The Social Novel, 1844-1854

THE fourth decade of the nineteenth century is often referred to as ' the hungry 'Forties '. It has also been described as the culmination of ' the bleak age ' and as ' the age of discontent '. The agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws, the rise and fall of Chartism and the struggle for some measure of factory and mines legislation are familiar features of the period. These movements, in themselves indications of a changing society, serve to define in general terms the social problems of the time. The agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws, which set landowners against factory owners, is at bottom a demonstration that for the future industry would be more important than agriculture and that the growing population, which accompanied commercial expansion, had burst the bonds of the older society which had had a rural basis. The rise of Chartism, with its demand for universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, the secret ballot and the rest was the logical deduction for the principle of reform which had been accepted by the Whigs in 1832 ; a deduction, however, which the ruling classes were not prepared to make. They felt that they had gone far enough in the modest concessions of the Reform Act. The struggle for factory legislation (and the Mines Acts) raised the issue of State intervention in industry ; a principle, obnoxious not only to the factory and mine owners, but contrary to the prevailing economic teaching. It was important that, while the Whigs and Tories might agree to resist further extension of the franchise, they differed on the questions of the Corn Laws and Factory Legislation. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was an event of the greatest significance but it should not be allowed to overshadow the Ten Hours Act of the following year. The landowners, defeated in their defence of the Corn Laws, were not averse to supporting a movement which restricted the powers of the factory owners and, what was in its inception a humanitarian impulse, became a political issue and in the end a powerful solvent of individualism.

All these cross-currents exercised strains and stresses on a society which was still in the making. The new industrial towns were over-crowded and most of them without the services, even of water or sewage, much less of education and the social amenities, which we have come to think are the essential requirements of civic life. The causes of discontent in the 'Forties were therefore many and genuine. There was, as Thomas Carlyle proclaimed to his contemporaries, an acute ' condition of England ' question ; but the fulminations of the prophet rarely provides objective facts or suggestions as to what practical steps should be taken. It is fortunate, however, that the novelists were more specific and the causes of the general unrest and nature of the

remedies put forward can be illustrated by reference to their works. They wrote social novels ; novels, that is, in which social and economic conditions of the time are discussed and policies advocated which in their opinion would lead to amelioration of such conditions. Whether this be a proper function of the novel as a literary form was questioned at the time and has often been discussed since ; but the point of view of the social historian this deviation, from strict orthodoxy, if deviation it be, is to be welcomed.

The Reform Act of 1832, although the franchise it granted was so limited, had the merit that it based representation on an intelligible principle. The old constitution, which was defended as an expression of the wisdom of our ancestors and regarded with awe as something of a mystery, had given place to a logical scheme obviously contrived by the Whigs to go so far and no farther in meeting radical opinion. It was certainly not sacred. Reform had been accepted as an objective. It had stimulated a general investigation of our institutions. Royal Commissions were appointed, of which the most important were those on the administration of the Poor Laws and the government of the towns. Drastic changes were recommended and adopted. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had a profound effect. It set up machinery, central and local, to bring to an end the giving of outdoor relief to the able-bodied, the vicious system of relief in aid of wages which dated back to the early days of the French Revolutionary Wars. The Municipal Corporations Act of the following year introduced popularly-elected councils with the power to levy rates for general administrative purposes ; a power which many towns were slow to employ at first, because of the expense involved, but by degrees adopted, particularly when the sanitary movement was stimulated by periodical outbreaks of cholera.

But the reforming zeal of the Whigs began to flag. It lost its momentum. The social problem remained and measures to meet its insistent demands became increasingly urgent. It was a moment to be seized by a politician with imagination and an ambition for leadership. And so it appeared to the young Benjamin Disraeli. He decided to employ the form of the novel as a means of defining his programme. In *Coningsby, or the New Generation* (1844) he poured scorn both on Whigs and Tories and drew the outlines of a new party of young noblemen prepared to devote their talents to the service of their country. But of the triology of novels, *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*, *Sybil* (1845) deserves special attention because in it Disraeli sets out to deal with the social question. Its sub-title is ' the two nations ', that is, the rich and the poor. The contrast between them is skilfully exhibited by rapid transitions, from the bored in London clubs who find it hard to while away their time and the groups of intriguing politicians, one passes to the sufferings of the hand-loom weavers, the evils of the truck system and the conditions under which women and children were employed in coal mines. There are long disquisitions

on political evolution which suggest a reading of history, not perhaps entirely untenable, but certainly unusual. It is characterised by a constant pressing back to a lost golden age. Of course, it was beyond 1832. It was indeed beyond 1688, when the Whigs established their oligarchy. It was beyond the Reformation when the Church was despoiled and the property basis given to the class which ultimately overthrew the monarchy in the seventeenth century. Was it not beyond 1066 when Saxon Harold was over-thrown by Norman William and the people were divided into conquerors and conquered? Reference is made to long centuries of degradation and the poor are often identified with the Saxons. In a rhapsody on the accession of Victoria, Disraeli speaks of a nation near her footstool, which looks to her with anxiety, with affection, perhaps with hope. ' Fair and serene, she has the blood and beauty of the Saxon. Will it be her proud destiny at length to bear relief to suffering millions, and, with those soft hands which might inspire troubadour and guerdon knights, break the last links in the chain of Saxon thraldom ? '

This peculiar gift of thinking of history in a symbolic way makes the novel seem so artificial to modern readers. There is the tacit assumption that nobility is an innate characteristic, passed on from generation to generation, and somehow associated with the possession at one time or another of extensive landed property. The outstanding personalities in the book are aristocrats, real or disguised; for Walter Gerard, working man and Chartist, is of the 'Saxon nobility' and has retained its high qualities. It would seem only necessary to endow genealogical research to find our true leaders rather than to extend the franchise to the general mass of nobodies. Was Disraeli really sincere? By descent, training and temperament, he was wholly un-English. And yet he identified himself with a reading of English history which gave to English blood and English institutions an almost sacred importance. Monarchy, Church, Aristocracy, Constitution—of these he speaks with the deepest reverence. It is difficult not to believe that he was indulging the vanity of those he means to lead. He was invoking a legend which might serve to create a party. With his great imaginative insight he was blending all the elements which offered means of regenerating the Tory Party. The recent accession of the girl Queen, the revival of sacerdotalism within the Church of England, the prejudice of the landed gentry against the new factory lords, the sentimentalism of the period—all are skilfully employed. He also opposed the principles which endangered the legend. Utilitarianism, the application of logic to reconstruction problems and all rational analyses were anathema to him. He was building on loyalties, intuitions, sentiment. On those foundations he thought a party could be based which would counter the teaching of the individualists; for like Carlyle he abominated the doctrine of *laisser faire.*

For his description of the working classes Disraeli depended on the series of Blue Books which had recently appeared rather than on personal knowledge or observation. His account of the distress of hand-loom weavers comes from the Report of the Hand-loom Weavers Commission of 1841. He puts into the mouth of Warner, the representative of this class, language which in sentiment and artificiality is Disraelian. 'I loved my loom and my loom loved me. It gave me a cottage in my native village, surrounded by a garden of whose claims on my solicitude it was not jealous. There was time for both. It gave me for a wife the maiden I had ever loved; it gathered my children round my hearth with plenteousness and peace . . .'. With this idealistic picture is contrasted the steady lowering of the standard of living owing to the adoption of power-loom weaving. It is worth remarking, however, that Disraeli suggests how society should deal with such a problem as the supersession of skilled labour by the introduction of new methods of production. It is a proposal of a revolutionary kind which he does not develop. 'If a society that has been created by labour suddenly becomes independent of it, that society is bound to maintain the race whose property is labour, out of the proceeds of that other labour which has not ceased to be productive '. He apparently means that the hand-loom weavers should be placed on compensation, the funds for the purpose being found out of the profits of power-loom weaving. When he turned to coal-miners Disraeli extracted his points from the Report on the employment of women and children underground, and that of the Select Committee on the payment of wages. The latter provided him with material for the vivid description of a truck shop. Finally the description of Wodgate is based on that of Willenhall in the Appendix to the Second Report of the Children's Employment Committee. The children were ignorant of the Queen's name, had never heard of Moses or Paul and confused Adam and Christ. There probably has never been so much use of Blue Books to fill out the details of a work of fiction. It must be added, however, that probably no decade has ever provided such lurid descriptions of industrial conditions in official form. Those Reports have indeed had a greater repercussion than Disraeli's use of them. They provided Karl Marx with evidence for the indictment of capitalism.

The weakness of Disraeli's treatment of industrial problems is that it is so eclectic. He offers a composite picture by blending accounts of different industries and is vague in his indications of locality. In this respect—and indeed many others—Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* is superior. She had a purpose —a very definite purpose—and that was to expose the condition of the poor in such a way as to appeal to the social conscience and in particular to ask what were the social implications of Christianity. Like Disraeli she rejects the prevalent teaching of Political Economy and is in favour of intervention; but she does not expect it from a political party but from a change in the social outlook. The moral of the book may almost be expressed in the trite phrase

'the promotion of better relations between employer and employed'. To illustrate her thesis she sets her story in an environment which she knew at first hand, for she had lived in Manchester in the 'Forties. The novel is remarkable because, save for the Carson family, it deals from beginning to end with artisans, especially in their home life. The central character is John Barton, Mary's father, around whom Mrs. Gaskell confesses all the others formed themselves. 'He was', she says 'my hero, the person with whom all my sympathies went and with whom I tried to identify myself at the time'. John Barton, like Walter Gerard in *Sybil,* was a Chartist. He had been driven to extreme courses, not by the acceptance of any revolutionary economic doctrine, but by despair about bridging the gulf between Christian profession and everyday practice. 'You see', says the unfortunate man on his death-bed, 'I've so often been hankering after the right way: and its a hard one for a poor man to find . . . When I was a little chap they taught me to read, and then they never gave me no books; only I heard say the Bible was a good book. So when I grew thoughtful and puzzled I took to it. But you'd never believe black was black, or night was night, when you saw all about you acting as if black was white and night was day. It's not much I can say for myself in t'other world, God forgive me; but I can say this, I would fain have gone after the Bible rules if I'd seen folks credit it; they all spoke up for it and went and did clean contrary . . . I think one time I could e'en have loved the masters . . . that was in my Gospel-days, afore my child died o'hunger . . . I gave it up in despair, trying to make folk's actions square with the Bible; and I thought I'd no longer labour at following the Bible myself'.

It is interesting to read the notice of *Mary Barton* by W. R. Grey in the *Edinburgh Review*; for it is always difficult to appreciate contemporary reactions to a book, especially one which develops a thesis which runs counter to prevailing beliefs. The reviewer declared that the book was marred by 'false philosophy' and 'inaccurate descriptions'. Referring to Mrs. Gaskell's plea for a greater degree of sympathy between the rich and poor, he remarks 'the rich can never have the same knowledge of the troubles and difficulties of the poor which the poor have of their own. Their paths lie apart. However much they may endeavour to visit among them, to become familiar with their circumstances, and acquainted with their griefs—they *can* do all this, from the very nature of the case, only very imperfectly . . . Difference of position, therefore, lies at the root of the alleged want of sympathy'. Afternoon calls would, I suppose, be embarrassing to both parties. But notice how Grey reveals the individualist presumptions of the day. 'Another consideration to which due weight is seldom allowed is this; the cause which, of all others, most deadens and restrains the hand of charity, is the fear of bestowing it unworthily and mischievously. Immense difficulty is experienced by the rich, when they

attempt to discriminate between cases of imposture and cases of real destitution'. Perhaps this was the dilemma which weighed on the mind of the young man who had great possessions when he went away sorrowful. The writer is wholly unconscious of the fact that his air of patronage is offensive. It is no surprise that he falls foul of Mrs. Gaskell's John Barton. He declares that he was not typical of his class. The press and certain members of Parliament had disseminated the idea that bad feeling existed between employers and workpeople. Mrs. Gaskell had been misled. Such feeling was not widespread. Then, John Barton's conduct was 'radically inconsistent with his qualities and character'. He is represented as an intelligent steady and skilful workman. But where is the intelligence of a man who does not save when in employment for the days when trade is bad? Why did he waste his time and money on trade unions? How could a man of such powers of reflection and discussion be so ignorant of 'the first principles of commercial and economic science?' All workpeople ought to save because what were the employers but men originally poor who had exercised prudence and foresight. Apparently the reviewer saw no obstacle to all workmen becoming capitalists, except their recklessness when they were receiving a regular wage. For him, the industrial system was an order within which each individual should be animated by a desire to better his own position. If each person worked hard and exercised prudence, it was assumed that industrial harmony would be achieved. This was the assumption which Mrs. Gaskell challenged. She did not believe that, if the economic motive became dominant and material wealth was piled up by a hard-working and prudent generation, a satisfactory society would result; in fact, she did not believe that end or the means of attaining it to be consistent with Christian principles. On these grounds she was an interventionist.

Mrs. Gaskell was content to say that society would be changed if Christian principles were followed in practice. She did not prescribe any particular application of those principles. In this she differed from the Christian Socialists. They definitely declared that competition was essentially unchristian and ought to be eliminated. The Christian Socialist Movement arose out of the social discontents of the period; its prophet was F. D. Maurice and its propagandist Charles Kingsley. They were clergymen with a concern for the condition of England. Looking backward, it is a curious episode falling within the years 1848 to 1854, the second half of the period under review in this paper. It had no relation to the Socialism taught by Robert Owen, or to that which was promulgated by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. So far as it had a body of doctrine, it was derived from J. M. Ludlow, who had been educated in France and was influenced by the ideas of a self-governing workshop, or producers' co-operation, which had found expression there. Ludlow held that men would prefer co-operation to competition if the alternatives were presented to them. He also contended that the attainment of

political emancipation—the avowed aim of the Chartists—would prove futile unless it was accompanied by industrial freedom. His teaching fired the imagination and stimulated the innate pugnacity of Charles Kingsley. He investigated conditions under which tailors worked for middlemen in London and gave a vivid account of his enquiries in the pamphlet 'Cheap Clothes and Nasty'. The shops where the garments were offered for sale were denounced as 'the temples of Moloch—their thresholds rank with human blood' and no Christian he declared should disgrace himself by entering one. Kingsley followed this up with *Alton Locke*, a novel, which, under the guise of being the autobiography of a tailor-poet, was a manifesto of the Christian Socialist group. It scored an immediate success. It served the two-fold purpose of drawing public attention to what we would now call a sweated trade, and also of advertising the remedy which the Christian Socialists would apply. The *laisser faire* position was held up to ridicule; a political economist was represented as saying there was no remedy for the evils exposed because competition was regulated by natural laws beyond any control. As against this, Kingsley proclaimed 'a Holy War against the social abuses which are England's shame; and, first and foremost, against the fiend of competition' and the weapon he proposed to employ was the organisation of self-governing workshops, small groups of tailors, shoemakers and other craftsmen working for themselves and sharing among themselves the profits of their labour. As a solution of the industrial problem this must appear to us hopelessly inadequate because it ignores the economies of large-scale production and the problem of securing a market. It could only be applicable to petty trades under special circumstances. But Kingsley's enthusiasm knew no bounds. He felt that the collapse of Chartism in 1848 was a challenge, and that the Christian Socialists had the answer to it. On the ruins of so many hopes he thought could be built a society in which competition would be eliminated and Christians would recognise the implications of their beliefs. But the Christian Socialist Movement proved to be more short-lived than the Chartist; the experimental workshops, for one reason or another failed, and Kingsley himself found new outlets for his abounding energy. *Alton Locke* was written with great rapidity under the spell of an idea. It remains the outstanding example of a novel with a definite social purpose and it undoubtedly had a permanent effect on public opinion. The social conscience was stirred.

Hard Times represents the nearest approach which Charles Dickens made to the treatment of the industrial question. It is not generally regarded as ranking high among his novels, though attention has recently been drawn to it by Mr. F. R. Leavis, who claims that it is of all Dickens's works the one that has all the strength of his genius and is a completely serious work of art. He contends that in *Hard Times* Dickens is for once possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilisation are seen

as fostered by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit. Regarded as 'a moral fable', a term Mr. Leavis applies to it, *Hard Times* is remarkably consistent throughout. The theme is illustrated by comparison and contrast with a skill, relevancy and lack of diffuseness which is not paralleled in the more famous of Dickens's novels. As an account of industrial conditions *Hard Times* is inferior to the novels we have already noticed; it does not exhibit the diligence in making use of Blue Books we found in *Sybil*, nor does it show that first-hand knowledge which is so evident in *Mary Barton* and *Alton Locke*. The protagonists, Josiah Bounderby and Stephen Blackpool, are not envisaged as employer and employed. Their temperaments come into collision; their clash of interests is not stressed. Ruskin remarked that the usefulness of *Hard Times* is diminished 'because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Bounderby a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman'. But his criticism would fall to the ground if we admit Mr. Leavis's argument and regard the story as a moral fable. Dickens is not so much concerned with the clash of industrial interests as with exposing the inadequacy of an economic doctrine. He wished to hold up the principle of *laisser faire* to contempt. His sense of justice was outraged by his suggestion that social evils would be corrected by allowing free play to self-interest. His antipathy towards the teaching of the Utilitarians practically dictated the form of the novel; it is not a detailed exposure of actual conditions, but a bitter satire on a point of view. Thomas Gradgrind, 'a man of realities, a man of facts and calculations' is made to pay dearly for his delusion that he could 'weigh and measure any parcel of human nature'. His children are educated on the lines which an 'economic man' might be thought to consider right. But human nature asserts itself; the finer sensibility of his daughter Louisa saves her from disaster, while her selfish brother makes a complete wreck of his life. The system had never completely conquered Louisa. She married Bounderby, not because the match could be approved on financial grounds, but because of her affection for her brother, which was a completely irrational motive. As to her brother Tom, when confronted with the fact that he had been guilty of embezzlement he told his father: 'So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk a hundred times of its being a law. How can *I* help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father, comfort yourself'. Gradgrind was in fact better than his professed principles. He gave his protection to the deserted Sissy Jupe, persuading himself that her misfortunes would be a lesson to his own children. This act, which could not be justified in its inception or approved in its consequences by the principles he enunciated, proved to be a great blessing to his family. The day came when Gradgrind had to confess that the ground on which he stood had ceased to be solid under

his feet. Not so Bounderby. He died a hypocritical humbug, having made in his will what provision he could for the perpetuation of bluster and balderdash. Towards Bounderby Dickens never relents ; he does not allow him a redeeming trait in his make-up. He is a veritable incarnation of Carlyle's 'Mammonism'—successful in business, though essentially stupid; boastful, he invents lurid details about his upbringing to create a stronger impression of his achievements of self-help ; contemptibly mean in his treatment of everyone with whom he has to deal. The little peculiarities of speech, which give a humorous turn to the characters painted in darker colours in other novels of Dickens, here only increase the sense of loathing with which one comes to regard Bounderby. How we writhe when we are so often reminded that the object of the 'hands' is to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon! 'You see our smoke. That's meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly to the lungs . . . You have heard a lot of talk about the work in our mills. I'll state the fact of it to you. It's the pleasantest work there is, and it's the lightest work there is, and it's the best paid work there is. More than that, we couldn't improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors'. There is no spirit of playful banter about this satire.

Just as the personal idiosyncrasies of Bounderby obscure the wider issues involved in the relations between employers and employed, so Stephen Blackpool's domestic troubles evoke deeper sympathies than his position as a worker does. The cross-currents in his life, particularly his unfortunate marriage, make him a special instance ; his actions are dictated by personal considerations, though they are by no means selfish. He would not consent to act with the United Aggregate Tribunal because he had given a promise. He was a member of the Union but he had no confidence in the policy of its leader, Slackbridge, and dared to be the only dissentient. Slackbridge was an unprincipled agitator and it is significant of the middle-class attitude to Trade Unionism at that time that both in *Sybil* and *Hard Times* it is represented as anti-social. But Blackpool will not agree that the agitators are the cause of his trouble. ''Tis not by them the trouble's made', he declares, 'I ha' no favour for 'em—I ha' no reason to favour 'em—but 'tis hopeless and useless to dream o' taking them from their trade, 'stead of takin' their trade from them . . . I canna, wi' my little learning an' my common way tell . . . what. will better all this . . . but I know what will never do't. The strong hand will never do't. Victory and triumph will never do't. Agreeing for to make one side unnaturally alwus and for ever right, and the other side unnaturally alwus and for ever wrong will never never do't. . . . Most o'aw, rating 'em as so much power, and reg'latin 'em as if they was figures in a soom, or machines, wi'out souls to weary and souls to hope—whan aw goes quiet, draggin' on wi' 'em as if they'd nowt of the kind, and whan aw goes unquiet, reproaching 'em

for their want of sitch like humanly feelings in their dealings with yo', this will never do't, till God's work is onmade'.

This passage contains the essence of Dickens's teaching. Discontent is deep-seated because it arises from a denial of common humanity. The workers are not always wrong and their employers always right. *Laisser faire* will never remove grievances. Kindness and patience and cheery ways, however, will prove a wonderful solvent. Nor can intervention be avoided. In this Dickens is at one with Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell and Kingsley. They all opposed the prevailing teaching of Political Economy. But the grounds on which they would base intervention differ according to their temperaments and opinions. Disraeli calls for a renewal of the sense of aristocratic obligation to the poor. Mrs. Gaskell appeals to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Kingsley agrees with her, but has a specific remedy. Dickens was too much of a radical to appreciate Disraeli's plea, and not enough of a puritan to understand Mrs. Gaskell's seriousness. Nor had he any programme so definite as that of the Christian Socialists. He stood, as G. K. Chesterton has so well said, for a more humane and hilarious view of humanity.

Orthodox Political Economy, as one expression of a narrow and dismal view of human nature, is bitterly satirized in *Hard Times*. For this Dickens has been accused of ignorance. 'His tale', wrote A. V. Dicey, 'is from beginning to end a crude satire on what Dickens supposed to be the doctrine of the political economists'. There is, of course, little to show that he had studied the subject; but it is useless to argue that a proper understanding of the writings of Adam Smith and his successors would have saved Dickens from the crudity of the attack. The economists had certainly taught the doctrine of *laissez faire*, and their analysis of industrial society lent support to the opinions of Gradgrind and Bounderby. Qualifications that they may have made, or were implicit in their teaching, were overlooked when self-interest found their general principles congenial. Dickens judged Political Economy from the fact that those who did not take a humane and hilarious view of humanity appealed to its principles in support of their attitude. The economists themselves may have been disinterested inquirers after truth ; but undoubtedly their conclusions were employed in practice to bolster up the ambitions of the aggressive employers and to counter the claims of the workers. It was this practical application that Dickens attacked. In this he was justified, for a line of conduct cannot be regarded as purely economic ; other issues are necessarily involved. Sissy Jupe cannot follow Mae Choakemchild's statement that a nation is prosperous because it has so much money—she wants to know how it is distributed among its inhabitants. She cannot see that starvation is any more pleasant to those starved because they form a fractional part of the population. She could find no comfort in the fact of the low percentage of those drowned at sea or burnt to death at home. It is always the mechanical or statistical

treatment of human problems that Dickens will not tolerate. 'So many hundred hands in this mill; so many hundred Horse Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever. Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means'.

Mr. Gradgrind had shown his devotion to the economists by naming two of his children Adam Smith and Malthus, though we are not told how they sustained this affectation in later life. He was a diligent collector of statistics and a close student of Blue Books. 'Whatever they could prove (which is anything you like) they proved there, in an army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits'—so runs the description of Gradgrind's private room. 'In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals and finally settled—if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. As if an astronomical observatory should be made without windows, and the astronomer should arrange his starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper, so Mr. Gradgrind, in *his* Observatory (and there were many like it) had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings all around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate and wipe out all their tears with one dirty piece of sponge'. This is the same note. It is always the confusion of abstractions with realities, the application of averages to society, the ruling out of the human element, that characterises the political economist to Dickens.

He makes a few concrete applications of his criticism which are worth noticing. For instance, he ridicules the view that State intervention would have an evil effect on industry and should therefore be avoided. Speaking of the prosperity of Coketown he remarks—'It had been ruined so often that it was amazing how it had borne so many shocks. Surely there never was such fragile china-ware as that of which the millers of Coketown were made . . . they were ruined when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery; they were utterly undone when it was hinted that they need not always make quite so much smoke . . . Whenever a Coketownman felt he was ill-used—that is to say, whenever he was not left entirely alone, and it was proposed to hold him accountable for his acts—he was sure to come out with the awful menace that

he would "sooner pitch his property into the Atlantic". This had terrified the Home Secretary within an inch of his life on several occasions'.

It has already been mentioned that Dickens gives an unfavourable view of trade unionism because his account of it turns round the activities of the agitator Slackbridge. But he recognises the hollowness of the pretence that there was any possibility of freedom of contract between employees and employed. When it is reported that the operatives were 'uniting and leaguing and engaging to stand by one another', that lost tart old lady Mrs. Sparsit declares 'It is much to be regretted that the united masters allow of any such class-combinations . . . Being united themselves they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man'. But Dickens was definitely against violence. Slackbridge was a dangerous and unscrupulous demagogue. How, then, could industrial peace be secured in a world of Bounderbys and Slackbridges? He had no solution on the economic plane. Allow the finer emotions free play, cultivate friendliness, follow the heart—it all comes to some such general precepts. In his attack on the Orthodox Political Economy over seventy years later, Ruskin in 'Unto this Last' pays a high tribute to Dickens. 'He is entirely right', he insists, 'in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, especially *Hard Times* should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. They will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they examine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all their trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told'.

Dedicated to Carlyle and clearly influenced by his teaching, accepted by Ruskin as substantially just in its social outlook, *Hard Times*, although not usually considered among the greatest of Dickens's novels, occupies an important place in our literature. It is a notable link in the chain of literary protest against the assumptions of the Orthodox Political Economy. For it is an interesting fact that, even in the days of its almost unchallenged ascendancy, the classical political economy did not commend itself to imaginative writers. There is a continuous protest from Southy the conservative and Shelley the revolutionary, through Carlyle, Kingsley and Dickens to Ruskin and Morris, and indeed to Shaw, Wells and Galsworthy.

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