The Rise of Respectable Society

A social history of Victorian Britain

F. M. L. Thompson

Литагент HarperCollins

The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain

Аннотация

For the quality of its research and the clarity of its synthesis, The Rise of Respectable Society will gain a reputation as an outstanding reinterpretation of the Victorian period.In the years since the appearance of G. M. Young's brilliant survey, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, a mass of new research from new perspectives has entirely changed the landscape of the Victorian era. The Rise of Respectable Society offers a new map of this territory as revealed by close empirical studies of marriage, the family, domestic and working classes from the rigidity of the class stereotypes by which they have been frequently portrayed. But it also argues that the diversity of cultures within those classes was in fact the essence of Victorian society, and that as each class developed its notions of self-respect, so it adhered ever more closely to the classes above and below it, thus avoiding the revolutionary fractures which appeared in many other European countries during this period.

Содержание

THE RISE OF RESPECTABLE SOCIETY

A Social History of Victorian Britain
1830–1900

F.M.L. Thompson

Copyright

William Collins

An Imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers* 1 London Bridge Street London SE1 9GF

A Fontana Press Original 1988

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Source ISBN: 9780007291526

Ebook Edition © FEBRUARY 2016 ISBN 9780007392780

Version: 2016-01-04

HarperCollinsPublishers has made every reasonable effort

to ensure that any picture content and written content in this ebook has been included or removed in accordance with the contractual and technological constraints in operation at the time of publication.

Contents

Editor's Preface

It has sometimes been remarked that all forms of history are becoming social history, and, less frequently, it has been claimed that social history is total history, alone capable of comprehending and articulating all facets of past human experience. This series, which aims to present in three volumes a view of the social history of Britain from the early eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, is not particularly attached to either proposition; it has no designs on the autonomy of other branches of history, though conscious of its close relations with economic history, and no pretensions to be all-embracing. It has the more modest and pragmatic aim of tackling the great outpouring of research and publication in British social history which has taken place in the last twenty years, and of attempting to integrate the fruits of these detailed and original studies into works which will be more accessible to students coming fresh to the subject and readers who have no time or inclination to scan a hundred books and articles in order to get the feel of a century. The aim, however, is also more ambitious than this may sound: the purpose is not to provide a survey and summary of what other scholars have said, but to construct an interpretation of continuity and change in society, in its structure, its institutions, its customs and habits, and its class and gender relationships. The three volumes cover the 'long' eighteenth century, extending

to 1830; the Victorian period; and the twentieth century. The editorial brief leaves each author to make sense of the material on his century in his own way: there is uniformity of structure in the thematic organization of each volume, but no uniformity of views, no party line. This is not a way of avoiding brickbats or shirking editorial responsibilities, it is just the way history works as a humane and liberal profession. If the result is a series which provokes discussion and stimulates further research and re-interpretation, that will be more than sufficient justification for the enterprise.

January 1988

F.M.L. THOMPSON

Author's Preface

It is fitting that an Editor who announces that the time is ripe to take stock of the effects of the explosion of interest in the social history of Britain should be the first to respond to his own call, if only to demonstrate that it is possible to offer a synthesis whatever the hazards of being tripped up on this or that point by the specialists. The expansion of social history, moreover, has not been a simple matter of the unearthing of new facts, new information, and new material by researchers digging in previously unknown or untapped sources, although there has been plenty of that. It has been above all a redefinition and enlargement of the territory of social history using instruments and concepts adapted from social anthropology and sociology, as well as quantitative methods, alongside the older guides derived from political economy whether of liberal or Marxist varieties. Where matters of faith, doctrine, or ideology are involved the synthesizer is necessarily stepping through a minefield. Nevertheless, the very fact that social history is about ideas and ways of viewing the behaviour and relationships of groups, genders, communities, generations, and classes, and not simply about the 'facts' of life – although sex is an important and often central activity which earlier generations of historians preferred to sweep under the carpet – means that no single overview can ever claim to be either comprehensive or definitive. Hence the

present volume is offered as no more than one out of several possible ways of depicting and attempting to understand what made Victorian society tick, and how it developed.

An overview such as this, which attempts to be more than a plain survey, which tries to look at all levels of society and not simply at the working classes, and which seeks to present a seriously argued revision of Victorian social history, has to be selective. Rather than attempting to squeeze everything in, certain topics and themes have been sliced up, spread over several chapters, or set aside: some will think they have been ignored. Rural society, religion, social policy, the social dimension of politics, whether parliamentary or popular, the professions, and even aristocratic society, for example, may – rightly – appear to have been dealt with in a perfunctory fashion, or not at all. This is not because of any dearth of recent literature on these subjects; on the contrary, plenty of excellent work exists which would have been grist to another kind of synoptic mill. It is because the organizing principle for a dynamic anatomy of Victorian society dictated a different way of arranging material thematically, so that some familiar categories have either vanished altogether, or play relatively minor supporting roles. Readers should be warned, however, that this is not a textbook which claims to contain all they want to know, or need to know, about the social history of Victorian Britain. It is only fair to warn them that although it is a book about Britain, it is definitely Anglocentric. In a mechanical way Scotland and Wales may receive proportionately

as much space as their populations contributed to total British population, about 12 per cent and 5 per cent respectively; but that is not offered as a justification for the neglect of the specifically Scottish or Welsh characteristics of social structure and social institutions, a neglect normally excused on grounds of limitations of space or knowledge, but in fact evidence of the persistence of national divisions within Britain which limit the possibilities of framing generalizations about British society.

A book of this kind does not rest upon original personal research, but upon research conducted, analysed, and published by other scholars. Rightly or wrongly the chosen format precludes the use of footnotes or detailed references, in order to sustain the flow of argument and avoid a parade of attribution, exegesis, and qualification which some readers might find irritating or superfluous. My complete reliance on the flood of monographs and articles is, I hope, sufficiently indicated by the short bibliographies linked to each chapter (but for convenience collected together at the end of the text), which list the works on which I have drawn. My sense of indebtedness to friends and colleagues, the authors of these works, is most inadequately expressed by the formality of these listings; it goes without saying that it is entirely due to their collective efforts that the opportunity of writing such a book as this exists at all. In one or two cases I have also listed unpublished doctoral theses, where they have been important sources of ideas and material. Only the exceptional reader is likely to have access to them; but the theses

apart, the chapter bibliographies may perhaps serve as guides to further reading as well as acknowledgements of my debts.

June 1987

F.M.L. THOMPSON

CHAPTER ONE *Economy and Society*

In the autumn of 1830 the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened, in an atmosphere of triumphant excitement turned to tragedy by the fatal accident to Huskisson, and the Reform Parliament met in a buzz of expectant speculation at Westminster. The two events were not unconnected. The railway, the first locomotive-operated public line in the world, was the culmination of the application of the new technological skills, enterprise, and capital which had been transforming the British economy for the previous half century or more. The first Reform Act was an attempt to adapt political institutions to the alteration in the balance of social forces brought about by this transformation. While they shared these common roots and may both be viewed as at once instruments and symbols of the start of a new age, Reform essentially glanced backward with an approving eye on the traditional order which it sought to buttress, and the railway pointed forward into the unknown territory of urbanized and industrialized society. Therein lies the kernel of their message: not that 1830 was some decisive turning-point and outstanding landmark in social history, but that it stood in a particularly prominent way at the crossroads between the traditional and the new, neatly demonstrating the twin forces of continuity and change that are always at work in society.

Nowhere was this tension between old and new more obvious

than in the political structure, which was widely believed to have become dangerously out of touch with social realities. Power and influence were concentrated in the hands of a privileged few, mainly the landed classes aided and abetted by allies and hangerson from the wealthier reaches of commerce and the professions, operating through a system whose agglomeration of curious franchises, pocket and rotten boroughs, was so bizarre as to defy rational justification. The unreformed system was tolerable only so long as it worked, through manipulation of its ramshackle machinery by networks of influence, patronage, and deference, to produce reasonably acceptable and enforceable exercise of authority. That this ceased to hold true for some sections of the ruling class itself, which were alienated from the governments of the 1820s by their handling of the issues of agricultural distress, deflation, and Catholic Emancipation, may indeed have triggered Reform by producing a critical shift within the charmed circle of the political nation that enabled an unreformed Parliament to reform itself without resort to unconstitutional means. Politically this was extremely important. More significant socially, however, was the resentment at their exclusion from the political nation expressed by many groups in society in the rumblings and eruptions of parliamentary reform agitation from the later eighteenth century onwards, since this defined the points at which political and social structure were felt to be seriously out of mesh.

The salient characteristic of those who spoke for the excluded

was that they came from every rank in society, save for the poorest and most illiterate, and framed their attacks on the old order in the language of justice and equality rather than in appeals to the interests of class. The leaders of popular radicalism were predominantly artisans, whose skills as printers, compositors, tailors, or cobblers stretched even further back than the ancestry of their ideas, which may be traced to the sturdy independence and self-respect of the Civil War Levellers. These were no more representatives or products of a recently created industrial order clamouring to be admitted to their rightful place in the body politic than were the gallery of orators from middle-class backgrounds – the farmers Cobbett and Hunt, and the army officer Cartwright were the most prominent – which played such a large role in the popular cause. They thought of themselves as the champions of the rights of downtrodden and neglected ordinary people, who counted increasing numbers of industrial workers, particularly factory workers, in their ranks; these undoubtedly formed an important element in the great reform meetings and demonstrations of 1816–19 or 1830–2, but there is no evidence that they were the backbone of popular protest. Information about the rank and file of such movements is invariably patchy, but such as there is suggests a different conclusion. A list of 'the leading reformers of Lancashire' at the end of 1816, for example, names two cotton manufacturers, two letterpress printers, a draper, a tailor, a hatter, a shoemaker, a stone cutter, and a clogger, who were all small masters or

artisans; three cotton weavers, three silk weavers, and one wool weaver, who would all have been handloom weavers; and not a single cotton spinner, the sole type of factory worker to be found in the region in any numbers at that time. At the other end of the scale the great Reform riots of 1831 took place in Derby and Nottingham, manufacturing towns but not factory towns; Bristol, a commercial more than a manufacturing town; and Bath and Worcester, well removed from the centres of industrialization. The factory towns of Lancashire and the West Riding were absent from this list not because they enjoyed a superior form of social discipline and unanimity in support of reform which rendered rioting against the traditional authorities that had rejected the second Reform Bill superfluous, but because the class antagonism between millowners and operatives was so strong that there was no popular support for what was seen as an employer's measure. Disciplined leadership of the struggle for parliamentary reform was taken by precisely those towns, Birmingham above all others but also Newcastle, which had seen considerable growth and industrial expansion but had retained the structure of small workshops that blurred the divisions between masters and men and supported sufficient social harmony and cohesion to nourish an interclass radical alliance.

There was, then, massive working-class involvement in reform, and it centred in the traditional, preindustrial, groups rather than in those spawned by factory and machine. This is

not to say that these groups had been unaffected by the course of economic change; but it is to say that viewed from this angle the perceived conflict between the established political structure and social reality was not a simple, direct consequence of the emergence of a factory proletariat. Viewed through the ruling-class end of the telescope, all workers, irrespective of their precise status or relationship to the means of production, being propertyless were either potentially dangerous as liable to subvert property and the social order, or at best not worthy of political recognition as being incapable of taking a balanced and responsible view of the public interest. The vital thing in the situation of 1830–2, so it seemed to Whig ministers, was to break the radical alliance by driving a wedge between the middle and the working classes, buying off the one with votes and representation and leaving the other, isolated and weak, outside the pale. The tactic, in Grey's words, was 'to associate the middle with the higher orders of society in the love and support of the institutions and government of the country'. Accordingly, the middle classes were accommodated with the £10 householder franchise, the hallmark of the 1832 Reform Act in the boroughs. It has often been remarked that this action defined, even created, the working class by lumping together all those unable to afford to occupy a house of at least £10 annual value as unfit to exercise the franchise, thus forging a common bond of resentment and frustration between otherwise diverse social groups. The other side of this coin is that the franchise also defined the middle class

as all those who came above the £10 line regardless of differences in social position.

The middle classes who asserted their claims to be included in the political nation were a very mixed bag, and it would be as difficult to claim for them as for the working classes that their alienation from the old order stemmed wholly or even principally from the new social forces generated by industrialization. To be sure, by 1830 many industrialists had come round to the view that the protection of their interests and recognition of their status required direct representation in Parliament, whereas a generation or so earlier they had been largely indifferent to notions of parliamentary reform and direct involvement in politics, being content to accept the arguments of virtual representation and leave the conduct of public affairs to those accustomed to handling such matters. Northern manufacturers, in Lancashire and the West Riding, were active in the cause of reform in 1830–2; and a Wolverhampton manufacturer neatly expressed the sharpening of political awareness in his class: 'Fifty years ago we were not in that need of Representatives, which we are at present, as we then manufactured nearly exclusively for home consumption, and the commercial and manufacturing districts were then identified with each other; where one flourished, both flourished. But the face of affairs is now changed – we now manufacture for the whole world, and if we have not members to promote and extend our commerce, the era of our commercial greatness is at an end.'

Manufacturers were key recruits to the cause of limited reform, and their demands for representation for themselves and the chief industrial centres were clear expressions of the failure of the political structure to reflect new social and economic developments. Nevertheless, manufacturers were recruits to a band of bankers, lawyers, writers, traders, editors, and other professional men, who continued to provide most of the drive and organization of middle-class political action: men of property, conscious of their position and probity no doubt, but not unmistakably men of the Industrial Revolution.

The towns which were given representation for the first time in 1832 were indeed in the main the chief centres of 'manufacturing capital and skill' in the Midlands and the north, whose fair representation Lord John Russell picked out as a major purpose of the Reform Bill when introducing it. It is worth remarking, however, that Brighton, the fastest growing town of the 1820s and in its fashionable seaside frivolity the very antithesis of an industrious town, and Stroud, a small pocket of the traditional woollen industry set in rural Gloucestershire, were included in the same company as the familiar industrial giants, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, and Sheffield, and were placed on a par with Bolton, Bradford, Blackburn, or Oldham. Similarly, Cheltenham, Frome, and Kendal were equated with the second-ranking industrial towns like Dudley and Walsall in the Black Country, Rochdale, Salford, and Warrington in Lancashire, or Gateshead, South Shields, and Tynemouth on Tyneside, in being

elevated to single-member boroughs. These are reminders that the new constituencies did not all fall into a single category, and that scope was deliberately found for some increase in the weight given to traditional and non-industrial urban interests, quite apart from the five new parliamentary boroughs created in metropolitan London, itself a kaleidoscope of aristocratic, financial, commercial, administrative, and professional, as well as manufacturing, interests. In addition the boroughs which were preserved from extinction, although shorn of one of their former two members, and those which were continued unaltered from pre-reform days, were predominantly county towns, small market towns, long-established ports, and the like, albeit they did include some places – Liverpool, Preston, Hull, Newcastle, or Sunderland, for example – that were in the mainstream of industrial growth. In sum, however, the collection of new and surviving boroughs that made up the total of 187 post-1832 parliamentary boroughs in England was dominated by small towns, hangovers from the preindustrial past.

The fact that something like two thirds of the post-1832 boroughs might be thus classed could indicate no more than the limited, cautious, imperfect, and muddled nature of the Reform Act itself, removing only the most glaring defects of the unreformed system, perpetuating many anomalies and inequalities of representation, and never intending to supply an accurate political mirror of the actual distribution of economic and social weight and consequence in the nation. Even so, it is

significant that among the top third of boroughs, measured by the size of their electorates, less than half would figure on any list, however widely drawn, of thrusting, expanding places at the forefront of economic change. Thus Chester, Exeter, Bath, Worcester, or York were in the same league as Manchester, Birmingham, or Leeds in numbers of voters, although not, of course, in total population; while Bedford, Reading, Colchester, Canterbury, and Maidstone could out-vote but not outnumber Stockport, Salford, Bolton, Oldham, and Wolverhampton. This was an effect of the franchise and the fact that the distribution of £10 householders differed, often quite sharply, from the distribution of population. In part this was due to marked regional differences in house values, themselves produced by complex interactions of custom and market forces, with the great majority of houses in London having rents of over £10 a year so that many working-class householders obtained the vote, while essentially similar houses in Leeds or Manchester were rented at £5 to £8 a year. In part, however, it was due to regional variations in the numbers and proportions of men with high enough incomes to command a £10 house and the standing of respectability and modest substance that went with it; in relation to total population the older established towns tended to have a higher proportion of such householders than those of most recent rapid growth.

While it is clear that the £10 householders did not constitute a single social class, since there were wide social differences within

towns between those who just qualified and those whose houses could be worth £50 or £100 a year, as well as between towns, it is also clear that this property qualification embraced virtually the entire population of middle-class family men, even if in some localities it also had the effect of bringing some artisans and skilled workers within the net. The middle class thus attached, in expectation, to the support of the constitution contained large numbers of small shopkeepers, traders, and dealers, small masters and lesser professional men, men of some consequence and influence in their communities but far removed in wealth and status from the great overseas merchants, the bankers and financiers, and the industrial capitalists. Whether they were precisely the sort of men Earl Grey had had in mind when he had spoken of 'the middle classes who form the real and efficient mass of public opinion, and without whom the power of the gentry is nothing', may perhaps be doubted, since at the time he was more concerned with the intelligent, educated and articulate men who shaped informed opinion in the press, the journals, the literary and philosophical societies, and the counting houses. Nevertheless, they formed the core of the middle classes, the most numerous and most widely spread groups with a solid stake in the country, however small their individual properties. This core had been growing in size and wealth as a result of the general influences of population growth and economic expansion, but only in some parts, depending on location, had it become integrated into industrial society in direct economic

and cultural dependence on the great capitalist employers. In bringing the urban middle classes within the political nation the new franchise brought in something at once more varied, and more traditional, than simply an industrial-based middle class. This was as much a matter of reflecting the nature of the existing social structure as it was one of political calculation, although it did not escape notice that the lesser bourgeoisie of the smaller towns were amenable to patronage and influence.

Political calculation entered strongly into the Reform Act's treatment of the countryside, and it is arguable that the entire business of reaching some kind of accommodation with the towns and the urban middle classes was of secondary importance to the political managers, whose prime concern was to revitalize and strengthen the power of the landed interest. In this view an inescapable minimum of concessions to the aspirations of the towns was a small price to pay for securing the power base of the landed classes in the counties. The trouble with the unreformed regime had not been its failure to reflect adequately the importance of new social forces in the community, but its increasingly corrupted and attenuated representation of the opinions and interests of the country landowners. Those opinions, it was argued, could only be properly expressed by county members chosen because of the trust placed in them by county constituencies which were too large to be dominated by one or two individuals, and too independent to be bribed. Instead, too many of the landed MPs sat for rotten or pocket boroughs,

represented nothing except their patrons' or their own personal wealth, were prone to be ensnared by the Administration of the day, and failed to voice the feelings of their order. The answer was to increase the county representation, and to purify the county electorates of urban and non-agricultural foreign bodies. This was done in 1832. The number of county members was increased from 188 to 253; and the parliamentary distinction between county and borough was made to correspond much more closely than before to the economic and social distinction between country and town. On the one hand, the invasion of county electorates by extraneous elements who qualified for the 40-shilling freehold county vote by the ownership of urban property was rolled back by the creation of boroughs in which such property conferred the vote; on the other hand, the agricultural character of county electorates was boosted by the enfranchisement, on a Tory amendment it should be noted, of the £50 a year tenants-at-will, that is the middling and larger tenant farmers.

As with so much else about the Reform Act, the line between town and country was not so clearly drawn in practice as this picture implies. To begin with, there were still many lesser towns, particularly in the manufacturing districts, that had not been made into parliamentary boroughs; those who owned freehold property in them worth over 40 shillings a year, whether in the form of warehouses, workshops, offices, factories, mills, or houses did not matter, qualified for votes in the county in

which the town lay. Then, while anyone owning property in a borough worth at least £10 a year was expressly restricted to acquiring only a vote in that borough, those who owned smaller parcels of property within a borough worth between 40 shillings and £10 a year remained eligible for votes in the surrounding county. Some dilution of county electorates with urban blood therefore remained, and in the industrial counties it was of considerable political moment. The Whigs in fact had hedged their bets over the wisdom of securing the preponderance of the landed interest in the counties, doubtless calculating that the increase in landlord influence stemming from tenant farmers' votes would chiefly benefit the Tories, and had therefore retained the urban propertied counter-weight in the counties which they or their liberal allies might hope to turn to advantage. Nonetheless, although it was thus fudged in its execution partly at least for party reasons, one important strand in the Reform design was to pen up the middle classes in the boroughs the better to secure the power base of the aristocracy and gentry in the counties, and thus preserve landed and agricultural interests from being undermined.

In retrospect it might seem that this was a purely defensive and protective measure, the use of entrenched aristocratic power while there was yet just time to fashion a barricade of franchises and constituencies which would keep the mounting urban and industrial forces at bay, thus delaying or preventing altogether their capture of the commanding heights of society and the

economy. The barrier was severely tested during the Corn Law debates of the 1840s, when the most radical wing of the Anti-Corn Law League hoped to use repeal as a lever for toppling the entire 'aristocratic monopoly'; but it survived, thanks to the opportunism and realism of the ruling class, and lived on to shelter the anachronism of a predominantly landed control of an essentially industrial society. Such a view, however, begs many questions: in what sense the landed dominance of government, Parliament, and much of local administration was artificially contrived rather than an expression of the essence of the social order; in what sense Britain was, or became, an industrial society; and in what sense urban and industrial interests and values were in conflict with the rural and agricultural world.

In the 1830s, at any rate, it made perfectly good sense to accord the preponderant place in the political nation to the landed and rural elements. This was not just a matter of privilege, property, and tradition, but one of economic and social reality. It is true that fundamental and far-reaching changes in the scale and methods of production had been under way for the past seventy years: an older generation of historians regarded the Industrial Revolution, in its headlong pioneering phase, as complete by 1830; a younger generation, intrigued by models of economic growth, placed the take-off into self-sustained growth as long since accomplished and viewed the economy of 1830 as being at least half-way through its drive to maturity, the maturity of a modern, fully industrialized economy. All would agree that

structural, technical, and organizational changes had gone so far that a wholly new kind of society was bound to develop; and all would accept G. R. Porter's statement that 'it is to the spinning-jenny and the steam-engine that we must look as having been the true moving powers of our fleets and armies, and the chief support also of a long-continued agricultural prosperity.' The revolutionary character of technological innovations and their potential for producing social transformation are one thing, however; the extent and pace of their impact on the social fabric are another matter, and the key to understanding the state of society.

It was a pardonable exaggeration to claim that the spinning jenny and the steam engine had been carrying the economy on their backs since the turn of the century. Cotton goods had replaced woollens as Britain's principal export, and the meteoric rise of the cotton industry, if not literally attributable to the jenny alone, could be justifiably ascribed to the new breed of spinning machinery, particularly the mule, and its harnessing to water and steam power. The spinning mills, the advance guard of the factory system, had momentous effects on work habits, living conditions, and social relationships, possibly more momentous and revolutionary than their effects in increasing production and creating wealth, since they were the birthplace of the industrial proletariat. Much attention was concentrated on the mills, their marvels and their miseries, their awesome grandeur and awfulness, as contemporaries commented on the apparently

limitless power of machinery and speculated on the chances of society handling, or indeed surviving, the arrival of a factory population.

The curiosity and anxiety were most understandable, in face of the novelty of the development and uncertainty about what it might portend for the future. For, in 1830, the day when typical English men or women would be town dwellers, or factory workers, still lay emphatically in the future. The cotton industry was very important, it was far and away the largest factory industry, and it was growing rapidly; but its factory element was not yet all that imposing. There had been around 100,000 factory operatives in the mills towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and by 1830 there were about double that number; they were still outnumbered by the quarter million or so non-factory workers who made up the rest of the labour force in the cotton industry, chiefly handloom weavers but also many ancillary workers, some working in quite large weaving sheds but many working in the home. Moreover, when factory inspectors began to count millworkers more accurately, from the mid-1830s, it was revealed that half the cotton factory operatives were women, a proportion that was to creep up in the course of the century to over 60 per cent. Child labour in the mills created an immense stir, and excited deep feelings of indignation, pity, and outrage; indeed, it is responsible for the enduring popular image of the Industrial Revolution as a shameful and regrettable episode fatally flawed by the 'evils of the factory

system' heartlessly inflicted on innocent children. There is plenty of evidence, to be sure, of incidents of maltreatment and cruelty to children in the mills, although whether it is sufficient to indict a whole generation of millowners is another question. For the moment the point to notice is that children under fourteen were about 13 per cent of the factory labour force, perhaps slightly more in 1830; 26,000 or so is certainly not a negligible number of children, but it was but a minute fraction of the age group, and the factory children were far from representative of the general body of child workers, let alone of children at large.

In a comparatively poor society with low productivity and limited resources, children had always had to earn their keep, since it was impossible to support large numbers of non-workers. Traditionally most children had probably been at work by the age of seven or nine, frequently helping at their parents' occupations but not uncommonly working for other masters. There was nothing remarkable about child labour in the mills, apart from the novelty of the factories themselves and the publicity they attracted. More remarkable was the minor role of men in the cotton mills, only a little more than a quarter of the factory workers, perhaps 50,000 or so in 1830, being adult males. Being men in a man's world, they had collared the plum jobs, as mulespinners; but by the same token, in a world which defined workers as essentially male, their minority position tended to emphasize the peculiarity and untypicality of factory workers among the working population as a whole.

The early recruitment and continued dominance of the mill girls has frequently been remarked and explained, in terms of the resistance of established, male, workers to employment in unfamiliar and possibly degrading conditions, and of the greater docility, submissiveness, and adaptability of the women. Since in the eyes of generations of commentators from Engels onwards virtue, in the promise of democratic and socialist achievements, has been seen to reside in the factory proletariat, it is more surprising that little emphasis has ever been placed on the influence of women as the major element in the first factory proletariat in the world. It could be that they contributed a decisively non-violent and non-revolutionary tone to the nascent proletariat at the one moment, in the late 1830s and 1840s, when for a variety of reasons social tensions were so acute that a determined move from the mills might have tipped the scales towards disintegration of the social order.

Powered machinery and factory organization of course existed in other industries besides cotton by 1830, notably in parts of the woollen and worsted industries of the West Riding, in flax spinning, in some branches of engineering, and in the large works engaged in the manufacture of iron. But, all told, there were probably still fewer than 100,000 male factory workers in 1830, outnumbered by the women although they were concentrated in fewer industries and were scarcely to be found outside Lancashire, Lanark, and the West Riding. There were more cobblers and shoemakers, craftsmen working on their own or

in small workshops, than there were male factory workers; and there were between three and four times as many working in the completely unmechanized building trades. Tailors outnumbered coalminers, and there were three blacksmiths for every man employed in making iron. The message is plain. Industry had been growing rapidly since the late eighteenth century, and employment in manufacturing, mining, and building, inside and outside the factory, had grown from about 30 per cent of the total working population in 1811 to over 40 per cent by 1831, or from 1.7 million men and women to 3 million. Yet most of this expansion took the form of multiplying the number of people working with traditional tools in traditional occupations: much less than 10 per cent of industrial workers had any experience of factories, or about 3 per cent of the occupied population.

Agriculture had long been in relative decline, certainly since the early seventeenth century if not before, since it is the essence of commercial and industrial growth that the non-agricultural proportion of the population should increase, fed and supplied either by the increasing efficiency of those who worked on the land, or by growing advantages and opportunities for importing agricultural produce. Both had been happening in Britain, although since in the early 1830s, given normal to good harvests, the country was virtually feeding itself, the emphasis had been on improvements in agricultural productivity, bolstered by growing imports of grain and livestock from Ireland. Agriculture had probably ceased to provide the livelihood of a majority of the

population before the middle of the eighteenth century, and the agricultural sector had declined from over a third of the working population at the beginning of the nineteenth century to a quarter by 1831. Nevertheless, the actual numbers engaged in farming were still increasing, growing from about $1^3/_4$ million then to the historical peak of over 2 million in 1851; it was only from the plateau of the 1850s that the long and practically uninterrupted decline in the number of farmworkers began. These numbers included nearly 300,000 farmers, about half of whom employed some hired labour while the other half used only the labour of themselves and members of their families. That left something like a million agricultural labourers, landless and propertyless, owning neither their homes nor their tools, and entirely reliant on wage labour. This was far and away the largest single occupation of male workers, about twice the size of the next largest group, those working in textiles of all sorts, and not far short of three times larger than the body of workers in the building trades. Many women also worked in agriculture, some full-time like the dairymaids, the members of the new and growing labour gangs in East Anglia, or the Northumbrian bondagers who were regular field workers as brawny as any men; many more were drawn in at the seasonal work peaks of turnip hoeing and singling, or harvest. Ambiguities of self-perception and of definition make the number of women who described themselves as agricultural workers (in the 1841 census) somewhat suspect; they appear to have been the fourth largest group of women workers, after

those employed in domestic service, textiles, and the clothing trades, but they may have been more numerous than the 80,000 enumerated in 1841 or 230,000 in 1851.

Insofar as it makes any sense at all to look for the average British workingman, he was to be found in 1830 working in the broadly defined industrial sector, but not in a factory; the most representative workingman, however, was the agricultural labourer. The typical working woman, there is no doubt, was a domestic servant. The nature of work is a major influence on a person's sense of identity, but its place is scarcely less important, and most people lived and worked in the countryside, whether directly involved in farming or not. It was not until 1851 that a majority of the British population was classified as being urban, on the unexacting definition of living in a place with 2000 or more inhabitants. Population size is a convenient, but rough and ready, measure of urbanity; while the judgement of contemporaries in the Registrar-General's office should be respected, that this size represented the dividing line between country and town, it is clear that many of the smallest notional 'towns' would have been overgrown villages, their inhabitants as close to the land in their way of life as their cottages were to the surrounding open country. It should be acknowledged that small country towns like Aberystwyth (Cardiganshire), Burford (Oxfordshire), Midhurst (Sussex), Sedbergh (West Riding), or Spilsby (Lincolnshire), all of which had populations in the 1500–2000 range in the 1830s, were unmistakably town-like

in the sense that they were something more than collections of agricultural workers and agricultural trades. They performed marketing, administrative, and professional functions for their rural hinterlands; and in their small way they looked like towns in layout and contiguity of buildings. Nevertheless, diminutive towns like these, and the great majority of the places which clearly had the look and feel of towns, were essentially traditional country towns. In 1831 about 90 per cent of the places which physically and often administratively were towns had populations of under 20,000, and in most of them the inhabitants were accustomed to country sights, sounds, and smells in the streets, and had strong links of kinship or friendship in the surrounding countryside. This considerable slice of the 'urban' population remained, therefore, well integrated into a traditional economic and social order, and by and large had not recently experienced upheavals in jobs or living conditions, or changes in the texture and scale of their environment, of a kind likely to produce disruptive social effects or to alienate them from established authorities in church, corporation, and neighbouring country house.

To be sure, the 20,000 threshold, like any other, is no more than an approximate and imperfect guide to a town's character, and there were places like Bury, Wigan, Bradford, or Huddersfield which had only just crossed it or were poised to do so, that were unmistakably parts of the new industrial order. All the same, it was in the really large towns that a new

kind of urban society was taking shape; it was there that the sheer scale of concentration of numbers produced something like a quantity – quality change and threw up those features of segregation, social distancing, overcrowding, pollution, public order, and health hazards most commonly associated with nineteenth-century urban living. In 1831 about one quarter of the total British population lived in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants, but the essentially urban element of society may be usefully visualized as smaller than that. By 1951, it should be noted, over half the population lived in urban clusters with more than 100,000 people, and that has become the normal setting of the typical British citizen. By contrast, in 1801 there had been no towns in Britain, outside London, with as many as 100,000 inhabitants. By 1831 there were seven – Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Leeds, and Bristol – and together with London they contained one sixth of the total population. This fraction, it can be argued, was both the central core and the advanced guard of modern urban society. It was here and in the next layer of the urban hierarchy that the most rapid and dramatic social changes took place, here that the most pressing problems and acute tensions and contrasts developed, here that new habits and lifestyles were evolved which ultimately percolated through to the rest of the country, and here that familiar and accustomed patterns of behaviour were most strongly challenged.

This was also the most rapidly expanding face of society in

the nineteenth century, for by 1901 there were nearly forty towns over the 100,000 mark and between them they accounted for well over one third of the total population. To put it another way, 10 million out of the net increase in British population between 1831 and 1901 of 11 million lived in these very large towns, which can thus be said to have monopolized expansion. The most significant point, however, was that the large-town urban base of early Victorian Britain, although not inconsiderable, was comparatively small. Moreover, at least two thirds of that base was occupied by London, and whatever the metropolitan scene offered in lavish wealth or abject poverty, magnificent buildings or filthy courts, happiness or misery, social harmony or social conflict, it was not exactly a new phenomenon. Already for several centuries government and society had been obliged to come to terms with the existence of a huge concentration of people in London, and to adjust to the consequences of the fact that a tenth or more of the entire population lived there. This is not to say that London was necessarily a static or particularly stable and unproblematic element in society, nor that it exercised a constant and predictable influence on the rest of the country. Far from it. The internal dynamics of changes within London in its size and structure, and the external dynamics of its changing relationships with Britain and the rest of the world, were and continued to be of fundamental importance in determining the main lines of British social, just as much as economic, development. It does imply, however, that the experience of

urban life on the metropolitan scale, and of London's impact on the lives of provincials and countrymen, had been absorbed and familiarized over the preceding generations into a normal and accepted feature of the early Victorian social fabric.

Viewed in this light the quintessentially novel feature of Victorian urbanization was the growth of the large-town population outside London from just over one million in 1831 to nearly nine million in 1901, from less than one tenth to about a quarter of the British people. It would be wrong to infer from this that London was outpaced or displaced by the large provincial cities, for if the continuous built-up area of Greater London is taken as the appropriate demographic and social unit for measurement, it increased its share of total population from 11.5 to 17.8 per cent in this period, thus decisively resuming its relative growth which had virtually halted in the eighteenth century. Equally it would be simplistic and misleading to leap from the unprecedented growth of extra-metropolitan large towns to the conclusion that all the exciting action of Victorian social history took place in that arena. Nevertheless that growth, and its timing, are crucial in placing the time-scale of the emergence of a modern urban and industrial society in Britain: however far the British economy may have travelled by 1830 beyond the point of no return on the path towards industrialization, Britain was still far from possessing that kind of society.

Its emergence was a Victorian affair. It was not a question

of the Victorians improving, reforming, institutionalizing, and more or less cleaning up a rough and raw society which they took over from the preceding half century of headlong economic change; it was rather a matter of their fashioning the elements of a new society in step with the appearance of its material and human components. This is not to deny that there were raw, indigestible, and unassimilated new elements already present in society as a consequence of previous urban and industrial growth. Manchester was already acquiring its reputation as the shock city of the Industrial Revolution, and Leeds was not far behind; but this was precisely because such places were so unusual and unfamiliar. More traditional environments and communities remained so much more typical, even if jobs and workplaces might have altered radically, that society as a whole had tolerated such exceptions without being transformed. Transformation was a long-drawn-out process, longer drawn out than the coming of machines and power and the transformation of the means of production. The making of the working class, once thought to have been accomplished by 1830, is now placed firmly in the 1890s; and many of the features of modern society, trivial and profound, from smaller families to bacon and eggs, from production-line working to fish and chips, or from class politics to branded foods, only made a strong appearance in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Family and neighbourhood ties, upbringing, inherited cultures, and group loyalties proved more persistent and resilient than technologies, which might change

almost overnight. These social forces were sufficiently powerful to smooth the impact of new working and living conditions, and to ease the passage towards large-town society without disastrous dislocation. A fruitful tension, and accommodation, between social continuity and conservatism, and economic innovation and discontinuity, was an underlying theme of the Victorian period.

The economy and society of the early 1830s, then, was not grossly distorted by the political mirror of the first Reform Act. Factory industry and urban concentrations were present, but not in sufficient proportion to eclipse the familiar world of farm and workshop, labourer, craftsman, and trader, village and small town, and it made reasonable sense to leave authority substantially in the hands which had held it for generations, those of landowners, clergy, lawyers, and greater merchants. The economic foundations of this social and political order were changing rapidly. The most momentous end-product of those changes was the growth of large towns, and it used to be assumed that industrialization and urbanization were synonymous. The distinction between the two processes, however, is critical to understanding the way in which people at all levels of society contrived to weather the shocks and stresses of revolutionary changes in working conditions or living arrangements without society itself experiencing the catastrophic disintegration or outright social revolution which were widely thought, especially in the 1840s, and not only by alarmists, to be inescapable and imminent.

Much more is involved than the observation that not all industry was urban and that not all the fastest growing, or largest, towns were industrial. Although this was a most important point about the early 1830s, when Brighton, emphatically a pleasure rather than a business let alone an industrial town, had been the fastest growing town of the previous decade, and when an important group of water-powered cotton mills were in semi-rural locations, it was of diminishing relevance over the rest of the century. The general tendency was for the mechanization of a broadening range of industrial activities, the adoption of steam power, and a gravitation towards coalfield sites; while all the larger towns supported some manufacturing industries, even if these might in some cases be geared only to their own internal markets. What continued to be important in the shaping of social structures was the diversity of developments within and between industries, in timing, technologies, and organization, and the variety of different occupations and activities forming the economic base of towns.

Industrialization, even considered in the restrictive and potentially misleading sense as something that happened simply to manufacturing industry rather than to all sectors of the economy, was far from being a one-way procession into the factory. Mechanization of one sector or process in an industry, and its move into the factory, could well generate increased demand for handwork and outwork in other sectors. The classic example was in the cotton industry, where from the later

eighteenth century the rise of the spinning mills had led to an enormous expansion in the number of handloom weavers, most of them outworkers (a minority were pseudo-factory workers, working in large weaving sheds for a single employer), and many of them rural workers with dual employments in farming. In cotton that expansion was over by the mid-1820s, and the decline in the number of handloom weavers as weaving moved swiftly into the mills in the 1830s and 1840s was little short of catastrophic in material hardship and social dislocation. In spite of the evident triumph of the powerloom, however, there were still nearly 50,000 cotton handloom weavers left in 1850, many of them in extreme destitution at the lowest paid and coarsest end of the industry, but some of them working upmarket on fancy designs in short runs which were still beyond the technical capacity, or economics, of power weaving. A few lingered into the 1860s, but by then the surviving handloom weaver in cottons was no more than a curiosity. The worsted industry followed much the same pattern as cotton, although barely one fifth as large in terms of total employment, and by the early 1830s worsted spinning was almost entirely a factory occupation; the key preparatory process of combing, however, remained a manual operation, and the woolcombers were among the cream of skilled workers until combing machinery undermined their scarcity and status extremely rapidly from the mid-1840s. Worsted weaving, indeed, became a factory industry even more rapidly and conclusively than cotton: until the mid-1830s there

were virtually no powerlooms in worsteds, and by the mid-1850s handloom weavers had all but vanished. In the process the industry, spinning and weaving branches alike, achieved a far more complete geographical concentration than the cotton industry which had an important secondary base in Lanarkshire centred on Paisley as well as its Lancashire-Cheshire heartland. Worsted workers, by the 1850s, were almost all to be found in the West Riding, strongly localized in the Bradford area, and this sharp focus of a particular kind of factory experience was not without social significance.

The woollen industry, by contrast, took to the mills later, much more slowly, and in a pattern which permitted factory work and outwork – at least in the handweaving of tweeds in the Highlands and Hebrides – to continue to coexist until the end of the century. The preponderance of the West Riding was firmly established long before 1830; it continued to become more pronounced over the century but did not achieve complete concentration to the exclusion of locally significant branches of the industry in Stroud, the West Country, Cumbria, or the Scottish Borders region. It was in the West Riding that factory methods and organization made most rapid progress, and even there half those engaged in the manufacture of woollens were still in 1850 non-factory manual and domestic outworkers. Spinning itself was not completely mechanized, although leading firms had adapted the mule to woollen yarns by the 1820s; and the intermediate process of preparing rovings from the carded wool,

before mule-spinning them, was firmly in the hands of the billy slubbers working their little wooden machines called billies, within the mill precincts but not properly factory workers. These handworkers were, in their turn, displaced by machinery, the condenser; but it was a very gradual matter. The condenser was known, and in use, from the mid-1830s, but it was not until the end of the 1870s that the billy slubbers vanished and woollen spinners became entirely factory workers. Woollen fabrics came in such a profusion of types and qualities that it is not surprising that in the early decades of their adoption powerlooms were as much complementary to as competitive with handlooms. Until mid-century it is probable that the numbers of handloom weavers, at roughly 100,000, had scarcely declined at all, at which point there were no more than 9439 powerlooms in woollens, giving work to 5–6000 factory weavers; there being at the same period over 32,000 powerlooms in worsteds, and 250,000 in cotton. Plenty of handloom weavers remained in the West Riding in the third quarter of the century, their numbers only gradually falling, and on the whole there was a reasonable amount of work for them at the fancy end of the trade. It was not until the 1880s that weaving was fully consolidated in the mills and virtually all the quarter million men and women employed in the woollen and worsted industries, taken together, could be classed as factory workers.

In the lesser but traditional textile industries, linen and silk, outwork remained at least as important in relation to factory

work as in woollens. Jute, practically speaking a new industry of the 1850s and strongly localized in Dundee, was by contrast a mill industry from the start; the few handloom weavers still there in the late 1860s were a sad leftover from Dundee's earlier linen-working phase. For a while the linen industry operated with something of a national division of labour, machine-spun yarn from English mills, epitomized by Marshall's great flax mill in Leeds of the 1820s, being woven by the cheaper domestic labour of Scotland and Ulster. By mid-century there may have been about 70,000 handloom weavers of linens in Scotland, clustered mainly around Aberdeen and Dundee, and in Dunfermline where much fine table-linen was woven. Thereafter the English section of the industry went into decline, but the Scottish held its own until the 1870s by switching into power weaving; in the late nineteenth century growth was Ulster's province. The silk industry grew rather rapidly from the 1830s, practically doubling its workforce between then and the early 1860s; at that time nearly two thirds, or about 100,000 people, were domestic outworkers, chiefly weavers. Silk weaving was expanding fast enough in the 1840s, indeed, to be able to absorb many of the displaced handloom weavers from cotton, so that by 1851 there were about 25,000 silk workers in Lancashire, a county where they had been almost unknown twenty years before. From the 1860s the silk industry declined continuously, so that by the end of the century its labour force, at around 40,000, was back to half the size of the mid-1830s; from the 1880s this shrinking

industry was predominantly a factory industry.

The general impression from this survey of the textile industries is that there was a succession of bursts of demand for outworkers, mainly handloom weavers, at different dates in different sectors, triggered either by the mechanization of spinning or by general expansion in the industry; and that these bursts were followed by periods of contraction of very variable duration, leading to the ultimate disappearance of non-factory workers. The conclusion that it was not until the 1880s that textiles in general were firmly settled in factories is less important than the lack of synchronization or uniformity in the process of shedding outworkers or in the speed at which factory work expanded; those were the factors which affected the work experience of the people involved, and hence their lives and those of their families.

The textile industries as a whole were the leading edge of the transformation of manufacturing from home and hand to power and mill, and it is therefore especially significant that outside cotton the decisive phases of this transformation took place after the overall expansion of textiles, as a provider of jobs, was over. Total employment grew rapidly in the decade after 1841, when the census occupation returns first make it possible to measure numbers, and the proportion of all manufacturing workers who were involved in textiles rose from one third to two fifths. After 1851, however, the numbers of textile workers ceased to expand and remained more or less constant at around 1.3 million for

the rest of the century, while in relation to total employment in manufacturing they entered a period of continuous decline, their share falling back to one third by 1881 and one quarter by 1901. The overall stability of numbers in the textiles group in the second half of the century was clearly the statistical end-product of shifts between the different branches and of movements between outwork and factory work, and certainly does not imply stability in the circumstances of individuals or families. The declining share of textiles in total manufacturing employment in turn reflects the expansion of other sectors of manufacturing, particularly in the metalworking and engineering group, and has no necessary implications for the continued prosperity or otherwise of those actually working in textiles. Nevertheless the growing diversity in the structure of manufacturing industry in the second half of the century and the ending of the lopsided dominance of textiles were both evidence of increasing maturity and balance in the industrial economy, and signals that the general social impact of any single industrial occupation was being progressively blunted and diluted.

Factory work itself was very far from being a single homogeneous category of experience, but varied widely with size of establishment, date, industry, location, and employer, as will be seen in a later chapter. But it was, in the age of almost universal adoption of steam power after mid-century, pretty well exclusively urban work. The handworkers and outworkers who survived for so long in the textile industries, on the other

hand, might live and work either in towns or in the countryside. The Spitalfields silk weavers, for example, still 16,000 strong in 1851, were decidedly town dwellers, as were most of their fellow weavers in Maccles-field; the majority of Lancashire's sore-pressed cotton handloom weavers in the 1840s were probably in the weaving towns, and maybe not actually working in their own homes, but a sizeable element of domestic outworkers in outlying villages undoubtedly persisted; this pattern was repeated with the Yorkshire woollen weavers, with an opposite balance between town and village, while weaving in the Stroud district was almost entirely a cottage industry. In the lace and hosiery trades, usually classified with the textile industries although they were engaged in processing materials – cotton, wool, or silk – produced by the primary industries, country and small-town locations remained characteristic until the 1880s. Hosiery, strongly localized in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, was a domestic industry on the classic model, the framework knitters in their cottages and their villages being organized, dominated, and exploited by layers of merchant-middlemen from petty bag-hosiers to master hosiers, who threw in extortionate frame-renting practices for good measure. It remained that way, in large part, until the 1890s; for although factories were known in the industry by the 1870s many of them were only large frame-shops full of hand frames, and it was not until the very end of the century that factories with power-driven machinery had taken over all the business. Lace, centred on

Nottingham, had perhaps completed a slow move into the factory several decades earlier, since the machinery required to satisfy the great Victorian appetite for lace curtains was complicated and costly, and perforce had to run in factory fashion.

The socks and stockings produced by the framework knitters were ready to wear, but for the rest the fabrics issuing from the textile industries had to be made up into final products before they could be used by the consumers. Much of this work, with furnishing fabrics as well as in clothesmaking, was done in the home and forms part of that domestic household production which is unmeasured in employment or national income accounting. But a great deal of clothing was made for the market, and the clothing trades (among which boot- and shoemaking are normally classified) were second in importance only to the textile industries themselves. Until 1861 just over one quarter of all the men and women engaged in manufacturing were working in this varied group of trades; thereafter the proportion gradually declined until it was down to one fifth by the end of the century. Total numbers in the group continued to rise, however, from a million in 1861 to 1.2 million in 1901, and by 1911 were on a par with those in the textile industries. No simple generalizations can cover such a diversity of occupations and industries, which ranged from independent village craftsmen-tailors to the sweated labour of seamstresses in city garrets, and from making fashionable gloves to making clogs. An important social feature, indeed, was the ubiquity of

country craftsmen in tailoring and shoemaking, and the extent to which local demands were met by local production. There were, however, concentrations of workers producing for more than local markets, the glovemakers of Worcestershire being a case in point. Some of these, like the straw plaiters and straw-hat makers of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, constituted an important rural industry, a cottage and village industry of outworkers, mainly women and children, its commercial and finishing organization imparted from the centre at Luton. Others, particularly in clothing proper, came to have a distinctly urban character. The initial effect of mechanization here was to increase the scope for outwork and its commercial organization, for the hand-operated sewing machines which were being introduced from the 1850s onwards were well suited to domestic working and to management by putting-out employers. Clothing factories, in which Leeds led the way from the 1860s, similarly served to increase the numbers of outworkers while pulling more of them into the urban environment; for the very speed and efficiency with which machinery performed some processes in these factories, such as cutting out or buttonholing, generated a massive demand for outworkers for other stages of production which still had to be done by hand, individuals or small workshops specializing in repetitive work on maybe collars, or sleeves, or linings for the large factories.

Clothing factories grew steadily in number and size, and in the quality of their product, in the last two decades of the

century, in Manchester and London as well as in Leeds; and they branched out from ready-to-wear men's clothing into blouses, skirts, and dresses. But at the end of the century even the making of mass-produced clothing, let alone the higher quality and fashion end of the business, was far from having become a pure factory industry. The factory workers needed the cooperation of perhaps hundreds of thousands of outworkers and other manual workers in the small workshops of subcontractors; the distinctive effect of mechanization was to draw more and more of the outworkers into a few large towns, rather than to eliminate or even sharply curtail their occupations. Boot- and shoemaking had a broadly similar history, with different concentrations of large-scale commercial production in Northamptonshire and lesser centres in Somerset and Westmorland. Machines for some parts of the manufacturing process began to be introduced from the mid-1850s, for some of the stitching and cutting-out work. The sequel was a half century of division of labour, albeit not a static division, between what was done by machine and in a factory, and what was done by hand and mainly by outworkers. So late as the early 1890s nearly half the work of bootmaking in Leeds was still done by outworkers in their homes, and the shoemaking villages of Northamptonshire around Kettering, Wellingborough, and Northampton itself were full of outworkers. Complete conquest by machine and factory – outside the high-quality bespoke trade – came late and in a rush in the ten years after 1895, with the adoption of perfected machinery for closing uppers on to

soles, and under the spur of competition from imported factory-made American shoes. By this time the image and reality of factory work had come full circle: factory conditions and factory wages were a boon to many of the workers, and boot and shoe operatives pressed for an acceleration of the move into factories as an escape route from penury.

Although textiles and clothing continued to employ more than half the manufacturing population until after 1881, the metalworking and engineering sector had clearly moved into the van of industrial change by mid-century. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a shrine to machinery of immense variety, ingenuity, and complexity, as well as a festival of manufactured consumer goods; its temple, the Crystal Palace, was itself an engineering product. This symbolized and foreshadowed the fields of innovation and expansion which were to dominate industrialization in the second half of the century. The growth of this sector from one seventh to one quarter of the manufacturing workforce is less important than the diversity of callings and of work situations which sheltered under the broad umbrella of this industrial classification. In economic terms, of technology, capital intensity, or business organization, there was precious little in common between the components of an industrial sector which included traditional crafts and trades like nailmaking, cutlery, or blacksmithing; long-established but totally revolutionized processes like iron- or steelmaking; and completely new occupations like the building of locomotives, and

the making of textile machinery, bicycles, or electrical apparatus.

This heterogeneous sector was at the heart of Britain's position as the workshop of the world, and it was in important respects indeed more of a workshop than a factory. Many traditional occupations of the Sheffield cutlery trades variety, or the manufacture of Birmingham wares, long retained their workshop structure, hundreds of small units perhaps coexisting with a few large establishments in the same general line of business, while small-scale use of power and specialized machinery, displacing former hand tools, could be incorporated into production methods without displacing the skilled workers. In some branches outworkers continued to survive, if not flourish, into the early twentieth century, either because their products could not be made by machines in factories, as with Black Country chainmaking, or because factory-made articles were inferior substitutes, as in nailmaking where the best horseshoe nails remained hand forged even though a factory trade in machine-cut nails and wire nails had been growing since the 1830s. Some categories, like vehicle-making, were no more than convenient labels artificially uniting such disparate trades as coach and carriage building, a handicraft business with a highly articulated hierarchy of specialized skills, and the manufacture of railway carriages and wagons, a new industry which lent itself to large works and assembly methods. Above all, the making of machines generated a whole series of new industrial activities and occupations, multiplying and bifurcating

from roots in the work of smiths, millwrights, and toolmakers. It is not too much to say that the development of machine tools, stemming from pioneering work on lathes, planing machines, slotting machines, steam hammers and the like in the 1820s and 1830s, lay at the heart of all subsequent mechanization in manufacturing and growth in the range and variety of consumer goods as well as capital goods. Yet not only was this development of more sophisticated and specialized machinery – turret lathes, milling machines, grinding machines – a long-drawn-out and continuing affair, of American rather more than British origin, but also it had scarcely begun to produce automatic machinery before the beginning of the twentieth century. In effect workers acquired power tools in place of hand tools, files, saws, drills, or hammers, and they had vastly greater speed, capacity, and accuracy. But the operation of these power tools continued to depend on the skill and experience of the operator, while the actual construction of the machine tools themselves continued to rely on the craftsmanship of individual workers and a great deal of skilled handwork in fitting together the components. This situation began to change from the 1890s, but the processes of minute subdivision of labour, production-line working, and deskilling had not reached very far before 1914. Until that time one highly important effect of the advance of mechanization was to generate new and rapidly increasing battalions of skilled workers, highly conscious of their scarcity value. Boilermakers, steam-engine makers, and engineers – makers or operators of

machine tools in the main – were craft-minded even if they were not exactly handicraftsmen; they liked to think of themselves as working in engineering shops, not factories, thus conveying the workshop atmosphere of the individual's control of his tools and his product, even if the scale of operations was likely to be a world away from the traditional workshop.

The engineering shops and the works producing or fabricating metals were in the vanguard also of the urbanization of industry. But whereas the heavy end of the industry, particularly the making of iron and steel, was tightly bound to the coalfields by its high fuel consumption, much engineering work with its high skilled-labour content was not equally constrained. The result was that iron and steel works tended to generate towns around themselves, while engineering and metalworking tended to grow where there were existing supplies of skilled labour, external economies in the form of supporting trades and services, and easy access to final markets, thus reinforcing and diversifying already large towns. Manchester and Leeds, Clydeside and Tyneside, became important centres for machine tools and other kinds of engineering, building outwards from core interests in textile machinery, shipbuilding, colliery equipment, and locomotives. London, far from any coalfield, was however the pioneer of mechanical engineering in the 1820s, and although technical leadership may have passed to the northern towns after mid-century it continued to have a larger mechanical engineering industry than any other region except Lancashire until after 1871,

an industry which went on growing to the end of the century and beyond. In the much smaller industry of instrument-making, with its large handicraft element, London held a preeminent position throughout the century, while in the new occupation of the 1880s, electrical engineering, it at once established dominance: such were the advantages of a large pool of highly skilled workers and an enormous market on the doorstep. The pulling power of the large towns should not be exaggerated. In such a specialized business as the making of agricultural machinery, proximity to the customers and direct knowledge of their requirements helped manufacturers to flourish in country towns like Lincoln, Grantham, Peterborough, Ipswich, Bedford, or Banbury, and to live with their competitors in Leeds or Manchester; but by the last quarter of the century firms with such country locations were supplying national and international markets, showing ability to outgrow any narrowly local initial locational factors and to ignore any apparent disadvantages of distance from their supplies of raw materials and fuel. It has been in the twentieth century that the spread of electric power has severed the umbilical cord tying engineering – and industry generally – to coalfield sites; but the link was not universally binding even in the full flush of steam power.

Large towns also had a strong but not overpowering attraction for other sectors of manufacturing industry. Some of these, although not large employers of labour in national terms, were well established as factory-type industries by the 1830s because

of their large and costly plant, and were concentrated in a few areas with favourable access to resources, where they could be of great importance in the local economy. The pottery, glass, and chemical industries are cases in point, with their concentrations in the five towns of the Potteries, Merseyside, Tyneside, and Clydeside. The woodworking industry, by contrast, employing roughly as many people as these other three throughout the period, was widely diffused. It was in effect a bundle of trades and crafts, from cabinet-makers and french polishers to willow-strippers and hurdle-makers, and like these last some remained parts of rural woodland economies. The chief effect of the growth of urban population and markets, however, was to stimulate the woodworking trades in towns generally, through a proliferation of workshops, small businesses, and outworkers, rather than through any rise of furniture factories.

The basic consumer industries, those concerned with processing food, drink, and tobacco, presented a mixed pattern of development of the growth of large enterprises using factory methods alongside both the survival of slowly declining traditional producers, and the multiplication of new small businesses. This group consistently held fourth place as an employer of workers in manufacturing, after textiles, clothing, and metals and engineering; and its steady rise in relative size after 1871, to reach over 15 per cent of the manufacturing workforce by the end of the century, was a reflection of the commercialization of much food preparation and preserving

which had previously been part of the household economy, as well as of a general increase in consumption. The Kellogg effect, or cornflakes revolution, was by this time under way, and in sweets and biscuits, cigarettes or margarine, it was in the late Victorian years that Cadbury and Rowntree, Huntley and Palmer, Wills and Player, and Lever were establishing themselves as household names. Much of the expansion of demand, however, perhaps particularly before the 1880s, was met by a simple increase in the numbers of small bakeries, confectioners' shops, and the like; indeed many processes long continued to be performed behind the shop counter, and it was not until the early twentieth century that a clear-cut distinction between manufacture on the one hand, and distribution and retailing on the other, became normal in the food trades. In corn-milling also the dramatic changes came in the 1880s. Steam mills were established in the larger towns earlier in the century, using traditional millstones, but they did not make serious inroads into the trade of windmills and watermills. The perfection of roller-grinding, coupled with the rise in wheat imports, led to rapid growth of giant flour mills in the major wheat-importing ports, London, Liverpool, and Hull, in the decade or so after 1881. Even so, although country milling came under pressure, its decline was not precipitous, and as late as 1907 not far short of a quarter of all the power used in flour-milling was still provided by water.

Manufacturing occupied the centre of the stage in the

industrial economy which was consolidated during the Victorian period. Machines, factories, and power were the key elements in innovation and productivity growth, and catch the eye of the historian as they did of contemporaries on account of their novelty, modernity, and success. The phasing of the introduction of factory methods over a long period, with steady diffusion in the third quarter of the century and a decided burst from the 1880s, coupled with the survival of pre-factory methods of production and the creation of new non-factory trades, means however that the overall social impact of manufacturing industry was much more diverse and complex than the straightforward creation of a factory proletariat. In any event one of the apparent paradoxes of industrialization is that the share of manufacturing industry as a whole in the national workforce did not increase over the century; it may possibly have been rising in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but from the 1840s onwards its share remained remarkably constant at around one third of the occupied population, although there were the considerable shifts between different sectors within manufacturing that have been noted. The relative decline of agriculture was inexorable, although the actual numbers employed in farming went on rising slowly until 1851; thereafter absolute numbers fell by 100,000 or more every decade, with the result that agriculture's share of the labour force declined from a quarter to a fifth between 1831 and 1851, and had dropped to under 9 per cent by 1901. This was the shrinking sector of the economy. Since the manufacturing sector

did not expand, relatively, it can be argued that the net effect of the restructuring of the Victorian economy was the redistribution of some 16 per cent of the labour force away from agriculture and into non-manufacturing, expanding, sectors.

Most of this expansion took place in the service sectors of the economy, commerce, transport, the professions, central and local government service, and domestic and personal service; some of it was in mining and quarrying, and building and construction, usually classified as non-manufacturing industries. In terms of economic analysis part of this expansion can be viewed as a necessary condition of the course of industrialization, and part as a consequence of generally rising incomes. Manufacturing clearly depended on increasing inputs from mining and building, and on more elaborate and sophisticated transport and commercial services; and, towards the end of the century, on more specialized services, in accountancy or advertising maybe, which industrialists had once supplied for themselves. The capacity of manufacturing to produce an enormous increase in industrial output from an unchanging share of the labour force depended – apart from its own internal rise in labour productivity through mechanization – upon the relative expansion of those sectors where labour productivity actually fell, as in mining, scarcely altered, as in building, or rose much less rapidly, as in the provision of services. If it were possible to quantify these elements of expansion, they could be accounted transfers out of agriculture for the necessary support of manufacturing. On

the other hand, some part of the expansion in building went to providing better housing, in transport to increasing and widening the opportunities for personal travel, and in other services to providing more education and health and more employment in entertainment, leisure, and holiday occupations. This part of the restructuring was an expression of the ways in which increasing wealth and incomes were enjoyed. In terms of social analysis, however, the prime interest of these expanding sectors lies more in their individual characteristics than in the identification of the different economic forces at work: a railwayman was a railwayman, up to a point, whether shunting coal wagons or driving an excursion train.

Mining had long been a strategically important activity for the industrial economy but in the 1830s it was still a comparatively small occupation, probably numbering less than 200,000 workers, among whom coalminers were scarcely more numerous than miners of copper, lead, tin, and iron; while a third of the coal output was destined for burning in domestic grates. The broad lines of nineteenth-century developments were for non-ferrous metal mining to decline to insignificance, either dwindling away as did lead from the 1870s, or collapsing swiftly as did copper also in the 1870s and tin in the 1890s, in the face of imports from vastly richer and more cheaply worked overseas mines; for coal output and coalminers to increase roughly tenfold between 1830 and the end of the century, so that the 800,000 coalminers of 1901 and million of 1911 constituted virtually the

whole of the mining industry; and for coal to become first the fuel of manufacturing, ironmaking, transport, and gas, a position reached by 1870, and then to become in addition a major export, so that by the early twentieth century one third of output was being exported. The continued relative expansion of the mining sector after 1881 can, indeed, be attributed as much to the rise of coal exports as to the decline in labour productivity.

There were many changes in the organization of this expanding industry, which may be crudely summarized as a tendency towards deeper workings and larger colliery undertakings, the mechanization of ventilation and vertical haulage – leaving advance in underground haulage to the pit ponies – and the retention of hewing as skilled manual labour. These changes were accompanied by shifts in the relative importance of different coalfields, principally the rise of the South Wales, Scottish, and South Yorkshire fields, the decline of Staffordshire, and the ending of the traditional predominance of the north-east. They did not, however, do a lot to modify or dilute the separateness, internal cohesion, and cultural independence of mining communities, with their strong tendencies to be places apart whose folk did not mingle much with others. Some mining communities became large settlements, and there were indeed pure, or almost pure, coal towns like Barnsley, Wigan, the linear towns of the Rhondda, or new towns like Ashington, Northumberland, which mushroomed with the development of mining under the bed of the North Sea in the 1890s. These, also,

were somewhat outside the mainstream of urban life, rather more than mining villages writ large but still retaining strong affinities with those typical, self-reliant, vigorous, and aloof communities.

Miners shared some of the conditions of factory workers, in being employed in large units, but scarcely shared in the life of ordinary towns at all. Builders, by contrast, were to be found in every town but had little from their work experience in common with factory workers. Building was an industry scarcely touched by technological change until the present century, and although some machinery was introduced in joinery shops it remained essentially a matter of assembling building materials, and fabricating some of them, by manual labour on the site. Many different skills were involved, those of masons, bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, glaziers, plumbers, slaters, and the like, traditional skills which were joined by the new ones of gas-fitters early in the period, and electricians towards its end, as new equipment entered offices, shops, and homes. By no means all of these were, or managed to remain, crafts which were highly skilled and could be entered only by serving apprenticeships; but they were skilled trades with strongly persistent customary work practices. The formal structure of the industry changed hardly at all in the nineteenth century – or indeed before the 1960s – with a great preponderance of small firms employing ten men or less, and large employers a rarity. This continuity of structure, however, concealed a change in organization, the rise of the entrepreneur-builder who contracted for all the different

work required for a complete building, which had far-reaching effects on the status and customs of the trades. Here, then, was a major industry growing, with its mass of unskilled labourers underpinning the trades, from 400,000 workers in 1841 to 1.3 million by 1901, which was far from being a simple preindustrial remnant. Its producers were fundamental to both urban and industrial growth, and it played a key role in the cycles of expansion and depression in the economy at large. Yet with its lack of mechanization, its manual labour and skilled trades, its small firms, and its continually moving workplaces, it was an industry whose workers remained a distinctively idiosyncratic element of late Victorian industrial society.

Symbolically and literally the railway lay somewhere near the centre of that society. Whether the railways did in fact impel the whole economy 'down the ringing grooves of change' is debatable. The extent and nature of the contribution to economic growth of both railway construction, as an investment, and railway operation, as a transport service, have been extensively studied; in general terms the conclusion is that the contribution was considerable but some way short of decisive. There is less doubt that railways were a major influence in stimulating and consolidating regional concentrations of industry, and in encouraging the move to town; and no doubt at all that railway speed, railway convenience, and railway timetables produced wholly new perceptions of individual horizons and profound changes in social habits, of work and leisure, in the pace as

well as the place of living. Railways paraded the power of the machine across the whole country, they eroded localism and removed barriers to mobility, and they created new jobs and new towns. Their very modernity and success in generating new traffic, however, also generated expansion in older forms of transport, for all the feeder services bringing freight and passengers to the railway stations were horse-drawn. This, coupled with the needs of road transport within the larger towns, produced a three- or fourfold increase in horse-drawn traffic on Victorian roads. The result, in employment terms, was that there were consistently more than twice as many road transport workers as there were railwaymen until after 1891, and that in the early twentieth century the road transport men, by now including some handling electric trams and soon to include others on motor vehicles, remained easily the largest group of transport workers. Railway companies, the first organizations outside the army and navy to have the control of thousands of men, and with the problem of managing and coordinating a workforce dispersed over tens or hundreds of miles, ran their labour with a discipline and hierarchical structure that no factory could rival. Railwaymen indeed could have been the leading example of the new type of labour created by industrialization and subordinated to machine and employer, were it not that the very paramilitary nature of their regime instilled habits of obedience and sentiments of loyalty to the company which separated them from other workers. Those

who worked with horse transport, on the other hand, remained in a highly traditional environment, modified here and there by the rise of large-scale commercial organizations for horse bus companies or some carriers' businesses, but technically conservative with work patterns which did not alter a lot.

The transport industry, with its merchant seamen and dockers as well as its railwaymen and carters, rather more than doubled its share of the total occupied population in the Victorian period. So, too, did the group formed by the professions and public service, which also chanced to be the same in absolute size, providing occupations for 1.3 million people in 1901. The postmen and policemen in this group had uniforms, discipline, and the attraction of job security in common with railwaymen; but most of the group were the salaried middle class of public servants, and the middle-class professions which expanded and multiplied as the economy grew more complicated and as society demanded more education and more health care. Much of the employing middle class was to be found counted in with the industrial sector in which each firm lay, since the occupational tables of the census did not distinguish between employers and employed. But most of the trading middle class were in the group providing commercial and trading services, which included merchants, traders, dealers, brokers, bankers, and insurers, as well as the lower-middle-class ranks of clerks, office workers, and small shopkeepers and shop assistants. The group was not exclusively middle-class, since it included coal heavers, rag-and-

bone men, and street traders, any more than was the group of public service and the professions; but taken together their growth from 14 per cent of the occupied population in 1841 to 22 per cent in 1901 may not be too badly misleading as an indicator of the growth of the middle classes. Domestic service has often been seen as the mirror reflecting middle- and upper-class status; this is definitely misleading, since while virtually all middle- and upper-class households had servants, all domestic servants were not to be found in such households. At one level domestic service was an outlet for otherwise unemployable and destitute girls from the workhouse, who for a pittance became drudges for other working-class families. At other levels it was a career of disciplined respectability in which something of the status and manners of wealthy employers might rub off on the servants, whose loyalty to employers and sense of superiority tended to keep them apart from other workers who regarded domestic service as degrading and inferior. Here was a very large, if varied, group of workers, swelling steadily along with others in personal service such as waiters, waitresses, charwomen, and laundresses, to over 15 per cent of the labour force by 1891 before beginning to subside slightly. Numerically four times as large as the transport sector at the start of the period and still twice the size at the close, domestic service was clearly not part of the dynamic of economic growth and industrialization; domestics can indeed be seen as underemployed human resources, although they were not so entirely unproductive as is sometimes supposed.

Their very large numbers, however, were evidence that an increasingly wealthy society preferred to use a considerable part of its wealth on consuming services rather than on consuming more goods; and they furnished another facet of the way in which an industrializing society spawned old-fashioned, menial jobs alongside the new.

The major shifts in the structure of the Victorian economy are only partially revealed by an approach through the occupations of the people, since that largely hides from view questions of international trade and investment, and assumes without discussion the different movements in productivity between sectors which were the essence of economic growth. The occupational results of economic changes, however, were the ones of most direct relevance to social structures and to individual lives. They suggest the complexity, diversity, and unevenness of the impact of the maturing industrial economy upon society, and indicate that continuity of the familiar was as important as change and disruption of work habits. They do not in themselves show how some uniformity and coordination was conjured out of occupational diversity, not only by the articulation of the different sectors into an effective economy, but also by common experience of expansion and depression, and these will be brought out later. Nor do they provide more than a partial explanation, or illustration, of the move to the towns, that other great social fact of the century. It is perfectly true that a restructuring of the kind observed, between agriculture and non-

agriculture to put it at its most basic, had it been conceivable within a static population would have occasioned an increase in urbanization. The actual course of urbanization, however, the emergence of the large towns and the living conditions in them, were determined more by the pressure of increasing population than by industrialization. Increasing numbers migrated to the towns to escape from rural poverty and overpopulation; they went in greater numbers to the industrializing towns than to other towns, because job opportunities were better there, but they went to other towns as well. Increasing numbers, in turn, were only to a limited extent a response to industrialization; they were the result of fertility and mortality experiences within the basic population unit and social unit, the family.

CHAPTER TWO *The Family*

The population of Britain entered on its prolonged and still continuing period of sustained growth from the middle of the eighteenth century. It built up to its fastest rate of increase between 1811 and 1821, after which the pace slackened somewhat although remaining at historically high levels, before it turned decisively downwards from 1881. This deceleration had little effect in the short run on the economy, because the age structure of the population and slight variations in the proportion that the active labour force formed of the total population, or activity rate, were sufficient to ensure that the size of the labour force continued to increase at much the same rate throughout the seventy years after 1831, and indeed until the 1920s. Similarly, the braking effects upon the growth of total population of the demographic changes plainly discernible from 1881 did not bite hard for a further generation; it was only after 1911 that population increase slowed to its typical twentieth-century level of 5 per cent or less per decade, having previously been at or above 10 per cent per decade ever since the first census. Nevertheless, although they might be ripples which barely affected the surface of population aggregates for another thirty years or more, the changes which surfaced in the vital statistics of the 1880s were of profound social significance. These concerned birth rates and fertility, and the prolonged

decline in both, which began at this time and continued without interruption until after the Second World War, signalled the appearance of what were to become characteristic features of modern industrial societies: family limitation and small families.

Ever since Arthur Young observed that 'the increase of employment will be found to raise men like mushrooms' and that 'it is employment that creates population: marriages are early and numerous in proportion to the amount of employment', it has often been supposed that British population growth was a response to the expansion of manufacturing in the later eighteenth century and a perception that large families could become an economic asset through widening openings for child labour. This is to take an unjustifiably insular view, since the transition from the centuries-old demographic regime of very little long-term growth punctuated by sudden and violent fluctuations, to sustained increase, occurred at much the same time in most of north-western Europe and most notably in Ireland, rural areas with little or no increase in industrial activity, just as it did in Britain. The contrary and much more widely held view is that population growth was the result of a very general reduction in mortality brought about by increased agricultural productivity, improvements in nutrition, and a decline in plague and smallpox. While allowing that such factors may have had some influence, it now seems, however, that the key change was a decline in the age at marriage, with earlier marriages resulting in more children and larger families. The earlier marriages were

a response to general improvements in material conditions and prospects, particularly in the price and availability of food, rather than to any increase of opportunities specifically in industry; and probably to the increasing irrelevance, outside peasant circles, of inheritance expectations as incentives to delayed marriage. With these qualifications, Arthur Young may not have been so far wrong.

The age of women at marriage continued to fall until the middle of the nineteenth century, but the decline was small and with the mean age remaining around twenty-five marriage could still be considered late, both in relation to puberty and to late twentieth-century habits, where twenty-two has become the average age at which women marry. Of more importance for trends in fertility and in total population, marriage was becoming more frequent and popular until the 1870s. Significant numbers never married, so that in 1881 12 per cent of the women aged forty-five to fifty-four, in England, and 19 per cent in Scotland, had never married; but the proportion remaining unmarried had declined, in every age group over the age of fifteen, since the first available figures, for 1851 (teenage marriages, however, were extremely uncommon, at only 2 or 3 per cent of the age group). It was primarily these marriage patterns which sustained the crude birth rate at around 35 per thousand of total population throughout the forty years after 1840, when the figures for births under the civil registration instituted in 1837 become reliable, and raised the fertility rate of births per thousand women in the

childbearing age group of fifteen to forty-four, from 135 in the early 1840s to its peak of 156 in the mid-1870s. This increase in fertility was almost entirely due to increased nuptiality, rather than to any rise in the number of children per marriage.

From 1878 both the crude birth rate and the fertility rate entered upon their prolonged decline, and by 1901 were down to 28.5 and 114 in England (remaining slightly higher in Scotland), a drop of about 25 per cent from the peak rates. The start of the twentieth century did not, of course, mark any particular milestone in these trends, which continued on their downward course until more or less stabilized at new low levels reflecting the reproductive behaviour of late industrial or post-industrial society in the second half of the twentieth century. The social mechanisms producing these trends did, however, undergo a radical reversal, if not immediately after 1901 then after 1914, and this subsequent change was sufficiently radical to mark off the years between 1878 and 1914 (or, as these were the nearest census dates, between 1881 and 1911) as a highly distinctive phase in the marital behaviour of a fully industrialized society.

It is frequently thought that the fall in fertility from the 1880s was the result of a general and growing adoption of birth-control practices amongst most classes in the community, and there is indeed plenty of evidence that contraception became more openly talked about and knowledge of methods became more widespread from this time. More traditional mechanisms were at work, however, although in non-traditional directions. The age of

women at marriage began to rise from its low point in 1871 and by 1901 was over twenty-six years, the increase of a full year in the average age signifying a major shift comparable in magnitude to any pre-nineteenth-century changes within a similar period of time. At the same time marriage became less frequent, the proportion of women who never married rising to nearly 14 per cent by 1901 and 16 per cent by 1911 in England, and 20 per cent in Scotland. Such tendencies were perverse, in the sense that real incomes were rising fast for most of this period, and that the overall sex ratio in the population was moving in women's favour with the numbers of males per thousand females rising, circumstances which in earlier times would have led to earlier and more frequent marriages. They were, moreover, peculiar to the late Victorian and Edwardian world, for since 1914 there has been a striking increase in the amount of marriage, as marriage rates have risen and marriages have become more and more youthful. The marital posture of the country at large in this late Victorian period was, therefore, decidedly odd in the light of the normal habits and preferences of earlier and later times. Granted that Britain only gradually matured into an industrial society, a process scarcely completed before the 1880s, and granted that it generally took a generation for patterns of individual behaviour to adjust to broad shifts in economic circumstances, it may well be that this apparent peculiarity of later marriages and increasing celibacy was society's collective response to industrialization.

This is distinctly paradoxical, when it is considered that Irish

society responded with more emphatic versions of the same marital trends to the precisely opposite situation, the absence of industrialization. When Famine signalled that the population had gravely outrun the resources available to sustain it, a balance was restored in predominantly agricultural Ireland, first by the grim check of starvation, and subsequently in part by mass emigration, and in part by a steep fall in the marriage rate and rise in the age at marriage, with the numbers of children within families restrained only by this last factor. Emigration plus the swelling ranks of unmarried Irish abruptly halved the total population of Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century, and stabilized it at a new, low, level more suited to the capacities of its non-industrial economy. The Irish logic was the traditional logic of making marriages and families fit the available means of subsistence. The British logic was a new logic of rising material expectations and of a society in which only a small minority was directly dependent on producing food; delayed marriage or no marriage at all were the end results of individual pursuit of better conditions and larger shares of goods and services, a strategy well suited to a time when the technical means of controlling births, and thus enlarging personal freedom and choice in making families, were still extremely limited.

This interpretation of the great tidal waves in family history which are expressed in the ups and downs of marriage will acquire many qualifications as the analysis develops. But insofar as decisions whether and when to marry were rational, and

matters of calculation, it made sense to pursue the maintenance and improvement of standards of living by postponing marriage, reducing the number of children to be supported, and reducing the rate at which new families and households were formed. The development and widespread dissemination of reliable contraceptive techniques in the twentieth century, it can be argued, liberated people from dependence on these preventive checks and enabled them to pursue the same ends of improving their lot while indulging in as much marriage at as early stages as individuals happened to prefer. Confirmation of the technologically intermediate basis of the late Victorian behaviour is provided by the observation that delayed marriages and rising celibacy were sufficient to account for approximately half of the decline in fertility between 1871 and 1911; the other half was the result of birth control. More and earlier marriages in the half century after 1911, by contrast, would have raised fertility by at least 50 per cent if even the already shrunken family sizes of the early 1900s had remained normal; instead, fertility actually declined by half, a decline entirely attributable to the increasing efficiency and popularity of family limitation.

The late Victorians were, therefore, practising family limitation on a scale that made a marked, although not an exclusive, impression on the figures of births. They were not doing it, however, through a wholesale donning of rubber sheaths. The condom, generally made from animal intestines on the sausage-skin principle, had indeed been known since

at least the early eighteenth century, the 'English overcoat' or 'armour' being used by upper-class men as a prophylactic against venereal disease rather than as a contraceptive. The successful substitution of rubber for skin was accomplished in the 1870s, by the 1890s there were several firms supplying the market, with the makers of Durex already well established, and barbers' shops had emerged as the main retail outlets. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear from contemporary accounts that the limitation of conceptions within working-class marriages, whatever may have been the case among the upper classes, was not achieved by sheathing, although the slight fall in illegitimacy at this period may have owed something to this. Still less were the variety of sponges, douches, syringes, and pessaries responsible for the result, although they were fairly widely, if surreptitiously, advertised and were certainly available commercially. It was the First World War which familiarized almost an entire generation of young men with rubber sheaths, as they were used, or at least distributed, on a massive scale by the army in an effort to check venereal disease; hence perhaps the entry of French letters into common usage. Before this the great majority of married couples, even if they had information about contraceptives, found them either too expensive or too complicated. They relied on withdrawal, abstinence, or possibly prolonged breastfeeding which was thought to inhibit conception. The concept of the safe period was also current in rather restricted circles, but since the medical men were disastrously mistaken in the advice which

they gave, pinpointing quite the wrong time in the menstrual cycle, it made no difference if this information was not widely disseminated.

The trouble with natural methods, apart from that of protracted suckling, was that they depended on male decisions and male self-discipline and control at the moment of maximum sexual excitement, and were inherently accident-prone. Despite the well-attested prevalence of coitus interruptus as the most widely practised form of birth control it is, therefore, a shade unlikely that it was sufficient to account for the extent of family limitation which was actually attained, with family size declining from about six for couples married in the decade of the 1860s to about four for the 1900 cohort. It seems highly likely that abstinence as well as withdrawal had been at work, and although the bedroom is a largely unrecorded area, the inference is that there was less sexual activity within late Victorian marriages than within earlier ones, which is odd if prudery and inhibition are thought of as essentially mid-Victorian attitudes. The trouble with coitus interruptus, for the social historian, is that it was not some newly discovered technique of the late nineteenth century but was a highly traditional method of attempting to limit pregnancies or control birth intervals, which had been used by some couples at all levels of society virtually from time immemorial. The problem then is to explain why a tried – but not necessarily completely proven – technique which had always been available should have been adopted on an apparently

very general scale at this particular time rather than any sooner. Clearly what happened was not so much the enlargement of the range of personal choices, as a change in the direction of the social choices of large groups of people.

A social diffusion model has found much favour, in which smaller family sizes were pioneered by the upper class, were subsequently adopted by the middle classes, and eventually percolated down to the working classes, a model which fits snugly into more general concepts of social change as a process in which changes spread downwards from the top to the bottom of society by imitation and emulation. There is indeed good evidence that the British aristocracy, from the sixteenth century at least, consistently went in for smaller family sizes than did the generality of the population, and that these began to contract from about the 1830s, a good generation in advance of the rest. Thus the average aristocratic family was down to four children in the third quarter of the nineteenth century from its high mark of five children fifty years earlier, at a time when six children was the national average; a steep fall in aristocratic family size, however, did not set in until after 1875, at much the same time as the general decline. The persistently lower levels at which aristocratic families operated were the outcome of later and less frequent marriages, which can be explained by the importance of property questions in marriage arrangements and by the reluctance of many to marry beneath themselves in the social scale. Eldest sons almost invariably did marry, in

order to continue the line and because they could readily attract women who were both their social equals and were backed by satisfactory marriage portions. Younger sons, however, might find it difficult or impossible to make such good matches, or to live at the standards to which they had been brought up in childhood, and might thus tend to stay single, thereby depriving a similar number of aristocratic daughters of eligible marriage partners and obliging them, on the social parity principle, to remain spinsters. The smaller family sizes were also, in part, the result of family limitation, and this appears to have been more practised with increasing effect from about the mid-1820s onwards. This could well have been a lagged response to the decline in child mortality which had set in some thirty to fifty years before, since it would have become obvious that the chances of children surviving to maturity had risen markedly and that it had become necessary to have fewer babies in order to achieve a target number of grown-up children, and prudent to do so to avoid the mounting costs and responsibilities of supporting larger families of survivors. The decline in child mortality may well have included a fall in infant mortality, although that cannot be separately measured; the growing unfashionability of putting aristocratic babies out to wet nurses would certainly have produced such a fall. Most of the decline, however, was probably due to better child care, improving nutrition, and better home conditions, all matters in which aristocratic resources were clearly likely to put them comfortably ahead of the masses.

Further, such material improvements could well have been accompanied by, and indeed have helped to foster, a change in parental sentiments leading to growing attachment to each individual child and hence to a more caring, and careful, kind of parenthood.

There are clear suggestions, although no hard statistical proof, that the urban middle classes were beginning to follow suit in the 1850s and 1860s. It could even be that the middle classes had for long had families that were small in relation to the national average, and conceivably smaller than those of the aristocracy. One strand in middle-class opinion which was already well established by the 1830s, after all, was a puritanical disapproval of aristocratic extravagance, indulgence, frivolity, and excess. This was openly expressed by criticism of luxurious and improvident styles of living, and of moral laxity in sexual behaviour; but it is not impossible that this contained an unspoken criticism of improvidence in the begetting of children, with the implication that the middle-class critics behaved differently. The improvident marriages which were loudly condemned, however, were those of the labouring classes. The thrust of the Malthusian case on the pressure of increasing numbers of mouths upon the means of subsistence, leading inexorably to growing impoverishment, was directed at imprudent and youthful marriages of the poor which produced insupportably and undesirably large families. Criticism of the system of poor relief, which was held to encourage

such imprudent marriages by subsidizing them at the ratepayers' expense, was a well-publicized special application of this view in the run-up to the reform of the Poor Law in 1834. The validity of the case is one thing, and it has been demolished by historical research; but those who held these views were presumably satisfied that they themselves were not guilty of imprudence in their own family affairs. The middle classes had, indeed, every reason to exercise moral restraint in delaying their own marriages until the bridegroom was sufficiently established in his career to be able to afford to keep a wife and family in the style considered suitable to his station in society. That this was the ideal to aim at was taken for granted in guidance literature and fiction alike, and was presumably largely observed in practice.

The postponement of marriage by middle-class men to their late twenties or early thirties did not necessarily affect the ultimate size of their families, although the delay is commonly held responsible for the Victorian's 'double standard' which connived at or even stimulated the sexual activities of bachelors while insisting on chastity for unmarried women. Other things being equal, the number of children born in a marriage depended on the age of the wife at marriage; the husband's age, provided let us say he was under fifty when he started, made little difference. Given that middle-class daughters were brought up to regard marriage and motherhood as their main purpose in life – although generally kept in ignorance of the mechanics of

procreation – there was nothing in their upbringing to suggest that they, or their parents, had a duty to exercise restraint by delaying marriage, unless sexual ignorance and fears of childbirth may have nourished anxiety to postpone the start of the long haul of childbearing. Middle-class standards, in other words, may simply have led to an unusually large difference between the ages of husbands and wives, with women starting married life at much the same age as in any other section of society. There are, unfortunately, no studies and no statistics of any of the particular social groups – apart from the peerage – which go to make up the national averages. On the other hand, the prudence which made middle-class men feel they were too poor or insecure to marry until they had reached some target level of income and independence, must also have made them feel too poor to support in acceptable style the indefinite, or very large, number of children with which God was all too likely to bless a very young wife.

It is, therefore, entirely possible that normal middle-class patterns were for above average ages at marriage for both sexes, which would have given them below average sized families. Another possibility is that middle-class intercourse was infrequent: male abstinence or weakness of sex drives, or female adroitness in rebuffing or avoiding encounters, would not have been inconsistent with prevalent evangelical attitudes to carnal pleasures, indeed pretences that sex was not pleasurable at all, however hard it may be to believe that intimate private

practice did not render such attitudes mere public hypocrisy. A third possibility is deliciously ironic. Middle-class couples may have been practising family limitation within marriage, by coitus interruptus or otherwise, at the very time in the 1820s and 1830s that middle-class, and clerical, opinion was vehemently denouncing radical campaigns for birth control among the working classes, in the name of public decency and morals.

It is thus plausible to speculate that middle-class fertility and family sizes were already functioning on a comparatively low level, for a variety of social and economic reasons, before demographic evidence begins to surface that shows they were on a declining trend from the 1860s. This evidence, mainly from the first census of fertility taken in 1911, which recorded information by social and occupational classes from all women then living, supplemented by a few studies using mid-Victorian census enumerators' books, indicates that middle-class family size had fallen to about 2.8 children by 1911 and had virtually closed any earlier gap there may have been between them and the upper class, since aristocratic families were only slightly smaller, at 2.5 children. Beatrice Webb has been cited as a dramatic illustration of the experience of the late Victorian generation of the wealthy middle classes: born in 1862 as one of the ten children of an industrialist and railway director, her marriage to Sidney in 1892, though it lasted over fifty years, was childless – whether by design or from infertility is not known. A less ambiguous illustration of upper-middle-class habits, if Oswald

Mosley's account is to be trusted, is provided by Margot Asquith, who married in 1894 and had two children (and three stillborn): when she visited Mosley's wife Cynthia after she had had her first baby, Margot is said to have advised, 'Dear child, you look very pale and must not have another baby for a long time. Henry always withdrew in time, such a noble man.' More expertly in bed than in politics, perhaps.

In restricting their families the middle classes were responding to their generally growing prosperity, punctuated by short periods such as in the 1880s when they may have felt retrenchment necessary to cope with economic pressures, and to a fall in child mortality starting in the mid-Victorian years. In brief, middle-class lifestyles were becoming more costly and ambitious, and it seemed more and more desirable to shift family expenditure away from numerous children and towards other things. The central place of domesticity and the family home in middle-class culture in itself implied a larger call on incomes than had previously been devoted to residential needs, and although this central place had already been marked out by the 1830s, the growing availability of creature comforts and domestic conveniences from mid-century – from more elaborate and differentiated furniture and furnishings to bathrooms, from gas lights to family photographs – and the growing attachment to them for reasons of personal comfort or social status, undoubtedly generated insistent pressures for more expenditure on housing and the home. Servant-keeping, a universal middle-

class aspiration if not a universally accomplished fact, became more expensive, until by the end of the century domestic servants were probably among the highest paid female workers in the country. Above all, perhaps, the cost of educating middle-class children was increasing, particularly as competitive parental ambition for their children pushed them towards more expensive schools and longer schooling.

The costs of respectability were rising, and one obvious way of affording them was through smaller families. Multiplication of the methods available for achieving smaller families, and wider dissemination of knowledge about them, were occurring at much the same time as the decline in middle-class family sizes; but this coincidence in timing should not be taken as establishing cause and effect. Religious teaching, which consistently held that procreation was the purpose and justification of sexual intercourse and the chief purpose of marriage itself, and that efforts to avoid conception were immoral and sinful, was indeed being weakened at this time both by the self-doubts within the Church over Darwin and by the challenge of the agnosticism or atheism of secularists. The specific birth-control propaganda of the neo-Malthusian secularists, kept alive by George Drysdale in the 1850s with his advocacy of 'preventive sexual intercourse' in which 'precautions are used to prevent impregnation [so that] love would be obtained, without entailing upon us the want of food and leisure, by overcrowding the population', and by the *National Reformer* journal in the 1860s, blossomed after

the publicity of the Annie Besant – Charles Bradlaugh trial for indecency – for distributing birth-control tracts – and the foundation of the Malthusian Society, in 1877. The championing of women's rights which had previously been the preserve of a tiny minority easily portrayed as extremist, eccentric, or subversive adherents of Mary Wollstonecraft or Robert Owen, became several shades more respectable when John Stuart Mill cautiously argued in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), and more decidedly in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), that women should have the same rights as men, and should be relieved of the physical suffering and intolerable privation and drudgery of excessive childbearing. A more direct impact on the ruling class was made by Josephine Butler and her campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864 and 1866, which empowered the police to arrest, examine, and regulate suspected prostitutes in specified garrison towns. Her fight, carried on in the name of rights of women to freedom from capricious arrest and to control of their own persons, rather than in the cause of purity and against state-licensed vice, was constantly before the public from 1870 until the suspension of the Acts in 1883; although it was not a campaign about birth control, it was one with obvious connections with the emancipation of women, sex, and women's control of their own sexual lives.

None of these activists, however, whether secularists, family planners, or feminists, were in the least likely to have made any impression on the country's birth statistics or on those

middle-class circles and middle-class wives among whom family limitation was first practised. The activists were educated men and women in reasonably comfortable circumstances, but they were consciously uttering extremely unconventional and heretical views out of a strong sense of intellectual and moral conviction, views which effectively excluded them from membership of conventional society or acceptance by the majority of their social class. The pioneers of family limitation, on the other hand, were families at the very heart of upper-middle-class Victorian society, guardians of respectability who by no stretch of the imagination could have been the first to succumb to avant-garde influences. They were the families of army and naval officers, accountants, doctors, civil engineers, solicitors, and the non-Anglican ministers. Only the authors and journalists, artists and sculptors, and tobacconists, could be considered outside the pale of unimpeachable respectability – on the ground of association with Bohemian habits, or with trade – among all the groups whose completed family sizes were below the average for the social class to which they belonged (the Registrar-General's Class I, the upper and upper middle class, for all except the aberrant tobacconists) for all marriages from pre-1861 unions onwards. By the same token, the French letters which a French observer found on sale in Petticoat Lane a little later, in 1883, 'avec le portrait du ministre Gladstone ou de la reine Victoria' were not likely to have appealed to these solid family men: they would be, presumably, for the young Conservative or republican

market, no doubt mainly aristocratic and wholly unmarried.

The strong probability is that the wives in these upper-middle-class families remained unemancipated, strong or at least unrebellious believers in the dutiful and subordinate role to which their upbringing had conditioned them, and that the initiative in family limitation came from their husbands; or, since the degree of male dominance in Victorian middle-class life may well be exaggerated in the conventional stereotype, that the adoption of family limitation was a strategy discussed and mutually agreed by wife and husband. What does seem certain is that it was not the consequence of any unilateral drive for independence on the part of wives resolved to free themselves from the trials and burdens of unending pregnancies. It is not certain that the particular uppermiddle-class groups which have been specified were in fact the only ones to begin limiting their families from at least the 1850s, since when the Registrar-General placed individual occupational groups into social classes from the 1911 returns he could only draw on occupational information to construct social classifications. It so happened that only some occupations, chiefly in the professions, could be assumed to be wholly middle- or upper-middle-class; other members of the middle class, for instance cotton manufacturers or ironmasters, were returned for census purposes in the industrial grouping to which they belonged and hence could not be distinguished in the fertility survey from the generality of textile workers or ironworkers. Partial information

about some groups of businessmen that can be isolated in the census returns does, however, suggest that the commercial and industrial middle classes may indeed have embarked on family limitation distinctly later than the professional groups. Thus, the upper-middle-class groups who entered the band before 1871 were all still from the professions: barristers, Anglican clergy, and those 'engaged in scientific pursuits'. Those who joined before 1881, however, included bankers, merchants (commodity unspecified), chemists and druggists, who were clearly in the commercial world, as well as dentists, architects, teachers, and law clerks, who were the professional laggards. Colliery owners, moreover, were ten to twenty years behind all these other middle-class groups in opting for smaller families, and at the end of the Victorian period still had larger families than considerable sections of the working classes.

The prominence of the professions in opting for smaller families suggests very strongly that there were some influences or circumstances peculiar to that group in society, or at least impressing them sooner and more insistently than other sections of the middle classes. It might be that some change in cultural or sentimental values or attitudes began to sweep through the professional class in the 1850s, but with the example of Victoria and her nine children before their eyes, and with the cult of the family in its domesticity reaching its height, this appears most improbable. It is more likely that the pursuit of economically rational behaviour was the dominant influence, and

the professions as a group can certainly be assumed to have mustered sufficient intelligence to identify the rational course to take. There are no grounds for supposing that they experienced the rising costs of prosperity, in terms of home comforts and luxuries, any earlier or more insistently than any other middle-class groups with similar income levels. It is very possible, on the other hand, that the professional class were more affected, and affected earlier, than other groups by the rising cost of educating their children. Not only were professional men likely to set a high value on a good education, but also if they were keen on their sons following in their footsteps, as so many in fact did, they were excellently placed to know what kind of education or training was currently appropriate for entering their own profession. The decline of 'Old Corruption' and its final dismemberment in the 1830s and 1840s removed the traditional route of patronage and favour as the way forward in the professions – more obviously in some, like the Church, the law, and perhaps medicine, than in others such as the army or the civil service – and more formal and more prolonged education began to be substituted as the avenue of entry. In some cases that meant staying longer at more expensive schools, or going on to university, in others it meant taking articles which had to be paid for and which yielded little or no income for the trainee; in either case the cost of launching a son into an acceptable career had increased. It is, moreover, apparent that businessmen who contemplated having their sons follow them in the family firm did not favour such prolonged or

expensive schooling; they did not become patrons of the public schools much before the 1890s, and their sons generally went into business at the age of sixteen or seventeen to learn on the job. The nine ancient public schools, those investigated by the Clarendon Commission in 1864, probably remained very much the preserve of the aristocracy and gentry and were not much penetrated by the sons of professional men. But the great crop of new public schools founded or radically reconstructed from grammar school origins between 1840 and 1870, for example Cheltenham, Clifton, Marlborough, or Radley, of which there were at least thirty altogether, catered primarily for the sons of the professional class. The total cost of educating a son and fitting him to enter a profession was of the order of £1500 to £2000, spread over perhaps ten years; with an outlay of that size in prospect it would be most understandable if parents developed a desire to restrict the number of their children to that which they could afford to educate adequately.

It is true that secondary education for girls, a truly revolutionary departure, made its appearance only a little later, with the North London Collegiate (day school) and Cheltenham Ladies' College (boarding school) in the early 1850s, both of which had the daughters of professional families much in mind. The growth of girls' public schools thereafter, however, was gradual rather than spectacular; Woodard, for instance, began his scheme for studding the country with strict Anglican public schools for boys with Lancing in the late 1840s, but did not

move into public schools for girls until the 1860s. It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that there was anything like a rush of foundations of girls' high schools and boarding schools, and until then it is a fair presumption that expensive secondary education for their daughters remained a decidedly secondary consideration with even upper-middle-class parents. Education-based family limitation, therefore, at least in its initial forty to fifty years, was most likely aimed at limiting the number of sons whose future prospects it was desired to maximize, and one would expect professional-class parents to go on having children until a desired number of sons had appeared, a strategy which could well have led to wide variations in the size of families between couples who shared the same family-limitation objectives. This could also help to explain why family sizes, which still remained at over four children for the pioneering professional groups until the 1880s, plunged down to a little over two by 1911, as more equal treatment for the two sexes became more widespread, educationally.

There is little in all this to suggest that the upper middle class was following, after a time lag, the aristocratic example. It is true that some of these groups, especially the army, Church, and law, lived on the fringes of aristocratic society and were prone to seek to emulate aristocratic lifestyles in such matters as servant-keeping and domestic apparatus, as closely as possible. But since the expense of such things does not appear to have been the dominant motive in professional-class family limitation, it cannot

have acted as the link in any social diffusion chain. Moreover the educational factor was distinctive to the professional classes, and was not strongly felt by the aristocracy who had long been accustomed to spending rather heavily on the education of their sons and to a lesser degree of their daughters, at least since the early eighteenth century and probably since the sixteenth. As to aristocratic behaviour rendering family limitation respectable, so that the upper middle class then felt free to adopt it themselves without risk of censure, not only is there no evidence that the subject was referred to or commented on by respectable people, but also a section at least of the upper middle class would not have accepted aristocratic behaviour as any guide to respectability. It is more sensible to conclude that the upper middle class had their own good reasons for embarking on restriction of family size, were responding independently to their own circumstances and needs, and were not emulating the class above them.

The rest of the middle classes started to restrict their family sizes from the 1880s, and it is not altogether clear whether they were copying the earlier examples of their social equals, responding to the general movement in educated opinion, or adapting to the arrival in their particular groups of circumstances similar to those which had begun to affect groups in the professions thirty or more years before. Possibly a mixture of the three, with most influence coming from the third factor. Manufacturers and industrialists, as noted earlier, were impossible to identify separately in the census returns; but

a family survey carried out privately by Charles Ansell in 1874, a postal questionnaire answered by over 25,000 clergy, lawyers, doctors, merchants, bankers, manufacturers, and peers, showed that the merchants, bankers, and manufacturers had larger completed families than the other groups. Insofar as the merchants and bankers had fallen into line with the professional families by the 1890s, it is not unlikely that the manufacturers had done so as well. It is perhaps excessively determinist to suggest that civil servants, whose families declined sharply in size with marriages made after 1871, responded instantly to the opening of the civil service to competitive examinations in 1870, since that would assume that civil servants hoped to breed future civil servants and began at once to tailor the number of their children to the more elaborate and advanced education which had implicitly been made necessary. Nevertheless, education-triggered family limitation applies as well to them as it does to manufacturers, whose ambitions for gentility for their offspring and more prolonged and modern education were supplying more public schoolboys by the 1890s. The very rapidly growing core of the lower middle class, the commercial clerks, were already restricting their families in all post-1861 marriages and from 1871 onwards their families were only fractionally larger than the upper-middle-class mean; yet these were miles away from being customers of the public schools. The clerks formed one of the fastest growing occupational groups of the second half of the nineteenth century, male clerks quadrupling in number between

1861 and 1891, from 91,000 to 370,000, and female clerks making an appearance from 1881 onwards. This expansion was sustained only by massive recruitment from other, largely manual working-class, groups, and the essential qualifications for entry were literacy, good handwriting, accuracy, and respectability. Recruitment was, therefore, likely to attract the working-class children from the top of the class who had performed best and benefited most from their schooling, and were likely to put a high value on getting as good a schooling as possible for their own children in turn. Moreover, clerks distanced themselves from those they regarded as their social inferiors less by any income differences, since they earned scarcely as much as many skilled workers, than by careful cultivation of status differences expressive of moral superiority, which in their own estimation included shunning public elementary or Board schools for their children and sending them to local private, fee-paying, schools. Here, at a lower level of incomes and standards, was the same category of motives for having fewer children.

The clerks could well have added that it was important to their social self-esteem to make it clear that they were different from the working classes who bred like rabbits, and that far from there being any question of emulating their superiors they were engaged in underlining contrasts with their inferiors. The working classes, however, were far from homogeneous in their family habits; they were not all big breeders; and it is more than doubtful if they were in the

business of emulating the middle classes themselves. Although unreflecting and vulgar Malthusians had spoken as though the lower orders were an undifferentiated, uneducated, and unbridled mass, heedlessly indulging in imprudently youthful marriages and insupportably large families, it is fairly obvious that there always had been different groups within the working classes, with different attitudes towards marriage and children. The apprenticeship system in the traditional skilled trades had always been regarded as a check upon headlong breeding, since the rules stipulated that an apprentice might not marry until he had served his term, normally seven years. The decay and erosion of the apprenticeship system has often been cited as a factor stimulating population increase in the eighteenth century, via earlier marriages. On the other hand, while formal and enforceable apprenticeship may have been withering, the enforcement of effective substitutes continued to be a prime aim of the trade societies not merely in the older crafts but also in the new skilled occupations generated by industrialization. Insofar as boilermakers or engine-makers were successful in controlling entry into their trades through monitoring the flow of trainees, and older trades such as those of compositors or masons succeeded in maintaining their traditional practices, similar effects in restraining early marriages might have been expected to continue. In any case, the skilled tradesmen of the labour aristocracy had powerful motives of self-respect and status-protection, quite aside from any possible sexual or marital

frustrations imposed by their training conditions, for wishing to confine their families to sizes which they could afford to support in respectable conditions. The difficulty is that the earliest firm foundation for observations on family sizes, the 1911 fertility census, does not give clear support to any such simple explanation and classification in terms of economically and socially rational behaviour.

The situation reached by 1911 was, indeed, one of apparently orderly and rational progression in average family sizes in a league table of working-class occupational groups that ran from the textile workers with the smallest families of 3.19 children to the miners with the largest, 4.33 children, the intermediate steps being occupied, in ascending order, by skilled workers, semi-skilled workers, unskilled workers, and agricultural labourers. It has been readily assumed that this hierarchy was not a recent development, but reflected differential behaviour that had long been established. In particular, it has been inferred from the 1911 position that textile workers were the pioneers among the working classes in family planning, and explanations of behaviour patterns have been focused upon them, and upon the opposite extreme, the miners. Before becoming unduly impressed by circumstantial evidence drawn from the 1830s and 1840s – that textile workers were exceptionally exposed to birth-control literature and ideas and exceptionally responsive to them because of their distinctive employment patterns – it is however as well to reflect on the prehistory of family limitation

in specific occupational groups which is revealed by the 1911 census. This shows that for pre-1861 marriages, whose couples were still living in 1911 (a sample biased by above-average longevity), the largest families of around eight or more children were indeed produced by coalminers and agricultural labourers, but masons and boilermakers were within a decimal point or so of producing the same number of children. Similarly, the smallest families were those of spinners and weavers in the woollen and worsted industries, of six and 6.86 children; but their comparative, although not outstanding, frugality was matched by other groups with fewer than seven children, domestic gardeners, domestic indoor servants, and railway signalmen and porters. The families of cotton spinners and weavers of this vintage, often regarded as in the vanguard of liberation or depravity – depending on how family limitation was regarded – were in fact of middling size, around 7.5 children. There was nothing to distinguish them, in this respect, from many other working-class groups, ranging from printers and compositors through railway guards and railway labourers to dock labourers; they were exceedingly average couples in their reproductive performance.

Mine owners and managers, as well as miners, had families of more than eight children in the mid-Victorian years during which the children of these pre-1861 marriages were being born. So also did butchers and master builders. There was, therefore, nothing peculiarly working-class about large families, even if it had already become rather peculiar for groups with middle-

class status or pretensions to breed to this extent. It is indeed probable that an average score of something like eight children born alive was the normal tally for families regardless of social class or occupation, until particular and differential influences began to operate to encourage limitation. The average, of course, embraced individual families running up to twelve or thirteen children as well as childless couples; and it included all children born alive, so that infant and child mortality with their differing impact on different classes winnowed down the number of children who survived into their teens in proportions that were not socially uniform. Nevertheless, it is wildly improbable that colliery managers or butchers, coalminers or textile workers, had the remotest idea of the relative risks they might face from infant and child mortality, and implausible to imagine that they thought of controlling the number of their conceptions with a view to ending up with some target number of grown-up children. On the contrary, it is likely that pregnancies were allowed to happen as they listed, until such time as motives for trying to limit pregnancies became insistent.

Occupational distinctions do not point to any single, simple explanation for those motives becoming insistent when they did in different sections of the working classes. The vanguard in the move to smaller families included most railwaymen, but not the engine drivers; most domestic servants, but not gamekeepers; most textile workers, but not cotton spinners; printers and compositors, but not cabinet-makers. It is difficult

to see what these groups had in common. It is easier to observe that the groups which started later but had caught up by the 1880s – engine drivers, fitters and erectors, cabinet-makers, and shoemakers – were predominantly skilled workers, although this observation tends to undermine any notion that skilled workers had always been predisposed to restraint on grounds of preservation of their superior status and job-training constraints on early marriage. It is also easy to see that those who were still producing comparatively large families right up to the end of the nineteenth century, of more than five children – and in the case of coalminers, more than six – were mainly those engaged in heavy manual labour. They were agricultural labourers, builders' labourers, dock workers, and of course, the coalminers themselves. But gamekeepers, boilermakers, and masons were in the same league clinging to large families for longer than the rest of society, and these were clearly not occupations characterized by lack of education or skill.

If this varied and complex pattern of behaviour was the result of rational decisions by thousands of parents, and if their decisions were primarily influenced by some ingredients of their economic circumstances, then the one thread linking the great majority of these occupational groups was the extent, and timing, of their exposure to the processes of industrialization. Thus, machine technologies, large-scale organization, or factory methods, came earliest to textiles, railways, or printing; much later to furniture-and shoemaking; and not at all to building,

dock, and farm work, and in the sense that coalmining remained essentially a labour-intensive industry using traditional methods, not to that industry either. Such a model cannot accommodate the exceptions, the engine drivers who were not among the early starters on family limitation, and the boilermakers who remained out of kilter with their large families; but the exceptions are not numerous. It could be that engine drivers, the cream of railway workers, felt that they could afford larger families than the rest of their industry, and that boilermakers responded in similar fashion to their high pay and status among the generality of engineering workers.

The low-scoring and high-achieving domestic servants are the apparently awkward exception to an explanation framed in terms of the influences of industrialization on family life. Domestic servants, however, have been cast in a central role in the general process of 'modernization', a conveniently vague concept intended to sum up the whole shift from traditional, rural and agricultural, customs and lives to modern urban living, without implying that industrialization in any narrow sense was necessarily the chief or only motor in the process. Domestic service was indeed a very important and busy highway for shifting country girls and farm girls into the big city and giving them a view from below stairs of the habits of middle-class households, and a slice of urban living on afternoons off. It is conceivable, but not probable, that female domestics, especially ladies' maids, not only observed the results of family limitation

by their employers but also learnt the secrets of the techniques from their mistresses; in this way they could have acted as an important channel for the diffusion and emulation of middle-class habits and attitudes among the generality of the working classes, particularly as they tended to marry respectable town-dwelling workingmen and not dockers, miners, or farmworkers. Given the extreme reticence of Victorian middle-class women, however, who could scarcely bring themselves to mention sex to their own daughters, it is rather absurd to imagine mistresses chatting to their maids about birth control. It would be more plausible to suppose that young female servants, almost daily faced with seduction by their employers or the sons of the house according to popular literature, were obliged to work out for themselves some sex knowledge and contraceptive methods as an essential part of job- and character-preservation.

Leaving specific experience and skills acquired on the job to one side, it is very likely that domestic service inculcated general notions of prudent and careful management, which would be applied to the conduct of their own lives when servants left to get married. A reputation for knowledgeable and competent household management, plus a nest-egg of savings, were after all commonly held to be the major attractions which domestic servants brought into the marriage market. It would not be surprising if, as wives and mothers, ex-domestic servants applied principles of prudence and domestic economy to their own childbearing. How widely ex-domestics diffused such attitudes

among the working classes can only be surmised, since there are no records on which to base any conclusions about the occupations of their husbands. Most girls who were in service for some part of their lives did eventually get married, probably at least 80 per cent of them, although they tended to be slightly older at marriage than other women and this in itself would tend to have limited the number of children they had. Very few married male servants and remained in domestic service, because the openings for married couples in service were limited. Since something like one in seven or one in eight of all females over ten years old were domestic servants throughout the Victorian period, they presumably provided about the same proportion of working-class wives and mothers; and although female servants were thought to have strong predilections for marrying shopkeepers and skilled tradesmen, if only because those were the groups with whom they came into contact most in the course of their duties, it seems likely that the sheer pressure of their numbers meant that many married outside those circles. They could, therefore, have been a most powerful agency in spreading attitudes, or a 'mentality', in which family limitation formed a natural part, although it must be emphasized that it is far from clear that such attitudes were absorbed from their middle-class employers rather than being self-generated.

The domestic servants whose small families were recorded in the 1911 fertility census were, of course, male servants, since all the occupational information concerned husbands' occupation,

it being thought of no importance, or impossible, to seek information on the wives' previous or continuing occupation. Male servants who married and managed to remain in service, some of them for over fifty years by the time of the 1911 census, were a somewhat special and peculiar subcategory of servants since the opportunities for their employment were very restricted. Servants such as coachmen, grooms, or gardeners were indeed frequently married men; but they normally lived away from the house in their own separate quarters, and were not ranked as indoor servants. It is the indoor male domestic servants who turned in a better family-limitation performance than the upper and middle classes, or at any rate had fewer children. The reason may well have been that these were upper servants of some distinction and special value to their employers – stewards, butlers, chefs, or specially trusted manservants – who were given the privilege of being retained after marriage. Such special male servants would tend to marry late, and would be well aware that if they wanted to keep their jobs they could not afford to have many children, since both space in the house and tolerance for nursery noise would be strictly limited. Alternatively, only those married male servants who turned out to have small families, for whatever cause, might have contrived to remain in service, the large-family men being forced out into other occupations. Either way, the male servants cannot have been important agents of 'modernization', and their small families were a consequence of peculiar occupational requirements rather than of the influences

of industrialization or urbanization.

There was a widespread feeling among contemporary observers of the early Victorian scene, especially among critics of the factory system, that the influences of industrialization were most strongly at work among textile, particularly cotton, workers, and that they were deplorable, immoral, unnatural, and subversive of the social order. The sight of women and girls working in the mills, as well as children, was found particularly shocking and offensive, the more so when it led to a reversal of gender roles, with the man doing the housework and child-minding while the wife toiled in the factory. Friedrich Engels saw in this not just class oppression and exploitation, but the approaching end of the natural order of the sexes, the dethronement and humiliation of men. 'One can imagine', he wrote, 'what righteous indignation this virtual castration calls forth amongst the workers and what reversal of all family relations results from it, while all other social relationships remain unchanged.' Whether achieved by castration or not, it was widely believed that the millgirls produced fewer children than other women. Mill work in childhood and adolescence was held to arrest and distort physical development, impairing the fecundity of the women or making them sterile. There is no evidence that the millgirls who were young in the 1830s and 1840s were not producing perfectly normal numbers of children in the 1850s, and no reason to suppose that childless couples were any more common in Lancashire textile towns than elsewhere.

Married women working in the mills were thought to raise fewer children than normal, because they worked until the final stages of pregnancy and because they returned to work within two or three weeks of childbirth, damaging their own health and leaving tiny babies to neglect and probable swift death. This, if it had been true, might not have affected the demographer's concept of completed family size, since that measures the total number of children born alive to a couple; but it would have affected the effective family size of children surviving beyond the age of one. In any case, there was little substance for such alarmist beliefs. Married women formed a small proportion of the female cotton workers, between a fifth and a quarter, and the great majority of these factory wives were either those who had not yet had any children or those whose children had grown up. The normal situation in the mill towns of the 1840s and 1850s seems to have been that only one tenth or so of all the wives went out to work in the mills; that most mothers with babies and young children stayed at home looking after them; and that the small minority of mothers with small children who did continue to work in the mills made adequate arrangements for baby-minding and child care, preferably with neighbouring kinfolk.

There was, then, an adaptation of family life and child caring to the factory environment, but it was neither on a vast or general scale nor did it necessarily cause any reduction in family sizes. More telling, perhaps, was the view that turning the sex roles within the family topsyturvy, the woman on top so to

say, led women to repudiate their childbearing functions at the same time that working in the mills put them in touch with the means of doing so. The notion that birth-control literature and information circulated freely and extensively within the mills was current from the 1820s, and was confirmed by the testimony of Lancashire and West Riding medical men at the official enquiries into factory conditions in 1831 and 1833. One witness agreed 'that certain books, the disgrace of the age, have been put forth and circulated among the females in factories', and that 'the circumstances of there being fewer illegitimate children [should be attributed] to that disgusting fact'. A Leeds doctor claimed that 'books or pamphlets, which are a disgrace to any age or country have been offered for sale' outside the mills; and another doctor asserted that 'where individuals are congregated as in factories, I conceive that means preventive of impregnation are more likely to be generally known and practised by young persons.' The sense of moral outrage shown by the doctors, and shared by the clergy and much of the middle class, is of more significance than any practical effect of the birth-control propaganda. The contraceptive methods being advocated – a sponge pessary 'as large as a green walnut or small apple' – were too complicated and too reliant on careful anticipation, as well as being too indelicate, to stand much chance of taking root among the millgirls. There was a strong current of working-class opinion which repudiated all birth-control ideas on ideological grounds, as a Malthusian-capitalist ploy designed to attribute all the social

evils of poverty and destitution to overpopulation and to divert attention from improvement through social and institutional changes. The chance that the mill population retained an aversion to any artificial birth control on moral and religious grounds should not be overlooked, despite its reputation for 'irreligion' in the sense of non-attendance at church or chapel, since its outlook and customs were traditionalist in many other respects.

Above all, there is the evidence that male cotton spinners and weavers continued to have rather large families, of more than seven children, into the 1850s, and did not begin to limit them significantly until after 1871. This is, of course, at best only indirect evidence of the attitudes and behaviour of the mill women; but given that the mill was a meeting place of the sexes, it is probable that a high proportion of marriages were between cotton women and cotton men. It is possible that abortion, rather than contraception, was widespread in the textile areas. It was certainly denounced no less vehemently by the doctors, and perhaps with more reason since the risks of illness and death from illegal back-street abortions were extremely high. Abortifacients, of dubious efficacy, were prominent in the armoury of traditional remedies and popular self-medication, and in the course of the nineteenth century were taken up, commercialized, and heavily advertised in thinly disguised terms. Davies's Emmenagogue Mixture of the 1890s, for example, was billed as 'the best medicine … for all irregularities and obstructions, however obstinate or long standing … Perfectly

harmless, never fails to bring about the desired result, as testified by thousands of married and single females.' How many unwanted pregnancies were terminated, with knitting needles or drugs, is not known or knowable. All that can be said is that there is no evidence that abortions were more common in textile towns than elsewhere, and that if they were at all frequent among cotton women the data on family sizes indicate that they must have been the refuge of unmarried girls, not of wives.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the doctors, who continued to denounce all forms of birth control including coitus interruptus until well into the twentieth century, and the clergy who were scarcely less vociferous, were themselves averaging families of 2.81 and 3.04 children respectively by the 1880s and 1890s, while the textile workers whom they had so uprighteously rebuked were averaging from 3.78 children for wool and worsted weavers to 4.80 for cotton spinners. Some would call it hypocritical; or at the least the muted development of a double standard of family morals, one for the rich and another for the poor. If textile workers, or indeed any other workers, were modelling their behaviour on any members of the middle classes, they were unlikely to have had much cause to emulate the doctors. Judging by results, those who did follow the preaching, but not the practice, of the medical profession were the miners; but they had good reasons of their own, that had nothing to do with outside influences, for persisting with large families for longer than any other members of society.

Coalminers were a people apart, fiercely loyal to one another, seeing little of other members of the working classes, and conscious of the presence of other social classes chiefly in the shape of their boss, a few shopkeepers, and perhaps a local parson or minister and a doctor. Some collieries, it is true, were in towns such as Wigan or Barnsley, where miners might rub shoulders with a larger and more mixed community; but the single-industry and isolated mining villages of Lanarkshire, the north-east, the West Riding, or the valleys of South Wales were their typical habitat. Within these communities they were far from immune from religious influences, as the numerous chapels of South Wales bear witness; and the miners of Northumberland and Durham were already thought to be better educated than most workers, in the 1840s, although labelled irreligious, meaning non-Anglican. But by and large they worked out their own standards and values for themselves, not greatly influenced by the example or competition of other working-class groups, or by their masters. This mentality accepted large families as normal and did nothing very much about reducing them, largely for the negative reason that no compelling motives emerged for easing the childbearing burden of their womenfolk or reducing the number of children's mouths to be fed. Coalmining was a continuously and rapidly expanding industry throughout the Victorian period, its expansion largely achieved by simply increasing the numbers of miners. There was always room down the pit – barring occasional years of

recession – for all the sons of mining families, and indeed the growth in demand for labour was such that natural increase was rarely sufficient to supply it, the difference being made good by continual immigration from rural areas. After 1843 the law forbade the employment of women and children underground, and such work had in any case all but died out before then, save in parts of Scotland. A few brawny women continued as surface workers, sorting coal on the pithead bank, throughout the century, but they could be reckoned in thousands against the hundreds of thousands of men. In general there was little if any employment for women and children in mining communities, and they were a clear drain on financial resources, unable to add to family incomes.

There was, of course, an extra amount of unpaid housework for the womenfolk in mining villages, given the large appetites of miners, their exhaustion after a shift and disinclination to help with the chores, and the occupational needs for extra washing and laundry. Women and girls were no doubt kept busy in mining homes, but with no prospects of local employment the girls who did not marry young miners had little choice but to move away, probably into domestic service. Having so little else to do, mining girls may very well have married young, thus helping to perpetuate the tradition of large families. Some historians have argued that in the early Victorian years it was economically rational for the generality of the working classes to have large families because 'children raised frugally and put out to work

were valuable assets'. This implies that the economic utility of children declined thereafter in some areas and occupations sooner than in others, explaining the fertility differentials within the working classes; but the argument in fact confuses this point with a different one which asserts that fertility fell first in areas where there was a good deal of female employment but remained high in the mining and heavy industry areas where there was little, because women who had worked outside the home were more interested in protecting their family's economic stability and their own personal freedom, than women who had not. If the reasoning of women, or of married couples, had worked in this way it ought to have caused miners to lead the way towards smaller families, since the economic utility of their children, especially the girls, was low and decreasing, and they should have readily grasped the need to keep the number of their children within the capacity of the husbands' wages. The rationality of miners' wives, and miners, was rather that they might as well continue to reproduce much as they and their forebears had always done, since there was so little else to do, even if the result was a strain on the family budget and a spell of penury while their numerous children were too young to be earning or to leave home. It was, in other words, a consequence of the failure of urbanization to reach the mining villages, since it was town life that generated the alternative pleasures and distractions and provided a clear incentive to save on children in order to spend on other indulgences and leisure.

Overlapping with differences in the timing and degree of exposure to industrialization as a factor explaining the fertility differentials within the working classes were differences in the availability of new forms of consumer goods and services. These, whether in the form of more varied clothing, clocks or pianos for working-class homes, commercial entertainments, organized sport, or seaside daytrips or holidays, were increasingly available from the 1850s onwards, were chiefly to be found only in sizeable towns, and needed quite a lot of cash. The higher paid workers in regular employment, with steady incomes, could afford them; these included not only the skilled workers in both traditional handicraft trades and new engineering occupations, but also many textile workers particularly where there were two wages in a family, many railwaymen, and many domestic servants. The low paid included the dockers, builders' labourers, and, right at the bottom, agricultural workers; these, together with the miners far from the city lights, were the last groups to start limiting their families. Such a response, while in many ways it mirrored the presumed middle-class response to growing affluence and proliferation of home comforts, did not necessarily derive from it by way of example or imitation. It might be argued that these material and costly temptations were placed before the working classes by middle-class capitalist interests anxious to civilize or emasculate the workers, as well as to make profits. It is less far-fetched to suppose that those workers who could afford it were simply pursuing their happiness and pleasures in ways of their

own choosing.

Nevertheless, economizing on children in order to be able to increase parental enjoyment was accompanied by, and reinforced by, changes in attitudes to the children themselves. There had been a time when very young children, from the age of five or six, had been widely expected to start contributing towards their keep – in agriculture, textiles, mining, chimney-sweeping, straw-plaiting, and most domestic and cottage industries – even if few had ever been really valuable economic assets. That time may have been coming to an end before legislation took a hand from 1833, with the prohibition of factory work in cotton, woollens, worsteds, flax, and linens, but not in silk mills, for all children under nine years old, and limited the work of nine- to thirteen-year-olds to nine hours a day. At any rate, there were less than 42,000 children under ten years old recorded as having any kind of employment in any occupation in 1851, a number which had fallen to 21,000 by 1871; there were 21/2 million children in Britain in the five to nine age group in 1851, and over 3 million in 1871, so that child labour had become negligible for the very young. Factory and workshop legislation came to define a child as anyone under fourteen, and sizeable numbers of ten- to fourteen-year-olds were employed in most industries throughout the Victorian period. The half-timers in the textile industries, defined by the 1844 Factory Act which limited them to a six-hour day, numbered 32,000 in 1850, increased to 105,000 by 1874, and then declined to 21,000 by 1901. And when education

became compulsory, to the age of ten from 1876 and eleven from 1893, it was assumed that school-leavers would normally go out to work. Still, from the point of view of an imaginary economic parent the prospect of feeding and nurturing a child for ten or eleven years, after which it might begin to earn a few shillings a week, can scarcely have made procreation look like an attractive investment.

Calculation of the distant future earning capacity of children may be ruled out as a force regulating marital sex, though calculation of the benefit of having some child alive when the parents reached old age may have been a good reason for wishing to have some children, but not an indefinite number. It is sometimes supposed that compulsory elementary education was itself a decisive factor in bringing home the advantages of family limitation to the working classes, on the grounds that it increased the costs of upbringing per child, even after schooling was made free from 1891. This change, however, came too late to explain the early limiters who had begun reducing their families from at least the 1860s; and in any event the opportunity costs of having children at school until they were ten years old were exceedingly small, seeing that there were so few jobs for that age group. Moreover, the majority of working-class parents did not need the state to persuade or compel them into sending their children to school, but voluntarily found the weekly schoolpence to send their children to the voluntary schools of the pre-1870 era. By the end of the 1850s there were already places in elementary schools

of some sort, some of them admittedly of more than doubtful standards, for at least two thirds of the total school age group of seven- to twelve-year-olds, and although attendance was erratic and in many cases barely more than token, something like one third of the age group seems to have been at school for 150 days a year or more. These proportions had been increasing since the early nineteenth century, and increasing rapidly since the state first began giving some financial aid to the voluntary societies in 1833, while factory children working in the textile mills covered by the 1833 Factory Act were obliged to attend schools provided by their employers.

It may well be, therefore, that the very substantial minority of working-class parents who were sending their children to schools well before there was any compulsion helped to create the pool of pioneers in family limitation. After all, the mentality which led parents to feel that schooling would in some way benefit their children would also be likely to lead them to feel that they could not afford to provide schooling for an indefinite number of offspring. The burden of the direct costs may not seem very heavy, a typical threepence a week for schoolpence in the early Victorian years representing an outlay of around ten shillings a year per child at school. A family with four children simultaneously of school age – which could have been normal even when completed family size reached eight or more – would have had a peak outlay of £4 a year on school fees. That would have been a very considerable, and indeed unthinkable,

sum for the lower paid workers whose annual incomes, if there was only one wage-earner in the family, scarcely totalled £25; but for the higher paid with earnings of £50 a year or more it looks at first sight like a possibly supportable expense. There were, however, indirect costs: the presentable and respectable shoes and clothes which the moral pressure of neighbourhood opinion made necessary for schoolchildren, for example; and, particularly before the 1850s when child labour was more widespread, the opportunity costs of forgone child earnings. All in all, the impact of schooling on the family budgets of even the highest paid workers was sufficiently large to make some family planning of birth intervals, in order not to have too many children at once of school age, a minimum prescription of prudential behaviour. Planning for a restrained ultimate family size was only a step away from this.

Children tend to grow up and become parents in their turn. It is entirely possible that the distinction between those who had had some schooling and those who had had none, which was a very marked distinction until the 1870s and 1880s, carried over into adult life. If it did not, it is hard to see what the purpose of education was. One relevant distinction was that the educated tended to get better jobs, or at least different ones, compared to the uneducated. Some, noted earlier, became commercial clerks; and some, usually the brightest pupils of the voluntary schools, became schoolteachers, mistresses as well as masters. Both of these groups were limiting their families from

the 1860s, sharply so by the 1870s. Occupational mobility within the working classes, rather than upward social mobility into the lower middle class, was, however, probably the most common experience for the educated working-class children, a move into the more skilled and less heavily manual jobs to join those whose parents were already in them. Broadly, these also were occupations showing early signs of family limitation. Whether the connection lay in the nature and circumstances of the job, or in the general parcel of values and mentalities derived from the schooling, it is impossible to tell; probably both strands of influence combined to produce the desire for smaller families.

It is also impossible to tell what weight should be given to first-generation educational influences, acting on cost-conscious parents, and what weight to second-generation influences, acting on parents who had themselves been through school. Information on both the precise chronology of family limitation and of school-going habits is insufficiently exact to sort these out, and there is no reason why both stages should not have been at work. In broad terms, however, the educational cap fits. The latecomers to family limitation among the working classes were precisely the latecomers to schooling, the dockers, builders' labourers, and agricultural labourers who needed the spur of compulsion before their children went to school, and whose families only began to shrink significantly in the 1880s. The miners, as always, remain an exception, since they had not neglected their children's education but still continued to have a lot of offspring.

In the schoolroom, as with the piano or the trip to Blackpool, there is a mirror image of a sort of middle-class habits and pastimes and middle-class sexual-reproductive responses. But there is very little to suggest that the formative working-class experience was in some way communicated by or copied from the middle classes, or that the working-class response was a matter of adopting habits or attitudes disseminated by the middle classes. That there were some influences working like a yeast in society at large, which emanated from the middle classes, is not to be denied; and these undoubtedly included general exhortations to prudence – although nothing so vulgar and unseemly as specific birth-control advice – which were relevant to the adoption of family limitation within the working classes. The weight of the evidence and its interpretation, however, leads to the conclusion that the middle classes and the working classes each took their separate paths, for their own separate reasons, which led, with different timing, towards the small families of the twentieth century. Broadly similar responses to broadly comparable circumstances, occurring at different times and places, were more in the nature of womankind and mankind than in the fabric of the class structure. In this fundamental matter of the family the classes worked out their own destinies and their own controls, from a common pool of techniques, and any appearance of a percolation downwards from the top of society to the bottom was a mirage of chronology rather than a fact of emulation.

CHAPTER THREE *Marriage*

Many early Victorians supposed that they were witnessing a 'crisis of the family' that threatened, unless successfully tackled and resolved, to undermine the entire fabric of society and to sweep the nation into turbulent, uncharted, and perilous times of chaos and anarchy. Other social problems might be more visible, more specific, more readily identifiable, more immediately insistent, and apparently more soluble: child labour, women's underground labour, chimney sweeps' boys, agricultural gang labour, even massive problems like poor relief, urban sanitation, or illiteracy, all these seemed to fall into that category. But for many the most menacing, because the most insidious, problem of all was what they saw as the disintegration of the family, eating away like a worm at the very foundations of all social order. Disintegration, it was thought, was being produced by the factory system, by large-town living conditions, by irreligion, and by the weakening and destruction of traditional moral and social bonds and restraints on the unbridled and irresponsible indulgence of individual lusts and selfish appetites. Feminine rebellion against the duties and functions of childbearing and home-keeping seemed to be looming; and with the approaching collapse of parental, particularly paternal, authority, the end of the family as the basic unit of education and social training, or socialization, which transmitted all the habits and standards that

enabled society to function, seemed to be in sight. Such were the views of Peter Gaskell or Friedrich Engels on the left, Richard Oastler or Michael Sadler on the right, William Greg or James Kay (Shuttleworth) in the centre, and they came to form part of standard educated middle-class opinion at the time, in varying degrees of intensity and alarm.

The family, plainly, did not collapse. It persisted as an institution cherished, tolerated, or accepted by the vast majority in all classes of society, certainly into the final quarter of the twentieth century. At this point awareness of the prevalence of single-parent 'families', of the incidence of divorce, of the large proportion of children with broken-home backgrounds, of the pervasiveness of permissiveness, and of the rebelliousness of teenagers, bid fair to make alarm over the approaching disintegration of the family part of standard educated conservative middle-class opinion in the 1980s. What happened in the intervening 150 years was that the family adapted itself to changing circumstances and functions, in a way which possibly it had always done, although it had never before been called on to adapt so rapidly and so radically. The mutual attraction of the sexes, the desire for companionship in 'pair-bonded' arrangements, and the wish to have children for their own sake and not merely as an unfortunate, and now dispensable, by-product of copulation, are probably sufficient to ensure that the family will continue to adapt, adjust, and survive. Well-meaning or interfering people were not lacking, in the nineteenth

century, to help the family – meaning the working-class family – on its way to adaptation and survival, and their agency should not be ignored even if it may be doubted whether it was crucial for the purpose in mind. Religion, evangelicalism, education, factory acts, children's acts, all these undoubtedly had some influence on the ways in which family life and family behaviour changed and developed, and contributed to making the family of 1900 different from the family of 1830. The major determinants of change, however, were the material circumstances of the men and women trying to bring up families, and the social influences of their kin, their neighbours, their workmates, and their inheritance from their own upbringing and ancestry. Well-meaning people, or busybodies, will not be lacking in the 1980s, peddling their recipes for rescuing the family from disaster. The future is quite capable of looking after itself; Victorians, in all classes, looked after themselves, but some classes were more bombarded with advice, instruction, and orders than others.

A multitude of observations, arguments, inferences, and prejudices converged to form the apprehensions of the alarmist early Victorians. There was the 'virtual castration' and transvestism of the wife as breadwinner wearing the trousers, noted by Engels as the consequence of the demand of the mills for female workers, and echoed by Ashley (Lord Shaftesbury). Engels in fact derived his view that 'when women work in factories the most important result is the dissolution of family ties' from Gaskell and his writings of the early 1830s in

support of the campaign to regulate factory working hours and conditions. Gaskell asserted that 'the chastity of marriage is but little known among them [factory workers]: husband and wife sin equally, and a habitual indifference to sexual rights is generated which adds one other item to the destruction of domestic habits', the other items including, one imagines, the 'parental cruelty, filial disobedience, neglect of conjugal rights, absence of maternal love, destruction of brotherly and sisterly affection' which he listed in a slightly later book. Such views were the stock-in-trade of the 'factory movement' which aimed at improving factory conditions through legislation, and while they made excellent propaganda for audiences and readerships that had no personal knowledge of factory life, they were not therefore necessarily true or grounded on fact. Closely associated with these views was the variant which held that all female employment outside the home, whether of married or unmarried women, whether in factories or elsewhere, made women into bad housewives and mothers because it deprived them of domestic training or inclination, and hence weakened the family. From the other end of the generational telescope it was held that family ties and parental discipline were being eroded by the premature, and immature, financial independence of youths who could earn a living wage from the age of fourteen or fifteen in the mills. Millgirls were further spoiled for future family life and motherhood, it was supposed, by the presumed bawdy licentiousness of their working lives, constant deflowerings in the

carding rooms or lunch breaks, as it were. Sexual harassment by overlookers or foremen was widely believed to be common, and Engels thought that 'the factory owner wields complete power over the persons and charms of the girls working for him', a belief shared by the French liberal journalist Leon Faucher who visited Manchester in 1844 and solemnly accepted local yarns and pub gossip about the millowners' seigneurial rights over the bodies of their millgirls. Engels, at least, who had shacked up with his millgirl Mary Burns, ought to have known better; but the pornographic appeal of a slice of brutish capitalist eroticism, even if totally fictitious, was obviously too good to miss.

Mingling with the presumed anti-family influences of female employment, especially factory employment, were apprehensions about the converging pressures of large-town life. Housing conditions, unsavoury courts, rookeries, and cellar dwellings, and overall chronic overcrowding, were denounced throughout the nineteenth century as inimical to domestic family life and as breeding grounds for all manner of vice and unnatural practices, as well as of misery. Where an entire family, husband, wife, and children of all ages and both sexes, lived in one room any notions of modesty and decency were grotesque, and chastity was thought to be an early casualty. Constant murmurings of incest reached the ears of polite society in the reports of slum visitors and parish clergy, the images of brother-and-sister, father-and-daughter relations thinly disguised in references to 'these breeding places of disease and vice and all manner of

abomination'. If incest was at all common or prevalent, which seems most unlikely, its consequences at least must have been massaged away into conventional and respectable forms; the illegitimacy rate, never at all high, was tending to fall from around 7 per cent of all births in the early Victorian years to 4 per cent or less by the close of the century. This must have been in the main the fruits of premarital and extramarital, rather than incestuous, intercourse. Similar goings-on, whatever they may have been, were probably more characteristic, and traditional, in rural areas than in the large towns, where in any case overcrowding was quite as prevalent as in the cities. Nevertheless, promiscuity, whether incestuous or not, was felt to be encouraged by urban housing conditions and to be further stimulated by the pubs, gin palaces, music halls, and other resorts of doubtful reputation which flourished in the larger towns, partly at least as refuges from the inadequacies and unattractiveness of home life. If to all this is added the virtual breakdown of organized religion in the larger towns, of which the more earnest of early Victorians were acutely conscious, then the full force of the supposedly pernicious effects of large-town life upon the institution of the family can be appreciated.

Whether or not any or all of these apprehensions were well grounded, they were the perceptions which induced, or contributed to induce, a whole range of movements, campaigns, moral crusades, religious, educational, and political endeavours, that were intended to reform or correct the material and cultural

environment so that, among other objectives, the family might be preserved from the perils which appeared to threaten it. These efforts, very largely but not totally misconceived and misplaced, will be considered more fully in later chapters, as external influences on working-class lives. They were, of course, very much internal influences on the lives of the middle classes, in the sense that they were largely generated by middle-class moralists and social reformers and presumptively reflected what were thought to be already existing habits and conditions within middle-class families. To this extent the content and aims of missionary efforts intended to save the working-class family are most informative about actual middle-class precepts and practices, and most of all perhaps about middle-class fears of the fragility of their own family ideals unless these were protected with constant vigilance by elaborate ramparts of morality, modesty, reticence, sexual segregation, parental discipline and authority, and male dominance. Any self-acknowledgement of such fragility was customarily phrased in terms of the need for barriers of privacy and propriety to protect the middle-class family from contamination by chance contact with vulgar and undesirable people and their corrupting habits, people who might include the raffish aristocracy as well as the great unwashed. The defences may also have been required to protect the middle-class family from the self-destructive potential of the desires and appetites of its own members. The double standard, of strict chastity for the girls and condonation of wild-oat sowing by the

young men, never more than obliquely mentioned, was a tacit acknowledgement of this.

The family, regardless of the social class to which it belongs, is always subject to actual or potential internal strains and conflicts which threaten breakdown or disintegration unless kept at bay by observance of accepted rules and conventions, and by all members, husband and wife, parents and children – and in some societies, other generations and other kin – playing their expected roles. What is expected and what is conventional varies between social classes, and over time. This is what the family's function in socializing its members, and what the social history of the family, are all about. The question for the Victorian period is not so much whether working-class families were so precariously based that they could not have survived without a reform and stiffening of their values and morals imposed, or nurtured, by official and middle-class-voluntary policy and preaching. It is, rather, whether and how working-class families managed to handle the manifest pressures of physical hardship, and the stresses of an environment almost turned upside down by urbanization, in such a way as to preserve the cohesion of the family and hold in check its self-destructive potential. The extent to which the routes towards this conservation of the essential cohesion of the family were mapped out by the working classes for themselves, were copied from middle-class examples, or were constructed by legislation, institutions, and moral pressures of largely middle-class inspiration, are matters of lively historical

dispute, more informed by the ideologies of the participants than by direct evidence, which is far from plentiful.

Marriage is the conventional starting point for families, and there was plenty of it about throughout the Victorian years. There was, indeed, a scare in the early Victorian decades that socialist ideas were attacking the very concept of matrimony. Robert Owen was after all on record as opposing the 'single-family-arrangement' of the traditional social order, and his critics thought that Owenites were indulging in all sorts of sexual experiments and trying to establish new forms of communities in which free-love reigned and there was 'indiscriminate intercommunion of the sexes, according to all the irregularities of temporary libidinous inclination'. But this was not only a misreading of Owen, who in his ideal new-harmony communities looked for some new form of free association between a man and a woman superior to traditional marriage and freed from the subjugation of wife to husband, but still dedicated to motherhood and child-rearing; it was also a grotesque exaggeration of the practical influence of socialist ideas, which was minimal. Ordinary people paid no attention, and the scare about marriage amounted to no more than a flutter in the clerical dovecotes. If, over the nineteenth century, some couples could always be found who ignored the forms of marriage and simply got on with cohabiting, that was not out of high-minded idealism but out of indifference. To be sure, a small number in the poorer classes were obliged to live in illicit unions because divorce

from a previous partner remained practically and financially beyond their reach, in spite of the formal legalization of divorce from 1857. Even then, there was a strong likelihood that such couples would go through a bigamous form of marriage, or trust that prolonged cohabitation would establish an effective 'common law marriage', while there is some evidence that public wife-selling as a form of popular divorce accepted by the community was still being practised until after mid-century: all of these indicated acceptance of formal and legal marriage as the norm, and a compelling need to find irregular substitutes when some impediment made the norm unattainable. Those who deliberately opted out of this norm when there was no legal obstacle to a legitimate marriage were not the irreligious, who probably formed the majority of the working classes, nor the atheists and secularists, who were a small and mainly bourgeois minority, but rather the minute proportion of the residuum, the dregs of the society, which was incorrigibly disreputable.

Those who never married were a small, but significant, proportion of the total population: in England and Wales about 11 per cent of males were unmarried at the age of forty-five, declining to about 9 per cent in the 1870s and 1880s, and rising again to 11 per cent by 1901; for females the proportions were about 12 per cent, falling to 11 per cent in the 1880s, before rising to 14 per cent by 1901; Scotland functioned with greater celibacy, the unmarried males running at 13 to 14 per cent, and the females at nearly 20 per cent. These, it can

safely be assumed, were genuinely unmarried in personal and social terms, as well as by legal definition; they constituted a group, especially of the spinsters and especially in the middle classes, of which society became increasingly aware. Working-class spinsters were expected to fend for themselves, merging unobtrusively into the general body of the female labour force if not required to look after ageing parents; it was the middle-class spinsters in families unable to support them in idleness who were perceived as constituting a social problem, because of the scarcity of jobs of acceptable status. There may, indeed, have been considerably more than the national average proportion of middle-class spinsters, given the socially specific marriage habits that prevailed. Only a limited amount of research has been directed to this subject, although the necessary evidence in the shape of marriage certificates recording parental occupations as well as those of bride and groom is massively available, at a high price in search fees, from the 1840s onwards. These data, together with the genealogies of the propertied classes, convey a strong impression that the upper class and the middle classes had an overwhelming propensity to marry only with their social equals, a category frequently defined in restrictive sectarian and locational terms, and that this tendency only began to weaken towards the close of the century. This meant that if a girl failed to find a partner from within her own social set she was likely to remain a spinster. In the working classes, by contrast, habits of marrying within a particular occupational,

geographical, or social group were much less rigid, although they were by no means wholly absent. The net result, however, was that both on grounds of social convention and on grounds of economic necessity marriage was the destiny of the vast majority of working-class daughters.

There were well-established traditions by the 1840s of shoemakers' sons marrying shoemakers' daughters, and this type of craft-based marriage is readily intelligible in terms of propinquity, opportunities of meeting, shared outlook and customs, and the desirability of finding a wife able to assist in the husband's trade. It was a pattern no doubt repeated in most of the traditional skilled artisan trades, where wives had an essential supporting role in the work process: the furniture trades, tailoring, and some of the metalworking trades fall into this category. Spinners and weavers may once, in the domestic outwork and cottage industry stage, have had analogous economic reasons for intermarrying; these were eroded by the advance of mechanization, but were replaced by the social substitution of the mill as meeting place and marriage market, which seems to have produced a fair proportion of factory marriages. In general, practical economic reasons for endogamous unions within the same occupation would seem to have weakened and disappeared with the development of factory and large workshop organization, and never to have been present in the traditional building trades or the new engineering occupations. To some extent the relaxation of technical and

economic incentives for marrying-in among the skilled and semi-skilled was balanced by the sustained and increasing sense of social stratification and group identity within the working classes, although the effects of this would be more likely to show up in keeping marriages within a broad social category such as the 'labour aristocracy' or the 'respectable', rather than within a single occupational group. The miners, because of their isolation and lack of opportunities for meeting other folk – except in such newer coalfields as that of the East Midlands, intermingling with the hosiery districts of Nottinghamshire as it opened up from the 1880s – remained in this, as in so much else, a law unto themselves. Miners' sons married miners' daughters, with some slippage of surplus daughters who went away into domestic service and maybe found husbands from completely different spheres. By and large, however, the impression is that marriages crossed the boundaries of social subdivisions within the working classes with relative ease and increasing frequency by the late Victorian years.

The social identities of marriage partners, usually depicted by the social and occupational background of the spouses' families but ideally including the education and jobs of the bride and groom themselves, are among the most sensitive and acute indicators of community or class feelings. Who marries whom, without courting alienation or rejection from a social set, is an acid test of the horizons and boundaries of what each particular social set regards as tolerable and acceptable, and a

sure indication of where that set draws the line of membership. It is, therefore, unfortunate that historical insights into acceptability and unacceptability are so largely hemmed in by the nature of the evidence to the views of the educated and articulate, that is substantially to the upper and middle classes. The vast literature on the working classes, even when it is not concerned to establish the existence of a single working class with a distinctive class consciousness – for which purpose any concern with differences in marriage alliances would be a distraction – has only scratched the surface of the subject. Marriage certificates, as already noted, can be made to supply this deficiency; but the labour is immense, and has so far only been undertaken in a few pioneering studies. For the period 1846–56 11,000 marriages have been studied in the three towns of Northampton, Oldham, and South Shields (John Foster); over 8000 marriages for the two periods, 1851–3 and 1873–5, for Kentish London, meaning the towns of Deptford, Greenwich, and Woolwich (Geoffrey Crossick); and about 2000 marriages for 1865–9 and 1895–7 for Edinburgh (Robert Gray). This is a vast number of marriages in comparison with the numbers of upper-or middle-class unions that have been scrutinized for their social messages, but a tiny proportion of the total amount of marrying going on in the working classes; in Britain as a whole there were 180,000 marriages a year in the 1850s, 226,000 a year in the 1870s, and over 250,000 a year in the 1890s, and at least three quarters of these must have been in the working classes.

Even if the methods of analysing and classifying the data in these three dips into the enormous brantub were similar and comparable, which unhappily they are not, it is therefore rash to generalize about the social structure of marriage and its development from the existing evidence, except in very broad and probabilistic terms. There are, however, no obvious reasons why behaviour in these towns should not have been broadly representative of the generality of British urban working-class populations of broadly Protestant sympathies. That is, the marriages of the Irish have been excluded from the count; the Irish Catholics, and other similar highly distinctive immigrant or religious groups, could be expected to intermarry on strongly extra-social grounds, their choices determined by cultural affinities which transcended purely class or status considerations. The investigations were primarily concerned with testing the degree of stratification within the working classes, but they do show, incidentally, that almost complete social exclusiveness in the choice of marriage partners was confined to the upper middle class of the large employers, and remained so. The middle and lower middle classes, of some of the professions, small masters, shopkeepers, and clerks, did substantially follow suit but were consistently less exclusive. There was always a considerable downward traffic of lower-middle-class daughters marrying beneath themselves, finding husbands from the skilled trades mainly, but also from among the agricultural labourers, and this was probably growing larger during the second half

of the century. The middle- and lower-middle-class males were probably more selective and class-conscious in their choice of wives, and did not become any less so; but they also consistently found a significant proportion of their brides, between a third and two fifths, from across class frontiers, daughters in the main of skilled workers but not altogether excluding the daughters of urban and rural labourers.

Working-class girls, therefore, could and did marry upwards in the social scale in significant numbers, chiefly into the lower middle class, many of them no doubt making the transition via a spell in domestic service. As a straw in the wind, the marriages of daughters of men in the skilled engineering, metal, and shipbuilding trades in Kentish London do show some changes in the third quarter of the century. The proportion finding husbands from the identical trades remained steady at one quarter, as did the proportion, just below 60 per cent, whose husbands came from the general group of skilled trades. But the proportion marrying upwards, with husbands from the ranks of white-collar workers, shopkeepers, and the gentry, increased from 18 to 30 per cent. Working-class men were apparently much more conservative and had less inclination or opportunity to jump over this social divide: the proportion of skilled workers in Kentish London who married shopkeepers' daughters remained unchanged at 11 per cent, while in Edinburgh it apparently declined from 12 per cent to 8 per cent between the 1860s and the 1890s. Nevertheless, this social frontier between the skilled

working class and the lower middle class, although policed with more vigour on both sides by the men than by the women, was not impenetrable and showed no signs of becoming any more difficult to cross during the second half of the century, indicating that at the least social attitudes were not hardening.

Most social historians, however, have been interested in the internal unity or disunity of the working classes rather than in gauging the depth or shallowness of the division between the working classes and the middle classes. Taking the working classes in the widest sense as embracing all manual workers, they clearly had very strong preferences for marrying one another, and could scarcely have done otherwise since collectively they were more than three-quarters of the total population. Within the working classes, however, differences of status and style between different groups were acutely, even jealously, felt and guarded, a matter of routine observation by all contemporary Victorian social analysts. Some social historians have, indeed, argued that the best-known subgroup, the aristocracy of labour, was actually created by the capitalist middle class in order to divide the working class against itself and thus neutralize any threat to middle-class dominance; this untenable theory has now been discarded, but it remains true that many in the middle classes were not averse to approving and encouraging the deserving and respectable 'labour aristocrats' to differentiate themselves from the broader semi-skilled and unskilled masses and the disreputable residuum. If such divisions within the working

classes ran deep, then not much marriage across the divides would occur. The available evidence indicates, to be sure, that the great majority of marriages were made within subgroups, not between them; but the question is, how much intermarriage between subgroups constituted a significant degree of social flexibility and a sign of interchangeability of marriage partners, in terms of social origins of bride and groom not of wife-swapping, within the generality of the working classes.

An older tradition from preindustrial times had held that the central core of marriage behaviour was for craft to marry like-craft, occupation like-occupation, in a voluntary version of an attenuated caste system. By the 1840s and 1850s, if not earlier, this had clearly largely disappeared, leaving the vestigial remains that men still tended to find the largest single category of wives from among the daughters of fathers in the same occupation as themselves, although this category had ceased to be the dominant one. The carters of Oldham, transport workers on the margins of the unskilled/semi-skilled, were by this time unusual in marrying more daughters of overlookers than of other carters. In place of craft- or occupation-based unions, marriages within the bounds of the subgroup which was felt to be socially homogeneous had already become the norm. This was socially, emotionally, and culturally comfortable, and understandable. 'The wife of a lighterman', it was said, 'felt that she was with her equals when she went out shopping with the wife of a stevedore or the wife of a shipwright, but never with the wife of a docker or an unskilled

labourer.' Roughly half the marriages of sons of skilled workers, from both traditional crafts and new skilled engineering trades, in both Kentish London and Edinburgh, were to daughters of skilled workers; although there were variations in the marrying strategies of particular trades within the skilled group between the 1850s and the 1890s, for the group as a whole this behaviour remained remarkably stable. This constancy suggests that however much the size and composition of the aristocracy of labour may have been changing in the second half of the century as a result of changes in the craft and industrial structure of the economy, its cohesion as a social group remained unaffected at any rate in this key area of marriage choices.

There remains, of course, the other half – or slightly less than half – of the marriages made by the sons of skilled workers. This confirms the stability of the habits and attitudes of the labour aristocracy. In the 1850s, 22.3 per cent of the marriages of the sons of skilled workers were to daughters of unskilled labourers and servants; in the 1870s the proportion was also precisely 22.3 per cent; in Edinburgh there was a slight, possibly statistically insignificant, increase in this ratio from 11.8 per cent in the 1860s to 13.8 per cent in the 1890s, notable in fact not for any change in habits but as an indication of the cultural gap between London and Edinburgh. On the face of it this suggests that the labour aristocracy was growing neither more nor less socially exclusive, and that it had never been particularly committed to marrying-in; on the contrary, it was

always reasonably open to finding brides from the unskilled, from the rural world of agricultural labourers, crofters, and the like, and where possible from the classes immediately above it. Such change as did occur may have been among the girls, not the men, and in a surprising direction. A steady quarter of the daughters of skilled engineering, metal, and shipbuilding workers in Kentish London married men in the same trades in both the 1850s and 1870s, and the proportion marrying into the labour aristocracy as a whole also remained almost constant at just under 60 per cent. But whereas only 18 per cent married into the classes above them (white-collar workers, shopkeepers, and the gentry) in the 1850s and 22 per cent into those below, the unskilled, by the 1870s the roles were reversed, with 30 per cent marrying upwards and 14 per cent downwards. At the margin, therefore, a decided upward shift was taking place in the unions of that two fifths of the daughters of the skilled which did not marry within their own class or subgroup. Unfortunately a similar calculation cannot be made for Edinburgh, as the data do not record marriages of or into the middle and lower middle classes. The clear impression is, however, that any erosion of the self-contained character of the labour aristocracy, which had never been all that self-contained anyway, was being engineered by its girls and was in the direction of blurring the boundaries with the classes above and not in the direction of merging the labour aristocracy into a wider, more unified, working class.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.