this principle unpopular in England of the 1830's and 1840's. This group was both vocal and widespread. Disraeli himself was to be defeated by this group in 1846, when he became a leader of that part of the Conservative party which insisted that the government must defend agriculture against the competition of foreign corn. The 1846 abolition of the Corn Laws marked a defeat for this group at the hands of the disciples of laissez faire.

In view of the fact that Disraeli's novels Coningsby and Sybil were in opposition to the principle of free trade, it is necessary to give some idea of how widespread and how powerful this philosophy was. Perhaps one of the more popular champions of a society divorced from the heavy hand of state interference was Richard Cobden, a Manchester manufacturer. During the 1840's he led the campaign for the abolition of the Corn Laws. Cobden could see no good resulting from a situation in which a government would regulate hours of labour and conditions of work in industry. He remarked on the subject that "...it would be

the first example of a legislature of a free country interfering with the freedom of adult labour...again I say...Look not to Parliament but only to yourselves." (1)

To Cobden, any move made towards protecting the labourer was an "...extension of the power of the State in its strongest form, definitely limiting in the interest of the labourer the administration of capital." (2) This attitude was a convincing and a popular one, and it gained Cobden many supporters. (3)

In Parliament from which factory legislation came, the principle of laissez faire was held just as strongly. Typical of this group was Joseph Hume, who remarked on the subject of state legislation in factories, that "...it was essential to the welfare of the country at large, that as little legislative interference as possible should take place between masters and servants." (4) Still another member of this group delivered a diatribe ~~panegyric~~ upon the evils of commissions of inquiry, whose reports Disraeli was to utilize in Sybil :

Were they to go on in this petty-fogging manner from day to day, adding fetter to fetter, and trammel to trammel, on the industry and the energy and the enterprise of the country. Were they, in these days of liberty of thought and liberty of action, to recur to the olden times of chartered guilds and exclusive

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- (1) John Morley, The Life of Richard Cobden: Vol. I (London: The MacMillan Co., 1908) Appendix, pp. 535-539.
  - (2) Ibid., pp. 325-326.
  - (3) Ibid., p. 320
  - (4) Debates, Feb. 9, 1832, p. 105.

companies, prescribing, if not the modes at least the hours of manufactures? There was, indeed, in the present day, a zeal, he might almost say an excessive lust, of legislation, ... (5)

This ardent attack upon state interference was not just confined to mere back-benchers in Parliament. Sir James Graham, who headed the Home Office in Peel's administration which began in 1841, (6) and who introduced a Factory Act in 1843, admitted to Parliament that he could not "recommend the House to adopt an enactment which limits the labour of young persons to a shorter period than twelve hours." (7)

Yet another powerful defender of free trade was John Bright, Cobden's partner in the campaign for corn law abolition. His attitude towards the regulation of industry was that "In a trade so extensive, employing so many people, carried on under circumstances ever varying, no Act of Parliament interfering with the minute details of its management can ever be fully carried out..." (8) Even Disraeli's political leader, Sir Robert Peel, became gradually an adherent of the principle of laissez faire. For example, The British Quarterly Review which reads like a Manchester manufacturer's diary, quotes Sir Robert as follows during the 1844 debates upon Lord Ashley's measure to reduce the hours of labour for workers:

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(5) Debates, July 5, 1833, p. 245.

(6) Halévy, op. cit., IV p. 1.

(7) Debates, March 15, 1844, p. 1109.

(8) Ibid., p. 1183.

...if you are to establish in industrial cases and in private families this principle of interference, you are about to establish a system of domestic inquisition and tyranny, which may occasionally produce a good effect in limiting the hours of labour in a particular case from sixteen hours to twelve, but which will end by entirely changing the character of the British people. You may make them entirely dependent upon government interference: you must then, indeed, have an army of domestic inspectors and sub-inspectors. And the only protection against your interference is this, that your Bill may become so odious, that the whole mass of the people will rise up against it. (9)

The British Quarterly Review was a good example of the journals that flocked to the banners of laissez faire. In the article cited above it warned that the dangers industry faced were "...to be found in the ill-judged interference of the legislature, which under the name of "protection" had imposed restrictions on exchange, and which is now pressed in the name of "humanity" to impose restrictions on exchange." (10)

Just as stalwart a defender of free-trade was the Whig organ, The Edinburgh Review. It saw the remedy for England's social evils in an unshackled industry: "If the demand for labour were as ample and as steady as it certainly would be under a system of unshackled industry and unrestricted commerce; and if the remuneration of that labour were as sufficient for comfortable maintenance as it would be, when laid out by sober, frugal, well-instructed people, the evils against which we are directing our piecemeal and fitful legislation would vanish of themselves." (11)

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(9) "The Factory System and Factory Legislation", The British Quarterly Review, I, (Feb. 1845) p. 148.

(10) Ibid., p. 126.

(11) "Juvenile and Female Labour" The Edinburgh Review LXXIX. (Jan. 1844) p. 152.

From this brief review of a school of thought popular in England during the 1840's, is illustrated the fact that leading men in society, politics, and journalism were opposed to any interference by the state in the economy. An educator of public opinion would meet a major obstacle if he or she attempted to attack too openly this principle. It was to Disraeli's credit that he had the courage to meet this problem, perhaps not so obviously, but nevertheless with some weight. Starting with his "Young England" group he proposed a philosophy, not at all new, that property had duties as well as rights. This philosophy and the group that sponsored it were to receive popularity and recognition in the author's novel Coningsby. This first major political treatise indicated what the duties of property were and how they were to be carried out.

To understand this, it is necessary to turn to the "Young England" group and to Coningsby.

In 1841, there appeared on the Tory side of Parliament a small group of young men who had been educated at Eton and Cambridge. Its principal members were George Sidney Smythe, Lord John Manners, and Alexander Baillie Cochrane. (12) This coterie on entering Parliament brought with them the sentiment and aura of the Romantic movement. In its political sphere the Romantic movement was a return of political faith, an appreciation by all classes of their duties, and a realization on the part of the aristocracy of the rights of the masses. Monypenny

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(12) Monypenny, op. cit., II, pp. 162-164.

remarks that "Like all true romantics, they had an antipathy to the middle class, ...they dreaded its growing influence, and hoped to provide a counterpoise by reawakening the sense of duty in the nobility and gentry, and restoring them to their rightful place as leaders and protectors of the people." (13)

This association of young Cambridge men soon accepted Disraeli's leadership in the House. "Henry Baillie, Dicky ~~Hodgson~~ Hodgson, and Lord John Manners, and several others came in turn and sat by me, ...The enthusiasm of young Smythe, extraordinary..." (14)

It was among this group and under Disraeli's influence that the idea of the "Young England" party sprang up. "I walked from the House with Henry Baillie, who told me in his cold quiet way:

'Upon my soul I am not sure if it was not the best speech I ever heard.' All Young England, the new members, were deeply interested..." (15)

Disraeli himself was quick to realize that he had been chosen to head this group. "I already find myself without effort the leader of a party, chiefly of the youth and new members." (16) Though this group, because of its small size and its Tory politics, were nominal supporters of Sir Robert Peel, they had formulated the idea of sitting together and voting together as a bloc. One member of the group wrote to Disraeli,

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(13) Ibid., p. 165

(14) Letter of B. Disraeli to Mrs. Disraeli, Mar. 9, 1842. Monypenny, II, pp. 127-128.

(15) Ibid

(16) Letter of B. Disraeli to Mrs. Disraeli, Mar. 11, 1842. Monypenny, II, p. 130



"I have fulfilled your instructions and written to John Manners... The first I have told are to sit together and vote as the majority shall decide, ..." (17)

What was the common ideal that held this group together? Disraeli's biographer has called it a "Faith in the germs of Toryism; a conviction of the possibility of restoring it to vigour by a recurrence to its historic traditions, and the reconstruction of the party on a popular basis; a desire to maintain and strengthen the influence of the upper orders combined with a readiness to trust the masses of the people, and a genuine interest in their well-being; above all, dislike of the Whigs, and of the middle-class Liberalism in which Whiggery was merging - these things Disraeli and his younger friends held in common." (18)

It is in Coningsby that we have fully outlined the political rejuvenation that Disraeli and his young friends debated, discussed and argued for. The novel itself deals with the career of young "Harry Coningsby" who passes into society and finally into Parliament through the familiar channel of Eton and Cambridge. His progress through school is supported by his wealthy grandfather, "Lord Monmouth", a Tory landlord. It is in the society of the affluent, in the clubs and political headquarters, in the universities, and in the high society of the day as seen by "Coningsby", that we note Disraeli's appreciation of England in

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(17) Letter of George Smythe to B. Disraeli, Oct. 20, 1842.  
Monypenny, II, p. 167.

(18) Monypenny, II, p. 169.

the 1830's. The plot of the novel need not concern us too deeply. What is of importance are the author's views upon England's institutions.

There is a dislike of the Whigs' 1832 Reform Bill, which in an attempt to be democratic, denied the franchise to many by a property qualification. Disraeli condemned this remarking: "In treating the House of the Third Estate as the House of the People, and not as the house of a privileged class, the ministry and parliament of 1831 virtually conceded the principle of Universal Suffrage. In this point of view the ten pound franchise was an arbitrary, irrational, and impolitic qualification. ...its immediate and inevitable result was Chartism." (19) This observation of Disraeli's was strikingly true and shrewd. The old unreformed parliament, based solidly on tradition dating back to 1295, fortified by all it had done for England's wealth, power, glory and happiness, could be defended on a comprehensive principle. No conceivable principle could defend the giving of the vote to the £10 householders and its denial to the £8 and £9 householders.

In the extension of the franchise the author also lamented the destruction of a powerful parliamentary opposition, without whose salutary check, the floodgates of reform, which to some was not very far removed from revolution, were left open. (20)

Though he castigated the Whigs for so conducting the

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(19) Benjamin Disraeli, Coningsby, The Hughenden Edition. (London: Longmans Green & Co. 1923) p. 37

(20) Ibid., p. 65

country's affairs after 1832, Disraeli could at the same time see no good in the Tory party of that period. He pitied Peel's position in 1834 in having to deal with an unprincipled, moribund party that had usurped the name Tory. "It had been the misfortune of this eminent gentleman when he first entered public life, to become identified with a political connection, which having arrogated to itself the name of an illustrious historical party, pursued a policy which was either founded on no principle whatever, or on principles exactly contrary to those which had always guided the conduct of the great Tory leaders." (21) Power had brought with it duties, and in Disraeli's opinion both parties had not realized this.

At this point it should be remarked that besides condemning the Whigs, and rejecting the Tories of his age, Disraeli was acutely aware of the rise of a machine economy, and with it new classes presenting problems that no political party had adequately solved. He noted that :

Now commenced that condition of England question, of which our generation hears so much. During five and twenty years every influence that can develop the energies and resources of a nation had been acting with concentrated stimulation on the British Isles. National peril and national glory; the perpetual menace of invasion, the continual triumphs of conquest; the most extensive foreign commerce that was ever conducted by a single nation; an illimitable currency; an internal trade supported by swarming millions, whom manufactures and enclosure bills summoned into existence; above all, the supreme control obtained by man over mechanical power; these are some of the causes of that rapid advance of material civilization in England, to which the annals of the world can afford no parallel. But there was no proportionate advance in our moral civilization. In the hurry-skurry of money-making,

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(21) Ibid., p. 67.

men-making and machine-making, we had altogether outgrown, not the spirit, but the organization of our institutions. (22)

These remarks, particularly the phrase relating to the manufacturing developments and enclosure bills, show how clearly Disraeli was aware of the rise of a great labouring class, that in the development of manufactures and trades had been overlooked or forgotten by England's traditional institutions - the Church, the government, the ruling classes. It is upon the unimanigative Tory administration of Lord Liverpool that the author places the blame for not using the institutions of England to ameliorate the condition of this huge, inarticulate class. He remarks in a neat and forceful phrase that "...they mistook disorganization for sedition." (23) Because this Tory government had failed to realize that institutions must keep pace with the times, they had continued such restrictive measures as the Combination Acts, the tax on newspapers and periodicals, and an anti-Catholic policy in Ireland.

In this age of too rapid advance the various classes of English society had forgotten their social duties. In contrast with this, Disraeli gives us a picture of the "Duke of Beaumanoir" a noble friend of "Coningsby" who realized that the nobility had a duty towards the poor. "He was munificent, tender, and bounteous, to the poor, and loved a flowing hospitality...A firm supporter of the corn laws, he never refused a lease." (24)

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(22) Ibid., 69

(23) Ibid.,

(24) Ibid., p. 82.

A similar example in Coningsby is given in the conduct of "Mr. Lyle", a Roman Catholic landowner who treated the local village labourers as befitted a feudal lord. The system of almsgiving instituted by him is evidently Disraeli's choice for poor-relief in England. "Mr. Lyle" in describing the practice remarks that "It is almsgiving day, ...The people of the parish with which I am connected come to St. Genevieve twice a week at this hour." (25) The author also approves of the idea of the almsgiving being conducted with some ceremony and pageantry, for as "Mr. Lyle" noted, "...I wish the people constantly and visibly to comprehend that property is their protector and friend." (26) This was what Disraeli saw as lacking in England. He wished to instill a sense of responsibility in the ruling class for the poor and unprotected.

Turning from the lack of effort and initiative on the part of the nobility and gentry to realize their duties, Disraeli refers to that other centre of wealth and power, the rising capitalist class. His observations on Manchester and its industry are worth noting, for they show a recognition of how great were the rights of the industrial magnates, and how little they acknowledged their duties. He noted that "In this unprecedented partnership between capital and science, working on a spot which nature had indicated as the fitting theatre of their exploits, he beheld a great source of the wealth of nations which had been reserved for these times, and he perceived that this wealth was

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(25) Ibid., p. 144.

(26) Ibid., p. 145.

rapidly developing classes whose power was very imperfectly recognized in the constitutional scheme, and whose duties in the social system seemed altogether omitted." (27) It is of interest here to note that Frederick Engels takes an identical view. Remarking upon the rise of a class of workers and capitalists, he notes that they form "... a different nation from the England of these days." (28)

In connection with Manchester and the rise of industry, Disraeli shows an awareness of the inevitable competition that modern manufacturing has built up between various industrialists, and as a result works for the harsh conditions labourers work under. "Coningsby's" conversation with a Manchester factory owner is indicative of this. The industrialist comments upon how he will beat out his competitors: "What a pity this is not the 1st. of January, and then my new mill would be at work. I should like to see Mr. Benley's face, or even Mr. Ashworth's that day. And the Oxford Road Works, where they are always making a little change, bit by bit reform, eh, not a very particular fine appetite I suspect for dinner at the Oxford Road Works the day they hear of my new mill being at work." (29)

These remarks upon the state of industry in England are but a minor portion of Coningsby. The later novel Sybil deals far more fully with manufacturing and its effects upon the social system. Still it is important to note that at this period in

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(27) Ibid., p. 155

(28) Engels, op. cit., p. 15.

(29) Disraeli, Coningsby, p. 158.

his writings Disraeli was aware of the problem faced by the new industry and could comment upon a few of its more obvious characteristics.

During his career, young "Harry Coningsby" falls in love with "Edith Millbank", the daughter of a Manchester factory owner. The description of "Mr. Millbank's" mill gives us Disraeli's appreciation of a new capitalist, who used his power and wealth to care for those under him. Thus the workers' village "...could boast of...an institute where there were a library and a lecture room, and a reading hall which anyone might frequent." (30) We are further told how "Mr. Millbank" "...had built churches, and schools, and institutes; houses and cottages on a new system of ventilation; how he had allotted gardens; established singing classes." (31) This was a member of a new class of power and wealth, who in addition to his rights, appreciated the duties he also held in the social system. Sybil, written a year later, gives examples of the new class forgetting its duties to the "other" England.

While Coningsby is partly devoted to noting the rise of new classes within the old constitution, it also presents Disraeli's regret for the decline of a powerful monarch, a powerful House of Lords, and a persecuted peasantry. Under the aegis of youth, the "new generation", he hopes to see these <sup>institutions</sup> ~~constituencies~~ revived. Under Robert Peel, Disraeli could see little good in

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(30) Ibid., p. 160.

(31) Ibid., pp. 162-163.

an adherence to Conservative principles. According to Disraeli, Peel's policy was an attempt to maintain "The prerogatives of the Crown, provided they are not exercised, the independence of the House of Lords, provided it is not asserted; the ecclesiastical estate, provided it is regulated by a commission of laymen." (32)

To Disraeli, the great Whig leaders were responsible for giving England a "Venetian" or oligarchical constitution whereby the few great families of the nation controlled the monarch, and took from him all those prerogatives which could have been used for the benefit of all and not just for the few. (33) In the powerful monarchy Disraeli saw the remedy for social evils. It was an institution that with its great rights would carry out its equally great duties. He did not see the House of Commons as the same instrument in his age. "Parliamentary representation was the happy device of a ruder age to which it was admirably adopted; an age of semi-civilization, when there was a leading class in the community; ..." (34)

As for the Church, Disraeli rued the day that it, like the monarchy, had come under the control of a powerful, oligarchical House of Commons. Under this control the Church was unable to fulfill its spiritual and social duties. As the "parliamentary" Church of his day had not accepted its duties, Disraeli looked to the older Catholic institution in which he saw :

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(32) Ibid., p. 99

(33) Ibid., pp. 263-266.

(34) Ibid., pp 355



...the estate of the people, as long as the Church is governed on real principles. The Church is the medium by which the despised and degraded classes assert the native equality of man, and vindicate the rights and power of intellect...It would do as great things now, if it were divorced from the degrading and tyrannical connection that enchains it. You would have other sons of peasants bishops of England instead of men appointed to that sacred office solely because they were the needy scions of a factious aristocracy; men of gross ignorance, profligate habits and grinding extortion; who have disgraced the episcopal throne, and profaned the altar. (35)

To set English society aright Disraeli would not resort to the Whig party or to the Conservative party. His views on this topic have already been noted, and further reference will illustrate more clearly his opinions. He cannot accept the Whigs, for they were the "...party...who demand that the principle of political liberalism...be carried to its extent; which it appears to them is impossible without getting rid of the fragments of the old constitution that remain." (36)

Political liberalism carried to its extent would have meant for Disraeli the complete abandonment of the helpless by any institutions, public or private.

He also cannot accept the Conservative party for it was

...devoted to the prerogatives of the crown, although in truth the crown has been stripped of every one of its prerogatives; they affect a great veneration for the constitution in Church and State, though every one knows the constitution in Church and State no longer exists; they are ready to stand or fall with 'the independence of the Upper House of Parliament,' though, in practice, they are perfectly aware that with their sanction, the 'Upper House' has abdicated its initiatory functions, and now serves only as a court of review of the legislation

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(35) Ibid., p. 358

(36) Ibid., p. 351

of the House of Commons. (37)

Such remarks by Disraeli as have been noted, are indicative of his views upon English society, political, social, economic, and religious. Thus the reverse of these would illustrate what he desired to see revived. Such of course would include a powerful monarch complete with prerogatives, a House of Lords equal in power to the Commons, a nobility and gentry that realized its duties to the lower orders, a capitalist class that realized its duties to the worker, and a Church free from Parliamentary control and willing to pursue a course of spiritual and social amelioration. As "Harry Coningsby" remarks, "Let me see authority once more honoured; a solemn reverence again the habit of our lives; let me see property acknowledging as in the old days of faith, that labour is his twin brother, and that the essence of all tenure is the performance of duty;...(38)

All the political objectives thus stated are the desires and hopes of "Harry Coningsby", and his Eton and Cambridge friends. As such they in fiction are the counterpart of the "Young England" group in Parliament. The novel apart from its emphasis on a political philosophy, relies upon youth to fulfill the aims their author has laid out. They were the "new generation" Disraeli had in mind.

"Coningsby" was the political manifesto of "Young England". It is interesting to note that the novel went through three

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(37) Ibid., p. 352.

(38) Ibid., p. 411

editions within three months, so great was its popularity. Its sale on the Continent and in the U.S.A. was equally successful. (39) The novel, with its wide sale and its popular topic soon brought Disraeli and his "party" much prominence and attention. The opinion of the Whig Edinburgh Review on Disraeli's party is interesting as well as amusing. It notes that "Young England" ...has got a little of everything; - a little of history, somewhat more of metaphysics, a small portion of unintelligible theology, expanded and inflated into an enormous bubble, bright in prismatic colours, but bursting at the first touch of a feather; and a very little of political economy; almost as bubble-like and inflated - not to mention other smaller accomplishments." (40) One is tempted to remark that the partisan Review would not have appreciated Disraeli's verbal and written attacks upon the Whigs.

For further indication that the novel and the group it publicized achieved recognition, Punch provides adequate material. Commenting upon meetings of the "Young England" group at Disraeli's house in Grosvenor Gate it remarks: "...we beg to inform Mr. Disraeli that there are thousands of darkened souls in London, equally ignorant of that Paradise, Grosvenor Gate, ... Therefore, we have no doubt, that Mr. Disraeli will upon this knowledge instantly issue cards of invitation to the dwellers of ...Whitechapel, Kent Street, Seven <sup>Dials</sup> ~~seals~~, and to other remote

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(39) Monypenny, op. cit., II, p. 199.

(40) "Coningsby or the New Nation", LXXX (October, 1844) p. 518.

fortresses of savage, pauper existence." (41) It would appear that in Sybil. Disraeli did acquaint himself with thousands of darkened souls, perhaps not in Whitechapel and Seven Dials but at least in Shropshire and Staffordshire.

The Conservative party certainly did not appreciate the Disraeli clique. Sir James Graham remarked that; "...the puppets are moved by Disraeli, who is the ablest man among them. I consider him unprincipled and disappointed; and in despair he has tried the effect of bullying. I think...that they will return to the crib after...a crack or two of the whip well applied,..." (42)

The British Quarterly Review gave a bitter appraisal of Coningsby and its author. Referring to the party Disraeli headed and his novels it noted that; "...the noise they made has passed away like the vacuous enthusiasm of after-dinner friendships. They have achieved notoriety for their author, oblivion for themselves." (43) Whether this criticism be valid or not, the novel and its author had certainly gained a desirable end; though the Review does not regard it as such. Disraeli wanted to gain notoriety and fame as a writer, for it was through this medium that he was first to impress English society with an "other" England; and also, it seems probable, to meet his

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(41) "The Ioways 'The Lost Tribe' and Young England" VII (Aug. 6, 1844, p. 95)

(42) A letter of Sir James Graham to John W. Croker, Aug. 22, 1843. Croker Papers III, P. 9.

(43) "Coningsby or the New Nation" The British Quarterly Review X (Aug. 1849) p. 119.

creditors.

Coningsby gave to England in 1844 a picture of how her classes and institutions had failed to meet the demands of a new age. Duties as well as rights were bound up with the tenure of property, be that property landed or in capital. This criticism was delivered by Disraeli in an age in which it has been noted, the principle of laissez faire argued persuasively that each man should look out for himself, and not worry about his neighbour. Having refuted this theory by indicating the duties that devolved upon property, Disraeli proceeded to write Sybil, in which the data of property's failure to accept its responsibilities were vividly outlined.

SYBIL - DISRAELI'S SOCIAL MANIFESTO

Soon after the appearance of Coningsby in 1844, Disraeli began his major work, Sybil. In the autumn of 1843 and 1844 he had visited the industrial north and had become acquainted with the conditions of the working class there.<sup>(1)</sup> In this same period came the publication of the first and second reports of the Children's Employment Commission, which in detail described the conditions under which colliers and factory workers laboured. The connection between these reports and Sybil can be noted by textual reference, which indicates where Disraeli has depicted conditions similar to both; and how much he was indebted to these Blue Books for the writing of Sybil.

The novel deals with the career of young "Charles Egremont", the brother of "Lord Marney". "Egremont" is elected to Parliament with the aid of his brother, but will in no wise subscribe to the politics of the latter, who would permit his labourers to comprise "... the most miserable population in the country..."<sup>(2)</sup>

Leaving his brother, "Charles Egremont" comes in contact with "Walter Gerard," a factory overseer, and his daughter "Sybil". In visiting them, he is introduced to factory and mine life. He is also made aware of the Chartist agitation of 1839. "Egremont" eventually wins the hand of "Sybil" after it has fortunately been discovered that she is in reality of noble birth. However, for our purposes, a study of industrial life with reference to the

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(1) Monypenny, op. cit., II, p. 250.

(2) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 174.

reports of the Children's Employment Commission and to the novel can be conducted without a too scrupulous reference to the plot of the novel.

The first report of the Commission gave evidence of the dreadful housing conditions miners had to put up with. A parish overseer who was interviewed on this subject remarked that living conditions were "Very rough, they make rough work in a house, they have very few goods:...The windows are badly kept, not cleaned, and most of the houses are seldom whitewashed." (3)

With regard to the streams of filth and refuse that surrounded labourers' cottages, the report notes that: "The houses occupied by the population in this neighbourhood are generally built on sloping ground, where one habitation is above another, and very rarely drained...These are places occupied by the lower part of the population that require to be drained; and as there are no public means for carrying off filth, etc., from these places, it must influence fever during different periods of the year." (4)

Disraeli's description of living conditions ~~which~~ in the rural town of "Marney", to which manufacturing had come during the Napoleonic wars, is remarkably similar to that which has been cited from the first report. He remarks that:

...Marney mainly consisted of a variety of narrow and crowded lanes formed by cottages built of rubble, or unhewn stones without cement, and, from age or badness of the material, looking as if they would scarcely hold

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(3) Reports from Commissioners, Children's Employment Commission: First Report. (London: William Claves & Sons, 1842) p. 168

(4) Ibid, p. 170

together. The gaping chinks admitted every blast; the leaning chimneys had lost half their original height; the rotten rafters were evidently misplaced; while in many instances the thatch, yawning in some parts to admit the wind and wet, and in all utterly unfit for its original purpose of giving protection from the weather, looked more like the top of a dunghill than a cottage. Before the doors of these dwellings, and often surrounding them ran open drains full of animal and vegetable refuse, decomposing into disease, or sometimes in their imperfect course filling foul pits or spreading into stagnant pools, while a concentrated solution of every species of filth was allowed to soak through, and thoroughly impregnate the walls and ground adjoining. (5)

The similarity here, particularly with reference to the heaps of refuse outside cottages, is remarkably parallel.

The first report gives details of the individual home of a worker as follows: "The hut itself is a wretched hovel, perhaps 10 to 12 feet square, in which a family of from six to ten individuals are huddled together...There is generally an absence of all drainage, and the filth etc. of each cottage is accumulated before the door, not even, in many cases, placed on one side; indeed there is rarely any other deposit for filth except the entrance to the dwelling..." (6)

Disraeli's description of the individual cottage in "Marney" shows evidence of a Blue-Book background. He describes the interior of a worker's dwelling as seldom consisting:

...of more than two rooms, in one of which the whole family however numerous, were obliged to sleep, without distinction of age, or sex, or suffering...The dwelling-rooms were neither boarded nor paved; and whether it were that some were situated in low and damp places, occasionally flooded by the river, and usually much below the level of the road;

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(5) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 60-61.

(6) Appendix. First Report pp. 395-396.



or that the springs, as was often the case would burst through the mud floor; the ground was at no time better than so much clay...These hovels were in many instances not provided with the commonest conveniences... contiguous to every door might be observed the dump-heap on which every kind of filth was accumulated, for the purpose of being disposed of for manure... (7)

The commissioners in their second report gave a graphic picture of the centre of an industrial town, in this case the manufacturing city of Wolverhampton:

In the smaller and dirtier streets of the town, in which the poorest of the working classes reside, 'there are narrow passages, at intervals of every eight or ten houses, and sometimes at every third or fourth house. These narrow passages are also the general gutter, which is by no means always confined to one side, but often streaming all over the passage. Having made your way through the passage, you will find yourself in a space varying in size with the number of houses, hutches, or hovels it contains. They are nearly all proportionately crowded. Out of this space there are other narrow passages, sometimes leading to other hovels' (8)

Disraeli's picture of the heart of "Mowbray" follows an identical course: "...the streets were thronged; an infinite population kept swarming to and from the close courts and pestilential culs-de-sac that continually communicated with streets by narrow archways, like the entrance of hives, so low that you were obliged to stoop for admission; while, ascending to these same streets from their dank and dismal dwellings by narrow flights of steps, the subterraneous nation of the cellars poured forth..." (9)

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(7) Disraeli, Sybil, pp. 61-62.

(8) Reports from Commissioners, Children's Employment Commission, Second Report, p. 33. As quoted in "Juvenile and Female Labour", The Edinburgh Review, LXXIX (Jan. 1844). All references hereinafter to the Second Report are from this article.

(9) Disraeli, Sybil, pp. 100.

One point of contention that irritated factory labourers greatly was the system of fines that factory owners adopted. Thus workers who were late, who left their work, who produced defective articles, were all subject to a fine at the hands of the mill owner. Frederick Engels, referring to the Factory Inquiry Commission of 1833, gives ample evidence of this practice. (10)

Disraeli, in Sybil, showed himself to be aware of this situation either through personal experience or by reference to such reports. He presents the realistic conversation of a factory worker who remarked; "They pretends to give the same wages as the rest, and works it out in fines. You can't come , and you can't go, but there's a fine. You're never paid wages ...I've heard they keep their whole establishment on factory fines. (11)

One evil that had developed in factory and mining centres was the rise of drinking and drunkenness among workers. The various reports of mine and factory commissioners bear testimony to this. Thus the commissioner of the Children's Employment Commission who investigated the parish of Inveresk in the Mid-Lothian district reported that: "Their wives are ... very drunken; and I have seen young children, many of ~~them~~ <sup>from</sup> not more

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(10) Engels, op. cit., pp. 178-181.

(11) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 101

than eight to ten years of age, take a glass of whisky as readily as their parents..." (12)

An iron foundry owner in the Airdrie district noted in reference to drinking that: "... the houses are as crowded on the Sabbath as any other day of the week,..." (13)

A clergyman of Auchterron in Fifeshire remarked that: "... drunkenness ... is lamentably frequent now". (14)

Drunkenness and intemperance had so arisen partially as a result of the long hours factory workers were obliged to labour. Having little means of leisure they resorted to the public houses. (15)

Disraeli was aware of this drunkenness as illustrated by the reports of commissioners, and was also aware of its cause. In his novel we have the humorous "Mrs. Carey" the proprietor of a small meat stall in "Mowbray" who remarks: "And if she is only drunk...what makes her drink but toil; working from five o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock at night, ..." (16)

Still another evil described by the commissioners was the practice in industrial towns of mothers, who, because of poverty, and a lack of education, treated their children when extremely young with medicinals and opiates which could have none but a

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(12) First Report, p. 401.

(13) App. First Report, p. 362.

(14) Ibid., p. 430

(15) J. L. & Barbara Hammond, The Age of the Chartists: 1832-1854. (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1930) p. 134.

(16) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 101.

bad effect upon a child; "The chief evil which they have to endure is, that when very young their mothers injure them by quacking, and give opiates, such as Godfrey's Cordial, which is a mixture of treacle and laudanum." (17)

Disraeli faithfully recorded and condemned this abuse in Sybil. The amusing character "Dandy Dick" complains: "I should like to know what my mother ever did for me, but give me treacle and laudanum when I was a baby to stop my tongue and fill my stomach, ..." (18) Disraeli condemns this practice remarking: "laudanum and treacle, administered in the shape of some popular elixir, affords these innocents a brief taste of the sweets of existence, and keeping them quiet, prepares them for the silence of their impending grave." (19)

Prevalent among industrial workers was the incidence of illegitimacy. Such children as were born out of wedlock were usually thrown out into the streets and forced to fend for themselves, if that were at all possible. The commissioners were aware of this problem and the lack of any institution to care for such orphans: "...before many years we shall see the necessity generally acknowledged of an institution for training up, at the public charge, those whom their parents are ... unwilling to bring up properly." (20)

Disraeli was just as aware of this problem. In Sybil we are introduced to "Devildust": "...the familiar appellation of a young

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(17) App. First Report, p. 39

(18) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 102.

(19) Ibid., p. 113.

(20) App. First Report, p. 354.

gentleman, who really had no other, baptismal or patrimonial. About a fortnight after his mother had introduced him into the world, she ... put her infant out to nurse." (21)

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Another/of the commissioners' first report was the description of the interior of a worker's house, with its obvious lack of furniture: "... two bedsteads, and sometimes only one, nearly destitute of covering, generally a few stools, ... some damaged crockery; the pot ... and the fire over which it invariably hangs." (22)

Disraeli's description of the poor weaver, "Warner's" home is a good duplicate of what the commissioners reported upon. "Warner's" household consisted of: "... a single chamber ... In two corners of the room were mattresses placed on the floor .... An iron kettle was by the hearth, and on the mantelpiece, some candles, a few lucifer matches, two tin mugs, a paper of salt, and an iron spoon. In a farther part, close to the wall, was a heavy table ..." (23)

Both report and novel in describing the shabbiness and poverty of a worker's one or two room dwelling give similar images, indicating a close correlation.

An item of particular importance that developed in the new industries was the necessity forced upon parents to allow their children to work in factories and collieries. The testimony of the Blue Books bears witness to this situation. The commissioners

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(21) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 112.

(22) App. First Report, pp. 395-396.

(23) Disraeli, Sybil, pp. 132-133.

who investigated the lace and millinery manufacturers at Nottingham, Derby, and Leicester, noted that parents were forced to rely upon what the children could earn, because the wages: "... in all branches of the lace trade are wholly insufficient to afford a decent living." (24)

The remarks of other commissioners on this subject are of interest. Dr. Mitchell, commissioner to investigate mines and collieries, stated himself as being in favour of forbidding children under twelve to labour in mines but would not publicly advocate this as he had to look to the "... necessities of poor parents with large families, and of poor widows, ..." (25)

A young witness interviewed by the commissioner remarked that she "... was at service, but father persuaded her to go below, much prefers service, but father needs her earnings." (26)

Disraeli, too, recognized the importance of this situation. The daughter of the weaver "Warner" is a fitting example of this. His wife complains to him: "How are we to have food then? ... you ought not to have let her leave us. You do nothing Warner. You get no wages yourself; and you have let the girl escape." (27) She adds that: "Our daughter has behaved infamously to us. She has quitted us without saying by your leave or with your leave.

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(24) Second Report, pp. 95

(25) App. First Report, p. 125.

(26) First Report, p. 50

(27) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 134.

And her wages were almost the only thing left to us..." (28)

The first report of the Children's Employment Commission devoted a majority of its space to the workers in mines and collieries. One commissioner who watched at the head of a pit gave a graphic description of miners coming up from work, particularly the children. He saw: "an...urchin of seven years and a half emerge from the hutch with his father, his white cheeks strongly contrasting with the coal dust smeared over them,..." (29)

Another commissioner was amazed at the lack of difference between male and female miners: "It is impossible to distinguish... before the broad light of day, an atom of difference between one sex and the other." (30)

These young children who worked in mines and collieries, because of their close association with older miners soon picked up habits of lying, swearing and profanity: "Lying, swearing, cruelty, and all sorts of moral evil abound in the future lives of uneducated miners." (31)

Of particular inhumanity was the labour of women in mines who were pregnant, or who had just been delivered of a child. One woman collier interviewed stated that she had: "... had four children, had usually wrought till within one or two days of the children's birth." (32)

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(28) Ibid., p. 138.

(29) First Report, p. 22.

(30) Ibid., p. 78.

(31) App. First Report, p. 24

(32) First Report, p. 30.

Disraeli did not permit his readers to escape these grim findings of the commissioners. In a single passage he presents a picture of the dark, profane, mixed group of miners. This passage is in no wise distorted and deserves to be given in full :

They come forth: the mine delivers its gang and the pit its bondsmen; ... The plain is covered with the swarming multitude; bands of stalwart men, broad-chested and muscular, wet with toil, and black as the children of the tropics; troops of youth -- alas, of both sexes -- though neither their raiment nor their language indicates the difference; all are clad in male attire, and oaths that men might shudder at, issue from lips born to breathe words of sweetness. Yet these are to be -- some are -- the mothers of England. (33)

Here, without any distortion, exaggeration, or colouring, Disraeli has reproduced the evidence of the commissioners which has just been cited.

In several mines of Britain, particularly in Scotland and Wales, the commissioners brought to light a form of labour that was to say the least, revolting. This was the practice of using young girls and boys to haul coal-waggons through subterraneous passages on their hands and knees by means of a girdle and a chain. The report and its lengthy appendix are filled with examples of this barbarity. For the purposes of this chapter, only a few need be cited to indicate that the evidence was a fertile source for Disraeli's material.

J. C. Symons, commissioner for the Yorkshire coalfields when presented with such labour was prompted to remark: "One of the most disgusting sights I have ever seen was that of young



females, dressed like boys in trousers, crawling on all fours with belts around their waists, and chains passing between their legs, ..." (34)

Still another commissioner exhibited his disgust at this labour as follows : "In one near New Mills, the chain, passing high up between the legs of two of the girls had worn large holes in their trousers; and any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work -- no brothel can beat it." (35)

Yet another commissioner could hardly believe that this practice was possible: "It is almost incredible that human beings can submit to such employment, crawling on hands and knees, harnessed like horses, over soft, slushy floors more difficult than dragging the same weights through our lowest common sewers, ..." (36)

With regard to this inhuman labour, Disraeli did not spare his readers. His excerpt in "Sybil" conforms to the evidence gathered by the mines commissioners, and he did not alter it. "Naked to the waist, an iron chain fastened to a belt of leather runs between legs clad in canvas trousers, while on hands and feet an English girl, for twelve, sometimes for sixteen hours a day, hauls and hurries tubs of coal up subterraneous roads, dark, precipitous, and plashy, ..." (37)

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(34) App. First Report, p. 81.

(35) First Report, p. 24.

(36) Ibid., p. 95.

(37) Disraeli, Sybil, loc.cit.

Such lurid sights of labour, barbarity and inhumanity, greatly impressed the commissioners who gathered the evidence. Dr. Mitchell noted in regard to mine labour in general that: "... instances of exceedingly gross ill-usage may be rare, but all this, and more than this was said by the planters respecting the slaves in the West Indies; but still the country would not be satisfied, and put an end to slavery in the colonies. Now here is slavery in the middle of England as reprehensible as ever was the slavery in the West Indies, which justice and humanity alike demand should no longer be endured." (38)

Speaking in the same vein, another commissioner called collier labour: "... a picture ... of deadly physical oppression and systematic slavery of which ... no one unacquainted with such facts could credit the existence in the British Dominions." (39)

The commissioners after lengthy research, after hearing both workers and mine owners, were prepared to call the system, a form of slavery worse than the slavery that had existed in the West Indies. They called for its abolition. The number of people who would read dry, lengthy, statistical Blue Books was small in comparison to the number who would read the novels of a prominent author and politician. In Sybil, Disraeli repeats the complaint of the commissioners, using almost the identical phrases. Referring to mine labour, Disraeli noted that there were extant:

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(38) App. First Report, p. 19.

(39) First Report, p. 94.

"... Circumstances that seem to have escaped the notice of the Society for the Abolition of Negro Slavery." (40)

The comparison of industrial labour with that of slave labour was not originally Disraeli's nor that of the mines commissioners. Michael Sadler had referred to the situation similarly as early as 1832 in Parliament. (41) What is important, is that Disraeli impressed the idea upon his readers in a novel much more forcibly than would dry, parliamentary debates and Blue Books. Of equal importance, it shows his obligation to the Blue Book commissioners for using a comparison he could profitably employ.

Another malpractice brought to light by the commissioners' report, was the labour of extremely young boys and girls as "trappers" in the mines. "Trappers" were those responsible for the opening and shutting of trap doors in the mine's shafts and passageways. "Trappers" of four and five years of age were employed in this position. A commissioner reporting from Oldham stated that: "... they will go so early as six, five, or even four years of age; some are so young, they go even in their bedgowns." (42)

A collier interviewed by the commissioners stated that: "Some boys go down as early as six." (43)

A coal mine proprietor who was interviewed gave an answer

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(40) Disraeli, Sybil, loc. cit.

(41) Debates, June 27, 1832, p. 1055.

(42) First Report, pp. 15-16.

(43) Ibid., p. 16.

that would indicate why children of five and six were allowed to work in mine pits: "No regulation exists here for the prevention of children working below. I think the parents are the best judges when to take their children below..." (44)

Besides their young age not being considered, "trappers" had usually to spend a longer period in the mine than anyone else. The 1842 report noted that the young children: "... have little else to do; but, as their office must be performed from the repassing of the first to the passing of the last corve, they are in the pit the whole time it is worked ..." (45)

The life these children spent was a dark, solitary, confined one. They were in the mine as the commissioner noted: "...above 12 hours a day ... in the dark ... It is a most painful thing to contemplate the dull, dungeon-like life these little creatures are doomed to spend..." (46)

Perhaps the most glaring abuse in connection with the labour of "trappers" was the fact that upon them depended the safety of the mine. If a trap-door were left open too long, poisonous ~~gases~~ would accumulate, and cause an explosion within the shaft. In this respect the commissioners reported that: "If a child keep open his trap-door when it ought to be shut, it is an offence

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(44) Ibid., p. 19.

(45) Ibid., p. 71

(46) Ibid.,

which may not be detected if no accident happens, but it is possible that the current of air in taking a wrong course may allow the ... gas to accumulate and be exploded." (47)

Still another commissioner in dealing with this subject noted that: "When the children go down, there being no properly appointed person to see to the safety of the pit, the first thing they did was to shut the door, thus sending the air suddenly round the foul workings, and driving a body of gas before it down the shaft ... where the candle of the children fused it; one of the men was burnt ..." (48)

This same commissioner concluded his condemnation of the safety of the mine being placed in the hands of infants as follows: "Thus are the health and lives of scores of work people, under circumstances of peril more imminent than in any other existing trade, placed in the hands of a <sup>subordinate</sup> ~~subordinate~~ ..." (49)

The evidence just cited was a fertile source for Disraeli. In a passage in Sybil he refers to the long hours of labour of the children, their dark, solitary life, their too responsible position in the mine. His passage on the "trappers" reads like the evidence of the Blue Books strung together by a more flowery style than the commissioners employed:

See, too, these emerge from the bowels of the earth. Infants of four and five years of age, many of them girls, pretty and still soft and timid, entrusted with the fulfillment of

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(47) App. First Report, p. 137.

(48) Ibid., p. 186.

(49) Ibid., p. 191

most responsible duties, and the nature of which entails on them the necessity of being the earliest to enter the mine and the latest to leave it. Their labour indeed is not severe, for that would be impossible, but it is passed in darkness and in solitude. They endure that punishment which philosophical philanthropy has invented for the direst criminals, and which those criminals deem more terrible than the death for which it is substituted. Hour after hour elapses, and all that reminds the infant trappers of the world they have quitted and that which they have joined, is the passage of the coal wagons for which they open the air-doors of the galleries; and on keeping which doors constantly closed, except at this moment of passage, the safety of the mine and the lives of the persons employed in it entirely depend. (50)

The passage just quoted from Sybil, is perhaps the one most replete with evidence from the Blue Books. Disraeli here was completely indebted for the data provided by the commissioners. He also gave reading society a picture of a situation that a community aware of its duties would not permit to exist. The illustration is in keeping with his Tory-democratic philosophy that property and classes had duties as well as rights. The plight of the "trappers" could at least hope to gain more prominence on the pages of a recognized author, than on the pages of an official report, whose audience would not extend much beyond Westminster, archives, and libraries.

One abuse in the mining and factory centres that continually worked an injustice to workers was the "truck" system. Miners and factory hands were in many areas forced to take a part or all of their wages in goods and provisions from a store, run by the owners of the mine or factory, or carried on by their sub-contractors. This system usually kept the miner in debt and forced him to pay more for his goods than elsewhere. The

shop where such goods were retailed was referred to as the "tommy" shop. The commissioners of the Children's Employment Commission gathered evidence which illustrated how these shops were not of benefit to the colliers: "The contractor generally keeps a shop for the sale of tobacco, bread, bacon, herrings .... from which the men obtain their supplies on credit till the settling day, when the amount of their bills is deducted from their wages coming to them, thus causing endless disputes, quarrels, and bickerings." (51)

Part of the abuse connected with the truck system was that the prices were usually higher than in nearby retail shops. Because of this, mine proprietors or their contractors made exorbitant profits. Thomas Tancred, commissioner for West Scotland, under the Mines and ~~Colliers~~ <sup>Collieries</sup> Commission reported that: "The profits of these stores are known to be very large, and instances have often been mentioned to me of ... contractors taking a pit at less than it could possibly pay at -- calculating that they should make up the deficiency by causing the workmen to deal at a shop in which they had an interest." (52)

A witness in South Wales testified that: "... necessaries of life are dearer in these shops by 25 per cent. than in another perhaps five miles off ..." (53)

The following table is a good indication of how these shops

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(51) First Report, p. 160.

(52) App. First Report, p. 338

(53) First Report, p. 159.

made their large profits at the expense of the colliers:

<u>At Tommy Shop</u>		<u>In the Town</u>	
	<u>Per Lb.</u>		<u>Per Lb.</u>
Sugar	9 d.		7½ d.
Salt butter	15 d. & 16 d.		10 d. & 11 d.
Bacon	9 d.		7½ d.
Tea	8 s.		5 s. (54)

Because many mining communities were plagued by these "tommy" shops, workers were often obliged to wait weeks before their credit was re-established at the shop. During this period they obtained credit for food and goods at the shop with the greatest of difficulty. The Mines and <sup>Collieries</sup>~~Colliers~~ report includes the evidence that: "... in many parts ... the wages of the working collier population are very rarely paid in money, ... the books of the shop and the books of the colliery are checked on the pay day, ... and the balance, if any, is handed over to the man. It very often happens however, that the men unfortunately have nothing to receive for months together." (55)

In view of this evidence it can be seen that one class of society was benefitting at the expense of another. It was an usurpation of the rights and privileges of the working class. Disraeli was prepared to show the lack of duty performed on the part of the capitalist class; and the truck system with the data

(54) Evidence submitted by Mr. Ferrand, Debates, April 19. 1842, pp. 837-839.

(55) First Report, loc. cit.



from the Blue Books at hand, gave him ample opportunity.

Following the material of the report, one of Disraeli's miners in Sybil complains: "The question is, what is wages ? I say, 'taint sugar, 'taint tea, 'taint bacon. I don't think it's candles; ..." (56)

Another miner voices his disgust, "The fact is, we are tommyed to death." (57)

The author was well aware of the hardship imposed upon miners by the lack of cash payments. The conversation between a group of miners in Sybil indicates this point: "And I have been obliged to pay the doctor for my poor wife in tommy ... Doctor, I said, says I, I blush to do it, but all I have got is tommy, and what shall it be, bacon or cheese ?" (58)

In line with the commissioners' evidence Disraeli did not spare his readers the fact that the "truck" system reduced the real wages of the collier. One of the author's miners remarks: "Bacon at ninepence a pound at Diggs; which you may get at a huckster's for sixpence; ..." (59)

Proceeding from the profits gained from the truck system, Disraeli lets his readers know of the difficulties miners had in arranging their living when payments were made only every five or six weeks, and then usually in goods: "I've been making

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(56) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 165.

(57) Ibid., p. 164

(58) Ibid., p. 163

(59) Ibid., p. 165.

a pound a week these two months past, ... but, as I'm a sinner saved, I have never seen the young Queen's picture yet." (60)

Thus, another of Disraeli's miners indicates how difficult his life is when he is only paid "... once in five weeks ... and how is a man to live in the meanwhile ?" (61) These miners could not go elsewhere to obtain their necessaries: "It's them long reckonings that force us to the tommy shops ..." (62)

From the excerpts from Sybil it can be noted that Disraeli, indebted to the Blue Books and their distasteful findings, reproduced for his reading public, facts and conditions of which they were in all probability totally unaware.

The iniquitous system of the shops that deprived workers of a good portion of their wages was generally conducted by a middleman known as a "Butty". The "Butty" and his manager, called the "Doggy" ran the mines on contracts from the owners, in addition to operating the "tommy" shops. The mine workers were under their control, and in their employ. In coal districts these individuals were petty tyrants, hated and despised by the collier population. Their cruelty was recorded by the mines commissioners.

The evidence of a young child is of interest. John Ghent, aged 13, of Butterly Park, testified that he: "Gets thrashed by the butties with what they can lay their hands on. They

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(60) Ibid., p. 163.

(61) Ibid., p. 165.

(62) Ibid.,

set them more than they can do, and then beat them; has been thrashed ... until the blood has flown out of his side." (63)

Samuel Richards, aged 42, reports that he: "Has within three months seen a boy nine years old beaten by a butty until he wetted his breeches, because he had not come the day before. He has often seen them beat so that they were black and blue; and if the parents were by they dare not say anything or they could be turned off the ground directly." (64)

Not only <sup>were</sup> young children subjected to the harsh treatment of the "butties", but also the older workers. A collier testified that: "... we are bound ... to work under the butties. If we ... are not able to come to work on any day, the butties make us work the next day for nothing." (65)

This situation was allowed to exist, partially as a result of the complete absence of the mine owner. The proprietor, even if he cared, was not aware of the conditions enforced upon the workers. The mines report notes that: "The proprietor of a colliery very rarely visits it at all." (66)

Disraeli with this evidence at hand, presented it to his readers. They were made aware of a tyranny in the heart of Britain, where heretofore the only despotisms they had acknowledged were those of a West Indian character.

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(63) First Report, p. 127.

(64) Ibid., p. 128

(65) App. First Report, p. 115.

(66) Ibid., p. 191.

With regard to the "butties"; Disraeli's miners speak as eloquently as the Blue Books:

There's wuss things as tommy ... and that's these here butties. What's going on in the pit is known to God Almighty and the colliers. I have been a consistent Methodist for many years, strived to do well, and all the harm I have ever done to the butties was to tell them that their deeds would not stand on the day of judgment.

They are deeds of darkness surely; for many's the morn we work for nothing, by one excuse or another, and many's the good stint they undermeasure... There ain't no black tyrant on this earth like a butty ... (67)

Disraeli did not omit from his readers the fact, brought to light by the commissioners, that mine proprietors knew little of their workers' plight at the hands of the butties: "It's as easy for a miner to speak to a minemaster, as it is for me to pick coal with this here clay." (68)

With the description in Sybil of the conditions extant in mining communities it can be seen that Disraeli was in the first place indebted to the evidence produced by the Children's Employment Commission. He faithfully reproduced what the reports had contained. In the second place, he gave to those who bought Sybil, a picture of a society in which duties and rights had been perverted to the elevation of one class, and to the degradation of another. In keeping with his philosophy of Tory democracy, Disraeli pointed out again that property had duties as well as rights.

Another section of the first and second reports of the

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(67) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 165.

(68) Ibid.,

Children's Employment Commission dealt with small trades such as iron-mongery, brass and steel works, blacksmithing, and nail making. The second report issued in 1843 gave some space to a description of such trades in Sheffield and W~~o~~lverhampton. (69)

These industries were primarily on a small scale, in which local masters who employed apprentices reigned supreme. There was no large accumulation of capital, labour, and plant, ~~and plant~~ such as characterized the heavy industries of Manchester or Birmingham. In towns of small scale industry there was frequently a shocking lack of any municipal authority. Lawlessness and anarchy went hand in hand; and a local constabulary was unknown. A witness interviewed by the commissioners for the first report gave evidence to this effect, with regard to iron works in the Airdrie district: "... there is not a worse place out of hell than that neighbourhood and murders may be committed every day and never heard of. They maintained some policemen a while, but the county would not support them; .... " (70)

Disraeli in Sybil gives us a similar picture of small industry, untouched by large-scale expansion or by a coherent system of local law. The reader is introduced to the industrial centre of "Wodgate" in which the labour employed by the small-masters was usually apprenticed labour. Like the towns noted in the second report of the Commission, "Wodgate" specialized in iron, brass, steel, and nail works that characterized the

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(69) Second Report, p. 83.

(70) App. First Report, p. 364

centres visited by the commissioners. (71) Disraeli described the town as one in which there was: "... no municipality, no magistrate; there are no local acts, no vestries, no school of any kind, the streets are never cleaned, every man lights his own house; nor does anyone know anything except his business." (72)

The treatment and conditions of child apprentices in these trades was an inhumanity which no civilized nation would permit to exist; yet it existed in England because of ignorance on the part of society. The reports of the commissioners gave evidence of brutality to children seldom equalled. Thus in the town of Willenhall: "... the children are shamefully and most cruelly beaten with a horsewhip, strap, stick, hammer, handle, file, or whatever tool is nearest at hand, or struck with the clenched fist or kicked." (73)

Another report tells of an apprentice whose master: "... hits him sometimes with his fist, and sometimes with the file haft, ...sometimes hits him with the locks; has cut his head open four or five times: ..." (74)

The first report dealing with children apprenticed to colliers gives similar details. Thus one child of nine testified that his master "...often beats him, and ... has pinched his ears through ..." (75)

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(71) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 187.

(72) Ibid.,

(73) Second Report, loc. cit.

(74) Ibid.,

(75) First Report, p. 127.

These facts were startling and grim. Yet Disraeli presented them in Sybil as the Blue Books had presented the material and evidence to him. He writes that the apprentices in the nail and brass works of "Wodgate" were often attacked by the masters who: "... not content with beating them with sticks or flogging them with knotted ropes ... are in the habit of felling them with hammers, or cutting their heads open with a file or lock. The most usual punishment however, or rather stimulus to increased exertion, is to pull an apprentice's ears till they run with blood." (76)

A young apprentice in Sybil complained that he : "...should like to have a crown for every time he has cut my head open. He cut it open once with a key, and twice with a lock; he knocked the corner of a lock into my head twice; once with a bolt, and once with a shut, ... He hit me on the head with a hammer once ... Many's the ash stick he has broken on my body; sometimes the weals remained on me for a week; he cut my eyelid once with a nutstick; ... he has pulled my ears sometimes that I thought they must come off in his hand." (77)

Once again Disraeli has followed the Blue Books, using their evidence, startling those readers who looked beyond the plot of Sybil.

Apart from the physical cruelties inflicted upon the

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(76) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 188.

(77) Ibid., p. 190.

apprentices, they were denied any moral and educational benefits. Literally speaking, they were stupid and ignorant. One of the commissioners of the mines and colliers testified with regard to the apprentices that: "Probably very few children ... have heard of such places as Birmingham or Manchester or Liverpool and as few ... have ever heard of Durham or of Newcastle. Such words as Scotland, Ireland, France or America bring no ideas into their minds. The children to whom only spelling and reading are taught have no materials on which they can exercise thought, and it can be no surprise that their ideas should be concentrated on the enjoyment of strong beer." (78)

The remarks of witnesses interviewed are even more enlightening and pitiful. One apprentice testified :

I can read the Bible. I go to school five nights in the week, and read a chapter and then come out. I never read any other book. I do not remember anything about Jerusalem. I think it is in the Bible. I have seen the name of David. I do not know what he was. I have heard of Abraham. He was very rich in cattle. I have not heard of Jacob ... I do not know anything of Moses. I never heard of France. I do not know what America is. I never heard of Scotland nor of Ireland. I cannot tell how many days in a year. I cannot tell how many weeks in a year ... There are 8 pints in a gallon of ale. (79)

Another worker, of fifteen, in reply to questioning stated that :

The Lord made the world; He sent Adam and Eve on earth to save sinners. I heard my grandfather tell about it; he is a great reader, but he can't see. I have heard of the Saviour, he was a good man but he did not die here; he is in heaven. We must pray to be saved. There is

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(78) App. First Report, p. 144.

(79) Ibid., p. 108



but one God, and he does not die like men. Jesus Christ was nailed on a cross, but that is all I have heard about it. I have not begun to learn to write. ...London is the largest town in England. I never heard mention of France. I never heard mention of Wales or of Scotland, but I know people that come from Ireland. I think Ireland is a town as big as Barnsley, where there is plenty of potatoes and lots of bullocks. 20 pence is one shilling and 8 pence; 32 pence is 2 shillings and 8 pence. 7 times 3 is 32 -- no, it's 22. I have learnt the Lord's Prayer. (80)

The evidence cited is a small example of the unparalleled ignorance of children in industry. English society certainly was not ~~was not~~ aware of it. Disraeli faced with these facts, did justice to them, and faithfully recorded in "Sybil" what the commissioners had recorded in the Blue Books. He refers to the labouring children as:

... animals, unconscious, their minds a blank; and their worst actions only the impulse of a gross or savage instinct. There are many in this town who are ignorant of their very names; very few who can spell them. It is rare to meet with a young person who knows his own age; rarer to find the boy who has seen a book, or the girl who has seen a flower. Ask them the name of their sovereign, and they will give ~~you~~ you an unmeaning stare; ask them the name of their religion and they will laugh; who rules them on earth, or who can save them in heaven, are alike mysteries to them. (81)

Basing his description of child ignorance even more verbally upon the Blue Books and giving his readers something to think about, Disraeli inserts in Sybil the remarks of a young girl-apprentice with regard to her religion. "I be a reg'lar born Christian and my mother afore me, and that's what few gals... can say. Thomas will take to it himself when the work's slack;

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(80) Ibid., pp. 245-246.

(81) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 189.

and he believes now in our Lord and Saviour Pontious Pilate, who was crucified to save our sins; and in Moses, Goliath, and the rest of the Apostles." (82)

In presenting this picture of deplorable ignorance Disraeli was merely reiterating the philosophy of all classes having duties and rights. Very obviously society's duty toward the apprenticed child had been mishandled, even forgotten, by English society. What the commissioners had discovered in child ignorance and presented to the House of Commons, Disraeli assiduously re-copied and presented to the bookstores and bookstalls.

In addition to ignorance, cruelty, and slavery in industrial life, the Blue Books brought to light an appalling lack of moral sensibility on the part of the labourer. The rise of intoxication in industrial areas has already been commented upon earlier in this chapter. The second report of the Children's Employment Commission revealed that this was common not only in centres of heavy industry, but also in the smaller-scale industries. In these places, religion was rarely practiced, and drunkenness too common. Referring to Birmingham the second report noted that: "The moral and religious state of the children and young persons employed in the trades and manufactures ... is ... very unfavourable. The social and domestic affections are but little cultivated and practiced; great numbers never attend any place of religious worship..." (83)

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(82) Ibid., pp. 192-193.

(83) Second Report, p. 176.

As for drinking, the report with regard to Sheffield states that: "Habits of drinking are formed at a very early age, malt liquor being generally introduced into the workshops, of which the youngest children are encouraged to partake." (84)

Disraeli gave his readers in Sybil a similar picture. "Wodgate", the town that was fictitious in name only, exhibited conditions that Sheffield, Birmingham, and Wolverhampton possessed in equal degree: "No church there has yet raised its spire; and ... even the conventicle scarcely dares show its humble front in some obscene corner." (85)

In "Wodgate" as in England's industrial towns that were reported upon by the commissioners, "On Monday and Tuesday the whole population ... is drunk; of all stations, ages, and sexes" (86)

Such labour as workers had to undergo was extremely bad for their health and physique. The commissioners investigating the lace trade reported that: "The majority of the children ... were pale and unhealthy-looking, and several were of diminutive stature. The health and sight are often greatly impaired, especially among the runners, who occasionally faint while at work ... short sightedness, amourosis, distortion of the spine, excessive constitutional debility, indigestion ... may be said to be almost universal:..." (87)

The first report brought in similar evidence. Children

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(84) Ibid., p. 177.

(85) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 187.

(86) Ibid., P. 188

(87) Second Report, p. 109.

employed in collieries were described as "... thin, skinny, and wasted, and indicate by their contracted features and sickly white or faint-yellowish aspect, their early participation in a deteriorated physical condition ..." (88)

Such was a picture of England's future generation. Disraeli gave his readers just what the commissioners had seen. He describes such children excellently in Sybil. "A lank and haggard youth, rickety and smoke-dried, and black with his craft, was sitting on the threshold of a miserable hovel, and working at the file. Behind him stood a stunted and meagre girl, with a back like a grasshopper; a deformity occasioned by the displacement of the bladebone, and prevalent among the girls ... from the cramping posture of their usual toil." (89)

The passages cited from Sybil that are pertinent to the Blue Books show that the author was well aware of the chapter and verse of the reports on labourers, young and old, in factory and in mine.

There are parts of Sybil, which, when compared with the Blue Books read almost identically with the commissioners' reports. Thus for example, do Disraeli's remarks upon the ignorance of apprentices, the labour of young "Trappers" and the toil of young girls in the mines approach, with an amazing similarity, the findings of the Children's Employment Commission.

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(88) First Report, p. 183.

(89) Disraeli, Sybil, pp. 190.

• The remainder of Sybil deals with the success of "Charles Egremont" in winning the hand of the heroine. There is a description of the Chartist uprising of 1842, with miner and factory hand uniting to demand political representation as a means of obtaining a fair wage within regulated hours. These particular events need not concern us, as the primary purpose of this chapter has been to show the debt Disraeli owed to the Blue Books, and his continual presentation to a reading public of a duty that was theirs to reform such wretched conditions as he had described.

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CHAPTER  
VII  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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The task of this thesis has been both literary and historical. It has been literary in the sense that the novel Sybil has been assessed and evaluated in its connection with the two reports of the Children's Employment Commission. It has been historical in the presentation of Disraeli's philosophy as he outlined it in Sybil and Coningsby.

There can be little doubt of the debt which Disraeli owed to the Blue Books. In this thesis, paragraph after paragraph has been quoted from Sybil; while at the same time, paragraph after paragraph from the reports of the commissioners has been cited. The similarity between the two sources is of course obvious. Disraeli faithfully reproduced for the reading public what the commissioners had provided for the House of Commons.

One point that deserves notice is the author's use of terms which were common among miners and factory workers, and to which the commissioners had given due notice. Thus such words as "Butty" in connection with the subcontractor in a mine, "Doggy" in reference to the "Butty's" aide, "Tommy" in regard to company stores, and "trappers" with reference to young children employed in the mine, were all contained in the jargon of the miners of Sybil, and in the reports of the commissioners. "There was a subcontract ... in mining. Those "butties" about whom Benjamin Disraeli learnt from the Blue Books of the forties - there is no record of his borrowing overalls to go down a mine; but it is easy to annotate Sybil from a well known report on midland coal-mining - the "butties" were sub-contractors, small master

miners so to speak." (1)

There is further authority to substantiate our findings that Disraeli was indebted to the Blue Books for his material in Sybil. In fact he was sharply criticised for writing the novel, "... his only knowledge of it being derived from published reports, ..." (2) Later he is praised for presenting "... the condition of the poor with a force and unsparing realism which is not behind 'Les Miserables', ... or a Blue-book on sweating." (3) In view of our findings, this thesis fully agrees with Sybil "... is a Blue Book in fiction; ..." (4)

The question arises, how successful was Disraeli in educating the Tory party and the electorate of England. to his philosophy that society has duties as well as rights ? The publication of Coningsby in 1844 and Sybil in 1845 certainly gained the attention of the leading reviews and periodicals of the day. This in itself is evidence that Disraeli's writings were at least being read, if not appreciated for what they contained. The remarks made about Sybil are of interest; none of them being particularly favourable.

The Edinburgh Review with reference to Sybil remarked :

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- (1) Clapham, J. H. "Work and Wages". Early Victorian England, Vol. I ed. G. M. Young (London: Oxford University Press , 1934, p.51.
  - (2) "Sybil", a Novel" The Westminster Review XLIV (Sept. 1845, p. 143.
  - (3) Lucas, Reginald, "Lord Beaconfield's Novels" The Quarterly Review , CCVII (July, 1907) p. 164.
  - (4) Victorian England: Portrait of an Age. G.M.Young, )London: Oxford University Press, 1944) p. 33

... the peculiar evils incident to a crowded population are vividly depicted, and all are laid to the account of the development of industry; while the harsh lines of distinction between high and low in this country are powerfully reprobated and mainly attributed to the aggregation of capital. But the remedy which should equally apply to a busy manufacturing Manchester, and an inactive agricultural Skibbereen, is not disclosed; and no better means of amalgamating the alienated classes are discovered, than the alliance of two persons - who turn out both to belong to the upper one. (5)

If the writer of the article had properly read Sybil, he perhaps would have noticed that Disraeli did not see the amelioration of the working classes by a mere marriage, but by a recognition on the part of the upper classes; industrial and agricultural, of their duty towards the lower orders. In Sybil there is the example of "Mr. Trafford" the industrialist, whose factory was clean and well kept, who paid his labourers a fair wage, allowed them adequate leisure time, built good homes and good schools, and who felt that between his workers and himself "... there should be other ties than the payment and the receipt of wages." (6)

The British Quarterly Review, in reviewing Sybil at least gave Disraeli credit for a keen observance of the mannerisms, dress and language of miners and factory workers. (7) The review, however, could not accept the author's philosophy that

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(5) "The Emancipation of the Jews", The Edinburgh Review LXXXV (July 1847) p. 142.

(6) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 209

(7) "Sybil or the Two Nations" The British Quarterly Review II (August 1845) p. 171



a "Young England" would ameliorate the condition of the people, which was Disraeli's whole purpose. Referring to his philosophy that society has duties as well as rights, it remarked:

But the story of this tale is ill-contrived and the plot vulgarly managed, in the worst spirit of the Minerva-press school. Few will read the volumes for either the story or the plot. The book may no doubt be taken as a sort of official, state-paper of Young England theories, which are, after all, very old exploded English doctrines, in the sense in which they are put forth, and may be comprised in the words, Queen, Church, and People. But the Queen must be a tory queen - with real power - who not only reigns but governs by her own will; the Church must be a high church, either Romanist or Puseyite, or a blending of both together; and the people must be a people, fed with good butcher's meat certainly, but clad in coarse woollens, and humbly disposed to bow to the right divine of princes and priests. But these jaded, outworn doctrines, however picturesque and medieval they may seem on paper, are gone forever by, and are abhorrent to the people of England; and though they may please the romantic taste of pure Caucasians, and find favor with scions of aristocracy, more poetical than wise or far seeing, yet they never again can find favour in this fair land of ours. (8)

What was perhaps the most bitter review of Sybil was contained in the Westminster Review. It noted that the novel was: "... a mere work of fiction ... very faulty. - abrupt in transitions - incorrect in costume - extravagant in delineation - fantastic and sometimes absurd in its philosophy - and far from high minded in its conception and its plot. (9)

This condemnation would indicate that perhaps the reviewer was aware of the plot of Sybil, and aware also that the author had used as material, evidence which had been accepted by the House of Commons. What he was not aware of, was the fact that

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(8) Ibid., pp. 172-173

(9) "Sybil". The Westminster Review, XLIV (Sept. 1845) p. 141.

the findings of a government appointed commission, accepted by the House of Commons were not usually regarded as extravagant, fantastic, or untrue.

The comments cited from these leading reviews in 1845 are a fair indication that Sybil was being read by many, but was perhaps not educating the same number to Disraeli's philosophy.

There is no satisfactory yardstick by which Disraeli's success as an educator can be measured. A reasonable approach to this may be found in the sales of his novels. With Coningsby, three editions were sold within three months, and shortly after 50,000 copies were required in the United States. (11) Sybil was equally successful as a best-seller. During the summer of 1845, it went through three editions. (12)

An even more enlightening guide to the popularity of Sybil and Coningsby is to be found in the diary of John Bright. Bright remarked: "Yesterday had a talk with Disraeli in the library... Spoke of his shilling edition of his novels. He said he had sold more than 300,000 copies in less than a year - that 400,000 copies would give him a profit equal to his salary as Chancellor of the Exchequer." (13)

This evidence indicates that if people were not comprehending

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(10) Ibid.,

(11) Monypenny, op. cit., II, p. 199.

(12) Ibid., p. 252

(13) March 15, 1854. The Diaries of John Bright, ed. R.A.J. Walling. (New York: William Morrow, 1930) p. 163

what Disraeli wrote, they were at least buying his novels. These figures indicate that a reading public, willing to buy shilling copies of Sybil, was at hand.

It has been noted that in connection with this thesis, Disraeli had found a source of material for Sybil in the Blue Books of his era. It has also been noted, that despite their very large sale, his novels did not receive very commendable reviews at the time they were published. Such would seem to indicate, that as a social and as a political educator Disraeli had not been successful.

Education however is not an affair of the moment, but of decades. In this respect Disraeli succeeded as an educator. During the years 1874-75 he achieved for the working classes, with the support of an enlightened and educated Tory party, what Sybil had advocated thirty years earlier. This was to his credit, and to that of the Tory party, for the Liberal party up to this date had neglected the obvious needs of the working class population. (14)

The social reforms of this era are almost a reflection of the abuses Disraeli had pointed out in 1845 in Sybil. During the period 1874-75, the Artisans Dwelling Bill was passed, providing for the removal of unsanitary houses in towns and empowering the local authorities to build new ones for the sole use of workers. (15) The evils of overcrowded, pestilential

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(14) The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Vol. V. George E. Buckel, p. 363.

(15) Ibid.,

labour dwellings were thus removed. To prevent the employee from being completely under the domination of the employer, two Bills were ~~legislated~~ legislated into law in 1875. The first made employee and employer equal before the law, the second made "conspiracy" as it applied to trade union disputes no longer a crime. (16) In 1874 the Truck Acts which protected the worker from the "tommy" shops were extended, (17) and in 1878 all factory laws and regulations were reviewed, consolidated, and improved by a Consolidation Act. (18)

In view of these striking measures in favour of the "other" England it can well be said that the lesson Sybil taught had been learned by the Tory party, and by at least a part of the English electorate. In this respect Disraeli's biographer noted that: "The aspirations of Sybil and 'Young England', the doctrines in which Disraeli had 'educated' his party for thirty years, ... were translated into legislative form; it was Tory democracy in action." (19)

In view of this series of legislative reforms which put into effect the philosophy of Coningsby based upon the data of Sybil, it is of interest to note what the critics of a later age have to say about Disraeli as an educator. In connection with

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(16) Ibid., p. 365.

(17) Ibid., pp. 366-367

(18) Ibid., p. 366

(19) Ibid., p. 369.

the education of a political party; Coningsby and Sybil were regarded as "...active forces..."<sup>(20)</sup> A review that could look back fifty years to the publication of Sybil called it;

...the most genuinely serious of all Disraeli's romances; and in many ways... the most powerful. Disraeli himself was a man of sympathetic and imaginative nature who really felt for the suffering and the oppressed. He was tender hearted as a man, however sardonic as a politician. He had seen and felt the condition of the people in 1844. It was a time of cruel suffering... It led to the new Radicalism of which Mr. Gladstone and Mr. John Morley are eminent types. But the genius of Disraeli saw that it might also become the foundation of a new Toryism; and Sybil was the first public manifesto of the new departure. The political history of the last fifty years is evidence of his insight that, to recover their political ascendancy, a Conservative party must take in hand 'the condition of the people', under the leadership of a 'generous aristocracy', and in alliance with a renovated Church. These are the ideas of Sybil... As a romance Sybil is certainly inferior to Coningsby. As a political manifesto, it had an almost greater success, and the movement that it launched is far from exhausted even yet. ...And when we consider all the phases of Tory Democracy, Socialistic-Toryism, and the current type of Christian Socialism, we may come to regard the ideas propounded in Sybil as not quite so visionary as they appeared to the Whigs, Radicals, Free Traders, and Benthamites of fifty years ago. (21)

In view of what critics fifty years after Sybil was published, said about his work and the great series of reforms he succeeded in passing into law for the benefit of the labourer; it is apparent that Disraeli succeeded in his task as a social and political educator. That part of the material for this curriculum was obtained from the Blue Books of the 1840's has already been widely illustrated.

Perhaps more than any writer of the age he lived in, Disraeli

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(20) Harrison, Frederick, "Disraeli's Place in Literature" The Forum XVIII (Sept. 1894) p. 198.

(21) Ibid., pp. 201-202.

realized and understood that there were "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws." (22)

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(22) Disraeli, Sybil, p. 76.

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