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EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN EARLY VICTORIAN ENGLAND

What is the nature and height of the fence
with which the playground is enclosed?¹

I

"I HAVE FOUND THE HOPES OF ALL ENLIGHTENED MEN TO REST, AS the great hope of staying to some degree this flood of evil, upon education". So, in 1845, wrote Henry Moseley, the most perceptive of the first generation of schools inspectors in England. He added, with a rarer insight, that these hopes were sometimes less than rational: men took shelter in the education cry "in despair of any other solution".²

It is not difficult to establish the first part of his statement. A cursory summary of the 1830s and 1840s shows that the education of the poor was, indeed, one of the strongest of early Victorian obsessions. In 1839, the Education Department began its cuckoo-like progress in Charles Greville's Council Office. Earlier in the decade other government departments with less direct responsibilities in this field, nonetheless looked towards educational remedies. The Prison Inspectorate, founded in 1835, turned, almost instinctively it seems, to moral and religious education to stem a rising crime rate, especially among the children of the urban poor.³ As in crime so in pauperism, crudely deterrent legal mechanisms were supplemented by attempts at educational rehabilitation — Chadwick's New Poor Law by Dr. Kay's workhouse and district schools. Similarly, the early Factory Inspectors, following the Benthamite logic of the Act of 1833, counted education among their major concerns.⁴ The education of the poor figured largely in many of the social and industrial inquiries of the period, even those appointed under other briefs.⁵

In parliament, a major part of the Whig party, rather erratically led by Lord John Russell and Henry Brougham and stimulated by the Philosophical Radicals, favoured from the late 1830s any practi-

¹ Form of Report for Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, *Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education*, 1840-1, p. 13. This important source, published annually by the Department, is cited below as *Minutes*.

² *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 266.

³ E.g. First Report, *Parl. Pap.*, 1836, xxxv, pp. 83 ff.

⁴ E.g. Horner, "Report of 18 January, 1837", *Parl. Pap.*, 1837, xxxi, pp. 98-9.

⁵ The Commission on the Hand-loom Weavers is a good example.

able measure of official educational action. Tory resistance rested more on distrust of a secular agency than upon opposition to the end itself. Indeed, the most ambitious educational plan of the period came from the office of a Conservative Home Secretary, while the most eager educationalist in the Cabinets of the time was Lord Wharncliffe, Graham's Tory colleague. "Public Education" was, of course, a perennial source of very inconclusive debate in both houses of parliament, many private members making the subject their own.

The growth of interest and of institutions outside government was no less marked. The National Society, educational agency of the established church, reached a peak of fund-raising and project-launching between 1838 and 1843. A similar involvement, notwithstanding deep inner disagreements, may be traced within most branches of old and new dissent. In the late 1840s the Roman Catholic Poor School Committee was founded. The period was marked too by the spread of training colleges for elementary school-teachers and of systems of diocesan organization. The founding of pressure groups like the Central Society for Education (1837-9), a boom in surveys of educational provision by, for example, the new Statistical Societies, a growth in educational journals and an enthusiasm for foreign and progressive teaching methods, all testify to the intensity of interest. Piles of educational pamphletary, usually appearing in batches, add *embarras de richesse* for the educational historian.

All this ignores, of course, the real roots of educational enterprise in the voluntary era: the founding and maintenance of schools for the poor in thousands of local communities, the critical subject of an educational history that still largely waits to be written. Omitted too are "educational" enterprises of a less formal sort, to which, as Professor R. K. Webb has shown, orthodox liberal opinion was increasingly addicted.⁶ Nor was the orthodox tradition the only one: there were those who sought to teach the people their political rights or move them to co-operation not competition. So it is clear that the condition of the poor came almost to *mean* the condition of their education. As one Birmingham Justice of the Peace put it: "I have no other conception of any other means of forcing civilisation downwards in society, except by education".⁷

Qualifications should, of course, be registered. Concern was not new, for the educators of these decades built upon a well-established

⁶ R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader 1780-1848* (London, 1955).

⁷ *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 266, note 2.

tradition of educational philanthropy, while greatly extending its scope and refining its methods. It would be rash too to consider concern universal, even among those with whom this article is concerned, the social "superiors" of the poor. Even in the 1840s, considerable if inarticulate resistance to popular education persisted, especially it was often said among employers of agricultural labour. And a more widespread lack of zest, or a failure of continuing interest, is suggested by the rather general disinclination of the laity adequately to support public philanthropic schools, the favoured agencies of orthodox educators. Those who spoke, wrote and preached so much about education were, no doubt, an articulate minority. The majority voted more silently with their pockets and were forced, at length, to pay by rates.

Even so, recognition of an intensification of interest raises interesting and important questions. What was the nature of this educational enterprise; how is it best understood? How are we to account for it at this particular historical juncture, and how is it to be evaluated? And why was it that despite the intensity of interest rather little was achieved before 1870, at least in terms of a really effective general system?

The aim here is to attempt to answer the first question and the fundamental one. But this is only a necessary prelude to the much bigger problem of explanation for which this article is intended only as a base.

II

There are at least four approaches. The first is to look at the stated intentions and the acknowledged motives of orthodox educators themselves: to see, in other words, what they thought or said they were doing. Although this is the obvious starting point for good pragmatic historians, there are equally obvious pitfalls: in particular the difficulty of penetrating to unacknowledged but possibly powerful motives and, allied to this, the difficulty of distinguishing between rhetoric (albeit significant rhetoric) designed for a particular polemical purpose and the conscious beliefs of the speaker. A bigger question looms too: how far is it sufficient to comprehend in terms of the conscious purposes of contemporaries? Or should we not be concerned with the working out of unconscious function within some wider system of change? An example may illustrate some of these difficulties.

In March 1840, Dr. James Phillips Kay, doyen of orthodox educationalists and the chief educational policy-maker within government in

the 1840s, wrote to Sir Thomas Phillips about the need for educational action in the notoriously turbulent region of South Wales.⁸ The letter was meant to bully colliery proprietors into promoting education and wielded three distinct sets of arguments. The first centred upon the material dangers of "disorganising doctrines" and upon the "interests of proprietors who have so much at stake". Educational promotion was represented (was seen?) as analogous to the use of profit to ensure against capital loss. This crudest of appeals to the values of the counting-house was followed by a plea for employees, albeit framed in very moralistic terms. Education would prevent that "self-destruction" attendant upon "high wages" among an "uncivilised" population. Finally, changing into a top-gear of altruism, Kay insisted on the duties of property in succouring a dependent population, a duty akin to that of a parent.⁹

Ambiguities such as these make it difficult to interpret most contemporary statements of intent in a convincing manner. This is especially so, perhaps, of religious educators (the majority) to whom the language of public order came as easily as that of saving souls. On the basis of this sort of evidence the enterprise may be represented as a quasi-coercive and essentially self-protective response or as the genuine outgrowth of humanitarian Christian consciences. And some such division seems to underlie rival interpretations of what we could once call, without any sense of ambiguity, "Social Reform". There is perhaps, more truth, less naïvety in the first than in the second view, but it is doubtful if either, or judicious mixtures of both can be firmly upheld on this sort of evidence.

This leads to other possible approaches. One of these is to study what was actually taught in schools and, by inference, the sort of results that were expected from such teaching. Another is to examine the social and economic foundations of educational promotion at the level on which it mainly operated, that is the local community. Neither approach has been fully exploited though it is clear that much can be learned about what was taught in schools from a content-analysis of the most popular school books.¹⁰ Approach via the local community has suffered from the disintegrative effects of historical specialisms. Interesting work on the motives of manufacturers apart,¹¹ the dynamics of local action remain obscure. What seems

⁸ *Minutes*, 1840-41, pp. 31-2.

⁹ For the significance of this common analogy see p. 112 below.

¹⁰ See, for example, J. M. Goldstrom, "The Changing Social Content of Elementary Education as reflected in School books in use in England 1808-1870" (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Birmingham, 1968).

¹¹ See especially, Sidney Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvi (1963-4); M. Sanderson, "Education and the Factory in Industrial Lancashire, 1780-1840", *ibid.*, xx (1967).

to be needed, though the programme is an ambitious one, is a combination of educational research, social-structural analysis and local economic histories in order to examine the functions of schools and the purposes of schools promoters within well-defined communities and regional economies. Since educational research is still too often in rather familiar grooves, proponents of social-structural research still rather inward-looking, and economic historians still not as interested as they might be in education, the gaps in our knowledge remain.

The fourth approach, more accessible and more traditional, is the one adopted here: to scrutinize the social assumptions implicit in a particular measure; to study, in a critical way, declarations of intent in conjunction with an item of educational practice. The item of practice chosen is the *Minutes* of 1846; the declarations of intent those of its authors, Dr. Kay and his handful of schools inspectors. Research elsewhere has shown that the *Minutes* did indeed grow directly from their perception of English social conditions, limited though action certainly was by the contingencies of educational politics.

This involves a narrowing of focus: governmental activities, still more those of the Department, form one rather thin thread in the whole complex educational enterprise. But they present an aspect which is unusually well-documented and not at all unrepresentative. The makers of the *Minutes*, unusually articulate and committed men, made manifest many contemporary assumptions. The *Minutes* themselves formed the basis of government action in the mid-century and received overwhelming support from a majority of religious educators, extreme High Churchmen and Congregationalists apart. Without some such agreement rooted in a common view of the social purposes of education, government action of this sort would have been impossible.

III

From the educational writings of Dr. Kay (or Kay-Shuttleworth as he became in 1842) and from the reports of his inspectors up to 1846, four recurrent themes emerge: the potential benevolence of economic change, at least in the long-run; an indictment of patterns of working-class behaviour; an emphasis on the need for some substitute for the abrogated functions of the working-class parent; an insistent demand for close control over that substitute — the elementary school and the elementary school-teacher.

The first theme, which might be called a contingent optimism, was strongest in Dr. Kay himself. It is best followed in his Manchester pamphlet of 1832, the real starting-point of his educational concern.¹² At first sight it may seem odd to call the pamphlet optimistic for it presented the city as an object-lesson in the disorders of "commercial" society, of a "disease which impairs its energies, if it does not threaten its vitality".¹³ As a social diagnostician Kay projected into the future tendencies in Manchester society which he had observed and sometimes measured: the incidence of cholera and typhus, domestic squalor, the collapse of family life, crime, prostitution, drunkenness, irreligion, machine-breaking, pauperism and Irish immigration (that "colonisation of savage tribes"). He held up to the reader a terrifying but hypothetical picture of "the natural progress of barbarous habits" — an appalling concatenation of evils that would reduce the working population to utter debasement, destroying the very structure of society by the "explosive violence" of "volcanic elements".¹⁴

Yet his pessimism was not pessimism about industrial society itself — as a system of economic and social organization. These "diseases", he repeatedly emphasized, had a "remote or accidental origin". They were not "necessary results of the commercial system" but stemmed from "foreign and accidental causes". They might "by judicious management" be "entirely" removed. They were temporary embarrassments by which the natural influence of manufactures was "thwarted".

A system, which promotes the advance of civilization, and diffuses it over the world . . . cannot be inconsistent with the happiness of the *great mass of the people*.¹⁵

So optimism was possible if certain conditions were met. These were two-fold: environmental and "moral". "Physical" reforms included the control of sanitary and housing conditions, the growth of "civic institutions" (especially an effective police force) and, in a more general sense of environmental, the removal of "arbitrary restrictions and monopolies in trade", including, of course, the Corn Laws.

The people, however, must also be changed to benefit from the system. "Morality is", as Kay put it, "worthy of the attention of the economist".¹⁶ Behaviour might be changed through a reform of the

¹² J. P. Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (London, 1832). There are two editions which differ significantly. In what follows the first edition is used unless otherwise stated, and is cited as *Manchester*.

¹³ *Manchester*, p. 49.

¹⁴ *Manchester*, pp. 50-1 and 72.

¹⁵ *Manchester*, p. 47.

¹⁶ *Manchester*, p. 51.

Poor Law — “the luckless pseudo-philanthropy of the law”, by the discriminating use of charitable endeavour and, above all, by a “general and effective system of education”. This should teach the artisan not only occupational skills, but also “the nature of his domestic and social relations . . . his political position in society, and the moral and religious duties appropriate to it”. Kay concurred with McCulloch that political economy was an essential element.¹⁷

There are really two modes of argument in the pamphlet. Sometimes Kay can be read as an environmentalist, disentangling a subtle interaction between conditions that were imposed and patterns of behaviour that followed, almost by necessity, from them. He attacked those “prejudiced men” who blamed the poor for all their sufferings. He was acutely aware of the “reflex influence” of conditions upon the “manners”. In an analysis of the “moral” effects of the division of labour, he borrowed from Adam Smith and anticipated Marx. He eschewed simple mono-causal explanations of evils.

But there is much crude moralism in the pamphlet too. “It is melancholy to perceive”, he wrote, “how many of the evils suffered by the poor flow from their own ignorance and moral errors”.¹⁸ He often opposed purely environmental reform, denouncing moves to limit the hours of labour, for instance, as “the nostrums of political quacks”. Without education, time “bestowed” would be “wasted” or “misused”, spent in “sloth”, “dissipation”, or “listening in ignorant wonder” to “political demagogues”.¹⁹ While making the still customary exception for hand-loom weavers, he thought wages generally adequate for a decent comfort, but “their means are consumed by vice and improvidence”. He stressed throughout a “contagion of manners”, a spread of “barbarous habits”, commonly originating among the “degraded” Irish population.

This ambivalence is too deeply rooted in the pamphlet to be resolved by a critical reading. It is a function of the language. Kay was attempting to express the connection between environment, consciousness, and culture in a language of moral censure, of providential causation and of his native Dissenting religion. The very term “morals” (or “moral”) itself, which Kay usually preferred to the kindlier, more neutral eighteenth-century term “manners”, was deeply ambiguous. It served at once as a synonym for “culture” (or “cultural”) and to impute blame. This significant lack of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-3.

¹⁸ *Manchester*, 2nd edn., Introductory Letter, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

a verbal differentiation might well be traced through the whole corpus of orthodox early nineteenth-century social comment.

One might speculate on the sources, intellectual or social, of Kay's contingent optimism. Intellectually he was as much a disciple of Thomas Chalmers, to whom the pamphlet was dedicated, as of Professor W. P. Alison, his teacher and his personal hero at Edinburgh University.²⁰ Alison was a compassionate environmentalist in his analysis of Scottish poverty and public health; Chalmers, building on his experience as a minister in Glasgow, believed in the "supremacy of the moral over the physical".²¹ But perhaps Kay's social loyalties were ultimately decisive, for as a young man he identified himself completely with the real makers of Manchester society: not with the landowner, nor with the "pure merchant", but with the "enlightened manufacturers" with whom he co-operated so closely in local politics and philanthropy. This distinctive class bias is acknowledged clearly enough in the pamphlet itself.²² Moreover there can be no doubt of the functional utility of Kay's diagnosis for the interests, immediate and long-term, of this group of men. It promised an expansion of their markets and a pacification of their work-forces. Above all, it neatly redistributed guilt away from the makers of a social revolution on to those who suffered most from it, with, it is true, a passing knock at "avaricious speculators" in land.²³ It gave to particular interests the appearance of a universal benevolence.

The young Dr. Kay came to education, the theme that was to dominate his official life, through reflection upon Manchester, the harbinger of an industrial civilization. His inspectors of the 1840s, Joseph Fletcher and Seymour Tremenhare apart perhaps, lacked his close acquaintance with the urban industrial environment or his close personal identification with its leaders. Of the seven full-time English inspectors appointed before 1846, five were Anglican clergymen, sharing a traditional Anglican unease about the industrial town. They were less inclined, therefore, to identify manufactures and some ultimate progress; more prone to regard the whole business as decidedly sinister but regrettably necessary. Moseley's vision of a "great tide of human calamity" (matching Kay's "natural progress of barbarous habits") allowed a less exalted rôle to the manufacturer

²⁰ B. C. Bloomfield (ed.), "The Autobiography of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth", *Education Libraries Bulletin*, Suppl. 7, p. 4.

²¹ *Manchester*, p. 61, note 1. For a full presentation of Chalmers's very influential ideas see his *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, 3 vols. (Glasgow, 1821-25.)

²² *Ibid.*, 2nd edn. Introductory Letter, pp. 8-11.

²³ *Manchester*, p. 69.

— blind rather than blameless.²⁴ It was Moseley, indeed, alone of his clerical colleagues, who rivalled Kay in the depth of his analysis. An exceptionally honest and sensitive man, with as acute an interest in science as in theology, he saw deeper than the instinctive or professional moralism of his clerical colleagues. He at least recognized with a humility that was very rare that he and members of his class could not understand what it was like to be a working man.

The fact is [he wrote] that the inner life of the classes below us in society is never penetrated by us. We are profoundly ignorant of the springs of public opinion, the elements of thought and the principles of action among them — those things which we recognize at once as constituting our own social life, in all the moral features which give to it form and substance.²⁵

It is a remarkable passage, yet in the last analysis Moseley himself was unable to bridge the gulf he plainly perceived. His contingent optimism was more muted, but the main contingency was the same: education, the right sort of education, must precede a more concrete emancipation.²⁶

IV

The second theme — their denunciation of working-class decadence — was a critical link in the diagnosis of the educational policy-makers. It provided them with their most powerful propagandizing argument within their own class, for as Kay persistently emphasized, beyond “degradation” lay the threat of a spiralling crime-rate or even bloody anarchy. An accent on changing the modes of working-class behaviour provided too a powerful counter-argument against those who sought to change industrializing society in more fundamental ways, through, for example, the introduction of manhood suffrage. Above all, perhaps, it eased the conscience of educators, or would-be educators, by giving them a warmer, more sentimental doctrine to preach than obedience to “natural” economic “laws”, or the necessity of coercion or punishment to maintain social cohesion. As Kay himself put it, in defending pauper education in 1838:

The attention the [Poor Law] Commissioners have given this subject is likely to prove a means of vindicating their opinions and designs from the imputation of being under the influence of cold blooded economical speculations, without the infusion of a more generous sympathy for the happiness of the poor classes.²⁷

²⁴ *Mimutes*, 1845, i, p. 265.

²⁵ *Mimutes*, 1845, i, pp. 266-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 265 and 271.

²⁷ Pub. Rec. Off., M.H. 32/49, Kay to Lewis, n.d.

In short, by blaming the poor for their poverty (and much else besides) the educationalist was *enabled to believe* that his was a humane, an adequate and an essentially Christian response to potentially removable evils.

The philanthropic indictment of working-class patterns of behaviour is, in outline, familiar enough. But the width and the indiscriminate nature of the version which is to be found in the reports of schools inspectors should be stressed. The attack was remarkably comprehensive.

On a relatively trivial level, the sports, the amusements, the language and the lack of "civility" of working people was severely censured. Inspectors commented on the persistence of "demoralizing sports" which they often associated with sexual immorality or cruelty to animals. One inspector, in Birmingham, found that working people were often sadists: they took "a fiendish exultation in inflicting pain" upon animals.²⁸ The public house was universally condemned, both for the obvious reason — "the abuse of spirituous and fermented liquors" — and because public houses were recognized to be the local hubs of working-class economic and political organization. They were places of resort "for the pleasure of talking obscenity and scandal, if not sedition, amidst the fumes of gin and the roar of drunken associates".²⁹ Not only beer, but also, more surprisingly, tobacco and snuff, were regarded as symptoms of domestic irresponsibility.³⁰ Inspectors waged war too upon "provincial dialect and an indistinct articulation", "coarse provincial accents" and "faults and vulgarities of expression".³¹

In terms of the spectrum of middle-class religion, most of the Inspectors, the resolute churchman Allen apart perhaps, were men of moderation. They inclined towards a liberal Anglicanism, tolerant of orthodox Protestant Dissent, concerned to stress the general moral precepts of true religion and its power to change ways of life. But they all made the conventional identifications of irreligion and sedition, infidelity, unconcern and moral iniquity. By their religious tests certainly, the working classes stood condemned, not only for what Horace Mann was later to call an "unconscious" secularism but also for indigenous forms of popular religion and belief. Moseley found the Potteries a district "not less remarkable for the wild forms of religious belief than for the *infidelity* prevalent in it, and the

²⁸ *Minutes*, 1840-1, p. 168.

²⁹ *Loc. cit.*

³⁰ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 107.

³¹ E.g. *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 140.

madness of its political combinations".³² Tremeneere made himself an expert on the superstitions of the "immoveable" population of Norfolk: "here a wizard terrifying his neighbours by the power of inflicting injuries by his charms; there supernatural appearances; in another neighbourhood a quack curing all diseases by his knowledge of the stars".³³ In many examples of "gross credulity", inspectors commented on the subterranean paganism of the rural poor, sometimes in anecdotes which were, unintentionally, very funny.³⁴ The dangers of such "vacuity" were repeatedly stressed: the "legitimate educator" should anticipate the "Socialist".³⁵

The political or economic beliefs of more articulate working people were commonly represented simply as "perverted opinion". One doubts whether many inspectors ever talked to a Chartist or an Owenite; only Tremeneere seems to have tried to plumb these depths of mischief. He found, for instance, "much quickness of intellect" among the Norwich weavers, but discovered what one suspects he sought — that "there was hardly a principle of religion, morals, society, trade, commerce, government, which I did not hear perverted by one or the other".³⁶ More commonly inspectors stressed a blind ignorance of, in Moseley's words, "the simplest and most obvious of those political relations which bind together the frame-work of society". He regretted (in a rather startling comment) that so many children were ignorant of who governed the country: they could not tell him the name of the queen.³⁷

Similar attitudes coloured inspectoral comments on popular literature: "obscene, exciting and irreligious works". This concern was most sharply expressed in a desire (later to be fulfilled) to control and to control most rigorously the reading matter made available in schools. Books commonly used were of "all kinds": poetry of a "questionable tendency", hymns in "extravagant and presumptuous language", letters addressed to "My Lovely Emma", to "Job Troublesome" or "complaining of the badness of times".³⁸

The inspectors believed, of course, that social and economic conflicts were fundamentally a factor of bad faith and misunderstanding, sometimes exploited by the "disaffected". Here and there, they gave hints of a more perceptive analysis, witness Moseley's attempt to

³² *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 522.

³³ *Minutes*, 1840-1, pp. 452-3.

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

³⁷ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 509. Startling for his own political naivety!

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

comprehend the gulf in class experiences, Bellairs's passing recognition of the social isolation of the rural poor,³⁹ or the occasional halting admission that some deeper cause was at work in the social system.⁴⁰ But the ultimate diagnosis was invariably working-class ignorance; the solution an authoritative direction of sentiment through education.

The most important area of conclusions, however, was the working-class family. Many, perhaps most of the failings which the inspectors perceived seemed to stem from some pathological tendency in "domestic relations". Here again Kay's Manchester pamphlet anticipated later findings. Reading it, it is easy enough to believe that the working-class family had altogether ceased to embody kindlier purposes, or even to perform the most basic of social functions. It did not support the old for their adult children "cast" them on poor relief. It provided no comfort for its members because resources were squandered even when adequate. It gave neither training nor education for children since "filial and paternal duties" were uncultivated. Even the common care of children and babies was neglected. There is one, just one, more flattering reference to the working-class family in *Manchester*, and that a reference to the families of fine cotton spinners inserted in the second edition in response to criticism.⁴¹

It is tempting to follow N. J. Smelser and to relate Kay's findings to functional adjustments following the family's traumatic introduction to the factory.⁴² Certainly Smelser's analysis allows us to understand some aspects of Kay's rather melodramatic discussion. Yet many of the "diseases" which Kay perceived in Manchester in 1832 were noted too by his inspectors, in many different parts of the country in the 1840s, providing an indictment not less comprehensive than the young doctor's. Their reactions in this sphere seem to have been determined quite as much by their picture of what the family should be (a conception derived no doubt from the bourgeois ideal of that institution) as by the undoubted cultural disruption faced by working people in many different industrial settings.

Thus most inspectors deplored the "imprudent habit of early marriage", tracing many family difficulties to this source.⁴³ At the same time they were deeply distrustful of unmarried working men of over twenty-five. Watkins declared that from great experience he

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 215.

⁴⁰ *Minutes*, 1846, p. 311.

⁴¹ *Manchester*, 2nd edn., pp. 9-10.

⁴² See N. J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution: An Application of Theory to the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1770-1840* (London, 1959.)

⁴³ E.g. *Minutes*, 1840-1, pp. 201-2.

"hardly ever knew a middle-aged single man [of the lower class] who was a good character".⁴⁴

Adolescence, however, was regarded as the period of greatest moral peril. From London and the West Riding, from Wales and East Anglia, from the countryside and from the growing cities, inspectors reported on the manifold misdoings of "youths". In Essex and Suffolk, Cook diagnosed a close relationship between adolescent independence and rural incendiarism. He also noted that the local clergy were in "awe and terror" over "the trial to which their best girls will be exposed on contact with rude, sensual and ignorant youths".⁴⁵ Watkins, making the adolescent sub-culture of West Riding towns one of his many moral specialisms, pointed to the early financial independence of children, their tendency to take their values from "bigger, rougher and more lawless" boys and a general failure of parental control. Since children did not honour and obey their parents, they showed no proper deference to their social superiors:

I have often passed with a clergyman through a knot of young people, either of long-haired idling youths, or of flaunting giggling girls, and seen no other notice taken of the minister of religion than an independent nod or a half impudent recognition.⁴⁶

But by far the best indication of inspectoral attitudes to the parent is to be found in their early discussion of the problem of attendance — the governing economic and social condition of the education of the "independent poor".

The problem of attendance was in reality a particular symptom, itself more complex than the short-hand term implies, of the demands that an industrializing economy imposed upon the working-class family and through it, upon the child. It arose from the economic necessity (to the family) of extensive child labour, in both town and countryside. Ultimately it stemmed from poverty, mitigated by the growth of some industrial occupations but certainly not removed by them, a poverty that remained deep and endemic in many areas and trades, and cyclical or seasonal in all. Poverty was aggravated by social dislocation attendant upon large-scale migration and the destruction of some previously literate working-class communities. Reports from some urban areas suggest a shifting population even within the towns, a frequent change of dwelling-place disrupting the patterns of schooling. In short, the environments in which most families found themselves in the 1830s and 1840s imposed severe

⁴⁴ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 267.

⁴⁵ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 157.

⁴⁶ *Minutes*, 1850-1, p. 119.

constraints on the use of educational facilities, supposing in the first place that they existed, and in the second that they were wanted.

It would be naïve to suppose that parental attitudes played no part in this situation. No doubt hostility or indifference to education existed, but it is difficult from the available evidence to distinguish between a parental unconcern for education as such, and, a different matter, a distrust (perhaps a rather rational distrust) of the forms of education which philanthropic endeavour offered. The parent who told Watkins "we wants a bit of reading, and writing, and summing, but no'at else" may well have been typical.⁴⁷

The Department was aware of all three dimensions of the problem well before 1846. Inspectors' reports confirmed the findings of the factory inquiries, the Statistical Societies and the Children's Employment Commission. It was estimated that a sizeable proportion of children never attended any school. It was also agreed that those who did attend attended very irregularly, schooling being subject to continuous interruptions, except in the regulated industries where evasion was nonetheless very common. But perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the problem was the very early age of withdrawal from school, commonly at the age of ten or eleven. Before 1846 statistical estimates were lacking but the evidence of unsystematic observation was entirely compelling.

Yet explanations of these phenomena were disappointingly superficial. Although in rural areas poverty and the indifference of farmers was sometimes blamed,⁴⁸ the main burden of moral guilt was transferred on to the parent. Schools did exist, argued Cook, and education was cheap, yet "thousands are either too indifferent, or too ignorant, or too vicious, or too little able to command their children, ever to avail themselves of the opportunity".⁴⁹ Watkins found it strange but "instructive", that parents would "almost starve themselves to give their children bread" but would make "*no sacrifice whatever* to give them food for their minds".⁵⁰

It followed that before the 1850s (there were significant shifts of inspectorial thought thereafter) the problem of attendance was not so much ignored as sublimated. Dr. Kay fully shared his inspectors' views, seeing the problem of attendance as fundamentally one of conversion. The onus clearly lay with the parent just as the onus of school provision lay with philanthropic élites. They were to be

⁴⁷ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 261.

⁴⁸ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, pp. 214-5.

⁴⁹ *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 155.

⁵⁰ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 276.

offered a greatly improved education for their children suited to their real needs and status in life, and, in time, like the sagacious and religious Scots, they would come to appreciate it.⁵¹ Moseley's belief — that the "whole question resolves itself into that of the efficiency of schools" — was the typical orientation of the makers of the Minutes of 1846.⁵²

This summary may give, then, some idea of the breadth of the attack. To be fair to them, inspectors did note some significant differences according to region or occupational group. Tremeneheer's examination of the relatively settled and privileged community of the Cornish tin-miners was rather favourable, even decidedly nostalgic.⁵³ More surprisingly, in view of later philippics from this region, Allen's early reports from the North Eastern coalfield were full of cautious praise. ("They are not immoral. An unmarried man of 25 is scarcely to be found among them".)⁵⁴ Certain aspects of working-class culture too were not condemned outright, commonly the more folksy, Merrie-England aspects: Cornish Parish Feasts, some forms of singing, some sports. Yet even amusements like these were commonly regarded as instruments to be moulded to new uses. Singing here was the outstanding example, witness the efforts of the Department, of John Hullah and of Kay himself to capture or to infiltrate a genuinely popular pursuit. As Kay put it: "the songs of any people may be regarded as an important means of forming an industrious, brave, loyal and religious working class". They might "inspire cheerful views of industry" and "associate amusements . . . with duties".⁵⁵

Yet surveying the evidence as a whole, it is the indiscriminating character of the assault and the highly-charged language of censure which leaves the most abiding impressions: "uncivilised", "degraded", "barbarous", "vicious", "supine" and so on. As a guide to the enormous variety of working-class cultures — rural, urban and transitional, serious and anarchic, self-conscious and primitive — inspectorial reports are very inadequate. As an indication of a mood of blanket condemnation they are most revealing.

V

The educationalists' third theme — parental substitution — can again be found in its purest form in Kay's writings. The idea that the school and the teacher could and should take over many of the

⁵¹ Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, *Four Periods of Public Education* (London, 1862), pp. 490-1.

⁵² *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 258.

⁵³ *Minutes*, 1840-1, pp. 188 ff.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-51.

responsibilities of the parent was a key concept in Kay's educational thought and a guide-line of his policies. It provided the link between diagnosis and remedy. Latent in the Manchester pamphlet, it was developed during his service as a very zealous Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in East Anglia and London and strengthened by his experience of Continental educational theory in the late 1830s.

Kay and his colleague and friend, E. C. Tufnell, added a new dimension to Poor Law policy. They argued that the Poor Law should not only sweep away incentives to idleness, but should also provide a positive machinery for rehabilitating the children of paupers. If the pauper child could be taught self-respect and self-reliance, even at the expense of the strict application of less eligibility, the stigma of "hereditary pauperism" and the tendency for pauperism to generate itself, might be erased. Pauperism could be seen as a sort of moral contamination transmitted through the parent.⁵⁶

Within the Poor Law then, especially after 1837, Kay's characteristic attitudes to parent, child and teacher were further developed. Pauper children were either truly orphans or deserted children, or their parents could be held to have signed away their parental rights by a sort of moral abdication. For such children the State was truly *in loco parentis* and the school should provide what a parent could or would not.⁵⁷ The Norwood experiment was a complete expression of this view: here Kay attempted to provide a substitute home for orphans, where the "parental" influence might extend even into adolescence.⁵⁸ More generally, in his plans for pauper district schools, the doctrine of separation of parent and child was taken to its extreme physical conclusion.⁵⁹

These arguments, still less these devices, could not be applied *tout court* to the education of children of "self-supporting" parents. But very similar ideas and the same basic orientation towards parent, teacher and child, were certainly imported by Kay into this field. As he put it in 1840:

The influence of the teacher of a day-school over the minds and habits of the children attending his school is too frequently counteracted by the evil example of parent and neighbours, and by the corrupting influence of companions with whom the children associate in the street and court in which they live.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ For a clear expression of these themes see "Report on the Training of Pauper Children", *Poor Law Commission, Fourth Annual Report, Parl. Pap.* 1838, xxviii, esp. pp. 393-4.

⁵⁷ "Training of Pauper Children", *loc. cit.*, pp. 286 ff.

⁵⁸ E.g. *Minutes*, 1844, ii, pp. 289-91.

⁵⁹ "Training of Pauper Children", *loc. cit.*, pp. 282 ff.

⁶⁰ *Minutes*, 1839-40, p. 75.

The problem, therefore, was to equip the elementary school and the elementary school-teacher with the means of combating these influences.

It followed that the teacher should be equipped to be a "second" or even a "substitute" parent, and the recurrent use of the language of family rôles in Kay's descriptions of the ideal school has a more than verbal significance: the school should resemble "the harmony of a well-regulated family"; it should be a sort of extended household; the teacher should perform the "civilising" rôle of the idealized parent. As Kay put it in 1841:

The teacher of the peasant's child occupies, as it were, the father's place, in the performance of duties from which the father is separated by his daily toil, and unhappily at present by his want of knowledge and skill. But the schoolmaster ought to be prepared in thought and feeling to do the peasant-father's duty . . .⁶¹

Kay's strong interest in Continental educational theory is best explained, therefore, in terms of a practical concurrence between his perception of English social conditions and the educational beliefs of the followers of Pestalozzi. The Continental reformers stressed the parental analogy in their attempts to comprehend and to exalt the educational process.⁶² A personal relationship between teacher and taught, an intimate moral rapport was a necessary condition for success, in contrast to the impersonal régimes of English monitorialism. So at Battersea, his experimental training college, Kay clearly saw himself as the English Vehrli, applying foreign ideas to be sure, and writing in very sentimental and un-English terms about "peasants", but applying these ideas and using this language because they fitted precisely his view of the function of the school in a particular social situation. Simply to regard him as an "educational pioneer", closely in touch with "progressive" teaching methods, misses the significance of this part of the educational diagnosis.⁶³ The teacher must become a sort of parent for the very good reason that natural parents were held to be disqualified or incapacitated from fulfilling their natural rôle.

The inspectorate expressed similar ideas in similar language. Drawing his perceptive contrast between the nurture of middle and working-class children, Moseley noted that whereas education for "our own children" occurred mainly through the "associations of home", "in respect to the child of labouring man, it must be done, if done at all, at school".⁶⁴ The pupil-teacher relationship should resemble

⁶¹ "First Report on Battersea", *Four Periods*, p. 313-4.

⁶² E.g. Vehrli's address quoted in *Four Periods*, pp. 305-6.

⁶³ Cf. the treatment in Hugh Pollard, *Pioneers of Popular Education 1760-1850* (London, 1956), pp. 214 ff.

⁶⁴ *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 271.

"a parental confidence and affection".⁶⁵ For Fletcher, the school must be an essentially foreign implantation within a commonly barbarized population. It should rest, not on the satisfaction of an indigenous demand, but upon "aggressive movements, on the part of the better elements of society".⁶⁶ The essential character of the whole educational project is caught in Fletcher's description of the school as "a little artificial world of virtuous exertion".⁶⁷

The fourth and final theme of the educational diagnosis followed naturally from this vision of the necessary social isolation of the school. Such schools could clearly not be under the control of neighbourhood or of parent. On the contrary means had to be found to emancipate them from these ties. Supervision must be entrusted to Fletcher's "better elements".

This theme of control had two related dimensions. The first dimension concerned the school-teacher himself, the primary agent of "civilisation". Teachers themselves must be emancipated from the local community, made independent of the whims of the parent, more closely linked to local élites (and particularly the clergy), and provided with the financial means of a cultural superiority. They should be raised, but not too far, out of their own class.

It is difficult to comprehend insistence on this imperative without some knowledge of an older generation of teachers, and inspectorial attitudes towards them. Unfortunately we know rather little about this class — if class it was — before the coming of the college-trained, certificated teacher. But one thing is clear: the gulf between school and community was often less wide than it was to become and to remain. This seems to have been as true of the more haphazardly organized public philanthropic and older endowed schools as of the private elementary schools which, financed by parents' fees, rested upon a genuinely indigenous demand for some educational provision.

We know least of all about this last and most interesting category of institutions. But both literary evidence and such statistical surveys of local and national school provision as are available suggest that they were genuinely popular, very ephemeral (and hence never accurately counted), rather numerous and very varied in their ambitions and functions. They ranged from child-minding institutions (a not unimportant function of the much-maligned "Dame School") to sources of, at least, a basic literacy. More significantly perhaps, they and indeed many public philanthropic schools, seemed to have formed

⁶⁵ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 507.

⁶⁶ *Minutes*, 1846, ii, p. 47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 49.

a sort of informal welfare-service, providing work and an income for people who were disqualified from common labour — the disabled, the ill, the old, the under-employed, the widows. One suspects, though it is difficult to demonstrate, that teaching sometimes provided a refuge for men who had quarrelled with authority. But certainly it is striking how many injured pitmen (commonly Primitive Methodists), ex-soldiers and sailors, ex-domestic servants and artisans, “broken tradesmen”, “common labourers” and, in areas of depressed out-work industry, how many under-employed domestic workers, were involved in teaching, often running their own self-financing schools.⁶⁸ Inspectors commonly regretted that parents were prepared to pay substantially higher fees to send their children to such people rather than meet the lower costs of public philanthropic schools.

By most of the tests that inspectors were wont to apply, “common schools” and many ill-supervised philanthropic schools were very inefficient. An older generation of teachers were accused of failings ranging from an amateur incompetence to “gross immorality”. Anecdotes of the stupidity of “untaught” teachers were a stock-in-trade of reports. Not that inspectors were altogether unaware of the characteristic virtues of the autodidact: as men, if not as instructors of the poor, self-taught teachers were often admired.⁶⁹ Generally, however, “common schools” in particular and haphazardly recruited teachers in general, were convicted of failing really to “educate”. They might give children a certain competence in elementary subjects, but did not teach them their “duties”, or “the habit of self-government”, or to be “wise and good men in after life”.⁷⁰ The older generation of teachers often lacked “the capability of effecting, to any desirable extent, the mental and moral improvement of those under their charge”.⁷¹

This inspectorial distrust of the “common” school and the untrained or unsupervised teacher rested as much upon a social suspicion as upon narrower educational deficiencies. So much is clear from cases in which “independent” teachers were praised for their sincerity and good sense, yet distrusted for the social influence they did or rather did not exercise. Allen’s doubts about a Derbyshire lace-maker who was a “nominal schoolmaster”, on the ground of the notorious turbulence of his district, was typical of this way of seeing things.⁷² Teachers who were socially identified with their clientele might be unreliable.

⁶⁸ E.g. *Minutes*, 1845, pp. 118 and 168.

⁶⁹ E.g. *Minutes*, 1844, ii, pp. 288-9.

⁷⁰ *Minutes*, 1840-I, pp. 163-4.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 163.

⁷¹ *Minutes*, 1840-I, pp. 192-3.

The debate over the Chester Diocesan Training College in 1845 provides a good illustration of this theme. There great stress was laid upon the teacher as the sympathetic equal of the parent, sharing the cares and preoccupations of his class, this in contrast to most training colleges that sought to "elevate". The Department's attitude to this experiment was ambivalent. The Chester ideal, wrote Moseley, was "not without its perils". To identify the teacher with a lower class would tend to separate him from the class above him — "that class in which all his better and higher impulses will find their chief stay and support". Identified with their own people, teachers might become, by their moral ascendancy, "active emissaries for misrule".⁷³ The Department's ideal was clear: the teacher should stand mid-way between his patrons and his clients, purveying the values of the clergyman, the training college, the Department and of authority in general to morally deprived children with the firmness and kindness of a parent. He had to be equipped in his nature, in his skills and in his economic and social situation for this difficult task.

The second aspect of control concerned the management of the school and the links that bound it to local functions. All the inspectors agreed that a "good" school was a school where there was proper, that is to say socially reliable, supervision. As Allen put it, "schools that are not properly superintended may be a very doubtful good".⁷⁴

There must be constantly at hand the unbought services of some one, either clergyman, esquire, or member of their families, who, keeping the most important ends constantly in view, will be capable, by both education and intelligence, to give that counsel, and infuse that spirit which cannot be looked for from our present race of teachers.⁷⁵

This criterion of proper control informed both inspector's reports before 1846 and departmental practices. During the early 1840s a procedure developed by which any aided school had first to submit its trust deeds and its management clauses for approval by the Department's lawyer. It is clear that in this, as in other fields, technical advice became the pretext for control. Although management clause policy was not made explicit until 1846, its general tendency can be gauged from the lists of applications published annually by the department. Of the schools aided up to 1846 only four had working men on their Boards of Management (three in Scotland, one in England) and in no case did they form a majority.

⁷³ *Minutes*, 1845, i, p. 370.

⁷⁴ *Minutes*, 1844, ii, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

When management policy was spelt out in 1846, the acceptable social composition of committees was specified: clergy, the local gentry, manufacturers, ladies' committees, and, at most, "respectable tradesmen" or "yeomen".⁷⁶ As one inspector put it:

We cannot let farmers or labourers, miners or mechanics, be judges of our educational work. It is part of that work to educate them all into a sense of what true education is.⁷⁷

The four themes of this contemporary analysis clearly form a whole, providing a justification for a very close social control over educational agencies. Yet this conclusion was not reached without some sacrifice of consistency.

The key lies in that curious mixture of moralist and environmentalist arguments which we have already noted in Kay himself. As moralists, educationalists were enabled to transfer cause and guilt away from a system of social and economic organization which they more or less endorsed, on to the people. The logic of this stress upon a moral responsibility, as also of an ultimate optimism, was to allow to the sufferer some autonomous ability to solve his own problems. If the system was ultimately benevolent, it should presumably allow for this. Yet it was precisely this power which was denied to the working class, and, more specifically, to the working-class family. And it was here that the environmentalist elements in the argument were so important. For the educationalist could also argue, in a much more paternalistic vein, that salvation must come from outside a vicious circle of cause and effect — from above. Kay and his inspectors had, in short, the best of two modes of argument, their conclusion on the necessity of control deriving from a hybrid of a rather optimistic liberalism on the one hand, and a rather self-conscious paternalism on the other. Though their sincerity is not in doubt, the very powerful conservative function of their argument should not be overlooked. One might say that the imperative of control shaped the argument.

VI

Finally, it is necessary to turn briefly from thought to practice. If our analysis of social assumptions is correct, we would expect to see, in the *Minutes* of 1846, an attempt to create powerful systems of control, centring upon the teacher as social missionary and the school as a functioning centre of sound influences.

⁷⁶ *Minutes*, 1846, i, pp. 27 ff.

⁷⁷ *Minutes*, 1857-8, p. 478.

This is rather a different approach from that adopted by most educational historians who have discussed the *Minutes*. As Kay has been represented as a precocious forerunner of modern conceptions of teaching, so the *Minutes* have been seen as a sagacious solution to obvious educational problems.⁷⁸ They have been seen primarily as an important step in the creation of an elementary school-teaching profession.

This view certainly embraces a part of the truth, but it may be criticized on two grounds. Firstly, though it is impossible here to establish the point, the educational efficiency and significance of the *Minutes* can easily be exaggerated. As a solution to the salient problems of school attendance and school finance they were rapidly proved to be inadequate. The conception of the profession that informed them was likewise shown to be hopelessly over-ambitious. They formed, as later administrators came to recognize, a *cul de sac* up which government had to return (a long and painful process) before more comprehensive solutions could be found.⁷⁹ Secondly, their full significance lies less in some separate educational realm than in their social and political objectives. Educational historians, in short, have tended to miss the political sociology of the measure. And this point may be established by analysing the *Minutes*, not so much as an educational measure, more as a system of social control.

Under the *Minutes*, control over the teaching profession was achieved by three phases of teacher-training and by extended financial support. The trainee teacher and even the qualified professional, so far from being haphazardly recruited as in the past, was subjected to an intricate system of supervision. The agencies of this supervision, however, were not simply departmental: the Department drew into its network of control the essentially voluntary but completely reliable agents of the local clergy, local élites, and denominational training colleges.⁸⁰

Before a child of thirteen could be apprenticed to a teacher in an elementary school, an inspector visited the school itself, reporting very fully on its management, curriculum, finances and the character and

⁷⁸ See, for example, Frank Smith's judgement, "the Minutes went to the roots of the schools' weakness". *The Life and Work of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth* (London, 1923) p. 173.

⁷⁹ For an elaboration of these points see J. R. B. Johnson, "The Education Department 1839-1864: A study in Social Policy and The Growth of Government" (Unpub. Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1968), pp. 416-501.

⁸⁰ The analysis that follows is based on the text of the *Minutes* themselves, elaboration of particular points being drawn from actual departmental practice in the years immediately following their passage. For a much fuller discussion see *ibid.*, pp. 286-308.

proficiency of the teacher. The teacher's ability to act "as a guide and example in the formation of the character of the apprentice" was particularly examined. Candidates for apprenticeship had to pass a qualifying examination in elementary subjects, and the clergy had to certify, on the basis of personal inquiry, that their moral character and that of their parents was satisfactory. Where a family was deemed unsuitable (for example running a public house), the apprentice was required to board in "some approved household", commonly with the clergyman. On entering upon apprenticeship, the pupil-teacher covenanted to serve his master "faithfully and diligently", and to conduct himself "with honesty, sobriety, and temperance, and not be guilty of any profane or lewd conversation or conduct, or of gambling, or any other immorality". He was, in short, to be a very untypical "youth".

Once apprenticed, the child became, in effect, a paid dependent of the Department, receiving aid to the tune of from £10 in his first year to £20 in his last. The teacher was also paid to instruct him. Progress was tested annually by examination conducted by the Department on a prescribed syllabus with recommended books. Each year three certificates had also to be produced: from teacher, school managers and the clergy. Each year the school was vetted by an inspector, the teacher receiving a long printed homily full of personal exhortation on the need for diligent self-improvement and the cultivation of "moral sentiments". Scholastic or moral failure on the part of the apprentice, or deficiencies in the school itself, could mean the withdrawal of aid, or, at worst, the blacklisting of the school or the teacher.

The pupil-teacher could enter the second stage of his training by sitting a public competitive examination. Subject to the result and to testimonials he might be awarded a "Queen's Scholarship" tenable at an inspected training college. During his two years there the college itself was subject to the same sort of control as the aided elementary school. Direct grants provided a pretext for increasingly detailed control over the syllabus and regimen.

Supervision extended, however, into the working teacher's career. Once trained he sat an examination for "the Certificate of Merit". Dependent on the result, he qualified for a grant in aid of his salary, graded according to his performance. The receipt of this grant remained conditional upon the state of the school in which he worked and the approval of the managers. One condition of aid was rent-free accommodation, always seen as a guarantee of a healthy independence.

Even secure retirement was, under the *Minutes* themselves, to be

dependent upon merit. To acquire a pension, a teacher was to have taught at an inspected school for at least seven years, his character was to be approved and the school efficient.

Taken together, these regulations comprised, on paper at least, a system of control of great rigour. In this sense, over a narrow area, the *Minutes* rivalled any major Parliamentary statute dealing with a social matter in the first half of the century. The intensity of control, as an ambition, was all the more striking, since it rested not on statutory sanction but on departmental discretions alone. The apparatus of teacher training, with its conditional offers of stipends, a degree of security, openings in the public service, a modest house and pension, amounted, in effect, to a system of guided, limited social mobility. Not that upward mobility was its governing idea; it crept in as a condition of cultural emancipation. Mission, not mobility was the keynote of Kay's training methods and those adopted by Department and training colleges. Satisfactory recruitment required the offer of substantial benefits, but, as teachers were to find not without chagrin, they were to be social intermediaries, not social aspirants. They were to form, in short, an army of highly-trained, highly-motivated mercenaries.

VII

The suggestion is that the early Victorian obsession with the education of the poor is best understood as a concern about authority, about power, about the assertion (or the re-assertion?) of control. This concern was expressed in an enormously ambitious attempt to determine, through the capture of educational means, the patterns of thought, sentiment and behaviour of the working class. Supervised by its trusty teacher, surrounded by its playground wall, the school was to raise a new race of working people — respectful, cheerful, hard-working, loyal, pacific and religious.

In itself, of course, this conclusion does not take us very far. But it may provide a fairly stable base from which to launch attempts at explanation and it may suggest too the general forms which explanation might most fruitfully take. For if control was the essence of the phenomenon, explanation should centre, not so much upon some objective "educational problem" which wise contemporaries perceived or half-perceived, but rather upon points of contact between class cultures, upon social relations, upon relations of authority, and upon the ways in which these were changing in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.

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