POVERTY AND THE POOR IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1837 – 1901

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ABSTRACT

Poverty and the Poor in the Victorian Age 1837-1901

by

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This thesis is an attempt to analyze the dimensions of poverty and living standards of the working-class masses in Britain during the heyday of industrial capitalism, the age of Queen Victoria between 1837 and 1901, with reference to primary sources-contemporary studies, memoirs and reports of correspondents-and secondary sources on the subject. Even though there was a huge accumulation of wealth within the new capitalist society during this period, the living standards of the common people rapidly deteriorated both in the rural and urban areas of Britain. On the other hand a small minority who were composed of the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie became the sole beneficiaries of the fruits of this tremendous economic development as poverty became more and more widespread and dramatic in the lives of the working classes.

However, the impact of poverty and misery upon the living and working conditions of the masses has always been overshadowed by the splendour and peacefulness of the period especially during the second half of the nineteenth

century. There was certainly a strong effort by the contemporary authorities to cover up the real extent of poverty in the society but above all poverty was used as a vehicle for the passivization and manipulation of the masses by the upper and middle classes during the Victorian age. This situation can be explained not only with the wealthy classes' fear of revolution but also with the creation of an artificial and effective environment of poverty by the ruling nobility and rising middle-class businessmen who on the one hand struggled for power and on the other collaborated for the easy exploitation of the working classes.

ÖZET

Önder Kocatürk

Victoria Devri Yoksulluk ve Yoksul Sınıf 1837-1901

Bu tez, sanayi kapitalizminin en parlak dönemi olan 1837-1901 arası Kraliçe Victoria çağı Britanyası'ndaki yoksulluğun boyutlarını ve işçi sınıfı kitlelerin yaşam standartlarını birinci el kaynaklara- dönem çalışmaları, anı ve muhabir raporları-ve konuyla ilgili ikinci el kaynaklara başvurarak inceleme çabasıdır. Bu dönem boyunca yeni kapitalist toplumda muazzam bir zenginlik birikimine rağmen halkın yaşam standartları Britanya'nın hem kırsal hem de kentsel bölgelerinde hızla kötüleşti. Diğer taraftan yoksulluk, çalışan sınıfların yaşamlarında gittikçe yaygın ve dramatik bir görünüm alırken sadece topraklı aristokrasi ve burjuva sınıflarından oluşan küçük bir azınlık bu müthiş ekonomik gelişmenin meyvelerinden faydalandı.

Bununla birlikte yoksulluk ve perişanlığın kitlelerin yaşam ve çalışma koşulları üzerine etkisi her zaman dönemin özellikle ondokuzuncu yüzyılın ikinci yarısı boyunca süren görkemi ve huzuru ile gölgelendi. Dönemin yöneticileri yoksulluğun toplumdaki gerçek ölçüsünü örtbas etmek için büyük çaba içindeydi fakat hepsinden önemlisi yoksulluk yüksek ve orta sınıflar tarafından Victoria devri boyunca

kitleleri pasifleştirme ve manipüle etmek için bir araç olarak kullanıldı. Bu durum sadece zenginler sınıfının devrim korkusuyla değil aynı zamanda ülkeyi yöneten soylular sınıfı ile gitgide güçlenen orta-sınıf işadamlarının bir taraftan güç mücadelesi yaparken diğer taraftan da işçi sınıflarının kolay sömürülmesi için işbirliği içinde suni ve etkin bir yoksulluk ortamı yaratmasıyla açıklanabilir.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to analyze the question of poverty and the poor in Britain during the age of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), which is rightly accepted to be the golden era of the United Kingdom. The Victorian age was a period of time during which Britain, namely the British Isles including England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland,[1] was the unrivalled supreme power as well as the wealthiest nation in the world. Yet this is not the only reason for the special focus on this period in the thesis. The thesis above all aims to illuminate the importance of the Victorian age with respect to the living standards of the common people namely, 'the working classes'[2] in the history of Britain and thus reveals the fact that a new society which was based upon the dynamics of not only industrial capitalism but also much more significantly and curiously poverty was created and evolved for the benefit of a privileged minority.

From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, Britain went into an enormous transformation as a

[1] After the Act of Union between England and Wales in 1536, the 1707 Act of Union linked Scotland to England and Wales (Colley, pp. 11-13). The Irish Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament and united the kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland in 1800 (Pugh, pp. 24-6, Belchem, 3-4).

[2] By the term the "working class" or "working classes" in the thesis, all groups of ordinary working people in the society, namely the lower-class people who constituted the great majority are meant-not only the factory proletariat in the Marxist sense.

result of the demographic and industrial revolutions and this process which culminated in the Victorian age created a new society in the urban districts. In this new 'industrial society' the British people had to adapt themselves to the unusual circumstances of industrial capitalism but unfortunately positive adaptation was not possible for the great majority of people who became the victims of a harsh exploitative system conducted by the minority, namely the landed aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie who were the real beneficiaries of the tremendous accumulation of wealth in Britain. Thus, the principal aim of the thesis is to shed light on the actual living conditions of the masses in Britain during this glorious age of prosperity and to find a reasonable answer to the question why the common people were not sufficiently able to get their shares from this general affluence in this period. The Victorian period was quite unique in respect to the living standards of the masses within the whole process of industrial capitalism between 1750 and 1914. This thesis tries to clarify the distinguishing peculiarity of the Victorian age in the nineteenth century social history of Britain by focusing on the masses of working-class people both in the rural and urban areas.

The thesis takes into consideration not only the sixty-four years between 1837 and 1901, but also the long period leading up to the Victorian age. It is impossible to

understand the importance of the Victorian age without considering the long duration from 1700 to 1914. Even this consideration would have been insufficient for the preparation of this thesis. Consequently, these limits have been exceeded and a research on the whole British history from the fifth century up to the present day was also done before focusing on the Victorian period in detail. Since Britain was an exemplary model for all the industrializing capitalist nations in the world during the nineteenth century, the thesis also aims to bring forward a new approach to the formation of a new concept of poverty and the class of labouring poor not only in Britain but also in other capitalist countries of the globe during the nineteenth century. Yet it is beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis to make comparisons between Britain and other capitalist countries of the world like France, Germany, Russia, the United States and Japan.

This thesis aims to understand the British poverty in the Victorian era, through the analysis of the primary sources, mainly the chronicles of the period and the secondary sources. The impact of the primary sources on the formation of the thesis by far predominates and the secondary sources provide the background information to support the thesis that the living standards of the masses seriously deteriorated during the Victorian age to the extent that there was mass poverty and misery among the

great majority of people (at least seventy to seventy-five per cent of the whole population), which was artificially created by the upper and middle classes, namely the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie for the exploitation and manipulation of the working-class multitudes to their own benefit.

As for the primary sources, Letters to the Morning Chronicle, which was a successful Whig/Liberal newspaper in 1849-1851 are the first important primary source used in the thesis.[3] The Morning Chronicle survey (Labour the Poor) is a unique descriptive social survey of the whole country at one point in time. From the start the survey was designed to cover three general types of area-the Manufacturing Districts, the Rural Districts and the Metropolitan Districts. Angus Bethune Reach who covered the northern industrial areas including the factory, mining and large town populations and later Charles Mackay who collected the information for Liverpool and Birmingham were the correspondents for the manufacturing districts. Alexander Mackay and later Charles Shirley Brooks covered the rural areas including agricultural labour, the fishing and tin mining communities and in addition, the rural and

[3] P.E. Razzell and R.W. Wainwright (eds.), *The Victorian Working Class, Selections from letters to the Morning Chronicle (1849-1851)* (London 1973), A. Humpherys (ed.), *Voices of the Poor, Selections, from the Morning Chronicle Labour and the Poor (1849-1850)* (London, 1971), E.P. Thompson and E. Yeo (eds.), *The Unknown Mayhew, Selections from the Morning Chronicle* (London 1971).

small town industries. London (the Metropolitan Districts) was undertaken by Henry Mayhew.[4]

Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*[5] is another important source used for the preparation of this thesis. Henry Mayhew's (1812-1887) letters as metropolitan correspondent to the Morning Chronicle in 1849-1850 aroused his interest in writing his huge work on the poor in London. In October 1850, Mayhew left his position as metropolitan correspondent and in December 1850, he started on his own a weekly publication, *London Labour and the London Poor* dealing in the beginning with interviews with street sellers but intended to cover eventually all occupations in London. The enlarged edition of his work (four-volume edition of *London Labour and the London Poor*) was published in 1861-1862.[6]

Charles Booth's (1840-1916) study of London poverty and his contemporary B. Seebohm Rowntree's study of poverty in York in the 1880s and 1890s are the other two very important primary sources used for the preparation of the thesis.[7] Rowntree was very much impressed by the work of Booth and hoped to make a similar investigation for a provincial town and compare his own results with those of

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[4] The information was obtained from Razzell and Wainwright (eds.), *The Victorian Working Class*, pp. xi-xiv.

[5] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor, A Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of, Those that will work, T hose that cannot Work and T hose that will not Work,* 4 vols. (London, 1967).

[6] The information was obtained from Humpherys(ed.), *Voices of the Poor*, p. xviii.

[7] Charles Booth, *Charles Booth's London, A Portrait of the Poor at the Turn of the Century,* eds. A. Fried and R.M.Elman (New York, 1968). B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, A Study of Town Life* (London 1900).

Booth. Besides, Rowntree was in close contact with Booth and expressed his indebtedness to him.[8] Both of their studies shed light especially on the second half of the nineteenth century.

William Acton's (1814-1875) *Prostitution, considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects in London and other large cities and garrison towns*, which was published in 1857 and 1870, is another important primary source illuminating not only the aspects of prostitution as the title implies but also many other crucial factors directly relevant to the study of poverty in the thesis.[9]

Other primary sources include various contemporary writings edited or published in various books. For example *Useful Toil* edited by John Burnett consists of the autobiographies of workers. *The idea of the City in Nineteenty-Century Britain* edited by B. I. Coleman and *Culture and Society in Britain 1850-1890* edited by J.M. Golby include many contemporary writings used for the preparation of the thesis: Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present (1843) and Latter-day Pamphlets (1850), Edwin Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (1842), J.S. Boone's The Need of Christianity to Cities (1844), J.T. Emmet's The State of English Architecture (1872), Robert Dudley

[8] See Rowntree, pp. XVII-XX, 53,353-56

[9] Acton, William (1814-1875), *Prostitution, considered in its moral, social and sanitary aspects in London and other large cities and garrison towns*, 1st edn. 1857, 2nd edn. 1870 (London, 1972).

Baxter's National Income (1868), Andrew Mearns' The Bitter Cry of Outcast London, An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor (1883) are some of these contemporary writings.

The thesis is divided into two main parts entitled 'The Process' and 'The Reality' respectively. The first part 'The Process', which describes the process of systematic impoverishment of the masses and importance of the Victorian age, is again divided into three chronologically arranged and closely related chapters: The Early-Victorian Period 1837-1850, The Mid-Victorian Period 1850-1875 and The Late-Victorian Period 1875-1901. Each chapter is divided into small sections but the unity of each chapter within the main framework of the first part is preserved. In general, the first part tries to describe the whole process during which the masses were deliberately exposed to the artificially created poverty by the ruling elite and rising class of capitalist entrepreneurs. Besides, this part tries to explain why the Great Boom which fostered employment in the country between 1850 and 1873 and the Great Depression between 1873 and 1896 which caused a sharp fall in prices did not improve the living standards of the working closes as well as to show and analyze the important factors or events characterizing the Victorian age within a chronological framework. Of course at the same time, the thesis throws light on the dominating role of poverty in the lives of the working classes in

three periods of the Victorian age, each of which represents a stage of the whole process of time when Britain experienced dramatic economic progress and was by far the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world.

Consequently, the manipulation and passivization of the masses by way of poverty within the wealthiest nation of the world are not only revealed but also the deep impact of poverty and misery on the lives of the working classes who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population in the new and undoubtedly alien industrial towns and the agricultural countryside is brought to light in three distinct but closely related phases of the whole dramatic process.

The first chapter 'The Early-Victorian Period 1837-1850' begins with an analysis of defining the limits of this first phase of the Victorian age. Then the major developments of the period, which are directly relevant to the study of poverty in British society, are argued within the general framework of the whole process: contemporary concern for poverty, issue of public health, introduction of railways, enclosure movement, the New Poor Law, repeal of the Corn Laws, Chartism, the Irish Famine, the economic depression and so on.

The second chapter 'The Mid-Victorian Period 1850-1875' also starts with a description of the boundaries of the period. The chapter focuses on the impact of the great

boom and argues in depth about if there was a significant improvement in the living standards of the masses or on the contrary, the living conditions of the great majority of people deteriorated during the great boom. The chapter also deals with the role of trade cycles, the Irish Poor Law and the Cotton Famine.

The third chapter 'The Late-Victorian Period 1875-1901', which again begins with a short definition of the period, analyzes the impact of the Great Depression upon the living standards of the common people. The chapter also focuses on the important developments of this last stage of the Victorian age: cheap food imports, collapse of domestic agriculture, trade unionism, manipulation of the working-class votes, the Taff Vale Case, the Labour Party, the Boer War, fashionable interest in eugenics and urban poverty and so on.

The second part 'The Reality' is an attempt to analyze the living conditions of the most important occupational groups who are quite representative of the rest, as well as the general aspects of the Victorian poverty in order to support the main argument of the thesis. The second part follows a topical order and adopts a general but simultaneously a closer approach to the central aspects of poverty during the Victorian age. The emphasis is placed on the living standards of the farm labourers, miners, domestic servants, factory workers, handloom weavers as

well as slop trade, tramping system, working-class societies, housing, pawning and various other characteristics of poverty in the Victorian age.

This thesis also aims to explain the absence of any serious revolutionary movement or mass agitation in British society, especially after the collapse of Chartism, during the second half of the nineteenth century. The rapidly rising level of national income together with the high increase in population and the indifference of the masses towards radical ideas or movements cast doubt on if there was a prevalent feeling of unrest, which was caused by low living standards and the huge extent of inequality between the wealthy entrepreneurs and the working-class multitudes in the society. Thus, it is widely accepted that it is not possible or reasonable to deal with the existence of large-scale or general poverty and misery among the working-class masses particularly after the beginning of the great boom around the middle of the nineteenth century. The thesis attempts to reveal the actual dimensions of poverty with the help of primary sources during the Victorian period. Yet at the same time a detailed definition of the concept of poverty in the Victorian age is made in the thesis.

PART I

THE PROCESS

1.The Early-Victorian Period 1837-1850

Definition of the Period

The period is defined on one side by the accession of Queen Victoria (1837) and on the other by the collapse of Chartism (1848-1850) and the end of the Great Famine in Ireland (1850-1851). The year 1837 marks not only the beginning of Queen Victoria's long reign[10], which coincided with Britain's industrial and imperial hegemony in the world but also the rise of Chartism[11], the mass working-class movement of the Victorian age. In addition, there was a major economic depression between 1837 and 1842, which caused mass unemployment, higher food prices (due to the Corn Laws of 1815) and falling profits. On the other hand the year 1850 is generally regarded as the onset of the great global boom. Britain, as the cradle of the Industrial Revolution and the first 'workshop of the world'[12], underwent an extraordinary economic transformation in the

[10] Victoria's long reign as Queen of Great Britain and Ireland coincided with Britain's industrial and imperial hegemony and her name has become synonymous with the central values and characteristics of her time. E.Longford, *Queen Victoria* (1964), M.Mallet, *Life with Queen Victoria*(1968) and *The Letters of Queen Victoria* (1908) are valuable as an introduction for a study on the period.

[11] The beginning of Chartism is either accepted to be 1837 (the publication of the Northern Star newspaper) or 1838 (the publication of the People's Charter). The year 1837 is more sensible. See D.Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp.1-30, and J.L.Hammond, *The Age of the Chartists*, pp. 267-76 for the beginning of the movement.

[12] The term is used by E.Hobsbawm in *Industry and Empire*, p.14 and *The Age of Revolution* p.68.

mid-Victorian period, which was symbolized by the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in May 1851. Thus, a sharp distinction is made between the early-Victorian period as a time of distress and agitation on the one hand and the mid-Victorian period as a time of welfare and stability on the other hand. Even the revolutionary ardour of people and the perception of impending social explosion in the 1830s and the 1840s completely disappeared by the 1850s.

It is supposed that the prevailing sense of discontent and desperation among the common people of Britain, which manifested itself in successive social movements such as Owenism (1815-1845)[13] and Chartism (1837-1850) as a result of hard and inhumane living and working conditions, is largely peculiar to the 1830s and 1840s. These two decades are accepted to be the acute stage of the painful and deplorable period of transition in the first half of the nineteenth century.[14] The beginning of the great boom and widespread dramatic improvement in the lives of British people is even dated to the 1840s in terms of statistical information. The years 1842(the end of the economic depression), 1846(the repeal of the Corn Laws) and 1848-1849(the defeat of Chartism) are implied as the end of the

[13] For the details of Owenism, see Price, p. 293n, Belchem, pp.439-41, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.44-5, Hammond, pp.263-7, E.P. Thompson, pp. 779-807.

[14] For example, Linda Colley who covers the period 1707-1807, emphasizes that most Britons were very poor and heavily taxed and there was always hunger which was the reason for why the poor succumbed so easily to diseases. See Colley, pp. 34-5, 38-9, Foster, pp. 91-6.

transition period and the commencement of the general improvement in the living standards of the common people. However, it is rather unreasonable to trace the origin of this supposed process of improvement in a period of crisis especially by neglecting the Great Famine in Ireland between 1845 and 1851 on the ground that Ireland was not part of Great Britain despite the Irish Act of Union in 1801. Thus, it is more advisable to take the year 1850, the aftermath of Chartism and the Great Famine and the exact middle of the century, as the beginning of a new period until the Great Depression in 1873.

Specific reference to the pre-Victorian times was inevitably necessary for the analysis of Victorian poverty. Thus, the Victorian era is also to be treated as the continuation of the long period of Industrial Revolution within a broad framework. For instance, the 1830s under the reign of William IV(1830-1837) who was Queen Victoria's uncle witnessed very important events like the Captain Swing movement (1830), the Great Reform Act (1832), the Poor Law Act of 1834, the trade union movements like the incident of Tolpuddle Martyrs (1834) and the utopian socialist movement of Owenism (1815-1845). It is therefore required to consider the seven-year reign of William IV as an inseparable part of the early-Victorian period.

Emergence of Contemporary Concern for Poverty

The emergence of sensitiveness towards the issue of poverty and misery among the common people of Britain is observed among the contemporary writers especially from the late 1830s onwards. The term 'Condition-of-England Question', which was coined by Thomas Carlyle in his essay 'Chartism'[15] in 1839 in order to bring the widespread destitution and misery of mid-nineteenth-century England to the centre of political attention, assumed a wider meaning with the rise of realism in literature. This new trend came to demonstrate the prevalent sense of crisis in British society by focusing particularly on the social discontent and unhappiness caused by the hard and unbearable living and working conditions of industrial capitalism. Thus, romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was replaced by realism of which the realist novel became the dominant form in the course of the Victorian age.[16] But the most dramatic phase of realism in the novel was the period between 1838 and 1860 with the novels of Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Benjamin Disraeli(1804-1881), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) and Anthony Trollope (1815-1882). These novelists

[15] Belchem, pp.140-1, Coleman, pp.94-6 (Extracts from Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843) and *Latter-day Pamphlets* (1850).

[16] The rise of realism and realist novel were quite important developments. See E. Ermarth, *The English Novel in History 1840-1895*, D. Walder, *The Realist Novel*, Gibson (ed), *Art and Society in the Victorian Novel.* John Foster makes a good analysis of this atmosphere of crisis in the first half of the century. See Foster, pp. 34-61, 125-161.

endeavored to display the reality of poverty and misery for the literate and well-to-do upper and middle class readers to arouse their sympathy especially for the poor working classes.[17]

Even though the novels of these Victorian writers have been regarded as exaggerated or exceptional stories by many scholars, for the first time there appeared a special interest in the extent of urban poverty, especially in London, with the investigations conducted by the correspondents of the Morning Chronicle between 1849 and 1851[18]. Among these correspondents, Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), who reported from London, collected his findings on various classes of people in London in a huge four-volume encyclopedic work, London Labour and the London Poor, in 1861-1862.[19] It is certain that the novels of the Victorian writers caused suspicion as well as curiosity among the wealthy ruling classes and encouraged them to explore the actual situation of the ordinary people. Thus, they allowed or rather did not stop the intellectuals and journalists from studying the living and working conditions of the masses. However, the reason for their interest in the living standards of the masses was by no means due to their

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[17] See Dyos and Wolff, vol.2,pp. 517-54.

[18] Morning Chronicle letters (1849-1851) are the major primary sources on poverty in the Victorian age. See P.E.Razzell and R.W.Wainwright (eds.), *The Victorian Working Class* and A.Humpherys (ed.), *Voices of the Poor*, for the letters on poverty among the working classes of Britain.

[19] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols. (I-IV). Even though his masterpiece was a landmark in the history of poverty, his investigations in London during the 1850s mistakenly revealed that about one in three families lived in poverty. Certainly, he deliberately underestimated the extent of urban poverty in his publication not to evoke any kind of revolutionary fervour in the society. See Mayhew, vol.4, pp.1-35.

mercy or affection but their strong desire to preserve and improve their social standing in the society. They always wanted to take measures against the inherent danger of revolution in Great Britain at the right time. One major factor for this revolutionary potential was the everlasting enmity between the Catholic Irish and the Protestant English people, which was aggravated by a historical process beginning with the execution of Charles I in the Puritan Revolution of 1648 and continuing with the accession of William of Orange and the overthrow of James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the American War of Independence and the American Revolution (1776-1783), the French Revolution (1789), the War between Britain and France (1793-1815) and the Act of Union in 1800 until the nineteenth century.[20] The Irish movement under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell(1775-1847)and the Irish famine (1845-1851) made the Irish Question even more sensitive and dangerous in the eyes of the ruling elite in the early Victorian period.

But more than this, the British authorities were definitely much more worried about the growing uneasiness and agitation especially among the new working classes in the urban districts in the 1830s and 1840s. The probability

[20] For the details of this crucial historical process, see Cole, *The Common People 1746-1946* and *The British People 1746-1946*, Price, *British Society 1680-1880*, the relevant topics in Cannon(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to British History*, Clark(ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, vol. 2 1540-1840* and C.W. Smith, pp.15-37, Colley, Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837. Colley emphasized the impact of pan-Protestantism and Britain's successive wars with Catholic France for the creation of a British nation and a common sense of Brutishness among the Englich, Welsh and Scots.

of a great anti-aristocratic revolution had always been taken quite seriously since the French Revolution but now from the 1830s onward, the working class movements and the Irish movement of Daniel O'Connell[21] maximized the fear of such a revolution among the members of not only the nobility but also the bourgeoisie. Thus, the studies of the living standards of the masses would be of great help to understand and prevent the circumstances under which a social revolution could happen. The aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were well aware of the fact that unless incited by an intellectual force in a rather efficient way poverty and low living standards among the masses were the most important elements for the maintenance of their power in the society. The revolutionary atmosphere in the 1830s and 1840s unsettled the authorities to the extent that after the defeat of Chartism at Kennington Common in London in 1848, they were willing to obtain information about the state of the masses. They wished to know if or to what extent were the people rebellious in the aftermath of Chartism and affected by the capitalist system and poverty particularly in the urban areas where the population was rapidly rising as a result of high birth-rate and migration from Ireland and the countryside. Hence it was not a coincidence that Henry Mayhew devoted himself to his large-

[21] Especially his election, as a Roman Catholic, as the member of parliament for County Clare in 1828 was a great shock to the ruling Tory (Conservative) Party (Dyos, vol 2,p.793, Belchem, p.433, Pugh, p.45).

scale study of the working classes after the defeat of Chartism in 1848.[22]

Rise of Concern for the Public Health

Another important development in the early-Victorian Britain was the rise of concern about the public health because of the spread of deadly epidemics like cholera, typhus, yellow fever, smallpox, whooping-cough and scarlet fever in the crowded industrial districts.[23] In the early nineteenth century, the only precaution against fatal contagions was the isolation of disease by means of quarantine. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was widely understood that the source of this common threat was within the urban areas which had remained deprived of even the essential requisites of sanitation and hygiene.[24] Not only the residential areas but also the working places invited epidemics. At the beginning epidemic disease was blamed on stagnant and decomposing filth which was thought to generate miasmas in the slums swarming with low lodging houses such as Jacob's Island in south

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[22] For the Chartist movement, see Price, pp.181-2, 275-6, 294, Hammond, pp.267-76, Dyos, vol.2, pp.772-3, D.Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists*, D.Thompson, *The Chartists*, Pugh, pp.59-62, Belchem, pp.112-3.

[23] For the spread of epidemics, innumerable examples can be given. See Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor,* vol.1, pp.57-8, vol.2, pp.35-6, 350, Razzell, Letter I (Rural Districts), pp.7-8, Letter XXIV, pp.245-6, Letter VII, pp.259-60 (Manufacturing Districts), Burnett, *Useful Toil*, pp.175-85 (William Tayler), 313-4(Henry Broadhurst), Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.33-8, C.W.Smith, pp.187-205, Coleman, pp.53(Sinclair, 1825), 66-7(Kay, 1832), p.77(Chadwick, 1842), Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, p.56.

[24] The concern for public health best manifested itself in London. See Mayhew, vol.2,pp.162-71(Dustmen), 178-275 (Scavengery, street sweeping, water supply of London), 281-385 (Rubbish carters), 387-450(Sewerage and sewers), vol.3, pp.1-24(Rat-killing), 24-41(Fight against bugs, flies and fleas).

London.[25] Thus, until the epidemics started to spread from the poor quarters to the other sections of the towns being the death of the wealthy and powerful from the 1840s onwards, the state and local authorities were not much concerned with misfortunes that befell the poor and miserable by 'divine providence'.[26]

For example, in the case of smallpox, English physician Edward Jenner's (1749-1823) discovery of immunization through vaccination as early as 1798 was adopted much earlier in many European countries and the United States than in Britain. In England and Wales vaccination was eventually provided free by the Poor Law in 1834 and became compulsory in 1853 but it was already compulsory in Bavaria (1807), Norway and Denmank (1810), Russia (1812) and Sweden (1816).[27] It is quite interesting to notice that although Britain was the cradle of industrial and technological innovation, the remarkable developments in medicine throughout the nineteenth century were mostly dominated by French and German scientists. In Britain the population growth and the spread of epidemics certainly forced the authorities to take health measures to improve the environment with systematic sanitary reforms and municipal services from the second half the nineteenth

[25] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.3-5.
[26] See for example, Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) in Coleman, pp.77-81 and J.S.Boone, *The Need of Christianity to Cities* (1844), in Coleman, pp.97-101, E.P. Thompson, pp. 289-90, 322-31.
[27] Belchem, pp.645-6.

century onwards. Yet, it is evident that the sanitary reform initiated after the Public Health Acts of 1848 was not sufficiently effective even after the bacteriological revolution led by French chemist Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) and German biologist Robert Koch (1843-1910) in the 1880s.[28] The reports of correspondents, especially those of Henry Mayhew, who was also a chemist and successfully realized the role of filthy drinking-water as the main agent for the spread of epidemics (beside the great decomposing filth creating miasmas), clearly show that the living and working conditions were awfully bad for the majority of British people in the middle of the nineteenth century.[29] Nevertheless, even the appearance of this concern for the public health as a result of the spread of mortal epidemics like cholera from the 1830s onwards is an important characteristic of the early-Victorian period.[30]

Advent of Railways

One of the major stages of the Industrial Revolution was the introduction of railways with the opening of the world's first railway between Liverpool and Manchester in

[28] Ibid.pp.167-71.
[29] For example, Mayhew, vol.1, pp.24-57 (Costermongers of London) vol.2, pp.471-510 (Crossing-sweepers), Razzell, Letter XI, pp.195-7, XVII, pp.197-205 and Letter XVII pp. 213-4 (Manufacturing districts).
[30] For public health and sanitation in Victorian Britain, see Dyos and Wolff, vol.1,pp.95-6, 393-4, 407-8, vol.2,pp.603-60, Briggs, *Victorian Cities,* pp.18-21, 144-7, 217-20, 225-30, 274-7, 385-90, Clark, pp.570-2, Daunton, pp.7-10, 207-29, 287-395, 629-72, Coleman, pp.162-4 (Richardson, 1876), Belchem, pp.167-9, 371-3, 503-4.

1830.[31] By the 1830s the canal era in Britain was drawing to a close because of this greatest revolutionary transformation of the nineteenth century. From the 1750s onwards the advantages of water transportation had been enhanced by the construction of canals linking the chief ports and industrial centers and reducing the cost of moving goods and raw materials at this early phase of the Industrial Revolution. The Bridgewater Canal, opened in 1761 to transport coal to the expanding Manchester market, and which was the first canal specifically designed to meet industrial needs had stimulated a boom in canal construction until the mid-1820s.[32] But railways allowed a faster and more flexible movement of goods and also large numbers of passengers without long and irregular interruptions.[33] It is still quite controversial whether the sudden and rapid popularity of the railways, which completely triumphed over the canals in the 1840s, was actually caused by its advantages (easy access to every corner of the country, safety and possibility for transporting great numbers of people, cheapness and rapidness) or simply by its identification with ultra-

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[31] There was a short railway between Stockton and Darlington which was opened in December 1825 but used only for transportation of goods. See Mayhew, vol.3,p.322.
[32] Mayhew, vol.3, pp.326-28, M.Pugh, *Britain Since 1789*, pp.31-2, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.23-4, Dyos, vol.1, Illustration 194, Clark, pp.626-7, 816-7.
[33] Mayhew gives very detailed information about the railways in Britain. See Mayhew, vol.3, pp.321-6.

modernity and human creativeness.[34] Despite the fact that most of Great Britain was within easy access of water by means of sea, river or canal, the crazy interest in the railways throughout the nineteenth century can not be explained only by the concept of fascination with this new invention. Of course, the appeal of this new marvelous innovation inspired many British investors and businessmen to spend huge sums of money from their surplus of savings for the foundation of railway companies which soon proved to be financially unprofitable but quite impressive as an indicator of prestige. However, the chief function of the railways was to accelerate the urbanization process of the Industrial Revolution by the rapid, large-scale and perpetual movement of the masses within the country.

The concentration of people in the new industrial towns gained extraordinary momentum from the 1830s onwards after the railways made it possible for the starving poor to travel long distances to seek their fortune in different parts of the country. Moreover, the railways not only offered mobility and communication to those on the breadline but also created fresh sources of employment (in the 1840s around 200,000-250,000 men were employed in the construction of the railways).[35] However, first and

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[34] See T.R.Gourvish, *Railways and the British Economy 1830-1914* and J.Simmons, *The Victorian Railway* for further information about the impact of railways in Britain. See also Dyos, vol. 1, pp.277 310, Coleman, pp.217-9 (Wells, 1901), Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.13-6, 24-7, 276-8, 363-4, Clark, pp.487-8, 760, 777-8, Daunton, 59-64, 82-3, 247-50, Price, pp.48, 317.

[35] Pugh, p.32, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.92.

foremost the railways enabled the poor and unemployed people both in the countryside and overcrowded urban districts to move to other developing areas of Britain to make their living. This ceaseless movement of British people led to the formation of new railway towns, the slums, the suburbs and even the seaside resorts during the nineteenth century.[36]

It is open to question if the railways had only a positive impact upon those living below or close to the level of subsistence in Great Britain. At first sight the railways seem to have radically transformed the British society by providing great social mobility especially after the parliament required every railway line in 1844 to offer third-class carriages in which passengers could travel for only one penny per mile.[37] Thus, the total number of railway trips in Great Britain per year rose from 33,791,253 in 1845 to 60,398,159 in 1849 while the length of the railway lines increased from 2343 miles in 1845 to 5447 miles in 1849.[38] The population of Great Britain except Ireland where there was no railway in this period and which had a population of around nine million was approximately twenty-one million in 1850. There is not sufficient information about the identity of people using the railways and Mayhew concludes by his own experiences

[36] See Dyos, vol.1, pp.359-86.
[37] Pugh, 74.
[38] Mayhew, vol.3, p.323.

that thousands of the labouring classes rarely travelled, perhaps not more than once on some holiday trip during the year.[39] But this is surprisingly a cursory remark regardless of the troubles of this period. Of course a person who had a regular income in this period of crisis could not be expected to move or travel even under hard and insupportable living conditions because such an adventure could not be easily envisaged even by the best skilled operatives and craftsmen.

Yet the early-Victorian period witnessed on the one hand an economic depression and on the other hand a constant wave of immigration from the countryside where the small peasant proprietors were replaced by large landowners, tenant farmers and a lot of farm labourers through the process of enclosure which was effectively complete by the middle of the nineteenth century.[40] Furthermore, the Great Famine accelerated the influx of Irish people into the industrial areas of the country.[41] Hence it is certain that not only the gentlemen (as Henry Mayhew implied) but also lots of jobless and starving people were on the move in this period in pursuit of employment for their livelihood. These poor people did not

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[39] Mayhew, vol.3 p.325.

[40] The autobiographies of a navvy named Bill, a straw-plait worker named Lucy Luck and a potter named Charles Shaw clearly demonstrate the terrible situation of the rural families in the 1830s and 1840s and how they were forced to migrate to the towns. See Burnett, pp.55-64 (Bill), pp.64-77 (Lucy Luck) and pp.289-296 (Charles Shaw). See also Coleman, pp.47-51 (Cobbett, 1853), 51-4 (Sinclair, 1825), 82-5 (Taylor, 1842).

[41] Rowntree, pp.30-2, C.W.Smith, pp.270-84.

travel just by train in the early-Victorian period when the railways were still in the early phase of development. Horse-drawn vehicles such as omnibuses, stagecoaches and cabs as well as water transportation (sea, rivers, canals) by means of sailboats, steamships, lighters and barges were still widely used by the people in this period.[42] What is more, many people travelled on foot-walking even hundreds of miles not to spend the last a few pence in their pockets.[43]

In general, the working classes, so long as they were employed, had to work hard almost without interruption during the whole year because there was not only an excessive surplus of labour to replace the old ones at any moment but also extreme local and foreign competition aggravated by the rise of slop trade caused the employment of the most efficient and cheapest labour in the market. Moreover, periodic slumps which caused significant wage-cuts and dismissals made the lives of the working classes quite precarious. For the great majority of workers holiday meant nothing but if possible, freedom from work on Sundays. For the great majority of workingmen, it was unthinkable even to dream of taking a vacation at any time in their lives because they had to endure long working hours (fifteen hours a day on average during at least six

[42] Mayhew gives detailed information about them. See Mayhew, vol.2, pp.339-47 (Omnibuses), pp.347-57 (Cabs, coaches, cabmen), pp.332-6 (Lightermen and bargemen).
[43] Daunton, pp.229-35. Many poor and unemployed people travelling on foot from place to place were classified as vagrants. See Mayhew, vol.3, pp.368-407.

days of the week) or search for work in times of unemployment.[44] It is therefore natural that railways' impact upon the leisure activities of the people was almost restricted to the upper and middle class families in the early-Victorian period and actually this situation did not much change throughout the whole Victorian age even though the 'aristocracy of labour' formed a small, exceptional minority among the working classes.[45]

Railways also improved the communication by carrying the post and reduced the costs of transport. Thus, railways expanded the British domestic market especially for perishable but also heavy goods. Besides, the construction of railways positively affected the coal, iron and steel industries by stimulating the demand for these products. Railways therefore fostered employment to a large extent in Britain. The sector itself gave employment to around 160,000 people in 1849 excluding about 250,000 workers building the lines in the 1840s.[46] Consequently, railways are supposed to have significantly alleviated the impact of severe poverty in the society. The creation of job opportunities in the industrial areas certainly saved many people from starvation but this did not mean a decline in

[44] For example, Mayhew, vol.2, pp.297-320 and Razzell, *Letters*, pp.120-61 (Metropolitan Districts), Coleman, pp.66-70 (Kay, 1832), 106-11 (Engels, 1845).
[45] For detailed information about the aristocracy of labour, see Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Razzell, *Manufacturing Districts,* Letter IV (Pearl button trade), pp.289-94, Letter VI (Manufacture of fire-arms), pp.294-5, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.157-8 (Toy makers), Mayhew, vol.4, pp.27-8, Burnett, pp.283-9 (Charles Newnham), 289-96 (Emanuel Lovekin), Daunton, pp.602-6.
[46] Mayhew, vol.3, p.325.

the extent of urban poverty exacerbated increasingly by the newcomers from the rural areas and above all an intentional policy of impoverishment by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

The reverse of the picture brings forward the question if the tremendous amount of money invested in railways- estimated between 240 million pounds[47] and over 350 million pounds by 1850[48] was reasonable enough in a period of time when the great majority of people suffered the afflictions of severe poverty. There was not any serious effort on the part of the wealthy authorities and capitalists to improve the deplorable living standards of the common people whose lives lacked even the basic amenities in the towns and villages like hygiene, good nutrition, rest and recreation, social security and education. The annual surplus of national income went largely to the establishment of railway companies which soon proved to be not very profitable. Nevertheless, investments into the railways as the major symbol of modernity and progress continued with the support of the governments throughout the nineteenth century. Even though a great amount of money was spent on the construction of colossal town halls in Greco-Roman style,[49] the investments in municipal services from the

[47] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.90.
[48] Mayhew, vol. 3, p.327.
[49] There was a huge expenditure in architectural works of art (town halls, railway stations, libraries, opera houses, churches, museums, mansions etc.) throughout the Victorian age. See J.T.Emmet, *The State of English Architecture (1872)* in Golby, *Culture and Society in Britain*, pp.284-92, Dixon and Muthesius,

1850s onwards were quite insufficient and limited covering the central and wealthy quarters at large.[50] The reckless expenditure upon the symbols of prestige by the upper and middle classes certainly increased the pressure of capitalist exploitation upon the labour of the masses, which manifested itself with the spread of poverty. The wealthy classes always compensated for their squandering of money by exploiting the labour of masses with low wages, long working hours, deductions, high rents, dismissals, manipulation of prices and so on. In this respect railways made a very important contribution to the development and spread of acute poverty in the Victorian period.

Enclosure and Countryside

The process of enclosure, which consolidated the small, scattered strips of land and common, open fields into private and compact units under a few large landowners, made the majority of rural people exposed to poverty and squalor.[51] The last and most dramatic phase of the enclosure movement between 1760 and 1820 witnessed the enclosure of vast areas by the Acts of Parliament. Enclosure, which aimed to bring about the highest

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Victorian Architecture, Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.41-3, 103-4 (Manchester Exchange), 152-5 (Bradford), 156-83 (Leeds), 232-6 (Birmingham), 252, 267-8 (Middlesbrough), Dyos, vol.1, pp.311-28, vol.2, pp.431-46, Clark, pp.625-40, Daunton, pp.414, 495-506.

[50] See for instance Daunton, pp.429-83.

[51] For the process of enclosure, see Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.76-82, *The Age of Revolution*, pp.188-9, Turner, *Enclosures in Britain*, pp.54-6, 67-70, 82-3, Razzell, *Rural Districts, Letters*, pp.3-91, Price, pp.42, 320-4, Clark, pp.245-6, Daunton, pp.190-1, Pugh, pp.4-5, Belchem, pp.202-3. See also Colley, pp. 65-6, 155-207, E.P. Thompson, pp. 213-33.

agricultural efficiency and revenues in the interests of the peers, reduced the status of almost all rural people-small peasant proprietors and farm labourers-to a low and humiliating level of inferiority. The peasant smallholders were reduced to simple wage-labour at the extensive farms losing all their common rights and benefits in the countryside like pasture for animal husbandry, firewood, timber requirement and so on. But more important than this they were forced to be totally at the mercy of the landlords as dependant labourers. Enclosure created more intensive work such as digging ditches, making drains and planting edges but it was far from absorbing the rapidly expanding rural population. As a result there arose a great surplus of agricultural labourers who had to live by hiring out their labour but this became more and more difficult, even impossible, since the tenant farmers who cultivated the land as the agents of the landlords made every effort to minimize the costs of farming.

The system of hiring the agricultural labourers on the basis of weekly or daily payments became widespread during the nineteenth century because there was a great surplus of labour and only the most able-bodied and experienced ones had some chance of employment if any.[52] Thus the old, traditional way of annually hiring the labourers completely disappeared by the end of the early Victorian period. What

[52] Razzell, Letter XV, pp.49-59 (Rural Districts).

is more, the wages were deliberately kept quite low by the tenant farmers who took the advantage of the surplus labour. Besides, from the 1840s onwards, the new innovations of the Industrial Revolution such as threshing machines, mowing machines, reaping machines and harvesting machines were introduced, though slowly and gradually due to the excessive and cheap labour, into the British agricultural sector. But nevertheless, the introduction of machinery certainly contributed to the rise of unemployment in the British countryside.[53] Seasonal unemployment, especially in the slack winter season increased to such an extent that it was almost impossible for the great majority of men to find employment even with miserable wages like two or three farthings or payment in kind. Since there was a great surplus of labour, opportunities for the employment of women and children were extinguished and this was particularly disastrous for widows with children, who were faced with starvation and had no way but to enter the workhouse or to move somewhere else to find employment as soon as possible. Again, the pressure upon the young, single women in the countryside reached to such a degree that they were compelled to leave their home to take care of themselves somehow or other. However, in most cases immigration was inevitable for the family as a whole because the new industrial towns offered employment (or at

[53] Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England,* pp.54-69, Razzell, Letter III, V, VII (Rural Districts), pp.8-16,Belchem, pp.14-6.

least hope for it) for all the members of a family who had been reduced to the level of starvation in the countryside.[54]

The early-Victorian period was the time when the demoralization of the agricultural people had reached its climax especially with the 1830 revolt of the underemployed and pauperized agricultural workers in the corn-growing southern and eastern counties of England under the leadership of their mythical leader Captain Swing[55] and the New Poor Law in 1834. The repression of this revolt, which was essentially a reaction against the disruption of the traditional, paternalistic social order as a result of the enclosures, and the Poor Law Act of 1834 accelerated the influx of people from the British countryside into the industrial towns.[56] Furthermore, the strict measures against poaching, which especially peaked for economic necessity in 1830 and 1843, contributed to starvation in the countryside. It was absolutely illegal to take any kind of game such as rabbits, salmon, deer, pheasant, partridge except for the landowners and their nominees (even on the public highways from 1844 onwards).[57]

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[54] See for example, Mayhew, vol.1, pp.395-420, pp.457-70 (Statements of poor street sellers), vol.4, pp.446-8, Razzell, Letter I, p.3, Letter III, pp.8-11 (Rural Districts), Coleman, pp.24-9 (W.Cowper, 1785), 47-51 (W.Cobbett, 1853).

[55] See Hobsbawm, *Captain Swing: A Social History of the Great English Agricultural Uprising*, Price, p.44.

[56] In addition, the incident of Tolpuddle in Dorset (March 1834) intimidated the rural masses and motivated them to leave the countryside. See J.Marlow, *The Tolpuddle Martyrs*, Pugh, p.55, Belchem, pp.618-9, Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, p.149.

[57] Price, pp.319-20, Belchem,p.480, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.83, Colley, pp. 184-6.

Broadly speaking, the pastoral nature of the British countryside ceased to exist in the eyes of the majority of people by the middle of the nineteenth century. Through expropriation, forced or voluntary sales with the aid of the Enclosure Acts of Parliament, the small farms altogether vanished and the aristocratic landowners built their country houses to enjoy the beauties of the countryside. On the other hand, the agricultural labourers who were exploited with hard and irregular work and miserable wages had to live in very small wretched dwellings for which they often paid rent to the landlords.[58] Thus, it is not reasonable to enter into the everlasting discussion if the British people were happier and more comfortable in the rural or industrial society. After the last and greatest enclosure wave between 1760 and 1820, which broke up around six million acres of mostly common fields and converted them into private property, life in the countryside became more and more intolerable especially for those landless labourers (and of course their families) whose livelihood depended upon the benefits of the commons such as arable farming, pasture, hunting, firewood, timber and so forth. The 1830 revolt of the farm labourers was the direct result of the great social distress maximized by this last phase of enclosure. The revolt took various forms in different counties but

[58] For example, see Razzell, Letter VI (Rural Districts), pp.12-5 (The village of Southleigh).

included widespread machine-breaking and arson as well as attacks on local elites. The government crushed the revolt with military force but above all the uprising paved the way for the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834.

Impact of the New Poor Law

The Poor Law Act of 1834 aimed to put an end to the agitation in the countryside by forcing the people to migrate to the industrial districts. This policy of making the country life utterly insupportable for the rural population was quite effective in the early-Victorian period when the migration to the towns gained speed in the 1840s. The migration from the countryside (including the emigration to America and the British colonies) continued throughout the Victorian age and thus the agricultural population declined from around thirty-five per cent in 1810 to about twenty per cent in 1850, fifteen per cent in 1875 and ten per cent in 1901.[59] Yet the migration of the rural poor into the urban areas did not bring about any significant improvement in their living standards. On the contrary, the newcomers created cheap surplus labour in the towns and metropolis, and therefore they became the victims of growing urban poverty under the extreme pressure of capitalism. The New Poor Law facilitated the predominance of urban poverty which assured the passive obedience of the

[59] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.329 (Diagram 4).

masses to the exploitation of their labour by low wages, long working hours and absence of social security.[60]

The upper and middle classes incredibly benefited from this process of industrial capitalism by swiftly multiplying their riches throughout the Victorian age. The tremendous increase in the national income of Great Britain from 232 million pounds in 1801 to 523 million pounds in 1851 and 916 million pounds in 1871[61] resulted from the huge accumulation of wealth by this small minority. There was certainly a deliberate policy of impoverishing the common people to such a level that they would be totally dependent upon this system of exploitation in order to survive. The enclosures of 1760-1850, the Great Reform Act of 1832, The New Poor Law of 1834, the violent repression of Chartism between 1839 and 1848 and the evident indifference towards the Irish Famine between 1845 and 1851 demonstrated this policy of making poverty inseparable from the lives of the masses whose apathy and unorganized nature guaranteed the enrichment process of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

The twenty-year-period between 1830 and 1850 was definitely the most crucial stage in the history of poverty in Britain. The concept of poverty was radically transformed by the dramatic events from the second half of

[60] For the dramatic impact of the New Poor Law on the rural families see Mayhew, vol.4,pp.393-7, Hammond, pp.55-78, Razzell, Letters XLV, XLVI, XLVII (Rural Districts), pp.77-91, Price, pp.167-81, Dyos, vol.2, pp.718-31, E.P. Thompson, pp. 267-8, 302-3, Foster, 61-4.
[61] Pugh, pp.34,73.

the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. The impact of this period of one hundred years (1750-1850), in which the early-Victorian period was the culminating phase, was profoundly felt throughout the Victorian age. The formative period of the impoverishment process of the common people was complete by the 1850s- after the collapse of Chartism and the end of the Irish Famine. The early-Victorian period was the time when the compromise between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, which was fully achieved by the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, created a suitable environment for the exploitation of the working classes by terminating the agitation in the society. The social turmoil was eliminated not only by the defeat of Chartism and spread of poverty, but also by deliberate reluctance to help the starving Irish during the Great Famine.[62]

Repeal of the Corn Laws

The British aristocracy were more worried about the rising middle classes (the bourgeoisie) than the humble and fatalist masses. The support of the bourgeoisie was considered to be essential more and more for the permanence of their authority. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, which symbolized the triumph of free trade in British

[62] See C.W.Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-1849* to understand the deliberate and rather merciless attitude of first the Conservative Government under Sir Robert Peel and then the Liberal Government under Lord John Russell towards the starving masses in Ireland. For example see pp.75-7, 110-7, 123-7, 132-9, 165-8, 320-3, 338-41.

history, was caused by the government's increasing fear of a possible alliance between the Anti-Corn Law League, which was established by middle-class radicals like John Bright and Richard Cobden in 1838 and Chartism as the mass working class movement throughout England, Scotland and Wales between 1838 and 1848. The apparent excuse for the repeal of the Corn Laws was to relieve the Irish Famine by the importation of cheap and abundant cereal crops into the country. Yet the Conservative (Tory) Party under the leadership of Sir Robert Peel could no longer risk the pressure of the middle classes in a period of crisis. Chartism came to be regarded as a serious threat particularly after the famine broke out in Ireland because of the fear that a social revolution could have happened with the collaboration of the Chartist leaders, middle class radicals and Irish nationalists. A conflict between the landed aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie had to be avoided at all costs by the two sides in this critical period. Thus, the landed aristocracy came to recognize the necessity of close solidarity with the rising middle-classes in order to exterminate the revolutionary threat in the 1830s and 1840s.[63]

After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the British government did almost nothing to prevent the mass

[63] For detailed information about the Corn Laws and the Anti-Corn Law League, see Hammond, pp.277-90, Pugh, pp.63-72, Belchem, pp.31, 149-50, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.61-2, 210-1, Price, pp.118, 278-9, Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.114-30. See also Ebenezer Eliot, the Corn-Law poet, who attacked the Corn Laws in his verse 'Steam at Sheffield' in Coleman, pp.70-3.

starvation in Ireland and even promoted it by permitting huge quantities of food exports from Ireland to England during the famine. The export of food from Ireland was not prohibited even in 1846-7 when the potato famine reached its height and even a temporary ban would probably have saved many lives. The repeal of the Corn Laws removed the last important obstacle for the collaboration between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie against the working classes who had to be reduced to the level of total dependence and subordination in the age of industrial capitalism. The passive subjection of the masses was vital not only to prevent a revolution against the monarchy but also to make sure the permanent rise of the upper and middle classes. Poverty and destitution were accepted to be essential to achieve the passive dependence of the common people upon the superior classes for their survival. The catastrophe in Ireland, which caused the death of at least one million people, was the most dramatic result of this mentality towards the masses. Certainly, the enmity towards the Catholic Irish played a significant role but above all the British authorities and high middle classes aimed to suppress the widespread rebelliousness and support for the Home Rule movement among the Irish by leaving them stranded and alone in the face of famine. Starvation would teach them the fact that their life was entirely dependent on the mercy of the landlords or employers. The survivors of the

famine would henceforth feel gratitude or respect to the authorities or simply lose their enthusiasm for the Home Rule movement whose aim was to overthrow the British authority. Thus, the full integration of Ireland with the British Empire would be realized on eternal foundations by the collapse of the Home Rule movement.[64]

The British nobility and the capitalist bourgeoisie began to hold the balance of power together against the working classes in the fullest sense of the word. In the countryside, the tenant farmers were wholly under the influence of the landlords and acted as their agents to control the rural population. However, the new middle-class businessmen some of whom were even wealthier than many aristocrats passionately desired to join the nobility. Thus, their challenge to the privileged status of the aristocracy became successful at a time when there was a growing agitation in the society. The Great Reform Act of 1832, which enfranchised the great majority of middle classes, and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 were the direct consequences of the organized middle-class reaction to the privileged hegemony of the aristocracy. The irresistible rise of the middle classes was justified in the eyes of the ruling elite in the early-Victorian age.

[64] The negative attitude and discrimination towards the Irish is, for example, observed in contemporary accounts. See Mayhew, vol.1, pp.104-20, 465-7, vol.2, pp.481-4, 493-4, Razzell, Letter VII (Manufacturing Districts), pp.259-67, Coleman, p.69 (J.P.Kay, 1832). The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 following the election of O'Connell as an MP in 1828 had contributed to a resurgence of anti-Catholicism in the society. See Colley, pp. 342-354.

Both sides were aware of the fact that the consolidation of their power and position in the capitalist society was dependent on their effectively joint exploitation and passivization of the masses. Poverty was the most indispensable element to achieve this purpose but it was supported by various other factors: religious fatalism, traditional and dogmatic reverence for the ruling elite (except the Catholic Irish), lack of proper education and high rate of illiteracy, long years of wartime, large surplus labour, lack of social security, hard working conditions, absence of influential trade unionism, shrewd policy of franchise, alcoholism, gambling and drug addiction, high population growth, large families and emigration to America and British colonies.

The Depression of 1837-1842

The depression in the early-Victorian period, particularly between 1837 and 1842 was not the main factor for the widespread poverty in this period.[65] The slumps significantly aggravated the living conditions of the working classes but not those of the upper and middle classes who diverted the pressure to the lower classes. It was absolutely essential for the common people to live at or below the subsistence level with the fear of starvation at any moment in their lives. An extremely precarious life

[65] The impact of the depression is extremely emphasized in historiography as a catastrophe in Britain. See for instance Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.55, 72, 92 and Pugh, pp.54, 57.

would stimulate an individual to find employment at all costs to survive in the society. The periodic depressions gave the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie the opportunity to lower the living standards of the masses. Of course, the impoverishment of the working classes during the depressions prevented or minimized the loss of the wealthy and therefore the line between the rich and powerful on the one side and the poor and weak on the other side became more and more distinct and insurmountable throughout the Victorian age. There was little possibility of achieving a higher social status for the great majority of the lower classes and the growing polarization between the rich and the poor did not cause any serious reaction or riot after the collapse of Chartism by the middle of the nineteenth century. Socialism was even unable to sink roots among the working classes though Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels spent most of their lives in England. Socialist organizations were not able to get mass support from the working classes who remained under the influence of the Liberal and Conservative Parties even long after the official foundation of the Labour Party in 1906.

2.The Mid-Victorian Period 1850-1875

Definition of the Period

The mid-Victorian period, which is defined on one side by the collapse of Chartism and the end of the Irish Famine around the year 1850, and on the other by the Great Depression (1873-1896), is generally accepted to be the golden era of Britain in the nineteenth century. There was a great economic boom which brought about extraordinary economic transformation and expansion up to 1873-the beginning of the Great Depression in Britain. It is rather curious to observe that the Victorian era of Great Britain, which was the heyday of British history, witnessed two economic depressions, 1837-1842 and 1873-1896 and a great economic boom between the two depressions, which seems to have elevated Britain to the top of the world. It is even supposed that Britain's supremacy and leadership in the world came to an end during the Great Depression between 1873 and 1896. But on the other hand the economic boom, which was interrupted by the slump of 1857-1858 exacerbated by the Indian Mutiny (1857-1858) reached its climax between 1871 and 1873. Thus, the year 1873 is regarded as a crucial turning-point which symbolized the beginning of the decline of Great Britain. However, it is more appropriate for the analysis of poverty to take the year 1875 as the end of the mid-Victorian period because from a social perspective, the

impact of the following long depression on the living standards of the common people was particularly felt from the mid-1870s onwards. In addition, it is more sensible to divide the second half of the nineteenth century into two equal parts in connection with the economic boom and depression for a better study of poverty in British society.[66]

Impact of the Great Boom

It is undeniable that there was a great boom which satisfied the moneyed class of investors to the utmost degree in the second half of the nineteenth century. The huge demand for British goods manifested itself with the rapid and extraordinary increase in the exports primarily to the overseas markets. The major downturns in the British economy in the second half of the nineteenth century were all associated with interruptions to exports, as a very high proportion of British goods depended on overseas markets after the introduction of free trade by the policies of Sir Robert Peel in the 1840s. The mid-Victorian boom rested on the twin pillars of the export of goods and the export of capital (for the purpose of investment). Hence this great demand for British products stimulated all the sectors of industry on an unprecedented scale, compared

[66] For the details of the great and at the same time global boom, see Hobsbawm, *The Age of, Capital*, pp.43-64, *Industry and Empire*, pp.87-127, 173-7, Pugh, 71-81, R.Church, *The Great Victorian Boom 1850-1873*.

with the first half of the nineteenth century. The rapid rise in prices (the inflationary period) and the possibility of cheap capital for high profits benefited first the middle class entrepreneurs and then the landed aristocracy. The British national income increased most rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century. Manufactures, mining and building increased their share of the national output, while the role of agriculture in economy diminished. Yet, despite the repeal of the Corn Laws and introduction of free trade in the 1840s, British agriculture was quite successful due to the expansion of the domestic market, which rapidly absorbed the food supplies and thus kept the prices up for the benefit of the producers during the mid-Victorian period. The agricultural revenues of the landed aristocracy did not fall but on the contrary increased though they had much more passion for capitalist investments.

The mid-Victorian era was the brilliant period of capitalism in the world and Great Britain was the absolute leader far ahead of the United States and Germany. In this universal age of industrial capitalism, the new working classes were created through a process of labour recruitment especially from among the rural immigrants and the proletarianization of the artisans and craftsmen at the factories and workshops. The tremendous progress in the major sectors of industry-textiles, iron and steel,

building, engineering, shipbuilding, mining, transport and railways-certainly offered employment for the poor masses on the verge of starvation. It is true that unemployment fell significantly in the industrial areas of Britain throughout the economic boom. But unfortunately the mid-Victorian boom is largely reverberated in a highly exaggerated fashion as a new era of prosperity with marked improvement in the living standards of the common people. It is assumed that high employment combined with the employers' readiness to grant wage increases stimulated better and regularly-paid jobs especially for the unskilled labourers in the urban areas. This 'brilliant' period made it possible for the poverty-stricken masses to move from worse and low-paid jobs to much better and regular ones, which made them so self-satisfied and happy as to rapidly put an end to the tension and agitation within the British society. The mid-Victorian boom is therefore held responsible for the collapse of Chartism and the disappearance of the revolutionary atmosphere in Britain as a kind of sub-golden age, which brought quite important improvements in the lives of the masses.[67]

The boom is also supposed to have made a positive impact upon the British countryside, which had been overpopulated and where there was not any possibility of

[67] For example, see Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.95-6, 137-42, *The Age of Capital*, pp.45-6, 262-9, Pugh, pp.73,80, Foster, pp. 205-14. Foster emphasizes the absorption of the working-class leadership into the bourgeoisie and the forceful use of law and order as the main factors before the economic recovery in Oldham.

employment for many people, by encouraging the rural surplus to migrate to the new industrial areas. Hence thanks to the great boom, the immigration from the countryside gained great speed in the second half of the nineteenth century and thereby the condition of the remaining farm labourers dramatically improved during the mid-Victorian period. Hence the tension in the British countryside which manifested itself like the Captain Swing revolts in 1830 and the incident of Tolpuddle in Dorset in 1834 was completely extinguished by the elimination of the rural surplus.[68]

In short, the mid-Victorian boom is generally regarded to have been a great blow to any kind of potential for revolution both in the countryside and towns in a very brief period of time because the supposedly sustained rise in the living standards of the people during the second half of the nineteenth century impeded the creation of suitable conditions for a social revolution in Britain.[69]

This general viewpoint is quite contrary to the thesis that there was a deliberate and systematic policy of impoverishing the masses on the part of the ruling elite

[68] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp. 139-40, 173-6. See E.P. Thompson, pp. 213-33. E.P. Thompson can only focus on the period between 1790 and 1841 and even his proportion of the poor falls from forty per cent of the population (10.5 millions) in 1790 to thirty per cent of the population (18.1 millions) in 1841.

[69] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire,* pp. 71-3, 95-99, 102-5, 137-42, *The Age of Capital*, pp. 43-8, 262-9, Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution,* pp. 205-12, Colley, *Britons*, p. 393, Pugh, *Britain Since 1789*, pp. 35-6, 71-4, 80-1, Church, *The Great Victorian Boom 1850-1873.*

and the bourgeoisie during the Victorian age.[70] Again, the common view is utterly against the thesis that the British aristocracy and the bourgeoisie consciously pursued together a policy of passivization and subordination of the masses within the forces of industrial capitalism. This common view, which is better to be named as 'boom theory', disregards the essential realities of the Victorian age and creates significant contradictions. First of all, the major question of poverty and consequent social unrest and agitation is simply reduced to the level of temporary booms and slumps in a rapidly growing capitalist economy. Yet trade cycles are characteristics of industrialized economies and in general terms, what happened in Britain during the nineteenth century was the most important determinant of world fluctuations in the trade cycle. Thus, when the pattern of the British trade cycle began to change in the 1840s, the same was true in the rest of the world. Until the 1840s agriculture had been the most influential factor on the trade cycle since the eighteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, exports played the key role in determining fluctuations in the British economy and agriculture did not even have any marginal effect upon the British trade cycle.[71]

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[70] This thesis is based on the idea that the living standards of the common people can not be accepted to have markedly improved during the great boom in Britain. The living and working standards of the majority of people badly deteriorated during the mid-Victorian boom as a result of the deliberate policy of impoverishment and passivization followed by the upper and middle classes.

[71] Belchem, pp.621-2.

Consequently, trade (business) cycles which are identified by periodic long-term and short-term booms and depressions were the natural elements of the capitalist system in Great Britain -the unrivalled world's leader of capitalism during the nineteenth century- and other powers like the United States, Germany, Japan, France, Italy and Russia. It is necessary to take into consideration the very long term in Britain between 1750 and 1901 in order to understand the impact of capitalism on all the sections of the society. Britain was just a middle-ranking European power in the early eighteenth century but the rapid population increase from the 1740s on was accompanied by the high rate of economic growth as a result of the industrialization, which fully started in the 1780s. Wealth was already accumulating in Britain in the late eighteenth century because overseas trade, especially with the colonies, was profitable, permitting income to be diverted into mining and manufactures. Adequate supplies of capital, raw materials and labour; and access to domestic and overseas markets enabled the rise of modern large-scale industrial capitalism in Britain far in advance of other countries in the world in the late eighteenth century.[72]

Throughout this long period of about one hundred fifty years (1750-1901) there occurred a number of booms and depressions of varying duration but all in all, Britain

[72] For the rapid population increase and industrialization in the second half of the eighteenth century see Price, pp.17-27, Pugh, pp.1-7, 28-37, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.1-74, Clark, pp.453-528.

became the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world. Britain's national and per capita income rose at a substantial pace during the entire period. Yet this process can not be explained simply by the great boom because Britain had already been the most powerful nation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The great boom introduced Great Britain, which was already and by far the greatest power of the world, into its most glorious period. The mid-Victorian boom was the heyday of the golden era (the Victorian age) in the history of Great Britain. Even the Victorian age was part of the long process beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century and ending with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Thus, the living standards of the common people should have noticeably improved during the one hundred-year period between 1750 and 1850 when there was a huge accumulation of wealth in Britain.

Yet, on the contrary, the living conditions of the masses severely deteriorated to such an extent that there was acute poverty and misery among the working classes in the early-Victorian period. A new poor working class was created in the industrial towns and differentiated from the rest of the society as 'lower classes' in the service of the 'superior classes.' Meanwhile, the ruling elite and the middle-class businessmen grew much more affluent and powerful ever since the beginning of the Industrial

Revolution. The extravagant expenditure on the canals and railways and revival of classical architecture in the towns was the best manifestation of their enourmous accumulation of wealth before and during the great boom.

The followers of the boom theory generally accepted the fact that there was severe poverty and wretchedness in Britain during the twenty-year period between 1830 and 1850. Even the 1840s are defined as 'hungry forties' by most of the authorities.[73] But curiously enough, the reason for this grave poverty at a time when Britain had already experienced great economic progress and become the wealthiest nation in the world for more than fifty years can not be explained in a reasonable way at all. Consequently, the boom theorists are unable to reach a general agreement on the question of poverty in the early-Victorian period.[74]

According to one point of view, there was never acute poverty in Britain during the nineteenth century and therefore the contemporary accounts including the novels were highly exaggerated and sensational stories that could be valid only for a small and usual minority in the society. A clear-cut distinction is made between Ireland and Britain as two completely separate nations throughout the nineteenth century (except Ulster, the north-eastern

[73] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.72. See also Foster, pp. 91-107, 255-9, E.P. Thompson, p. 232. Yet the proportion of the poor is never estimated more than thirty to forty per cent of the whole population.
[74] See E.P. Thompson, pp. 207-12, Belchem, pp. 591-3, Pugh, pp. 33-7.

province, where Protestants were concentrated) and the Irish immigrants are blamed for the existing poverty and unemployment especially in the towns. The new industrial society is always evaluated in comparison with the pre-industrial rural society. Thus, it is concluded that the living standards of the people dramatically improved during the nineteenth century and the most impressive phase was the period of great boom when the sharp decline in unemployment and rise in wages brought permanent stability and peace to Britain. The Irish Famine is presented as a good example to demonstrate the precariousness of a rural society and the Irish are tacitly held responsible for the disaster because of their historical antagonism towards the English monarchy. The beginning of the boom is sought in the early-Victorian period, particularly in the 1840s, because the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851 is considered to have been the symbol of high progress in the society.[75]

The champions of the boom theory who accept acute widespread poverty among the common people of Britain in the 1830s and 1840s are actually much more irrational than those who do not. A transition between the two quite opposite situations-poverty and social tension on the one

[75] Non-Marxist historiography (i.e. Sir John Clapham, T.S. Ashton, M. Pugh, R. Price, J. Belchem, R. J. Soderlund, A.J. Taylor) generally exemplifies the characteristics of this version of the boom theory. The continuous rise in the living standards of the people since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution eliminated the revolutionary potential in the society. See Belchem, pp. 591-3, E.P. Thompson, pp. 591-3, Pugh, pp. 33-6, Price, *British Society 1680-1880.*

hand, prosperity and serenity on the other hand-should reasonably be invented. The contemporary accounts of poverty are held in high esteem and therefore the beginning of the supposedly dramatic improvement in the living standards of the masses is to be correctly determined. Inevitably, the impact of the great boom upon the living standards of the common people is magnified to such an extent that there is supposed to have been a radical transformation in the society during the second half of the nineteenth century. An obvious distinction is made between the society in the first and the second half of the nineteenth century. The first half of the nineteenth century (particularly the last two decades) is considered to have been a period of destitution and crisis in the society, which is certainly true. However, the whole period is conceived as a temporary stage of the Industrial Revolution, which is indispensable for the formation of a large-scale revolutionary class of workers. There was a natural trend towards the proletarian revolution in the first half of the nineteenth century. The 1830s and 1840s demonstrate the impending social revolution in the near future but a revolution never happened and even the existing social unrest disappeared in Britain. [76]

[76] Marxist historiography (i.e. E. Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, J.L. and B. Hammond, J. Foster) generally exemplifies the characteristics of this version of the boom theory. A socialist revolution was about to happen in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century but the dramatic improvement in the living standards of the working classes during the second half of the nineteenth century eliminated the revolutionary fervour in the society.

The inability to explain the supposedly unexpected end of the revolutionary atmosphere in Britain around the middle of the nineteenth century especially after the collapse of Chartism gave rise to this version of the boom theory. The absence of a social revolution or even any serious working-class movement could only be explained by the existence of widespread contentment in the society. Thus, there had to be a marked improvement in the living standards of the working-class people, which would create a prevalent sense of pleasure and comfort to finish the social unrest in the early-Victorian period. Of course, the acute poverty and misery among the working-classes in the 1840s had to be extensively eliminated as a result of the significant rise in their living standards.

The great boom, which is supposed to have caused a dramatic improvement in the living standards of the masses in a very short time and removed forever the possibility of a social revolution in Britain, is considered to have been the main factor for the end of the revolutionary atmosphere, which had still been developing in the 1840s. Then, according to this viewpoint the harsh widespread poverty among the working classes was a natural consequence of industrial capitalism and even necessary for the formation of revolutionary consciousness and movement in the society. In the early-Victorian period the conditions for a social explosion were convenient: mass poverty and

destitution, harsh and inhumane working conditions, the rising bourgeoisie and nobility and above all the rapidly expanding proletariat beside the narrowing but still large rural population. Yet the impact of the great boom was so strong that not only the prevailing social agitation died out in the short-term but also socialism did not take root in the society in the long term.[77]

This standpoint which regards the mid-Victorian boom as a milestone in the history of Great Britain can not reasonably explain the beginning of the 'dramatic transformation process' in the society (Ireland is again excluded from the history of Britain in the Victorian age). Since poverty and squalor are accepted to have been widespread in the 1830s and 1840s, the beginning of the great boom is dated to the early 1850s-mostly to the year 1850-but when contemporary accounts considered it seems unlikely to occur a sudden improvement in the living standards of the people in the 1850s. Thus, despite the beginning of the boom in 1850, the rise in the living standards of the working classes is supposed to have accelerated after the depression of 1857, particularly in the 1860s.[78] Again, one of the periodic slumps-the depression of 1857, which is usually regarded as the first

[77] This is true for the boom theory in general. The sustained rise in the living standards of the working classes was a great blow to the popularity of socialism.
[78] This statement is true for the common boom theory. The 1860s and early 1870s are considered to have been the period when there was a rapid improvement in the living standards of the working people. See Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, pp.46-7, Pugh, p.73.

world-wide trade-cycle crisis, is held responsible for the delay of the general amelioration in the living conditions of the masses. The Industrial Revolution started in the 1760s but according to this argument, the thirteen-year period between 1860 and 1873 (or at most twenty-three years between 1850 and 1873) improved the living standards of the common people who had suffered the agonies of poverty and misery in spite of the one hundred years of unbroken industrial development.

It is not reasonable or even possible to consider a general marked improvement in the living standards of the common people during the mid-Victorian boom. Throughout the one hundred years between 1750 and 1850 Britain underwent continous economic growth and became the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Besides, a totally new society which was based on the dynamics of industrial capitalism was created and rapidly began to develop and replace the old rural society. Thus, the living standards of the common people are to be assessed above all within the new industrial society without regard to their previous experiences in the rural society. The living and working conditions of the masses increasingly deteriorated both in the industrial towns and countryside throughout the whole nineteenth century but the Victorian age (including the great boom) was particularly the period of time when the

pressure of industrial capitalism upon the living standards of the working classes substantially increased as a result of the deliberate exploitation and subjugation policy of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Industrial capitalism enriched further a small minority at the expense of the working-class people during the mid-Victorian boom. The apparent rise in employment was only a remedy for the unemployed multitudes of newcomers, who were saved from starving to death in the countryside. Yet the low wages or earnings in an inflationary period as well as the absence of a social security system and very bad working conditions did not actually bring about any improvement in the living standards of the working-class people. On the contrary, high domestic and foreign competition prompted the employers to reduce the costs of production to the greatest extent possible. Thus cheap labour, payment in truck and long working hours became the main tenets of the employers during the mid-Victorian boom.[79]

[79] For example, see Razzell, The Dock Labourers (Letters III, IV), pp.91-4, The Operative Tailors and Stitchers (Letters IX, XVI),pp. 94-6, Cheap-Clothes Trade in the East End of London (Letter XVII), pp.96-8, The Unskilled Labourers (Letter XIX), pp.98-101, A Cotton-spinner who became a beggar (Letter XXVII), pp.105-7, The London Carmen and Porters (Letter LXXIII), pp.153-6, The London Tanners, Curriers etc. (Letter LXXVIII), pp.159-61, Workers in Bolton, Oldham, Macclessfield, Middleton, Leeds (Letters IV, VIII, XI, VII, XII, XIII, XVII), pp.183-214, Iron-Workers and Colliers (Letter X), pp.267-8, Mayhew, vol.1, Costermongers, pp.4-61, Poor Street Sellers and Hawkers, pp. 363-407, 414-470, vol.2, Casual labour in general and Chimney-sweepers, pp.297-378, vol.3, Lives of coal porters, pp.261-5, Timber and Dock Labourers, 292-301, Carmen and Porters, pp.357-368, Lives of Vagrants, pp.368-400, Golby, *Charles Dickens, from On Strike (11 Feb 1854),* pp.177-86, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, Seamen Afloat, pp.193-213. There was a general fall in earnings over the last two decades. A hatter, who earned 20 shillings in November 1850, earned three guineas twenty years ago (63 shillings). See pp.185-9 or a fireman in steam vessels acting as an engineer earned 24s-30s a week in 1850 but twenty years earlier earned three pounds (60s.) a week. See p.209, Coleman, pp.125-7(Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke*, 1850), 132-4 (M.D.Hill, 1852).

The important question why the long period of economic development in Britain between 1750 and 1850 did not raise the living standards of the ordinary people but on the contrary created large-scale poverty and misery, which was especially evident in the 1830s and 1840s can not be answered by the boom theory. Again, the enclosures and overpopulation had already made it impossible for the majority of people to subsist in the countryside at the beginning of the industrialization process. The old rural society was in the rapid process of decline against the new industrial society. Thus, for example, if a jobless individual who migrated from the countryside into the town was employed with a low wage under long and insanitary conditions, it is not true to call this 'an improvement' in his living standards because he was obliged to live in a totally new and alien environment. The distinction between the industrial and rural societies is to be made within the general framework of industrial capitalism. The migration from the countryside to the industrial towns gained great momentum during the mid-Victorian boom and as a result it is rather unreasonable to detect any kind of general improvement in the living standards of the people who had started a new life and were still in the process of adaptation in the towns.

The social unrest, which gradually reached its height in the 1840s after about one hundred years, could not

suddenly disappear due to the supposed improvement in the lives of the working classes in a thirteen-year period of boom. Statistical data like income and consumption per capita[80] which was relied on to prove the case was quite misleading because the Victorian age was the time when there was also an important expansion in the size of the bourgeoisie who constituted twenty to twenty-five percent of the population.[81] Furthermore, the extreme accumulation of wealth by the upper and middle classes certainly continued during the mid-Victorian boom, therefore the gulf between the rich and the poor greatly widened at the same time. [82]

The predominant tendency to seek the origin of the present-day wealthy British society in the industrial revolution leads to the firm conviction that the constant rise in the living standards of the masses was to begin and proceed in the nineteenth century. Thus, the great boom in the Victorian age is mistakenly referred to as a period when the progress in the living standards of the common

[80] For example, consumption of meat, tea, sugar, wheat, tobacco, vegetables, etc.

[81] R.Dudley Baxter calculated the proportion of the upper and middle classes in the United Kingdom as twenty-three per cent (6,618,000) in 1867 from a total population of 29,709,000 (Ireland included). The rest seventy-seven per cent (23,091,000) is classified as manual labour class. He puts the result into round numbers as 7,000.000 people classified as the upper and middle classes and 23,000,000 classified as the manual labour class out of a total population of 30,000,000 in 1867. See R.D.Baxter, *National Income, in Culture and Society in Britain* by J.M.Golby (ed), pp.15-9. However, he included among the middle classes all office workers, shop-assistants, shopkeepers, foremen and supervisory workers, slop or garret masters, tenant farmers, well-paid skilled workers and the like. The situation did not change throughout the Victorian age even though the total population rose to 35,000,000 in 1880 and 40,000,000 by the end of the Victorian age. See Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, p.342.

[82] One of the most famous expressions of this fact came from a young radical Tory politician, Benjamin Disraeli (the future Conservative prime minister) in 1845 when he attacked the emergence of two seperate nations, the rich and the poor. See Coleman, pp.111-2 (Disraeli, *Sybil or the Two Nations*, 1845).

people considerably gained speed. In addition, from a very optimistic perspective, the fall in unemployment during the great boom is considered to have caused a very significant improvement in the living standards of the masses. The advancement from the level of starvation or workhouse to that of severe poverty and misery can not be regarded as an important rise in the living standards. Except a small number of skilled operatives who had the chance to bargain effectively with the employers for higher wages in the boom periods, the rest of the workers were exploited with very low wages and under heavy working conditions without any social security during the mid-Victorian boom.[83] Thus, it is not sensible to call the slight upward movements well below the poverty line in an age of enourmous affluence and permanent economic progress as 'improvement' in the living standards. In this respect for instance, the living standards of women migrants with children who were forced to prostitution and earned enough money to avoid starvation or workhouse can not be said to have improved in the towns in comparison with the countryside.[84]

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[83] It is impossible to call the rapidly rising number of societies and clubs as well as government agencies as efficient institutions for the protection of working-class people. On the contrary, most of them were manipulated by the upper and middle classes in order to achieve the passivization and exploitation of the masses during the Victorian age. For more information about these inefficient institutions for the common people, see Mayhew, vol.4, pp.Xİ-XXXVİİİ, Booth, *Charles Booth's London*, pp.207-320 (Institutions, Working Men's Clubs, Friendly Societies, Co-operative Stores, Cocoa Rooms, People's Palace, Toynbee Hall and Oxford House, Salvation Army etc.), Rowntree, *Poverty,* pp.383-405 (Clubs).

[84] The same is also true for those involved in begging and even theft and cheat. It is important to emphasize that the contemporaries made little distinction between a girl on the streets or a professional prostitute and a woman who simply lived with a man without being married to him. See for example, Mayhew, vol.4, pp.35-7, 210-26 (Prostitution), 273-81, 303-25, 334-66(Theft), 427-47 (Mendicity), Acton, *Prostitution*, pp.161-86.

Situation of the Countryside

The common belief that high job opportunities in the industrial areas encouraged the people to leave the countryside and therefore the living conditions of the remaining rural population remarkably improved is not true.[85] The situation of the unskilled farm labourers always remained one of the worst-paid among the working classes during the Victorian age. The constant influx of people from the countryside did not bring about any significant change in the poor lives of the remaining farm labourers because above all migration from the countryside did not create labour shortage for a rise in wages. Moreover, enclosure and technological advance minimized the labour requirement on the large farms but more important than this Britain began to abandon its dependency on the domestic agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century. The extension and intensification of transport system together with innovations in food processing resulted in the emergence of an international market for world-wide agriculture. Especially from the 1870s on, large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs accelerated further the decline of domestic agriculture as an unprofitable sector. Consequently, Britain almost totally became dependent on the international market by the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, the possibility of regular

[85] See for example Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.95, 139-40, 175.

employment in the countryside fell to such a low degree that less than ten percent of the population was engaged in agriculture in Britain by the end of the Victorian age.[86] Furthermore, the impact of the 1834 Poor Law upon the agricultural laborurers began to be felt particularly during the great boom when the decline in rural population made it easier for the boards of guardians to enforce the law much more strictly especially in the northern districts where the large number of poor applicants for relief forced the local authorities to grant outdoor relief since it was not possible to place all of them in the limited number of workhouses.

The Irish Poor Law

On the other hand in Ireland-whose population was rapidly increasing, three-quarters of her labourers unemployed, housing conditions appaling and the standard of living unbelievably low-the Irish Poor Law Act was passed in 1838.[87] The Irish Poor Law was the exact replica of the 1834 Poor Law-outdoor relief was prohibited and entry to the workhouses was made compulsory-but the outbreak of the Great Famine and at the same insufficient number of workhouses forced the authorities to pass the Irish Poor Law Extension Bill in June 1847 which seemingly allowed

[86] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.329 (Diagram 4).
[87] C.W.Smith, pp.36-7. See also E.P. Thompson, pp. 429-44 to understand how merciless were the British authorities towards the poor and miserable Irish in the first half of the century.

outdoor relief by increasing the rates of Irish landlords.[88] Yet the British authorities simply aimed to avoid the enormous expenditure of keeping the workhouses by putting the burden on the Irish landlords who were thought to have been wealthy enough to maintain the starving masses. This mentality certainly aggravated the dimensions of the disaster by increasing the death toll because the law was quite open to abuse by the Irish landlords and the British government who remained rather neglectful of the masses struggling against acute poverty and starvation.

The Cotton Famine

The slump in Lancashire's textile mills between 1862 and 1864, which is known as the Cotton Famine and was caused by the American Civil War created mass unemployment and poverty among the great majority of workers who constituted a labour force of 500,000. The Federal blockade of rebel southern ports caused great scarcity of cotton because the south tried to force Britain-which imported eighty percent of its raw cotton from the southern states-to recognize its independence but the industry was already caught in a crisis of demand, not supply and many middle-class speculators made their fortunes through stockpiling.[89]

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[88] For the details of the application of the Irish Poor Law during the Great Famine, see C.W.Smith, pp.172-3, 296-9, 302-3, 307-15, 317-24, 369-75, 408-11.

[89] See W.O.Henderson, *The Lancashire Cotton Famine*, and short diary of John Ward O'Neil covering the years between 1860-4 when he worked as a powerloom weaver under harsh conditions due to the Cotton Famine. See J.Burnett, *Useful Toil*, pp.78-89.

3.The Late-Victorian Period 1875-1901

Definition of the Period

Defined on one side by the Great Depression and sudden end of the Great Boom at its height in the year 1873 and on the other by the death of Queen Victoria (1901) and the end of the Boer War (1902), the late-Victorian period is characterized as a time of rapid and persistent decline. The Great Depression between 1873 and 1896 is considered to have initiated the process during which Britain lost its superiority as the world's leader of industrial capitalism against American and German competition. Even though the true dimensions of the Great Depression are widely argued, the contemporaries-especially the members of the ruling aristocracy and bourgeoisie-complained of falling profits, prices and interest, which clearly indicated the existence of a serious slump in this period.[90]

Impact of the Great Depression

Paradoxically, the common viewpoint-'the boom theory'-is converted into 'the depression theory' with respect to the living standards of the masses. According to this general standpoint, the drastic fall in prices (particularly prices of food) during the period of depression greatly reduced the living-costs for the common

[90] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.105-12, *The Age of Capital*, pp.62-3, *The Age of Empire*, pp.35-46, Pugh, pp.114-6, Belchem, pp.262-3, Price, pp.338-9.

people of Britain. Thus, it is widely accepted that the living standards of the masses of working-class people considerably improved during the late-Victorian period. Since there had already been a very impressive progress in the living standards of the people during the mid-Victorian boom, the Great Depression (1873-1896) is emphasized as the most deflationary period in British history when around forty percent fall in prices caused further a much greater improvement in the living standards in comparison to the previous period of great boom (1850-1873). Yet above all the starting point of this trend is supposed to have been large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs into Britain from the overseas markets in the 1870s. The whole depression theory is actually based on this crucial turning point in the early 1870s when large imports of cheap food, especially wheat, supposedly made a positive impact for the decline of poverty among the working classes.[91]

It is assumed that the cheap food imports and at the same time the depression caused a dramatic fall especially in the prices of essential foodstuffs like bread and therefore people could divert more of their expenditure to other items of consumption. As a matter of fact, all the booms are inflationary and all the depressions are deflationary on the basis of economics. However, the fall in prices is considered to have been abnormally high in

[91] For example, see Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.105,140, 142, Pugh, pp. 122-3.

this period of depression mainly as a result of the cheap food imports and sharp decline in exports. Thus, according to the common viewpoint, the rapid progress in the living standards of the masses which began with the great boom in the 1840s or 1850s, continued even at a much higher rate with the Great Depression in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Great Depression is regarded as the unique period when the negative consequences of a depression such as unemployment, dismissals, wage-cuts and above all widespread poverty and misery were not important at all to prevent the dramatic rise in the living standards of the working classes. The evidence given for the supposedly high improvement in the living standards of the people can be generalized for the whole second half of the nineteenth century: the increase in the variety and consumption of the necessities of life, the emergence and expansion of the sectors aiming at the masses and the rise of multiple shop and chain store, the increase in the membership of friendly societies offering sickness benefits and/or a decent funeral in return for regular small subscriptions, the rise of the small savings accounts in the Post Office, the emergence of working-class seaside resorts like Blackpool on the Lancashire coast, the transformation of popular entertainment, the introduction of public transport by means of the trams and so on. The question if all these and

other less significant indicators really prove the common argument that the general social stability and peace in the British society were provided by the sustained rise in the living standards of the masses during the second half of the nineteenth century cannot be answered or even asked by the authorities. The argument itself is incorrect because the social order and peace are mistakenly identified with the prominent rise in the living conditions of the masses and decline of poverty in the society. The common assumption, which definitely stipulated the high improvement in the living standards of the masses for the absence of any kind of social crisis or movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, distorts the argument at the outset.

Curiously enough, the two diametrically opposed periods -the Great Boom and the Great Depression-in the nineteenth century British history lasted for about twenty-three years and the end of the boom was the beginning of the depression in the year 1873. Thus, a whole uninterrupted process of forty-six years during which there was a steady and rapid rise in the living standards of the people is envisaged and firmly accepted as an incontrovertible fact. However, a comparative analysis of the common positive impact of the two completely distinct periods (the boom and the depression) on the lives of the masses cannot be adequately made in any case.

The supposedly high improvement in the living standards of the ordinary people is believed to have created an atmosphere of satisfaction and serenity in the society during the late-Victorian period as well. But it is emphasized that the improvement in the living standards of the people in the late-Victorian period was much greater than the improvement in the mid-Victorian period. Hence the increasingly prevailing apathy of the working classes prevented the mass support and popularity for the socialist revival in the 1880s and 1890s when new socialist organizations were established in Britain: the Social Democratic Federation (1883) under the leadership of H.M.Hyndman (1842-1921), the Fabian Society (1884) led by Sidney Webb (1855-1947) and Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), the Independent Labour Party (1893) under the leadership of Keir Hardie (1856-1915) and Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) and the Labour Representation Committee (1900).

Consequently, it is implied that the British authorities gave support to the cheap food imports in order to relieve the pressure of the depression on the masses in this period. The upper and middle classes in Britain, namely the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie were cautious about the growth of socialism and trade unionism especially after the foundation of the First International in 1864. Thus, it was unavoidable for the authorities to let the cheap food exports into the country to maintain the rise in

the living standards during the Great Depression. The calm environment and social stability created by the great boom in British society was by no means to be risked with the consequences of the depression. In this manner 'the boom theory' is turned into 'the depression theory' because this time despite the existence of a large-scale working class and socialist organizations, as well as a relatively mild authoritarian regime in a period of severe depression, the apathy and passivity of the masses cannot be explained in any way other than the self-contentment caused by the high progress in the living standards.[92]

The depression theory is to be accepted as completely wrong and misleading if the true connection between the cheap food imports, the Great Depression, the Great Boom and the living standards of the working classes is properly recognized. First of all, it was quite normal and even inevitable to occur such a great depression immediately after the great boom because the excessively huge demand for British goods had reached to the utmost level and besides American and German competition had already begun to undermine the British industrial supremacy in the world. Such a huge accumulation of wealth which took place in the boom years could not last for a very long period of time

[92] It is also accepted, perhaps rightly, that from the middle of the nineteenth century the country was no longer able to feed itself from its own agricultural production because of the rapid increase in the population. Thus, during the Great Depression it was quite normal to expect an explosion in cheap food exports at any moment for the satisfaction of the rapidly increasing number of working-class people long after the repeal of the Corn Laws (this was absolutely necessary to avoid any kind of social agitation or revolutionary unrest in this critical period) according to the general depression theory.

and eventually a period of stagnation or recession had to follow the boom as a natural economic trend. The Great Depression was therefore not an unexpected historical event in nineteenth century Britain contrary to the common viewpoint. In addition, the dimensions of the depression were not unusually extensive because the boom period between 1850 and 1873 was incomparably enormous and thus the ensuing slump would be much more intense than the other periodic and short-term ones. The Great Depression just like the Great Boom was a very natural part of the industrial capitalism in Britain. Consequently, if the nineteenth century but especially the second half of the century considered as a whole, the Great Depression was in fact far from being a great blow to the British economy.[93]

The same is certainly true for the large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs from the 1870s onwards. After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 there remained no major protectionist obstacle to the development of free trade as the main economic policy of Britain. Henceforth British exports and imports fairly increased but nevertheless food prices, which had been the central argument of the Anti-Corn Law League, did not fall until the 1870s.[94] The delay for the fall in food prices cannot be explained in a clear

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[93] See for instance Saul, *The Myth of the Great Depression*. However, it is not true to call the Great Depression simply a myth. There was an important depression in comparison with the 'golden years' between 1850 and 1873.

[94] For instance imports of wheat into the United Kingdom rose from 39,700(1840-4) to 82,200(1850-4), 144,100(1860-4), 148,100(1865-9) before the new wave of imports from the 1870s onwards (Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.176).

way and still remains a mystery in British historiography. First of all, it is obvious that the land-owning aristocracy gained great revenues from their estates in the countryside and despite the repeal of the Corn Laws and evident increase in the imports of wheat and other cereal crops, the domestic agriculture did not decline and on the contrary flourished more than ever until the 1870s. This is largely attributed to the small-scale food imports and the rising population, which kept prices up to the benefit of the landed aristocracy. It is assumed that the dominance of domestic agricultural sector deterred the merchants from importing large quantities of foodstuffs and thus the imports were not sufficient to cause a dramatic fall in food prices. But on the other hand the supposed contribution of the Corn Laws to high food prices and as a result high wages underlay the opposition of the employers who supported the seemingly humanitarian cause of the Anti-Corn Law League. Of course, the boom theory, which accepted the sharp rise in not only employment but also wages and living standards during the boom, cannot explain the long delay for the fall in food prices. The Anti-Corn Law League had been founded in 1838 and the Corn Laws were abolished in 1846. It is quite certain that the employers were complaining about the high wages in the 1830s-well before the boom. In this sense the wages increased further during the great boom in the 1850s and 1860s. Thus, after such a

great fuss about the issue it is incomprehensible why the large-scale food imports started and gained great momentum in the 1870s and 1880s-particularly during the Great Depression when there was inevitably a process of economic deflation as well.[95]

In fact, all this confusion is caused by the wrong assumption that there was a significant rise in the wages and living standards of the masses during the great economic boom. The employers' complaints about the high wages were always present and certainly not justifiable even during the great boom. Thus, there was no correlation between the food prices and the wages of the working classes in Britain throughout the Victorian age. It is entirely untrue that high prices (especially the prices of basic essentials such as food and clothing) caused high wages in Britain. High food prices greatly benefited the landed elite but the middle classes did not suffer either. However, the middle classes wanted to raise their power and status in the society by somewhat breaking the highly privileged status of the landed aristocracy. The establishment of the Anti-Corn Law League and the repeal of the Corn Laws are to be evaluated from this perspective. The Corn Laws were the main instrument of the British

[95] If the wages had further increased during the mid-Victorian boom, compared with the wage level of the 1830s and 1840s about which the middle-class businessmen were complaining, the large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs must have started in the 1850s and 1860s to lower the supposedly high wage level. Yet large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs are considered to have started and gained great speed during the Great Depression when there was already a fall in prices and wages.

aristocracy for the maintenance of their great superiority over the bourgeoisie. Thus, the repeal paved the way for the rise of the middle classes during the Victorian era.[96]

In truth, the employers had total control over the wages and therefore they did not care about the high food prices after the repeal of the Corn Laws. Moreover, so long as there was a great demand for the industrial goods during the boom, it was not logical to encourage a deflationary atmosphere in any way including cheap food imports into the country. More important than this, the rising bourgeoisie wholeheartedly supported the deliberate policy of impoverishing the masses of working people. It was above all crucial both for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie to hold the working classes in poverty and misery in order to constitute a perfectly exploitative capitalist system. Therefore, the people were passivized with very low wages and hard working conditions to such an extent that the possibility of a social crisis or revolution was averted and the enrichment of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie was raised to the maximum level. Thus, lower food prices particularly during the great boom, when there was a marked increase in employment, would have really caused a noticeable improvement in the living standards of the working classes. Although this possible improvement in the

[96] Of course not only the repeal of the Corn Laws which regulated the trade in barley, wheat, oats and rye but also other merchantilist restrictions in the form of high tariffs for the raw materials and primary products of the foreign markets were largely abolished in the 1840s. Yet the repeal of the Corn Laws was the last phase symbolizing the triumph of free trade.

living standards could have never been big enough for the great majority of the workers to achieve a higher social status by means of social mobility (due to the very low wages and heavy working conditions) it was to be avoided at all costs because a significant rise in the living standards of the workers could have created class consciousness and organization among them. The fragmentation of the Victorian working class was absolutely essential for the permanence of the middle-class hegemony in the society. Furthermore the aristocracy of labour namely, the upper strata of the Victorian working class consisting of a small minority of skilled workers, were always considered as a serious menace by the employers.[97] The emergence of trade-unionism, working class organizations and movements in the first half of the nineteenth century reinforced the solidarity between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie to pursue the policy of impoverishment and passivization for the multitudes of workers during the whole Victorian age.

As will be clear by now cheap food imports on a large-scale were highly harmful both for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie during the age of Chartism (1838-1850) and the period of great bloom (1850-1873). Yet then what happened during the 1870s and 1880s that large-scale food imports

[97] They were rightly believed to have the potential of organizing and inciting scattered masses of working classes to whom they set a good example. Thus, they were treated or made to feel like part of the bourgeoisie in the society.

were accompanied by a dramatic fall in prices? And what was the impact of the falling prices on the lives of the masses?

It is totally unthinkable to accept that the British authorities resorted to the cheap imports of foodstuffs to remove the negative results of the Great Depression and maintain the rise in the living conditions of the common people. The parliament and the government were still overwhelmingly dominated by the landed aristocrats who had never assumed such a socialist attitude towards the masses since the introduction of the Corn Laws in 1815. Besides, the ruling elite had no formal control over the food imports since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and in fact the imports of foodstuffs, especially wheat, steadily increased between 1845 and 1870. It is important to realize that large-scale food imports began in the early 1870s, namely during the heyday of the great boom but oddly enough, the fall in prices started in the mid-1870s and made itself felt in the early 1880s, namely during the Great Depression.

Thus, there was definitely a principal factor for the fall in food prices apart from the large-scale imports of cheap foodstuffs. Cheap food imports were simply the means for achieving the purpose behind this main factor. The same factor was also responsible for the collapse of already declining British farming during the late-Victorian period.

This factor was the decision of the bourgeoisie to make the huge expenditure of the masses on food and to a lesser extent clothing a profitable sector during the Great Depression when the middle classes suddenly suffered from fairly reduced profit margins after the economic boom. The poor working classes, who constituted the great majority of the population, spent most of their miserable income on food. In addition, there was a huge consumption of food by the rising middle-class families throughout the industrial age. Thus, this huge expenditure on food brought great and constant profit to the British landed aristocracy because the domestic agriculture retained its virtual monopoly on food consumption of the population until the Great Depression. The bourgeoisie came to realize that they could make incredibly great profits out of mass food consumption in the society during the Great Depression.

Collapse of Domestic Agriculture

Of course, the middle classes were aware of the fact that this aim could only be achieved at the expense of the British farming, which was dominated by the landed aristocracy. The bourgeoisie had tolerated the artificially high food prices during the inflationary economic expansion since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. However, the Great Depression brought a serious setback for the rise of the middle classes in the society. After the sudden end of

the Great Boom, the businessmen extremely panicked with the dimensions of the depression and immediately sought remedies to protect and maintain their social standing. The huge spending on food within the society could entirely be controlled by the bourgeoisie not only for making incredible profits but also raising further their influence in the society.

The first step was to lower the prices of food by means of cheap imports to exterminate the dominance of the British farming in the domestic market. The attempt was quite successful during the late-Victorian period when the British farming could not compete with the overseas imports and rapidly collapsed as an unprofitable sector. However, the collapse of domestic agriculture was a great blow not to the landed aristocrats and their tenant farmers but to the great number of unskilled farm labourers and their families who already eked out a precarious living with irregular employment and miserable wages. Despite the perpetual migration from the countryside to the urban districts and abroad there was still a large rural population by the 1870s. Thus, many farm labourers were either dismissed or compelled to work with lower wages and harder conditions (dismissals increased the burden of the rest). Since poverty and squalor in British countryside reached to the climax in this period, migration into the

industrial areas gained great speed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Yet the absorption of the newcomers by the manufacturing industries was not possible during the Great Depression when there was a high level of unemployment even among the urban population because of the dismissals and bankruptcy. As a result, a huge group of unemployed and mostly unskilled people, who were willing to be employed under any conditions to survive, came into existence in the late-Victorian period.[98]

Trade-Union Movement

Moreover, despite Britain's early industrialization, trade unions were rather slow to establish themselves except on a limited basis. By 1880 about 750.000 men held union membership or only one manual worker in every seven. Men were much more easily recruited into unions when employed in large-scale factories and mills. Yet in spite

[98] See for example Charles Booth, pp.1-25. Even though Booth accepted the Class E, who formed over forty-two per cent of the total population, above the line of poverty, it is rather easy to realize his contradictory and rather subjective remarks or conclusions in his classification of the people in London. Interestingly, Booth acknowledges that the dividing lines between all the classes are indistinct and the classes are by no means homogeneous (p.23). Indeed there is not any difference between the classes especially between B,C,D, and E. The distinction is made between dock, wharf, warehouse labourers, porters, gas workers, carmen, messengers, stevedores. For example, Booth gives the casual dock and waterside labourers, gas workers as examples of the Class D, classified as 'poor' and whose wages do not exceed 21s. Yet he puts the carmen, porters, messengers, warehousemen, permanent dock labourers into Class E, classified as 'not poor' and whose regular earnings were between 22s.and 30s. Besides, he deliberately overestimated the size of the Class F,G and H but curiously foremen, better class warehousemen and lightermen are included in Class F as 'higher class labourers'. Nevertheless, Charles Booth's study of London poverty reveals the fact that over seventy five per cent of the population had low and precarious living standards and therefore could be classified within the poor working classes. Booth's poverty line-22s. 6d.for a family with three children at the ages of 11,8 and 6- is rather optimistic but this is meaningful since Booth had to reduce the proportion of the poor as far as possible not to arouse indignation in the society.

of the early development of a factory system, British industry had not advanced as far in this direction as used to be believed, in fact by the 1880s the average workshop employed only 29 men. Thus, most of the workers remained close to their employers and saw less need or had no courage to form trade unions as a result of the huge surplus labour during the Victorian age. For several major occupations such as domestic service or agricultural labour, the fragmentation of the workforce and its acute dependence upon the favour of the employers severely undermined independent behaviour. Even where trade unions were established they rapidly lost credibility as well as effectiveness during the nineteenth century owing to their inability to conduct strikes successfully. When faced with the threat of a strike, employers invariably locked their workers out or brought in men from elsewhere to break the strike. The availability of surplus labour crucially undermined the efforts of the unions especially during the late-Victorian period when there was a revival of unionism under the influence of socialism against the prevalence of mass poverty and unemployment aggravated by the Great Depression. The actively promoted emigration schemes abroad by some unions in the hope that those who remained at home would enjoy greater bargaining power were far from being sufficient for the rapidly increasing population. In the same way, trade unions felt handicapped in industries such

as cotton textiles in which large numbers of women were employed. Since women, particularly widows with children, were willing to work for much lower wages than men, the employers deliberately used them to keep down the general level of wages and make the trade unions' activities fruitless.[99]

Hence trade unionism in Britain became essentially sectional, concentrated in certain skilled crafts, although two semi-skilled groups, the miners and cotton textile workers managed to build a considerable membership. During the late 1880s and 1890s the union movement began to extend itself beyond the narrow range of skilled men to include previously unorganized groups such as dockworkers and gas workers who were organized under new general unions for the semi-skilled. The aim of the unions was to organize all possible competitors for the same job and thereby maximize the bargaining power of unskilled workers. In fact, these unions typically emanated from groups such as stokers in the gasworks who possessed some degree of skill which gave them a scarcity value in the labour market. In times of depression their membership inevitably contracted to this nucleus. These unions were well-aware of the fact that the best way for increasing their bargaining power was to limit the size of their class as far as possible. Thus, until

[99] For the trade union movement in the late-Victorian period, see Pugh, pp.123-8, Pelling, pp.13-39, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.133,143,374(Diagram 51), *The Age of Empire*, pp.121,128-9, Clegg, pp.55-96, Belchem, pp.418-20(New Unionism by R.Price).

around the First World War, these unions survived only by behaving more like the exclusive craft unions.

Yet despite the development of unionism among the unskilled workers with a series of strikes in the late 1880s like the London Dock Strike of 1889,[100] the British trade union movement can hardly be said to reverberate a very pronounced class consciousness. By comparison with working-class organization on the mainland of Europe, the British were slow to develop a distinctive ideology and in particular showed little interest in Marxism. It is quite obvious that the masses could not grasp the idea of a socialist society because there was widespread dislike and lack of confidence for state intervention as a result of the New Poor Law and workhouses. In this context even the most ambitious workers looked less to the state and more to self-help strategies in the form of friendly societies, consumer co-operative stores and trade unions to improve their position. But the great majority of people were much more anxious to have regular employment at a period of time when brief unemployment meant either workhouse or starvation for the people. This was exactly what the British authorities wanted to impose on the common people: a systematic exploitation by means of poor and harsh living conditions in the capitalist society.[101]

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[100] See Dyos, vol. 2, p. 595, Belchem, pp.173-4.

[101] See for example Booth, pp.102-124 (harsh living conditions under extreme competition), pp.204-6(the crucial role of unemployment, old age and sickness as well as casual labour for poverty and misery

Consequently, the new unionism was short-lived. After initial concessions, employers mobilized for a counter-attack, which began as early as 1890-in the aftermath of the Dock Strike of 1889, which seems to have been the last straw. The full force of this counter-attack was felt by the early 1890s when worsening depression undermined union membership. The key defeat of the new unions was on the docks, where employers used 'free labour' to break strikes and by 1893 many of the unions had disappeared and membership had fallen to about 140.000. But other unions were not destroyed, and some even continued to secure gains throughout the 1890s. Those unions that survived were able to do so by retreating into their core strengths of semi-skilled workers with some skill scarcity and occupational stability. Crucially, the employers' offensive in the 1890s coincided with a series of legal decisions which gravely undermined the financial status and legality of trade-union activities, particularly picketing. In 1899, driven by the need to safeguard its position and overturn adverse legal decisions, the Trades Union Congress (a national body of trade unions, founded in 1868 to advance the common interests of organized labour) agreed to hold a national conference with socialists to work for independent labour representation in parliament.

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among the working-class masses, Rowntree, pp. 152-75 (causes of primary poverty), Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London. An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883) in Coleman, pp. 172-4, George Gissing, *The Nether World*(1889), in Coleman, pp. 179-82.

Franchise Reform

At the conference, held in London on 27 February 1900, delegates from the socialist societies and several trade unions founded the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), the predecessor of the Labour Party. The establishment of the Labour Representation Committee, dedicated to securing a distinct labour group in parliament marked a major step in the evolution of labour as a political estate in British society. The Third Reform Act of 1884 had increased the number of voters to 5.7 million, which represented around six adult males out of every ten. However, the complications of registering for a vote and the prohibition on those who received poor relief continued to exclude several millions.[102] Moreover, most of the workers who were able to cast their votes in the elections voted the only two political parties-the Liberals and the Conservatives-under the influence of their employers. The Liberals and the Conservatives successfully manipulated the working classes for the maintenance of their own authority and prevented the emergence of a distinctive left-wing working-class movement until the end of the nineteenth century. For example, after the 1867 Reform Act some constituencies were effectively dominated by coal miners and thus the Liberal Party supported the nomination of the Miners' Federation officials against Conservative candidates. In this way the

[102] Belchem, pp. 332, 456, Colley, pp. 354-70. The United Kingdom remained, right up to the First World War, one of the least democratic states by the standards of eastern as well as western Europe.

first two workers were elected to the House of Commons and known as 'Lib-Labs'. As a result, Lib-Labism ensured the commitment of the labour movement to an alliance with the Liberal Party. Lib-Labism became the Liberal Party's means of getting the working-class votes to surpass the Conservatives in the elections.[103]

On the other hand some working-class voters strongly supported the Conservatives-the traditionally landed party of the Tories-especially in the east end of London, Lanchashire and Birmingham simply because they reacted to the extra competition for employment and housing and blamed the Liberals for allowing free entry (i.e the Irish and the Jews) or movement of impoverished people.[104] But most of the workers who voted for the Conservatives were simply influenced by employers or landlords. The Primrose League, which was founded by a group of British Conservative politicians under Lord Randolph Churchill in 1883, became the major means of mobilizing mass support for the Conservative Party against the Lib-Labs of the Liberal Party. The league, which claimed a million members by 1891 and 1.5 million by 1901, became Britain's largest political organization in a short time. By offering a low membership

[103] The first two workers were Thomas Burt and Alexander MacDonald who were elected in 1874. By 1906 twenty-four such workers had become MPs. See Pugh, p.126, Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.265-6.
[104] See for example, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.25-30 (Lumpers' reaction to the influx of young Irish migrants working for nothing), 127-36 (Boot and shoe makers' reaction to the imports of foreign goods and the small masters' competition), 193-213 (Seamen's reaction to the employment of supernumeraries-mostly men the government had refused to help emigrate-by the shipping masters), *London Labour and the London Poor,* vol.1,pp.104-17 (Irish migrants), vol.2, pp.115-25(Jewish migrants), vol.3, pp.292-305, Razzell, Letters III and IV, pp. 91-101(Metropolitan Districts) (Reaction of the dock labourers).

fee and social activities in combination with political propaganda (musical entertainments, teas, fetes, picnics, sports and railway excursions), the league managed to enrol at least an important part of the labour aristocracy who were somewhat influential and exemplary on the lower strata of the Victorian working class. Its extensive local network provided a stable base for the sweeping electoral victories enjoyed by the Conservatives between 1886 and 1905, though it was in steady decline after the turn of the century as a result of the growing popularity of the Labour Representation Committee.[105]

The Taff Vale Case

The extension of the franchise to the working classes with the Acts of Parliament in 1867 and 1884 was exactly a means of passivizing the workingmen under the absolute control of the ruling elite. The ostensible integration of labourers into the political system weakened any inclination to resist or overthrow it. Both the Liberals and Conservatives were skillfully able to use the working classes to have the upper hand in the elections. However, the Labour Representation Committee was seen as a real threat to the political system because for the first time a seriously crucial step was taken for the organization of labour as a political force. The offensive of the employers

[105] Pugh, pp.109-10, Belchem, pp.494-5, Price, p.289.

against unionism reached to a climax in 1901 when a legal decision held trade unions liable for damages when a business suffered as a result of a strike. It was the culmination of a series of anti-union court judgements and increasing trade-union support for an independent political organization. The specific case for the 1901 Taff Vale decision, which shattered trade-union financial security, was about a strike at the Taff Vale Railway in south Wales in August 1900. The railway company, seeking to end the mass picketing organized by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, took out injunctions against two union officials and the society itself. A court granted the injunctions, rendering the union's funds liable for any damages suffered by the company and this judgement was subsequently upheld by the House of Lords.[106]

In reality, the ruling aristocracy, in close collaboration with the bourgeoisie, aimed to undermine the influence of the newly established Labour Representation Committee before becoming a serious threat. However, on the contrary, the Taff Vale incident further strengthened the support of organized labour for the Labour Representation Committee which, constrained by its dependence on the liberal-inclined trade unions, refrained from advancing a socialist programme. Its programme reflected much common ground with that of the Liberal Party: free trade, land

[106] Belchem, p.599, Pugh, p.148.

reform, graduated taxation, poor law reform and old age pensions. The Taff Vale decision gave the young labour organization new political weight. Recognizing that this judgement decisively undermined trade-unions' legal rights and status and alarmed at the Liberal Party's indifference, a number of formerly reluctant trade unions pursued affiliation with the Labour Representation Committee, which after a significant breakthrough in the 1906 general election by winning twenty-nine seats changed its official name to the Labour Party.[107]

The Taff Vale decision was indeed a turning point because at last some sections of the working class came to realize the necessity of joining together under an efficient organization to withstand the oppressive system. Then, the second important step would be to win electoral success and eventually achieve the majority in the Parliament. But it is certain that the new labour movement was far from being revolutionary in any real sense. The Liberals continued to win elections in working-class constituencies, and most union members still voted Liberal rather than Labour. They won a landslide victory at the election of January 1906 and retained office until 1915. The Labour Party succeeded the overall majority for the first time in 1945 but the Labour government under Clement

[107] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.217-9.

Attlee (1945-1951) rapidly lost popularity against the Conservatives in the 1950s.[108]

Thus, the new labour movement or the Labour Party was not a seriously radical challenge to the existing order which was based upon the impoverishment and exploitation of the masses. The living standards of the common people remained lamentably low-even very badly deteriorated as a result of the world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the trade union movement in the late-Victorian period is not to be belittled as a total failure. It was important in two ways. First, it opened the debate about socialism and independent labour politics within the new labour movement. The new unionist spokespersons were able to win some significant victories within the Trades Union Congress, hitherto dominated by conservative craft unions. At the local level, the new unions began to transform municipal politics by securing representation on school and Poor Law boards. Secondly, it laid the foundations for a permanent expansion of trade-union organization that was to occur again just before the First World War.[109] Yet this was the time when the power of the bourgeoisie reached to the climax and indeed the defeat of the disorganized trade-union movement was inevitable in this sense.

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[108] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.225-6, 243-6, Pugh, pp.210-9.
[109] See Daunton, pp.302-7, Belchem, pp.419-20.

The trade-union movement in the late-Victorian period could not challenge the hegemony of the rising bourgeoisie. The expansion of the labour surplus in the industrial districts and the absence or failure of effective labour organizations and movements during the late-Victorian period made dismissals and wage-cuts much easier during the Great Depression when British industry lost its dynamism and priority. But on the other hand as her industry sagged, her finance triumphed, her services as shipper, trader and intermediary in the world's system of payments became more indispensable.[110] Its massive invisible income from both its international business services (banking, insurance, etc.) and the income which came to the world's largest creditor from its enormous foreign investments reinforced its financial position and wealth.[111] Thus, the fall in prices was in fact a delayed return to the normal level from the artificially high prices because of the sharp fall in demand for British goods in this period.[112] Besides, the middle classes were able to change the course of huge amount of money spent on food by the masses directly into their own pockets by way of cheap imports of foodstuffs. There was certainly a significant improvement in the living standards in this period but this was true for the living standards of the bourgeoisie.

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[110] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.129.
[111] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, p.52.
[112] Despite the fall in prices, Charles Booth points out that the prices in the market were usually double what the seller and every bystander knew to be the market price of the street and day. Booth, pp.38-41.

Decline of The Landed Nobility

Meanwhile, the landed aristocracy rapidly lost its domination in the society against the bourgeoisie during the late-Victorian age. Landownership stopped with some exceptions to be the basis of great wealth and became merely a status symbol. Aristocrats were the majority in almost all British cabinets before 1895. After 1895 they never were and indeed the line between the nobility and the bourgeoisie became more and more indistinct as titles of nobility were granted to the middle classes. This was the period when the aristocratization of the bourgeoisie began in full sense. However, the decline of the landed aristocracy is not to be exaggerated. The collapse of domestic agriculture was not a great blow to the aristocrats who had been ready for the possible results by their involvement in industry, finance and trade since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. They were aware of the decline of agriculture which was getting insufficient to meet the demands of the rapidly increasing population. Yet what they did not foresee was the incredible enrichment of the bourgeoisie that would finally make them part of the ruling nobility. The discovery and domination of the mass food market by the bourgeoisie, which resulted in the

collapse of British farming, was the last stage for the triumph of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century.[113]

It is rather evident that artificially high prices (particularly food prices) were used as a means of deliberately creating poverty and misery among the working classes for a very long period of time. The situation of the working classes was made worse during the Great Depression to such an extent that even a return to the normal price level could not improve their living standards in any significant way.[114] From an optimistic point of view, the fall in food prices probably reduced or prevented

[113] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, pp.170-2, Pugh, pp.116-7, Daunton, pp.673-714.

[114] For example, Rowntree's classification of the people in the city of York reveals similar contradictions with those of Booth (Rowntree, pp.66-110). He acknowledges that there is not much difference between the Classes B and C who are composed of poor and largely unskilled working-class families earning between 19s.9d.and 26s.7d.on average. Yet his Class D who consist of 'skilled' working-class families and constitute 32.4 per cent of the total population is rather ambiguously differentiated as 'not poor' from the Classes B and C with an excessively high income level of 41s. 9d. He says that the class consists largely of skilled workers but there is also a number of families in which, though the father is an unskilled worker, the wages of children bring up the family income to above 30s. a week and there is no poverty except such as is caused by drink, gambling or other wasteful expenditure. Thus, he openly admits the existence of poverty in Class D but calls the whole class not poor at all. Furthermore, the Class E, who are supposed to be higher than the Class D, consist of female domestic servants (5.7 per cent of the total population). Moreover, Rowntree accepts the workhouses as quite efficient institutions whose 'object is to provide a diet containing the necessary nutrients at the lowest cost compatible with a certain amount of variety'. His calculation of the minimum necessary expenditure per week for families of various size is based on the information obtained from the workhouses throughout England and Wales (Rowntree, pp.129-43). Thus, his poverty line is quite low-7s.for an adult per week and 21s.8d.for a family with three children. Besides, Rowntree's conclusion of the proportion of primary poverty (15.46 per cent of the wage-earning class and 9.91 per cent of the whole population) is incredibly low and meaningless due to his great emphasis on the secondary poverty (17.93 per cent of the whole population). Interestingly, as he points out, his poverty line does not include any kind of expenses like those for travel, entertainment, communication, health care and saving. Thus, his calculation of the total expenditure on all sundries for a couple with three children (clothing, fuel, light, household equipment, soap) as 4s.11d.per week is quite optimistic. In addition, Rowntree puts heavy emphasis on the role of individual actions for poverty-drink, betting, gambling, ignorant or careless housekeeping-and therefore other underlying factors, though recognized, are underrated (Rowntree, pp.152-79). Nevertheless, if the city of York is considered to be representative of Britain (p.25), it is not difficult to conclude from Rowntree's study of poverty that over 70 per cent of the population (including Ireland) were struggling against poverty in Britain. It is to be noticed that Rowntree, just like Booth, attached great importance to the small number of people receiving poor relief in the country (Rowntree, pp.420-6). Like Charles Booth, Rowntree deliberately underestimated the scale of poverty (27.84 per cent) but made an effort to draw attention to the people's squandering of their earnings on drink, gambling, betting and so on as well as the main causes of poverty like low wages, unemployment, death of the chief wage-earner, irregular work, large families, inability to work due to old age, illness or accident.

deaths from starvation (especially infant mortality) and certainly made it easy to escape from entering the workhouses. However, the drop in food prices was caused not by humanitarian purposes but by avarice on the part of the ambitious middle classes.

As a matter of fact, according to the common boom theory, there was a significant improvement in the living standards of the people both in the industrial districts and the countryside during the economic boom. Having made such a conclusion, it is quite unreasonable to suppose that the authorities encouraged cheap imports of foodstuffs into the country to relieve the working classes during the Great Depression by way of a sharp fall in food prices. The collapse of domestic agriculture and massive influx of people into the industrial towns could have further led to chaos on a much larger scale both in urban and rural areas if there had been a general atmosphere of welfare in the society during the boom. Thus, even the boom and depression theories are totally incompatible with each other.

Decline of British Supremacy

It is commonly argued that the Great Depression started the rapid decline of Britain in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, the apparent decline of Britain's military supremacy which manifested itself with

the Boer War between 1899 and 1902[115] was not caused by the economic depression or any other problems in British economy. The long exploitation and impoverishment of the masses by the upper and middle classes created a seriously growing degeneration within the society throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, the great majority of people were both physically and mentally unfit for the army by the late nineteenth century.[116] Nevertheless, since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, there had been no serious external threat to Britain and the authorities were largely preoccupied with the internal affairs like the Irish Question. The success of British imperialism during the 1880s and 1890s did not reveal the severe weakness of the army. Yet the humiliations suffered by the army in the South African (Boer) War after 1899 had the effect of creating a mood of deep pessimism and exposing all Britain's institutions to critical scrutiny. The long oppression of the working classes under harsh living and working conditions and the extraordinary enrichment of the minority-namely, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie-during the age of capitalism severely undermined the militarism of Britain. In other words, the incredibly great social inequality in the wealthiest nation of the world brought about the

[115] For the details of the Boer War see Warwick, *The South African War*, Pugh, pp.135-6, 155-6.
[116] For instance when the British people was for the first time medically examined en masse for military service in 1917, it included 10 per cent of young men totally unfit for service, 41.5 per cent (in London 48-9 per cent) with marked disabilities, 22 per cent with partial disabilities and only a little more than a third in satisfactory shape (Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire,* pp.142-3).

decline of the British Empire by the late-nineteenth century. The reforms and social welfare measures during the Edwardian period were far from being adequate to ameliorate the degeneration of British society. The gravity of this predicament clearly appeared during and after the First World War.

Eugenics Movement

It was not a coincidence that there was a fashionable interest in eugenics and studies of urban poverty in the 1880s and 1890s. The roots of eugenics-the 'science' of improving the national stock by breeding from the best elements, and preventing reproduction among the physically unfit and mentally backward, lay in late-nineteenth century Britain and developed in Social Darwinist circles. Though not widely supported in the country, the eugenics movement was very influential amongst the political and intellectual elite around the turn of the century. But unfortunately the poor working classes were again blamed for their moral failings and fertility in the society. The importance of stopping birth control among the 'fine middle classes' and eliminating the excess of the 'undesirable elements' in the society were offered as solutions for the production of good human offspring. Hence although less extreme eugenists left some scope for social reforms, education and

environmental change in general, eugenics became a semi-racist science in Britain.[117]

Contemporary Interest in Poverty

Meanwhile, there was a renewed interest in urban poverty by the studies of Charles Booth in London and B.Seebohm Rowntree in York during the 1890s. It is certain that like Henry Mayhew they underestimated the extent of poverty but nevertheless their studies of urban poverty illuminate the real situation of the masses around the turn of the century. The question of poverty and unemployment became a serious matter of concern amongst the educated middle classes during the late-Victorian period when poverty and squalor are supposed to have been reduced to an insignificant level in the society.

The revival of interest in the living conditions of the people by way of either eugenics or studies of poverty clearly demonstrates the fact that there was a growing concern over the degeneration of the British society in the late-Victorian period. Britain's vulnerability to the mass-

[117] Bonfield, Smith and Wrightson (eds.), *The World We Have Gained*, pp.337-54, Belchem, p.208, Pugh, 119-20, Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire,* pp.253-4. Charles Booth's solution for the elimination of poverty was a good example of this mentality among the British intelligentsia. He made a distinction between the more or less self-sufficient poor (classes C and D) and the hopeless poor (classes A and B). Booth came to the conclusion that the classes A and B threatened to pull down the classes above them – especially the classes C,D,E and even F and therefore shaking the foundations of the whole social structure. Thus, he suggested the eradication of class B through the foundation of compulsory labour camps, isolated from the rest of the society, where men and women would be taught skills and work discipline while their children were raised under strict supervision. If they failed in these special camps, they would be sent to the workhouses and their children would be taken from them. If they were successful, they would be allowed to return to the civilized society. See Booth, pp.9-24 (The Classes), pp.290-300(Eliminating Poverty).

conscript armies created by the European powers started to be realized at last by the end of the Victorian age.

PART II

THE REALITY

Agricultural Labourers

In the course of the nineteenth century the landless agricultural labourers had the lowest standards of living in the British society. The Victorian age was a period of time when the living conditions of the great majority of rural families rapidly deteriorated to a much severe extent. The farm labourers constituted by far the largest occupational group in the countryside and thus their living standards were highly representative of the majority of the rural population.[118]

The rural areas were the source of growing population but not the scene of a corresponding growth in social resources for the employment facilities. The creation of huge and mostly unskilled surplus labour was inevitable and certainly desirable for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Hence the agricultural population above all suffered from chronic insecurity, which made it an apparent source of cheap labour not only in the countryside but also in the industrial districts as a result of the progressive rural migration throughout the nineteenth century.[119]

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[118] See E.P. Thompson, pp. 213-34.

[119] This huge cheap labour surplus first manifested itself with the increasing number of street-sellers, costermongers, hawkers and pedlars in the urban areas of Britain. For example, see Mayhew, vol.1, pp.1-

The labour of the multitudes of workers in the countryside was at the command of anyone who bid for it and unless the labourer was hired by the year like the shepherds and carters, his life was dominated by constant insecurity with irregular employment and wages kept at the minimum level by the employers.[120] Even a very brief period of unemployment meant acute poverty and possible starvation for a worker and his family who had no alternative but migration, workhouse or theft. In actual fact, many of the rural people felt themselves sunk so far below the line of welfare that the effort to reach it seemed beyond their power. They were totally convinced that they could not achieve better standards of living in any way. Hence despair combined with helplessness led to the emergence of mass apathy among the rural families. This apathy sometimes took the form of fatalism like the faith in providence or the feeling of guilt due to the belief in personal, parental or even ancestral offences and sins.[121]

It is rather unfair to call the miserable cottage of a farm labourer 'home' in a real sense. The labourer, his wife and children were obliged to live in very bad

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7 (costermongers and street sellers in general), pp.7-64 (costermongers), pp.104-18 (Irish costermongers and street sellers), pp.120-7(hawkers and street sellers of poultry and game), pp.134-7(flower girls), pp.457-68 (Women street-sellers). The formation of a general and large category of casual labourers in the industrial society was another indicator of the large surplus labour. See for example Mayhew, vol.2, pp.205-233 (scavengers), pp.281-96(rubbish carters), pp.297-302 (casual labour in general), pp.357-75 (chimney sweepers), vol.3, pp. 272-92 (ballast heavers), pp. 292-311 (dock labourers), pp.364-8 (porters), Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.25-30 (lumpers), pp.39-48 (tailors and seamstresses), Razzell, Letters III, IV, IX, XVI, XVII, XIX, (dock labourers, tailors and unskilled labourers), pp. 91-101 (Metropolitan Districts).

[120] Razzell, Letter I, p.3, Letter III, p.8 (Rural Districts).

[121] Razzell, Letter I, pp.6-8 (Rural Districts).

insanitary conditions, leading a life of absolute privation. Most of them could only find bread, potato and water for meals. The cabins had hardly any ventilation at all and were very small to live in especially for many families with a number of children. Agricultural labourers were largely paid by the day not by the week and only for the number of days during which they were actually at work. The wages of the labourers averaged from 6s. to 10s. per week in different regions of Britain but employment was quite irregular not only because of the great surplus labour but moreover there was hardly any work in wet or unfavourable weather particularly during the winter. In addition, the decline of British agriculture accelerated with large-scale imports of foodstuffs from the 1870s onwards. Thus, even a miserably low income was not regularly possible for the male breadwinners of the rural families. Yet they had to pay rents for their miserable dwellings (1s.6d - 2s. per week).[122]

Despite the increase in the population of counties, the landlords demolished or left the old cottages to collapse instead of building new ones deliberately to get rid of the surplus labourers and reduce the costs by compelling the workers to stay in very crowded, unhealthy and wretched conditions.[123] The pressure upon the

[122] Razzell, Letter I, pp.4-5, Letter III, pp.9-11, Letter V, p.12, Letter VI, pp.12-5, Letter VII, p.16, Letter XV, pp.49-58, Letters XXIV, XXVI, XXVII, pp.60-6, Letter XXXIX, pp.69-70 (Rural Districts).
[123] Razzell, Letter V, p.12 (Rural Districts).

agricultural labourers was intensified by the New(1834) Poor Law. The Poor Law guardians were often landlords or their loyal officiers who resorted to all types of abuses in administering the law. The law tended to increase the amount of poor rate placing additional burden on the tenant farmers in local parishes (relief in the workhouse was more expensive than relief at home and thus at the beginning guardians were unwilling to build workhouses capable of housing all those who applied for relief especially in times of depression)[124]. The tenants definitely employed less number of labourers than required to minimize the costs by imposing the extra burden on the labourers working on the farms.[125]

One common way of abusing the New Poor Law by landlords or tenant farmers was to eject the labourer from his cottage and the parish before the expiration of five years which would give him a legal settlement, if not already possessed of one (Each parish or township was responsible for the maintenance of its own settled poor, the cost being met from a local rate). Having expelled the poor labourer from the parish and being relieved from the fear of his becoming a burden on them they could still offer him employment if his services or performance needed

[124] Razzell, Letter XLVII, p.83 (Rural Districts).
[125] Razzell, Letter XV, pp.49-59, Letter XXXIX, pp. 69-70, Letter XLI, pp.70-6 (Rural Districts).

but the labourer frequently had to walk very long distances.[126]

Most landowners did not allow any rise in the number of cottages upon their estates. They even demolished the existing ones or let the cottages decay without making any effort to prevent their collapse and when the wretched huts fell down in the end, new ones were not built. In this way, the landlords aimed to clear and keep off the masses of people from their estates. Of course, this was an effective way of forcing the rural people to migrate into the industrial districts.[127]

Another practice adopted by the landlords and tenant farmers to prevent the poor from getting relief was to promise the applicant a job on the farms. The promise was made by boards of guardians who were themselves landlords and farmers. However, the applicant was deceived for one or at most two days' work and then dismissed to wait starving until the next board day. In fact, the poor applicant was usually aware of the situation owing to past experiences but already unwilling to enter the workhouse especially with his family, he did not dare to reject the offer. The Poor Law guardians could easily label a labourer as an insurgent if he showed little resistance or reaction towards themselves. Such a bad reputation would be

[126] Razzell, Letter XLVII, p.84. (Rural Districts).
[127] Razzell, Letter XLVII, p.85 (Rural Districts).

disastrous for a labourer and his family closing all possibilities of survival in the empire.[128]

One of the most conspicuous abuses of the labour of British women and children was the agricultural 'gang labour' system prevalent especially in East Anglia and the Midlands. Children were employed by gang leaders to work for large farms pulling turnips or potatoes but their wages were often appropriated by the unscrupulous subcontractors. The 1867 Gangs Act, which prohibited the employment of children under eight in gangs and the 1876 Education Act, which made it illegal to employ children under ten in agricultural work, were not deterrent enough to end the system which is still in use to recruit unemployed adults from northern cities for farm work.[129]

The local authorities had total control over the destiny of the people in the rural districts to the extent that they packed the poor and needy off to the manufacturing districts if necessary. Women and widows with children were particularly preferred to be used as cheap and docile labour in the industrial areas.[130]

Labour of women and children was essential for the precarious subsistence of rural families. Tenant farmers preferred women and children, to whom they offered very low

[128] Razzell, Letter XLVII, pp.86-7 (Rural Districts).
[129] Belchem, p.119, Razzell, Letter I, p.8 (Rural Districts). Orphan children who were sent to the workhouse were taken out again by their 'relatives' in order to work them for miserable earnings on the fields. It is rather doubtful if these children were really taken out by their relatives or the men of the gang leaders. All the same, they became the victims of the gang labour system.
[130] Razzell, Letter XV, pp. 212-3 (Manufacturing Districts).

wages under severe discipline, to men on their farms as far as possible. Women, (particularly widows) and children were much more obedient and easy to be maltreated under harsh working conditions as cheap labour.[131] Furthermore, the possibility of organized peasant revolts was diminished to a large extent even though incendiarism or violence committed by the young men against the farmers due to low wages (2s.-3s. a week), ill-treatment, unemployment and poverty was occasionally encountered during the Victorian age.[132]

Married women frequently went to the fields to work but they had to leave their children at home. In many cases, the children were too young to be left alone, thus they were generally left in charge of a young girl hired for the purpose. The money paid to the nurse who was often herself a child was 8d. to 1s. per week and besides she was fed and lodged in the cottage.[133] Hard living conditions combined with the lack of elementary domestic comforts like adequate lighting, heating, furniture, space, cleanliness and food made the home quite unattractive for men. Wives were unable to change the conditions. They largely arrived home late from the fields, exhausted and anxious to sleep

[131] This remained true especially for the women both in the towns and rural areas throughout the Victorian age. Charles Booth emphasized that women were the rivals of the male workers because they worked to support fatherless children or to eke out their husbands' and children's earnings or even to earn a little pocket money to be spent on pleasure or dress (Booth, p.110). Actually, the majority of women's position in the society were already bad and inferior between 1707 and 1837 (See Colley, pp. 252-63) but certainly their living standards deteriorated during the Victorian age. See E.P. Thompson, pp. 414-7.
[132] Razzell, Letter XV, pp.52-5 (Rural Districts).
[133] Razzell, Letter III, pp.8-9 (Rural Districts).

at once. Actually, even when the woman did not work, she could do nothing to make the miserable cabin a livable place. Thus, the man went to the nearest public house where he spent most of the family's earnings for drinking.[134] Mass alcoholism and drunkenness among the men were the common characteristics of the British countryside. Not only the farm labourers but also other occupational groups like miners, fishermen and quarriers were generally addicted to drinking at public houses. Vast number of workers in the countryside had their midday meals at the public houses.[135]

The British authorities did nothing to prevent the mass consumption of alcohol and even encouraged the increasing number of public houses despite the emergence of the temperance movement in the late 1820s.[136] Alcoholism was one of the best ways of impoverishing and passivizing the people. Consequently, the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie enthusiastically encouraged the opening of public houses throughout the country.[137] Furthermore, there seems to have been a close but secret relationship between the publicans and the upper and middle classes, which still remains a mystery. Public houses operated like agencies for regaining the money of the poor working classes everywhere in Britain. It is absolutely certain that there was a very

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[134] Razzell, Letter III, pp.9-11, Letter XLVI, pp.78-83 (Rural Districts).
[135] Razzell, Letter XLI, p.72.
[136] For the details of the temperance movement in Victorian Britain, see Harrison, *Drink and The Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872*, Mayhew, vol.4, pp. XXİV-XXV, Dyos, vol. 1, pp.181-5.
[137] Harrison, pp. 37-63, Dyos, vol.1, pp.161-90, Daunton, pp.767-71.

influential authority over the publicans just like the power over the tenant farmers. It was this high authority rather than the publicans themselves who made use of the depressed psychology of the labourers. Publicans acted like the servants of this authority and were by no means independent business opportunists.[138]

Chastity was not a significant virtue in the countryside and it was not respected by the majority of women who were forced to live with men without marriage because there was not any other alternative except the workhouse for mere survival. Many young girls had to leave their miserable overcrowded homes as soon as they reached maturity. However, men were largely reluctant to marry and often managed to persuade young helpless girls to live with them without marriage. The lack of chastity was not regarded as a shame on a woman's character. Women were by no means tarnished on strict grounds of morality in the British countryside. The practice of cohabitation before marriage was prevalent. Many women were abandoned by the men they lived with but some others left themselves during this period of cohabitation. Different names of children of the same mother were quite usual and indicated the paternity of different children. Acute poverty and squalor in British countryside did not make possible the formation

[138] See Mayhew, vol. 3, pp.245-60 (Drunkenness in different trades).

of ideal households and women badly suffered the privations of rural life.[139]

Children had to contribute to the family income as soon as possible. Straw-plaiting and lace-making afforded employment not only to the adults of both sexes but to children of the most tender age from the age of three years old. As soon as children were able to earn even a few pence during the week by their endeavours, they were constantly obliged to work without being given any education to them. Introduction of machinery reduced the hand-made making of pillow lace and thus fostered poverty among the rural people.[140] When the village of Gibraltar at Aylesbury was hit by a cholera epidemic causing many deaths, the mortality was chiefly among the men of families. Orphan children were sent to the workhouse but after a week they were taken out again by their relatives who eked out their living with the earnings of the children's labour in the fields.[141] What is more, in the fen districts like the county of Hunts and the Isle of Ely, the practice of opium-eating had prevailed because rheumatic illnesses in the fen districts caused poor people to resort to opium as a means of alleviating their pains. However, it gradually spread among people in the whole country as a temporary stimulant

[139] Razzell, Letter XIII, pp.28-35, Letter XXVIII, pp.36-48, Letter XXIV, pp.60-1, Letter XXVI, pp. 62-5, Letter XXVII, p.66, Letter XXXIX, pp.69-70 (Rural Districts), Mayhew, vol.1, pp.412-4.
[140] Razzell, Letter XXXIV, pp.67-9 (Rural Districts), Burnett, pp.64-77 (Autobiography of Lucy Luck, straw-plait worker).
[141] It is rather probable that many children became the victims of gang-labour system. See Razzell, Letter I, p.8 (Rural Districts).

for enjoyment. Mothers frequently gave their children-even those of a few months old, opium to make them silent or sleep when they were hungry or were left home alone. Thus, death rate among children was high but nevertheless offset by the high birth rate in the countryside.[142]

When the family had nothing to use as fuel such as turf and furze and had to purchase wood or coal for heating, one universal system of stealing prevailed in the countryside. The stealing was generally done by children who were instructed by the parents for this purpose. Petty theft particularly for food was prevalent in the rural districts. [143] Labourers like those employed in the barns of their employers took home at night small quantities of wheat or barley in their pockets or in small baskets.[144]

For the great majority of rural population, mendicancy was regarded as a great shame and thus they preferred death to such dishonour. In addition, begging was not much possible in the countryside. Cambridge and Hertford where the moneyed classes were frequently encountered were the centers for the beggars in the countryside. Those who were involved in begging saw it like an occupation and deliberately did not buy any clothes because their wretched outward appearance provided a great help for begging, which surprisingly earned 10s. to 15s. a week to a beggar.

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[142] Razzell, Letter XLI, pp.70-2 (Rural Districts), Letter IX, pp.176-82 (Manufacturing Districts).
[143] Razzell, Letter XIII, pp.35-6 (Rural Districts).
[144] Razzell, Letter XLI, p.72 (Rural Districts).

Discrimination against Irish immigrants forced them into begging in English and Scottish countryside.[145] But nevertheless, the great majority of the rural masses even avoided entering the workhouses. There was nothing more repugnant and disgraceful than the idea of being buried as a pauper by the parish. Thus, the desire for decent interment was so strong among the working classes that many of them tried to leave deposits in the savings banks or in friendly societies for this purpose.[146]

Industrial Workers

Slop Trade

Mass poverty and misery in the industrial urban districts generally arose from the massive rise in the number of unskilled labourers who possessed neither craft skill nor trade union. The unskilled workers constituted by far the largest category in British society throughout the Victorian period. Their working conditions were characterized by low earnings, irregular work due to economic fluctuations or seasonality of employment, job insecurity and interchangeability of employment.[147] Above all the great increase in the number of surplus workers led to the spread of small trades namely the 'slop' or 'dishonourable' trade in Britain. The slop or dishonourable

[145] Razzell, Letter XLI, pp.73-6 (Rural Districts), Mayhew, vol.4, pp.399-403, 446.
[146] Razzell, Letter XV, pp.58-9 (Rural Districts). Such funerals cost 4 to 6 pounds but it was rather difficult for the working-class people to save such an amount of money in their lives.
[147] In the Victorian age, even a great number of workers who had some skill or a high degree of job specialization were regarded as unskilled labourers like those in textile and clothing industries-particularly women and children whose labour were inherently unskilled.

part of a trade paid wages much lower than those approved by societies or trade unions. The multiplication of small employers who were generally called 'slop masters' by the contemporaries increased the competition to such an extent that wages were reduced to starvation level in a very short period of time. During the Victorian age piece-work was the most common system of wage-payment in the slop trade. High competition caused the prices to move downwards-more prominently during the slumps. Consequently, slop masters cut down the already low piece-rates of workers to the minimum level and became responsible for the mass poverty and wretchedness among the large sections of working classes in the society.[148]

Factory production and powered technology gave greater control to employers over the pace and quality of work but the cost advantages of low capital requirements and overheads as well as cheap labour, plus the ability to contract production quickly in the face of depression allowed the slop trade to prevail in Britain throughout the Victorian age. The success of slop masters rested on the cheap labour of women and children in particular as well as cheap labour of Irishmen and Jews.[149]

The small workshop, which was in truth not a workshop at all but an ordinary room without any or adequate ventilation, accommodated excessive number of labourers

[148] Booth, pp.101-7, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.39-44.
[149] Booth, pp.108-13.

under the harsh discipline of the slop master who was also referred to as the 'garret' or 'chamber' master. Besides, working at home was quite common especially with the stitching trades-tailoring, millinery, seamstressing, glove-stitching, boot and shoe making and so on. Any work which could be done at home without elaborate equipment, which was repetitive and needed only simple and easily acquired skill was subject to exhausting human sweat. The absence of employers' direct control and supervision over workers did not the relieve the pressure upon them as a result of piece-work. Frequently, the lodging was provided by the employers as another room next to or close to the workplace, where labourers were crammed under bad sanitary conditions.[150]

London tailors and seamstresses, for instance, were quite representative of the whole workers in slop trade.[151] In most places the workers had to live together in one narrow and very crowded room. They had to endure long working hours-from seven in the morning to eleven or twelve at night including Sundays. Slop masters deducted the expenses of lodging, trimming, washing, light (candles) from their earnings. There were so many people to work at

[150] Mayhew, vol.2, pp.302-7 (Garret masters, strapping system), pp.307-20 (Home workers), vol.3, pp.221-31 (Garret masters), *Voices of the Poor*, pp.137-42 (Chamber mastering), Booth, pp.105-8, Razzell, Letter LXIII, pp.134-6 (Furniture workers), Letter LXV, pp.138-41 (Slop-cabinet trade) (Metropolitan Districts), Letter VIII, pp.192-4 (Small masters in Oldham) (Manufacturing Districts).
[151] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.39-48, Razzell, *Metropolitan Districts*, Letter IX (Stitchers), p.94, Letter XVI (Operative tailors), p.95, Letter XVII (Cheap clothes trade), pp.96-8, *Manufacturing Districts*, Letter VII (Tailors, slop trade and sweating system in Liverpool, pp.274-80.

the job that they accepted very low prices given to their work. Women, especially young women were the great sufferers. Young women were generally unwilling to enter domestic service and gave preference to slop work. However, the prices given to their works were not sufficient to support themselves. Consequently, prostitution and living with men without marriage were common among women workers. Many of the young girls were forced to prostitution in the streets in their lives because of the acute destitution. The age of women in sewing trades was below twenty in general because their bodies were made weak through undernourishment and overwork. Thus, those women who were frequently taken ill or whose performance was unsatisfactory were discarded by the employers to be replaced by younger and cheaper labour. Women who suddenly remained unemployed often resorted to prostitution particularly if they were alone and had children to look after.[152]

The slop masters frequently advertised for workers even though they did not need them because they wanted to see how many people were out of work and how cheap they could get their work done. They employed only those who were the cheapest and most efficient and dismissed those who were not. Since sickness was quite common among the women workers, employers wished to replace them as quickly

[152] Mayhew, vol.1, pp.412-4, vol.4, pp.27-8, 35-7, 210-69, 355-66, Acton, pp.161-86, 271-302.

as possible and this practice was prevalent in Britain during the Victorian age.[153]

Many young girls had to look after their parents who were totally dependent on their labour in most cases. Parents-especially widows who were unable to work due to old age or sickness-had to rely on the labour of their children to survive without entering the workhouse. Young unmarried daughters had strong affection for their parents in particular. A nineteen-year-old seamstress "struggled hard to keep her mother and father from the workhouse".[154] Another young woman of twenty years age who was making moleskin trousers was obliged to live with a tinman to look after herself and her mother. After becoming pregnant by him, she did not see him for six months and had to enter the slop trade. If her young man did not return and support her and the child she would have to go to the streets for prostitution like thousands of other young women in the slop work.[155]

On the other hand, death of husbands like the husband of the trousers maker suddenly caused wives to fall into destitution and poverty alone in the world. Her husband was a soap maker who earned £1 per week. After his death, her wife remained penniless with two small children and entered the slop work. But it was impossible for her to buy food

[153] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.39-48, 179-84.
[154] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.46-8.
[155] Mayhew, *The Unknown Mayhew*, pp.147-9.

and clothing with her miserable income. She applied to the parish for help but they wanted her to go into the workhouse. She refused because she did not want to be separated from her children. She was forced to prostitution to keep herself and children from starving. But she lost her children due to scarlatina and whooping cough.[156]

Women avoided entering workhouses as far as possible but nevertheless application to workhouses was seen among those who had nowhere to stay but streets even in freezing winter like the young girl Magdalen who had to enter the workhouse with her baby.[157] As soon as she went in the workhouse, she was separated from her baby and during her stay for two years she was allowed to see him once a month. Application to workhouses was particularly seen among women who were refused by their fathers into their houses and whose earnings were not sufficient to pay the rent even for a miserable lodging. Yet the conditions inside the workhouse were much worse and mortality particularly among children separated from their mothers was quite high. Thus, even those who left their children in workhouses endeavored to take them out as soon as possible.[158]

Occasionally, a family-husband, wife and children together-was involved in slop trade like the boot and shoe

[156] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.86-8.
[157] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.88-91.
[158] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor,* pp.91-100, Mayhew, vol.1, pp.43-6, 134-7, 457-68, vol.3, pp.388-430 (Statements of inmates in the workhouses).

makers of London.[159] Husband, wife and children worked together in the same small chamber under very bad working conditions and they had to pay a high rent for their miserable dwelling as well. Families exploited by chamber masters tried to find remedies to escape from abject poverty and misery. For instance emigration was the best alternative but it was often impossible for the whole family because of the expenses. Of course, it was unthinkable to leave wife and children behind for a husband whose labour and income were vital for them. Furthermore, the husband generally rejected to enter the workhouse even if the family was on the verge of starvation because of the compulsory separation of family members inside the workhouse. As a result, many poor families were employed in slop trade as cheap and efficient labour by chamber masters. In fact, the central figure in the whole system was the merchant-manufacturer who distributed raw materials to households or workshops and collected the semi-finished or finished products often through intermediaries known as slop, chamber or garret masters and arranged their sale. The slop masters were sometimes directly employed by the warehouses for the organization of the whole system. But on the whole they acted like intermediaries responsible for the production of goods with minimum costs. There was

[159] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.137-56.

certainly the presence of the high bourgeoisie behind the prevalence of the whole slop trade in Victorian Britain.[160]

Another way of furnishing cheap labour by small masters was the apprentice system. Apprentices were usually taken from among children at the workhouses, ragged schools and parishes. An employer got five pounds, three suits of clothes and a kit for each child as subsidies to employ them as apprentices. Children were not given any money even though an employer could earn quite well from their labour. Children were only provided with board, lodging and clothing by the employer but after some time the employers deliberately made the living conditions insufferable for the children. Violence towards the children (i.e. flogging and beating) was the most common method of the employers to force the children to run away and get new ones from the parish with money. Overwork(at least sixteen hours each day) caused children to become sickly and ineffective and thus giving the master a reason to get rid of them as soon as possible and get new children into apprenticeship.[161]

Employment of boys and girls to displace the work of men as far as possible at the less laborious parts of the trade was a common practice adopted by employers during the Victorian age.[162] This was an important factor for

[160] For example, see Mayhew, vol.2, pp.302-20, vol.3, pp.221-31.
[161] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.140-4, Mayhew, vol.2, pp.302-7.
[162] See for example, Razzell, *Manufacturing Districts*, Letters I, II (Birmingham), pp.285-9, Letter IX, pp.297-300, Letter XVII, XVIII, pp.310-3, Booth, pp.13-9, 47-8, Rowntree, pp.66-104, pp.170-1, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.127-56.

unemployment as well as low wages in the society but miserable earnings of children were essential for the mere survival of poor families in general. Slop trade increasingly made use of the child labour because state legislation restricting the hours of work or monitoring the conditions of children in mines and factories were totally ineffective in slop trade. What is more, small boys who were exploited by slop masters in their lives were motivated to become masters themselves in the future. Indeed very few of them could succeed in becoming employers themselves when they reached adulthood. In fact, the capital needed for a start was very small and a few pounds were sufficient to become a master.[163] A very small workshop, which was in truth an ordinary room, was enough for the beginning and he could employ cheap child or women labour without much difficulty.[164] Even though only a small section of the humble workers could manage to establish their 'independence' as small masters, the process led to the excessive multiplication of small employers throughout the Victorian age. Thus, the wholesale houses took advantage of the substantial competition in the society by reducing the prices of products to such a level that the small employers had to impose very severe working conditions on their employees in order to make satisfactory profits. The actual beneficiaries were the heads (owners)

[163] Booth, p.105.
[164] Booth, p.106.

of these wholesale houses and of course the worst sufferers were the workers sweated by the masters under very bad sanitary conditions. However, the living standards of the majority of slop masters were by no means high and indeed it is rather unreasonable to include them in the middle classes. Many of them lived very close to poverty line and went bankrupt during the slumps. Since they maintained very precarious lives themselves, they assumed a quite merciless attitude towards the workers in general. They did not want to lose their low domineering status in the society at all costs. The cost was the exploitation of cheap labour as far as possible.[165]

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was an influx of Jewish people into London and other industrial districts of Britain, which brought a new momentum to the exploitation of working classes in the society.[166] According to Charles Booth, the Jews were quite ambitious, hard-working and capable to be employed in many manufacturing industries as cheap and efficient labour.[167] They were particularly involved in slop trade and some of them were able to become small employers or slop masters. It seems that the employers largely preferred the Jews to the British because of their industrious, obedient and cheap labour but nevertheless their contribution to

[165] Booth, pp.100-10, Razzell, Letters, pp.192-211, 213-4, 295-7.
[166] Mayhew, vol.2, pp.119-32, Booth, pp.36-8, pp.134-46.
[167] Booth, pp.110-3.

unemployment and low wages, namely poverty among the working classes was a limited factor.[168]

Factory Workers

Large workshops and factories enabled greater division and specialization of labour, mass production, closer supervision and greater intensity of labour. They also created new skills and supervisiory hierarchies within the workforce as a consequence of progressive mechanization. However, throughout the Victorian age, most of the workers remained largely unskilled in status even at the factories and thus cheap labour of women and children were used particularly in the textile industries. A distinct category of semi-skilled workers or factory operatives was created by the end of the nineteenth century when technological and organizational changes in new industries like electrical, chemical and engineering industries made comprehensive education or training necessary for the unskilled recruits. Thus, a great majority of factory workers suffered from long hours and exhausting conditions and except a small highly skilled stratum of skilled workers who were also known as the aristocracy of labour, were poorly paid by the employers who took the advantage of the large surplus labour. Yet the conditions at the factories were certainly

[168] Booth, pp.136-56.

better than those in slop trade particularly with respect to sanitation.[169]

The Factory Acts of 1833, 1847, 1850, 1853, 1867 and 1874 which regulated the working conditions in factories almost only for women and children were somewhat effective or deterrent at least upon few comparatively large-scale and conspicuous factories and workshops. Yet even the ten-hour day for women and children employed at the factories and workshops was violated by most of the employers throughout the Victorian age. There was no restriction upon the working hours of adult men by any legislation but more important than this the acts allowed various loopholes for the employers especially with regard to the age of children. Inspection of the factories was both quite insufficient and open to abuse or connivance. Actually, the intense rivalry between the employers probably caused various intrigues including the denunciation of those less influential and privileged violators of the laws by the more powerful employers who wanted to increase their hegemony in the domestic and foreign markets.[170]

Miners

Among the unskilled workers, the miners represented the largest homogeneous group of industrial workers who had

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[169] Booth, pp.108-9, Razzell, *Manufacturing Districts*, Letters I, III, VI, IX, pp.165-82 (Manchester operatives), Letter IV, VI, IX, XII, XIV, XV, XVII, XVIII, pp.289-313 (Birmingham workers). See E.P. Thompson, pp. 189-212.

[170] For more information about the Factory Acts and Child Labour Laws, see Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State*, Price, pp.203-4, Belchem, pp.118-20, 216-9, 607-8.

the worst living and working conditions even though their wages were generally higher than the rest (15s.-25s. per week).[171] Colliers were by far the largest community in comparison with iron miners, tin and copper miners because as the first industrial nation, Britain led the world in coal production for the greater part of the nineteenth century and it was also the greatest coal-exporting nation.[172] But the living standards of the miners displayed the same patterns in general. Miners inhabited isolated and compact communities in villages near the mines. Thus, they developed a somewhat distinctive life style from the other working classes in the mining districts. The lives of miners were dominated by constant and grave precariousness which inevitably made them rough, insubordinate and carefree personalities in general. Most of their houses were uncomfortable-almost uninhabitable and absolutely dangerous. For example, the coal population in Staffordshire lived either in miserable detached cottages or in rows and clusters of houses sprinkled at random in the midst of rubbish waste or along the roads in overgrown villages.[173] Frequent landslides caused significant damages

[171] For contemporary information about the miners, see Razzell, *Rural Districts*, Letter XI, pp.28-30 (Miners of Cornwall), Letter XXVIII, pp.36-48 (Stone Quarriers of Swanage), *Manufacturing Districts*, Letter XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, XXII (Northumberland and Durham Coalfields), pp.215-39, Letter XXIII, XXIV (Colliers of Staffordshire), pp.239-47, Letter I, II, III, IV, VII, X (Mining in Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales), pp.253-69, Burnett, pp.99-115 (Autobiographies of coal miners-Thomas Jordan, B.L.Combes), pp.289-96 (Autobiography of a colliery manager, Emanuel Lovekin).
[172] Mayhew, vol.2, pp.169-71, Belchem, pp.134-5, Price, pp.305-8.
[173] Razzell, Letter XXIV, p.245 (Manufacturing Districts).

to the miserable dwellings of the miners who were not safe from danger even inside their homes.

Old technology continued to be used in most of the British mines even though there were some improvements for work in relatively safer conditions and at greater depths in the course of the nineteenth century: improvements in methods of laying out workings (with long-wall methods of working substituted for the older pillar-and-stall techniques, more efficient pumps, the substitution of cast iron for wooden tubs, mechanical ventilation fans, better underground transportation, steam-powered winding mechanisms and the safety lamp for increased illumination. Mechanization occurred mainly after 1900, first in the United States, where electricity and compressed air allowed the use of devices for cutting, undercutting and hauling.[174] Yet the owners of mines in Britain completely ignored the workers' safety and health in this quite toilsome and deadly occupation. As a result at least 1000 miners were killed annually in accidents during the Victorian period.[175]

The employment of women and boys under the age of ten below ground was legally prohibited by the Coal Mines Act of 1842 but the restriction of the hours of work for children between ten and thirteen in mines was also abandoned.[176] Although commonly seen as one of the great

[174] Belchem, pp.134-5.
[175] Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.94n.
[176] Belchem, p.119, E.P. Thompson, pp. 331-2.

examples of Victorian humanitarian factory reform, it was not effectively administered due to the absence of proper inspection. Around 30,000 children were employed in hard and exhausting jobs in the coal pits. Girls largely sorted and graded coal at the surface as 'pit-brow' girls but boys worked as 'trappers, hewers and putters' in hard underground work in the mines. Children were involved in the works which could be done more easily and quickly by small children rather than adults but were paid very low wages (2s.-5s. per week).

The mortality rate from epidemics, especially cholera was quite high in the mining districts. The cholera epidemic at the town of Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales, which particularly affected the poor labouring classes of the Welsh and the Irish populations, caused 1500 deaths out of a population of 40,000 in four months in 1850.[177] Again another cholera epidemic at the town of Staffordshire caused more than 700 deaths out of a population of 24,000 in the same year.[178] Death toll in epidemics per annum was much higher than the one in accidents. Very bad sanitary conditions of the mining districts were not alone responsible for the high death rate from epidemics but malnutrition and arduous overworking without adequate ventilation in mines made the miners' health weak and vulnerable to diseases. Death at an early age was prevalent

[177] Razzell, Letter VII, pp.259-60 (Manufacturing Districts).
[178] Razzell, Letter XXIV, pp.245-6 (Manufacturing Districts).

among the miners and thus the number of those who were involved in mining was certainly underestimated by contemporary assessments.[179]

Payment of wages in goods-the truck system-was quite widespread in the mining districts. The workers had to endure this system of dependence and exploitation under the pressure of necessity. The large surplus labour and the competition between mines combined with the lack of effective union organization and fear of being discharged and blacklisted by the employers forced the miners to bear the hardships and injustices of the job. Despite its filth and danger as well as its liability to unemployment and irregularity of payment, mining was considered as an attractive job for the unskilled multitudes of men because it offered comparatively higher earnings and more freedom (A mine in full production operated six days a week but on average four and a half days a week). Almost all of the miners were passionately fond of spending their leisure at public houses and thus wasted most of their wages on drinking, gambling and betting on various games. They largely neglected their families and lived daily without any future expectations. The majority of them were illiterate and by no means pious-never attended the church services. They did not send their children to school if there was any but instead wanted them to become miners like

[179] By the end of the Victorian period, the number of miners was between 1-1.5 million. See Foster, pp. 118-20, 234-7 for valuable information on coal industry and workers.

themselves in the future. Therefore, they tried to place them into work in mines as early as possible.

Mining was accepted to be a very prestigious job among the working classes because miners were supposed to have had regular and high wages under the protection of trade unionism which made it possible for them to have a strong bargaining power against the employers. Because of their isolation in their own districts from the rest of the society, the miners were seen as a closed group of people who were envied by the poor masses. However, the miners, who had miserably low living standards, were far from being successful in most of the scattered and ill-organized strikes. Even the Great Strike of 1844 in the collieries of Northumberland and Durham, which lasted for four months, was a great failure.[180] The miners were unable to resist the power of strikebreakers and troops as well as starvation even if they belonged to a trade union. The strikes were largely caused by extremely low wages as a result of constant wage-cuts and truck system. Even a small increase in wages by the employers after a strike was a great success in the eyes of the miners. Curiously enough, the passion for drinking and gambling among the miners was so strong that they were particularly determined to go on strike when they had no money to spend at the public houses. Yet the consumption of alcohol was widely

[180] Razzell, Letter XVIII, pp.216-8 (Manufacturing Districts).

encouraged among the miners as well. In the mining districts the beerhouses often became tommy shops. Miners were engaged by butties or small contractors who kept public houses where the men for whom they found employment were easily accustomed to spending a good part of their wages. This reached to such an extent that the majority of miners spent more than half of their wages at the public houses.

Domestic Servants

Throughout the nineteenth century and until the First World War domestic service constituted the largest single employment for English women and the second largest employment for all British people, male and female after agriculture.[181] Under this institution young men and women lived and worked in the households of non-relatives for a period before they married and set up their own homes, this relationship being based on a formal contract of employment for a set length of time. The growth of domestic service matched the growth of the middle classes who were its main employers. With the process of industrialization and urbanization from the eighteenth century onwards there was

[181] For the detailed information about domestic service in Britain, see Burnett, pp.135-74, pp.175-245 (Autobiographies of domestic servants: William Tayler, pp.175-85, William Lanceley, pp.185-93, Gabriel Tschumi, pp.193-202, John Robinson, pp.202-9, Edward Humphries, pp.209-14, Lillian Westall, pp.214-20, Lavinia Swainbank, pp.220-6, Winifred Foley, pp.226-34, Jean Rennie, pp.234-45), Mayhew, vol.2, pp.479-81, vol.4, pp.XXVİ-XXVİİ, pp.257-60, Rowntree, pp.105-6, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.96, 135, Belchem, pp.176-9, Golby, *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1859-1861), pp. 189-91, E.P. Thompson, p. 211.

a simultaneous differentiation of productive activities and the home. The latter came to be the area into which the bourgeoisie could retire from the hardships of business life and from which productive activities and those-particularly men who were not family members were excluded. Servitude in Britain assumed an increasingly feminine form to provide personal services to the middle or upper class families. The majority of domestic servants were young single women from the countryside-usually at the age of twelve or thereabouts, who had no previous experience or training. Perhaps with the exception of the governess, house steward and housekeeper of the aristocratic and wealthy employers who had vast servant retinues, low birth and lack of education became the characteristics of most Victorian domestic servants. Servants provided leisure, comfort and a barrier to the outside world for the upper and middle classes but above all servant-keeping was the crucial component of the British elite, which distinguished them from the rest of the society.[182]

Domestic service is generally regarded as a rather attractive and comfortable job for the unskilled men and women during the Victorian age. It provided board and lodging as well as a cash wage in a protected environment where a young girl or boy would be subject to the control and moral care of older servants and employers. Moreover,

[182] Rowntree, p.35. Rowntree made a distinction between the servant-keeping class as the upper class and the working-classes.

it is supposed that the skills learned in households enabled the servants to make advantageous marriages and use them in their later married lives. Over forty per cent of the female workforce in the Victorian period consisted of domestic servants despite the decline of domestic service in the late nineteenth century. However, this common optimistic view of Victorian domestic service does not reflect the truth at all. First of all, domestic service was a much more socially widespread phenomenon and a large number of domestic servants worked alone in quite modest middle-class households. Even at the extreme, young women worked in the homes of farmers or shop-keepers and engaged in agricultural or retailing tasks beside the houseworks. Yet the optimistic point of view puts the emphasis on the other extreme-the vast servant retinues of extremely wealthy households employing butlers, chefs, cooks, housemaids, footmen, gardeners, governesses and so on. The specialization and division of each task in such a household led to the increase in types of servants within a strict social hierarchy. Thus, the burden on each servant might not have been heavy and tiring in such a household. On the other hand the majority of domestic servants had to endure the drudgery of housework for very long hours everyday.[183]

[183] For example, Lillian Westall, as a kitchen-maid in Surrey, endured the hard work which 'needed the stamina of an ox' as she described, for about three months. See Burnett, pp.214-20.

Secondly and most significantly, the isolation and loss of freedom at an early age combined with the routine drudgery of housework caused grave depression among the domestic servants. Marriage and intercourse were not permitted during the course of servitude despite few exceptions. Servants had no entertainments and social activities like festivals and picnics enjoyed by factory workers in their isolated lives. As a matter of fact, most of the domestic servants hoped to leave domestic service as soon as they saved enough money to begin a new life in the outside world. But very low wages (2s.-3s. per week in general) made it never possible for the majority even to save a few pounds for years. Even those who could save a few pounds over the years grew old enough not to dare a new life outside the household. Many of them left the job with very little or no money in their pockets risking starvation for the sake of freedom.[184]

Thirdly, young girls in particular but also boys who entered domestic service were occasionally forced into sexual intercourse and even raped by the male members of the households. When a young woman became pregnant, she was immediately forced to abortion and often dismissed with very little money. Those who managed to resist the seducer were subjected to ill-treatment and forced to leave the households by themselves. Yet many young helpless women

[184] Razzell, Letter VII, pp.296-7 (Manufacturing Districts).

surrendered to their employers for a long time because they had nowhere but workhouse or streets (for prostitution) to go and hoped to save sufficient money and find a husband of moderate means. In the end, they were dismissed often without any savings to be replaced by younger domestic servants.[185]

In the late nineteenth century, domestic service began to decline in importance and the scarcity of applicants led to a revival of interest in poor children at the workhouses as a source of labour. In fact, throughout the Victorian age domestic service was not a popular job for the great majority of people who preferred even slop trade to domestic service. New employment opportunities for women in offices and shops as well as factories and workshops after the end of the Great Depression in 1896 helped women to evade domestic service to some extent. Yet in 1901, it still accounted for forty per cent of all employed women in Britain. Thus, the indifference towards domestic service in the last years of the century is not to be exaggerated and attributed to the rising living standards. Almost all of the women and men saw no difference between slavery and domestic service throughout the period. Parents were largely unwilling to place their children into domestic service because very miserable wages did not make any contribution to the family income. In addition, most

[185] See Burnett, pp.214-45, Acton, pp.161-86, 271-302 to understand the immense pressure upon the poor young women during the Victorian age.

parents expected their children to look after them when they were unable to work because of old age or sickness as well as periodic unemployment. Hence they wanted their children to learn some kind of skills as early as possible rather than busy themselves with houseworks in domestic service.[186]

Skilled Workers

The distinction between the skilled and the unskilled rested on apprenticeship in general. The nineteenth century skilled worker was one who began at an early age to pass his time in an organized craft, proceeding from apprentice to journeyman and perhaps to small master or artisan, establishing broad workplace authority and independence either on his own or his employer's premises. Of course the possession of skill was the basis for greater security of employment, more substantial levels of remuneration and higher status within the working class. Yet in the Victorian period the definition of skilled worker became more and more indistinct mainly because the type and degree of manual skill, knowledge and prudence possessed as well as other factors like gender, age, health became essential for achieving high status within the working class. Gender discrimination defined women's work as inherently unskilled and worst paid regardless of their skill and knowledge. Old

[186] See for instance Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.39-48.

age and sickness reduced even the status of the high skilled to the level of the unskilled or pauper in the society. Above all being skilled in many trades did not mean higher status within the working class like the masses involved in clothing and textile industries. The development of industrial capitalism and technological revolution reduced the status of many skilled workers to a very inferior level but on the other hand new necessities created a much smaller but more superior class of skilled workers who were known as the aristocracy of labour and close very much in status to the lower middle classes.

Handloom Weavers

The dramatic decline of handloom weavers, who constituted the largest manufacturing occupation in the early nineteenth century with about 500,000 skilled employees, exemplified the human cost of this process in the Victorian period. After the introduction of power looms on a wide scale around 1830, the weavers were compelled to accept very low prices offered by employers and therefore extremely impoverished to the level of starvation. Many of them worked as costermongers and dockers when they were not at work. Those who were lucky to get tasks had to endure fifteen-hour work for very low wages (5s. per week). Thousands of handloom weavers struggled to survive in

miserable conditions until the disappearance of the trade in the 1850s.[187]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the majority of skilled workers were still craftsmen in the old unrevolutionized handicrafts. Except a small minority, most of the skilled workers were badly impoverished throughout the Victorian age.[188] A cotton spinner who earned £2 10s. per week until he lost his job in 1837 due to the introduction of steam machinery could eventually become a beggar in the streets.[189] A fireman in steam vessels acting as an engineer earned 24s. - 30s. a week in 1850 while his income was £3 per week twenty years ago when he entered the job.[190] Besides, large numbers of skilled men were exposed to slop trade or tramping system even in the mid-Victorian period.

Tramping System

The tramping system in which skilled men on the tramp travelled from town to town seeking work at their trade among local craft societies or clubs was adopted by virtually every skilled trade in the early nineteenth century as a response to the chronic unemployment. The

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[187] See Mayhew, vol.4, p.447, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.33-8, Burnett, pp.78-89 (Diary of John Ward), E.P.Thompson, pp.269-313, Razzell, *Manufacturing Districts*, Letter VII, pp.183-5 (Cotton Spinners), Letter XI, pp.195-7 (Macclesfield Silk Trade), Letter XII, pp.197-205 (Middleton Silk Weavers), Letter XVII, pp.213-4 (Leeds woolen and flax industry), Foster, pp. 43-6, 78-80.
[188] Mayhew, vol.4, pp.401-15, pp.446-7.
[189] Razzell, *Metropolitan Districts*, Letter XXVII, pp.105-7.
[190] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, p.209.

presentation of a blank or certificate of membership at a society's house of call or trades union's relieving station entitled a skilled worker to some food, lodging and a small allowance for his one to three day stay in the town. If no work was available, the migratory craftsman travelled on to the next destination. Tramping was an extremely toilsome practice for the survival of a skilled worker. It was rather difficult for those who had families to look after because they had to seek employment alone and very likely their families had to enter the workhouse after they started tramping. Thus, tramping was largely resorted by either unmarried craftsmen or those who dared to leave their families behind at all costs to find a job as soon as possible. Besides, they often had to travel hundreds of miles in search of work for a long time and since their relief allowance was quite small, they often had to walk tens of miles and endure starvation during their journeys.[191]

In the 1870s and 1880s the tramping system started declining as most trades adopted static unemployment relief. Of course the expansion of surplus labourers in the urban districts of Britain made it meaningless even for the skilled to move within the country in search of employment.

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[191] For the tramping system in Victorian Britain, see Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, pp.30-50, Burnett, pp.283-9 (Charles Newnham, carpenter and builder), 289 – 96 (Emanuel Lovekin, navvy and colliery manager), 296 – 304 (Charles Shaw, potter), 304-12 (Thomas Wood, engineer), 312-20 (Henry Broadhurst, stonemason), 320-30 (George Sturt, wheelwright), 330-40 (Paul Evett, compositor), 340-7 (Arthur Gill, gold beater), 347-55 (T.R.Dennis, cabinet maker), Belchem, p.623.

Moreover, the mid-Victorian boom reduced the rate of unemployment especially for the skilled workers in the towns. Yet the abandonment of the practice by most trades was never an indication of a rise in the living standards of the skilled workers. After entering the workhouse tramping was the most undesirable solution for a skilled worker who suddenly lost his settled job and faced poverty and even starvation often together with his wife and children. In the late-Victorian period particularly during the Great Depression there was very little scarcity of skilled labour in the towns and thus almost no demand for the great majority of unemployed skilled or unskilled labourers throughout the country. Consequently, tramping rapidly lost its function in the majority of trades because there was no sense in making people travel within the country in vain. Furthermore, many craft societies were no longer able to cover the expenses of their tramping members largely because they were ill-organized to form sufficient funds especially during the periods of chronic unemployment and no doubt stoppages from the wages of their members were not properly used by the administrators.

Working-Class Societies

The societies played a major role in spreading alcoholism and gambling among their members. Their houses of call were often public houses and beer-houses where

their members were made used to spending most of their money. There was a close collaboration between the publicans, employers and administrators of societies. Payment of wages at the public houses on Saturday night was a very common practice throughout the Victorian age. Trade-union meetings were generally held at the public houses or places provided by the publicans.[192]

An 1834 Act gave friendly societies unequivocal legal recognition but many smaller societies never registered and thus accurate membership figures are impossible to calculate. By 1872 the total number of societies probably exceeded 32,000, with some four million members. By 1888 around eighty per cent of adult British males belonged to a society but only about ten per cent were trade unionists.[193] There were also building societies whose members were tradesmen and the better-paid working classes. Most of them operated as savings banks as well as lenders of mortgages and by 1900 building societies developed into a powerful force in the British financial market.[194]

Obviously, the earnings and savings of millions of working people, either skilled or unskilled were seen as a means of making fortunes by some people who established their control by way of poor relief organizations. Most of these relief institutions were founded for the purpose of

[192] Rowntree, pp.363-85, Booth, pp.224-6.
[193] Belchem, p.239.
[194] Belchem, pp.86-7.

making a lot of money rather than helping the members as an important part of the process of impoverishment and passivization of the masses throughout the Victorian age. Certainly, there were honest institutions which endeavoured for the benefit and welfare of their members but they were in the minority within the society. The rest including even some trade unions were under the influence of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The main reason for this degeneracy was the great desire and passion among the workers to become wealthy and powerful personalities in the society. Thus, even though the heads of the relief societies or unions were workers themselves, most of them, if not already at the beginning, were soon afterwards corrupted by the appeal of power and wealth. Yet it was not possible for them to abuse their office independently without the consent or support of the high authorities. The heads of these institutions were allowed to grow rich and become part of the bourgeoisie gradually but in return the societies were used to keep the masses under control by the authorities. The competition between the Liberals and the Conservatives also led to the use of relief and charity institutions as well as trade unions to attract the working class votes at the elections.[195]

[195] For detailed contemporary information about the working-class and relief institutions, see Booth, pp.212-66, Mayhew, vol.4, pp.XVİİ-XXXVİİİ, Rowntree, pp.383-426, Razzell, Letter XVI, pp.280-4, Letter XX, XXI, pp.313-23 (Manufacturing Districts). See also Foster, pp. 216-20, E.P. Thompson, pp. 418-24.

However, specific and concrete steps were never taken by the authorities-Liberal or Conservative-to provide relief for the destitute working classes during the Victorian age. Unemployment and old age were two main reasons for poverty and misery among the working classes-skilled or unskilled. The 1905 Unemployed Workmen's Act was the first serious legislative attempt on the issue of unemployment. Old-age pensions (five shillings a week at the age of seventy) were introduced in 1908. The Victorian era was absolutely a period of profound insecurity for the great majority of working people. Thus, they were enthusiastically interested in anything that offered them solutions to the nightmare of poverty and wretchedness. This made it possible and easier for the increasing number of societies, some of which offered only a decent funeral, to attract the working classes. As long as these working class institutions remained scattered and unorganized without any inclination of militancy and unification for radical actions, they were easily manipulated by the upper and middle classes. Otherwise harsh repressive measures were inevitably taken by the alliance of ruling authorities and employers against the uncontrollable working class movements like Chartism and the trade union movement in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Non-Workers

There were various smaller occupational groups among the working class masses including costermongers, street sellers and hawkers, lumpers, porters, seamen, scavengers, sweepers, cabmen, omnibus drivers, fishermen, dockers, street singers and performers and others whose lives were dominated by the hardships and privations of poverty throughout the Victorian age. There was also a large category of people who were distinguished from the working classes as 'non-workers'.[196] This category included on the one hand those who were unable to work because of old age, sickness, infirmity, insanity or physical injuries as well as imprisonment and on the other hand those classified as prostitutes, beggars, thieves and swindlers and vagrants. Even though there were many professionals among the prostitutes, beggars, thieves and swindlers who adopted these actions as their occupations and even taught or encouraged others to do the same, these classes were by no means homogeneous. Most of the people were forced or tempted under the pressure of acute poverty and starvation at the beginning and became professionals in time. Besides, many people temporarily resorted to prostitution, beggary or theft when they fell into severe destitution during the periods of chronic unemployment. Yet higher returns became so tempting that some of them were frequently involved in

[196] Mayhew, vol.4, p.2, 28. See also pp.210-73 (Prostitution), 273-393 (Thieves and Swindlers), 393-451 (Beggars).

these actions. Women and children were especially subjected to such actions sometimes under the pressure of the male heads of families but often by the sheer necessity of survival.

General Characteristics of Victorian Poverty

The lives of all these groups of people-skilled or unskilled workers as well as non-workers-were shaped by the impact of poverty and thus the general characteristics of Victorian poverty are revealed in a real sense.

Social Housing

Dreadful social housing provided for the common people in the towns and rural areas became one of the major evils of poverty in British society throughout the Victorian age.[197] The fundamental aim was to cram as many dwellings as possible on a specific plot for the accommodation of the greatest number of people at the lowest cost. Thus, rows of small houses built back to back and tenements, which were known as 'lodging houses' in general, became accommodation for the Victorian working classes in the urban areas. In the countryside peasants lived in very old and miserable cottages on the estates of the landlords. The lodging

[197] See Mayhew, vol.1, pp.47-51, 109-13, 251-8, 407-10, 423-4, 475-6, vol.2, pp.35-6, 164-5, vol.3, pp.312-8, vol.4, pp.215-7, 223-4, Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.3-11, 33-48, 214-29, Booth, pp.52-100, 320-6, Rowntree, pp.180-211, Razzell, Letter I, pp.3-8, Letter V,VI, pp.12-5, Letter XV, pp.50-8 (Rural Districts), Letter VIII, pp.192-4(Manufacturing Districts), Acton, pp.9-16, 227-33, 295-7, Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp.18-24, 275, Dyos, vol.1, pp.127-8, 333-53, Coleman, pp.156-8 (Earl of Derby, 1871), 173-4 (Mearns, 1883), Belchem, pp.579-81, Everitt. pp.191-8, E.P. Thompson, pp. 318-22.

houses in the towns were often owned by the middle class proprietors or the societies whose aim was to make profits even out of the rent of these lodging houses. The agricultural labourers in the countryside had to pay rent for the cottages which were deliberately left to collapse by the landlords. In the towns the worst class of houses often escaped payment of local rates. The absence of ventilation, drainage and pure water was combined with the narrow and excessively overcrowded atmosphere of the dwellings. The rents were high for the poor inhabitants who assigned at least thirty per cent of their wages if regularly employed. Even the rent paid for the low lodging houses, which were hotels where only a bed or a part of the floor in a room was rented for as low as two pence a night, was great because thirty people staying in a single room, for instance, paid a total of sixty pence (five shillings) a night.

The districts of the working class multitudes were separated from those of the wealthy classes in the metropolis and towns. The isolation of the masses from the upper and middle classes was not a new phenomenon but now this isolation took place in an entirely alien, insecure and rather ugly environment to which adaptation seemed impossible for them. Most of the people in the slums and poor quarters of the industrial towns were born and raised in the countryside. Thus, they longed for beauty and peace

of nature in the countryside even though enclosures and unemployment had made it impossible for them to live there. The disappearance of open public spaces used as playgrounds by the common people made the life in towns and villages quite tedious and unbearable especially for the men who were easily attracted by the spell of the public houses and beerhouses where gambling and betting as well as drinking wasted most of their low earnings.

Of course, terrible insanitary conditions badly affected the psychology of family members and their relations with each other. Since home was unattractive, the concept of family began to lose its meaning in the majority of households. Men often spent much of their time and money at the public houses and women who were unable to create sanitation at home and look after their children with the little remaining money from their husbands' income preferred any kind of employment to staying at home all day. The earnings of children were vital for the maintenance of the families most of which became too large with the increasing number of children. Narrowness of space plus grave poverty and misery caused many children to leave their homes at early ages to seek their fortune on their own.[198] The absence of deep affection between the members of a family as well as sheer helplessness, boredom and strong aspirations caused yong people to leave their homes. If the

[198] This was also an important factor for the early marriages and thus the rapid rise in the population. See Rowntree, pp.172-5, Razzell, Letter VII, pp.295-7 (Manufacturing Districts), Booth, pp.175-9.

earnings of a boy (or girl) were quite significant for the maintenance of a family, his abandonment would be a great blow and thus the parents did not wish him to leave as long as possible. Furthermore, they often expected their children to look after them when they were old and needy. Hence elder children, particularly sons who earned money were worthier than the newborn babies and small children particularly daughters, who were much more neglected and tormented under the pressure of poverty and squalor in the working-class households.

Pawning

Pawning played a very important part in the lives of the masses throughout the Victorian age.[199] By 1870 there were over 3000 pawnshops in England and Wales, and in 1902 it was estimated that there were six per capita pledges in London each week.[200] People pawned their belongings like clothes, blankets, sheets and pots to meet urgent cash needs, particularly to buy food and pay rents. Sudden dismissal, sickness or death of the male breadwinner as well as low wages, long intervals between paydays and chronic unemployment compelled the British working classes to apply to the pawnshops. However, high interest rates charged by pawnbrokers made the practice a good and profitable way of exploitation. People who took their

[199] For example, see Mayhew, vol.4, pp.374-6, Rowntree, pp.25, 88-9, Booth, pp.48-52, 202-4.
[200] Belchem, p.462.

belongings out of pawn lost an important part of their miserable wages and were soon forced to pawn them again. Thus, they eventually became dependent upon the mercy of not only their employers or landlords but also the pawnbrokers. There were many workers who paid the greater part of his wage to the pawnbroker and weekly pawned his belongings again to get the loan. Since wages were often received on Saturday nights, families took their goods out of pawn and pawned them again on Monday morning. Yet application to pawnshops was also a status indicator and recurrent recourse to the local pawnbroker was a sign of low social standing within the society. It was a shame for a family to resort to pawning regularly but nevertheless pawning was much more preferable for a needy family than entering the workhouse, begging or theft.

Pawning is to be accepted as an important part of the process in which the masses were impoverished by the upper and middle classes. Pawnbrokers just like the publicans acted as active agents of the constant pressure upon the incomes of the working classes. The number of pawnshops rapidly increased in the industrial towns where the new working classes were created throughout the Victorian period. In this respect, it would be a mistake to treat the pawnbrokers simply as small moneylenders or profiteers. They definitely functioned as an effective vehicle of the large-scale organization for cutting the earnings of the

working classes. Again, subordination of the people was reinforced by the practice of making them run into debt because common people were supposed to have been more passively reliant and devoted to their superiors when they were in debt to them.

Pawnshop is not to be regarded as a helpful working class institution which provided credit like a saving bank for the poor. On the contrary, it promoted poverty by making it indispensable in the lives of the ordinary people. Pawnbrokers were always well-informed about the financial situation of the workers in their own districts. They fixed the amount of credit and interest rates in accordance with the earnings of the working-class families within their regions. Actually, a slight rise in the wages led to an increase in the charges of pawnbrokers who either offered less money for the goods or demanded higher interest rates. In other words, there was a close collaboration between the employers and the pawnbrokers to such an extent that the working-class families were obliged to have recourse to the pawnshops by the deliberate actions of the employers. Low wages, irregular employment, long intervals between paydays, deductions, bad social housing and payment of wages at public houses were the major

factors for making the working classes remain in need of pawnbrokers.[201]

The Poor Law Act of 1834 made a very important impact upon the prevalence of pawnshops as alternatives to the workhouses. The prohibition of outdoor relief and deterrent nature of workhouses and poor law guardians dissuaded the masses from applying for relief in the first instance. Thus, they turned to the pawnbrokers rather than the guardians when they were grievously needy.

Education

Lack of proper education was a general characteristic among the common people of Britain. The ruling authorities consciously excluded the working classes from getting adequate education because they saw the poor education as a guarantee for the subjugation of the multitudes under the pressure of industrial capitalism. There was not a system of compulsory elementary education until 1891 and thus for the great majority of people education meant nothing but literacy throughout the Victorian age. This absence of education among the lower classes made it possible for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie to inculcate the so-called moral and religious principles of obedience, gratitude and

[201] See for instance Mayhew, vol.1, pp.457-68, vol.2, pp.205-50, 323-76, 465-505, vol.3, pp.272-315, 364-400.

esteem for the superiors and patriotic values for the empire and royalty.[202]

Ragged schools remained as the major educational institutions until the Act of 1891, which enabled the children to attend elementary schools free of charge, brought the movement to an end. These free schools operated like charity institutions whose teachers were volunteers from all classes to teach the children of the poor reading and writing together with the principles of morality and religion and a simple trade for their livelihood in the future. Yet without sufficient funds and supervision, the ragged schools were ineffective educational institutions. Children spent very short time at schools and as a result most of them got a very bad and insufficient education at the schools. Many children who were supposed to have been able to read and write were found to know only the letters of the alphabet and very few of them were able to read and write well an easy text. The conditions of the schools were miserably low because the burden of maintaining the schools fell largely on the local clergies and thus very often Bible was the only textbook used for teaching at the ragged schools.[203]

Lack of discipline at the ragged schools made theft and prostitution widespread among the children-particularly

[202] For example, see Mayhew, vol.1, pp.22-4, 35, 107-8, 462-74, 482-3, vol.2, pp.207-53, 295-300, vol.3, pp.368-98, Booth, pp.157-75, Rowntree, pp.385-410, Colley, pp. 26-30, 43-5, 239-41.
[203] Mayhew, *Voices of the Poor*, pp.11-22.

teenagers. There was a large class of general dealers who encouraged the children of the ragged schools for theft and prostitution. Many children organized by dealers met together and made up parties at the ragged schools and went to theft. Consequently, several children from the ragged schools had been in prison in their lives. Curiously, the ragged schools were founded for the purpose of educating poverty-stricken and potentially criminal children but on the contrary they became instruments for the spread of crime to such an extent that children were even trained to steal by means of the ragged schools.

Children were poorly taught skills to learn some sort of trade at ragged schools in general but even if they were highly good at performing a craft, they were never allowed to be capable of making their living as independent craftsmen but were only made the apprentices of the slop masters or slop home workers. Thus, most of the working-class families wanted their children to acquire skills by starting a job as early as possible. They did not much care about the education of their children under the pressure of poverty and unemployment. Those who sent their children to day and Sunday schools for the ragged wished their children to learn writing and reading as soon as possible.[204]

The introduction of compulsory education and laws supposedly restricting the labour of children did not

[204] Everitt, pp.161-83, Foster, pp. 215-6.

change the mentality of working-class families. The decline in child labour in the last decades of the nineteenth century was caused by the increase in cheap surplus labour and high unemployment after the Great Depression. Half-time work which meant the employment of children on alternate days or half a day spent at the workplaces and the rest in the free elementary schools or elsewhere increased the rate of literacy but not that of intelligence significantly among the masses.

Fear of Workhouse

The fear of workhouse remained a major working-class anxiety throughout the Victorian age. Indeed there was not much difference between the prisons and workhouses for the common people of Britain. After the introduction of the Poor Law Act of 1834, which made poor relief in the workhouse compulsory, conditions inside the workhouses were deliberately aggravated by the authorities to the extent that entering the workhouses became a nightmare in the eyes of the masses. Entry into the workhouse meant the separation of family members, segregation from the opposite sex, monotonous labour and dreary regimentation but above all enourmous humiliation and loss of freedom as well as the label of pauper within the society. In the Victorian period the policy of deterrence initiated formally by the 1834 Poor Low Act made a great emphasis upon the social

stigma of being a pauper, which came to be identified with especially those willing to enter the workhouses. Pauperism was accepted as a very serious and shameful offence caused by personal temptations, vices or faults. Hence it was true to treat the paupers as offenders who surrendered themselves to idleness as parasites of the society rather than as victims. Since they were saved from starving to death by the favour of administrators they deserved the lowest social status in the society.[205]

Of course, the real object behind this new prejudiced attitude towards the poor was not to prevent the spread of poverty caused by idleness and individual misdeeds. Almost all of the people who applied for relief became impoverished because of factors beyond their own control like unemployment and low wages. The authorities were well aware of this fact but wanted to make the masses believe or at least feel in time that poverty was caused by their own or their parents' offences. Very often strong fatalism was added to the feeling of guiltiness and thus the people grew indifferent to life itself in time.

In addition, the main reason for the negative attitude towards the poor was not the belief that the Old Poor Law, which was based on the payment of subsidies and the grant of outdoor relief from the local rates had become too expensive for ratepayers and had the effect of turning

[205] See E.P. Thompson, pp. 266-8.

workingmen into paupers. It is true that after the end of war with France in 1815, demobilization and rapid population growth plus enclosures caused chronic unemployment and low wages which subsequently led to widespread poverty particularly in the countryside. As a result there was a significant rise in the absolute amount paid in relief, which bothered the ratepayers to some extent. But the cost of relief was far from being a serious burden upon the wealthy landlords and businessmen who multiplied their riches throughout the nineteenth century. They were more worried about the rapid and excessive increase in the number of surplus labourers in the countryside. The decline of agriculture against the process of industrialization as well as enclosures substantially reduced the demand for the rapidly increasing number of surplus labourers on the large farms. They were no longer needed and wanted in the overpopulated rural areas. Again, they increasingly got out of control and even caused uprisings like the 1830 revolt in England. Hence the authorities came to realize that they had to accelerate the movement of people from the countryside to the industrial areas or abroad as soon as possible. Poor relief was seen as the most important factor for keeping the masses needlessly in the countryside. Some local squires particularly those who had introduced the Speenhamland System were supposedly blamed for 'demoralizing the poor by

their generous payments based on the current price of bread and family size'.[206] Consequently, the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834 gave great momentum to the migration of the starving masses from the countryside to the new industrial towns. Yet even this was not the actual reason behind the new approach to poverty.

The crucial question is why the New Poor Law remained in effect throughout the Victorian period if it was only intended for the purpose of compelling the people to move from the rural areas into the towns. The answer-that the law secured the constant mobility of the people in pursuit of employment within the country-would be quite simple. People could have been persuaded or encouraged to move by equitable and humanitarian methods. Poor relief-indoor or outdoor-was by no means an obstacle to seek employment for the common people of Britain. Britain was extremely wealthy to create sufficient funds to cope with the problems of poverty and unemployment as well as insecurity during the Victorian period but nothing significant was done or achieved.

Consequently, from the very beginning, the underlying cause of the new harsh attitude towards the poor was to make sure the passivity of the masses against the capitalist exploitation by breaking their resistance to poverty and destitution. The New Poor Law dramatically

[206] Pugh, p.56, Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, pp.82-3, Hammond, pp.55-8, Price, pp.167-70.

increased the impact of poverty upon the people who were deprived of relief outside the workhouses and stigmatized as paupers in the case of application for relief. Urban poverty and squalor were made the permanent features in the lives of the new working classes. The Old Poor Law,-especially the practice of outdoor relief-was seen as a very important hindrance for the spread of poverty in the urban areas. Thus, the repeal of the Old Poor Law and the introduction of the New Poor Law are to be accepted as part of the impoverishment process of the masses not only in the countryside, but also in the industrial districts. In this process the New Poor Law and the workhouses played a major role as the legislative mechanism of the authorities to settle firmly the conviction in the Kingdom that pauperism was a great offence, a matter of dishonour and shame to be avoided at all costs by anyone in the society.

The fear of being a pauper in a workhouse became widespread among the working classes by the middle of the nineteenth century. This phenomenon inevitably led to the extreme fear of unemployment or dismissal which manifested itself as the passive, unconditional obedience to the tough regulations of the employers during the Victorian period. Poverty became a person's own affair to be overcome by his own efforts, otherwise the social stigma of pauperism in a workhouse would be his ultimate punishment by the society.

The policy of making poverty an individual problem and responsibility started a process in which many people came to believe that as long as they were able to live on without being 'paupers' at the workhouses they were not poor at all and would die as the honourable citizens of the Kingdom. Thus, even if they were on the verge of acute starvation they did not want to disclose their plight as far as possible in the society. Social stigma of pauperism was identified with the dependence on poor relief and some people preferred death to getting relief to such an extent that they even refused any kind of philanthropic or charitable endowments outside the workhouses as a great demonstration of indignity.

The percentage of people receiving poor relief dramatically fell throughout the Victorian period. In England and Wales only 2.5 per cent of the total population received poor relief in January 1901.[207] Most of the people in the workhouses were mental and normal patients, old and infirm people and children rather than healthy adults. Besides, there were vagrants who were admitted to special wards for only one night except those who came on Saturday night. The vagrant wards were one of the worst features of a workhouse and the method of dealing with the vagrants had no deterrent effect. Yet the small number of vagrants were

[207] Rowntree, pp.425-6.

not a serious trouble for the authorities at all.[208] The principal aim of discouraging the masses from poor relief was successfully achieved in a brief period of time after the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834.

Indulgence of Drink, Betting and Gambling

The indulgence of drink particularly at the public houses was a common characteristic of the working classes in the Victorian period. Drink was often accompanied with betting and gambling through which the greater part of the weekly income was squandered. Interestingly, many women and children were increasingly addicted to spending their money at the public houses. Of course, low living standards and heavy working conditions created a very convenient atmosphere for the spread of drink and gambling among the people who were unable to endure the monotony and cheerlessness of life especially in the towns. But the increasing consumption of alcohol and the popularity of gambling and betting were not spontaneous developments in the society, which were chiefly responsible for poverty and misery among the common people.

The public houses were the crucial instruments for making the multitudes of poor and dependent upon the mercy of the upper and middle classes by getting their earnings back in a very short time. Payment of wages at the public

[208] Mayhew, vol.3, pp.368-400, Rowntree, pp.433-4.

houses on Saturday nights was quite common. Besides, in the lodging houses and inns, many workers were seduced to spend their money on drinking and gambling. In the Victorian age, the public houses became the major working-class institutions where the workers met together and felt themselves free and at ease after hard and tiring work. Even the activities of many trade unions and societies were directed from the public houses. Obviously, publicans and innkeepers acted as the servants or officials of the high authorities who were the real beneficiaries of the flow of money from the working classes.[209]

Meanwhile, this general passion for drink and gambling among the working classes strengthened the conviction that poverty was the result of personal misdemeanours. The enforcement of the New Poor Law was justified on the grounds that it would punish those who wasted their money and shamelessly demanded relief. Furthermore, it was argued that widespread addiction to alcohol, gambling and betting among the lower classes was a good demonstration of the fact that there was not poverty and deprivation caused by factors beyond the people's power like low wages and unemployment. Thus, the abolition of the Old Poor Law, which allowed outdoor relief, was widely adopted without serious criticism by the upper and middle class intellectuals.

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[209] Booth, pp.187-202, Rowntree, pp.175-9, 363-85, Razzell, Letter I, pp.285-7, Letter VII, pp.295-7, Letter XX, pp.313-20 (Manufacturing Districts), Mayhew, vol.3, pp.245-60, Foster, pp. 133-6, 218.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian age (1837-1901) was unquestionably the heyday of Britain despite the apparent symptoms of decline in the last decades of the nineteenth century like the Anglo-Boer Wars, which were fought to prevent the independence from Britain of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, two independent Boer republics in South Africa. This was the period when the great accumulation of wealth in Britain, which was the birthplace of industrial capitalism, reached to its climax and made the nation more prosperous than ever before. Certainly, the formation of a distinct class of wealthy businessmen who can generally be classified as the middle classes or the bourgeoisie was not unusual and this class became much more dominant in the Victorian age. The dividing line between the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie which was still quite prominent before the Great Reform Act of 1832 became more and more indistinct throughout the Victorian age.

What was unusual was the existence of large-scale poverty and misery among the masses in this period of huge affluence and abundance.[210] The successive events beginning with the loss of American colonies in 1783, the French Revolution in 1789, the Anglo-French War between 1793 and 1815, the Irish Home Rule movement to repeal the Irish Act

[210] At least seventy to seventy-five per cent of the population remained poor during the Victorian age.

of Union in 1800, the Owenite movement between 1815 and 1845, the 1830 Agricultural Revolt, the Chartist movement between 1837 and 1850, the emergence of socialism in the 1840s had already created strong fear of revolution among the ruling nobility and the moneyed middle classes.

However, a full co-operation between the landed nobility and the middle-class entrepreneurs against the working-class masses started in the Victorian age particularly after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846.[211] Previously, the British aristocracy felt powerful and confident enough to hold the balance of power both against the rising middle classes and the working people in the rural and urban areas. The newly emerged bourgeoisie posed no threat to the authority of the ruling aristocracy and in fact, they submissively collaborated for the manipulation of the common people in the capitalist order. Certainly, the repercussions of the French Revolution and the war with France prevented any kind of conflict between the new class of businessmen and the landed nobility in the early phase of industrial capitalism. Besides, the middle classes were not powerful enough to challenge the highly privileged status of the ruling elite and therefore had to remain totally dependent upon the favour of the nobility to survive in the new industrial society.

[211] See Colley, pp. 176-207 for information about the elite before the Victorion age.

The situation began to change after the end of the war in 1815 and the immediate introduction of the Corn Laws in the same year. The increasing influence of the bourgeoisie manifested itself with the Great Reform Act of 1832, the foundation of the Anti-Corn Law League in 1838 and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. There was certainly a serious conflict between the upper and middle classes in Britain between 1815 and 1846 but this was by no means a revolutionary threat against the British authority. The middle classes were aware of the fact that a revolutionary working-class movement would be a disaster for themselves as well and thus had to be avoided at all costs. They never attempted to incite the masses against the ruling authority if a small minority responsible for the agitation in the society like Robert Owen, Feargus O'Connor and Daniel O'Connell were excluded. Even the relations between the landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie did not suffer any harm due to this anti-aristocratic reaction in favour of free trade. Yet the timing of this mild reaction by the middle classes was perfect and the ruling authorities did not want to run the risk of rejecting the demands of the middle-class businessmen in a period of crisis. They needed the full support and loyalty of the middle classes in order to overcome the 'revolutionary crisis' in the society. Curiously enough, after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 Chartism collapsed and the great boom started in Britain

but nevertheless this does not mean that if the repeal had not occurred, Chartism would not have failed or the boom would not have happened. This process was inevitable but certainly the repeal removed the last important and somewhat symbolical obstacle for the rise of the middle classes.

The full compromise between the landed nobility and the bourgeoisie was not propitious for the masses of working classes in the urban and rural districts of Britain. The Poor Law Act of 1834 was the crucial step to make poverty an effective weapon against the common people of the nation. The gulf between the rich and powerful, namely the upper and middle classes on the one hand and the poor and weak, namely the working classes on the other hand rapidly began to widen in the Victorian age. However, this was not a spontaneous or natural development of large-scale industrial capitalism. The living standards of the great majority of common people remained lamentably low but on the other hand the living standards of a small minority - about twenty to twenty-five per cent of the population- dramatically improved throughout the Victorian age. Yet there was not any economic reason for widespread poverty and squalor in this period of enormous prosperity.

The New Poor Law in 1834 was definitely a landmark which signalled the creation of an entirely new concept of poverty in Britain. The ruling aristocracy and the

bourgeoisie began to use poverty as an effective means of passivizing and exploiting the masses in the society. As long as the people lived near the breadline, they were considered to be far from being revolutionary and easy to be manipulated by their superiors. Thus, a deliberate policy of impoverishing the common people was adopted and successfully administered by the collaboration of the upper and middle classes during the Victorian age. Neither the great boom which created plentiful employment in the industrial towns especially for the multitudes of unemployed migrants from the countryside nor the Great Depression which caused a sharp fall in prices brought about a significant improvement in the living standards of the working classes. On the contrary, the living conditions of the working-class masses deteriorated during the Victorian age when poverty was institutionalized and made inseparable from the lives of the ordinary people.

Of course, the impact or pressure of this artificially created poverty upon the lives of the common people changed according to various factors like gender, age, health, skill, family circle, education, personal prudence and good fortune. Unfortunately, the last one played a minor role in the lives of the masses. Women and children whose labour were inherently unskilled were among the greatest sufferers from acute destitution. They were forced to work with very low wages but often under hard and insanitary conditions if

there was any employment at all. Thus, many of them were involved in prostitution, theft and mendicancy which were prevalent during the Victorian age. Old age was a terrible nightmare for the working classes who were deprived of a system of national insurance or social security but not only old people who were unable to work or find employment were likely to face starvation or workhouse but also those who were taken ill even for a short time could lose his job and become needy all of a sudden. Large surplus labour enabled the employers to replace those whose performance was unsatisfactory with the new workers at any time. Yet, as we have seen, it was not possible to maintain good health for the great majority of people during the Victorian age.

Possession of some skill was certainly an advantage to be employed on a more regular basis and certainly with better wages but the status of being a skilled worker did not significantly increase the endurance of an individual against poverty during the Victorian age even though there were exceptions. However, the burden upon the unskilled multitudes of people-especially the newcomers from the countryside-was much heavier than the rest because they were much more susceptible to unemployment or hard and exhausting work which required great physical and mental stamina rather than skill in such industries as building, mining, iron and steel or professions like porterage,

scavengery, street hawking, domestic service or long and routine factory work.

The low living standards among the common people of Britain during the Victorian age are demonstrated with the prevalence of early marriages and extramarital affairs because the general feeling of unhappiness and unrest caused by the pressure of poverty motivated the people to involve in love affairs at early ages. This was responsible not only for the rapid increase in the population during the Victorian age but also the spread of poverty and misery among the working-class people in a short time. In general, the husband's income was not sufficient to cover the expenses of the family, therefore the earnings of wife and children were indispensable to avoid starvation or workhouse. In a period when there was not even an adequate system of elementary education, literacy was perhaps the only and most desirable virtue acquired by the children of the working classes if possible in such an atmosphere of deprivation and poverty.

Consequently, harsh living conditions together with the difficulty of adaptation to an entirely alien environment without adequate public amenities and comfortable households facilitated the spread of alcoholism, betting and gambling among the working classes not only in the industrial towns but also interestingly in the countryside where there was a rapid and perpetual

decline in the population. The British countryside had already lost its old pastoral appeal for many people by the beginning of the Victorian age but during the Victorian age life in the countryside became unbearably difficult for the common people of Britain. Yet moreover, the rapidly increasing popularity of drink, gambling and betting among the working-class multitudes, which was an important part of the deliberate policy of impoverishment and passivization followed by the upper and middle classes, caused the prevalence of imprudence in the society.

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