

aristocratic character of the Constitution, the privileged position of the Church, and the exclusion of the working classes from the legislature still remained evils about which all radicals could agree. Political power remained as concentrated as it had been before; bishops, lords and placemen were scarcely less entrenched.²²⁹ But the tight link forged between the oppression of the working classes and the monopoly of political power exercised through the medium of 'class legislation' – the essence of Chartist rhetoric – began to loosen. The Chartist capitulation on the issue of repeal and free trade wholly undercut the emphasis upon the home market and underconsumption. The labour market and the fate of the producer could no longer be presented simply as politically determined phenomena. Economics and politics were increasingly sundered and the embryonic features of mid-Victorian liberalism began to emerge. Chartism was again to revive in 1847–8, but the staleness and anachronistic flavour of its rhetoric became apparent even to its strongest supporters.²³⁰ That the stabilization of the economy and the mid-century boom finally killed off all but a few beleaguered Chartist outposts is a fact acknowledged by all historians of Chartism.²³¹ But as a coherent political language and a believable political vision, Chartism disintegrated in the early 1840s, not the early 1850s. Chartist decline was not initially the result of prosperity and economic stabilization, for it effectively preceded them. Attention to the language of Chartistism suggests that its rise and fall is to be related in the first instance not to movements in the economy, divisions in the movement or an immature class consciousness, but to the changing character and policies of the state – the principal enemy upon whose actions radicals had always found that their credibility depended.

²²⁹ For the changed character of radicalism in the post-Chartist period, see F. Gillespie, *Labour and Politics in England 1850–1867* (1927); F. M. Leventhal, *Respectable Radical, the Life of George Howell* (1971); Harrison, *Before the Socialists*.

²³⁰ See Belcham, 'Fergus O'Connor'.

²³¹ What this stabilization involved is briefly discussed in Ch. 1 in this volume.

4

WORKING-CLASS CULTURE AND
WORKING-CLASS POLITICS IN
LONDON, 1870–1900: NOTES ON THE
REMAKING OF A WORKING CLASS

In the London of the 1880s, Charles Masterman recalled, the future that all had foretold had been one of class war and the formation of a workers' party. But that future had not materialized. For, 'a wave of imperialism has swept over the country, and all these efforts, hopes and visions have vanished as if wiped out by a sponge'.¹ Masterman was writing in 1900, the year of the Mafeking celebrations. No one who saw the crowds on Mafeking night ever forgot them. 'Mafficking' entered the English language, and the memory was still vivid in the 1920s and 1930s when a growing literature of reminiscence comforted the dispirited inhabitants of servantless houses with the legend of a departed golden age. 'In those days', asserted one former stockbroker, 'East met West. And yet each "knew his place", the boast of the time... You would see beves of 'Arrys and 'Arriets in these national demonstrations burst out from the congestion of the pavements to jig themselves into forgetfulness of the sterner realities of Bermondsey and Bethnal Green as they "set" to one another in a saturnalia of howl and mouth organ.'² The strangeness of the occasion was strikingly recaptured by Thomas Burke, forty years afterwards: 'I was out at Armistice Night, but I don't recall that publicans went right off their heads and refused all day to take money from anybody. I don't remember any young men screwing up five-pounds notes and tossing them into the air for catch-who-can. I don't remember money-grubbing City men going so mad as to shower sovereigns and handfuls of silver among the crowd. I don't remember seeing

¹ C. Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire* (1901), 3.

² Shaw Desmond, *London Nights of Long Ago* (1927), 94–5.

men take off their hats and jump on them.³ The celebration was not confined to the central pleasure area or the middle-class suburbs. According to the report of the events in *The Times*, 'the news was received with extraordinary enthusiasm in East London and Saturday was generally observed as a holiday. The Whitechapel and Bow Roads were a mass of flags and bunting, while all the trams and omnibuses flew flags... a large body of working men with flags and banners perambulated the Bow Road, singing patriotic airs, while hundreds of cyclists wearing photographs of Colonel Baden Powell formed into procession and paraded the principal thoroughfares of Poplar and Stepney.'⁴ It is not surprising that startled liberals, like Masterman, should have imagined that they were witnessing the emergence of a 'new race... the city type... voluble, excitable, with little ballast, stamina or endurance - seeking stimulus in drink, in betting, in any unaccustomed conflicts at home or abroad'.⁵

This picture painted by anxious liberals and complacent conservatives must be somewhat modified. The predominant feeling on Mafeking night was not aggression but relief after the disasters of the 'black week'. There was little hooliganism or violence. It has recently been established that not workers but students and clerks formed the loutish jingo mobs which broke up pro-Boer meetings and ransacked the property of 'little Englanders'.⁶ Recent research also suggests that the Boer War was not the main concern of working-class voters in the 'khaki election' of 1900. The poll was below average and the decisive issues in poorer London constituencies were local and material - high rents, job opportunities, Jewish immigration, the protection of declining trades and the improvement of the water supply.⁷ Finally, the recruitment figures show that workers did not volunteer to fight in the war in any significant numbers until the return of unemployment in 1901.⁸

³ Thomas Burke, *The Streets of London* (1940), 136.

⁴ *The Times*, 21 May 1900.

⁵ Masterman, *Heart of the Empire*, 7-8.

⁶ Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (1972), Ch. IV.

⁷ Price, *Imperial War*, Ch. III; Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (1967), 45, 47, 52, 57; id., *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (1968), 94.

⁸ Price, *Imperial War*, Ch. V.

These qualifications are important, but it is unlikely that they would have done much to assuage the anxiety felt by radicals and socialists at the time. For, if the working class did not actively promote the jingoism, there can be no doubt that it passively acquiesced to it. Certainly, the celebrations of Mafeking night were not highly politically defined. There is every reason to believe that they were an expression of admiration for the bravery of husbands, brothers and sons at the front, rather than a general endorsement of the war, and that this identification with the common soldier was the primary way in which London workers related to the South African campaign. But it is still important to remember that workers had not previously expressed such feelings by dancing in the streets and fraternizing with the rich.

Modern historians have tended to belittle the anxieties of Masterman and the perplexity of radicals and socialists. Standard interpretations of the period, 1870-1914, have tended to concentrate on the great waves of trade union expansion, the growth of socialism, the foundation of the Labour Party, the conversion of the working class from liberalism, the demand for social reform and the beginnings of the welfare state. Phenomena like Mafeking and the prevalence of conservatism among the working class in a large city like London, when discussed at all, have generally appeared as accidental or aberrant features of a period whose basic tendency was the rise of Labour and the mounting pressure for social reform. When attempts have been made to explain such deviations in the Boer War period, they have concentrated almost exclusively upon short-term causes and subjective factors: dissensions within the Liberal Party; the absence of a 'charismatic' figure like Gladstone or Bradlaugh capable of mobilizing an anti-war movement; the lack of any adequate theory of imperialism; and the inability of radicals or socialists to formulate an attractive alternative political programme.

Any form of historical explanation which is forced to resort to a theory of charisma immediately betrays its inadequacy. In reality, weakness of platform, absence of effective leadership and feeble organization were symptoms rather than causes of the lack of vitality in London working-class politics. The failure of radicals and socialists to make any deep

impression on the London working class in the late Victorian and Edwardian period had deeper roots than subjective deficiency. Underlying it were longer term structural changes in the character of London working-class life which made attempts at political mobilization increasingly difficult. What Mafeking and other imperial celebrations portended was not so much the predominance of the wrong politics among the mass of London workers, but rather their estrangement from political activity as such. There was general agreement that the politically active working man of the time was a radical or a socialist. Loyalism was a product of apathy.

One of the features of this period which has generally received little attention from historians was the emergence of a distinctively new pattern of working-class culture in the years between 1870 and 1900: a type of culture which literary critics like Hoggart were to label 'traditional' in the 1950s.⁹ One reason why the growth of this culture has been neglected is because indications of its presence are not generally to be found in Hansard, the political press or the records of trade unions. It might also be added that evidence of its growing ubiquity and strength is difficult to reconcile with prevailing general interpretations of the period which still largely derive from the work of Cole and the Webbs. But once the relevance of this information is admitted it becomes impossible to explain the behaviour and attitudes of the working class during this epoch outside the context of this culture and the material situation which it represented.

In this paper, I shall attempt – very tentatively – to trace the conditions of emergence of a new working-class culture in London and to delineate its characteristic institutions and ideology. Given this task, however, it must be borne in mind that nineteenth century London not only gave birth to a new working-class culture, but also to a new form of middle-class culture based upon an increasing convergence of outlook between the middle class and the aristocracy. Both these 'cultures' must be examined, for it is impossible to understand the one except in relation to the other. By juxtaposing the two,

⁹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). A pioneer historical exploration of the origins of this culture has been made by Eric Hobsbawm. See *Industry and Empire* (1968), 135–7.

I hope to explain the emergence of a working-class culture which showed itself staunchly impervious to middle-class attempts to guide it, but yet whose prevailing tone was not one of political combativity, but of an enclosed and defensive conservatism. In this way, I hope to open up a different line of approach to the problem of London politics in the age of imperialism and to go a little way towards reconciling the cultural, economic and political history of the working class.

In England today, the idea of working-class culture, of a distinct working-class way of life, is practically a cliché. It is still a major preoccupation of humour, of etiquette, of creative literature and of literary and sociological investigation. So pervasive has this theme become that class is almost invariably interpreted as a cultural rather than an economic or political category.

But it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century – in London at least – that middle-class observers began to realize that the working class was not simply *without* culture or morality, but in fact possessed a 'culture' of its own. Charles Booth's observation that the London working class was governed by 'strict rules of propriety', but that these rules did not necessarily coincide with 'the ordinary lines of legal or religious morality',¹⁰ may appear bald and incurious when compared with the work of later connoisseurs like Orwell or Hoggart. Nevertheless, it signalled the beginnings of a new attitude towards the working class. Of course, there had been anticipations. Henry Mayhew, ahead of his time and class in so many respects, had gestured unsuccessfully towards this idea in his primitive anthropological distinctions between 'wandering' and 'civilized' tribes.¹¹ But Mayhew's approach found no echo in the slum-life literature of the ensuing forty years. London workers were 'heathen'. 'Civilization' had not reached them. The poor lived in inaccessible places, in 'dens', in 'swamps', in the 'deeps', in the 'wilds', or in the 'abyss'. The 'Light' of 'civilization' did not shine upon them because they dwelt in 'the shadows', 'the shade', 'the nether world', the 'darkest' regions. When missionaries from 'civilization'

¹⁰ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Religious Influences Series 3 (1902), vol. 2, 97.

¹¹ H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), vol. 1, 1–2.

ventured into that 'Babylon', they were confronted by 'terrible sights', and if struck by guilt or fear, they recalled the stories of Dives and Lazarus or Jacob and Esau. The terms, 'working classes' or 'toiling masses' carried no positive cultural connotations, for they signified irreligion, intemperance, *improvidence* or immorality. Indeed, it was often difficult for these strangers from the 'civilized' world to discover where the 'working classes' ended and where the 'dangerous classes' began. For crime, prostitution, disorder and sedition were also thought to lurk in these poor regions, hidden from the gaze of the well-to-do, and when left to fester in this 'nether world', could suddenly break out and threaten the town.¹² As the political economist, J. R. MacCulloch observed in 1851:

The lowest class of all, those whose means of existence are precarious, disreputable or dishonest, have peculiar habits. They care little for appearances and are all but unknown to the rest of the people, except when their wants and delinquencies intrude them on the public notice.¹³

The working class lacked 'civilization' because it was hidden away and removed from it. The imagery of this language and the situation which it represented was itself a novel product of the Victorian period. Referring to the lowest class of London in 1807, J. P. Malcolm had written:

I shall venture ... to draw the reader's attention to the Alms-houses, Workhouses, Charity Schools, Hospitals and Prisons which surround us; and ask whence they are filled? Who turns his attention to the *second floors*, the *garrets*, the *back-rooms*, and the *cellars* of this Metropolis? [my italics].¹⁴

Eighteenth century writers had often been perturbed by the 'insolence of the mob' but the mob was in no sense geographically isolated from the more prosperous districts of the town. As Malcolm's remarks show, masters, traders, journeymen and labourers not only inhabited the same areas, but often resided on different floors of the same houses. Distinctions between trades were more important than distinctions between masters and journeymen. As Dorothy George has

¹² For a selection of slum-life literature employing this imagery, see Gareth Steedman

Jones, *Outcast London*, 2nd edn, London (1984), pt III.

¹³ J. R. MacCulloch, *London in 1850-1* (1851), 107.

¹⁴ J. P. Malcolm, *Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London*, 2nd edn (1810), vol. 11, 413.

written, 'apprenticeship tended to make trades hereditary - trades had their own customs, their own localities, often a distinctive dress and much corporate spirit'.¹⁵ Social distinctions abounded at every level, but there was no great political, cultural or economic divide between the middle class and those beneath them. Despite the great turbulence of the London crowd, its political outlook was generally in accord with that of the City of London's Common Hall which tended to reflect the views of the less substantial merchants and masters.¹⁶ It was only after the Gordon riots that the alliance began to break down. Culturally, there were certainly greater affinities between these groups than were to exist later. All classes shared in the passions for gambling, theatre, tea gardens, pugilism and animal sports.¹⁷ All except the richest merchants lived within a short distance of their work, if not at the place of work itself.¹⁸ The pub was a social and economic centre for all and heavy drinking was as common among employers as among the workmen.¹⁹

In the period 1790-1840, the distance between the London middle class and those beneath them increased dramatically. Political positions were polarized by the French Revolution. The propertied classes turned increasingly to evangelicalism. The small masters and traders, after an initial flirtation with the London Corresponding Society, found Benthamite ideas of cheap government, franchise extension and political economy more congenial. Their evolution is symbolized by the career of Francis Place. Artisans forged a political position of their own from the writings of Paine and the Jacobinism of the French Revolution. Their ideology was secularist, republican, democratic and fiercely anti-aristocratic. The alliance between middle-class radicalism and artisan democracy came under increasing strain after 1815. The incompatibility between the growth of trade unionism and the radicals' espousal

¹⁵ M. Dorothy George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (1930), 157.

¹⁶ See George Rude, *Handwritten London 1714-1808* (1971), 183-227; E. P. Thompson,

The Making of the English Working Class (1963), 66-73.

¹⁷ See Malcolm, *Anecdotes*; Mary Thale (ed.), *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (1972);

William B. Boulton, *Amusements of Old London*, 2 vols. (1901); Sybil Rosenfeld, *The*

Theatre of the London Fairs in the Eighteenth Century (1960).

¹⁸ George, *London Life*, 95-6.

¹⁹ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (1971), 45-6.

of political economy announced the breach. After the 1832 Reform Bill, the alliance had no common basis. Owenism and the New Poor Law completed the rupture. The direct impact of the Industrial Revolution upon London was slight. The vast majority of firms remained small and factories rare. But the indirect impact was formidable. It can be detected in the decline of the Spitalfields weavers, in the removal of legislative protection of apprenticeship, in the growth of the slop-trades in clothing, furniture and footwear, in the huge expansion of commercial activity, and in the growth of the port of London. Even in the absence of factories, middle-class consciousness developed just as surely. From the end of the 1820s, more and more of the middle class abandoned the city and the industrial quarters for the exclusiveness of the suburbs. The centre became the sphere of the counting house, the workshop, the warehouse and the workers' dwellings, while the periphery became a bourgeois and petit bourgeois *elysium* – a private world where business was not discussed and where each detached or semi-detached villa with its walled garden and obsession with privacy aspired in miniature to the illusion of a country estate.²⁰ Shillibeer's omnibus, the Metropolitan Police Act and the 1832 Reform Bill inaugurated a new pattern of class relations in London.

In the forty years after the Reform Bill, this process of segregation and differentiation completed itself. By the 1870s, it had become part of the natural order of things. Rate-payer radicalism of the Benthamite type, which had triumphed with Hobhouse's Act of 1831, degenerated into the meanness of Bumble in Oliver Twist. Only sixteen years after 1832, the middle classes were enrolling as special constables to aid the Duke of Wellington against the Chartists, and by the 1870s they were generally voting Conservative. Evangelicalism and utilitarianism, originally distinct and to some extent opposed philosophies, increasingly coalesced. In 1814, Benthamite reformers had withdrawn their support from the West London Lancastrian Association on the issue of religious teaching in the school curriculum.²¹ But Ashley and Chadwick were able to form an alliance on the General Board of Health in the

1840s, and by the time the Charity Organization Society was founded in 1869, the evangelical and utilitarian traditions were scarcely distinguishable. The social basis of this coalescence was the ever more insistent middle-class striving towards gentility. According to the Bankses, in the years between 1850 and 1870, 'specialist domestic servants were employed in ever increasing numbers. Middle class men and women dined out more frequently and gave more dinner parties at home. They spent their annual holidays at seaside resorts or even abroad. They kept a horse and carriage and employed a coachman and groom.'²²

Moreover, this style of life, if not its material standards, was increasingly adopted by the growing army of clerks, teachers and new 'professional' men. Not to compete for these trophies, or at least the semblance of them, was to invite ostracism. Even the penniless Marx family found itself compelled to employ two domestic servants, to send their daughters to the 'South Hampstead College for Ladies' at £8 per term and to pay extra for language and drawing lessons. 'And now I have to engage a music fellow', Marx complained to Engels in 1857.²³

The Marx family was of course exceptional. In general, middle-class incomes were rising. Even so, gentility of this kind was expensive, especially for those whose incomes could not match their aspirations to status. Sacrifices were necessary. The age of marriage was postponed and from the 1870s the size of families began to be restricted. Subtle savings were made in that part of the household budget not on public display. Needlework, ostensibly for charity, often supplemented the family income.²⁴ In the mid-Victorian period, prudence and thrift – what Harriet Martineau called 'the necessity and blessedness of homely and incessant self-discipline' – were not merely the battle-cries of economists and politicians.²⁵ They were integral necessities of middle-class domestic economy.

²² J. A. and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (1965), 71; see also J. A. Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood* (1954), Ch. 7.

²³ Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx* (1972), vol. 1, 32.

²⁴ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 2, vol. 5, 36; Series 1, vol. 4, 295–7.

²⁵ Harriet Martineau, *History of the Thirty Years' Peace* (1850), vol. 2, 705.

²⁰ For an exploration of some of these themes, see Dickens' *Little Dorrit*.

²¹ Francis Sheppard, *London 1808–1870, the Infernal Men* (1971), 217.

How then did these new aspirants to gentility regard the 'unwashed' proletarians crammed together in the smoky regions which they had left behind? In times of prosperity and stability, they probably thought little about them at all, since their major concern was to create a life style as far as possible removed from them. What Walter Benjamin wrote of the Parisian bourgeoisie under Louis Philippe could be applied to their London confrères.²⁶

For the private citizen, for the first time the living-space became distinguished from the place of work. The former constituted itself as the interior. The counting-house was its complement. The private citizen who in the counting-house took reality into account, required of the interior that it should maintain him in his illusions. This necessity was all the more pressing since he had no intention of adding social pre-occupations to his business ones. In the creation of his private environment he suppressed them both.²⁷

But in times of political disturbance and economic depression, this complacent self-absorption gave way to fear and anxiety. As the physical distance between rich and poor areas increased, personal acquaintance diminished. Knowledge or rumours about the conditions and attitudes of the working class came not from personal experience, but from Parliamentary enquiries, from the pamphlets of clergymen and philanthropists and from the sensational reports to be found in the press. From these sources, it could be learnt that workers were infidels, politically seditious, immoral and improvident. At these times of insecurity, fears for property were combined with a great emotive yearning to re-establish personal relations between the classes. The enormous popularity of the novels of Dickens in the late 1830s and 1840s, with

²⁶ Evidence of the substantial sums given annually to all forms of London Charity, recorded for instance in the various editions of Samson Low, *The Charities of London* (1850), does not conflict with this argument. Charitable subscription was a mark of gentility. To appear on a published list of subscribers in the company of titled and aristocratic people was to demonstrate general status. This neglected aspect of Victorian charity was pointedly satirized by Dickens in the dealings between Boffin and the Duke of Linseed in *Our Mutual Friend*. See Humphrey House, *The Dickens World*, 2nd edn (1942), 80-1. While a high proportion of nonconformists continued to give charity for religious reasons, amongst the rest of the middle class the connection between charity and snobbery became increasingly important.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Paris-Capital of the 19th Century', *MLA*, 48, 83.

their nostalgia for Christmas spirit and traditional personal benevolence, was an expression of this desire.²⁸ But this was only a fantasy solution, a wish fulfilment. In reality, relations of benevolence could only be re-established by proxy. So money was invested in missionary organizations designed to eradicate pernicious customs and dangerous class prejudices from the poor, and to promote acceptance of the moral and political code of their superiors. The policeman and the workhouse were not sufficient. The respectable and the well-to-do had to win the 'hearts and minds' of the masses to the new moral order and to assert their right to act as its priesthood. Propertied London had no need of the new industrial religion of Comte, its ascendancy was to be established through the implantation of self-help and evangelical Christianity.

In the Victorian period, there were three major waves of anxiety among the propertied classes about the behaviour and attitudes of the London working class.²⁹ The first was a response to the uncertain conditions of the 1840s and early 1850s. There was anxiety about cholera, about Chartism and the Revolutions of 1848, about the inrush of Irish immigrants and the deteriorating condition of artisans threatened by the expansion of the 'dishonourable' and sweated trades. Focal points of concern can be discovered in the growth of the London City Mission reinforced by the findings of the 1851 Religious Census, in the foundation of Lord Ashley's Ragged School Union, in the association of crime and discontent made by Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge*, in the promotion of model dwellings companies and the inspection of common lodging houses, in the hurried attempts to create a public health authority, in the beginnings of Christian Socialism, and finally in Mayhew's investigation of the condition of street people and casual labourers. This period of anxiety about the social condition of London came to an end in the early 1850s. Feelings of insecurity subsided in a new phase of commercial and industrial expansion.

²⁸ See House, *Dickens World*, 46-52.

²⁹ For a discussion of these themes, see Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, Pt. III, and E. P. Thompson, 'Henry Mayhew and the Morning Chronicle', in E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, *The Unknown Mayhew* (1971), 11-50.

The second peak of religious and philanthropic energy occurred between 1866 and 1872. Anxiety was less intense and certainly less widespread than it had been in the 1840s. Nevertheless, these were the years of the Second Reform Bill and the Paris Commune, of high bread prices coinciding with high unemployment in the East End, of another cholera epidemic and almost equally lethal outbreaks of scarlet fever and smallpox. The country as a whole was stable, but in London the number of paupers rose dramatically and the working class was suspected of republicanism. The spate of reforming concern which these uneasy years produced is reflected in the foundation of the Charity Organization Society, the beginning of Octavia Hill's housing experiments, the promotion of church-run workmen's clubs, Edward Denison's residence in the East End, the foundation of Dr Barnardo's East End Juvenile Mission, James Greenwood's journalistic investigations of the 'wilds' of London and Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*. But despite the demonstrations, unemployed marches and over-filled stone yards, the problem of order was never acute. By 1873, the last traces of anxiety had passed away.

The third wave of insecurity reached its peak in the years between 1883 and 1888. It was a period of low profits, of high unemployment, of acute overcrowding, of another threatened visitation of cholera and of large-scale Jewish immigration into the East End. Artisans were known to be secularist and to support Henry George's single tax proposals; unemployed and casual workers were suspected of harbouring violent solutions to their misery and appeared to be falling under the sway of socialist oratory. Forebodings were increased by the uncertainties of the Irish situation, by suspicions of police inefficiency and evidence of municipal corruption. The reaction to this situation can be seen in the sensational journalism of Andrew Mearns, G. R. Sims, Arnold White and W. E. Stead, in the novels of Gissing and the first investigations of Charles Booth. Attempts to re-establish harmony ranged from Barnett's Toynbee Hall and Besant's People's Palace to the Salvation Army's Darkest England scheme and a rash of new missions promoted by churches, universities and public schools. But again, the crisis was not long-lived. Fear of

disorder and insurrection began to fade as the depression lifted and virtually disappeared after the dock strike of 1889.

In each of these waves, the combination of high unemployment, social unrest abroad, threatened epidemics and doubts about the political loyalties of the masses, created varying degrees of uneasiness among the respectable and the well-to-do. Unemployment encouraged vagrancy. Labourers and broken-down tradesmen tramped into London and filled the common lodging houses in search of work or charitable relief. 'Plagues of beggars' appeared on the streets. The city was full of unemployed artisans and bankrupt small traders. Furniture and tools were pawned. Overcrowding increased as normally prosperous skilled workers and their families were forced to take in lodgers or to move to cheaper and smaller apartments. Epidemics, particularly those like cholera or smallpox which attacked adult wage earners, were known to exacerbate class hostilities. Revolutions abroad could produce disorder at home. Hard winters in years of depression reduced food consumption to dangerous levels and led to disturbing numbers of deaths from starvation. Those with property assumed an intimate link between begging, crime and political disorder. It is not surprising that some of them felt that they were sitting on a powder keg and that each wave of anxiety should leave behind it a new crop of social and religious organizations determined to hasten the work of christianizing and 'civilizing' the city.

Two major stratagems can be detected in this christianizing and 'civilizing' activity. The first was to use legislation to create a physical and institutional environment in which undesirable working-class habits and attitudes would be deterred, while private philanthropy could undertake the active propagation of a new moral code. The material needs of the poor would then be used as a means towards their moral reformation. Thus, in the sphere of housing: street clearance acts, railway promotion, sanitary legislation, common lodging house inspection and Artisans' Dwellings Acts demolished rookeries and slums and dispersed their inhabitants, while model dwellings companies and philanthropic housing trusts provided what propertyed London considered to be more appropriate working-class housing. Habits of order and

regularity were enforced through the insistence upon regular payment of rent and through detailed regulatory codes governing the use of facilities. The presence of the caretaker was designed to ensure that the rules were observed. Even the architectural design of these buildings, as George Howell noted of the Peabody blocks, was intended to ensure 'regulation without direct control'.³⁰

A similar and even more calculated attempt to weight the workers' felicitic calculus in favour of middle-class norms of conduct was apparent in the organizational ambitions of the Charity Organization Society (COS). The aim of the Society (never remotely realized) was to act as a clearing house for all requiring charitable assistance in London: all applicants were to have their cases thoroughly investigated; if found 'deserving' (showing signs of thrift and temperance), they were to be directed to the appropriate specialized charity; if found 'undeserving' (drunken, improvident), they were instructed to apply to the workhouse. The COS was a logical complement to the reforms in London Poor Law administration which occurred at the end of the 1860s. The intention of these reforms was to make the workhouse an effective deterrent to the able-bodied pauper and to abolish outdoor relief. Control of charitable outlets allied to strict Poor Law administration would, it was hoped, effectively demonstrate to the poor that there could be no practicable alternative to 'incessant self-discipline'.

These attempts to reform the manners of the working class through the control of its physical and institutional environment were generally accompanied by a firm belief in the civilizing effects of personal relations between the classes. Evangelical in origin, the intensity of this belief grew virtually as a reflex reaction to the growing social segregation of the city. The practice of 'visiting the poor' was pioneered by the Church and increased steadily after the 1851 Religious Census had shown that the christianization of the working class would only be accomplished by active missionary work. In the years that followed, the mission hall became a familiar feature of the slum landscape and evangelical crusades were directed at

every sector of the 'friendless and fallen'. High churchmen, Christian Socialists, nonconformists and Salvationists all competed to implant Christian principles among the poor. But Christianity and 'civilization' were generally synonymous terms. Under the aegis of the local church, household management classes, coal and blanket clubs and penny savings banks were started, teetotal working men's clubs were promoted, ragged school unions were fostered, railway excursions were organized and wholesome athletic sports encouraged. By the end of the 1860s, the idea of inter-class contact was being employed in purely secular missionary enterprises. It was the guiding principle, for instance, of Octavia Hill's use of 'lady rent collectors' to bring in receipts from poor tenements: good examples were set, elevated thoughts implanted, habits of thrift and industry nourished, coarseness and improvidence penalized. Octavia Hill's experiments were carefully costed to show that philanthropy and profitability could go together. Her hope was that all landlords in poor districts would follow her in accepting responsibility for the morality and habits of their tenants. Thus, the moral advantages enjoyed by the inhabitants of model dwellings could be generalized throughout the metropolis.

This belief that missionaries from civilization would dispel the 'shades' and 'shadows' in which the poor dwelt, reached its apotheosis in the settlement houses of the 1880s. According to Samuel Barnett, the founder of Toynbee Hall, the rift between classes had continued to grow despite the previous efforts of philanthropy:

The poor, moved away to make room for railways, left to inhabit back courts and back parts of the town, have not caught the message, unity. Thus it is, that they believe still in conversion rather than in development, and think that progress is to be won by revolution. Thus it is that the great part keep themselves to themselves and 'association', the watchword of the future, is not understood. The good news of a unity greater than rich or poor, greater than creeds, greater than nations, held together by national service is yet to be preached... humanity will help the poor to see the rich as their brothers and God as their father.³¹

Barnett's preaching found a ready response. Centres of

³⁰ George Howell, 'The Dwellings of the Poor', *Nineteenth Century* (June 1883), 1004.

³¹ Samuel Barnett, 'The Duties of the Rich to the Poor', in J. M. Knapp (ed.), *The Universities and the Social Problem* (1895), 72.

civilization, 'manor houses,' were established in east and south London. University men, inspired by the idea of 'service' brought their 'culture' to the working class. Through the power of these outposts of civilization, class suspicions were to dissolve in harmony and brotherhood. 'Essau' would put away his bow and join together with 'Jacob' in the appreciation of a national treasure house of art, literature and religion.

The cumulative external effect of this middle-class onslaught in the Victorian period was considerable. Old haunts of crime, vice and disease were demolished and their inhabitants scattered. Writing in 1860 of the once notorious St Giles' district, Renton Nicholson observed:

The city of cadgers is not what it was. Formerly its boundaries were lawless, like Alsatia... It was a refuge for the desperado, the thief, the cadger and the prostitute: it now scarcely affords a home for the two latter classes. The introduction of a police station in the immediate vicinity has perhaps caused this revolution in the precinct of the classic ground. The operations of the Mendicity Society have naturally decreased the number of beggars in the Metropolis. These and other multiplied causes have had the effect of reducing the population of St Giles's as well as altering for the better the character of its inhabitants. Working people employed in selling fruit and other things in the streets, and labourers in the markets, are the principle occupiers of the tenements in the 'rookery' at present.³²

The sites, formerly occupied by these 'Alsatias', were now occupied by acres of model dwellings. By 1891, these blocks housed 189,108 people and by the end of the century the numbers had increased by a further substantial amount.³³

By the end of Victoria's reign, gin palaces had virtually disappeared. The social and economic functions of the pub had been reduced; drinking hours had been restricted and children had been excluded from the bar. Cock-fighting, bearbaiting and rattling had all but died out. Gambling had been driven off the streets. 'Waits', 'vales' and other traditional forms of 'indiscriminate charity' had been increasing-

³² Lord Chief Justice Baron Nicholson, *Autobiography* (1860), 262-3; for the former character of St Giles' see Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1967 edn), 113-14; Anon., *Dens and Sinks of London Laid Open* (1848), *passim*.

³³ Henry Jepson, *The Sanitary Evolution of London* (1907), 368.

ly resisted by large sections of the middle class.³⁴ Evangelical disapproval had hastened the disappearance of tea gardens, free-and-easies and judge-and-jury clubs. Public executions at Newgate had ceased in 1868. Southwark, St Bartholomew and the other great London fairs had been abolished. Craft drinking rituals had declined and St Monday had disappeared in most trades. In place of these traditional carnivals and holidays, four regular bank holidays had been instituted in 1871 and a growing number of parks, museums, exhibitions, public libraries and mechanics' institutes promoted a more improving or innocuous use of leisure time.

The churches' ambition to bring the working class into contact with its ideology had also benefited from legislative assistance. From the time of the 1870 Education Act, all children were subjected to religious education and initiated into the rituals of established Christianity through a daily routine of morning prayer. Legislative attempts to change the unsabatarian habits of adults had not been so successful. Lord Robert Grosvenor's Sunday Trading Bill provoked serious riots in Hyde Park in 1855 and had to be hastily withdrawn. Even in 1880, R. A. Cross, the Conservative Home Secretary, said that if Sunday closing were introduced he would not be responsible for the peace of London.³⁵ Nevertheless, at an unofficial level, the scale of missionary activity had increased enormously and by the 1890s efforts to establish inter-class contact in working-class areas had in some cases reached saturation point. In Deptford, for example, Booth reported: 'Some time ago (says the vicar) the only workers were church of England, Congregationalist and Roman Catholic; now all sorts are trying... The poor parts of

³⁴ A street ballad of the 1840s states:

Of all the days throughout the year
There was never one, I say,
That could come up in former times,
At all to Boxing Day.
But in the windows now you'll see,
How shocking, I declare,
Notice, recollect, no Christmas Boxes
will be given here.

³⁵ 'Boxing Day in 1847', John Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads* (1888), 396. See also James Greenwood, 'Out with the Waits', *In Strange Company* (1873), 328-40.
³⁶ See Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 244-5.

Deptford are, indeed, a veritable "Tom Tiddler's ground" for missions, and we hear of one woman busy "at the washtub" calling out, "You are the fifth this morning."³⁶ Salvationists paraded up and down the main streets, while armies of religious volunteers visited the poor in their homes. At the turn of the century, these visible symbols of religious and charitable intervention could be found in every poor borough of London.

How far had this middle-class onslaught changed or influenced working-class attitudes and behaviour? Certainly not in the way it had been intended. By the Edwardian period, it had become inescapably clear that middle-class evangelism had failed to re-create a working class in its own image. The great majority of London workers were neither Christian, provident, chaste nor temperate.

The results of fifty years of Christian missionary activity had been insignificant. The *Daily News* religious census of 1902 concluded that 'the poorer the district the less inclination is there to attend a place of worship'.³⁷ Charles Booth's encyclopaedic survey of 'religious influences' in London at the end of the 1890s produced similar results. 'The churches', according to Booth, 'have come to be regarded as the resorts of the well-to-do, and of those who are willing to accept the charity and patronage of people better off than themselves.'³⁸ Where the poor did attend church, it was generally for material reasons. Church attendance was rewarded by church charity. When charity was withdrawn, the congregation disappeared.³⁹ It was a pleasant irony that the poor should adopt a thoroughly utilitarian attitude in the one realm in which the middle class considered it to be inappropriate. The consequence of this association between church and charity was that religion became a symbol of servile status. Church attendance signified abject poverty and the loss of self-respect. As Booth noted of the Clapham-Nine Elms district, 'the poor are regularly visited, but others are above visitation, and apt

to slam the door, and say, "I am a respectable person."⁴⁰ Even among the poor themselves, however, clergymen complained that they were unable to make contact with the men. Dealing with middle-class intruders, like paying the rent and all other activities pertaining to family expenditure and the upkeep of the home, was the province of the wife. Describing the clergy's attempts to make contact with the working class in their homes, Booth reported: 'The visit only results in a conversation on the doorstep, or through the half-closed door, or if the man answers to the knock, he will very likely say "ah you're from the church; you want to see the missus" and will then clear out.'⁴¹ The same impression emerged from the detailed descriptions of the attitudes of the poor, compiled by M. E. Loane, a district nurse. She wrote:

One day while attending to a woman who was seriously ill, I heard a constant rapping at the front door. It would have been against all etiquette for me to offer to go and see what was wanted, but when I observed that the patient was getting nervous and worried by the sound, I went to look for the husband, who had been requested to remain within call. I found him in the backyard, squeezed into the only corner which was not easily visible from the road. 'There is a lady knocking at the door.' No response. 'I think it is Mrs - the vicar's wife.' 'Terror knock then,' he replied valiantly, 'I'm not a tome. When the missus is about, she can do's she like.'⁴²

If efforts to christianize the working class were largely a failure, efforts to induce temperance appear to have made even less impact. The temperance movement tended to be strong in areas where drunkenness was most prevalent. But drinking habits in London were moderate compared with those in mining districts or centres of heavy industry. Furthermore, as Brian Harrison has pointed out, not only was brewing a major London industry, but a high proportion of London's immigrants were drawn from the south-eastern counties, centres of hop and malt production.⁴³ It should also be remembered that large numbers of the casual poor depended upon the annual excursion to the Kent hop fields to bridge the slack summer season. Among the mass of the

³⁶ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 5, 14.

³⁷ R. Mudie-Smith (ed.), *Religious Life of London* (1903), 26.

³⁸ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 7, 426.

³⁹ A missionary in Hackney told Booth, 'You can buy a congregation, but it melts away as soon as the payments cease.' Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 1, 82.

⁴⁰ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 5, 190.

⁴¹ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 1, 81.

⁴² M. E. Loane, *An Englishman's Castle* (1909), 3.

⁴³ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, 58.

working class, the popularity of music-hall songs extolling the pleasures of drink and lampooning teetotalism was a general indication of antipathy towards the temperance cause. But even among radical artisans, although there were many moderate temperance advocates, temperance never became a prominent feature of the metropolitan radical tradition. A bar was a normal fixture in radical workmen's clubs and provincial socialists were often shocked by the Social Democratic Federation's tolerant attitude towards beer.⁴⁴ In the provinces, working-class radicals and middle-class liberals often shared a nonconformist religious background. But in London, there was no common ground between artisan secularism and middle-class nonconformity. Because of this absence of any shared religious outlook, temperance was liable to be associated with sabbatarianism and the 'canting hypocrisy of the nonconformist conscience'. The Liberals' support of the Local Option in the 1895 general election appears to have lost them a considerable number of working-class votes in London.⁴⁵

At the end of the century, Booth reported that drunkenness had decreased but that drinking was more widespread than before. The pub remained a focal point of local working-class life. But its role had changed. It had been shorn of many of its former economic functions and was now more narrowly associated with leisure and relaxation. Women used pubs more frequently, and so apparently did courting couples. Straightforward heavy drinking had become less widespread, as was testified by the virtual disappearance of the gin palace. But there had been no dramatic shift. Frequent and heavy bouts of drinking remained common in traditional London trades and jobs requiring great physical exertion. In the long term, the moderation of drinking habits depended upon the increase of mechanization and the decrease of overcrowding.

Neither of these tendencies was characteristic of London in the period before 1914.⁴⁶

The results of the pressures exerted by Poor Law officials, charity organizers and self-help advocates to induce thrift among the working class were similarly disappointing. The bulk of the working class did not adopt middle-class habits of saving. What saving there was among the casual workers, the unskilled and the poorer artisans was not for the purpose of accumulating a sum of capital, but for the purchase of articles of display or for the correct observance of ritual occasions. Thus the 'goose club' run by the publican to ensure a good Christmas dinner, or the clothing clubs providing factory girls with fashionably-cut dresses were much more prevalent and characteristic forms of saving than membership of a friendly society which was confined to the better paid and regularly employed.⁴⁷ The one form of insurance common among the poor, death insurance, was typical of their general attitude towards thrift. The money was intended not for the subsequent maintenance of dependants, but to pay for the costs of the funeral. If one thought obsessed the minds of those in poverty, it was to escape a pauper's funeral, and to be buried according to due custom. This attitude, which Dickens has immortalized in the character of Betty Higden, was described by one of Booth's informants:

'Funerals,' said the chaplain... 'are still very extravagant, especially in the case of the poorest people, flowers being one of the chief items of expenditure. Plumes on the horses are quite commonly used... Fish and cat's meat dealers and costermongers are the people most addicted to showy funerals. A large proportion of the elaborate tombstones facing the main drive belong to these people. There is a feeling among the poor, that when a man dies if he has saved money, it is his: "he made the money, poor fellow, and he shall have it..."'⁴⁸

More generally, evidence about patterns of spending among the London poor suggests that a concern to demonstrate self-respect was infinitely more important than any forms of

⁴⁴ The possession of a bar in workmen's clubs was in the 1870s in fact the principal symbol of emancipation from aristocratic or ecclesiastical interference. For the struggle around this issue, see John Taylor, 'From Self-Help to Glamour: the Working Man's Club, 1860-1972', *History Workshop Pamphlets*, 7, esp. 1-20; on the friction between the London SDF and provincial socialists on the drink question, see Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21* (1969), 8, 14.

⁴⁵ Pelling, *Social Geography*, 58.

⁴⁶ Booth, *Life and Labour*, final vol., 'Notes on Social Influences', 59-74; and see also Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, Ch. 14.

⁴⁷ See Charles Manby Smith, *Curiosities of London Life* (1853), 310-19; Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 1, vol. 1, 106-12; J. Franklyn, *The Cockney* (1953), 183-4.

⁴⁸ Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 3, vol. 1, 249.

saving based upon calculations of utility. When money was available which did not have to be spent on necessities, it was used to purchase articles for display rather than articles of use. An extreme example of this preference was cited with disapproval by the Honourable Maud Stanley who visited the poor around the Five Dials in the 1870s. One cold February, she visited the room of an unemployed painter. The family was on the verge of starvation, the furniture had been pawned, one child had already died and the life of the other was precarious.

I provided her [the wife] with all she wanted for the child, and looked after it constantly until it was out of danger. The man got a promise of work, and I lent him £1 to get his clothes and tools out of pawn, and he gave me his word to repay me in small weekly sums. He got work and changed his house. I went there to Mrs Lin, and to my surprise found the walls of her room hung with little pictures. I asked her how she had got them; and she said that when her husband had brought home his first week's wages on Saturday she had spent 3/6d in buying these pictures, as the room looked so uncomfortable without them. She had not yet bought bed or bedding, and I should have said needed every necessary of life.

I was not over pleased, and said she should have repaid me before buying luxuries.⁴⁹

A similar attitude towards expenditure was described thirty years later by M. E. Loane. Describing the 'pleasures of the poor', she wrote:

Expensive furniture is desired by men, women, and even children, partly as incontrovertible evidence of character and position, partly to satisfy an untrained aestheticism. Comfort has nothing to do with the matter, and use is still less considered. In a home often visited by sickness, and where in earlier days hunger had more than once shown its terrible face, there was a brass fender in the locked parlour. I naturally thought it was a recent purchase, but the second daughter, a girl of 24, told me that it dated from her childhood... even in the comparatively prosperous days when I made their acquaintance, it would have been easy to pick out 50 things that they needed more urgently than that fender.

Perhaps the real reason why pictures precede other superfluities is because even the most 'keardless' and revolutionary person cannot suggest any method of using them. I almost invariably find that it is the frame and the extent of glass that gives a picture its value; not only is artistic worth entirely unrecognised, but the subject rarely excites the slightest interest.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Anon. (Maud Stanley), *Work about the Five Dials* (1878), 21-2.
⁵⁰ M. E. Loane, *Englishman's Castle*, 56.

This concern for display and for keeping up appearances was not confined to the poor, it was predominant throughout the working class. Even the well-paid artisan who could afford to rent a terrace house in Battersea or Woolwich reserved the front room for occasions when he dressed in his best clothes, for Sunday high teas with family relations, to entertain a prospective son-in-law or as a place to lay out the coffin when a death occurred. The room generally remained unused during the week.⁵¹

For the poor, this effort to keep up appearances, to demonstrate 'respectability' entailed as careful a management of the weekly family budget as any charity organizer could have envisaged. But its priorities were quite different. 'Respectability' did not mean church attendance, teetotalism or the possession of a post office savings account. It meant the possession of a presentable Sunday suit, and the ability to be seen wearing it. At the turn of the century, according to Fred Willis:

Sunday clothes were absolutely essential. Anyone who appeared on Sunday in work-a-day clothes was beyond the pale. The ritual of Sunday clothes was sacrosanct, to the labourer in his respectable black suit, black choker and bowler hat, as much as to the Balham bank clerk in his silk hat and frock coat... Stiff white shirts and collars, too, were indispensable. On Saturday afternoon and evening children could be seen in every street carrying home the weekly white shirt and collars from the laundry... [and] he who could not afford the dignity of a white shirt, carefully built up the illusion of one by covering his chest with a 'dicky' and pinning stiff white cuffs to the waistbands of his plebeian Oxford shirt.⁵²

To appear without Sunday clothes was to admit inferiority. According to Alexander Paterson writing in 1911:

The mother with a bitter sense of pride, will not allow her family to stray into the main streets should a week of depression have ended in the pawning of Sunday clothes. The father himself, deprived of his best suit and collar, omits to shave, and kicks about his room in socks, having lain in bed till past midday... The boy of sixteen acquiesces in this subservience to opinion, and remains indoors all day, caged for want of a collar.⁵³

⁵¹ For the attitude of class 'E' - Booth's typical London artisan - see Booth, *Life and Labour*, Series 2, vol. 5, 329-30; for the atmosphere of the parlour, see Fred Willis, *101, Jubilee Road, London*, S.E. (1948), 102-3.

⁵² Willis, *Jubilee Road*, 70; see also M. E. Loane, *The Next Street but One* (1907), 20.

⁵³ Alexander Paterson, *Across the Bridges* (1911), 38.