

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

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Being a Thesis Presented to the University of Manitoba
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements Leading to
the Degree of Master of Arts.

Winnipeg, Manitoba.
May, 1949.



PREFACE

The writer would like to express his appreciation and gratitude to Professor W. L. Morton of the University of Manitoba at whose suggestion the preparation of this thesis was undertaken. His guidance, advice, and suggestions in later revisions were invaluable. To Professor R. Glover, of the University of Manitoba a similar debt of thanks is due for his supervision and guidance. Appreciation is due to Mr. J. L. Johnston of the Provincial Library and his staff, by whom every courtesy and aid was offered. A similar debt of thanks is due to the staff of the Library at the University of Manitoba, both at Senior Division and Junior Division.

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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

(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

(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)

(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 ^a 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

(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^{area} 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

(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)

(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.