LEARNING AND LIVING 1790 - 1960

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A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement

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Volume 9

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1961

This edition first published in 2007 by
Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Transferred to Digital Printing 2007

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN10: 0-415-41978-6 (Set)
ISBN10: 0-415-43237-5 (Volume 9)

ISBN13: 978-0-415-41978-9 (Set)
ISBN13: 978-0-415-43237-5 (Volume 9)

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

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LONDON

First published 1961
by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd
Broadway House, 68–74 Carter Lane
London, E.C.4

Printed in Great Britain
by Western Printing Services Ltd., Bristol

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Preface

THIS book has been ten years in the making. During that time my chief debt has been to the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies in the University of Leeds for the opportunity to undertake the research and gain the practical experience necessary for such a study. Especially am I grateful to S. G. Raybould, Professor of Adult Education and Head of the Department, for his encouragement and help at all stages of the work. To H. L. Beales I am greatly indebted for the original idea of a social history of adult education, and for many stimulating suggestions of approach and presentation. Colleagues and friends in the movement have helped me greatly, particularly many of the older members of the Workers' Educational Association and G. F. Sedgwick, District Secretary of the Yorkshire (North) District, W.E.A.

In the collection of material from widely scattered sources I wish to express my thanks to the Librarians of the Public Libraries of Leeds, York, Bradford, Halifax, Scarborough, and Middlesbrough; to the Librarian of the Leeds Library; to the staff of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; to the Librarian of the Goldsmiths' Library, University of London; to the Librarian of the Bradford Mechanics' Institute; to the Principal of the Leeds College of Technology; to the Director of the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York; and to members of the York Society of Friends.

The writing of the book was begun during the academic year 1957–8 at the University of Wisconsin, U.S.A., where I derived much help from discussion with colleagues, notably Merle Curti and David A. Shannon of the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, and Lawrence A. Cremin of Teachers' College, Columbia University. The MS was read, in whole or in part, by the following friends, to whom I am grateful for comments and

suggestions: Asa Briggs, J. M. Cameron, Richard Hoggart, N. A. Jepson, Harold Perkin, S. G. Raybould, and Roy Shaw.

For help with the illustrations I am indebted to Harold Nichols and the Leeds City Reference Library, and also to E. P. Thompson and Mrs. G. H. Thompson. The portrait of Samuel Smiles is reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Parts of the book have previously appeared in print in other forms, and I am grateful to *Victorian Studies*, the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, the Thoresby Society, and Leeds Branch, W.E.A., for permission to make use of this material.

J.F.C.H.

Introduction

THE opening sentence of the now classic report on *Oxford and Working-class Education* (1908) began: 'The story of adult education in the nineteenth century has still to be written.' Forty years later this was still substantially true, despite the valuable historical survey in the 1919 *Final Report* of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, and A. E. Dobbs' brilliant but truncated pioneer study, *Education and Social Movements, 1700–1850* (1919). There is still no standard history of the English adult education movement; but since 1950 a number of excellent studies of several branches of it have been made, and the annual supplements to *A Select Bibliography of Adult Education in Great Britain*, ed. Thomas Kelly (1952), published by the National Institute of Adult Education, show a steady flow of historical monographs and articles. Most of these studies are institutional or biographical in their approach. They fill in gaps in the narrative as it has been hitherto recorded, and in the main substantiate the traditional interpretations of the movement. From the detail thus amassed, it should be possible in due course to compile an authoritative general history of the institutions and personalities of English adult education.

It is not the object of this work to attempt that task. Valuable as it would undoubtedly be, there is a grave danger that the essential spirit of the adult education movement would largely elude any attempt to define it in such terms. The need is for a very much wider approach to the history of adult learning, an approach primarily in terms of social purpose rather than of institutional form. The object of this book is to uncover the dynamics of successive phases of the movement. Its theme is unfolded through the conception the participants had of their own work, in the conviction that, as the late G. M. Young put it, the essential matter of history is not so much what happened

as what people felt about it when it was happening. To strive to hear the people of a past age talking must be the supreme aim of the historian. The history of adult education has to be examined through the ideas and attitudes of those taking part in it, and to seek to show the social origin and development of those ideas and attitudes is a main purpose of this study. It is primarily a social history of some aspects of popular thought and intellectual interests as expressed in that variety of institutions and learning situations which is known collectively as the adult education movement.

An approach based on social attitudes presents certain problems when combined with the chronological division of material which must be the backbone of any historical study. Institutions and concepts appear in several different chapters, and are not always treated exhaustively. Additional material and refinements of an institutional nature will be found in the sources referred to in the footnotes and bibliographical note. Since the pattern of social change is basic to this interpretation of adult education, it is not sufficient to throw in a few scraps of economic and social history from time to time as 'background'; the pattern of social endeavour is so closely interwoven with adult educational activities and aspirations as to make them unintelligible by themselves. Accordingly several sections of the book are devoted to an exposition of contemporary aspects of social policy and social change.

The limits of the study in time, place, and content arise out of the nature of the approach and the material available. Undoubtedly the idea of adult learning can be traced very far back in history; and whether the starting point is taken as the Ancient Greeks or the Medieval Christian Church or Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* is mainly a matter of personal choice. The emergence of the English adult education movement, in the sense that contemporaries were first consciously aware of it as such, can be dated more exactly. In the 1790s the movement in its recognizable modern form appeared as one of the functions of the new industrial society. There had been lectures for adults, schools for adult literacy, and mutual improvement societies throughout the eighteenth century and earlier. But when J. W. Hudson published the first *History of Adult Education* in 1851 he began his story at the end of the eighteenth century. The promotion by the

Corresponding Societies and the Societies for Constitutional Information of groups to study the works of Thomas Paine in 1792, and the establishment of the first specifically Adult School at Nottingham in 1798, heralded a new development. The two institutions symbolized the ambivalent role of adult learning as alternatively a movement of protest and a means to promote social acceptance and harmony. At first the institutions for adult learning were weak, but the movement gathered strength as industrialism got under way, bringing in its train a host of problems arising out of social dislocation and readjustment. The effective beginning of the adult education movement was in the attempts to grapple with these problems, at first tentatively, spasmodically, and on a small scale, but then more elaborately and with permanent institutions. The chapters which follow are designed to bring out the relative importance of different factors involved in this process.

Ideally a study of this kind should draw upon material from all parts of England and Wales, but this is not at present possible. Adequate monographic work does not yet exist, and without such a basis, a history purporting to cover the whole of the country could hardly avoid the pitfalls of eclecticism. The material has therefore been drawn from one selected area, Yorkshire, 'the epitome of England' as Fuller called it, and the largest English county. Within its boundaries were wide varieties of geography and economic and social conditions: the cities and smoke of the industrial West Riding, the old market towns and villages of the Plain of York, the remote homesteads of the Dales. The south and west of the county was a cradle of the industrial revolution; the north and east shared in the prosperity of the hey-day of Victorian agriculture. J. G. Symons, like other observers, commented in 1839 (*Arts and Artisans at Home and Abroad*) on the independence of thought among the artisans of the North, while Mrs. Gaskell in her *Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857) noted 'the peculiar force of character which the Yorkshiremen display'. In such fertile soil every major development in the adult education movement during the last 170 years flourished. As a laboratory of nineteenth century social change and experiment it could scarcely be bettered.

The content of the book has been determined by the evidence of the material available. No attempt is made to start with an

a priori definition of adult education and then discover what in the past seems to coincide with it. Better is it to include the many forms of social, political, cultural, and religious activity of adults which had some educational intent, and accept within the terms of reference all such activities as interested and knowledgeable people at the time were accustomed to think of as adult education. In general this amounts to John Walker Powell's 'planned and purposive adult learning occasions regularly provided under some organised scheme of guidance' (*Learning Comes of Age*, 1956). A distinction has to be made between the education of adults and adult education. Under the former could be included almost anything which influences the adult mind and a vast number of social activities; whereas in adult education are included only those activities which have some purposefully educational intent. For most adult learning, however, the criterion must be the process itself, rather than its results.

The central theme which runs throughout the book is the growth of democracy in England. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have experienced a continual widening of the areas of democratic participation, an unfolding of new opportunities—political, social, and cultural—for an increasing number of the people. Education has contributed largely to this, and the adult education movement has been continually on the frontiers. At the beginning of the period England was a pre-industrial, aristocratic state; at the end she is striding forward in the new age of mass democracy. The traditions of a movement which has helped to bring about changes of this magnitude are obviously rich and varied. Four aspects, however, stand out from the rest. First, adult learning has been the outcome of a movement, largely voluntary, not just a series of organizations. Second, it has been in the main regarded as a movement for freedom and liberation, both personal (in the sense of widening horizons) and social. Third, it has been an earnest, serious affair; there has been comparatively little of the 'learning for leisure' approach and a great deal of emphasis on striving and struggle by people who had very little leisure. Lastly, adult education has reached out to a minority of the people only; it has been, in several senses, an elite movement. The primary equipment required to analyse the historical dynamics of this great movement and set them in the perspective of their times is that of the social historian; but

without the sympathy and understanding which comes from daily involvement in the movement the task is made immeasurably more difficult. For this added blessing I am profoundly grateful.

FOOTNOTES

The place of publication in all cases is London, except where shown otherwise.

The following abbreviations have been used:

A.R.	Annual Report
M.I.	Mechanics' Institute
Y.U.M.I.	Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes
Trans. N.A.P.S.S.	Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science
Dom. Miss.	Leeds Unitarian Domestic Mission Society
N.A.S.U.	National Adult School Union

PART ONE

Learning and Living in the First Industrial Society

I

The Ground to be Cultivated

To any tutor in the field the chastening importance of environmental factors in adult education is soon brought home. He soon learns the extent to which the horizons of his work are determined by the social and educational backgrounds of his students. Reluctance to recognize these limitations has been a recurrent cause of failure throughout the history of the movement, and inability or unwillingness to assess accurately the significance of changes in these areas has led to the decay of more than one institution. In the early days of adult education its opportunities and limitations, in fact its very nature, were determined by the all-compelling conditions of life in the new industrial society which was emerging. The length of the working day, the level of wages, the homes of the people are more than mere 'background' to the operations of educational institutions. They are the very stuff of the adult education movement. Hence it is necessary at the beginning to examine the physical conditions of life of those people who constituted a potential clientele of adult education and to make some assessment of their educability.

Although leisure-time lectures and classes for adults on scientific, mathematical, and religious subjects had been organized in the larger towns of England in the eighteenth century, such activities were not normally what contemporaries had in

mind when they spoke of adult education.[1] Nor were the Philosophical and Literary Societies which had sprung up in the Northern and Midland towns at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries included within that term. The Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, founded in 1819, might or might not have been '. . . a little torch of culture, burning in the midst of the darkness of provincial philistinism';[2] but when adult education was required in Leeds it was considered necessary by the founders of the Philosophical and Literary Society that a different type of institution—a mechanics' institute—should be started. The Philosophical and Literary Society was intended for the leisure-time cultivation of scientific interests by the professional and employing classes of Leeds; adult education was institutional instruction for artisans. Except to certain individuals such as James Hole, a prominent Leeds social reformer and Honorary Secretary of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes in the mid-decades of the nineteenth century, the idea of adult education as a definite stage in a lifelong educational process was not familiar.[3] The need for adult education, whether conceived as the diffusion of useful (particularly scientific) knowledge, or as a grounding in liberal studies, or simply as the provision of rational amusement, was felt to be primarily a need of the working class; and this conviction was not basically altered by the common experience of adult educational institutions that provision which had been intended for manual workers was not infrequently utilized mainly by clerks and shop assistants.

If to the middle classes adult education appeared as one method of coping with the baffling problem of 'the moral and social condition of the working classes', to many local working-class leaders adult education appeared as a useful instrument in the struggle

[1] Nicholas Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (1951), devotes chapters 7 and 8 to adult education in the eighteenth century, but shows very little before the end of that century which would be recognizable as adult education in the usual nineteenth-century meanings of the term.

[2] T. Wemyss Reid, *Memoir of J. D. Heaton* (1883), p. 99.

[3] The Earl of Shaftesbury, in his opening address at the annual meeting of the Social Science Association at Bradford in 1859, posed the question 'as to when education may be supposed to terminate. Is it closed with the period of school, or may it not, in one sense, be said to go through the whole of life? If so, then let us endeavour to meet one influence by another.' *Trans. N.A.P.S.S.*, 1859, pp. 17–18.

for social and political emancipation. But from whichever side adult education was approached there was agreement based on experience that the ground to be cultivated was primarily among the working classes, and, moreover, that that ground required very considerable cultivation before it could be expected to yield much of a harvest. As Joseph Livesey, the Preston temperance advocate, expressed it in 1833, when urging support for an adult education institution: 'There is no *desire* for learning; the ground is in a fallow state; and therefore it is not enough to purchase manure, and secure the implements of cultivation; they must be applied, the ground must be broken up, the manure must be spread, and then we may hope that the results will be good.'[1]

1. THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLAND QUESTION

Commenting on the debate in the House of Commons on Lord John Russell's motion on the State of the Labouring Classes, in May 1845, a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* (vol. 83 (1846), p. 64) observed that 'one of the most marked characteristics of the present time is the large amount of public attention which is given to the working classes'. From 1830 the Poor Laws had engaged the attention of Parliament, to be followed by factory conditions, Irish poverty, and national education. It was not that successive governments relished probing into the details of working-class life (except perhaps in so far as they provided ammunition for political battles), but that 'the condition of the working classes', and in particular 'the social, educational, and religious state of the manufacturing districts', had forced themselves upon public attention. Public soup-kitchens, Chartism, and fever epidemics could not be hidden away or left entirely to the private ministrations of philanthropy. The working classes, though they had not yet entered politics, had become a political issue.

The consequent need for information about the working class was in part supplied by official blue books and the investigations of local enthusiasts in the thirties and forties; but despite the

[1] 'The Preston Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge', *Moral Reformer*, III (Sept. 1833), 296–7.

vast amount of valuable detail which these reports contain, no very clear overall picture of the working classes emerges from them. Perhaps in the nature of things this is not to be expected, for contemporaries themselves were by no means clear in their own minds as to the various divisions and strata of the working classes. But they were at least agreed that the problem was the working classes, and not a homogeneous group, the working class.

The first and obvious breakdown of the category 'the working classes' was into industrial and agricultural workers, the latter tending more to variations between different regions than to differences within the agricultural labouring population in a particular locality. The pattern of the industrial working population was more complex, differing not only between neighbouring manufacturing areas such as Yorkshire and Lancashire, but also between localities within a single area. Trade practices, domestic routines, and social and religious attitudes in the West Riding differed from town to town; so that, for instance, the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioner in 1840 found the popular attitude towards education more sympathetic, and the 'degree of emulation' among sects greater in Leeds than in Bradford, though the towns are but eight miles apart.[1] Within the working population of the town the usual practice was to consider separately the needs and condition of three main groups, namely the mechanics and artisans (skilled workers), the manufacturing or operative classes (semi-skilled factory workers), and the labouring population (unskilled workers, sometimes called 'the poor'). The wives and children of the last two groups formed further sub-sections of the labour force, and below the working class as a whole were the paupers, who could not, for various reasons, such as chronic sickness, disablement, or old age, support themselves by their own labour. It was a commonly held view among contemporary observers that the distinctions between these groups, especially between the first and the rest, were very real. Thus a writer in the *Quarterly Review*, in 1863, in an article on mechanics' institutes and adult education, insisted that 'A distinction must, however, be drawn between institutions for mechanics and artisans, and the schemes of a kindred nature

[1] *Reports from the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioners*, III (1840), 570.

which are being multiplied on every side for the labouring poor or for the neglected and depraved. The mechanic and artisan class do not readily mix with the poor, nor even with the lower orders of unskilled labourers. . . .' Similarly Lloyd Jones, who had had considerable contact with the working classes in Yorkshire and Lancashire, stated that the artisans of the workshops were very superior in intelligence and habits to the factory operatives, and that it was the former who initiated and led the Short Time movement.[1] The supporters of mechanics' institutes were also very much aware of the difference between 'the superior type of artisan', who was originally intended to be the backbone of the movement, and the mass of the labouring population who remained largely untouched by any form of organized adult educational activity.

Nevertheless, the condition of the working classes is not to be comprehended solely in terms of division into these three main levels of wages and skill. Not only must different layers of social and intellectual hope and allegiance—which do not necessarily correspond exactly to economic divisions—be taken into account, but even the three-fold economic division at times became blurred. It was characteristic of the new industrial society that the distinction between 'the poor' and 'the working class' tended to become obliterated, and that successive visitations of unemployment and epidemic disease exercised a levelling effect within the working class as a whole. In the manufacturing towns of the West Riding the physical conditions of life in which these changes took place could be amply demonstrated. It would be beyond the limits of this study to pursue the subject in detail in all the main towns of the area. A single example must suffice; and Leeds, 'the centre, or more properly speaking, the focus, of the woollen manufacture', as the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioner put it, may be taken as representative (despite the localization of other branches of the textile trade, such as worsted, elsewhere) of triumphant Northern industrialism. A brief survey of the material environment of life in Leeds will illustrate the condition of those working classes for whom adult education was to be provided.

The growth of the town had been most rapid in the decade

[1] J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Classes, 1832–1867* (1867), pp. 18, 21.

1821–31, when the population increased by 47·2 per cent;[1] and although the rate of increase thereafter dropped to but half this figure, the continued and still rapid rise in numbers was the root cause of many of those physical problems of urban living which remained for so long unsolved. In Leeds the Statistical Committee of the Town Council in 1839 estimated that of the total population of 82,120 in the township, 61,212 belonged to the working classes, and the majority of these lived in certain well-defined areas of the town. The North, North East and Kirkgate wards, together with the rapidly growing out-townships of Holbeck and Hunslet formed a densely populated working-class area; while the middle classes occupied the healthier and more pleasantly situated areas in the Mill Hill, West, and North West wards. The sorting out of the population into different areas on a basis of social status was thus far advanced, and the social distinctions between the working classes and their more respectable neighbours, already apparent in differences of dress, speech, and mental attitudes, was thus reinforced by physical isolation. The gulf between classes inevitably widened, and to many social reformers the bridging of this gulf seemed the most urgent and yet most difficult task of all. 'Go into their (i.e. the working classes') streets, and their alleys, and their courts', urged James Smith to the middle classes of Leeds, 'and form a personal acquaintance with them', in order to get to know how they live and to promote 'a frequent and kindly intercourse' between classes.[2] Edward Hall, the Unitarian Domestic Missionary, repeatedly urged his financial supporters in the Mill Hill congregation to visit Holbeck and see for themselves the conditions in which the mission had to work, for

> . . . but few of its supporters know, from personal observation, anything of the working of the Mission. The large and densely populated district south of the river is in many respects unfavourably situated. It is the district in which a large proportion of the wealth of the town is created, and where the hands which create it live; but where none of the employers, the more educated and refined reside, who can avoid it: hence it is deprived of all those civilizing influences and mutually respectful feelings which are exercised when rich and

[1] See Frank Beckwith, 'The population of Leeds during the Industrial Revolution', *Thoresby Society*, XLI, Part 2, (1945), 178.

[2] *Report on the State of Large Towns* (1845), II, 149.

poor—employer and employed—know more of each other than they possibly can under present arrangements.[1]

Within this warren of working-class housing in Leeds there were streets and yards which equalled anything in the grimmest pages of Engels' *Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844*. In the North ward the condition of some of the streets and dwellings was so bad as to be described as 'proverbial', the infamous Boot and Shoe Yard being but one selected example of many. Here the Statistical Committee of Leeds Town Council found 34 houses occupied by 340 people, or ten to every house. The number of rooms in these houses was about 57, making an average of six persons to each room. The annual rental of this property was £214. There were only three out offices, from one of which, during the period of the cholera, 75 cartloads of soil were removed by order of the Commissioners, and which was reported not to have been cleaned out since. There was no water within a quarter of a mile. Very few of the inhabitants possessed vessels in which to hold or fetch water, and those who had means of fetching it had to pay anything from 2d. to 2s. a week for it.

The living conditions in cul-de-sacs, yards, lodging houses and cellar dwellings (i.e. those of the lowest section of the working classes) were those which naturally attracted the attention of contemporary investigators, and which they described in most detail.[2] These were the houses for which less than £5 a year in rent was paid, and in 1839 there were some 5,272 of them in the township. But 8,331 houses were rented at between £5 and £10 per year, and a further 2,640 at between £10 and £20 per year; these were the homes of the 'respectable' working classes. In comparison with the squalor of Irish cellar dwellings such 'cottages' were indeed comfortable, but the conditions of life in even a typical cottage were, to say the least, severely restricted. 'The size of an ordinary cottage room in Leeds', reported the Statistical Committee in 1839, 'is 5 yards square, and about 4 yards in height. Few comparatively exceed

[1] *A.R. Dom. Miss.* (1856), p. 24.

[2] E.g. the condition of lodging houses in Leeds, described in a report by the police to the Leeds Board of Guardians in 1851, *Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 Feb. 1851; and Robert Baker's description of Irish cellar dwellings in Leeds in *Report on the Condition of the Residences of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Leeds* (1842).

this size. Each house consists generally of a cellar, a sitting room, and a chamber.' Such cottages, built back to back, were when new, let for £12 per year, 'and continue to be so let for a considerable period . . .; there are very few of the rent of £5 which contain more accommodation than this.' Describing similar cottage houses in Holbeck in 1858, Edward Hall emphasized the details of daily life in such accommodation:

> They are built back to back, with no possibility of good ventilation, and contain a cellar for coals and food, the coal department being frequently tenanted with fowls, pigeons, or rabbits, and in some cases with two or all three of these—a room from 9 to 14 feet by from 10 to 12 or 14 feet, to do all the cooking, washing, and the necessary work of a family, and another of the same size for all to sleep in. Think for a moment what must be the inconvenience, the danger both in a moral and physical sense, when parents and children, young men and women, married and single, are crowded together in this way, with three beds in a room, and barely a couple of yards in the middle for the whole family to undress and dress in.

And while there was very little room for a family within such dwellings, there was even less outside in the way of garden or yard, with the result that: 'the intersection of the street with clothes-lines is an anomaly in street regulations. In the township of Leeds, out of the total number of 586 streets, 276, or nearly one-half, are weekly so full of lines and linen as to be impassable for horses and carriages, and almost for foot-passengers.' That such conditions were characteristic of the 'hungry' forties is now a commonplace. What is not so widely appreciated, but which a study of living conditions in Leeds makes abundantly clear, is the extent to which these conditions prevailed well into the sixties and later. James Braithwaite could still describe cellar dwellings in Leeds in 1865, more than a quarter of a century after the exposures of Robert Baker and the Statistical Committee of the Town Council;[1] James Hole's pioneer study of the *Homes of the Working Classes* was not published until 1866; and the Unitarian Domestic Missionary in Holbeck continued to describe housing and sanitary conditions in the sixties which were little if any better than those of a decade earlier. It is clear that, despite improvements, especially

[1] James Braithwaite, *An Inquiry into the Causes of the High Death Rate in Leeds* (1865), pp. 31–2.

in sanitation, after about 1855, the housing conditions of very large numbers of the working classes in Leeds remained a formidable obstacle to any educational effort throughout the whole period from 1830 to 1870.

That the ravages of disease, particularly epidemic disease, should have been endemic in such conditions is now axiomatic. Situated in the lowest lying part of the town, in what had previously been meadows and marshes along the banks of the River Aire and its tributary becks, the working-class area was that in which efficient sewerage and drainage was at once the most necessary and yet the most difficult to construct. Unpaved, unsewered, and ill-lit, with cottages built back-to-back and rooms overcrowded, the working-class wards of the town provided ready breeding grounds for disease. 'The lower parts of the town', reported Robert Baker,

> are . . . disgusting, particularly on account of a general want of paving and draining, for the irregularity of their buildings, for the violation of the common decencies of life in the abundance of refuse and excrementitious matter lying about in various directions, and what is indeed a matter of universal complaint in every part of Leeds, for the pavement, where there is any, being set in ashes, and occasionally covered with the same, by which, in dry weather, a black and irritating dust prevails, not only in the streets but in the houses; and in dirty weather, a spunging puddle, most foul and most offensive.[1]

There was little wonder that Baker could show that in the borough of Leeds whereas the average age at death of gentlemen and professional men was 44, and of the tradesmen and farmers 27, for operatives, labourers, and their families, it was but 19. Yet somewhat strangely as it may now seem, the direct connection between bad sanitation and high mortality was not immediately apparent to contemporaries. Dr. C. Turner Thackrah, a Leeds physician, set out to examine the relations between various occupations and mortality,[2] and his conclusions, which did not present the conditions of factory life in a very favourable light, were used rather to support the case for factory reform

[1] *Report on the Condition of the Residences of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Leeds*, p. 3.

[2] *The Effects of the Principal Arts, Trades and Professions, . . . on Health and Longevity* (1831).

than the urgency of an adequate sewerage system. It was Robert Baker who, from the time of his first report on the Leeds cholera epidemic of 1832, showed repeatedly how epidemic disease and high mortality rates clung to the working-class areas of the town. Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, 1842, put the matter succinctly:

> By the inspection of a map of Leeds, which Mr. Baker has prepared at my request, to show the localities of epidemic diseases, it will be perceived that they similarly fall on the uncleansed and close streets and wards occupied by the labouring classes; and that the track of the cholera is nearly identical with the track of fever. It will also be observed that in the badly cleansed and badly drained wards to the right of the map, the proportional mortality is nearly double that which prevails in the better conditioned districts to the left.

It was long before the municipal authorities could bring themselves to incur the cost of adequate sewerage for the whole town, and Leeds deserved Baker's epithet that it 'was certainly one of the most unhealthy towns in England'.

Fever and cholera were no respecters of persons. Although the diseases usually originated amongst, and ravaged most severely the very poorest of the working classes, they inevitably took their toll of all sections of the people living in the congested areas of the town. Even in a period of commercial prosperity such as the year 1866, when there was work for all in Holbeck, the Domestic Missionary had to report:

> Early in the year, and for three consecutive months, the sickness and mortality of our district were truly appalling. The voice of mourning was heard in every street. Fever had its centre in almost every court and alley, while small-pox played sad havoc, especially with our young people. And not that this state of things was limited to any particular part of our district, or confined to one class of persons. In our best streets, where every sanitary precaution that could be taken, obtained; and amongst the temperate and cleanly of our artisans did I meet with the ravages of disease, as well as the victims of premature death.

Sickness, especially of the breadwinner, was an almost overwhelming tragedy for the working-class home at this time. Earnings ceased, or (where the wife and children were also earning), were drastically reduced. Small savings, if any, were

eaten into, and during prolonged illness disappeared altogether. It was impossible in the humbler homes for the sick person (and often even a dead body) to be isolated from the rest of the family, and the daily routine of washing, cleaning, baking, and personal hygiene had all to continue within the cramped dwelling room of the cottage.

Thackrah had reached the conclusion (eagerly seized upon by the defenders of industrialism) that the woollen industry was not in itself unhealthy, judged by standards of longevity. But he did emphasize the evil effects on health of the long hours of work, the lack of ventilation and muscular exercise, and the employment of children from a tender age. The excessively long hours of labour—never less than 11, and often 13 hours per day —throughout the period from 1830 to 1870, emphasized the central theme of working-class life in the nineteenth century, namely, that the working class existed to work, not to govern or enjoy leisure-time pursuits. The result was put bluntly by Thackrah when he observed that 'Most operatives in this country prematurely sink from labour, if they be not destroyed by acute disease. "Worn out" is as often applied to a workman as a coach-horse, and frequently with equal propriety in reference to premature decay.' And Edward Hall, some 28 years later, described how he had observed that after six days of labour the working classes in Holbeck were completely exhausted by Sunday: the working classes,

> . . . are not generally healthy in the full sense of the term; but under the best of health which they enjoy, they are subject to feelings of languor and weariness, which people do not feel who live in healthy situations and breathe pure air when they are asleep. This feeling is forced off by necessity on the six days of labour; but on Sunday, when this is not the case, it is felt perhaps more than at any other time, giving them a disinclination to exert either their mental or physical powers, except it be to stimulate them by the exciting drink and company of the beershop or public house.[1]

It is impossible to generalize as to how far low wages contributed to working-class difficulties in Leeds at this time. The wages of handloom weavers, woolcombers, or flax hecklers were notoriously inadequate, but in many cases handicraftsmen such

[1] *A.R. Dom. Miss.* (1858), p. 14.

as shoemakers and tailors seem to have earned but very little more.[1] In most trades, even when wages were apparently sufficient to support life a little above subsistence level, they were not adequate to meet those periods of financial strain which were part of the normal pattern of family life. A wage which was adequate for a single man living with his parents, and which even permitted small luxuries if he were to marry and his wife were to continue earning, became increasingly inadequate as successive children were born and his wife's earnings ceased. The pressure to send the older children as part-timers to the mill became almost irresistible at this stage, as successive additions to the family without any increase in wages progressively lowered the income per head. By middle age, when the children had become young adult wage-earners, the economic strain on the family was eased, and a period of comparative comfort could normally be expected. But with old age came a renewed time of hardship. No longer able to earn as formerly, dependent on the good graces of a son or daughter, the closing years of many an old person were darkened by fears of the workhouse, and, most shameful of all, a pauper funeral.

Inadequate as were the wage rates of many lower paid workers, a yet greater scourge was unemployment. For the majority of operatives there was just no certainty of work from one week to the next. At any moment it might be announced that 'Messrs. B. Gott and Sons, the extensive woollen manufacturers of this town, discharged between 30 and 40 hands on Saturday last, owing to the slackness of trade in the lighter descriptions of fabric.'[2] At times of general commercial depression the distress in Leeds was almost universal among the working classes. In 1831, 1837, 1841–2, 1847–8, the depths of depression were reached, each time to be paid for in terms of acute human suffering. In the autumn of 1841 an Operative Enumeration Committee (with James Speed, a handloom weaver, as chairman, and James Rattray, an operative stuff-printer, as secretary) investigated the extent of distress through unemployment in the town. The Committee claimed, on the basis of personal visitation, that

[1] Details of wage rates and earnings are given in Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 16; 'Report of the Statistical Committee', pp. 412, 422; and *Reports from the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioners* (1840), III, 529–34.

[2] *Leeds Mercury*, 5 Sept. 1846.

out of 4,752 families examined, consisting of 19,936 individuals, only 3,780 persons were in work, while 16,156 were unemployed, and that the average weekly earnings amounted to only 11¼d. per head.[1] Three months later 16,000 persons were on the books of the Leeds workhouse as receiving parochial relief, while in addition to this 10,000 persons had received relief from a voluntary subscription fund of £7,000. The price of wheat in August 1841 was quoted at 86s. a quarter. This was the culmination of four years of depression, and well might the Mayor and Council declare in their Petition to the Treasury in 1842: 'Never at any former period in our recollection has this manufacturing district experienced distress so universal, so prolonged, so exhausting, and so ruinous'; and they went on to point out that with 16,000 individuals receiving relief from the workhouse every fifth person in the township was a pauper.[2] Trade revived in the following years, but by 1846 a downturn of the cycle was again apparent. In the second half of 1847 economic conditions deteriorated rapidly; and the winter of 1847–8 witnessed that combination of depressed trade, widespread unemployment, and high cost of living which had marked the earlier period of distress. In April 1848 'trade was almost at a standstill' in Leeds; 15,000 persons were receiving relief from public soup kitchens, and their weekly earnings did not reach 10d. per head. Nor did unemployment and working-class destitution disappear with the end of the 'hungry' forties, though the universal and widespread nature of its incidence seems to have been somewhat mitigated. In the annual reports of successive Domestic Missionaries in Holbeck there are only three years (1860, 1864 and 1866) between 1856 and 1870 in which trade was said to be prosperous; in all other years considerable (often very acute) unemployment was reported, and that in a district in which the variety of trades (i.e. iron founding and machine shops, as well as textiles) to some extent mitigated the effects of economic depression, since all trades were not affected simultaneously.

The devastating effects of unemployment on the conditions of working-class life cannot easily be exaggerated. It made middle-class injunctions to cultivate thrifty habits a mere mockery in many homes. While still insisting that many more working men

[1] Samuel Smiles, *Autobiography* (1905), pp. 114–15.
[2] B.M. Add. MSS., 40612.

could save than in fact did so, the Domestic Missionary by 1868 had reluctantly to admit that,

> . . . it seems to me that there are only two sections of the artisan class who can be reasonably expected to spare anything from their wages (i.e. to lay by), and these are the well employed who have no families dependent upon them; and the other is where the family are grown up and are in full work; but the man who has three or four children dependent upon him, though he may be in the receipt of good wages, I cannot conceive how he can justly meet the demands of a home and spare anything to lay by.

Had the full rate of wages been received regularly every week, working-class life would still have had few luxuries. But unemployment, with only a gesture at relief, reduced even this income. The true cost of unemployment to the working classes was realized by the Assistant Handloom Weavers Commissioner, when he investigated conditions of unemployment among the handloom weavers in the clothing villages in the Leeds district:

> Few people take the trouble to think of the small proportion which the largest sums raised by the benevolent for such purposes (i.e. relief of the unemployed) bear to a few weeks' wages. To say that the 10,000 weavers of the district around Leeds were out of employment three months in 1837 is, I am convinced, within the truth; as an aggregate average, calling wages only 10s per week, we have a sum of £65,000, of which the weaving population were deprived. Now, I venture to assert, that from all extraneous sources not a tithe of that sum was distributed among the weavers. We often felicitate ourselves on the large sums raised to relieve the distresses of particular classes during periods of depression; but we are too apt to overlook the extent of the evil to be remedied. No relief, in fact, can make up for a short period of stagnation. When the general rate of wages is low, as in the case of the weavers, as well as in that of the agricultural labourers, there must be acute suffering. . . .[1]

Moreover, the effects of unemployment continued after the artisan had resumed work; in fact, it was often then that his greatest difficulties began, for he was called upon to pay all his arrears, replace articles of clothing which had long since been worn out, and resume his former standard of diet—all on earnings which had never been anything but marginal for normal needs.

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 537.

To this catalogue of objective vicissitudes to which working-class life was exposed there was one subjective factor to be added, namely, drunkenness. For poor housing, lack of sanitation, unemployment, and low wages, the working classes could hardly be held directly responsible; but even the most sympathetic of investigators invariably condemned their habits of drunkenness. The problem was not merely one of the 451 inns and beer-houses within the township of Leeds—though this aspect of the matter bulks large in the reports of most 'social workers'—but that drinking usages were woven into the very fabric of working-class life. 'Not a class of artisans, and scarcely one of professional men is to be found', wrote Thackrah, 'in which intemperance may not be discovered'; but 'the most striking effects are to be seen among the artisans'.[1] During working hours a wide variety of customs was enforced to extract payments for drink. Not only were the usual footings paid, but in the woollen trade the changing from one loom to another, the first lighting of the factory in autumn, or the first time a young man was seen by his mates with a young woman (the 'bull shilling'), were all made the occasion for payments to be spent on drink.[2] At weekends the grosser results of working-class intemperance were manifest. Saturday night, Sunday, and Saint Monday (known in Pudsey as Cobbler Monday) were commonly given over to prolonged drinking by many artisans and labourers though it is difficult to define the extent of this indulgence in statistical terms. H. S. Chapman, the Assistant Handloom Weavers' Commissioner, was at pains to stress the temperate habits of the handloom weavers as a class: 'As a body, they are temperate, and a contrary habit is an immediate change of separation into a distinct class.' But Edward Hall was convinced that in Holbeck 'No other habit has such a strong and terrible hold upon a large portion of our working population; it occasions more waste, more sin, more misery and wretchedness than anything else besides. . . .'[3]

Following the section on the 'moral state' of the working

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

[2] See John Dunlop, *The Philosophy of Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usage in Great Britain and Ireland* (6th edn., 1839), pp. 250–1.

[3] *A.R. Dom. Miss.* (1857), p. 17. Samuel Smiles, living in Leeds at the time, was similarly convinced of the widespread intemperance amongst the working classes. See the controversy in *Cooper's Journal* (Oct. 1850), pp. 417, 470–1.

classes (which was usually concerned primarily with intemperance), most contemporary treatises on 'the condition of the people question' had a chapter on education; and it seems desirable at this stage to include an estimate of the educational provision for the children of the working classes in Leeds. Three main types of institution existed at which the children of artisans could normally hope to secure the rudiments of a formal education—the private day school (including the dame school), the Sunday school, and the factory school. The Statistical Committee of the Town Council provided data on all of these for 1839. The total number of private day schools in the township was 154, and there were 20 factory schools: in these weekday schools were some 6,759 children, being about 1 in 12 of the whole population. In addition there were 50 Sunday schools (in which literacy was taught) of various denominations, attended by 11,429 children. Numerically this provision does not seem as inadequate as might perhaps have been expected, and Edward Baines was convinced that adequate provision in Sunday and day schools was in fact available in the manufacturing districts for all children for whom it should be provided.[1] But, as the Report stated, at least 4,577 working-class children under the age of 9 were receiving no instruction whatsoever in day schools. Moreover, the quality of education in such schools as were available was low: of the 154 day schools, 112 were kept by females, and in 109 the charge per head (school pence) was under 6d. per week: knitting and sewing were taught in 107, and writing and accounts in only 74 (i.e. under half). In fact, many of the 82 schools whose charge was under 3d. per week were only dame schools, 'and are . . . more for keeping children out of danger during the employment of the mother, than for the purposes of real education'. In very few of the schools was anything taught beyond the elements of the English language, and seldom, if ever, according to any systematic principles. The factory schools,

[1] *The Social, Educational, and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts* (1843), pp. 21–8. He arrived at this conclusion by reducing Lord Ashley's estimate of one-fifth of the population as the number requiring some education (i.e. children aged 5 to 15) to one-ninth (on the assumption that five years' schooling was adequate for working-class children). He also took an optimistic view of the efficacy of Sunday school instruction, and concluded that the educational condition of the manufacturing districts was not such as to give cause for general dissatisfaction.

with the exception of one or two such as those at Hindes and Derham's flax mills and Marshall's mills in Holbeck, were little better.[1]

Such was the position in 1839. In the next quarter of a century, through the strenuous efforts of the voluntary religious school societies, a network of elementary schools was built up. Whereas in 1839 the proportion of children in day schools in the township had been 1 in 12, the Census for 1851 showed a corresponding figure for the borough of 1 in 7·89.[2] Assuming that the proportion of schools to population in the township and borough were about the same, the increase of scholars in the twelve years from 1839 to 1851 was about 4½ per cent. More striking, according to James Hole, was the improvement in the quality of the schools and the teaching in them. During the years between 1853 and 1860 the number of children in schools under government inspection (and in which a minimum degree of attainment was therefore assured) rose from 6,529 to 10,017, representing an increase from 3·79 per cent to 5·22 per cent of the total population of the borough. The growth of Sunday schools was equally remarkable; the 11,429 children in Sunday schools in the township in 1839 had represented 13·9 per cent of the total population; by 1851 this percentage had increased to 16·7 for the borough (some 28,761 children); and in 1858 the percentage was 18·2, with 35,000 children in Sunday schools in the borough.

This improvement in popular educational facilities was a reflection of that general improvement in living standards from the middle of the century which, though difficult to pinpoint in statistical terms, was commented on so frequently by contemporaries. It was not necessary to subscribe to the excessive optimism of Samuel Smiles to see that the working classes as a

[1] Under the educational clauses of the Factories Act, 1833 (clauses 20, 21, 22, 23), every child aged 9 to 13, whose labour was restricted to 48 hours per week, was to 'attend some school', to be chosen by the parents or guardians, or appointed by the Inspector of Factories. Baker stated that out of 500 mills under his superintendence in the West Riding, 300 to 400 made use of short-time labour; but he would not be 'able to name a dozen schools where the education is systematically good, and the mill owner personally cognizant of the progress of his children'. See *Reports of the Factory Inspectors on the Effects of the Educational provisions of the Factories Act—Joint Report* (1839), pp. 60, 71–2.

[2] The figures in this paragraph are from James Hole, *Light, more Light!: On the Present State of Education amongst the Working Classes of Leeds* (1860), pp. 6–10, 31–4.

whole were materially more comfortable in 1860 than in 1842. To ex-Chartists and old Owenites the change was patent. Wage rates in the woollen industry had increased slightly, and prices, apart from a rise in the middle fifties, tended to fall or remain stationary. The sanitary condition of the town was slowly improved. After eleven years of deliberation by the Town Council, the construction of main sewers in the principal streets was begun in the summer of 1852, and a municipal waterworks was acquired. Even so, progress was slow, and it took a sustained campaign in 1865 to rouse the Town Council to take notice of many remaining nuisances in the working-class districts of the town. The efforts of W. B. Denison and the 'Society for promoting public improvements in the borough of Leeds' drew attention to the great social need for decent housing for the working classes; but despite efforts to promote the building of model cottages, and the example of enlightened employers who erected model villages for their workpeople, the problem as a whole proved intractable. The basic problem remained, namely, that a weekly rent of 2s. 6d., which was all that large numbers of working men would or could afford, was insufficient to provide economic housing much above the minimum standards of decency. Poor housing remained for many years one of the most depressing conditions of working-class life.

In this Leeds was representative of the other manufacturing towns of the West Riding. To a greater or lesser extent the same basic pattern of working-class life was to be found in all the main centres of the area, but varied by local differences of geography, occupation, and custom. A glance at the *Second Report of the Commissioners for inquiring into the State of Large Towns* . . . (1845) reveals the same physical problems of urban life in Huddersfield, Halifax and Bradford; and the smaller towns and industrial villages, although retaining something of older community traditions, reproduced on a smaller scale many of the worst features of industrial life. The evidence of the hardness of life for ordinary people in this period has been used by many writers, and the main facts are not in dispute. The detail in the picture, however, is not so important for this study as the picture itself, seen as a whole. It is the picture of the outward, visible, material conditions in which a new type of society, industrial society, was embedded.

2. THE RURAL LIFE OF ENGLAND

The apologists of the new industrial order were usually prepared to admit the need for improvement in the social conditions of the people, but emphasized that changes for the better were in fact under way, and that, in any case, conditions in the towns, unsatisfactory as they often were, compared favourably with those in the agricultural districts. Edward Baines, for instance, made great play with the 1843 *Reports of Special Assistant Poor Law Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture*, selecting evidence of immorality, illegitimacy, and overcrowding, to counter similar charges made by Lord Ashley against the manufacturing population.[1] But Baines' evidence related almost exclusively to the eastern and southern counties, and did not refer to Yorkshire. Indeed, the statistics of illiteracy for 1839 (the same year as the Report of the Statistical Committee of Leeds Town Council) seemed to indicate a better state of things in Yorkshire agricultural areas. Whereas in that year the proportion of men who signed the marriage register with a mark was 16 per cent in the East Riding and 22 per cent in the North Riding, in the West Riding it was 38 per cent; and the superiority in literacy of the agricultural regions was still apparent in 1875.[2]

The West Riding, although the home of the new manufactures, still contained some purely agricultural districts, and many more in which industrial and agricultural pursuits were combined. There was not only the seasonal migration of the woolcombers, for example, from Craven to work in the corn harvest in the Plain of York, but also the continuation of the weaver-farmer tradition which Defoe had noted a hundred years earlier. James Caird described the small clothiers of the West Riding in 1851: 'Besides those employed in the large mills, there is a class called "clothiers", who hold a considerable portion of the land within several miles of the manufacturing towns; they have looms in their houses, and unite the business of weavers and farmers. When trade is good the farm is neglected; when trade is dull the weaver becomes a more attentive farmer. His holding is generally under 20 acres, and his chief stock

[1] *State of the Manufacturing Districts*, pp. 58–60.
[2] See 76th (1846) and 38th (1875) *Annual Reports of the Registrar General.*

consists of dairy cows, with a horse to convey his manufactured goods and his milk to market. This union of trades has been long in existence in this part of the country, but it seldom leads to much success on the part of the weaver-farmer himself, and the land he occupies is believed to be the worst managed in the district.'[1] Such men were of more substance and independence than agricultural wage labourers, as also were the small farmers of the Dales. On the southern and eastern sides of the West Riding were larger arable farms, on which wage labourers were employed, and on a model farm in this area Caird instanced wages of 14s., 13s., and 12s. per week for ploughmen, according to ability.

Something of the tradition of an independent peasantry probably survived into the mid-decades of the nineteenth century in parts of the North Riding. But the custom of annual Hirings in Stokesley, Thirsk, Pickering, York, and the larger villages of the North Riding is alone sufficient evidence of the extent to which a large class of landless agricultural labourers existed in the district. In the East Riding this was even more so. There, in an area of rolling chalk wolds, the farms were large, anything from 300 to 1300 acres, with large corn fields of 30 to 70 acres each; and 'the farmers are probably the wealthiest men of their class in the county'.[2] Mary Simpson, the daughter of the Vicar of Boynton and Carnaby with Fraisthorpe (an extensive parish on the eastern side of the Wolds), described such an agricultural district in a letter of July 1856:

> This is a very scattered parish, entirely agricultural. I do not know if in any other part of England the population and customs are quite similar. Every farm (there are 12 in this parish) comprises in its household from 6 or 7 to 20 plough lads, according to the size of the farms; their ages varying from about 14 to 24, but the greater part in their teens. These are all changed every year at Martinmas (i.e. the last week in November).[3]

In this, the most purely agricultural area of Yorkshire, a landless agricultural working class formed the bulk of the population. Living in the farm houses were the 'farm servants', usually

[1] *English Agriculture in 1850–51* (1852), p. 287. [2] Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 310.
[3] *Ploughing and Sowing, or Annals of an Evening School in a Yorkshire Village, and the Work that grew out of it. From letters and private notes. By a Clergyman's daughter* (1861), p. 1.

lads and lasses in their teens. They were hired annually at the Martinmas Hirings, and usually changed farms each year. During working hours they were supervised by a foreman and (the girls) by the mistress of the house. Board and lodging were provided, and wages—varying according to age—were seldom paid more frequently than twice or three times a year. Upon marriage the farm servants moved out of the farm house, and set up home for themselves.

The cottages into which they then moved were no larger than those of the artisans in the town, though the general rural environment was perhaps less depressing than the smoky pall which hung over the low-lying centre of Leeds. William Blades, an East Riding agricultural worker, was born in 1839 at Nafferton, a large village lying on the eastern side of the Wolds in the heart of a rich corn-growing district, and his account of his life there in the forties and fifties was set down many years later by a sympathetic country rector.

> The house of the Blades family was, like all the houses of the agricultural labourers, small, consisting of two rooms on the ground floor called the 'house', or living room, and the parlour, with two bedrooms above. In many of the cottages at that time there was over one or other of the sleeping chambers a space or area, it could not be dignified with the title of room, which was frequently used as a sleeping-place for some of the children; it was just possible to get a small bed or two into it; and there they slept in their beds in the manner shortly to be described. So contracted was the space, that in getting out of bed the youngsters had to exercise great caution so as not to knock their heads against the rafters of the roof. This upper area always went by the name of 'cockloft'. . . . In addition to these rooms there was what was called a 'backer-end', which was a kind of lean-to shanty at one end of the house.[1]

Blades was one of a family of twelve children, and the pressure to leave home at an early age in order to make room for the younger children (already sleeping three and four in a bed in the 'cockloft') was inevitable. At the age of 8 he, like all labourers' children in the Wolds villages, left home and entered farm service, his main job being 'tenting' crows in the cornfields. From then on, as for the normal agricultural worker, life was a long hard labour, relieved mainly by short breaks at the traditional

[1] Rev. M. C. F. Morris, *The British Workman Past and Present* (1928), p. 3.

local holiday-festivals. No doubt in many ways the work was more satisfying than that of the factory operative, but it would be a mistake to accept at its face value the idyllic picture of simple bucolic pleasures so dear to the writers of Victorian magazine articles.[1] The hours of work, especially in summer when they were from 4.0 a.m. to 8.0 p.m., were so long that when the horses had finally been 'suppered up' it was the usual custom to go to bed. There was thus literally no leisure at all for considerable periods of the year. The average wages for this amount of labour in 1850 were 12s. a week in the East Riding, as compared with 11s. in the North, and 14s. in the West Ridings. These rates were lower than those of most artisans in the towns, though the difference was to some extent offset by lower rents and more regular employment in the rural districts. Distress among farm workers' families was caused rather by high prices than unemployment. Thus the high cost of food in 1855 and 1856 reduced the Blades family to a very frugal diet, though the father was fully employed:

> For breakfast there would be some kind of brown or barley bread and treacle, a basin of water, and possibly an occasional 'sup' of milk. Tea was at a prohibitive price; the nearest approach to it they could ever come was when the landlord of the neighbouring inn would give the mother the used tea leaves, which produced a drink with the faintest flavour of tea, and might be likened to water 'bewitched', as the saying is. For the children's dinner there would be a kneading bowl on the floor in which were mixed the broth which they got from a farm three days a week, mashed potatoes, with pepper and salt, with perhaps a dumpling or two in addition; the children sat around on the floor with wooden spoons, and ate away as quickly as they could, and when the meal was ended their mother would come to them with the words 'say your grace, and away you go'. The evening meal was similar to breakfast, except that they might have perhaps a bit of cheesecake or apple pie in addition.[2]

William Blades was more fortunate than some of his contemporaries in that he had the opportunity of a few years of

[1] Even William Howitt in *The Rural Life of England*, 2 vols. (1838), a work which depicted rural England in the most favourable, even sentimental terms, had to admit that the upbringing of the ordinary farm labourer made him little better than an animal.

[2] Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

schooling before the age of eight. There were three schools in Nafferton in the decade 1840–50. Two of these were dame schools, at which only the alphabet and simple reading were taught; one, with about a dozen scholars, was held in a small house near the church, and the fee was 1d. per week; the other, also kept by an old lady, was similar. The third school was run by Thomas Smith, who in addition to being schoolmaster at Nafferton for 58 years was also parish clerk for 36 years. His school was held in the 'Black Hole' (a lockup for drunkards), and, when he was not busy knitting, he taught 'the Bible and Church Catechism' as well as the three Rs. The fee for this was 3d. per week. But to many children in the East Riding even such modest schooling was denied, with the result that many farm servants were completely illiterate. This was the experience of Mary Simpson, who in 1856 discovered in her father's parish that 'Out of ten plough lads that I was teaching on Sunday, there was only one that had any notion connected with Christmas beyond a general holiday—that is, who knew why it is observed.'[1] Others had no idea who Jesus Christ was, and they told her that it was useless for them to go to church since they simply could not understand the language of the service and sermon. When by the sixties the voluntary societies had begun to provide elementary schools in the towns and larger villages of the rural areas, the employment of children in agriculture frustrated much educational effort. The Rev. George French, H.M. Inspector of Church of England Schools in the North and East Ridings, reported of village schools in 1866, that:

> The boys, sometimes even at the very early age of eight years, spend a considerable proportion of their time (often five or six months out of twelve) in working in the fields or in the farm yards; and loud and continual are the complaints of managers and teachers of their almost entire inability to give anything like instruction which will be of permanent good to children who attend so irregularly. Whenever lads can earn 6d a day by 'tenting' (as they say here) pigs or cows or sheep, by making hay, by picking weeds, by singling turnips, by frightening birds off the fields of ripening corn, or by any other of the many ways in which a farmer can find employment for them, the schoolroom is emptied; and then the troubles of the teachers begin.

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 13.