

*Economic History*

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# Population Malthus

His life and times

Patricia James



ECONOMIC HISTORY

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POPULATION MALTHUS

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ECONOMIC ISSUES IN THE 19TH CENTURY



# POPULATION MALTHUS

His life and times

PATRICIA JAMES

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## POPULATION MALTHUS



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MALTHUS  
*His Life and Times*

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PATRICIA JAMES



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To  
the memory of  
**ROBERT MALTHUS**  
M.A., A.M.I.Mech.E.  
1881-1972

'Biography, though dealing too much in panegyric, is always more or less entertaining and instructive, often affording at the same time historical facts and traits of character, that are by no means without their importance, though they may have escaped the general historian.'

*William Smyth*  
*Professor of Modern History*  
*Cambridge, 1817*

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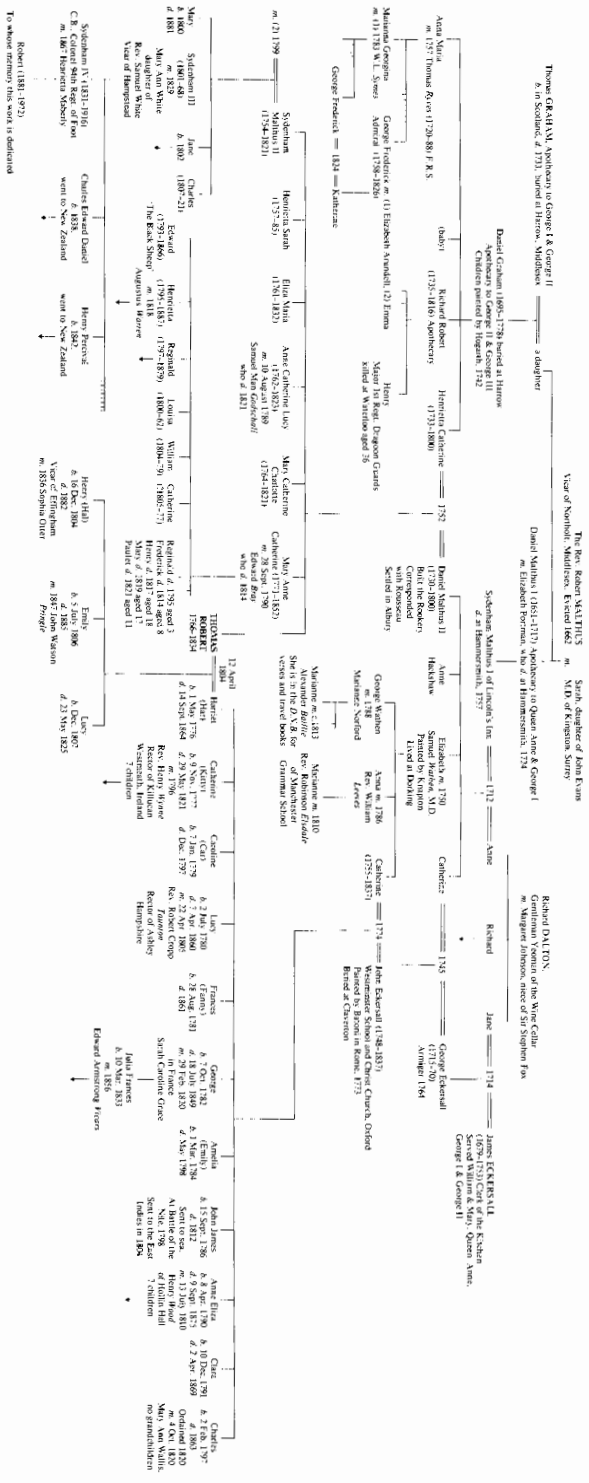
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THE FAMILY OF POPULATION MALTHUS



To whose names this work is dedicated

## *Prologue*

Thomas Robert Malthus, always known as Robert or Bob, was born on 13 February 1766 and died on 29 December 1834.<sup>1</sup> Millions of words have been published, in many languages, about the Malthusian Theory of Population: nobody has ever written a full-length biography of the man. His date of birth is given incorrectly in the *Dictionary of National Biography*; in the introduction to a classic reprint of the *Essay on Population* he was alleged to have had eleven daughters,<sup>2</sup> whereas in fact he had but three children altogether – and so on. This book, based on fifteen years' intermittent research, is an attempt to set the record straight and to give some account of a man whom the author, at least, has found as interesting and lovable as his friends described him.

To begin at the beginning: I was told that 'with such an outlandish name, Malthus could not possibly have been an Englishman.' He was. I do not propose to trace the family history back to the time of Edward the Confessor, but I believe it could be done. The name is sometimes said to be derived from Malt-house, and I have come upon eighteen versions of the spelling of it. For our purpose, we need go no further back in time than the sixteenth century, and no further afield than the town of Reading. Here Malthuses (in all their variants of orthography) are scattered throughout the archives of the County of Berkshire and the Borough of Reading itself, where the name is familiar and correctly pronounced, and the Mayor and Corporation, with the boys of the Reading Blue Coat School, annually attend the Malthus Service in the church of St Laurence.

Reading, at the confluence of two navigable rivers, grew to prosperity through the manufacture of woollen cloth, said to have been established in the reign of Edward I. At the time of the Civil War, which ruined the trade, it was an attractive and flourishing town of some 7,000 inhabitants, 'comfortably maintained' as sorters, carders, spinners, weavers, dyers, and the like.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries we come across innumerable Malthuses in every kind of record: they are listed as drapers, clothiers and mercers; they are churchwardens, chief constables of Charlton Hundred, and Mayors of Reading over and over again.<sup>4</sup>

Like other merchants of the time they invested in land, and the archives abound in deeds relating to their holdings in Binfield and Shinfield, Warfield and Swallowfield, Woolhampton, Whitley, Farnham and Old Windsor. Sometimes they were styled 'yeoman', at other times 'gentleman'; Richard

Malthus, who made his will in 1577, when he was 'sick in body, hole in mind', was a member of the Middle Temple. It is interesting to see that there was no distinction, at this period, between what a later generation sharply differentiated as Trade and the Professions. A seventeenth-century uncle left '£20 to Thomas, son of my brother Robert Malthouse to be paid him when apprenticed or sent to the University'; Thomas in fact went to Oxford, to Corpus Christi College, and became vicar of Alfriston in Sussex, while a little later his cousins William and John were apprenticed to a goldsmith.<sup>5</sup>

That the Malthuses were men of public spirit as well as substance, is shown by the offices they held, their gifts of plate to churches, and the many charitable bequests in their wills. Like other merchants, as the wool trade of Berkshire declined, they went off to London to seek their fortune, but their hearts must have remained in Reading.

The most conspicuous of these London benefactors of their home town was William Malthus; his will, made in November 1700, provided for the sale of his ships, as well as other property, in order to buy land for charitable endowments.<sup>6</sup> A childless man, he rather pathetically required that the ten 'Malthus Boys', whose places he provided at the Reading Blue Coat School, should wear coats of a distinctive green, with WM on their buttons - which they did, poor children, for nearly a century.<sup>7</sup> He also left money for the endowment of a charity at Blewbury which retained its character for nearly two centuries; it provided for the supply of medicines to the poor, and an establishment for twenty children, ten of each sex, with a resident master and mistress, who were to care for them and educate them until they were of an age to be apprenticed.<sup>8</sup> The administration of these endowments has changed with the years, and in 1956 part of the Malthus Foundation investments were realised for the modernisation of the Blue Coat School;<sup>9</sup> but the 'Malthus Sermon', for which William bequeathed two guineas annually, is still preached each year in July, before a large congregation, which the present writer has had the pleasure of joining.<sup>10</sup>

The first direct ancestor of whom we must take note was the Rev. Robert Malthus, who was evicted from his vicarage of Northolt in Middlesex in 1662; his parishioners had a number of grievances, including the fact that he had 'not only a low voice, but a very great impediment in his utterance',<sup>11</sup> which might have been due to a hare-lip and cleft palate. Population Malthus was born with this defect, and it should be appreciated at the outset that he was a badly handicapped child.

A hare-lip is of little importance nowadays and is usually dealt with in the first months of infancy, but at that period it was a serious disability. The lip was sutured, but no operation could be performed on the palate itself. Moustaches were completely out of fashion, so that there was nothing to conceal the immediately obvious disfigurement of the lop-sided upper lip and distorted nostril. Malthus must always have talked like someone with

#### PROLOGUE

a very bad cold. Eating would have been difficult, although it is possible that he wore a silver plate to make an artificial roof to his mouth.<sup>12</sup>

I was surprised to find so little evidence of Malthus's deformity. The affliction was considered a disadvantage when, as an undergraduate, he discussed entering the church; 'a retired living in the country' was the utmost of his wishes;<sup>13</sup> we shall never know whether, or how unhappily, he sighed for the glories of the law and politics. Apart from this instance, the matter is not mentioned in family papers. In letters or memoirs published in the nineteenth century I have discovered only three references to Malthus's defective speech. One comes from the protégée of Horace Walpole's old age, who was later prominent in society for many years – Mary Berry (1763-1852); of a London dinner-party in 1811 she wrote: 'I sat by Malthus, and had a good deal of conversation with him – interesting, when one gets over his painful manner of speaking from wanting a palate to his mouth, and having had a hair-lip [*sic*] – not, however, at all unpleasant in appearance.'<sup>14</sup>

Another literary lady, Harriet Martineau (1802-76), whose hearing was peculiar, was astonished to find in 1832 that 'of all people in the world', she could follow Malthus quite easily without her ear-trumpet: 'Malthus, whose speech was hopelessly imperfect, from defect in the palate. I dreaded meeting him . . . When I considered my own deafness, and his inability to pronounce half the consonants in the alphabet, and his hare-lip which must prevent my offering him my tube, I feared we should make a terrible business of it. I was delightfully wrong. His first sentence, – slow and gentle, with the vowels sonorous, whatever might become of the consonants, – set me at ease completely . . . It really gratified him that I heard him better than anybody else.'<sup>15</sup>

As far as I know the only man to comment on Malthus's way of speaking was Sir Henry Holland (1788-1873). In his *Recollections of Past Life* he describes Malthus's 'tremulous stammering voice, seemingly little fitted for the utterance of any doctrine which could be deemed dangerous to social welfare'.<sup>16</sup> This is unexpected from a Physician in Ordinary to the Queen, but then Dr Holland was famous, almost to his discredit, for suavity and discretion.

In this connection it is important to remember that Victorian editors had no scruples over bowdlerising their texts. They excised or altered (without saying so) anything that might give offence, and this is perfectly illustrated in the case of Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849). In collections of her letters published about a hundred years ago, there is no mention whatever of Malthus's disability; Christina Colvin's fine edition shows that, much as Miss Edgeworth loved Malthus, 'his uncouth mouth and horrid voice' jarred her and her step-sisters whenever they met him. In 1822 Maria wished 'that hair lip [*sic*] were away and that he could speak more like a human creature – for if I were a child and had heard of his being an Ogre I should

#### PROLOGUE

run away if he were to come near me and begin to speak.<sup>17</sup>

Since we admire people who overcome their handicaps, such editorial suppression is hard to condone. I am told that this reticence might have been due to a superstition - once widely held - that a hare-lip was a punishment for more than ordinary sin. Whatever the truth of this, I think his misfortune must have affected Malthus's career. There is, for instance, only the one portrait of him, painted a year before his death, in which Linnell handles the twist of the lip with great tact and skill; it is probable that there would have been a number of earlier portraits, were it not for this disfigurement, for Robert Malthus was otherwise an exceptionally handsome man.

## CHAPTER I

# *Background*



### 1 Family Tree

The seventeenth-century Rev. Robert Malthus married the daughter of John Evans, MD, and it was possibly through this connection that his son Daniel became an apothecary in London under the internationally famous Dr Thomas Sydenham (1624–89). Daniel Malthus (1651–1717) was made a freeman of the Society of Apothecaries when he was twenty-seven; he set up his shop, with the sign of the Pestle and Mortar, in a tall house on the north side of Pall Mall, next door to Dr Sydenham's (both houses were later demolished to make way for Waterloo Place). Dr Sydenham had a great regard for Daniel Malthus, and appointed him a trustee for his children.<sup>1</sup> Mary Beale's painting of Dr Sydenham is in the National Portrait Gallery, but her chalk drawings of Mr and Mrs Daniel Malthus cannot be traced.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that Apothecary Daniel was the founder of the fortunes of this branch of the family, for sometime after 1691 (a special Act of Parliament was necessary) he purchased the Manor of Hadstock in Essex from 'the Trustees of James, late Earl of Suffolk' for over £5,500.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, his sister had married another successful apothecary, Thomas Graham. Having served a seven-year apprenticeship in Scotland, Thomas Graham was admitted as a 'foreign brother' of the Society of Apothecaries on 14 September 1698. He had a son whom he christened Daniel, and in due course Daniel Graham was apprenticed for eight years to his Uncle Malthus, starting on 6 December 1709.

By that time 'Daniel Malthus, Esq.,' was 'Apothecary to our Royall Person', Queen Anne having signed a Warrant to this effect on 22 November 1704, although he had been 'sworn' on 22 July.<sup>4</sup> By virtue of this appointment he 'came on to the Court of Assistants of the Apothecaries, was immediately elected Master but excused himself because of business and paid a fine of £50'. His salary from the Queen was £115, but he also received £205. 5s. for 'Physick for our Person in lieu of bills', making £320. 5s. per annum, paid quarterly. Daniel Malthus served his mistress well and was with her throughout the four days of her agonising death.<sup>5</sup> With his fellow-apothecary James Chase he prepared the anointing oil for George I's coronation, for

#### BACKGROUND

which they received the customary fee of £206. When he retired in 1716 his brother-in-law Thomas Graham took over his shop, as well as his court appointment, since his son (Sydenham Malthus I) preferred law to physic.

But Daniel Malthus I had done far more than make his family comfortably well-to-do; he had established contact with two other families connected with the Royal Household - the Daltons and the Eckersalls, with whom Malthuses and Grahams were to marry and intermarry for just over a hundred years; finally in 1804 our Robert Malthus (whose mother was a Graham) married his cousin Harriet Eckersall, after he had obtained a living in Lincolnshire from his kinsman Henry Dalton.

A glance at the family tree will explain relationships which it would be tedious to describe, but it is, I think, worth while to spend a little more time over the records of the departments of the Lord Chamberlain and the Lord Steward. The Daltons in whom we are interested served Charles II: a Richard the Elder as Sergeant of the Wine Cellar, a Richard the Younger first as Page of the Cellar and then in a series of offices, including those of Keeper of the Ice and Snow and Yeoman of the Mouth (the duty of the latter was 'to fill and taste His Majesty's wine at the sideboard'). They must have been concerned with such things as the issue of 'Gascoigne Wine, For the Communion, For Healings, For Making of Jellies' and 'Canarie, For the Chaplaines upon Sermon Dayes, For Washing the King's Feet'.<sup>6</sup>

After the accession of William of Orange, as might be expected, the account books of the Royal Household are no longer decorated with gilt flourishes, and the total annual expenses fall sharply, but a bottle of sherry was apparently set aside weekly for the washing of the King's feet.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to follow this line of Daltons, who were all called Richard, but we know from James Eckersall's diary that they were comfortably established near Leatherhead, Surrey, in 1741, at a manor house called Thorncroft.<sup>8</sup>

It was during William III's reign, in 1692, that James Eckersall entered the Royal Household at the age of thirteen, on the recommendation of the Countess of Derby, who had connections with Bury in Lancashire, where the Eckersalls lived, and was Groom of the Stole to Queen Mary. This remarkable man James Eckersall is still a family legend. His note-books are now distributed among the descendants of his only grandson, and I have been kindly allowed to see them in Yorkshire, Gloucestershire and Somerset by owners quite unknown to each other. It seems more than likely that Malthus looked at these diaries, and they are worth perusal for the light which they throw on the world in which his parents grew up and from which his own world evolved.

James Eckersall did not become Chief Clerk of the Kitchen until 1742, when his predecessor died at the age of ninety, but he had been doing the work of the office for the previous thirty years. His establishment was about 150 strong. Among the highest paid were the Clerk of the Spicery and the Table Laundress; among the lowest those who worked in the Larder (six

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of them), Scald House, and 'Scullery including Pankeeper'. On occasion he hired temporary turnspits. Four men worked in the woodyard, for the kitchens needed great quantities of logs and charcoal, with faggots for quick fires for pastry; coal was only used for warming a few rooms.<sup>9</sup> As one would expect, his account books are full of such items as French Beans and Green Pease, Sparragrass and Collyflowers, most expensively welcomed in April. When Jonathan Swift and some friends dined with 'James, I know not his other name', in February 1711, he inhabited 'a snug little house in St. James's, and we had the queen's wine, and such very fine victuals that I could not eat it'.<sup>10</sup>

But Eckersall had other interests. He is among the friends of Alexander Pope who are mentioned in John Gay's poem; they are all supposed to be assembled to welcome him on his return from Greece - that is, after he had finished his translation of the *Iliad* in 1720.<sup>11</sup> In February 1720 Pope wrote two letters to James Eckersall about lottery orders and speculation generally: 'I also hear there is considerably to be got by subscribing to ye new African Stock, Pray let us do something or other, which you judge the fairest Prospect, I am equal as to what Stock, so you but like it. Let but Fortune favor us, & ye world will sure to admire our Prudence. If we fail, let's e'en keep the mishap to ourselves. But 'tis Ignominious (in this Age of Hope and Golden Mountains) not to Venture.'<sup>12</sup>

However much other people suffered from the breaking of the speculative South Sea Bubble in 1720, James Eckersall prospered. His dealings with the Royal Africa Company may have come as a shock to Population Malthus, an ardent anti-slavery man, if he read these little books. Eckersall jotted down in his diary that the RA Company had made a contract with Messrs Thomas to supply them with 400 negroes in January 1740 and 200 more in May. He then mentions the ships the *Success* and the *Expedition*, both of 85 tons, each with twelve men and a boy, and a sloop, the *Catherine*, with four men and a boy, which was 'freighted with Provisions'. The two larger vessels each carried a cargo valued at £2,500, and 'All for Cape Coast Sign'd their Sailing Orders the 27th Sept' 1739.'<sup>13</sup>

Before we are too hard on James Eckersall, we must remind ourselves that he lived more than two hundred years ago. The very 'almanacks' in which he wrote, elaborately bound and full of official information, contain surprising advice for those whom we think of as educated people in a civilised country. In July, 'Get Rue, Wormwood, and Gall, to strew your Floors, to destroy Fleas.' In November, 'Kill Swine in or near the Full of the Moon, and the Flesh will prove the better in the Boiling.'<sup>14</sup> In this same year (1730) Cousin John Eckersall, who was Secretary to Queen Caroline, was keeping the accounts of the royal nursery, which included over £40 worth of lace for the nine-year-old Duke of Cumberland. We can also learn that he paid four shillings for 'A hundred of Clarified Quills'.<sup>15</sup> It is very remote from us, but not from Malthus, who used a quill pen all his life,

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and took lace as a favourite example of the luxuries purchased by the rich, men and women, in contrast to the bare necessities consumed by the poor.

In his old age, James Eckersall attempted little doggerel verses, perhaps as toasts, and in 1748 he wrote:

I wish my Friends Ease Health and Peace  
And that their Fortunes may Increase  
To Enable them to do Much Good  
To Friends and Those Allied in Blood.<sup>16</sup>

Again, we shall not understand the past if we judge dead men's actions in the light of present knowledge and present attitudes. We shall not be able to imagine Malthus's world until we realise that posts at court, public offices, college fellowships and church livings, were all then regarded as forms of property, of which it was stupid and undutiful not to make the fullest use for the enrichment of one's family.

To continue with this particular family history: Daniel Malthus resigned his post as Royal Apothecary two years after George I's accession. By that time his son Sydenham (named after the famous doctor) had married Anne Dalton, and James Eckersall had married (as his second wife) Anne's sister Jane. We can see from Eckersall's accounts that Daniel Malthus attended Mrs Eckersall when her only child, George, was born on 9 October 1715.<sup>17</sup> Of poor Jane her husband was to write that she was loved by him, 'Esteemed by her Superiours, and Admired by all her Acquaintance. Her Constitution was tender but of a chearfull disposition when her Infirmities were Supportable, she Miscarryed Eleven Times and Dyed much Lamented by all that knew her the 6 day of August 1729.'<sup>18</sup>

Eckersall goes on with his family history in the same notebook: George 'was 8 years at Westminster School and at 16 went to Queens College at Oxford a commoner for 3 years and a half, Then had Chambers in Lincolns Inn and was called to the Bar; in June 1745 he married Miss Catherine Malthus Daughter of Sydenham Malthus Esq.'

This Sydenham Malthus was also a member of Lincoln's Inn; he was one of the six Clerks in Chancery, a director of the South Sea Company in 1741, and made money enough to buy land as an investment in Hertfordshire and near Cambridge. But both Sydenham and George seem shadowy intermediate figures between their fathers who established their fortunes and their sons who spent them, for both Daniel Malthus II and John Eckersall were what would now be called 'characters'. One became the economist's father, and the other was his first cousin and also his father-in-law.

Unfortunately, little is known of the youth of Daniel Malthus II, who was born in 1730. He entered the Queen's College at Oxford in 1747, but left without taking a degree; in 1749 he too was admitted to Lincoln's Inn. On 6 May 1752 he married his second cousin, nineteen-year-old Henrietta Catherine Graham.

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Henrietta was the elder daughter of the Daniel Graham who had been apprenticed to his Uncle Malthus in 1709, when he was fourteen years old. He also had become a Royal Apothecary, in 1721, on the death of James Chase, and so he and his father Thomas Graham had together embalmed the body of George I and made up the anointing oil for George II and Queen Caroline; Daniel had five yards of scarlet cloth allowed him for the coronation.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Graham died in 1733, and was buried in Harrow church, in Middlesex; as he and his son were both governors of Harrow School, one assumes that the Grahams had a country house there. In any case, Daniel Graham resigned his post at court in 1740, in favour of his cousin, another Thomas Graham, with whom he was a partner in his private practice. Daniel Graham also had a post at the Chelsea Royal Hospital, and he became once more a Royal Apothecary - to George III - for just two years, before he died in 1778 at the age of eighty-three;<sup>20</sup> he was no doubt an excellent man, who fully deserved his Latin epitaph about his kindness to the sick, but his chief gift to posterity (apart from his grandson) is the picture of his children painted by Hogarth in 1742.

This is not the place to expatiate on that delightful masterpiece *The Graham Children*, which hangs in the Tate Gallery, and which few people can look at without smiling. The baby in the pull-along chair was soon to die, but Richard Robert carried on the family shop in Pall Mall until 1800; he lived to see his nephew become famous, and in 1816 died at the age of eighty-one; he too was buried at Harrow, although his domicile is given as Chelsea. The little girl in white embroidered satin was to become Mrs Ryves, and her daughter Georgina was to marry the elder son of her big sister in gleaming blue; it is difficult to realise that the smug little person holding the shiny red cherries is the mother of Population Malthus.<sup>21</sup>

But this is anticipating the future. I do not know where the newly-married Daniel Malthuses first set up house in 1752; the accession of George III probably found them in the neighbourhood of Dorking, in Surrey. In 1750 Daniel's sister Elizabeth had married Samuel Wathen, who was a well-to-do surgeon or physician (he is described as both); he had estates in Cumberland, but they lived near Dorking, where a road is named after him. Knapton painted an attractive group portrait of them in 1755.<sup>22</sup> Daniel's sister Catherine, who had married George Eckersall in 1745, was conveniently near at Leatherhead, as her husband had rented Thorncroft from the Dalton relations. There was a third sister, Anne, who made a childless and unsatisfactory marriage with a man called Humphrey Hackshaw, and whose financial position was a source of anxiety to her family until her death in 1793. Apart from her, Population Malthus's aunts provided him with an array of cousins who were to be very important to him throughout his life.



## 2 Family Circle

I have not discovered the birthplace of the Daniel Malthuses' first two children, Sydenham II and Henrietta Sarah; but the third, Elizabeth Maria (Eliza Maria for short), was christened in Wotton church on 21 July 1761. Sydenham I had died in 1757, and Daniel II must have found himself established, in Bishop Otter's words, in his *Memoir of Robert Malthus*, as 'a gentleman of good family and independent fortune'. At the age of twenty-nine he bought a farm called Chert Gate in the little valley of Mereden, just outside Dorking on the way to Guildford, and 'taking advantage of its beauties, hill and dale, wood and water, displaying them in their natural simplicity, converted it into a gentleman's seat, giving it the name of the Rookery'.<sup>23</sup> There is a photograph of it in the *Supplement to Country Life* of 28 September 1912, when the grounds extended to 175 acres in all.

The best description of this famous and extraordinary place is by John Timbs, who published at his own expense *A Picturesque Promenade Round Dorking*, of which a second edition appeared in 1823:

The whole of the building is rough-cast, surmounted with battlemented parapets and gothic pinnacles . . . The hill behind the house is clothed with a fine beech wood, extending a considerable distance, and intersected by serpentine walks, which formerly led to several romantic buildings with appropriate dedications.

The foot-path (a public thoroughfare) passes the front of the tasteful residence. A bye-path branches off to the left, and winds on the brink of an extensive sheet of water . . . In the centre is a small island, on which is a ruinous fishing house, partially hidden by trees and evergreens . . . The hottest and most sunny season of the year seems the time for enjoying this place to full advantage. In dark and chilly weather it must, probably, appear to superabound in shade and water; yet the site of the house is tolerably cheerful and open. A boat-house, a rude ice-house, and a small corn-mill complete this enchanting spot, unparalleled in rusticity and picturesque effect.<sup>24</sup>

The reader will not be surprised to learn that Daniel Malthus had a passionate admiration for Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

It is possible that the Malthuses moved to the Rookery in the summer of 1761, after their second daughter's birth. The Wotton register shows that Anne Catherine Lucy was born at the Rookery on 8 September 1762, and Mary Catherine Charlotte on 16 July 1764. In his *History of Surrey* William Bray wrote that Daniel Malthus 'had travelled much in Europe and in every part of this island';<sup>25</sup> his increasing family does not seem to have prevented him from going abroad in the spring of 1764, when he spent, according to

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himself, six congenial hours with Rousseau at Motiers-Travers. Thus it was natural that he should send a welcoming letter to Rousseau as soon as that notable exile had landed in England, written in a schoolboy French which sounds painfully sentimental today.

Daniel Malthus assured Rousseau that, although he was neither milord, author, nor philosopher, his little country house was entirely at his disposal.<sup>26</sup> No one records how Mrs Malthus felt about this invitation, with her sixth child due in a month's time. On Thursday 13 February 1766 the baby was born, and on the 14th he was christened Thomas Robert.<sup>27</sup> We can imagine his mother's joy when she was told that she had a second son, after four daughters in a row; then her grief as she looked at the hideous little face, and wondered how she could explain to the other children about their new baby brother's hare-lip.

As for Robert's father, before the baby was a fortnight old he was offering to house-hunt for Rousseau and his mistress, for Thérèse le Vasseur had been brought over to England by James Boswell. The poor woman is always assumed to have been uncouth as well as ignorant, but Rousseau insisted on her dining at his host's table wherever they went. On 24 February 1766, apropos of his search for a suitable farm-house for them, Daniel Malthus again begged Rousseau to come and stay at the Rookery, that he might choose for himself his 'ideal refuge'. But when David Hume brought Rousseau and Thérèse to look at places in Surrey, on Saturday 8 March, they stayed the night with a Colonel Webb, and returned to their lodgings in Chiswick after spending only Sunday afternoon with the Malthuses. Did Thérèse take the ugly little baby into her arms, and tell his mother how she yearned for her own five, packed off to a foundling hospital?

Daniel Malthus was bitterly mortified; he had expected the party to stay at least one night in his house. He wrote to both Rousseau and Thérèse, offering his services in any capacity, and then was hurt again when he went to Chiswick on 29 March, and found that they had already left for the north without letting him know. But Daniel was persistent in his devotion, and in June there was a family excursion to Derbyshire - presumably the younger children were left behind - where Rousseau introduced him to the delights of botany.

The Malthus party, who stayed at an inn and not actually with Rousseau, included Jane Dalton; she was an orphaned cousin, a permanent member of the household. In 1766 she would have been twenty-four, and she seems to have taken to both Rousseau and botany with enthusiasm. Jane has been somewhat unkindly described by one of Daniel's granddaughters, Louisa Bray, in her 'Recollections', as 'a single lady related to Mr. Malthus, and had been his ward. She became romantically attached to him, and was his constant companion, more than his daughters. She had been handsome until the Smallpox spoiled her complexion, was very clever, had an excellent memory, and read much. This made her society much sought after.' But she

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was also 'enterprising and manoeuvring for herself and others, fond of power and admiration'. It is possible that Louisa Bray was biased by filial jealousy, for Jane Dalton was very attached to Louisa's mother - who had been the baby of the family - and Mrs Bray nursed Jane on her death-bed in 1817.

That Jane Dalton had much in common with her cousin Daniel is shown by the fact that she displayed, later on, 'remarkable taste in laying out grounds, or doing anything that required a picturesque effect, and everyone consulted her when they had gardens to make or improve. Her own Cottage and grounds at Albury were perfection.'<sup>28</sup> Her dinners may also have been perfection, for her French cookery books are included in the library of her cousin Robert at Jesus College, Cambridge. Her 'cottage', a house with two staircases and about ten acres of land, was left to Robert's elder brother, Sydenham.

But to return to the summers of 1766 and 1767. Daniel Malthus described to Rousseau the craze for botanising which he had inspired, on the hill behind the Rookery, with 'the little cousin' Jane aiding his researches, while his dear Henrietta and her children also played their part. He was horrified and miserable to learn of Rousseau's bitter quarrel with Hume, and then hurt yet again when Rousseau left England without telling him; he was in Wales at the time, and heard of Rousseau's departure through a newspaper. In what reads like a desperate love-letter, dated 6 August 1767, he describes how frantically he had tracked Rousseau's movements, through his banker, to get his address. On 14 December he sent a much shorter letter, very pained that Rousseau had not written to him, but 'Ce coeur qui vous aime si tendrement ne sait pas vous accuser' (This heart which loves you so tenderly does not know how to reproach you).

Was Rousseau touched by this, or did he merely want a supply of English botanical works? In any case he wrote for some, and Daniel was very happy to procure them, writing on 24 January 1768, 'I prefer your commissions to all the compliments in the world.' In this long letter he gives an account not only of his summer botanising but also of his winter fox-hunting, in which he joined partly from habit, and partly because it gave him some idea of 'la vie sauvage'. He assured Rousseau that he took no share in the quarrels of the landlords, with poachers and with each other, and that he spent more time in cottages than in castles.

Daniel Malthus concluded this letter, 'If ever I am famous, it will be as the friend of Rousseau.' How wrong he was! Yet his acquaintance with Rousseau gave him a sort of distinction in the neighbourhood; most people enjoy a connection with a celebrity, however tenuous, even a celebrity of whom they disapprove. By the time Bishop Otter came to write his *Memoir* of Daniel's famous son, Daniel had become 'the friend and correspondent of Rousseau and one of his executors',<sup>29</sup> which last he most certainly was not.

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Some members of the family were unfavourably impressed. Daniel's granddaughter Louisa wrote in 1857: 'My Grandfather Malthus was a great admirer of Rousseau and his works, which no doubt contributed to his eccentricities. He would not allow his wife to wear her wedding ring. My Grandmother would not have been supposed a happy woman by those who knew her, yet towards the close of her life, she said she would willingly pass it over again.'

It is tantalising to know so little about Mrs Malthus. According to Louisa Bray, she 'was a most affectionate and indulgent Mother, and all her children loved her in the tenderest manner. She was likewise a devoted wife. They all took after her rather than Mr. Malthus, for never was there a set of more amiable and unselfish beings than my uncles and aunts.' Of Daniel she wrote further: 'My Grandfather's character was peculiar and his opinions on some subjects eccentric. With a highly cultivated mind and very fascinating manners, he was cold and reserved in his own family, except towards his eldest daughter, of whom he was very fond, and his youngest son [*sic*], whose talents probably early attracted his attention. I have heard Mama speak of him as a person whose will was imperative, and to whom everything gave way.'

Louisa is just, however: 'My Grandfather Malthus was not a religious man, but he had a respect for religion, and would never allow light conversation on such a subject in his presence. If any of his children had behaved ill in Church or talked of the persons they had seen there, remarked on their dress or anything of the kind (unhappily so commonly done by persons professedly religious) they would have been severely reprimanded. He would not allow his daughters to read the Old Testament, but encouraged their reading of the New.' And their niece had seldom met with women of more cultivated minds and pleasing manners than her Malthus aunts, all educated at home without a governess.

But we must go back to 1768, when possibly the Malthuses and their elder children went to Dijon in the summer, to join the George Eckersalls there, since that is what Daniel was planning when he wrote his last letter to Rousseau, in January. All we know for certain is that in 1768 the Rookery was sold, to a banker named Fuller. For the next nineteen years the family 'wandered about' - Miss Bray's expression - until 1787, when they returned to Surrey, to Albury and Shere, where descendants of Daniel Malthus still live.

Why did he sell the Rookery so suddenly? There is no obvious explanation, any more than there is of Daniel Malthus's leaving Oxford without a degree, or abandoning the law. Perhaps his disappointment over Rousseau, the baby's hare-lip, and what Timbs called the superabundance of shade and water, all had something to do with it. Robert Malthus's youngest sister, and the one most like him in looks and character, Mary Anne Catherine, was born in 1771, but such were her parents' wanderings that she herself

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never knew where this event had taken place.

What we do know for certain is that the family must have spent at least the spring and summer of 1773 at Claverton House in Somerset, near Bath. This information comes from the Rev. Richard Graves, who was to be Robert Malthus's first tutor outside the domestic circle, and a close friend of them all. He was born in 1715, was with the Methodist preacher George Whitefield at Pembroke College, Oxford, and became a Fellow of All Souls in 1736; he won a sort of second-hand fame through his intimacy with William Shenstone, a poet admired by writers as different as Dr Johnson and Robert Burns. Graves then offended his family by marrying a farmer's daughter, became rector of Claverton in 1749, and is said never to have been absent from his parish for more than a month.

In 1773 Richard Graves would have been fifty-eight years old. He had published in the previous year a satirical novel called *The Spiritual Quixote*, in which he recounted the adventures of a certain Mr Geoffrey Wildgoose, who had travelled around the country as a free-lance saver of souls. Lest this should prejudice some readers against Mr Graves, I take the liberty of quoting a few verses he wrote at a later period, published in 1801, in a collection endearingly entitled *Senilities*:

Survey the conduct of mankind,  
Unless it too much shocks ye,  
His duty no one does, you'll find,  
For all is done by Proxy.

To every office should you go,  
The Principal but mocks ye;  
He's at his country-seat, I trow,  
His business done by Proxy . . .

Pray, John, where does your Rector live  
So fam'd for orthodoxy?  
At Lon'non master, I believe,  
But preaches here by Proxy . . .

Well, farmer, you sit by your fire,  
Your man in dirty frock, see!  
Does all your work for slender hire,  
You plow and sow by Proxy . . .

In ev'ry post of Church or State,  
Of deputies what flocks, see!  
Why should it then surprise create,  
If t'heaven they go by Proxy?<sup>30</sup>

In addition to his literary activities, which included two more novels and a translation of Marcus Aurelius, Richard Graves took pupils, as did many

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other clergymen of the period, and fortunately for him the Manor of Claverton was purchased by the philanthropist Ralph Allen, the original of Squire Allworthy in *Tom Jones*. According to Graves, 'after having repaired, improved, and built a gallery in the church; finding that the rector had several young gentlemen of family and fortune under his care; and a very indifferent old house for their accommodation, Mr. Allen offered to build him a room, which he immediately executed; building a room twenty-five feet by sixteen with two bed-chambers over it, which he observed would serve for a school, as long as he continued that employment.'<sup>31</sup>

That was in 1760, according to a note in the parish register, but even this addition was not enough for the increasing number of pupils. Ralph Allen left Claverton House to his niece, the wife of Bishop Warburton, and on 6 November 1766 the latter was writing to Bishop Hurd: 'But apropos of Mr. Graves. My Wife has let him the great house at Claverton, for which he gives £60 a year; and the great gallery-library is turned into a dormitory, so that where literature generally ends, it here begins.'<sup>32</sup>

Since Mr Graves's school lasted into the 1780s, one can only assume that he did not use the whole of the house, but sub-let part of it to Daniel Malthus. And in 1773 he wrote some lines to his tenant's wife, which were published in a miscellaneous collection called *Euphrosyne* in 1783; I quote from it at length, for it gives a picture of activity and sunshine very different from the sequestered gloom of the Rookery.

After comparing 'Mrs. M-lt-s' with Cynthia, or chaster Dian, he goes on:

Well-pleas'd she sees her infant train  
Of nymphs sporting on the plain  
Or dancing in the checquer'd shade,  
Like little Loves in masquerade.  
Whilst Harriet with Madona face,  
The rival of her mother's grace,  
Her novel flutt'ring in the gale,  
Hangs pensive o'er some moving tale;  
Or with expressive air attends,  
Whilst sprightly Delia cheers her friends,\*  
(Not with wise comments on the weather,  
Or hints of 'who and who's together',  
But) with remarks on books profound,  
Or anecdotes of the gay monde:  
Then Manlius paints the toils and strifet

\*This must be Jane Dalton.

†Daniel Malthus himself. Graves also wrote some verses especially for him; Manlius' 'poetic eyes' could appreciate the charms of 'Each primrose pale, that slighted blows, Each mossy stone that lies'.

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The vain pursuits of public life:  
Gently to lead, with art design'd,  
In Virtue's paths the youthful mind;  
Hence taught with innocence to rove,  
Content, thro' life, the peaceful grove.

But when on serious studies bent,  
I see the pygmy group intent  
On books; with maps and globes surrounded  
(By change reliev'd, but not confounded)  
Their tutor's wise, parental care  
Soften'd by love's more gentle air:  
Whilst some amid' the studious quire  
Touch the guitar or tune the lyre;  
With dedal skill whilst Delia weaves  
In threads of gold the mimic leaves;  
Or decks with flow'rs the Brussels lace  
To veil the beauties of her face -  
When I behold this rural scene  
So gay, so cheerful - yet serene:  
What poets sing of nymphs and swains  
Assembled on th' Arcadian plains: . . .  
These scenes, methinks, so fam'd of yore,  
Tho' fancy'd to exist no more,  
Or deem'd by sceptics, fables all,  
Are realiz'd at Cl-rt-n Hall.

June 1773.

N.B. this is a real though imperfect sketch of a worthy family, who have happily united in their domestic economy, the elegant simplicity of the pastoral ages with the refinements of modern life.<sup>33</sup>



### 3 Early Education

We do not know when the Malthuses resumed their wanderings, presumably leaving Robert behind at Claverton to start his education in earnest. This was to be the setting for important days in his life; he was at school here until he was sixteen, and then at the turn of the century the great house was taken by his first cousin, John Eckersall; in Claverton church Robert was married to John's daughter Harriet, and the ramifications of the family were united here for holidays until the house was sold over their heads in 1817.

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It must have been a wonderful place; unfortunately, only fragments now remain of the terrace of the old honey-coloured manor house, which in 1819 was completely demolished. It was built in the first decade of the seventeenth century, in three storeys, with beautiful mullioned windows and ornamental gables. An architect's plan shows that the great gallery, as was characteristic of Jacobean mansions, ran the entire length of the very top of the house. Here forty little boys are said to have slept; there are no chimneys marked on the plan, so it would have been very cold in winter. Behind the great gallery were four bedrooms, all of which had chimneys, as did every other room in the house. On the floor below were four more bedrooms, one with a little dressing-room leading out of it; unexpectedly, a very large room is marked Dressing Room on the plan, which I feel could be a mistake for Drawing Room, with a small 'Library' adjoining it, communicating in turn with one of the larger bedrooms. On the ground floor was the great hall, a library as large as the kitchen, a small servants' hall, and the resident family's dining-room, used in the eighteenth century after they had ceased to have their meals on a dais at one end of the hall, while all the servants sat a little below them on long benches. There were, of course, no bathrooms or water-closets marked on the plan.<sup>34</sup>

Close by the great house, but deeper in the hollow, where the village lay, was the rectory, and then the little church. As Malthus's contemporary, John Britton, wrote: 'The scene is truly romantic, wild, and picturesque. An abrupt declivity, from the table-land of the Down, descends to a narrow ever-green valley, through which the river Avon meanders silently and sluggishly towards the west. This steep hill consists of rocks and woods, interspersed with natural terraces . . .'<sup>35</sup>

It would have been a good place for playing Cavaliers and Roundheads. When the present writer was exploring the village, she found herself in trouble through never having heard of the Battle of Claverton in 1643; those killed in it are buried in the churchyard, one Royalist and three Parliamentarians. A cannon ball was found embedded in the dining-room wall of the manor house - William Bassett, the owner, was an officer in the King's army - but it was after hand-to-hand fighting in the village that the Royalists won.

It is worth noting that the Prayer Book in use throughout Malthus's life contained a service for the annual commemoration of the death of Charles I, King and Martyr, on 30 January; on 29 May was celebrated the restoration of Charles II, in a service of 'praise and thanksgiving for the wonderful deliverance of these kingdoms from THE GREAT REBELLION'. On 5 November Richard Graves's pupils would have given thanks not only for deliverance from 'the most traiterous and bloody-intended Massacre by Gunpowder', in 1605, but also for 'the happy Arrival of his Majesty King William on this Day, for the Deliverance of our Church and Nation', in 1688, an event known as the Glorious Revolution.

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Over the Down from seventeenth-century Claverton lay eighteenth-century Bath; here during four 'seasons', from 1777 to 1781, Sarah Siddons played all her great tragic parts. It was here that Malthus presumably acquired his love of the theatre, which lasted all his life; here, possibly, he also acquired his lifelong distaste for towns (Jane Austen disliked Bath so intensely that she fainted away on being told she had to live there).

Bath at this time was a brash new place, still being built - or rather, run up - by speculators. It was notorious for bad smells, which our less squeamish ancestors called stinks and stenches. Contemporary prints also show the beggars for which the city was equally famous, with their crutches and wooden legs; there are wandering vendors, too, of all kinds, with every sort of basket, and trays carried on the head; there seem to be children and stray dogs everywhere; one man is driving a single cow, another a small flock of sheep; it is almost as if the wheel had not been invented - the rich are carried in sedan chairs along the deeply rutted streets, and baggage is slung on pack-animals.<sup>36</sup> Drowsily turning over the pictures, one is astonished to find that eighteenth-century Bath is evoking memories of towns today which are far south and east of Suez.

In addition to the hypochondriacs and the truly sick who came, with their respectable families, to drink the waters, Bath also collected gamblers and adventurers. These sometimes came up to Claverton Down, since it was outside the jurisdiction of the Bath constables, to fight duels; the Down was also well-known for pick-pockets and highwaymen. More legitimately, it was the site of Bath race-course until it was abandoned in favour of Lansdown in 1784; the Claverton grandstand and stables were built in 1770, and the thirteen-year-old Bob Malthus might have been among the crowds in 1779 when the Duke of Cumberland attended the meeting, and took all the stables for his own horses. Bob would only have been eight at the time of the Down's most famous cricket match, Somerset against All England, in 1774, but he must have watched other matches; this was cricket played in three-cornered hats, shirts and breeches, with two stumps instead of three, bats resembling hockey-sticks, and a ball made by a local cobbler.

Richard Graves wrote at least two letters to Daniel Malthus about his son's progress. 'Don Roberto', wrote Graves, 'though most peaceably inclined, and seeming even to give up his just rights, rather than to dispute with any man, yet, paradox as it may seem, loves fighting for fighting's sake, and delights in bruising; he has but barely recovered his eyesight, and yet I have much ado to keep him from trying again the chance of war; and yet he and his antagonist are the best friends in the world, learn together, assist each other, and I believe love each other better than any two boys in the school.'<sup>37</sup>

In the second letter Don Roberto is referred to as Bob, and Graves is reporting on his progress in Latin. 'He has finished Horace, and has read five satires in Juvenal with apparent taste, and I never saw a boy of his age

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enter more instantaneously into the humour of the fifth satire, which describes so feelingly the affronts and mortifications which a parasite meets with at a great man's table.' It is admittedly a puerile and crude form of humour: the sycophant, who cannot complain, being served some loathsome fish, while those at the head of the table enjoy every sort of delicacy with ostentatious pleasure. But the happy schoolmaster went on, 'I never saw a boy shew a quicker sense of the beauties of an author, or at least of any humorous and unexpected strokes': Bob was more responsive than two of his fellows who were fifteen years old.<sup>38</sup>

It is plain that Graves did not do his teaching by proxy, although the provision of cakes and pies was delegated to a kind but redoubtable Mrs B. She seems to have kept the boys clean and tidy, and thumped those with round backs to make them walk upright.<sup>39</sup>

But in 1782 this happy time came to an end, and Daniel Malthus indulged in what must have been regarded as one of his oddest eccentricities: he sent the sixteen-year-old Robert to read with Gilbert Wakefield, first at Warrington, in Lancashire, where the famous Dissenting Academy was just about to close down, and then at Wakefield's own home at Bramcote in Nottinghamshire. Younger readers, who cannot remember when small communities in England were still split between Church and Chapel, may have difficulty in understanding what an unusual step this was.

Since the Test Act of 1673, no one could hold any public office unless he received Holy Communion once a year according to the rites of the Church of England; moreover, only members of the Church of England could take a degree at either of the two English universities, Oxford or Cambridge.\* This meant that Protestant Nonconformists, debarred from the services and the professions, naturally turned to industry and commerce. As they prospered, they set up their own establishments for higher education, with far wider curricula than the 'great schools' or grammar schools, or Oxford and Cambridge, training boys for practical managerial work as well as for the dissenting ministry.

Why Daniel Malthus sent his son to Warrington - roughly half-way between Liverpool and Manchester - we shall never know. His lifelong friend Bishop Otter remarked that Robert's character, when grown into maturity, bore few marks and signs 'of the scenes and persons to which he had been entrusted for the specific purposes of education'.<sup>40</sup> I am not so sure. Warrington may have given Malthus his dislike of what he called unwholesome manufactures, which was to bias his outlook as an economist for some years. It was a busy port, for ships of 70 or 80 tons could come up the Mersey, bringing, amongst other things, hemp from Russia, as about half the heavy sail-cloth used by the Navy was made in Warrington. There.

\*In Scotland the position was different, and some English Dissenters received degrees from Scottish universities.

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was an iron foundry and a sugar refinery, and workshops where locks and hinges were made; glass was manufactured there, and 'coarse linens and checks'. There was also an establishment for the manufacture of pins, so it is possible that Malthus saw for himself an example of Adam Smith's famous illustration of the division of labour.

John Aikin, MD (the son of one of the leading tutors of the Academy, John Aikin, DD),\* described Warrington itself thus:

The principal part of the town consists of four streets crossing at the centre, one of which runs directly from the bridge, and from its narrowness and mean buildings, gives but an unfavourable idea of the place to a stranger. But some of the other streets are much opener, and contain many good houses interspersed, the usual effect of commercial opulence rising in a place of antiquity. It has the common fault of being most straightened at the centre; a great inconvenience to a town which is one of the principal thoroughfares to the north.<sup>41</sup>

But if the town was unattractive, the Academy seems to have been a happy and lively place for many of the twenty-nine years of its existence. Joseph Priestley was a tutor for six years; it was there that he completed his *History of Electricity* in 1767, and in 1768 his *Essay on Government*, which contained that notable phrase 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'; his discovery of oxygen came after he had left the Academy, in 1774. Gilbert Wakefield became classical tutor at Warrington because he could find nowhere else to go. The son of a clergyman, he became a Scholar of Jesus College, Cambridge, at the age of sixteen, and then Second Wrangler and one of the Chancellor's Medallists (the highest honour for classics) at the age of twenty. He was immediately made a Fellow of his college, and in 1778, when he was twenty-two, he was ordained deacon, and held curacies in Stockport and Liverpool. Most unfortunately for himself, he studied theology and became a Unitarian, although he was never attached to any specific dissenting sect - in fact, he disapproved of public or social worship altogether. His nonconformity, naturally, meant that he could get no living from the church, and he forfeited his fellowship through marriage in 1779.

In his *Memoirs*, Wakefield wrote of Warrington Academy, 'I pronounced the speedy downfall of this establishment soon after my arrival there.' He lists among his reasons 'the want of an established fund, secure from fortune and caprice', pointing out that they were bound to suffer from 'the death, sickness or declining zeal of subscribers, always more active in the *infancy*

\*The Doctorate in Divinity was conferred on John Aikin the Elder, without notice, by the King's College, Aberdeen, in 1774. John Aikin the Younger, although he studied medicine for some time in Edinburgh, took his degree in 1784 at Leyden, in Latin.

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of a scheme'. He also mentions 'the incapacity of preserving proper discipline from the untowardness of the situation and injudicious structure of the buildings'. However, he records that the trustees' behaviour to him 'was liberal and respectful on all occasions, worthy of gentlemen and dissenters'.<sup>42</sup>

I cannot find out to what extent Malthus was a member of the Academy, and how far he was a private pupil in Wakefield's household. Wakefield wrote to a friend of an arrangement with a young gentleman 'who attends some lectures at the Academy'. It is also confusing that both Lucy Aikin and her niece Mrs Le Breton speak as if Malthus had known John Aikin the Elder, although he died in 1780; it is possible that the family legend grew up through Malthus's having made some complimentary reference to the reputation of their grandfather and great-grandfather respectively. One of Lucy Aikin's brothers married Gilbert Wakefield's elder daughter, and we know that Malthus, ever a faithful friend, kept up the family connection until his death.

It is exasperating that young Robert's letters home are lost: Dr Bonar tells us that he wrote to his father on 26 April 1782, which would appear to be the first in the series. According to Wakefield's *Memoirs*, Wakefield was 'fixt' in the autumn of 1783 at Bramcote, 'a most pleasant village within four miles of Nottingham on the Derby road'. He had written to all his friends ('real or pretended' - Wakefield's *Memoirs* are full of such animadversions) for recommendations to parents, but 'All my applications were answered only by a single pupil who had been a student under me at Warrington', which rather implies that Robert had gone home for a while and then travelled north again.<sup>43</sup>

Wakefield charged £100 a year, and liked his pupils to stay with him all the time, except for two months in the summer. In 1798 he wrote to a friend about his relationship with his young gentlemen:

As every species of magisterial severity and distance is, and ever was, absolutely foreign to my thoughts, and inconsistent with my dispositions, an entire equality of association has ever taken place with all my pupils and my family, so that no more embarrassment as to any domestic enjoyment should attend them than if they were at home, and no affections prevail in me towards them but such as extend to my own children.

On this account the whole family becomes moulded anew, and the same alteration takes place merely by the admission of one gentleman, as of half a dozen: nay, in some respects more; as the want of associates renders a much greater portion of friendly intercourse necessary to render their lives happy; without which no literary improvement can ever be expected to take place. Out of the intervals of study, therefore, I should neither expect nor wish a young gentleman to be insulated in his own room, but to have a free

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communication with us all, as he finds agreeable, without any hesitation or formality.

It is impossible not to speculate on how Robert regarded the household of his tutor, who was but ten years older than himself, and often worried at this period, as his letters show, by the illnesses of his little children.

His biographers point out that although Wakefield 'had a great dislike to interruptions, especially in the morning, yet he never betrayed any incivility or impatience when broken in upon by those who, perhaps, from their own want of occupation, would intrude rather indiscreetly on his hours of study'. In a paper entitled *Petty Moralities* Wakefield himself wrote, 'I never denied myself to any visitor, of whatever rank or calling, on account of occupation, or any other cause, to my knowledge, in all my life.'<sup>44</sup> Malthus was the same. After his death his colleague Empson wrote of him: 'It is one of the blessings of well-ordered natures to be always comparatively at leisure and unconstrained. While [Mr. Malthus] was most deeply engaged in his philosophical speculations, he could pass at once from his study to his drawing room with an elastic step and a placid countenance, to animate and share the cheerfulness around him.'<sup>45</sup>

In another aspect of his character Malthus was not influenced by his tutor at all. According to one of his descendants Wakefield was, 'in an age of cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and almost universal indifference to the sufferings of animals, so humane that he gave up fishing, of which he was exceedingly fond, as well as shooting, because every form of cruelty was abhorrent to him. He tried to persuade his friend, Charles James Fox, to do the same, but was unsuccessful in the attempt.'<sup>46</sup> Malthus, like Fox, much enjoyed shooting all his life.

How much of his liberal politics Malthus picked up from Wakefield is a matter of conjecture. Robert wrote to his father on 16 March 1784: 'Mr. Fox and his party have, it seems, at last given up the struggle, and by the account of the papers Mr. Pitt is quite elated with his success. [He had just gained a large majority in the general election, after three months of minority government.] I really think he will ruin himself and will not be able to stand it after all, for the rest of the Ministry have but very little ability. He will never be so great a man as if he had shown a little more condescension and less ambition. It appears ridiculous that so young a man should hold the highest offices in the State.'

'Thank you for your politics,' his father replied on 5 April, 'but I am not of your mind with regard to young ministers. They may have a little liberty and a little of the fine enthusiasms caught from Athens, Lacedaemon, and Rome, which Sir Robert Walpole used to say cost him a year or two to rid some obstinate boys of. I am afraid that . . . old men buy their political experience with the loss of too many virtues.'

Robert answered on 15 April: 'I am by no means against young ministers,

but I think that general enthusiasm of youth which you mention is seldom found separated from a kind of modesty and diffidence in their own abilities. This, from the accounts I have always heard, seems to be by no means the case with young Pitt, who has taken upon himself the sole management of the State without any single person of any ability to associate in the arduous undertaking.' In the same letter he wrote: 'I think I shall never repent having been this little time at Bramcot before my going to college, for I have, if I am not deceived, got into a more steady and regular way of study.'<sup>47</sup>

Like other young gentlemen of eighteen, Robert sounds as if he could be insufferable at times, but the letters show a happy relationship between father and son. Of Robert's mother Bonar writes that 'only a few touches are recorded. She appears from the private letters to have been the oracle of the household in practical matters. There is one letter of Robert to her written on 11 December 1783, in which familiarity and affection and respect are properly blended. From a letter of Daniel to Robert (21 April 1784), it appears that she did not want Robert to go to either of the two great Universities. "I have myself" (adds his father) "a partiality for your taking degrees, and I prefer Cambridge."<sup>48</sup>

Gilbert Wakefield seems to have made all the arrangements, and on 7 June 1784 he set out from Bramcote with his pupil, to enter him at his own old college, Jesus, as a pensioner (what is called at Oxford a commoner). After a brief stay in Cambridge, presumably at Jesus College, Wakefield returned to Nottingham, to combine domestic gentleness with bitter theological and academic controversy.<sup>49</sup> Robert, we imagine, went home for the long vacation.

'Home' at this period was Ferry House, at Cookham in Berkshire, on the river Thames. According to Eliza Berkeley, the daughter-in-law of the philosopher-bishop, Daniel Malthus had there become very fond of her son George, who was three years older than his own Robert. From her pathetic introduction to her posthumous collection of George's verse, it is possible to find out a little about the neighbourhood: some families, 'The polite Lord Conyngham's, the learned, accomplished Daniel Malthus's, the very sensible Thomas Forster's . . . lived in the strictest harmony, perpetually meeting at each other's houses.' Mrs Malthus was in favour for having praised George's good looks, and he sent a sad poem to her when in the spring of 1781 he left Eton to go to the University of St Andrews. He wrote some equally conventional verses to the Misses Malthus, but the eldest seems to have been his idol, and on her death he composed an elegy which he had printed but 'never sold', although it is marked as costing 1s. 6d.

The Malthuses must surely sometimes have smiled at the Berkeleys behind their backs. Poor Eliza reminisced: 'It was a great diversion, when Mr. Berkeley was 17 or 18, to a lovely young lady [Henrietta Malthus] . . . to wink on Mrs. Berkeley and say, "Aye, one day or other Berkeley will marry a girl with a hundred thousand pounds, and change his name to

Hickenbottom". . . . He used to storm, and say, "Harriet, hold your tongue: I will not change my name for a million."<sup>50</sup>

When Henrietta Malthus died on 8 July 1785, George Monck Berkeley (1763-93) was about to be admitted a student of the Inner Temple. His elegy was dedicated to the surviving members of that 'truly amiable family of which Miss M — — was once a bright, a distinguished and a justly valued ornament'. According to this young man Henrietta, 'not satisfied with the attainment of every female excellence, and every human virtue, soared, on adventurous wing, into the regions of science and philosophy'. She was charitable, too, for the poet exhorts her father to look after her 'aged swains'.<sup>51</sup> Henrietta's niece, Louisa Bray, recalls her mother telling her that her eldest sister was 'very musical, and when they lived at Cookham on the Thames, they often went on the river, and she would sing the beautiful airs from the Messiah with only the accompaniment of a flute or guitar'.

It must have been a sad day when twenty-eight-year-old Henrietta was buried ('in Wool') at Harrow, like her Graham grandfather and great-grandfather. There seems no reason why this church should have been chosen unless she had been staying there before her death, possibly under the care of her uncle Richard Robert Graham, but this is conjecture. That she had been ill for a considerable time is indicated by some verses which her brother Robert is supposed to have written about her, beginning

In pain and sickness tried, thou'st kissed the rod.  
Go, gentlest, purest spirit to thy God.<sup>52</sup>

So far as is known, the Malthuses had buried no other children.

Until this bereavement, the family circle sounds to have been both happy and enlightened, in spite of Daniel Malthus's eccentricities, or perhaps because of them; it is, of course, possible that outsiders like the Berkeleys were more conscious of his charm than his family were, and less affected by that 'imperative will' to which everything gave way. We would nowadays praise Daniel Malthus for his choice of schoolmasters for his gifted but severely handicapped son, so it is interesting to find a very different opinion expressed by a much younger man who only knew Robert Malthus for the last ten years of his life - William Empson (1791-1852). Empson was a Winchester man, and a school-fellow of Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby, with whose educational views he was in complete agreement.

Thus we find Empson, in 1837, writing disparagingly in the *Edinburgh Review* about 'the successive roofs of Richard Graves, the Warrington Academy, and Gilbert Wakefield'. Empson rejoiced that neither upon the surface of Malthus's mind

nor in its depths was there anything to be perceived of the schools in which he had been brought up - nothing either of the wayward

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father or the eccentric novelist, of the scrupulous nonconformist or the presumptuous polemic. Difficulties which would be ruinous to an ordinary disposition, may accordingly have been serviceable in the strengthening and perfecting of his. The early habit of having to think and decide for himself, would force on him a steadiness beyond his years. While the necessity, in which he was often placed, of differing from those whom he otherwise regarded with affection and esteem, doubtless contributed essentially to that combination of universal kindness towards others, with strict personal self-respect, which met so happily in his character.<sup>53</sup>

Daniel Malthus could hardly have been better rewarded.



## 4 Cambridge

Robert Malthus arrived at Jesus College on 3 November 1784. His first concern would have been with furniture; we know from his friend Clarke that some of the beds in Jesus were 'not half long enough', and that it was important to make sure there were plenty of candlesticks.<sup>54</sup> Robert wrote home to his father on 14 November:

I am now pretty well settled in my rooms. The lectures begin tomorrow; and, as I had time last week to look over my mathematics a little, I was, upon examination yesterday, found prepared to read with the year above me, though I believe I shall attend a few lectures at the same time with those of my own year. We begin with mechanics and Maclaurin, Newton, and Keill's *Physics*. We shall also have lectures on Mondays and Fridays in Duncan's *Logick*, and in Tacitus's *Life of Agricola* on Wednesdays and Saturdays. I have subscribed to a bookseller who has supplied me with all the books necessary. We have some clever men at college, and I think it seems rather the fashion to read. The chief study is mathematics, for all honour in taking a degree depends upon that Science, and the great aim of most of the men is to take an honourable degree. At the same time I believe we have some good classics. I am acquainted with two, one of them of this year, who is indeed an exceedingly clever man and will stand a very good chance for the classical prize if he does not neglect himself - I have read in chapel twice. It seems that it is the custom when the readers are absent that the two juniors should read the lessons, and I believe I am the junior of my year.<sup>55</sup>

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All this sounds rather solemn, but there were other sides to Robert's career as an undergraduate. To begin with the most important: while he was at Cambridge he made four lifelong friends. Chief among these was William Otter of Jesus (1768-1840), who had also been educated by tutors, the son of a country clergyman who had parishes in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Otter in due course became Bishop of Chichester and founded a teachers' training college, but we are particularly indebted to him for his *Memoir* of his celebrated friend; it was published in 1836 as a sort of preface to the posthumous second edition of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy*.

Edward Daniel Clarke (1769-1822), known as Ned, another Jesus man, was also the son of a country clergyman. His father and grandfather had both been antiquaries of some note. Clarke had been to the Grammar School at Tonbridge, and in 1812 he wrote to Otter that he did not think anyone educated privately had been truly popular at the University: a belief hardly supported by the facts, but in due course the young Clarkes went to Eton and the young Otters to Rugby.

The other two men, who were close friends with each other although they were at different colleges, were John Wishaw (1764-1840) and William Smyth (1765-1849). Wishaw was from a well-to-do Cheshire family, and came up to Trinity College from Macclesfield Grammar School intending to go into the church; but the loss of a leg while he was at Cambridge made him 'canonically ineligible to the service of the altar' - he was not 'a whole man' - so he entered Gray's Inn in 1789, to be called to the Bar in 1794. Smyth, of Peterhouse, was the Etonian son of a Liverpool banker, and later became Professor of Modern History. Malthus seems to have known this pair of friends quite separately from the other pair, Otter and Clarke.

Since we shall follow the lives of these four men as we follow Malthus's, I need say no more about them here, except to mention Ned Clarke's balloon. It was sent up with great éclat from the lovely Cloister Court of Jesus, bearing a kitten in the basket: 'This balloon,' wrote Otter, 'magnificent in its size and splendid in its decorations, was constructed and manoeuvred, from first to last, entirely by himself.'<sup>56</sup> Malthus did nothing so dramatic, although according to his niece Louisa Bray he was extremely avant-garde in his hair-dressing. She heard that when he was an undergraduate 'he let his fair hair, which curled naturally, hang in ringlets on his neck, which in those days of powder and pig-tails must have looked singular.' Henry Gunning (1768-1854) observed in his invaluable *Reminiscences* that at this period in Cambridge 'All men wore powder, and many were the degrees of whiteness; I can well remember several who used it of a pink shade.'<sup>57</sup> Some ten years later, when George Pryme went up (he was to become the University's first Professor of Political Economy) the scene had changed: 'There were two or three undergraduates who wore powder . . . The rest

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of us wore our hair curled. It was thought very rustic and unfashionable not to have it so.’<sup>58</sup> Thus in some small matters, as well as great ones, Malthus was in advance of his age.

Otter did not describe Robert’s personal appearance, but he had this to say about him:

At this time, he was generally distinguished for gentlemanlike deportment and feelings, a polished humanity which remained with him through life, and a degree of temperance and prudence, very rare at that period, and carried by him even into his academical pursuits. In these he was always more remarkable for the steadiness than for the ardour of his application, preferring to exert his mind equably in the various departments of literature then cultivated in the college, rather than to devote it exclusively or eminently to any one, and evidently actuated more by the love of excellence than by the desire of excelling. For this happy disposition he seems to have been indebted next to his own gracious nature to the peculiar character of his education, which while it had employed higher motives with good effect, had rarely brought into action the principle of competition, so generally resorted to in colleges and schools; and the consequence was that he read in a better spirit, reflected more freely and more usefully and acquired more general information than any of his contemporaries.

Otter then went on with a little essay on the general necessity of competition in education, as ‘a natural remedy for the natural evils of our youth, indolence and the love of pleasure’.<sup>59</sup>

In spite of his gentlemanlike deportment, Malthus seems to have been a buffoon on occasion. He had ‘fitful bursts of fancy, which were wont to set the table in a roar’; his taste for humour, ‘set off as it used to be by a very comic expression of features, and a most peculiar intonation of voice when he was in the vein, were often a source of infinite delight and pleasantry to his companions’. Again according to Otter, Malthus ‘found sufficient time for the cultivation of history and general literature, particularly of poetry, of which he was always a great admirer and discerning judge’. He ‘obtained prizes for declamations in Latin and English’, which is unexpected, in view of his disability.<sup>60</sup>

Robert’s general physical health was always good, although he apparently suffered from rheumatism during the winter of 1785–6. In a letter his father admonished him: ‘Don’t say *rhumatism*, but consider the derivation, and that no man should have a disorder which he can’t spell, especially a man of Jesus.’ Malthus was to be bad at spelling all his life.<sup>61</sup>

The attack of rheumatism occurred when Robert stayed for several inclement months continuously in Cambridge, as he did not go home for

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the Christmas vacation of 1785 - the family's first Christmas without Henrietta. His father sent him a long letter on 13 January 1786:

My dear Bob,

I find you are not yet in your new rooms. I heartily hope they will prove agreeable to you. We should have been truly glad to have seen you here in the leisure of Christmas, and would have subscribed to your journey; not that I used to think Oxford the less pleasant, and certainly not the less useful for being disburthened of some of its society: I imagine you will say the same of Cambridge.

I have always found that one of my greatest comforts in life was the delight I have ever taken in solitude - if, indeed, one can give that name to anything which is likely to happen to you or me. A true hermitage for any length of time is, I believe, an unnatural state; it would be a cruel deprivation of what we have both experienced to be the heart's dearest happiness. But even this at certain seasons will strengthen and refresh the mind, and suffer her wings to grow which

In the various bustle of resort  
Were all too ruffled and sometimes impair'd.

The skating has been good this year. Did you go to Ely? By the way have you learnt the heart and cross roll? All the other tricks, such as skating backwards, &c. are absurd; but I like these as they amuse one upon a small piece of ice . . . The frost was harder than usual in England. January 2, at sunrise, 14 Fahr. January 3, at 9½ post merid 14 again. Ask Mr. — — how it was at Cambridge. My thermometer was upon a north wall at a distance from the house.

Did not I ask whether you had got my Theocritus with you? Have you got Rutherford's Philosophy, 2 vols. quarto? I would advise you to read something of that kind, while you are engaged in mathematical studies; and constantly to use yourself to apply your tools. I hate to see a girl working curious stitches upon a rag. [This may be a reference to Jane Dalton's embroidery, so much admired by Richard Graves. Jane Dalton's bookplate was a representation of an elaborately scalloped handkerchief, diamond shaped, with a coarse darn in the middle.]

I recommend Sanderson's Optics to you, and Emerson's Mechanics; Long's Astronomy you certainly have. There are papers of the mathematical kind in the Royal Society transactions which are generally worth reading. How do you manage about books? What good book on mensuration have you met with? Have you seen Bongner's mensuration of the degree in South America? I suppose Sir I's Principia to be your chief classical book after the elementary ones.

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We are all pretty well; but Charlotte will write in a day or two.  
All send love. Adieu, my dear boy!

D.M.

Malthus kept all his life the copy of Sir Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, which he bought second-hand, splendidly bound and embossed with his college arms. Few of us nowadays would take in our stride a scientific treatise in Latin, but this copy of the 1726 edition has been well used. Young Bob replied to his father very firmly:

The plan of mathematical and philosophical reading pursued at Cambridge is perhaps too much confined to speculation; the intention seems to be to ground you well in the principles, supposing you to apply them at leisure after your degree. In going through this course of study, if I read popular treatises upon every branch, it will take up my whole time, and absolutely exclude all other kinds of reading whatever, which I should by no means wish. I think therefore it will be better for me to pursue the general course adopted by the university, seeing the general application of everything I read without always descending to particulars.

When I mentioned popular treatises I did not mean to refer to the books you recommended in your last letter, but to what you said in a former one, expressing a wish to see me a practical surveyor, mechanic, and navigator; a knowledge of which kind would be difficult to obtain before I took my degree, while engaged in the plan of mathematical reading adopted by the university.

I am by no means, however, inclined to get forward without wishing to see the use and application of what I read. On the contrary I am rather remarked in college for talking of what actually exists in nature, or may be put to real practical use. With regard to the books you mentioned in your last, as it is absolutely necessary to read those which our lecturer makes use of, it is difficult to find time to apply to other tracts of the same nature, in the regular manner they deserve: particularly as many other books are required to be read during our course of lectures to be able to understand them as we ought. For instance, we have had no lectures of any consequence in algebra and fluxions, and yet a man would find himself very deficient in going through the branches of natural philosophy and Newton's *Principia*, without a decent knowledge of both. As I attended lectures with the year above me, and the course only continues three years, I shall be entirely my own master after the next summer vacation, and then will be my time to read different authors, make comparisons, and properly digest the knowledge I have taken in.

I believe from what I have let fall at different times, you have conceived the Senate House examination to be more confined to

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mathematical speculations than it really is. The greatest stress is laid on a thorough knowledge of the branches of natural philosophy, and problems of every kind in these as well as in mathematics are set during the examination; such a one as the ascertaining the distance of the Sun by a transit of Venus is not unlikely sometimes to be among the number.

If you will give me leave to proceed in my own plans of reading for the next two years, (I speak with submission to your judgment), I promise you at the expiration of that time to be a decent natural philosopher, and not only to know a few principles, but to be able to apply those principles in a variety of useful problems. I hope you will excuse me for detaining you so long upon this subject, but I thought I had not sufficiently explained myself in my last letter, and that you might possibly conclude from what I there said, that I intended to go on in the beaten track, without once reflecting on the use and application of the study in which I was engaged.<sup>62</sup>

These letters, quoted by Otter, speak for themselves. Possibly on account of his vacation work, Robert Malthus was made an Exhibitioner of his college in 1786: an exhibition at Oxford or Cambridge is an award lower than a scholarship, but for either to be conferred by the authorities in the course of an undergraduate's career is an honour worth having. It was in the spring of this year that Bob sent a letter to his father about his future; Bonar maintains that he had wanted to go into the church 'long before Cambridge', but he gives no reference for this statement. In any case, it was after a discussion with the Master of Jesus, Dr Beadon, that Robert wrote on 19 April 1786:

He seemed at first to advise against orders, upon the idea that the defect in my speech would be an obstacle to my rising in the Church, and he thought it a pity that a young man of some abilities should enter a profession without at least some hope of being at the top of it. When, however, I afterwards told him that the utmost of my wishes was a retired living in the country, he said he did not imagine that my speech would be much objection in that case, that, for his own part, when I read or declaimed in chapel he scarcely ever lost a single word. As to the business of getting into orders, he did not conceive there was any legal objection, but the bishops had it so entirely in their power to ordain whom they pleased that it was impossible to say how they would act; he thought there were some who might refuse, but that the generality would not.<sup>63</sup>

There is no evidence as to what Daniel Malthus thought about his son's decision, but it would have been very different from the views of an unorthodox parent today. In the eighteenth century at least one of the

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younger sons of a good family went into the church almost as a matter of course.

As was the custom of the time, Malthus did not have his final examination until January 1788, so that in 1787 he could enjoy his third Cambridge summer. His father wrote to him on 16 June:

May I take the liberty of sending my compliments to Mr. Frend, with my most grateful thanks for the attention he has been so kind as to show you. You will guess the pleasure I have in returning thanks for that notice which you would not have had without deserving it.

Everything I have heard of you has given me the most heartfelt satisfaction. I have always wished, my dear boy, that you should have a love of letters, that you should be made independent of mean and trifling amusements, and feel a better support than that of the next man who is idle enough to offer you his company. I have no doubt that you will be able to procure any distinction from them you please. I am far from repressing your ambition; but I shall content myself with their adding to your happiness. Every kind of knowledge, every acquaintance with nature and art, will amuse and strengthen your mind, and I am perfectly pleased that cricket should do the same by your legs and arms. I love to see you excel in exercises of the body, and I think myself that the better half, and much the most agreeable one, of the pleasures of the mind is best enjoyed while one is upon one's legs; - this is pretty well for me to say, who have little else left but my bed and my arm-chair. [He was fifty-seven.] May you long enjoy all the delights of youth and youthful spirits, of an improving mind, and of a healthful body, but ever and above all, my dear boy, with virtue and its best affections in your heart. Adieu!<sup>64</sup>

The Mr Frend mentioned in this letter was William Frend (1757-1841), Robert's tutor at Jesus. Had he not still been alive when Empson criticised Malthus's teachers in his *Edinburgh Review* article, some harsh things might have been said about him too. William Frend was a year younger than Gilbert Wakefield; he had, like him, been Second Wrangler, taken orders, and become a Fellow of Jesus, although he had been at Christ's as an undergraduate; there his tutor had been that great Anglican William Paley (1743-1805). In addition to his fellowship, Frend was also given the living of Madingley, so that a competence and a career in the church were available to him against the time when he should marry and have to resign from his college. This Frend renounced in the summer of 1787, in a moving declaration which his pupils must have read:

Whereas I, William Frend, did at several times, within the years 1780 and 1784, subscribe to the articles and doctrines of the church

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of England, as by law established, being now convinced, by an attentive study of the holy scriptures, that many things contained in the said articles, have no foundation whatever in the holy scriptures, I do hereby declare my disbelief of many of the said articles and doctrines, particularly of the second, the fifth, and the eighth articles of that summary of faith, commonly called the thirty-nine Articles: and whereas from November 1780, till June 1787, I did officiate as a minister of the church of England, I do moreover declare, that there are many parts of its liturgy, to which I have insuperable objections, particularly to the prayers addressed to Jesus Christ, and to the Trinity; and as universal benevolence seems to be the striking character of the religion of Jesus Christ, I cannot conclude this declaration, without expressing my abhorrence of a tenet inculcated in one part of the said service, by which every person differing in opinion, as to some obscure points of an obscure creed, is doomed to everlasting perdition.<sup>65</sup>

Jesus College was to be proud of Frend, nearly two centuries later, as one of its famous Unitarians; but at this period Malthus's tutor must have been extremely unhappy. He followed up his declaration of disbelief with a pamphlet against the University's insistence on subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, and on the treatment of Nonconformists in England generally. We know that full religious toleration, for both Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, was one of the firmest tenets of Malthus's life, and it is impossible not to speculate on how he felt at this time about the position of the Church of England. My own guess is that Malthus was more or less in agreement with Archdeacon Paley: it is certain that he admired Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, which appeared in 1785, and was much gratified to learn later that Paley had been converted to his theory of population.

Paley's attitude to the Thirty-nine Articles was well summed up by his biographer, G. W. Meadley:

The Articles of Religion [Paley] treated of as mere articles of peace, the whole of which it was impossible the framers could expect any one person to believe, as upon dissection they would be found to contain about two hundred and forty distinct and different propositions, many of them inconsistent with each other. They must therefore, he said, be considered as propositions, which, for the sake of keeping peace amongst the different sects of reformers, who originally united in composing the church of England, it was agreed should not be impugned or preached against.<sup>66</sup>

There is, I must stress, no evidence; but it seems likely that Malthus would have accepted this opinion. We shall see later that he did in fact share

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Frend's abhorrence of the idea of everlasting perdition.

Whatever his views may have been, the young Robert duly went to the Proctor to pay his examination fees, and then to the Registry to subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles. From the four-day ordeal which followed, he emerged with credit as Ninth Wrangler, the only Jesus man among the Wranglers. It should perhaps be explained that this extraordinary title for outstanding Cambridge mathematicians owes its origin to the fact that part of the examination consisted in 'Keeping an act', which meant a public argument defending a prescribed thesis, that is, 'wrangling'. It was a severe test, considered the hardest in Europe, and Pryme reminds us that 'the Senate House was not then artificially warmed'.

Henry Gunning, writing in about 1851, began his chapter on 1788 thus:

On the 18th of January, we were admitted *ad respondendum quaestioni*. The admission of the Bachelors took place without the least interruption. Our University at that time prided itself that in this respect our practice was diametrically opposite to that of our sister University, at which on all public occasions the entrance of the University officers, and of persons distinguished by their rank and station, was greeted either by shouts of applause, or by hissing and hootings. Sorry am I to observe that for many years past the conduct of our undergraduates has become more outrageous than that of the Oxonians. It has not unfrequently happened that the Proctors have been obliged to clear the galleries entirely, and it *has* happened that the Vice-Chancellor has been under the necessity of adjourning the proceedings; for not only have the University authorities whose conduct has been thought to be marked by harshness and severity, been hissed and hooted, but even private individuals, whose supposed opinions (whether political or religious) were disagreeable to the majority, have been received with marked insult. On this account the election of Vice-Chancellor, which used to take place in the afternoon, is now constantly completed at an early hour in the morning. After admission to their degrees, the Bachelors generally assembled in large parties to dinner, when everybody was obliged to swallow a considerable quantity of bad wine.<sup>67</sup>

Malthus apparently stayed up at college after the jollifications to prepare for ordination and do some general reading. He wrote to his father on 17 April 1788:

I have laid aside my chemistry for a while and am at present endeavouring to get some knowledge of general history and geography. I have been lately reading Gibbon's *Decline of the Roman Empire*. He gives one some useful information concerning the origin and progress of those nations of barbarians which now form the

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polished states of Europe, and throws some light upon the beginning of that dark period which so long overwhelmed the world, and which cannot, I think, but excite one's curiosity. He is a very entertaining writer in my opinion; his style is sometimes really sublime, everywhere interesting and agreeable, though perhaps it may in general be called rather too florid for history. I shall like much to see his next volumes.<sup>68</sup>

They were published a few weeks later. Sometime that year Robert Malthus, Esquire, became the Rev. Robert Malthus, and then, for a decade, we seem to lose him. It was a decade of much drama, in this history of the world and in the lives of Malthus's family and friends, but of his own doings, between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-two, we know almost nothing.



## 5 Albury and Shere

From 1787 until 1939 the village of Albury, in Surrey, was to be the headquarters of the Malthus family. One wonders whether Mr and Mrs Daniel Malthus intended to establish themselves here permanently at last, or whether they had always meant to settle down in each new home they tried. Henrietta's death in 1785 had been followed by a year of anxiety over their youngest child, Mary Anne Catherine, who was 'supposed to be going into a decline, and for a whole year lived on vegetable diet, and was bled every month, but she recovered entirely to go through fatigues few constitutions could have borne', dying at the age of eighty-one.<sup>69</sup> Some of her descendants still live in Albury and the neighbouring parish of Shere.<sup>70</sup>

We know that in addition to the estate in Essex purchased by his grandfather, Daniel Malthus owned land in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire; but Surrey then, as now, was the favourite county of the well-to-do who wished to be within easy reach of London.

Daniel's nephew John Eckersall (whose parents had settled near Leatherhead) had married Daniel's Dorking niece Catherine Wathen, in 1774, and built himself a house called Burford Lodge, near Box Hill, in the same part of Surrey. John Eckersall had gone up to Christ Church from Westminster School in 1766, and took his BA in 1770, the year his father died. He made the Grand Tour in some style, with the Hon. John Trevor, also of Christ Church, and like so many Englishmen he was painted in Rome by Pompeo Batoni. The portrait, three-quarter length, his head turned to his right, shows him rather unflatteringly: he looks too fat for a man of twenty-five, his lips are too much of a Cupid's bow; one is reminded of Jane

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Austen's immortal phrase 'a strong, natural, sterling insignificance', which it were utterly false to apply to the truly delightful old gentleman into which John Eckersall developed after he had had eleven children.<sup>71</sup>

Catherine Wathen, soon after she became Catherine Eckersall, was painted by Reynolds; sittings began in 1775, stopped some time before the birth of her daughter Harriet (on 1 May 1776, at St James's Square, London) and were resumed again afterwards. It is a lovely picture in the traditional grand manner, half length, with the bride's hair piled and coiled, ermine at her neck, a flower at her waist, the pensive left profile resting on her hand, a hint of a windswept tree in the background. We can well believe that Catherine had a beautiful voice and played the harp; it is harder to visualise her as the happy and lively matriarch she was later to become.<sup>72</sup>

We do not know whether a visit to the older Wathens or the younger Eckersalls inspired the Malthuses to return to Surrey; we do know that in 1786, on Friday 10 October - a cloudy day - William Bray met Mr Malthus at Albury Park. The house was then owned by Captain (later Admiral) Finch, and the Rector of Albury, Mr Polhill, was the third visitor.

We know this from William Bray's diaries, never published in full, and one of the treasures of Guildford Muniment Room.<sup>73</sup> They are little more than engagement books, but a most useful source for Malthus's biographer, since Bray did not die until 1832, at the age of ninety-six. The Brays had been the principal family in Shere since Tudor times; we must distinguish between the Brays, who were 'landed', and the Malthuses, who bought land in different parts of the country for investment. William Bray, being a younger son, became a lawyer, with his headquarters in London, in Great Russell Street; by the time he inherited the Surrey estate from his elder brother George, a bachelor clergyman, he was far too immersed in his practice to give it up. His activity was remarkable, for in addition to a large legal practice, which involved incessant travelling - on horseback as well as by chaise and coach - he wrote the major part of Manning and Bray's *History of Surrey*. According to his granddaughter Louisa he was 'a cold dry man', but it is impossible to read his diaries without admiring his energy and sympathising with his intense grief at the deaths of his children and grandchildren - grief perhaps the more intense because he was unable to express his affection for them while they lived.

Possibly William Bray arranged for the purchase by Daniel Malthus of 'Captain Schaw's house'. The descendants of both these men (keen local historians) have not been able to identify the site, but it was in that part of Albury which belonged to the parish of Shere.

Whatever his religious views, a parish document, dated 28 September 1787, shows that Daniel Malthus rented seats in Shere church appropriate to his position. His 'Maid Servants' apparently needed more than one row: some sit behind those of George Bray, of Tower Hill, and others with those of Mr Duncomb the Rector, just in front of the row allotted to 'Women