

SAMUEL SMILES

SAMUEL SMILES  
EDITOR  
OF THE  
LEEDS TIMES

By  
ALEXANDER TYRRELL, M.A. (EDINBURGH)

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University  
(October) 1966

MASTER OF ARTS (1966)  
(History)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: Samuel Smiles Editor of the Leeds Times

AUTHOR: Alexander Tyrrell, M.A. (Edinburgh University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor H. W. McCready

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 287

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: Introduction

Samuel Smiles in Scotland (1812-38)

Editor of the Leeds Times

→ The Radical Creed of Samuel Smiles  
(1839-45)

Journalism and Popular Politics  
(1839-42)

→ The Emergence of Self-Help (1843-45)

Conclusion

Appendix

Bibliography

## PREFACE

This thesis is the outcome of an essay on Samuel Smiles and the Victorian Climate of Opinion, written while I was a graduate student at McMaster University. In the course of writing my essay I became dissatisfied with my attempts to account for the emergence of self-help as a theme in the writings of Smiles at a time when the working class of Britain was enduring the hardships of that era often called the "Hungry Forties". No study of the source material relating to Smiles's early career had been made, and the possibility suggested itself that research might profitably be devoted to the circumstances which caused his apparent insensitivity to social distress despite his experience as a popular journalist and political Radical.

With the exception of a collection of letters donated to the Leeds Central Library by Miss Aileen Smiles, no attempt has been made to collect the documentary evidence required for such a study, and my research took me to Edinburgh and Leeds, the two cities where some literary trace of Smiles's early career remains. The evidence directly relating to Smiles's activities in Scotland is slight, but with the help of references in his Autobiography it has been possible to study extensive primary and secondary material

descriptive of those early influences which did so much to shape his basic assumptions. Primary source material is more abundant in Leeds, where Smiles enjoyed some local repute as an editor, and this thesis is devoted in part to a study of the Leeds Times during the years when he had sole responsibility for its editorial policy. I have also been able to study documentary evidence of his educational activities in that city.

I welcome the opportunity to express my gratitude to the City Librarians of Leeds, Bradford, Edinburgh and Dundee for the courteous assistance of their staffs, and I wish to thank Mr. Frank Beckwith of the Leeds Library, whose advice is a sine qua non for those who venture into the history of his city and county. The invaluable benefits of being afforded access to the National Library of Scotland, to the University libraries of Edinburgh and Leeds, and to the Register House in Edinburgh are also gratefully remembered.

To my supervisor, Professor McCready, and the Faculty of Graduate Studies of McMaster University I am entirely indebted for the opportunity to conduct my research. It was on Professor McCready's suggestion that I originally commenced my study of Smiles's ideas, and this thesis has benefitted from his advice in countless ways. The Faculty of Graduate Studies made available to me the Teaching Fellowship award without which my research in the United Kingdom

could not have been undertaken.

A. T.

The University of New England,  
New South Wales,  
Australia.

June 1966.

# I

## INTRODUCTION

"There is a silent march of thought which no power can arrest, and which it is not difficult to see will be marked by important events. Mankind were never before in the situation in which they now stand."<sup>1</sup> Published in 1821, Samuel Bailey's assessment of his age exemplified that keen awareness of change which became an important part of the British climate of opinion during the youth of Samuel Smiles. Having witnessed the effects of the American and French Revolutions on Europe, Bailey's generation had become increasingly aware that another revolution was taking place in early nineteenth-century Britain further undermining the régime of inherited privilege in Church and State. Traditionalists continued to defend the heritage bequeathed by previous centuries, but their concepts increasingly failed to accord with the series of technical innovations, the growth of Protestant Dissent and the developing class consciousness of the "lower orders". The first industrial society was emerging, and no youth of ability and imagination could fail to be stimulated by the ferment of ideas which

---

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Wickwar, The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press 1819-32 (London, 1928), p. 246.

attended its progress.

Like other societies in other ages this society produced its apologists, many of them exponents of that literary genre which offers its readers instruction in the methods of adjusting to the ethos of the day.<sup>2</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century Samuel Smiles gained renown as a writer of this kind, but the need for such a literature was recognised during the first quarter of the century, when industrialism and the changes which accompanied it were novel and highly controversial: "To articulate the creed of progress, to state its evidences and draw out its implications, was the mission of that remarkable group of men variously known as the Utilitarians, or the Philosophic Radicals."<sup>3</sup> By the middle of the eighteen-twenties Jeremy Bentham and James Mill had defined the creed and the Westminster Review had started to propagate it. Thereafter the movement developed rapidly, largely because it provided a suitable anti-aristocratic ideology for a rising middle class proud of its innovations and impatient for the enhancement of its status. Two important results of this were that the Westminster Review became a vehicle for the expression of the rising class consciousness of the middle class and that James Mill iden-

---

<sup>2</sup>A. Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 124.

<sup>3</sup>G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age (London, 1960), p. 8.

tified middle class interests with progress.

The value of the middle classes of this country, their growing numbers and importance are acknowledged by all. These classes have long been spoken of, and not grudgingly by their superiors themselves, as the glory of England; as that which alone has given to us our eminence among nations; as that portion of our people to whom everything that is good among us may with certainty be traced.<sup>4</sup>

Where James Mill and the Westminster Review led others followed, with the result that a school of propagandists emerged in large numbers during the eighteen-twenties to pursue no less an aim than the persuasion of the nation to accept middle class leadership and adopt the way of life which the middle class considered to be appropriate to the new era.

Although members of an essentially middle class movement, the Philosophical Radicals strove for the support of the working class. Advanced middle class Radicals accepted "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" as a summary of their creed, and many of them also insisted that universal suffrage was the only means of ensuring the continued progress of the nation. This did not mean that James Mill and his disciples wished to establish the rule of the working class majority. "Our opinion," Mill claimed, is that the business of government is properly the business of the rich; and that they will always obtain it,

---

<sup>4</sup>B. Simon, Studies in the History of Education (London, 1960), p. 78.

either by bad means or good. Upon this everything depends. If they obtain it by bad means, the government is bad. If they obtain it by good means, the government is sure to be good. The only good means of obtaining it are the free suffrage of the people.<sup>5</sup>

It was thus the hope of the middle class Radicals that a constitution would be established which would destroy the aristocratic ascendancy inherited from the eighteenth century without replacing it by a working class ascendancy.

Such a result, they believed, could be achieved by a movement supported by the working class and led by the middle class. Carefully controlled by the Radicals, the working class could not harm middle class interests, but the spectre of a discontented populace could be invoked to coerce the landlords' parliament into conceding reforms in Church and State. James Mill made these tactics explicit in a letter to Albany Fonblanque at the height of the agitation for the Reform Bill.

I am persuaded that everything depends upon the attitude of the people. Their enemies will give up nothing but in the fear of worse following. . . . The difficulties are very great. The people, to be in the best state, should appear to be ready and impatient to break out into outrage, without actually breaking out. The Press which is our only instrument has at this moment the most delicate and the most exalted functions to discharge that any power has yet had to perform in this country. It has at once to raise the waves and to calm them; to

---

<sup>5</sup>Simon, p. 127.

say, like the Lord, "Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further."<sup>6</sup>

A role was thus assigned to the working class in the creation and operation of a reformed constitution, but the ascendancy of the middle class was assumed by the Utilitarian Radicals.

Not yet fully class conscious, the working class gave many indications of its willingness to co-operate with reformers of other classes before 1832. Particularly after the collapse of the Liverpool Ministry both the middle class and the working class were exhilarated by the possibility of seeing the Tories driven from office and the régime of inherited privilege overthrown. In these circumstances even Cobbett agreed that the call for a "GENERAL POLITICAL UNION between the lower and middle classes of the People" was the best means of obtaining constitutional reform,<sup>7</sup> and during the struggle for the 1832 Reform Act many members of the working class contributed their support. In the perspective of History, however, it can now be seen that the rising tide of class consciousness swept over the working class no less than the middle class, and that a dangerously divided soci-

<sup>6</sup> E. Barrington de Fonblanque, ed., The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque (London, 1874), p. 29. See also J. Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution (New Haven, 1963), p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> A. Briggs, "Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1840", Past and Present (1956), p. 70.

sity was emerging during the years between Waterloo and the Great Exhibition. One important result of this was that large sections of the British working class gave unmistakable indications that they did not accept the cult of "Progress" and the conclusions which were drawn from it by middle class propagandists. Machine breaking and demands for a revival of state intervention in social and economic matters showed that, although the working class used the term Radical and demanded reform, both its attitude to industrialism and its concept of society differed from that of the middle class Radicals. This divergence of interests was accompanied by unmistakable indications that an independent working class movement was emerging. Restrictive legislation had been passed, but working class journalism continued to develop after Waterloo, accompanied by the striking phenomenon of working class coffee houses and public houses with an educational and political function.<sup>8</sup> Thus if the cult of "Progress" was to triumph, its apologists must convert the working class before a form of agitation gained ground to the detriment of middle class interests.

A growing awareness of this threat from the working class led many prominent middle class spokesmen to play an active part in journalism and education. Motives of phil-

---

<sup>8</sup>R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader (London, 1955), p. 33.

anthropy were not absent (Evangelical religion and the philosophy derived from the eighteenth-century enlightenment both emphasised education), but as early as 1821 Charles Knight, pioneer of popular publishing, defined one of their intentions.

If the firmness of the Government, and, what is better, the good sense of the upper and middle classes who have property at stake, can succeed for a few years in preserving tranquillity, the ignorant disseminators of sedition and discontent will be beaten out of the field by opponents of better principles, who will direct the secret of popular writing to a useful and righteous purpose.<sup>9</sup>

In the course of the following ten years, by means of publications and other educational ventures, the middle class Radicals made a sustained attempt to fulfil this intention and make the working class a docile ally.

Although he had many predecessors, the most vocal exponent of this crusading zeal was Henry Brougham, whose Practical Observations upon the Education of the People blazed a trail for many later advocates of adult education, including Samuel Smiles. A Whig of equivocal Radical opinions, Brougham derived most of his ideas from others including Bentham, but, by publicising them with great verve, he provided much of the driving force behind the first nation-wide adult education movements. Both the Mechanics' Institutes, local associations for the instruction of the

---

<sup>9</sup>Simon, p. 159.

working class in those fields of knowledge appropriate to their occupations, and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, a publishing venture providing the working class with cheaper improving literature, owed much to his efforts. One of the features of the eighteenth century had been the growing demand in all classes for instruction in science,<sup>10</sup> and Brougham's schemes owed much to previous attempts to satisfy this demand, but he intended also to help the working class to adjust to industrialism, and T. L. Peacock aptly satirised the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge as the "Steam Intellect Society". In the course of his Practical Observations Brougham described those existing means of instruction which he found praiseworthy, and he called for a sustained attempt to extend adult education to the working class. According to his analysis it would be unrealistic of the upper classes to advance social or political reasons for refusing to extend education, as, like Knight, he believed that the working class was already being instructed to some extent. The only question to be settled was "whether they shall be well or ill taught".<sup>11</sup> Opposed to charity (he called on the working

---

<sup>10</sup>T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1962), p. 101.

<sup>11</sup>H. Brougham, Practical Observations upon the Education of the People, Addressed to the Working Classes and Their Employers (London, 1825), p. 32.

class to follow Benjamin Franklin's example of self-education<sup>12</sup>), Brougham insisted that working class students should finance their own education and that they should even control its management, but he was adamant that the upper classes should take the initiative. "Even in the largest towns, it is hardly to be expected that the workmen should yet concert measures for their own instruction, although sufficiently numerous to require no pecuniary assistance in procuring the necessary teachers."<sup>13</sup>

Brougham's ideas did not meet with the universal approval of the propertied classes. At the end of the eighteenth century some Tories had been suspicious even of that form of education offered to the poor by Hannah More, and, mindful of the disorders which had occurred after 1815, many of Brougham's Tory contemporaries, with certain notable exceptions, regarded his education schemes as subversive. Quick to reply to the Practical Observations, "A Country Gentleman" lamented that such notions were "agitating half the kingdom" and would "end only in being a school for faction and democracy".<sup>14</sup> But, with that unbounded faith in

<sup>12</sup> Brougham, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> The Consequences of a Scientific Education to the Working Classes of this Country Pointed Out; and the Theories of Mr. Brougham on that Subject Confuted, in a Letter to the Marquess of Lansdown (London, 1826), pp. 1, 26.

the efficacy of education which was one of the hallmarks of the Utilitarian, Brougham had already shown to his own satisfaction how the most dangerous forms of class consciousness could be overcome. Blurring the distinction between propaganda and education, he wished to have works on history, the constitution, and political economy produced for the working class to guide it towards orthodox middle class ideas.

Popular tracts, indeed, on the latter subject, ought to be much more extensively circulated for the good of the working classes, as well as of their superiors. The interests of both are deeply concerned in sounder views being taught them; I can hardly imagine, for example, a greater service being rendered to the men, than expounding to them the true principles and mutual relations of population and wages; and both they and their masters will assuredly experience the effects of the prevailing ignorance upon such questions, as soon as any interruption shall happen in the commercial prosperity of the country, if indeed, the present course of things, daily tending to lower wages as well as profits, and set the two classes in opposition to each other, shall not of itself bring on a crisis.<sup>15</sup>

In this statement the middle class fear of working class consciousness was clearly expressed and a positive remedy devised.

The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and many of those who founded the earliest Mechanics' Institutes did not at first follow this advice and restricted their instruction to the less controversial technical subjects, but the rise of trade unionism and the outbreak of

---

<sup>15</sup> Brougham, pp. 4-5.

industrial unrest during and after 1830 added force to Brougham's words. The working class had to be shown that many of their activities were flouting the best economic teaching of the day. As early as 1819 Ricardo had called on McCulloch to provide a popular statement of Political Economy.<sup>16</sup> McCulloch had never fully complied, but in the early eighteen-thirties less accomplished economists undertook the task of popularisation with the intention of making Political Economy obviously relevant to the conditions of the working class. Thus the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge belatedly fulfilled Brougham's intentions by urging the working class to accept mechanical innovations and not to turn against those who owned capital. The need to give positive advice was recognised too, and Charles Knight on behalf of the Society briefly stated what was to become the kernel of the middle class response to the sufferings of the working class during the adversities of the trade cycle.

When there is too much labour in the market, and wages are too low, do not combine to raise the wages; do not combine with the vain hope of compelling the employer to pay more for labour than there are funds for the maintenance of labour; but go out of the market. . . . You have, in too many cases, nothing but your labour for your support. We say to you, get something else; acquire something to fall back on. When there is a glut of labour go at once out of the market; become your-

---

<sup>16</sup>E. Halevy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London, 1949), p. 343.

selves capitalists.<sup>17</sup>

The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge never fully acquired the techniques of popularisation, and the interpretation of Political Economy for the masses was more promisingly undertaken by another Radical, Harriet Martineau, whose Tales of Political Economy were more likely to reach working class readers brought up in the chapbook tradition.

The result of these experiments in popular adult education was that the working class was being shown with increasing clarity and simplicity how to adjust to the conditions created by industrialism. To a great extent this form of education was a blatant middle class propagandist enterprise, but it possessed a curiously philanthropic aspect in the nineteenth century, which should not be dismissed from consideration. Objective truth and even immutable laws were believed to have been discovered in Political Economy no less than in the physical sciences, and with utter sincerity it could be believed that the working class could achieve only harm by defying the teachings of the economists. To show them the error of their ways was a truly benevolent act on the part of Harriet Martineau and

---

<sup>17</sup> Simon, p. 161.

other Radical educators.<sup>18</sup> The cult of science and the religious fervour of the age had combined to create a host of minor prophets unable to distinguish between hypothesis and tested truth.

Thus when the student days of Samuel Smiles came to an end in 1832 the issues which were to concern him in Leeds were becoming evident. The advance of industrialism showed no signs of faltering unless restricted by legislation, and only the social and political consequences remained to be determined. Encouraged by the economic developments of the age, the middle class had become increasingly class conscious, and, resentful of the privileges possessed by the aristocracy, the more advanced middle class Radicals were stimulated rather than satisfied by the breakthrough in 1832. Forcing its way to the fore, however, was the hostility towards industrialism shown by a working class which was acquiring the means of setting up an independent class agitation. In the van of the struggle against the aristocracy the middle class Radicals had had to recognise that the two forms of class consciousness might collide unless positive leadership was provided for the working class. The task of the middle class propagandists thus resolved itself into leading the working class against the aristocracy, and

---

<sup>18</sup>R. K. Webb, Harriet Martineau A Radical Victorian (London, 1960), p. 133.

at the same time instilling the acceptance of an industrial society under middle class leadership. "On the one side were the working class press and socialist and co-operative movements; on the other were the publicists and educators of the middle classes, like the Chamberses, Knight, McCulloch, Wade, Place, Mrs. Marcet, and Harriet Martineau."<sup>19</sup>

Throughout his early career Samuel Smiles was involved in this battle of ideas, and it will be the function of this thesis to examine his participation in popular reform movements as a propagandist of industrialism and middle class values. This will require a close study not only of his basic assumptions as editor of the Leeds Times but also of his attitude to manifestations of class consciousness with which he was not in agreement. The day has passed, however, for Smiles and other Victorians to be dismissed as stereotyped bourgeois spokesmen, and consequently an important part of this thesis will be devoted to an examination of those factors which eventually caused him to prefer practical schemes for social reform to the advocacy of doctrinaire Philosophic Radicalism. As a result the genesis of Self-Help will be seen more fully. What will finally emerge will be more than part of one man's life history. The story of the national debate about the "Two

---

<sup>19</sup> Webb, The British Working Class Reader, p. 100.

"Nations" in early Victorian Britain has been told from many points of view, but a study of Smiles's career will enable fresh knowledge to be gained concerning important currents of thought in Leeds, an important centre of opinion in the English industrial districts.

## II

### SAMUEL SMILES IN SCOTLAND (1812-38)

It has been claimed by an eminent Scottish historian that the infancy and early youth of men and nations "cannot be recollected and deserve not to be remembered".<sup>1</sup> This opinion has been shared by those who have described the early career of Samuel Smiles, basing their accounts only on the tantalisingly brief references in his autobiography. The neglect of his life in Scotland has been unfortunate, because sources exist which reveal the opinions of the young Smiles and connect him firmly with the rising middle class popular education movement at a time when Scottish influence was one of its most pronounced characteristics.<sup>2</sup> As his Scottish experience launched Smiles into his career at Leeds, the study of the ideas and interests which he is known to have had before 1839 facilitates an understanding of his policy as editor of the Leeds Times.

Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which anyone is influenced by the mental climate of his day,

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Robertson, The History of Scotland (London, 1818), I, 1.

<sup>2</sup> C. W. New, Life of Henry Brougham to 1830 (Oxford, 1961), p. 199.

it is undoubtedly significant that Samuel Smiles came of age during the reigns of George IV and his successor, an era when time-hallowed ideas and institutions were being challenged, and the effective change was being made from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Smiles, indeed, could have been the boy whom G. M. Young imagined entering manhood in 1830 "with the ground rocking under his feet as it had rocked in 1789".<sup>3</sup> "The agitation for the Reform Bill was then in full progress. It passed over the face of the country like a tornado. Those who lived at that time will remember with what vehemence the movement spread, and how strongly it attracted the young thinking minds of all classes."<sup>4</sup> This vivid recollection, written over forty years later by Smiles, gives a clear indication of the lasting impression made on his own mind by the exhilarating national events which occurred during his student days at Edinburgh (1829-32), when the passion for change ran high, and he saw great demonstrations taking place in favour of Lord Grey's Reform Bill.

Many, however, have been the student radicals who have matured into conservatives, and by leaving the excitement of Edinburgh in 1832 to practise medicine in Hadding-

---

<sup>3</sup>G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age (London, 1960), p.1.

<sup>4</sup>S. Smiles, "The Story of Robert Nicoll's Life", Good Words (1875), p. 314.

ton, the burgh where he had previously lived, Smiles might have seemed to be following a course of action certain to erode the aspirations of even the most fervent of reformers. Had not a bare ten years elapsed since Jane Welsh Carlyle left Haddington, swearing that the burgh was "the dimmest, deadest spot in the Creator's universe . . . the very air one breathes is impregnated with stupidity"<sup>5</sup>? In this, as in many other instances, objectivity evaded the pen of a Carlyle, because other evidence shows that Haddington, far from being a rustic paradise for village idiots, was a local capital of some note in the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1832 and 1838 Samuel Smiles gained valuable experience while he resided there.

Haddington had been left untouched by the industrial innovations of the age, but the compiler of the entry in the New Statistical Account of Scotland proved that there were many compensations, not the least being the comparatively high standard of living enjoyed by the lower classes in this progressive agricultural area. "Being commonly paid in farm produce, and allowed to keep a cow, they are generally considered to be in a more comfortable and thriving condition than any other description of labourers or than common

---

<sup>5</sup>S. Smiles, The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LL.D., ed. Thomas Mackay, (London, 1905), p. 6.

tradesmen whose wages are paid in money."<sup>6</sup> Haddington also did not experience mass illiteracy, one of the greatest problems of the industrial districts. By the standards of the day the general level of educational attainment was very high.

The improvement of the lower classes had long been an aspiration in Scotland, and during the eighteenth century the Lowland parishes had been making extensive provision for education as the best means of fulfilling this. The population of the industrial districts soon expanded beyond parochial resources, but in East Lothian, an area of small parishes, great educational progress was made.<sup>7</sup> Haddington, the county town, was particularly well-favoured. There, supplemented by private ventures, the parish and burgh authorities succeeded in extending an elementary education to the many and an advanced education to the few. Not only was teaching undertaken by the parish school, the Sabbath schools, and various private schools, but the Burgh School also provided an education in English, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and mathematics, leading to the Classical education offered by the Grammar School, the apex

---

<sup>6</sup> The New Statistical Account of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1845), II, 10.

<sup>7</sup> L. J. Saunders, Scottish Democracy 1815-40 (Edinburgh, 1950), p. 251.

of this local system.<sup>8</sup>

Samuel Smiles was fortunate that his parents were able to send him through the system, from private school, to the Burgh School, and then to the Grammar School,<sup>9</sup> but the mass of the Haddington population benefitted to some extent from the local schools. Although education was neither free nor compulsory in Scotland, public opinion had the force of law in areas such as East Lothian,<sup>10</sup> and the result was that the inhabitants of Haddington were "in general acquainted with the elementary branches of education - as reading, writing, and arithmetic".<sup>11</sup> Obviously Haddington had given proof of a high degree of enlightenment, and, although Smiles had many criticisms to direct against the form of education which he had received there, subsequently he could not but be aware that his native burgh contrasted sharply with the English industrial districts, where as late as 1848 the idea "that the working class existed for any purpose other than to work, was only just being broken down".<sup>12</sup> Within a few months of arriving in Leeds Smiles could be

<sup>8</sup> New Statistical Account, II, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 7-11.

<sup>10</sup> Saunders, p. 242.

<sup>11</sup> New Statistical Account, II, 11.

<sup>12</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, A History of the Working Men's College 1854-1954 (London, 1954), p. viii.

found strongly urging the need for a national system of education.

Although in some parts of Scotland a high level of literacy was attained, the educated poor experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining literature of high quality at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was the situation in East Lothian, but the challenge was accepted, and it was there that George Miller, "the father of cheap literature", made an early attempt to perform the task later assumed by Charles Knight and the Chambers brothers.<sup>13</sup> His most famous venture was the Cheap Magazine, which was praised by a London periodical in 1814 for attempting to inculcate correct "dispositions and habits in the lower orders . . . by Precepts, by Stories, by Anecdotes, by short Biographical Sketches".<sup>14</sup> Miller himself subsequently advertised his Monthly Monitor and Philanthropic Museum as

a cheap repository for hints, suggestions, facts, and discoveries interesting to humanity; and for papers of every description having a tendency to prevent the commission of crimes, counteract the baneful effects of pernicious sentiments and bad example; encourage a spirit of industry, economy and frugality among the middling and laborious classes; and promote the religious moral, intellectual, and physical condition of man.

<sup>13</sup>A. Somerville, The Autobiography of a Working Man (London, 1951), p. 47.

<sup>14</sup>G. Miller, Letter Struggles in the Journey of My Life (Edinburgh, 1833), p. 51.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

Miller's publications had much in common with those issued in great numbers by the tract societies of the day, but he did not give a "predominancy to religion",<sup>16</sup> and his venture is better regarded as a forerunner of the secular publishing movement of the eighteen-twenties.<sup>17</sup> Miller was accounted a failure by his own generation, but his Cheap Magazine and other publications give an indication of the climate of opinion emerging in East Lothian while Smiles was a boy.

Miller was not alone in responding to the challenge presented by the state of education in East Lothian at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Samuel Brown of Haddington, though less in advance of his day than Miller, devised significant educational innovations in the county. As a zealous Dissenter, Brown, like many of his contemporaries, was led into the social reform movement by the influence of the religious revival which took place at the beginning of the nineteenth century. While he was still a young man he helped to found the second tract society in Scotland,<sup>18</sup> and he regularly catechised in the Haddington prison.<sup>19</sup> From such activities arose his resolve to improve

---

<sup>16</sup> Somerville, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Vide supra, Introduction, passim.

<sup>18</sup> S. Brown, Some Account of Itinerating Libraries and Their Founder (Edinburgh, 1856), p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

the educational facilities for adults in the county. According to Henry Brougham, Brown set up a library for religious tracts in 1810,<sup>20</sup> and this led to the founding of his famous Itinerating Library system in 1817,<sup>21</sup> by which time his interests were less narrowly religious. This library scheme was an efficient attempt to end the shortage of good general literature available to the poor. By placing branches of the library throughout the county and systematically exchanging books from branch to branch Brown succeeded in making an unprecedentedly wide selection of religious and secular literature available to "families of the first respectability in the county down to the poorest and most distressed of its inhabitants, - not excepting the prisoners in jail".<sup>22</sup> Smiles became a member of Brown's library, and the experience remained prominent in his memory after he went to Leeds. He did not believe that Brown's book selections were of "the most attractive kind", but he informed the Select Committee on Public Libraries that "the Itinerating Library system, efficiently worked, would do more, in connexion with elementary instruction, to elevate the char-

<sup>20</sup> H. Brougham, Practical Observations upon the Education of the People, Addressed to the Working Classes and Their Employers, (London, 1825), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> S. Brown, p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> W. Brown, Memoir Relative to Itinerating Libraries (Edinburgh, n. d.), p. 4.

acter and improve the tastes of our town and country population, than almost any other system of operations that I know of".<sup>23</sup> This evidence, it should be noted, was given after a decade of activity in English adult education.

Brown's interest in education was not motivated solely by religious considerations; having devoted many leisure hours to Chemistry - a common practice of this generation - he wished to encourage others to cultivate an interest in the sciences. Scientific works were acquired for the Itinerating Library,<sup>24</sup> and he was instrumental in setting up the Haddington School of Arts,<sup>25</sup> a Mechanics' Institute in all but name, where lectures and books were made available "to communicate to the mechanics and others of Haddington and its vicinity a knowledge of science and its application to the useful arts".<sup>26</sup> The Third Report of the Haddington Committee indicates that Brougham was correct in assigning the origin of the School of Arts to 1821,<sup>27</sup> the

<sup>23</sup> Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849), p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>25</sup> S. Brown, p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in W. Forbes Gray, J. H. Jamieson, "East Lothian Biographies", Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society, IV, (May, 1941), p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Third Report of the Committee of the School of Arts in Haddington for 1825-26, Being the Fifth Session (Haddington, n. d.)

year in which, according to Professor Kelly, Edinburgh produced the earliest fully-fledged Mechanics' Institute.<sup>28</sup> Brown was thus one of the first to practise the ideas espoused by the middle class utilitarians who subsequently set up the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the Penny Magazine and the English Mechanics' Institutes. In his Practical Observations Brougham praised Brown and offered both the Haddington Itinerating Library and the School of Arts as examples to the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Like Knight, Brougham and other English disseminators of useful knowledge, Brown and his Haddington associates offered the working class a form of education which served middle class interests as well as the cause of philanthropy.<sup>30</sup> The Itinerating Library, which did not admit books "on civil or ecclesiastical politics",<sup>31</sup> exhibited this propagandist characteristic less than the School of Arts, which provided lectures on "the principal subjects of Political Economy, such as - Property - Labour - Capital - Wages - Population - Price - Pauperism". These lectures

<sup>28</sup> T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1962), p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> Brougham, pp. 7, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Vide supra, pp. 6-13.

<sup>31</sup> Itinerating Libraries in East and Mid-Lothian under the Superintendence of Mr. Samuel Brown. Haddington (Haddington, n. d.), p. 1.

were a conscious response to the outbreak of strikes which followed the repeal of the Combination Laws. Answering accusations that the education of the working class had produced a spirit of rebellion, the Haddington Committee offered the following defence of their School of Arts:

But the Committee go much farther than simply acquitting Schools of Art of all blame; - of being the authors of injury to Society, - they hold, that it is by their means, in part at least, that combination itself will be overthrown. The root of this great evil is ignorance. Our mechanics do not sufficiently know the limits of their own, nor the extent of their masters' just rights. . . . Only let the working classes be trained to discrimination, either by that general science which sharpens the faculties of all who are conversant with it; or let them be made acquainted with that particular science, part of whose object it is to elucidate the nature of the relation in which capitalists and labourers stand to each other; and we shall be as little disturbed by the spirit of combination, as by a revival of the spirit of witchcraft.<sup>32</sup>

The faith in education, the concern for middle class interests, and the misguided notion of science exhibited by the Haddington Committee show that their School of Arts was an outstanding example of the middle class concept of adult education during that era. When Smiles encountered a similar threat from working class militancy during the Hungry Forties, he devised an education movement in which the same characteristics emerged.

There can be no doubt that Smiles was interested in

<sup>32</sup>Third Report of the Committee of the School of Arts in Haddington for 1825-26, Being the Fifth Session,  
pp. 7-13.

the Haddington School of Arts during the decade which preceded his arrival in Leeds. In November 1826 he became the apprentice of Dr. Lorimer, whose lectures on Mechanics and Chemistry had been referred to in Brougham's Practical Observations,<sup>33</sup> and he helped to prepare the scientific experiments which Lorimer performed.<sup>34</sup> His interest became more prominent later, because on returning to Haddington in 1832 he followed Lorimer's example by acceding to Samuel Brown's request that he should give Chemistry lectures in the School of Arts.<sup>35</sup> This was the first of many occasions when Smiles addressed working class listeners intent on self-improvement. Shortly after this the School of Arts would seem to have faded out,<sup>36</sup> and subsequently during his editorship in Leeds Smiles could bestow few words of praise on the Mechanics' Institute movement. Nonetheless he had learned much from the history of the earlier Mechanics' Institutes, because his first independent venture in Leeds working class education attempted to profit from their mistakes.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Brougham, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Sketch of the Late Mr. Samuel Brown of Haddington (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Vide infra, pp. 231-233.

It is probable that Smiles's growing interest in adult education during the eighteen-thirties was stimulated by his acquaintance with the editor of the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle, Dr. Thomas Murray, who invited him in 1836 or 1837 to contribute to the newspaper. Smiles was still practising medicine in Haddington at this time, and he would seem to have been engaged only as an occasional contributor, but Murray had reckoned without the ambitious enthusiasm of an extremely able young man, who found that the over-staffed profession of medicine bestowed on young doctors an amount of leisure time which was as ample as their financial reward was meagre. Within a short time Smiles was writing leading articles "as if I were the editor", an obvious indication that he was well-acquainted with the policy of the newspaper and had earned the trust of Thomas Murray.<sup>38</sup> The newspaper files no longer exist, but some light can be shed on the opinions of Smiles at this time, because both Murray and the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle were well-known for their support of certain prominent movements.

The Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle was the voice of a thriving local education movement which was attracting considerable attention in 1836 and 1837.<sup>39</sup> Some indication of the extent and zeal of the adult education branch of the

<sup>38</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 64.

<sup>39</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (March, 1836), p. 192.

movement is provided by Lord Cockburn's Journal.

The intellectual fermentation is astonishing. On the single subject of popular instruction, any newspaper states facts and suggests reflections which imply the dawn of a new day. Schools, lectures, private colleges, normal institutions for the mere manufacture of teachers, pedagogic mills, associations open to all ranks, but chiefly for the middle and lower, inviting both sexes and all ages, embracing all subjects, physical and moral, practical and theoretical, all arts, ornamental and useful - everything, in short, except classical learning.<sup>40</sup>

Cockburn believed that Political Economy was only a minor part of the education which was offered, but in this he would seem to have been mistaken. Thomas Murray frequently appeared in the company of other lecturers, and it was as a lecturer on Political Economy that he was known.<sup>41</sup> In 1836-37 one of his lecture courses was reported in the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle, which thus became a vehicle for the dissemination of popularised Political Economy.<sup>42</sup>

By 1836 Murray had acquired considerable experience of public lecturing, because he was the disciple of J. R. McCulloch, under whose influence he became one of the first popularisers of Political Economy. Ricardo and the early economists had given a basically pessimistic analysis of the

<sup>40</sup> H. Cockburn, Journal of Henry Cockburn 1831-54 (Edinburgh, 1874), I, 117.

<sup>41</sup> W. H. Marwick, "Early Adult Education in Edinburgh", Journal of Adult Education, V (April, 1932), 400-01.

<sup>42</sup> T. Murray, Summary of Lectures on Political Economy (Edinburgh, 1837).

condition of the lower classes, thus making the popularisation of their "dismal science" a difficult task, but by an intellectual tour de force McCulloch succeeded in offering a message of hope to the lower classes without destroying the basic beliefs of Classical Political Economy. Disagreeing with James Mill and other economists of his day, he stated his belief that capital could be accumulated easily and naturally, enabling the working class to become the master of its own fate. "Ambition to rise is the animating principle of society. Instead of remaining satisfied with the condition of their fathers, the great object of mankind in every age has been to rise above it - to elevate themselves in the scale of wealth." In this way, according to Halévy, "the philosophy of progress once more becomes almost unrestrictedly optimistic".<sup>43</sup> The Malthusian spectre had to some extent been exorcised, and the teachings of Political Economy could now plausibly be offered to the working class as the means whereby they could improve their social condition. McCulloch expounded his theories in the lectures which he gave in Edinburgh until about 1828, when Murray, an acquaintance, undertook the continuation of his task.<sup>44</sup> The

<sup>43</sup>R. Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (London, 1949), p. 368.

<sup>44</sup>W. H. Marwick, "Adult Educationalists in Victorian Scotland", Journal of Adult Education, VI (April, 1933), p. 132.

lectures published by the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle show that ten years later Murray was still expounding a message similar to McCulloch's revision of orthodox Political Economy. With less eclat than Charles Knight and Harriet Martineau, Thomas Murray had become an early propagandist of middle class economic and social values.<sup>45</sup> When Smiles knew him, Murray even had two working class disciples, John and Alexander Bethune, who incorporated many of his ideas in their own lectures and dedicated the printed volume to him.<sup>46</sup>

The lectures printed in the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle show that Murray related his teaching to the daily life of his listeners, and it was probably this method which enabled him to win the respectful attention of working class listeners. Thus he introduced Political Economy as follows: "It explains to all the foundation both of individual and national prosperity; it teaches all the nature of their relative position; and how they may improve that condition, add to their independence and comforts, and rise in the world."<sup>47</sup> Underlying this concept was a boldly stated approval of a social structure directed by an enlightened

<sup>45</sup> Vide supra, pp. 7-12.

<sup>46</sup> A. and J. Bethune, Practical Economy Explained and Enforced in a Series of Lectures (Edinburgh, 1839).

<sup>47</sup> Murray, p. 1.

middle class and based on industry and commerce.<sup>48</sup> In his lectures Murray attempted to teach his working class listeners and readers that they should adjust to this new society by emulating the middle class. Keeping to the well-worn path of laissez-faire economics, he bluntly affirmed that legislation could do nothing to help the working class, and that it should learn to trust to its own efforts.<sup>49</sup> The Bethunes were even more explicit. They condemned trade union activity: ". . . it appears evident that strikes and combinations, even when they are apparently successful, never can produce any permanent advantage to those who adopt them for the purpose of improving their condition".<sup>50</sup>

Making use of McCulloch's theory of capital accumulation, Murray and the Bethunes proceeded to draw up a programme for the working man to adopt "in order to improve his condition and to rise in the world".<sup>51</sup> Their advice was firmly based on the belief that even the poorest of men could acquire capital by saving small amounts, an assumption which Smiles later helped to turn into a cliche of the Victorian world. Having perceived the problem of the "two nations", Murray

<sup>48</sup> Murray, p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Bethune, p. 109.

<sup>51</sup> Murray, p. 13.

was one of those who offered a solution derived from the orthodox middle class concept of the ideal society in which rewards would be conferred in accordance with proved merit.

The likeness of Murray's lectures to the "Gospel according to Smiles"<sup>52</sup> is too obvious to ignore, because by affirming that the situation of the working class "must, in all cases, be determined chiefly by their own intelligence, prudence, frugality, and forethought"<sup>53</sup> Murray was stating the theme of Self-Help, and by describing the material and moral benefits to be derived from small savings he was employing even vocabulary similar to that of Thrift. Smiles was the trusted colleague of Murray when the lectures were printed in the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle, and it is probable that he was aware of Murray's theories. Sufficient evidence does not survive to prove this connection conclusively, and, although Smiles's association with Murray is interesting as an indication of the type of acquaintance he cultivated at this time, too much significance should not be attached to Murray's lectures. Murray may well have been one of the first adult educators to expound self-help systematically in accordance with the teachings of Political Economy, but the basic idea was commonly expressed in a climate of opinion dominated by a puritan morality and

---

<sup>52</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. xii.

<sup>53</sup> Murray, pp. 92-93.

laissez-faire economic thought. Smiles himself later frankly avowed that the theory of self-help was an old one, and his real achievement as an author depended, not on the novelty of his ideas, but rather on his gift for assessing the tastes of the Victorian reading public and presenting some of the most characteristic ideas of the day in an anecdotal form attractive to his contemporaries. Thus only fifty copies of Murray's lectures were printed,<sup>54</sup> whereas over a quarter of a million copies of Self-Help were sold in the life-time of Smiles.<sup>55</sup> Murray's popularised form of Political Economy lectures may have stimulated Smiles, but, as a writer, his indebtedness to Murray was certainly small.

The reporting of Murray's lectures was only one of the services performed by the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle for the cause of education in Edinburgh, and other leaders of the movement found an outlet for their ideas in the columns of this newspaper. One of these was George Combe, with whose name the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle was being associated in 1836.<sup>56</sup> This was important, because, if Edinburgh at this time was "humming with good causes and transcend-

<sup>54</sup> Murray, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living (London, 1961), p. 52.

<sup>56</sup> Fair's Edinburgh Magazine (March, 1836), p. 191.

ental schemes of human progress and perfection",<sup>57</sup> much of the intellectual ferment could be attributed to Combe, who enjoyed an international reputation for his exposition of phrenology, a theory of psychological motivation derived from the study of skull characteristics.<sup>58</sup> Many, including Smiles, were influenced by this unorthodox thinker.

Although, according to Professor Harrison, no doctrine created a greater stir in the forties and fifties than phrenology,<sup>59</sup> the impact of the new "science" could be observed in Edinburgh much earlier. Impatient of the conservative forces in the Church of Scotland, which denounced his opinions as "direct emanations from Satan",<sup>60</sup> Combe allied his promotion of phrenology with many liberal causes of a less bizarre nature. For a time he advocated political reform and became Secretary of the Edinburgh Reform Committee,<sup>61</sup> but after 1832 he increasingly "sought the solution of the problem which was disturbing the country and its statesmen by the elevation of the lower classes by the means

<sup>57</sup> Saunders, p. 93.

<sup>58</sup> J. C. Flugel, A Hundred Years of Psychology (London, 1951), p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> C. Gibbon, The Life of George Combe (London, 1878), II, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., I, 249.

of education".<sup>62</sup> He soon became a well-known figure in Edinburgh and further afield because of the adult education societies which he and his disciples helped to set up,<sup>63</sup> and because of the lessons which he personally gave to poor children.<sup>64</sup> So great was the influence of Combe's philosophy at this time that one historian has claimed that the early concepts of secular education in the nineteenth century were derived from it. These may be summarised as "the training of mind and body by appropriate exercises" and the offering of "instruction in various sciences relating to the constitution of man and his place in nature and human society".<sup>65</sup> Such ideas were revolutionary at a time when, as many autobiographers testify, the most respected form of education was instruction in the Classics. Smiles became acquainted with Combe's opinions and, greatly impressed, attempted to contribute to his work.

Combe's thoughts on social reform found their fullest expression in his Constitution of Man, a work which he wrote in order to "discover as many of the contrivances of

<sup>62</sup> Gibbon, I, 251.

<sup>63</sup> W. H. Marwick, "Early Adult Education in Edinburgh", Journal of Adult Education, V (April, 1932), 397-402.

<sup>64</sup> C. Mackay, Forty Years' Recollections (London, 1877), II, 266.

<sup>65</sup> A. L. Dobbs, Education and Social Movements 1700-1850 (London, 1919), p. 169.

the Creator, for effecting beneficial purposes, as possible; and to point out in what manner, by accommodating our conduct to these contrivances, we may lessen our misery and increase our happiness".<sup>66</sup> Harriet Martineau later claimed that Combe's book stimulated great public interest in the physical condition of "the multitude, high and low",<sup>67</sup> and this was certainly the effect which it had on Samuel Smiles, who, having read the Constitution of Man, published his own first book, Physical Education or, the Nurture and Management of Children, Founded on a Study of Their Nature and Constitution, and immediately sent a copy to Combe "soliciting his opinion of it, because the subject was one which had been most ably dealt with by him".<sup>68</sup> The tribute was just, as Smiles's indebtedness to Combe and his disciples is evident throughout the book. For example, although there is no indication that Smiles ever became a convinced believer, he did in one passage, express at least a guarded approval for phrenology by describing infant mental development "in phrenological language".<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> G. Combe, The Constitution of Man, (Edinburgh, 1828), pp. 17-18.

<sup>67</sup> Biographical Sketches (London, 1877), p. 273. Cf. also J. Morley, Life of Richard Cobden (London, 1881), I, 93-94.

<sup>68</sup> Gibbon, II, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Smiles, Physical Education (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 24.

But Samuel Smiles was interested in education rather than phrenology, and in his preface he hoped that his book would supply "a desideratum in Popular Educational Literature". Smiles and others were to provide many books for the real and imagined needs of a mass readership later in the century, but the production of this form of literature was in its infancy in the eighteen-thirties. Some valuable experience had been gained, it is true, and Smiles would seem to have been influenced by Scottish attempts to offer cheap improving literature to the working class. It is known that by 1838 he was acquainted with the career of a certain Mr. Slater, an unsuccessful publisher of cheap works of merit,<sup>70</sup> and that he was sufficiently acquainted with the work of the famous Chambers brothers to submit his book for their consideration.<sup>71</sup> Favourable reviews in Chambers's Journal and other periodicals subsequently showed that the seal of approval was given to the book by the men who led the middle class movement for popular enlightenment during this seminal stage.<sup>72</sup>

The book was not a commercial success, however. Part of the reason was a mishap which prevented Smiles from having it published by William Chambers and obliged him to

<sup>70</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

bring it out privately. Few copies were printed, and even fewer were sold despite the favourable reviews.<sup>73</sup> But the Smiles of 1838 was not the Smiles of 1859, and the dissimilarities between his first and his later books are obvious. Even the title of the first book, by its involved and clumsy phrasing, betrays an awkwardness of style when compared with Self-Help, Thrift, and the writings of the mature Smiles. Explanations "in phrenological language" lend force to this criticism. Smiles, in fact, had not yet learned how to wear his learning lightly, and, although the work was judged sufficiently "instructive and charming" to be re-issued after his death,<sup>74</sup> it was unsuitable for the popular readership which he had in mind at the time of writing.

Although Smiles's association with Brown, Murray and Combe makes it obvious that his life-long interest in education was developing strongly in Scotland, it was as a political journalist that he went to Leeds in 1838. The sources are scanty, but his involvement in politics and political journalism can also be shown to have occurred while he resided in Haddington. One indication is provided by his active participation in local politics to the extent of

---

<sup>73</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> Edited with additions by Sir Hugh Beever, (New York, 1905).

joining the Burgh Council in 1836.<sup>75</sup> No record survives of his opinions, and his tenure of office was fleeting, but a strong connection exists between the issues in local politics and the educational interests which he is known to have had at that time.

The spirit of reform was vigorous in Haddington after the reform of Scottish municipal government in 1833, and in politics as in education this spirit was personified by Samuel Brown, first Provost of Haddington under the new régime. Smiles, it will be remembered, knew Brown and respected his educational endeavours. Smiles was also a friend of the Brown family.<sup>76</sup> By 1836 he could not have failed to be aware of the ideals of liberalism which Brown held as a "Whig of the Edinburgh School".<sup>77</sup> While Brown was Provost yearly statements of policy were issued to the inhabitants, the accounts were published, wasteful expenditure was checked, and sectarian intolerance in local affairs was deplored. Brown also envisaged constructive reform, and, far in advance of electoral opinion, he urged the desirability of improving water supplies and sanitation, extending elementary education, subsidising the School of Arts, and

---

<sup>75</sup> Haddington Burgh Registers, Excerpts from Council Books, (1669-1861).

<sup>76</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 58.

<sup>77</sup> S. Brown, p. 95.

establishing a town museum of natural history and industry.<sup>78</sup> Smiles cannot have been ignorant of these policies while he was a Councillor, because Brown's conduct in office attracted attention even in distant London,<sup>79</sup> but the evidence will permit no more than a statement that his political support of Brown's ideas would have fitted into the pattern of his other activities at this time. In later years as editor of the Leeds Times Smiles often called for active local government and for policies such as those which Brown had devised.

Smiles's connection with the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle also sheds some light on his political ideas at this time. Like many newspapers of the day, the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle had changed ownership and editorship frequently, veering in its politics from High Church Tory to Dissenting Radical, but when Smiles was a contributor its opinions were Radical-Whig, and it championed many of the liberal causes of the day.<sup>80</sup> The connection between Nonconformity and liberal politics was strong at this time, and one of the most prominent themes of the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle

<sup>78</sup> S. Brown (Sen.), To The Electors, Burgesses, and Other Inhabitants of Haddington (Haddington, 1835 and 1836), passim.

<sup>79</sup> Sketch of the Late Mr. Samuel Brown of Haddington, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (March 1836), pp. 191-2.

would seem to have been its forthright opposition to the ecclesiastical establishment. "The hostility of the bigotted portion of the Established clergy and the High Churchmen" consequently descended on the newspaper.<sup>81</sup> This would not have daunted Smiles, who was himself a Dissenter,<sup>82</sup> and it is probable that his connection with this newspaper helped to confirm his liberal convictions.

A better indication of Smiles's political convictions is provided by the periodicals which he is known to have read while he resided in Haddington. These were Albany Fonblanque's London Examiner and Fox's Monthly Repository, a choice of newspapers which strongly suggests that Smiles was an advocate of extensive reform.<sup>83</sup> Fonblanque was a Radical whose ably-written articles poured a withering scorn on the exponents of aristocratic and ecclesiastical privilege. His journalistic skill subsequently earned lavish praise from the Scotsman. "In the excited political times from 1830 for a few years onwards, an epigram, an illustration, a witticism in the Examiner - and there were often a dozen, more or less admirable, in one short article - went off like a

<sup>81</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (March 1836), p. 192.

<sup>82</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

great gun, echoing all over the country."<sup>84</sup> W. J. Fox, who became editor of the Monthly Repository in 1827, and its owner in 1831, was one of the most prominent members of the highly influential group of London Utilitarians who contributed to Radical causes. Under Fox's control the Monthly Repository became a widely read publication "of an uncompromising radicalism in complexion, and of unsurpassed excellence and distinction in its articles and its list of contributors".<sup>85</sup>

Surprisingly, however, the most conclusive proof that Smiles was a convinced Radical reformer while he lived in Scotland is provided by his book on child care. Those few who read it would have found that he declined to be restricted by the narrow medical aspect of his subject, and that he went to some trouble to show that his opinions were well-grounded philosophically. For this reason the book is of some interest to the historian.

It soon becomes obvious to the reader that Samuel Smiles, like many of his generation, had adopted a paradoxical belief. That their age was one of unrivalled innovation and material progress enabling man to control his destiny they had no doubt. Equally firm, however, was their

<sup>84</sup> E. Barrington de Fonblanque, ed., The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque (London, 1874), p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> R. K. Webb, Harriet Martineau A Radical Victorian (London, 1960), pp. 96-97.

belief in laws of nature which could not be violated with impunity.<sup>86</sup> To discover these laws and conduct human activities in full conformity with them was one of the aspirations of the age.<sup>87</sup> Many found an understanding of the paradox in the teachings of Political Economy, which proclaimed that national progress and well-being could only be achieved within the natural harmony of economic activities fostered by the invisible hand of laissez-faire. To others science was revealing the laws of nature on which progress must be based. To Smiles the existence of immutable natural laws had also been revealed by medicine:

The laws that regulate and govern living beings or organized nature, are as invariable as those which regulate the physical or material world; . . . man deceives himself, and suffers the penalty of his ignorance, if he neglect to fall back on Nature, to consult her laws, and call experience to his aid. The practice of the physician is merely to regulate and assist her in repairing derangement - to remove obstructions to her peaceful and healthy action.

In this way laissez-faire, the liberal philosophy of the age, found expression even in Smiles's medical theory, and he denounced those of conservative inclination who "have grown up to maturity under an erroneous system of management, and perpetuate its evils in their offspring because it

<sup>86</sup> Vide supra, p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> H. T. Buckle, History of Civilization in England (London, 1903), I, 225.

has the sanction of ancient custom and habit".<sup>88</sup>

Having rejected conservatism as a philosophy Smiles made it obvious that he was in sympathy with the radical philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and his followers. This was not surprising because "in discipleship or reaction no young mind of the thirties could escape their influence".<sup>89</sup> That Smiles accepted the Benthamist form of analysis is beyond doubt, because he called for more of the "greatest happiness" principle and scathingly dismissed those who, in discussing marriage, objected to "cold calculations . . . instigated by the principles of utility".<sup>90</sup> There is no evidence that he sought any involvement in Scottish politics because of his Benthamist Radicalism, but as soon as he went to Leeds he devised his editorial policy in accordance with the teachings of Philosophical Radicalism.

Smiles had retained his medical practice in Haddington despite his growing involvement in education, journalism and politics, but by 1838 he had reached the conclusion that Scotland could not provide him with an adequate living in his profession, and shortly after the failure of his book he decided to leave Haddington for a visit to Holland and Germany, with the intention of improving his medical qualifica-

<sup>88</sup> Smiles, Physical Education, pp. 5-10.

<sup>89</sup> Young, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Smiles, Physical Education, pp. 46-7.

tions prior to emigrating to Australia.<sup>91</sup> Although this indicates that he experienced some disillusionment, the years between 1832 and 1838 had not been wasted. He had gained valuable experience at an important time in his own and the nation's history. Looking back over the nineteenth century, John Morley claimed that it was the seven or eight years prior to 1841 which produced the sentiments and ideas held by the thinking section of the British people between 1840 and 1870.<sup>92</sup> In several respects the same pattern may be detected in the life of Samuel Smiles.

He had, for example, gained an experience of adult education which was to influence him strongly throughout his active life. Samuel Brown's effective synthesis of the religious and utilitarian concepts of education took Smiles to the heart of the education movement which had been developing throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century and introduced him to the climate of opinion within which British education continued to develop. If his Haddington experience had not already done so, Smiles's association with Thomas Murray almost certainly made him aware of the attempt to use education as a means of inducing the working class to accept those "scientific truths" which

---

<sup>91</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 65, 74.

<sup>92</sup> Morley, I, 90-91.

protected middle class interests. Combe's influence reinforced Brown's and Murray's, but above all it introduced Smiles to the theory of education as a physical and mental training for later life. This made him an exponent of what Matthew Arnold was to call "Hebraism". Brown, Murray and Combe had turned to education as the best means of averting the impending social catastrophe of the age, and, inspired by their example, Smiles participated in the work of the Mechanics' Institutes, and in the movement for providing the working class with cheap improving literature. Obviously even before he left Scotland he had become an exponent of "sound middle class common sense".<sup>93</sup>

The evidence suggests that his political commitment in Scotland was less than it was to be in Leeds journalism. Brown, Murray, and Combe had lost most, if not all, of their interest in national political reform when the 1832 Reform Act was passed, and it is interesting to note that Smiles was prepared to become fully associated with the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle, although "in political Radicalism" it had not gone "beyond the Ministry of the day".<sup>94</sup> His own newspaper reading, and his acceptance of Benthamism indicate that he probably sympathised with the political Radicals, but he does not seem to have expressed his Radicalism

<sup>93</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. xi.

<sup>94</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (March 1836), p. 192.

politically. Thus, when he gradually withdrew from the political activities which claimed his attention in Leeds from 1839 to 1843 and extended his educational activities, Smiles was not making as great an alteration in his attitude to reform as may appear. In some ways he was going back to the priorities which he had accepted in Haddington before he was swept into the political journalism of the Hungry Forties.

### III

#### EDITOR OF THE LEEDS TIMES

On his return from Holland Smiles continued to think of emigrating to Australia until he was dissuaded by Rowland Hill, whom he visited in London. The visit was arranged by Provost Lea of Haddington, Hill's uncle, who had written to describe Smiles's career and interests in Scotland. Knowing the young man's contribution to popular education, Hill not only urged Smiles to remain in Britain but also gave him a brief introduction to liberal circles in London.<sup>1</sup> It was not Hill's influence that improved Smiles's prospects, however, but the stroke of good fortune which caused the editorship of the Leeds Times to fall vacant. Smiles was then offered the position as the result of an application which he had made at the end of 1837 on the strength of his success in writing for the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle.<sup>2</sup> After some hesitation he accepted and travelled to Leeds at the end of 1838.

Published under a motto borrowed from Milton's Aegopagitica, the Leeds Times staunchly claimed to be the voice

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Smiles, The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LL.D., ed. Thomas Mackay, (London, 1905), pp. 72-82.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 64, 84-85.

of the Radicals in the West Riding of Yorkshire, but, when Samuel Smiles became editor in January 1839, the reality was less impressive than the aspiration. In the short time since its birth in 1833 the newspaper had not only experienced a change of ownership<sup>3</sup> but had also passed under the direction of several editors of varying ability, who had failed to secure for it a consistently large circulation. Smiles's hesitation before accepting the editorship was justified, because by 1838 a circulation crisis had developed of sufficient gravity to make it extremely unlikely that he would survive longer than any of his editorial predecessors.

Little is known about Frederick Hobson, the owner of the Leeds Times before and during Smiles's editorship. He took no prominent part in local public life, and, exercising no influence on editorial policy, contented himself with appointing Radicals as editors with full freedom of expression.<sup>4</sup> Editors came and went, however, and of Smiles's predecessors only Robert Nicoll had gained any success measured by circulation or political impact. According to Smiles's testimony the newspaper had been "loosely conducted" before Nicoll's arrival, and "the leading articles

---

<sup>3</sup>R. V. Taylor, Biographia Leodiensis (London, 1865), p. 510.

<sup>4</sup>Poems by Robert Nicoll (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 50.

wanted vigour and decisiveness".<sup>5</sup> Between 1836 and 1837 these qualities were supplied in full measure by the young Perthshire poet, who hastened his death by unsparing attempts to advance the cause of Radicalism against the objections of opponents and faint-hearted friends. "I am speaking boldly out, and the people here like it," boasted Nicoll; "and the proprietor of the Leeds Times is aware that it is to my exertions he owes the wonderful success of the paper."<sup>6</sup> There is no reason to doubt this claim, as his correspondence with Charles Hooton reveals a shrewd judgment of news presentation, which was rewarded both by an unprecedented rise in circulation, and by the emergence of the Leeds Times as an important factor in local politics.

Nicoll's success was fleeting, and his death was followed by the swift decline of the Leeds Times; a rising circulation of 3370 in 1837 fell to 2666 in 1837-38.<sup>7</sup> Charles Hooton, Nicoll's friend and successor, was partly responsible for this reversal of fortune, because he lacked the qualities of a successful editor despite his experience as a novelist and journalist. Smiles, who replaced him,

<sup>5</sup>S. Smiles, "The Story of Robert Nicoll's Life", Good Words (1875), p. 416.

<sup>6</sup>Poems by Robert Nicoll, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup>F. Beckwith, "An Account of the Leeds Intelligencer", Publications of the Thoresby Society, XL (1953), p. 41.

considered that Hooton was "despondent and almost hopeless".<sup>8</sup> The editorial chair of the Leeds Times was no place for such a person in 1838, a year when the conducting of a Radical newspaper would have been a severe trial for the ablest and most zealous of men.

The difficulties which Hooton failed to overcome at Leeds formed part of a wider problem encountered after 1832 by many of the Radical disciples of Mill and Bentham. Accepting an advanced programme of political reform, they had at first been heartened by the success which attended their endeavours on behalf of the Reform Bill, and they had looked forward to a new campaign which would implement their concepts to the full. For example, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, one of the leading Radical publications, confidently proclaimed in 1833 that "the vacillating policy of the Whig administration" would soon collapse.

The vehemence with which the demands for relief will be reiterated by the People, and by the popular members of the House of Commons, will cause a division of the nation into two great parties. . . . On one side will be the Aristocracy, consisting of the Tories and Conservative Whigs: on the other, the real Reformers, including the avowed Radical Reformers, and those who, although they call themselves Whigs or Independents, entertain Radical principles.<sup>9</sup>

This belief was based on the assumption that the middle

<sup>8</sup>S. Smiles, "The Story of Robert Nicoll's Life", Good Words (1875), p. 415.

<sup>9</sup>Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (October 1833), p. 1.

class and working class reformers would continue to co-operate in the eighteen-thirties as they had done during the previous decade. It also assumed that the Radicals in parliament would continue to be regarded as the spokesmen of both the middle class and the working class. Disillusionment was the price paid by those who entertained such beliefs. Despite its early promise the fourth decade of the nineteenth century treated the parliamentary Radicals and their followers harshly.

The failure of the Radicals to attain their Utopia in the eighteen-thirties has received various explanations. John Stuart Mill, for example, believed that there was an inevitable reaction of public opinion after the excitement of the struggle for the Reform Bill.<sup>10</sup> Denied public support, the Radicals in parliament "sank into a mere Côte Gauche of the Whig party".<sup>11</sup> Francis Place, however, blamed the Radicals themselves for their failure to make any progress. "We found that the supineness and truckling of the so-called Radicals in the House of Commons were the cause of what is called the apathy of the people, and sure I am that in our hearts we both wished the Reformers should be well cart-whipped, and that the Whigs and Tories were dead and

---

<sup>10</sup>J. S. Mill, Autobiography (New York, n. d.), p. 148.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

damned."<sup>12</sup> In more circumspect language Harriet Martineau also blamed the Radicals for their own predicament. She saw them as a group of bickering middle class intellectuals who "were not properly a party, nor ever had been".<sup>13</sup>

They were as far removed from influence over the mob by the philosophical steadiness of their individual aims, as from influence over the aristocracy by the philosophical depth and comprehensiveness of their views. They were as far from sharing the passion of the ignorant, as the selfish and shallow nonchalance of the aristocratic . . . and thus they were cut off from sympathy and its correlative power above and below.<sup>14</sup>

These contemporary opinions are inadequate as explanations of the Radical decline in the eighteen-thirties. Roebuck, Hume, and other Radical politicians did carry out strenuous activities in popular politics in the hope of creating an alliance of middle class and working class reformers. They wished to follow the precedents of the previous decade by offering themselves as the mentors of the working class, and it is their most significant experiment in class co-operation which gives the best indication of the real problem which had to be overcome after 1832. They helped to devise the People's Charter in an attempt to co-operate with the London Working Men's Association, a group

<sup>12</sup> M. Fawcett, Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir William Molesworth (London, 1901), p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> H. Martineau, History of the Thirty Years' Peace (London, 1858), p. 534.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

of class conscious artisans who had drawn up their constitution in the belief that the various classes in society were divided by their separate interests. Years of working class disillusionment were reaching their climax, and, when the Chartist movement gained ground, the patronage of the middle class Radicals was increasingly brushed aside. Henceforward the Radicals found that when they appealed for the united support of the middle class and the working class they could obtain the trust of neither. Disraeli's "Two Nations" had reached the fulness of their development.

Championing the cause of middle class Radicalism, the Leeds Times enacted the tragedy of the parliamentary Radicals on a local scale. The struggle for the 1832 Reform Act had set the pattern in Leeds by revealing the divergent interests of the middle class and working class.<sup>15</sup> Thereafter the prospects of co-operation diminished even further. When working class political activity revived in the second half of the decade the Leeds Working Men's Association emerged as the main focus of loyalty, an indication that class consciousness was developing. It had not yet developed completely, however, and three main groups may be detected in the Association: the Owenites, the physical force Radicals, and the more moderate Radicals including

---

<sup>15</sup>A. S. Turberville and F. Beckwith, "Leeds and Parliamentary Reform 1820-32", Thoresby Society Miscellany, XLI, Part 1, (1943), passim.

Robert Nicoll. That the latter group was in favour of an alliance between the middle class and the working class reformers is indicated by the editorial policies of Nicoll.<sup>16</sup> While he was editor of the Leeds Times the three groups held together in a fragile coalition, but this collapsed when Nicoll's fatal illness at the end of 1837 was accompanied by the deepening of the economic depression and the arrival of Feargus O'Connor in the West Riding. Henceforward separate Radical, Socialist and Chartist groups existed in Leeds, each with its own publication. From the moderate Radical point of view, worse immediately followed. The ineffective opposition of Charles Hooton was swept aside, and O'Connor successfully gained an ascendancy in West Riding popular politics.<sup>17</sup> In Leeds the last links between middle class radicalism and working class radicalism had snapped.

Journalistic trends in the West Riding also contributed to the deteriorating condition of the Leeds Times. When Smiles became editor no county had more local newspapers than Yorkshire,<sup>18</sup> and no part of Yorkshire had more flourishing newspapers than Leeds, where editors of great

<sup>16</sup> Poems by Robert Nicoll, pp. 49-55.

<sup>17</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies (London, 1962), pp. 65-75.

<sup>18</sup> P. L. Simmonds, "Statistics of Newspapers in Various Countries", Journal of the Statistical Society of London, IV (1841), p. 115.

ability were earning the attention of politicians and journalists throughout the land. Like nearly all British newspapers of that era each of the Leeds newspapers professed a political affiliation which sharpened its rivalry with other local newspapers, and when Smiles came to Leeds he found that well-conducted Conservative, Whig and Chartist newspapers had been exploiting the difficulties of the Leeds Times by encroaching on its circulation.<sup>19</sup>

The Conservative cause, for example, was effectively defended at Leeds by the editor of the Leeds Intelligencer, Robert Perring, whose vigour and flair for political journalism were devoted to the task of providing a new and more popular image for the old and discredited Toryism. Quick to perceive the growth of suspicion between the middle class and the working class after 1832, Perring fashioned his newspaper into the spearhead of a powerful Conservative revival in Yorkshire. He denounced the unpopular middle class doctrine of laissez-faire and threw his influence behind a bold attempt to forge an alliance of "the altar, the throne, and the cottage" in the Leeds Operative Conservative Society.<sup>20</sup> Robert Nicoll had eagerly accepted the chal-

<sup>19</sup> Between 1839 and 1841 Owen's New Moral World was also published in Leeds.

<sup>20</sup> F. Beckwith, "An Account of the Leeds Intelligencer", Publications of the Thoresby Society, XL, (1953), p. 39.

lenge, and, treading the same path as Roebuck and the London Radicals, he had helped to establish the Leeds Working Men's Association in support of a Radical political programme.<sup>21</sup> While Nicoll was editor Perring's challenge was beaten off, and the sales of the Leeds Times exceeded those of the long-established Intelligencer; but Perring's activities did not cease, and after Nicoll's death the Leeds Times lost ground in comparison with its Conservative rival.<sup>22</sup>

If the editors of the Leeds Times were doomed to fight hard for a working class readership in the late thirties, the difficulties to be overcome in winning middle class support were scarcely less formidable. The main reason for this was the competition of the well-respected Leeds Mercury, the Whig newspaper conducted by the Baines family, who had traditionally spoken for the Yorkshire reformers and the powerful Non-conformist cause in the North of England. Rightly recognising the Leeds Mercury as a dangerous rival, Robert Nicoll had been forthright in condemning the Whigs nationally and locally, even though his Radical friends who conducted Tait's Edinburgh Magazine had deplored his boldness in clashing with a newspaper of such a

<sup>21</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> F. Beckwith, "An Account of the Leeds Intelligencer", Publications of the Thoresby Society, XI, (1953), p. 40.

reputation.<sup>23</sup> Their misgivings were not unreasonable, as Smiles subsequently testified.

The Leeds Mercury has long been known to the public as the leading Whig organ of Yorkshire: as such it has acquired a large amount of local influence, its opinions being quoted and looked upon by many as almost oracular. . . . Its large circulation has given it an important control over the opinions of those who read it; and on almost all the great questions which have agitated the public mind during the last twenty years, the fiat of the Leeds Mercury, in the populous districts where it circulates has generally been considered as satisfactory and decisive.<sup>24</sup>

Whig and Tory journalism, however, was less dangerous for the Leeds Times than the rise of the Chartist movement, which, both locally and nationally, completed the rupture of the Radical movement by accentuating class tension. This divergence was fundamental. One form of Radicalism, which may be traced back to Cobbett, had always rejected the ethos of industrialism and had sought political reform in order to alter an economic and social structure which seemed to neglect the interests of the working class. Offering a sharp contrast, the middle class form of Radicalism was based on the teachings of Bentham and the Political Economists, with the result that middle class Radicals tended to regard the emergence of an industrial society as a sign of progress which should not be hindered by legislation. The

<sup>23</sup> Poems by Robert Nicoll, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Leeds Times (January 1, 1842).

1832 Reform Act and some of the Benthamist legislation of the eighteen-thirties gave the working class a taste of the disillusionment which could stem from an alliance with these Radicals. Increasingly the working class asserted its independence, and in industrial Yorkshire this trend was reinforced by the economic crisis at the end of the decade. It was Hooton's misfortune that the growing class tension was expressed journalistically at Leeds itself by the establishment in November 1837 of the Chartist Northern Star. "Fus-tian jacket" radicalism was proclaimed, and the mediating influence of the Leeds Times was brushed aside.<sup>25</sup>

The Leeds Times was thus in a severe plight when Smiles became editor at the beginning of 1839. Far from emerging as the Yorkshire voice of the victorious movement which the Radicals of 1832 had prophesied, the newspaper, lacking the support of a compact social, economic, or religious pressure group, was on the defensive, harassed by resurgent Toryism, scarcely heeded by the Non-conformist middle class, and outbid for working class support by the Northern Star. Hooton had failed; now Smiles took up the task of reviving the influence and prosperity of the newspaper.

Smiles later expressed considerable distaste for

---

<sup>25</sup>E. Glasgow, "The Establishment of the Northern Star Newspaper", History (1954), p. 66.

many aspects of his editorial duties, referring in his Auto-biography to "the perpetual grinding, the threshing of straw that had been a thousand times threshed",<sup>26</sup> but the evidence shows that at first he had a high regard for the function of the journalist. Brougham's concept of the "March of Mind" was one which continued to fascinate Radicals, and Smiles frequently emphasised that editors should contribute to the progress of public opinion. To give one example, he is found addressing a meeting of Bradford Radicals in 1842 on the growing "Spirit of Inquiry", "The newspaper is now-a-days what the preacher was some two or three hundred years ago. It is the guide, counsellor and friend . . . the great agent of political education, the chief bulwark of liberty, and the most active pioneer of public intelligence."<sup>27</sup> To a generation mindful of the struggle for freedom of the Press these were far from being clichés, and editors in Leeds, "a centre for the manufacture of opinion",<sup>28</sup> were consequently people of some importance. It is true that as recently as 1829 Sir Walter Scott had confirmed the hitherto low status of journalists by informing Lockhart that any connection

<sup>26</sup> Smiles, p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> S. Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes (Leeds, 1842), p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> F. Beckwith, "An Account of the Leeds Intelligencer", Publications of the Thoresby Society, XL (1953), p. 3.

with a newspaper would be a "disgrace and degradation", <sup>29</sup> but at Leeds the eminent respectability of the Baines family ensured that the journalistic profession was not socially unacceptable per se. Smiles indeed was later to look back on his editorship as a time when society opened its doors generously to him.<sup>30</sup> A study of his activities consequently reveals an interesting picture of the life of a provincial editor at this time.

Even without the serious rivalry of local newspapers, the activities of an editor of the Leeds Times would have been sufficient to strain the most resourceful of men. Consisting usually of eight large-sized, closely-printed pages, of which the central two were dominated by editorial and news columns, his newspaper ranked among the largest in Britain.<sup>31</sup> Smiles described his rôle as follows: "I used to write about four columns of leader a week, besides sub-leaders and paragraphs. Then I wrote a column or two of reviews of books. This, with looking over correspondence, filled up my time pretty well."<sup>32</sup> With the exception of the

<sup>29</sup> A. Aspinall, "The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, XXI (1945), 218.

<sup>30</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 126

<sup>31</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, IX (1842), p. 548.

<sup>32</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 89.

advertisements, notices, and reports of meetings, this accounted for most of the newspaper, and Robert Nicoll, it is known, had found his professional duties "incessant and harassing", because he had been given no editorial assistant.<sup>33</sup> The offer of the sub-editorship of the Leeds Times made to William Lovett in 1840,<sup>34</sup> when the circulation and political prospects of the Leeds Times had begun once more to improve, would seem to indicate that on at least one occasion an attempt was made to provide editorial help for Smiles. This unsuccessful proposal may, however, have been prompted by temporary political expediency, because in January 1844 Smiles could be found writing about the increasing difficulty of attempting over a long period of time "to supply unaided, from three to four and five columns weekly of original matter".<sup>35</sup>

In return for these duties the editor of the Leeds Times received an extremely small salary, and even Robert Nicoll, at the height of his success, had received only the

<sup>33</sup> Poems by Robert Nicoll, p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> W. Lovett, The Life and Struggles of William Lovett (London, 1876), p. 245.

<sup>35</sup> Leeds Times (January 6, 1844). The attitude of Frederick Hobson to his editors and the evidence given in this paragraph prove that the opinions of the Leeds Times were those of Smiles, although the articles in the newspaper were not accompanied by a signature.

sum of £100 per annum.<sup>36</sup> As a married man Nicoll had found this inadequate, and he had been obliged to add to his burdens by writing leading articles for a Sheffield newspaper. When Smiles became editor during the crisis of 1839 it is unlikely that he received more than Nicoll, and, according to his own testimony, lack of an adequate salary was one of the considerations which led him to resume practice as a doctor after he had decided to be married.<sup>37</sup>

Arduous and financially unrewarding though a provincial editor's task might be, more was demanded of him than the presentation of news and opinions. The Leeds newspapers were dedicated political organs, and their editors were expected to play a personal part in local politics. Thus Perring of the Leeds Intelligencer had helped to establish the Leeds Operative Conservative Society, and Edward Baines of the Leeds Mercury had played a part in many local political and social organisations. Nicoll had been a zealous local politician, but Smiles claimed that Hooton had been unable to live up to expectations in this respect and had diminished the impact made by the newspaper.<sup>38</sup> By plunging into public debate with Peargus O'Connor three weeks after

<sup>36</sup> Poems by Robert Nicoll, p. 47.

<sup>37</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 126.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

taking up his appointment,<sup>39</sup> Smiles soon gave evidence of his intention of re-establishing the editor of the Leeds Times as a political leader in the West Riding. The list of his political activities thereafter is impressive. A consistent speaker at Radical meetings, he became one of the foremost supporters of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, which briefly assumed a national significance. He spoke frequently in public against the Corn Laws and for a time was prominently associated with the Leeds branch of the Complete Suffrage movement. In addition, Smiles was occasionally called upon as a Radical to support public meetings on matters of foreign and ecclesiastical policy. Most of his speeches were delivered in Leeds and the surrounding district, but he also delivered speeches in other Yorkshire towns and even on one occasion represented the Leeds Radicals at a meeting in Belfast. Soon he attracted the attention of leading reformers in other parts of the country. From Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, for example, came praise for "Dr. Smiles, the able editor of the Leeds Times",<sup>40</sup> an opinion echoed by J. A. Roebuck in a letter to Tait referring to "the editor of the Leeds Times, who is

---

<sup>39</sup> Leeds Times (January 19, 1839).

<sup>40</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (October, 1840), p. 679.

doing good in the North".<sup>41</sup> Thus, for a time Smiles became one of the leading figures in northern Radicalism.

Neither this vigorous entry into Leeds politics nor the journalistic experience gained in Scotland enabled Smiles to raise the circulation of the Leeds Times immediately, and his first few months as editor must have been nerve-wracking. From an average weekly circulation of 2769 during the months of April, May, and June 1838, there was a fall to 1846 copies in the same months of 1839.<sup>42</sup> By the end of the year, however, the decline had been arrested, and a favourable trend continued throughout the remaining time Smiles was editor, enabling him to claim in January 1844, that the circulation of the Leeds Times had doubled during the five years that it had been under his management.<sup>43</sup>

Although this recovery began during the depression, the improvement in the national economic situation after 1842 must have helped to reverse the setbacks incurred while Hooton was editor. The near collapse of Chartism, moreover, could hardly fail to benefit Smiles, and it is significant that the rejection of the first Chartist petition in July

<sup>41</sup> R. E. Leader, Life and Letters of J. A. Roebuck (London, 1897), p. 131.

<sup>42</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies, p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> Leeds Times (January 6, 1844).

1839 was followed by a rise in the circulation of the Leeds Times during the second half of that year. In 1839 the sales of the Northern Star reached their peak, and thereafter this journalistic threat to the Leeds Times diminished. With Chartism and its newspaper declining, middle class Radicalism could once again emerge as a serious force in Yorkshire.

In January 1844 after the circulation crisis was over Smiles estimated that he had a readership of twenty thousand, "supposing each number of our paper to be read by five persons".<sup>44</sup> This was not an excessively optimistic estimate, because at 4½d. the Leeds Times, like most other newspapers, was too expensive to be purchased by many working class readers, who could in any case resort to the increasing number of reading rooms and to the collective readings of newspapers in public houses. Philip Snowden's memoirs give an example of the methods by which some of the working class in the West Riding obtained newspapers about this time. Recognising their limited financial resources and reading ability a group of weavers in his father's village would seem to have contributed to the purchase of the Leeds Mercury, which his father subsequently read to

---

<sup>44</sup> Leeds Times (January 6, 1844).

them.<sup>45</sup> As Smiles enjoyed some influence over part of the Yorkshire working class during his political and educational endeavours, it was not unduly optimistic of him to assume that his own newspaper's readership and influence were extended by similar means. Later in life a former reader was to tell him of an equally interesting practice which the Penny Post may have made common - the exchanging of the Leeds Times for a newspaper from another town, at a time when newspapers were "rare and precious and valued".<sup>46</sup>

Smiles's success as a political journalist soon brought his newspaper to the notice of the rest of the Press. In towns as far away as Dundee and Dublin newspapers reported the opinions and policies of the Leeds Times, enabling Smiles and the reformers with whom he associated to influence as widespread a readership as was possible before the rise of national popular newspapers.

Contrary to his statement in the Autobiography, which has been accepted in subsequent accounts, Smiles continued as editor of the Leeds Times beyond the year 1842. It is true that at the end of 1842 he relinquished the part-

<sup>45</sup> P. Snowden, An Autobiography (London, 1934), I, 18. See also A. Aspinall, "The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, XXII (1946), passim.

<sup>46</sup> Leeds City Library, Archives Department, SS/A/IX/66, R. C. Hall to S. Smiles, January 31, 1876.

nership which he had obtained in the newspaper<sup>47</sup> and resumed practice as a doctor, but the evidence conclusively shows that he also remained as editor at least until 1845, in which year he entered the employment of the Leeds and Thirsk Railway Company. This amended chronology is of some importance, as the columns of the Leeds Times during these later years indicate the significant development of his ideas.

The files of the Leeds Times curiously provide no direct references to the departure of Smiles, but the New Year greetings for 1843, 1844, and 1845 could only have been written by one who had been editor in the immediately preceding years. A Leeds Directory for 1845 also provides strong evidence by referring to Smiles as "surgeon, and editor of the Leeds Times newspaper".<sup>48</sup> Called before the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849), Smiles himself gave a statement referring to the length of his editorship. He had been "for eight years editor of a newspaper at Leeds".<sup>49</sup> This statement presents difficulties, because it ought to mean that Smiles relinquished his duties in 1846, which is unlikely, as he entered the employment of the Leeds

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Leeds Times (December 31, 1842 and January 7, 1843).

<sup>48</sup>Williams's Directory of the Borough of Leeds (Leeds, 1845).

<sup>49</sup>Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849), p. 124.

and Thirsk Railway Company in 1845. It also contradicts the claim that G. S. Phillips became editor of the Leeds Times in 1845.<sup>50</sup> It is thus most likely that Smiles ceased to be editor in 1845.

The evidence which he gave before the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849) shows that it would be a mistake to regard these years of involvement in political journalism after 1839 as a sign that Smiles had forgotten his earlier connection with the movement for extending education. English Radicals of his generation took an active interest in education, and many of his associates at Leeds shared his interest. Thus, while he was editor, the Leeds Times could be depended upon to support their cause, and, even when he was most concerned with politics, Smiles could be found seeking to base the Leeds Radical movement to a great extent on activities of educational value. Education must be based on the interests of the learner, he claimed, and for this reason the study of politics presented itself to him as "one of the best means of adult instruction" for working men.<sup>51</sup> His continued zeal for education was well illustrated by his leisure activities in Leeds.

<sup>50</sup> M. Phythian, "January Searle in Yorkshire", Journal of Adult Education, I (1926), p. 146.

<sup>51</sup> Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, p. 5.

Becoming a member of the Literary Association and subsequently of the Mechanics' Institute, he delivered a number of lectures on a wide variety of subjects for their essentially middle class membership. It was also at this time that he devoted considerable personal endeavour to the work of the Youths' Guardian Society and warmly supported the Leeds Mutual Improvement Association in the hope of extending the benefits of education to the less privileged. From such activities he derived the rich fund of experience on which he was to draw for many of his later writings.

IV

THE RADICAL CREED OF SAMUEL SMILES (1839-45)

The readers of Samuel Smiles's leading articles were soon made aware that an explicitly Radical philosophy was inspiring editorial policy. His first book had already shown that he accepted the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham; now his first leading article for the Leeds Times called for "the more general recognition of the democratic or 'greatest happiness' principle, as the rule for all legislation",<sup>1</sup> thereby immediately acknowledging that Bentham was still his mentor. Subsequently the degree of his deference was shown by a startling appeal to "the two greatest utilitarians that ever lived - Jesus Christ and Jeremy Bentham".<sup>2</sup> Exaggerated though this respect for Bentham seems, it was of great benefit to Smiles by giving him access to a clearly defined exposition of Radicalism, which enabled him to make an immediate contribution to the flow of ideas in the West Riding, at a time when the "Condition of England" question was being heatedly debated both locally and nationally.

Later in life Smiles was to express distaste for

---

<sup>1</sup> Leeds Times (January 5, 1839).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. (April 10, 1841).

politics, but as a young editor in Leeds his doctrinaire Benthamism could not allow him to deny that government was an important factor affecting the pleasure and pain of the greatest number, and it was to political matters that his readers usually found their attention directed. A strict application of Benthamist hedonism had revealed to him that a constitution restricting the franchise to a minority entailed legislation discriminating against the welfare of the majority. Consequently, although it soon emerged that he was prepared to bend before the demands of expediency, Smiles consistently urged his readers to see in universal suffrage the remedy for much of the distress which had befallen society. "Let the whole community be proprietors in government, and the interest of the whole community will then be cared after, instead of the partial interests of class and party as at present."<sup>3</sup> Smiles saw little difference between the two main parties "snarling occasionally at each other over their mutual feast of public spoil"<sup>4</sup> and went on within the ideological framework of philosophical Radicalism to support the case for radical reform which would destroy their control of the House of Commons. Half measures would be futile. For example, Smiles always declined to support an agitation for the ballot alone, since

---

<sup>3</sup> Leeds Times (March 16, 1839).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. (January 5, 1839).

"it would withdraw the elector too entirely from the beneficial control of the public voice".<sup>5</sup> Only in conjunction with universal suffrage would the ballot be a valuable reform.

In the climate of opinion created by the Chartist movement such ideas were often denounced as dangerously extreme, and Smiles had to defend his political creed against those "Mr. Thingumbobs" who

take up the word and cry, "Keep them out," muttering sundry moist things about "unwashed", "monstrous innovation", "greasy mob", "impertinent intrusion"; ending in their making sundry very hard winks at each other, and putting their shirt collars on the qui vive with the air of men who have done their duty.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing that the defenders of a property qualification were worthier opponents than this satire a la Carlyle would indicate, Smiles employed considerable skill and tenacity in combatting their arguments. Once let the propertyless section of the population have the franchise, one school prophesied, and the property of the wealthier sections of the community would be seized as plunder. Besides, were not the majority inadequately educated to vote responsibly? Macaulay offered an able exposition of these beliefs in his speeches during the debates on the Charter, and Smiles met them also in the Leeds Mercury soon after his arrival in

<sup>5</sup> Leeds Times (September 21, 1839).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (July 27, 1839).

Leeds. Benthamist logic formed the basis of his reply. He also made good use of History, which, he believed, afforded valuable lessons for the student of human affairs.<sup>7</sup> Laws could be deduced from History, one of them being a theory of class evolution of an almost Marxist quality. "The history of the world presents one continuous example of successive eruptions of the excluded classes on the dominions of caste and faction; and it would be a gross mistake to suppose, when the times indicate a more than ordinary pressure from without, that the end has been reached now."<sup>8</sup> To resist this trend would, he claimed, entail the outbreak of class warfare. Recent history afforded him the further valuable lesson of the American experiment in liberal government. Judged by practical Benthamist tests the Americans and their system of government triumphantly emerged as responsible for the unique achievement of swiftly transforming a wilderness into a thriving country. Praising the American people as "the most enterprising, generous, brave and intelligent, in the world",<sup>9</sup> Smiles frequently during his editorship showed that he had been powerfully influenced by American ideals, and American writers played no small part in the evolution

---

<sup>7</sup> S. Smiles, History of Ireland and the Irish People under the Government of England (Dublin, 1844), p. ix.

<sup>8</sup> Leeds Times (July 27, 1839).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (October 29, 1842).

of some of his most cherished beliefs.

Such was his doctrinaire respect for the principle of Universal Suffrage that Smiles, like few of his generation, was prepared to debate it to the logical conclusion of female suffrage. In his writings and speeches allusion was often made to the rôle of women in society. Although he usually defined this as the formation of character within the home, he had been impressed by the abilities and public services of unmarried women like Hannah More and Harriet Martineau.<sup>10</sup> Yet, he found, the status of women was low. Guided by Benthamist philosophy, Smiles claimed that they were no less affected than men by government, both alike being "susceptible of pain and pleasure". Was not the legislation relating to the civil identity and property rights of women an adequate refutation of the virtual representation theory? Fearing that this was probably the case, but still affirming his faith in the ability of universal male suffrage and public opinion to improve the status of women, Smiles called for serious thought about female enfranchisement. "Twenty years ago, Lords laughed at the idea of the franchise being conferred upon ten pound householders. The question is one of "the greatest happiness", and ought to be so considered, and decided upon accordingly."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Leeds Times (September 11, 1841).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (May 9, 1840).

Nearly thirty years later John Stuart Mill was to find similarly enlightened ideas on female suffrage being dismissed as "whims of my own".<sup>12</sup>

Logically it was for the completely unrepresentative parts of the British constitution that Smiles reserved some of his most scathing references. "The fact is, that royalty and aristocracy, aye and hierarchy also, are nothing less than impious institutions all, living lies, and insults upon God and man."<sup>13</sup> Denouncing aristocracy as the most powerful of these opponents, he forthrightly warned the readers of his first issue that the reforms advocated by the newspaper would always encounter the opposition of "that Lazaar-house of Incurables - that rotten and most corrupt of all corporations - the House of Peers".<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, Smiles devoted little attention to the House of Lords after this, although he continued to attack aristocratic influence in the House of Commons. The reason was probably that the House of Lords seemed to have been weakened by its ineffective demonstration against the Reform Bill. Deceived by appearances, Smiles saw the Lords rather as "a few venerable old personages, sitting amusing themselves with playing at statesmanship, than as responsible legislators engaged in directing

<sup>12</sup>J. S. Mill, Autobiography (New York, n.d.), p. 213.

<sup>13</sup>Leeds Times (October 30, 1841).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. (January 5, 1839).

the affairs of this mighty empire."<sup>15</sup> For such an institution scorn seemed more appropriate than serious condemnation, and he contented himself with echoing O'Connell's suggestion of "turning the Thames into it for half-an-hour, as the efficient ventilator".<sup>16</sup>

His opposition to the monarchy is more surprising until it is remembered that criticism of the throne could be voiced more openly in the first half of the nineteenth century than later. The famous obituary reference to George IV in the Times of London had been written only nine years before Smiles came to Leeds, and in the first few years of his editorship Smiles too made no effort to conceal his contempt for the recent history of the Royal Family. "Within the last thirty years the English people have been successively governed by a puling dotard, a profligate debauchee, a petticoat-governed old man, and an amiable young lady scarce out of her teens."<sup>17</sup> Such a dynasty was an obvious target for an onslaught of Benthamist reasoning. At first Smiles supplied this in the belief that he saw the emergence of "a disposition to examine the first principles on which governments are founded, and to test by the grand touchstone of

<sup>15</sup> Leeds Times (April 23, 1842).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (August 3, 1839).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (July 18, 1840).

utility the institutions under which we live".<sup>18</sup> By ruthlessly exposing the frivolous extravagance of the Monarchy and Court he attempted to encourage this tendency in Leeds. Republicanism was his logical conclusion; the U. S. A. was his obvious model. "We imagine that it will be difficult to keep up this system much longer, now that we have a mighty nation so near as to exemplify all the prominent advantages of republican institutions in contrast with the mischiefs which flow from our own patchwork of prejudice, error, selfishness, and folly."<sup>19</sup> It did not take him long to discover that the monarchy was deeply rooted in the national life and that republicanism was not a popular cause. Seeking refuge in vagueness, he took the precaution of defining a republic as "the form of government from which the greatest amount of Public Good is to be derived",<sup>20</sup> thereby allowing himself to accept a reformed monarchy. In 1840 and 1841 he continued to criticise the expenditure of the Court, but his opposition to the idea of monarchy became less extreme. The reason is interesting. At first he had dismissed Victoria as only "a little girl (and not one of the wisest of little girls either)",<sup>21</sup> but by September 1842 his opinion was

<sup>18</sup> Leeds Times (March 16, 1839).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (August 24, 1839).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. (May 25, 1839).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (January 25, 1840).

altering. Still deplored the "idolatry of the people" he could praise "one who has displayed many noble and estimable qualities as a woman and a mother".<sup>22</sup> The monarchy, he admitted, was harmless and, provided Universal Suffrage was conceded, "we have no objections to the existence of a nominal head of the State, called King or Queen; believing good government by means of popular representation, to be quite as possible under a King or Queen, as under a President."<sup>23</sup> Even criticism of royal expenditure assumed less force when Victoria's insistence on simplicity became known, and in 1844 he found it possible to praise her for helping to end "the reign of empty form and ceremony".<sup>24</sup> Victoria had obviously won over at least one of her provincial opponents.

More relentless was his opposition to the Ecclesiastical Establishment, which Smiles, like many of his liberal contemporaries, regarded as an anachronism perpetuating the vices of the parasite and the bigot. Before a mounting tide of such opposition the Church had fallen back on the defensive from the beginning of the century, while the forces of Dissent, having gained a numerical predominance in

<sup>22</sup> Leeds Times (September 10, 1842).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (September 30, 1843).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (September 28, 1844).

many areas, were mobilising in opposition to its privileges. Although the Hanoverian Church has been rehabilitated to some extent by historians, Smiles was committing only a pardonable exaggeration when he joined the attack by describing the Church as "a sleeping curiosity, more wonderful than all the Pickwickian fat boys that ever lived".<sup>25</sup> In Leeds itself the Church was obviously not in a position of strength during the thirties. This was shown by Baker's statistical report in 1839 when it was seen that the various Methodist sects together provided more accommodation for worship than the Established Church.<sup>26</sup> These statistics did not give a complete picture of Anglican weakness in Leeds, the Church there having almost succumbed to a death wish before the arrival of Dr. Hook in 1837. Hook found that his curates had to be compelled to perform even the daily services, because "instead of seeking for a congregation, the curates, sexton, clerk, etc. have endeavoured to prevent one being formed, and then used that as an excuse for having no service".<sup>27</sup> "The de facto established religion is Methodism"

<sup>25</sup> Leeds Times (January 25, 1840).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. (November 9, 1839).

<sup>27</sup> W. F. Hook to his sister, July 5, 1837, in W. R. W. Stephens, Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook (London, 1878), p. 401.

was Hook's own assessment of the situation,<sup>28</sup> and by asking the Benthamist question, "of what use are they?",<sup>29</sup> Smiles must have known that many of his readers would have no hesitation in replying with a condemnation of the Anglican clergy based on personal experience.

There can be no doubt that attitudes derived from religion constituted an important part of the Radicalism which Smiles expounded in his writings and speeches. This was by no means unusual. Affirming that the politically effective part of the English people consisted of two sections at this time, one historian has pointed to a dividing line which was "not economic or political, but religious, the line between the Church of England and Protestant Dissent".<sup>30</sup> A Scot might have been expected to remain indifferent to English religious attitudes, but the history of the Smiles family was identified with Dissent in Scotland, and his studies led him to sympathise with the cause of the English Non-conformists. "It is only where Dissenters have been labouring, that society presents anything like a civil-

<sup>28</sup> W. F. Hook to Samuel Wilberforce, July 1837, in Stephens, Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook, p. 404.

<sup>29</sup> Leeds Times (February 23, 1839).

<sup>30</sup> G. Kitsos Clark, "The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties", Economic History Review, IV (1951), p. 5.

ised and enlightened appearance",<sup>31</sup> he wrote, and later in his History of Ireland he supplied a historical reason for this. He looked back to the seventeenth century, an era which fascinated him, because he believed that the principles of liberty had been clarified by the religious struggles. The Non-conformists had been in the vanguard of the struggle for liberty and good government then, but after the Cromwellian era they had seen King and Church collaborate in setting up a despotic and corrupt régime, the traces of which Smiles could detect in his own day.<sup>32</sup> Such was his reading of History, and, just as the Church in Charles II's time had ruined the country by persecuting the Puritans, "the most industrious and wealthy English citizens",<sup>33</sup> so he saw the Church in the nineteenth century fulfilling its historical rôle of hindering the progress of the nation by upholding bad legislation and destroying valuable education schemes which might benefit the Dissenters.<sup>34</sup> For Smiles the issue was clearly defined. The "Shovel Hat Agitators" must yield that the forces of progress might triumph.

Sectarian squabbles had no attraction for Smiles,

<sup>31</sup> Leeds Times (July 27, 1839).

<sup>32</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. 169.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Leeds Times (February 23, 1839).

however, and his normal praise of the Dissenters unflinchingly changed to denunciation when they attempted to discriminate against the Leeds Catholics and Unitarians.<sup>35</sup> His granddaughter has claimed that later in life Smiles "did not often go to Church unless to hear a really BROAD sermon",<sup>36</sup> and this unwillingness to identify himself with any sect seems to have been consistently maintained from the beginning of his adult life. He agreed with those who had "an utter aversion to bind down the human mind, like a second Gulliver, prostrate under the thousand little cords of the Lilliputians, by an endless variety of articles and creeds".<sup>37</sup> His editorial attacks on the Church of England consequently eschewed doctrinal disputes, and it was on the alliance of Church and State that he concentrated, claiming that it violated the principles of liberty. While Smiles was resident in Haddington, Samuel Brown, Provost of the burgh, had taken his stand on this matter by deplored the influence of religion in determining the choice of burgh magistrates,<sup>38</sup> and by declining to become an elder of the United Secession Church, because he could not in conscience

<sup>35</sup> Leeds Times (April 10, 1841).

<sup>36</sup> A. Smiles, Samuel Smiles and his Surroundings (London, 1956), p. 128.

<sup>37</sup> Leeds Times (July 9, 1842).

<sup>38</sup> S. Brown, To the Electors, Burgesses, and Other Inhabitants of Haddington (Haddington, 1836), p. 10.

make the necessary affirmation that "the Presbyterian Form of Church Government is the only form delivered and appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ in his word, to continue unalterable to the end of the world".<sup>39</sup> The Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle was also identified with the cause of complete religious liberty, and this was probably the attitude of Smiles when he came to Leeds. Immediately he defined his position clearly in the course of a review of Gladstone's The State in its Relations with the Church. Finding the book "so intolerant in its spirit, so bigotted in its views", Smiles condemned those "who tolerate us to believe for ourselves, yet will not tolerate us to withhold from a priesthood the oblation of tithes and offerings and church rates which, it may be, contributes to propagate error and delusion".<sup>40</sup> This review showed that the struggle for the basic right to worship freely was over, although Smiles occasionally found it necessary to condemn those reactionaries who, for example, called for the repeal of Catholic Emancipation, the enforcement of old statutes concerning recusancy, and the punishment of blasphemy. Gladstone's stand, however, obliged Smiles to take the struggle to its logical conclusion by demanding complete non-interference in reli-

---

<sup>39</sup> "Sketch of the Late Mr. Samuel Brown of Haddington", United Secession Magazine (December, 1839), p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Leeds Times (January 26, 1839).

gion by the State. In other words, disestablishment and ecclesiastical laissez-faire were his objectives.

The economic application of laissez-faire also formed an important part of Smiles's radical creed. "Next in importance to political liberty is commercial liberty - the liberty to buy, to sell, and to exchange - the liberty to carry our labour and its products to whatever mart we will, there to dispose of it in the way and manner we think best."<sup>41</sup> His interest in economic policy probably dated at least from his association with the Political Economy lecturer, Thomas Murray of the Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle, and he would also seem to have been an admirer of Colonel Perronet Thompson, the author of the Catechism on the Corn Laws.<sup>42</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to regard Smiles as one who had read economic theory deeply, when his references to Smith, Ricardo, and McCulloch, the accepted masters of the new science, were few. His study of medicine influenced him to a greater extent. This had convinced him that nature was governed by laws with which man must merely comply for well-being, and in his first book he had urged his readers to regard medical practice as an application of laissez-faire principles. He immediately transferred this reasoning

<sup>41</sup> Leeds Times (February 27, 1841).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. (September 7, 1839).

to commercial matters on becoming editor of the Leeds Times.

Every intelligent mind will allow that the laws of nature, so far as we can disclose and understand them, are fitted for the production of happiness and enjoyment in organised beings. The structure and functions of the human frame prove this to be the case; as well as the moral and intellectual qualifications with which man above all mere animals, has been endowed.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, he believed that the different areas of the world were designed by nature to meet the needs of men, and, implicitly accepting Adam Smith's invisible hand theory, he forthrightly stated his belief that industry, commerce and capital flourished only when left free by government. By causing the Corn Laws to be erected in defiance of the dictates of nature the aristocracy visited the nation with dire penalties. Deprived of the British market for their agricultural products, foreign governments retaliated by erecting tariff barriers against British goods, as Smiles attempted to show with reference to various tariff enactments of the United States, Brazil, and the Zollverein. Sheltering behind these tariff barriers arose foreign industries whose competition harmed British industry. He was well aware of the working of the trade cycle in his own day. "Prosperity, glut, panic, and general distress, follow each other as regularly as the spokes of a wheel, or the mutations of the seasons."<sup>44</sup> This cycle was attributable to the

---

<sup>43</sup> Leeds Times (January 26, 1839).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (November 9, 1839).

Corn Laws, which inflicted punishment on the economy, particularly during times of bad harvest when foreign supplies of corn had eventually to be introduced. Foreign suppliers did not then accept British manufactures in return, because the Corn Laws had driven them to alternative sources in normal times. The resulting drain of gold caused financial dislocation which the rash issue of paper money periodically turned into an economic crisis. At such times small capitalists lost their markets, and Smiles foresaw a time when this class would be "swept away, and we have only the two extremes of society left - the inordinately rich, and the inordinately poor".<sup>45</sup> Like Engels, Smiles saw that the trade cycle carried with it the possibility of revolution. Unlike Engels, he saw a peaceful remedy - free trade and access to new markets.

But were these restrictions in trade removed and (as is highly probable) the demand for our manufactures increased, the competition would then be on the side of the masters for labourers, and wages would then rise. The change would operate as beneficially on the manufacturer as on the labourer: the one having surer profits, the other having equal or better wages and certainly much cheaper food.<sup>46</sup>

It was usually within this framework of economic theory that Smiles assessed the problem of the Hungry Forties, becoming in the process a spokesman whose support was deemed worthy

<sup>45</sup> Leeds Times (September 14, 1839).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. (January 12, 1839).

of cultivation by Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League.

Surveying the history of the creed to which he had given his support in Leeds, Smiles saw Radicalism emerging as a "kind of cross between Political Economy and theoretic Universal Suffrage".<sup>47</sup> There can be no doubt that his own editorial policies, and in particular his theory of government, came largely from these sources. Benthamism obliged him to insist on a government representing the people; laissez-faire obliged him to restrict the activities of that government.

Government thus has no rights of itself, apart from the people, whose creature it solely is, and to whom it owes duties alone. . . . In fact, those duties are more of a negative than a positive nature; and consist rather in the prevention of evil than in the accomplishment of actual good. "Let alone" should be the motto of all constitutional governments. If let alone, Society will do for itself all which is necessary for its own individual and collective happiness, prosperity and welfare.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, when Smiles, like any other public figure, was called upon to give his solution to the current social crisis, he usually advocated both universal suffrage and the repeal of the Corn Laws. Given these reforms, the national malaise would recede. On one occasion he even implied that the woes of Ireland could be attributed to the positive misgovernment of the Corn Laws and could be cured by repeal. "They increase competition for land; rent is raised; corn and

---

<sup>47</sup> Leeds Times (November 16, 1844).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. (August 29, 1840).

potatoes become dear; they are sent to supply the more wealthy consumers of the English market; their food is exported, and the people who raised it starve."<sup>49</sup> In this way Smiles must all too often have left his readers with the impression that a laissez-faire regime was the solution of the national problems.

In fact he frequently admitted that repeal of the Corn Laws, though beneficial, was no panacea. The economic crisis obliged him to concede that positive policies were also required, and, being fully alive to contemporary currents of thought, he encountered the polemics of Thomas Carlyle. Many were the references to Carlyle and his works in the Leeds Times while Smiles was editor. He did not read Carlyle uncritically but the call to action contained in the French Revolution, Chartism and Past and Present obviously impressed him. "Political Economy, or the science of accumulating wealth has done much for us as a nation", he claimed, but it was not enough. Carlyle and Southey, though conservatives, were right to call for the study of "moral and social economy, whose objects are the distribution of those elements of happiness, which the other has gathered together".<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Leeds Times (June 15, 1839).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. (January 18, 1840).

What this moral and social economy was, he did not at first clearly define, but he agreed with Carlyle that laissez-faire theories could not be applied ruthlessly, and that the New Poor Law in particular was heartless, being "one of the first enactments framed on the nasty Malthusian anti-breeding doctrines".<sup>51</sup> The fatalistic acceptance of distress explicit in Malthusianism clashed with his basic faith in progress and disgusted him.

Statesmen may tell us that population has a tendency to press upon supply; and that of necessity there will always be, on the outskirts of society, great numbers in wretchedness. Political economists may tell us this; and priests may tell us that Heaven has so decreed it. We tell the impious hypocrites they lie!<sup>52</sup>

Shrewdly he pointed to the inconsistency of passing a laissez-faire Poor Law while retaining the Corn Laws, and he demanded a more humane system of poor relief to accord with the circumstances of the day. He was willing to countenance some State regulation of living conditions and welcomed the report of the Select Committee on the Health of Towns, which proposed that legislation should be passed enforcing measures of public sanitation and forbidding the construction of squalid housing.<sup>53</sup> He was even prepared to accept some regulation of working conditions. Referring to Ashley's

<sup>51</sup> Leeds Times (October 5, 1839).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (February 20, 1841).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. (September 26, 1840).

Coal Mines Bill in 1842 Smiles blamed Society for doing nothing to improve the lot of women and children.

We are therefore of the opinion, objecting though we do to the interference of government in the concerns of labour, trade, and commerce, that it is now fully justified in interfering and passing some such law for the protection of the helpless as has been introduced into the House of Commons by Lord Ashley.<sup>54</sup>

Likewise, in discussing the 1844 Factory Act, he insisted that men must be left free, but women and children should be protected by the State if necessary.<sup>55</sup>

Despite this refusal to give full allegiance to pure laissez-faire doctrine, Smiles remained consistently suspicious of government action. His attitude to State-sponsored schemes of education illustrates this well. When he commenced his editorial career, the Whigs were attempting to draft a plan for a national system of education, which could be accepted as a satisfactory compromise by all the interested parties. Ever interested in education, Smiles at first praised the idea,<sup>56</sup> but suddenly his attitude altered. His reasons seemed compelling. One of them was his fear that, as long as electoral corruption and a restricted franchise existed, any extension of government activities would automatically entail an extension of the spoils system.

<sup>54</sup> Leeds Times (June 11, 1842).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. (April 20, 1844).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. (February 23, 1839).

"For so long as those who live by corruptions of government, whether in the Church or State, have the superintendence of popular education, it will not be their interest to give it the efficiency which the people are entitled to expect from it."<sup>57</sup> This consideration re-appeared in 1844, when the discussion of State control of the railways prompted Smiles to forecast that "every railway establishment would become a nest of pensioners, perhaps idlers - always ready to support the despotic powers of the government".<sup>58</sup> Such fears were well grounded in recent history, and Dr. Kitson Clark numbers them among "the natural legacies of the eighteenth century".<sup>59</sup>

Pointing to the Napoleonic system of prefects as an example of centralised despotism, Smiles wrote an interesting article giving another important reason for opposing any extension of government action in his own day. Strong central government could not be trusted to heed the wishes of the subject. In Britain itself the Whigs were already undermining the liberty and independence of the subject by threatening to place him "under the perpetual guidance, coercion and restraint of a distant authority with which he

<sup>57</sup> Leeds Times (June 22, 1839).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. (July 20, 1844).

<sup>59</sup> G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London, 1962), p. 97.

has no sympathy". An outstanding example of this tendency was the New Poor Law, which, "by centralising the power which formerly was distributed in localities, effected an easy and almost unopposed step towards despotism".<sup>60</sup> Although such fears seem exaggerated to the historian of Lord Melbourne's administration, there were warning signs to which Smiles could point in his own day, the most sinister being the proposal to institute a rural constabulary and to increase the provision for a military establishment in the provinces. The idea that centralised government could confer benefits efficiently and without danger was one which required to be put to the test of time before the suspicions of liberals would abate.

By denying to the central government the power of intervening in social and economic matters unless in exceptional circumstances, Smiles did not condemn the nation to complete individualism. Alternative forms of collective action received his support, and, well aware that the Socialists had gained important experience in collective activities, he devoted some attention to their ideas. Complete Owenite Socialism was too extreme for him to accept, but he declined to agree with the Rev. J. E. Giles, who, in a work seemingly distinguished only by its lack of charity and scholarship, came to the conclusion that Owen was a "hoary

---

<sup>60</sup> Leeds Times (August 3, 1839).

apologist for crime" and a "veteran and systematic advocate of fornication and adultery".<sup>61</sup> Smiles deplored many of Owen's ideas as impractical, but he insisted that there was much to admire in Owen's career, and, replying to a letter from a Socialist reader, he accepted one of Owen's most prominent ideas. "We admit the power of CO-OPERATION."<sup>62</sup> This idea fascinated him beyond all doubt even during his earliest days in Leeds, when he introduced himself to the Leeds working class in an article extolling education through co-operation.

It yet remains for the working classes to take the matter into their own hands, and did they but set about it with good spirit and with energy, we doubt not of the most happy and beneficial results. They must bring their power of Combination to bear upon the matter. This power they are just beginning to discover; and let them direct it for the accomplishment of great and good objects such as this, and effects unheard of may be expected to flow from it.<sup>63</sup>

This was an expression of what Noel Annan has called the positivist disposition of mind. Men were not independent of their environment, but they could study the facts of their situation and turn them to advantage.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Leeds Times (January 19, 1839).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. (May 30, 1840).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. (February 2, 1839).

<sup>64</sup> Noel Annan, "Science, Religion, and the Critical Mind: Introduction", in P. Appleman, W. A. Madden and M. Wolff, eds., 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 33.

Smiles willingly admitted that individualism could be supplemented not only by co-operation but also by energetic local government. The desirability of local management of public institutions was so often proclaimed by the Leeds Times while Smiles was editor, that it is impossible to understand his theory of government without first studying this basic tenet. Centralised governments being remote from popular control could not be trusted with additional powers, but local authorities were both responsible and trustworthy. Even an additional police force would not be a threat to liberty, if it was "under the controul of the parochial authorities, while its support is wholly entrusted to the rate-payers who are to maintain it".<sup>65</sup> Thus, when Baker's statistical report was presented in 1839 informing the Leeds Town Council of the state of the town, Smiles, having welcomed it as "the stuff out of which entire social and political systems may be most safely reformed or constructed",<sup>66</sup> called for a municipal programme to overcome the defective sewerage and the deplorable condition of the streets.<sup>67</sup> Such measures would also diminish the unemployment rate of the town. This was undoubtedly an emergency

---

<sup>65</sup> Leeds Times (February 2, 1839).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. (November 9, 1839).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. (November 30, 1839).

programme dictated mainly by considerations of public health, but Smiles later extended his definition of local government by supporting permanent municipal schemes for providing and maintaining baths, museums and libraries to improve the quality of life in Leeds.<sup>68</sup> Such ideas, it should be remembered, were being discussed in Haddington while he was concerned with local government there.

Doctrinaire though his Radicalism may usually have been, it was not without claim to deep personal commitment.

We . . . hold it to be a sin of ingratitude on the part of those whose means are greater, and minds are more cultivated than their fellow creatures, to withhold their aid in elevating them from the lower debasements of humanity. The most valuable things in the world are men. . . . For he who has no such desire to raise their condition, and whose sympathies extend not to them, but are frozen up in Self, has claim to the character <sup>69</sup> neither of patriot, philanthropist, nor Christian.

No hypocrite, Smiles consistently kept his word by strenuous personal endeavour in the education movement. His definition of education being wide, he wished to transcend contemporary practice and extend the means of creative leisure to the working class. "We should like to see a democracy of Art - a time when all men, and all women too, should be able to relish a fine picture as they would a fine thought or a beautiful idea."<sup>70</sup> In seeking to improve the pastimes of

<sup>68</sup> Leeds Times (May 17, 1845).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. (February 23, 1839).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. (August 10, 1839).

the working class Smiles clashed with many prejudices commonly regarded as typical of the Victorian bourgeoisie. He strongly believed that certain sections of parliamentary and public opinion too often accused the working class of pursuing barbarous leisure activities and relied too heavily on restrictive policies. He was quick to detect the hypocrisy of measures such as those which ignored the vices of the rich, yet sought to diminish working class drunkenness.<sup>71</sup> Temperance reform was desirable, but he demanded positive means of leading the working class to a better life. An industrial town such as Leeds was not likely to foster a taste for wholesome leisure, and Smiles, doubtless guided by his medical studies, supported those who extolled what a later age would class the "green belt" theory. "The heaths and open grounds in the neighbourhood of large towns have been well named their LUNGS, and they should really be as carefully guarded and preserved for the health and re-creation of the people."<sup>72</sup> Logically his allies ought to have been the churches, but the darkness of Victorian Puritanism was descending on working class prospects of recreation and culture on their one day of freedom. The hypocrisy associated with this appalled Smiles. "But the fashion of

---

<sup>71</sup> Leeds Times (March 23, 1839).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. (April 27, 1839).

the day must be complied with, forsooth, and a religious reputation must be earned at any rate. It is certainly cheaply acquired at the expense of cant like this, which is easily displayed, while it costs nothing.<sup>73</sup> The Leeds Mercury was the local champion of such "cant", and he was soon locked in combat with Edward Baines, who, for example, had supported the ending of Sunday half-price excursions by rail in Yorkshire. Smiles denounced this as enforcement of Sabbatarianism by price<sup>74</sup> and returned to the attack a year later when the Mercury opposed the opening of zoological gardens on Sundays, an episode which showed that Baines's attitude to the working class was coloured by "a prurient and diseased imagination". By defending the liberty of the individual in this matter Smiles was risking unpopularity in influential Non-conformist circles, and he freely acknowledged that "we run counter to the preconceived notions of many of our best friends and supporters".<sup>75</sup>

Another sign of cant which Smiles detected in his day was the willingness of society to retain public executions while condemning the brutal pastimes of the working class. The entire official attitude to crime and punishment, he believed, was an impediment to social reform. It

<sup>73</sup> Leeds Times (June 13, 1840).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. (August 22, 1840).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. (August 28, 1841).

was a relic of barbarous coercion, which failed to achieve any end other than "REVENGE upon the criminal - which is accomplished either by cruel treatment, or removing him from society by hanging or by transportation".<sup>76</sup> Smiles insisted that society itself was responsible for much of the existing crime, and it followed that the most effective way to diminish crime would be to eliminate social injustice and elevate the condition of the people by educating them. Crime would not vanish even then, but capital punishment and transportation could not be defended even for the hardened criminal. The principle should be recognised that "no crime whatever can justify society in revenging itself by strangling a human being. The criminal should in such extreme cases be treated as a moral patient labouring under a mental weakness or disease which should be strengthened or cured accordingly."<sup>77</sup> This boldly enunciated penal theory is a good indication of how advanced the ideas of Smiles were at this time; it associated him with a cause which has remained prominent in British radical movements down to the present day.

Opposed to the use of force as a weapon of justice, Smiles had no less decided opinions about the use of force

---

<sup>76</sup> Leeds Times (May 16, 1840).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. (April 6, 1839).

as an instrument of foreign policy, and frequently, when describing the radically re-constituted government which he hoped to see established, he held before his readers the prospect of a foreign and colonial policy conducted in accordance with more rational and pacific principles. The Leeds Times was a provincial newspaper and "necessarily occupied in a great measure with local matters",<sup>78</sup> but Smiles accepted a clearly defined theory of overseas policy which he explained in his History of Ireland and referred to in the Leeds Times. "It is the province of civilization to break down the barriers of race and of caste, to create a moral and intellectual brotherhood of nations, and to establish a tribunal of public opinion for all the empires, kingdoms, and republics of the world."<sup>79</sup> Smiles was a child of his age in seeing commerce as an agent of this civilising mission, and, like the Manchester theorists, he looked forward to a time when nations could be "united together by the bond of commercial union".<sup>80</sup> Such was his faith in the progress of civilisation that he could even envisage international political union.

Union is one of the great ideas of modern times. As provincialism has merged towards nationality, so do

<sup>78</sup> Leeds Times (May 11, 1839).

<sup>79</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. ii.

<sup>80</sup> Leeds Times (March 16, 1839).

nations tend to unite, to amalgamate, to confederate with each other, to the effacement of local laws, manners, and customs. The tendency of humanity is towards cosmopolitanism, brotherhood, universal kinsmanship.<sup>81</sup>

Logically he could only regard war as a descent into barbarism, and (the idea is startlingly modern) he looked forward to a time when the increasing destructiveness of weapons would ensure the certain death of the combatants. "Then adventure would be as much out of the question as it now is in the case of the sheep driven to the butchers' shambles."<sup>82</sup> Arbitration, he believed, was "the rational remedy" for international disputes,<sup>83</sup> and he refused to accept the balance of power as a factor over-riding the teachings of Christianity and liberalism. Not for Smiles was there any glory or advantage in waging war for commercial or colonial aggrandisement. The aristocracy alone could be said to benefit from an active overseas policy by using it to distract attention from their domestic misgovernment and to create more places for their protégés, leaving the cost to be met by the industrious classes, whose taxation increased while markets and employment diminished.<sup>84</sup> Pointing to the "uselessness of colonies" Smiles advised the government to

<sup>81</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. 470

<sup>82</sup> Leeds Times (September 5, 1840).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. (March 30, 1839).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. (September 19, 1840).

follow Bentham's guidance and set them free.<sup>85</sup> Colonies failed to benefit British commerce and their defence not only placed a burden on the mother country but also increased the prospects of war. Too often had the colonies been plundered by the aristocracy, and Smiles professed considerable sympathy for the Indians "crushed to the very earth with chains".<sup>86</sup> Anticipating Gladstone by forty years he also championed the cause of weaker nations by denouncing British policy in Afghanistan as "unwarrantable aggression".<sup>87</sup> Inevitably, oppressed nations would claim their freedom, and, analysing the unrest in Canada with the help of the Durham Report, Smiles sketched out a radical colonial policy.

The great object, we hold, ought to be to fit the Canadians to govern themselves, by conferring on them free institutions and a representative system of government based on the broadest and most comprehensive principles; and when set fairly on their own feet, to allow them to commence business on their own account, as the separation would then be equally beneficial to them as to us.<sup>88</sup>

It is obvious that a firmly rooted belief in progress underlay all the Radical policies supported by Smiles. This came to him from an optimistic reading of history. He

<sup>85</sup> Leeds Times (August 10, 1839).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. (February 9, 1839).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. (April 9, 1842).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. (February 16, 1839).

interpreted the tendency of the previous hundred years in particular as proof of "the march of events in the direction of human emancipation", the most significant happenings being the revolutions in America and France. The forward march had then led to "the bloodless revolution of the Reform Bill at home, which was less the completion, than the commencement, of great elemental changes and social ameliorations".<sup>89</sup> Even the centuries of bloodshed and repression, which his research into Irish history had revealed, led him only to conclude that "all history forbids despair".<sup>90</sup>

The survival of this optimism in Leeds during the Hungry Forties is surprising, as the files show that Smiles was just as aware as Engels of the depths of degradation reached in those years. Frequent references were made by Smiles to local and national evidence such as the following:

One of the individuals engaged in surveying and examining into the state of Lower-Cross Street, at the Bank, entered one cellar dwelling in which he found no less than ten inmates - not all human beings either - living, eating and sleeping in the same apartment. One of these was an old woman upon a sick bed, just at the point of death, the death-rattle being in her throat at the time; an old man; five other males and females; and three pigs!!<sup>91</sup>

In 1839 and 1840 the accumulation of such evidence caused

<sup>89</sup> Leeds Times (May 18, 1839).

<sup>90</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. 261.

<sup>91</sup> Leeds Times (March 30, 1839).

his faith in progress to falter and doubts to grow about the industrialised urban society which was emerging. Optimism re-asserted itself by the end of 1840, and he interpreted the era as one of the "dark passages . . . unavoidable in the course of the appointed progress of mankind". Revolution could be avoided, if government and society adapted themselves to "the national progress in knowledge and the arts of industry".<sup>92</sup> In a speech at Bradford he gave a more extended explanation of his reasons for retaining his faith in progress. Public opinion was being heeded as never before, and even Tories no longer disregarded it completely. He also appealed to the tangible evidence of transport improvements and the application of science "to modify the whole internal economy of nations".<sup>93</sup> In short, man could determine his own fate as never before. Even if his own strenuous efforts on behalf of working class education were not known this philosophy would suffice to save Smiles from a charge of indifference to the poor. The repressive measures of the post-Waterloo era and even the form of transport which had recently brought him to Leeds were parts of a less enlightened age, and, when progress had taken place so dramatically in these respects, it was not irrational of him

---

<sup>92</sup> Leeds Times (September 26, 1840).

<sup>93</sup> S. Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes (Leeds, 1842), p. 8.

to believe that it would resume its advance on a wider front, if a soundly constituted government removed artificial restrictions. Meanwhile, he was fully prepared to support measures alleviating the distress of the day.

A definite attitude to social class also underlay Smiles's radical beliefs. Being a well-educated member of a profession who had entered the world of letters, Smiles belonged to the middle class in Leeds despite his low salary, and he proclaimed his proud consciousness of the part which the middle class had played and would play in promoting the progress of the age. History and religion accounted for the creative rôle which he assigned to the middle class. In the seventeenth century the British middle class had forced its way to the forefront stimulated by the flow of ideas after the invention of the printing press and the success of the Reformation. Smiles found much to condemn in the conduct of the Puritans, whom he regarded as the leaders of the seventeenth century middle class, but he saw the inter-regnum as one of the few glorious eras of good government.

Notwithstanding all their crimes and cruelties in Ireland, which we would be the last to palliate, it is not to be denied that the administration of affairs in England, under the Commonwealth was such as had never been surpassed. The energy, vigour, and efficiency of the government, in the management of affairs both at home and abroad, was never more sensibly felt.<sup>94</sup>

Though reaction subsequently triumphed, Smiles saw the

<sup>94</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. 169.

middle class even in the eighteenth century fulfilling their historical rôle of rejecting feudal backwardness and promoting the rise of civilisation by their commercial activities.

And COMMERCE, in all climes and countries, has been the genuine friend of civilization. Liberty invariably follows in its steps; together with knowledge, religion and social happiness. . . . The spirit of commercial enterprise has, at all times, been opposed to the spirit of barbarism, and is destructive of feudal and class legislation.<sup>95</sup>

In this way Smiles, like James Mill, made the middle class the main agents of progress in recent history and defended their economic achievements against those who accused them of callously destroying a more humane and natural way of life. That Cobbett was not alone in opposing the disruption of the old settled agrarian society the growing cult of the Middle Ages testifies. Smiles applied the name Fuseyism to this response of the old order to the advance of middle class industrialism, and he denounced the philosophy of reaction forthrightly, revealing, incidentally, the common factor in the Toryism of the aristocracy and the Chartism of the working class.

The Quarterly Review preaches up the return of social feudalism, and has no objection to the razing of half our manufacturing towns: the Fuseyites anathematize Protestantism, and would have us go back to the good old times when the thoughts and opinions of the people were in the keeping of the established Priesthood: others, Fuseyites in mechanics, preach against machinery, and would have us go back to spinning by distaff, and

<sup>95</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. 310.

ploughing by horses' tails.<sup>96</sup>

Smiles was thus a convinced defender of the nineteenth century British bourgeoisie, in whose ranks, he claimed, "is to be found much of the intelligence and real stamina of the country".<sup>97</sup>

Neither the Leeds Times nor Radicalism had adhered to a narrow definition of middle class aspirations before 1839, and Smiles, whose interests in Haddington had already led him to seek the improvement of the working class, always declined to bind himself entirely to the attitudes and interests of any one class. His attack on the cant of middle class Nonconformity proves this, and, when Chartist spokesmen accused him of being in the pay of the "factory lords", he indignantly rebutted the allegation.

Any one who has read the Leeds Times during the last two or three years, will know that we are just as little afraid to speak freely of "factory lords", as we are to unmask hypocrites and imposters who have assumed the garb of patriots for the purpose of more securely practising their delusions upon the public.<sup>98</sup>

Although it is true that the Leeds Times opposed those spokesmen of the middle and working classes who preached or practised the class war against each other, this apologia was an exaggeration. Smiles may not have been in the pay of

<sup>96</sup> Leeds Times (January 29, 1842).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (January 5, 1839).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. (January 29, 1842).

the factory lords, but he was certainly a middle class propagandist, seeking to control working class consciousness by means of his Radical ideology. The message of his editorials was that the interests of both classes were complementary, and the movements he supported most vigorously were those which sought to unite the middle class and working class segments of "the labouring or industrious population".<sup>99</sup> This union of the classes, it seemed to Smiles, had to be based on the acceptance by the working class of industrialism and middle class values. He even exhorted his working class readers to take a pride in industrialism. Had not their class provided the creators of the new industrial age "from James Watt, who first set the steam-power in operation, to the commonest artificer, who fabricates a valve or moulds a piston"?<sup>100</sup> Having helped to create a society based on industrialism, it was logical, Smiles claimed, that the working class should recognise that their interests and those of the industrial capitalists were inter-dependent within the framework of this society and the rational statement of its values provided by Benthamist hedonism and Political Economy.

Both master and man are alike animated by the same powerful motive of self-interest: the one aims at ob-

<sup>99</sup> Leeds Times (February 1, 1840).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. (August 3, 1839).

taining a high rate of profit, the other naturally seeks to enjoy a high rate of wages. Their interests, in a healthy state of society, and under just and provident institutions, would mutually harmonise and blend with each other; the prosperity of the capitalist ministering to the prosperity of the labourer, and to the well-being of society at large.<sup>101</sup>

Smiles consequently deplored the movement towards class warfare which Carlyle and other writers warned him was developing. Recognising that "there is very little sympathy between Rich and Poor in this country",<sup>102</sup> he devoted his attention at Leeds to persuading the working class to co-operate with the middle class in pursuit of a common programme of reform.

Opposition to a common enemy has often been recognised as an effective means of inducing people to act in co-operation, and Bright's much quoted call for a movement against the aristocracy was anticipated by Smiles. "The struggle is now between Aristocracy and Democracy, between Privilege and the People, between Monopoly and Industry, between old Feudalism and modern Civilization."<sup>103</sup> This attitude has well been called a middle class version of Marxism with the aristocracy cast in the role of the exploiting class. Aristocratic influence was thus detected behind all the abuses of the day. Having fomented hatred of the arist-

<sup>101</sup> Leeds Times (August 8, 1840).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. (September 12, 1840).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. (May 22, 1841).

ocracy Smiles sought to canalise it into a movement strong enough to destroy the aristocratic clique which had dominated Britain since the Revolution of 1688. This was to be a limited reform, and there was to be no question of demolishing all class distinctions. A discredited aristocracy would yield its privileges, unjust and ill-advised legislation would be repealed, but society would otherwise remain unaltered. The statements of some Chartist leaders showed that the working class might wish to go further, and, knowing that his working class readers would encounter egalitarian propaganda, Smiles in one of his earliest leading articles frankly informed them that the working class could not achieve the improvement of social conditions "by pulling down the other parts of society to its own level". Given education on a nation-wide scale, he saw no reason for denying the possibility of the working class elevating itself. Individuals had succeeded in rising, and "what individuals have done singly we conceive they may as easily do collectively". Peaceful co-operation and not the class war would be their most effective method.<sup>104</sup> In this way Smiles sought to keep working class consciousness within bounds acceptable to the middle class.

While Smiles was defining his Radical beliefs the

---

<sup>104</sup> Leeds Times (February 2, 1839).

national political scene was one of confusion arising from the clash of rival theories and movements. Conservatives competed with Whigs for the support of the propertied classes and mastery at Westminster; Radicals of various kinds, Chartists and Socialists all competed with each other for the support of the wider public. What then was distinctive in Radicalism and the newspapers which expounded it? Smiles faced this question after he became editor, and he had no doubt about his reply. The Leeds Times was the only newspaper in the district to espouse fully and logically Bentham's insistence on "the greatest good of the greatest number".<sup>105</sup> By the standards not only of Tories and Whigs but also of many Radicals this marked Smiles out as an extremist. His attitude to female suffrage, capital punishment and the Church, for example, would have made him an advanced thinker at any time in the nineteenth century, and even the most extreme republican of his day would have found it difficult to exceed his ruthlessly neat condemnation of their late sovereign, George IV, as "a superannuated debauchee, whose strength was so prostrated by his impure excesses, as not to be able to write his own name".<sup>106</sup> In these and other matters Smiles carried his thoughts to their

---

<sup>105</sup> Leeds Times (January 2, 1841).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. (January 25, 1840).

logical conclusion, no matter how extreme, and it was only when they failed to arouse public support that he modified or abandoned them.

But, if Smiles and those Radicals who thought like him were prepared to press for the full extent of political reform, it is difficult to see any justification for the existence of separate Radical and Chartist movements. The Socialists were not at that time a political movement, and their isolation is easier to understand, but Radicals had helped to draw up the Charter, and Smiles himself espoused all its points. Seemingly so firm, the prospects of uniting Chartists and Radicals proved to be chimerical. The surface agreement concealed a basic divergence of thought. This was revealed in an article which Smiles received from "a friend". "The Chartists demand the six points . . . for the purpose of establishing some thing like Political Socialism. . . . In short Radicalism was a dissatisfaction with the form and administration of government: Chartism is a dissatisfaction with the structure of society itself."<sup>107</sup> Behind its façade of political extremism, Radicalism, as defined by Samuel Smiles, was essentially an expression of the prevailing middle class disposition of mind which was based on the belief that progress would be assured when men dispelled "ignorance, false doctrine, and anachronistic institu-

---

<sup>107</sup> Leeds Times (January 15, 1842).

tions".<sup>108</sup> Each would then be master of his fate. Latent, however, was a basic conservatism concerning property rights in a capitalist society. Logically, those of the working class who rejected the brave new world of industrialism and the leadership of the captains of industry were in basic disagreement with the Radical creed of Samuel Smiles.

---

<sup>108</sup> Noel Annan, "Science, Religion and the Critical Mind: Introduction", in P. Appleman, W. A. Madden and M. Wolff, eds., 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, p. 32.

## JOURNALISM AND POPULAR POLITICS (1839-42)

The beginning of 1839 was not a favourable time for the rise of a political movement in Leeds dedicated to the ideals which Smiles expounded in his editorials. He inherited a crisis created by a decade of rising class tension, personal antipathies, and disputes over aims and methods. Above all the course of events had led to the rise of the Chartist movement, which had claimed Charles Hooton as one of its first victims. Never had the outlook for middle class Radicalism been so bleak since James Mill, Charles Knight, Henry Brougham and other ideologists had commenced their attempts to control the rising class consciousness of the working class. The situation was aptly, if unpoetically, summarised by the Chartist Circular almost one year after Smiles had written his first editorial in Leeds.

Harry Brougham

Britain's now astir all over,  
All complaining and conspiring,  
And, from John O'Groats to Dover,  
Democrats all souls are firing.

Ask you whence arose the storm?  
All is owing to "Reform";

If the people rage and fume,  
'Tis the fault of Harry Brougham.

"Education, Education,  
Free from articles and creed;  
Agitation, agitation,  
Schoolmaster's abroad indeed."

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

"Whigs you give not half enough -  
All soft sawdor words and blarney;  
Let's have men of sterner stuff, -  
Will not our wide grumbling warn ye?"<sup>1</sup>

As the successor of Brougham and the earlier Radicals,  
Smiles assumed the task of attempting to bring this militant  
working class under middle class influence.

Smiles came to Leeds well prepared for this situation. During his recent visit to Rowland Hill in London he had attended a meeting in New Palace Yard on September 17, 1838, where he had his first sight of Feargus O'Connor. He was not impressed. Shortly afterwards he met Ebenezer Elliot, the Corn Law Rhymer, who had attended the meeting, and Elliot too bluntly denounced O'Connor's methods.<sup>2</sup> With

<sup>1</sup> Chartist Circular (February 1, 1840).

<sup>2</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 75, 83.

these events fresh in his memory Smiles commenced his editorial tasks. His first issue expressed the dilemma which he tried to resolve in the coming years. For the principles of the People's Charter he proclaimed his respect; for its West Riding exponents he could not conceal his distaste. Whereas a true Radical movement would draw on the support of both middle class and working class reformers, Chartism was being turned against the middle class by O'Connor.<sup>3</sup> Looking back to earlier forms of Radical political agitation, Smiles dedicated his first four years in Leeds to the restoration of a movement drawing on both middle class and working class support.

This was the time when the rise of the movement against the Corn Laws was attracting considerable attention. The famous meeting of the seven founders had taken place only in September 1838, but the movement had spread quickly from Manchester. Corn Law repeal was an established Radical demand, and, well aware of its relevance to the debate on the standard of living, Smiles at first believed that this was the agitation which could rally the working class to the side of the middle class Radicals. Dismissing the fear that repeal would merely encourage the masters to lower wages, Smiles immediately wrote a series of articles urging the

---

<sup>3</sup>Leeds Times (January 5, 1839).

working class to abandon O'Connor and agitate against the Corn Laws.<sup>4</sup> Words led to actions, and two weeks after becoming editor Smiles took the first step towards restoring the prestige of his newspaper. He confronted O'Connor at a Corn Law debate in Leeds - a considerable undertaking for one of slight political experience.<sup>5</sup> Smiles did not assert that the Anti-Corn Law League satisfied all his requirements of a Radical movement, and he made no pretence that repeal of the Corn Laws was other than one of the many tenets of Radicalism, but his belief was that the Radicals must find a point d'appui acceptable both to middle class and working class reformers. The agitation against the Corn Laws, he informed O'Connor, could supply this without denying other worthy aspirations. Later Smiles freely admitted that Corn Law repeal was an attractive rallying cry not only because of the material benefits it would bring but also because it would direct the weapon of class warfare against the aristocracy and avert a collision between the middle class and the working class, whose interests, he constantly affirmed, were complementary. "There could not have been selected a more favourable ground for the reorganisation of the Radical

---

<sup>4</sup> Leeds Times (January 1839).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. (January 19, 1839). See also Smiles, Autobiography, p. 88.

forces than this.<sup>6</sup> Thus, when Tait's Edinburgh Magazine called for a union of Chartists and Corn Law repealers, Smiles reviewed it favourably.<sup>7</sup> If this call had been heeded, working class consciousness would have ceased to represent a threat to middle class interests, and the pre-1832 pattern of Radical politics would have been restored.

Unlike Cobden, however, Smiles was not prepared to persevere with the Anti-Corn Law movement, when the working class refused to desert the Chartist movement. He had no intention of accepting a narrow middle class movement as the focus of his loyalty, and, when the League and the Chartists remained intransigently hostile to each other, he seems to have regarded the decline of both the Chartist Convention and its Anti-Corn Law counterpart as inevitable. By April 1839 he believed that the Chartist Convention had been discredited by "such vulgar catchpenny quacks as O'Connor and Taylor", while the rejection of Villiers's motion for repeal had shown that the League was unlikely to succeed unless the franchise was first extended. A non-Chartist suffrage agitation was required. "To effect this object there must be a remodelling of party - a meeting of all Reformers on one common ground, an union of will, and action, and a merging of individual difference for the gaining a large stride in

<sup>6</sup> Leeds Times (August 24, 1839).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. (March 9, 1839).

the onward progression of the people."<sup>8</sup> However much he might deviate from principle into expediency, this was the theme which constantly appeared in his editorials until the economic crisis ended in 1843. Meanwhile, in his first six months as editor all he could do was to await developments, and he devoted much of his attention to government plans for extending education.<sup>9</sup>

The remaining events of the year confirmed his desire for a completely new Radical movement. Parliament rejected the Chartist Petition, and the transfer of the Chartist Convention to Birmingham in May 1839 was followed by extremism and violence, which he could only deplore. "Nothing is more likely to increase the irresponsibility of government to the people, as the additional power allowed to it in putting down this civil commotion; and nothing is more likely in the meantime to augment the sources from which corruption ever delights to feed itself."<sup>10</sup> Fearing the onset of reactionary government, Smiles gave considerable thought to the Chartists and attempted to bring the West Riding middle class to an understanding of the motives and aspirations of the politically active section of the working class in the hope of salvaging the cause of Radicalism.

---

<sup>8</sup> Leeds Times (April 6, 1839).

<sup>9</sup> Vide supra, pp. 92-93.

<sup>10</sup> Leeds Times (July 27, 1839).

At this time ignorance and suspicion of working class movements coloured the attitude of many members of the upper classes, and Smiles, having satirised the "complacent everything-as-it-should-be Mr. Thingumbobs", repeatedly attempted to enlighten them.<sup>11</sup> His editorial analysis of Chartism may have seemed disingenuous to some readers,<sup>12</sup> but on August 10, 1839 he described the "Progress of Political Disaffection Between the Middle and Working Classes" in an unusually long leading article skilfully placing Chartism in the social and political context of the preceding age. Social distress caused by economic change was the fundamental cause of Chartism. "The rich have become richer; the great more powerful; and new aristocracies of wealth have risen up among the middle classes. But with all this increase, poverty and misery have also increased." The "grasping selfishness" of the propertied classes was partly to blame for this effect, but the aristocracy had added to the distress by imposing the Corn Laws, the New Poor Law, and unjust taxation. There was also a more sophisticated reason for the rise of Chartism; it was an aspect of the March of Mind.

Joseph Lancaster's schools have had no small share in producing it; William Cobbett gave it a great impulse in

<sup>11</sup> Leeds Times (July 27, 1839).

<sup>12</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies (London, 1962), p. 83.

his day; the middle classes while agitating for the Reform Bill, endowed it with a resistless power and energy; but, above all, the increase of newspapers - the increase of political reading - has conferred on it an undying vitality in the minds of the British people.

This article was addressed to the middle class and was provoked by the fear that coercion by government action might be accepted as the best means of dealing with the Chartists. By giving this lengthy analysis of Chartism Smiles was attempting to convince the middle class that the movement, despite its excesses, had a raison d'être which no amount of coercion could destroy. At this point one is reminded of Henry Brougham's reasoning in his Practical Observations. In his next issue Smiles urged the middle class to display an enlightened initiative by supporting the demand that the working class should be enfranchised.<sup>13</sup> In short, Smiles was following the standard middle class Radical policy of seeking rather to control working class consciousness than to suppress it.

For the rest of 1839 Smiles continued to develop the ideas of his August articles. Having diagnosed both social and political causes of working class discontent, he strongly urged the adoption of a "Socio-Political Reform" consisting mainly of an extended suffrage and free trade.<sup>14</sup> He was willing to concede that one demand must have precedence, and

---

<sup>13</sup> Leeds Times (August 17, 1839).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. (September 21, 1839).

for a time he continued to describe the repeal of the Corn Laws as "the first and most attainable measure of relief",<sup>15</sup> but his reluctance to align himself completely with the Anti-Corn Law League was shown when he championed Colonel Perronet Thompson against the "grovel souls of Manchester".<sup>16</sup> Thompson, whose opinions were similar to those of Smiles, "was in the position of being a supporter of the Chartist and of the Anti-Corn Law League - a position difficult to hold".<sup>17</sup> To Smiles, Thompson was "a man after our own heart", and the possible leader of a revived Radical party.<sup>18</sup> Their collaboration soon commenced, because Smiles, too, remained unwilling to make a final choice between suffrage reform and Corn Law repeal.

In his attempt to create a broadly based Radical movement Smiles had initially looked for a lead from the Parliamentary Radicals, who, he asserted, possessed "great influence derived from popular support".<sup>19</sup> Such optimism could not be justified by the trend of events inside and

<sup>15</sup> Leeds Times (August 31, 1839).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. (September 7, 1839).

<sup>17</sup> L. G. Johnson, General T. Perronet Thompson (London, 1957), p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> Leeds Times (September 7, 1839).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (January 5, 1839).

outside Parliament since the General Election of 1837,<sup>20</sup> and it was in 1839 that Lord Melbourne informed Queen Victoria that the Radicals had "neither ability, honesty, nor numbers".<sup>21</sup> Smiles was soon to be found informing his readers that the Parliamentary Radicals showed few signs of regaining the influence which had been theirs at the beginning of the decade.<sup>22</sup> By late 1839 there were no signs of an improvement in the fortunes of the Parliamentary Radicals, but he had discovered two of their greatest weaknesses and believed he knew the remedy. They had failed to produce a leader, and they had lost touch with public opinion. "Peage Reform, Church Reform, Irish Municipal Reform, Vote by Ballot", and other reforms championed by the Radicals had ceased to interest the public.<sup>23</sup> The only method by which the Radicals could restore their influence would be by seeking to understand the aspirations of the middle class and working class as the preliminary step to finding "an object on which to concentrate their strength and powers of action".<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Vide supra, pp. 52-55.

<sup>21</sup> E. L. Woodward, The Age of Reform, 1815-70 (Oxford, 1946), p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> Leeds Times (May 4, 1839).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (September 28, 1839).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. (October 26, 1839).

Still searching for his point d'appui which would revive Radicalism and supersede both Chartist and the League, he encountered the destitution of the harsh winter of 1839. Smiles was no stranger to poor social conditions - he had studied medicine amid the social extremes of Edinburgh - but frequently during 1839 he showed that he was deeply moved by the social problems created by industrialism. For example, despite his doctrinaire misgivings, he conceded the need for legislation on behalf of factory children.<sup>25</sup> By the beginning of 1840, however, such was the extent of poverty and degradation that he temporarily ceased to believe in the efficacy of the accepted Radical remedies for the ills of society; and, for what seems to have been the only time during his life, he even faltered in his support of reform by education. The nation, he believed, was on the verge of economic and social collapse. "Scarcely has there ever been a time of more general depression than the present. Periods of localised suffering there have often before been - now in the manufacturing, and then in the agricultural districts. But now it is general, deep seated, and widely extended."<sup>26</sup>

An impressive accumulation of evidence reinforced his temporary disillusionment with industrial society. Reports of death by starvation appeared in the pages of the

<sup>25</sup> Vide supra, p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Leeds Times (February 1, 1840).

Leeds Times,<sup>27</sup> and the extent of the social distress in the township of Leeds itself was established by Robert Baker's statistical report, which Smiles accurately summarised at the beginning of November 1839.<sup>28</sup> This report is one of the cardinal documents relating to Leeds during Smiles's editorship. Eleven months of careful research enabled Baker to demonstrate that Leeds contained many blatant examples of the social abuses associated with town life during the Industrial Revolution. Out of a total number of 18279 dwellings in the township, 555 were recorded as cellar dwellings - a striking testimony to the existence of the utmost squalor, which was made even worse by the immigration of many Irish families, whose custom it was to "keep pigs in the cellars which they themselves inhabit".<sup>29</sup> Private squalor was rivalled by public indifference, as, of the 586 streets counted, only 244 were stated to be well-paved and cleaned. Contrasted with the streets in the richer areas of the township were Brook Street, Milk Street, and Lower Cross Street, all in one poor district, which were neither sewered, nor paved, nor drained, and there were dwelling-houses in these streets containing 450 persons,

<sup>27</sup> Leeds Times (November 2, 1839).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. (November 9, 1839).

<sup>29</sup> R. Baker, "Report upon the Condition of the Town of Leeds and of its Inhabitants, by a Statistical Committee of the Leeds Town Council, October 1839", Journal of the Statistical Society of London, II (1839), p. 401.

who were absolutely without a useable privy! . . . we have revealed to us sufficient reason for the fearful amount of mortality prevailing among the population of these districts.<sup>30</sup>

Baker's statistics showed that in Leeds the means of social reform were inadequate. There existed 15<sup>1/4</sup> day schools attended by 6390 children, but 80 of these schools provided no education in writing and accounts. In addition there were 20 factory schools attended by 360 children, and another 11429 attended Sunday schools. 15000 children, however, were not in attendance at any school according to Baker's calculations. "Opium of the masses" there was in Leeds, but it was not provided by religion, as the plethora of sects could offer accommodation sufficient only for 41451 people, or one half of the population of the township, whereas there were 216 inns, 235 beer houses, and 98 "houses of ill fame". Understandably, Smiles was horrified by Baker's statistics. "It is a startling fact revealed to us by the late statistical investigation, that the mortality among our population, so far as has been ascertained, exceeds that of almost every other town or city in Europe!"<sup>31</sup> A municipal programme was required to check the mortality rate, he urged.

Moved by the evidence of suffering, and fearing a

<sup>30</sup> Leeds Times (November 9, 1839).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. (November 30, 1839).

revolutionary outbreak during that harsh winter, Smiles for a time adopted attitudes and policies not to be expected from one who was to make his name as the industrial biographer. He turned to Cobbett. "Would that WILLIAM COBBETT were alive; for his 'GRAND FEAST OF THE GRIDIRON' is evidently approaching!"<sup>32</sup> The Leeds Times was soon devoting considerable attention to Cobbett's analysis of society, and an editorial attacked contemporary theories of progress, which made the "vulgar mistake" of believing that "progress is in all cases identical with improvement".<sup>33</sup> Later in life Smiles himself was taken to task by his critics for this very mistake, and it is a testimony to the extent of the prevailing social distress that he made the distinction in 1839. In his editorial he denounced the political institutions of the country for holding back improvement, but Cobbett's influence also led him to a deeper analysis revealing serious defects in a society created by industrialism. Cities, "those cesspools of civilisation", had grown with unprecedented rapidity because of the commercial activity of an increasing population, and none had grown more than "the enormous WEN". Love of money alone had guided the rise of this new society, and the values of humanity had

<sup>32</sup> Leeds Times (October 5, 1839).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. (November 2, 1839).

been ignored. "Millions of human beings have been trained up in the notion that man's chief end is to manufacture cotton goods and broad cloth - to fabricate knives, toys, and cutlery - to speculate in sugar, silk and hardware - and to accumulate wealth as rapidly and abundantly as possible." In this one sentence the industrial and commercial practice of Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and the "City" stood condemned.

Having endorsed Cobbett's criticisms of industrialism, Smiles went on to agree with his insistence on land reform as a means of social regeneration, and by the end of 1839 he was calling for a national plan of relief for the growing number made unemployed by the slump. A review of Sharman Crawford's Defence of the Small Farmers of Ireland provided the occasion for a discussion of unemployment, in the course of which Smiles uncompromisingly denounced both Malthusianism and the emigration schemes inspired by it. More acceptable was Crawford's idea of dividing uncultivated land in Britain into small-holdings as a means of social reform. Smiles called this "exceedingly sound".<sup>34</sup>

No more was added to the idea until the end of December 1839, when Smiles began to unfold a programme of social relief bearing a close resemblance to Crawford's

---

<sup>34</sup> Leeds Times (October 5, 1839).

theories. In the first three months of 1840 home colonisation became a reiterated theme of the Leeds Times, and references to letters received from Crawford appeared in the columns. Accepting unemployment as the basic social malady, Smiles presented a logical solution in his series of articles. "Tens of thousands of industrious, willing workmen are idle. Tens of thousands of cultivable acres of land are lying waste. Let us marry these two, and depend upon it their union will be prolific of contentment and plenty."<sup>35</sup> If public funds were devoted to such a scheme, he forecast that unemployment would be diminished, because part of the industrial labour force would be transferred to a productive life in agriculture, becoming in the process consumers of the goods produced by those who remained in industry. Smiles was undoubtedly influenced by the lively fears of machinery which were commonly expressed at that time, and his leading articles referred to the disruption of the accepted social and economic pattern by steam power.

What have been the results of these extraordinary inventions? Immense production of manufactured goods; keenness of competition among producers unparalleled; an immense increase in our importing and exporting trade; the whole earth ransacked for its raw materials of silk, flax, cotton, and wool, to feed the devouring maw of the British Factory; then the markets of the world glutted; demand ceasing; and suddenly our producers are appalled by the occurrence of successive panics, and crises, and

---

<sup>35</sup> Leeds Times (December 21, 1839).

commercial bankruptcies and embarrassments.<sup>36</sup>

Even at this time Smiles never allowed himself to condemn machinery and industrialism absolutely. His main aspiration throughout was to provide agricultural employment for the surplus labour of the towns, in order that urban conditions of life and work would improve in accordance with the laws of supply and demand. The scheme of home colonies was to be no mere application of spade husbandry. He could even see his home colonies as an industrial adjunct performing the useful task of teaching new trades to workmen rendered redundant either by mechanisation or by the trade cycle.<sup>37</sup> The scheme was to be as flexible as possible, involving not only home colonies but also small allotment schemes and methods of encouraging the pursuit of agriculture and manufacturing in conjunction. He was even prepared to support a scheme of co-operative colonies directed by "skilled mechanics and small capitalists of all trades and occupations", citing the Moravians, Rappites and Shakers as successful exponents of such ideas.<sup>38</sup> Smiles was obviously seeking not to supplant industrialism but to provide a response to its worse abuses. Machinery was "indispensable to the progression of man in knowledge, science, and civilisa-

<sup>36</sup> Leeds Times (January 4, 1840).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. (February 29, 1840).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

tion", but it had left too many people living in towns at the mercy of the trade cycle, and he wanted a positive policy adopted to avert the evils of this imbalance.<sup>39</sup> Implicitly acknowledging the influence of Carlyle, whose denunciations of political economy pervaded many of his articles at this time,<sup>40</sup> Smiles firmly warned his readers that "it is full time that the voice of Humanity were heard amid the noisy pursuits of the Mammon-hunters".<sup>41</sup> But if his basic motivating force was social-conscience, it should not be forgotten that by urging the investment of poor relief funds in home colonies Smiles was devising a scheme of poor relief likely to appeal to the middle class respect for sound investment. A system of aiding the poor without destroying their self-respect and making them a burden on the rest of the community would have been devised. The idea of land colonies would also appeal to middle class prejudices, because it would serve the useful purpose of turning the minds of the working class towards a scheme where only the interests of the aristocracy were threatened.

Although encouraged to persevere by a letter from Crawford, Smiles ceased to advocate the idea of home

<sup>39</sup> Leeds Times (March 7, 1840).

<sup>40</sup> Vide supra, p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> Leeds Times (March 7, 1840).

colonies when winter began to yield before the advance of spring in 1840. Political activities again began to dominate his thoughts. In November 1839 he had defiantly informed the Leeds Mercury of his hope of making the Leeds Times a bridge between the middle class and the working class.<sup>42</sup> The distress of that harsh winter stiffened his resolve. By the beginning of 1840 many leading Chartists had been imprisoned, leaving their movement weakened after its frenzied activities in 1839, and, commenting on the lull in political activity during the winter, Smiles called for action to forestall the recovery of Chartism.<sup>43</sup> At last it seemed that the Radicals might be able to seize the initiative and prevent the revival of militant working class consciousness.

This time, however, Smiles did not seek to lead the working class into the anti-Corn Law movement. Throughout 1839 Smiles had not ceased to demand repeal of the Corn Laws, but his impatience with the Anti-Corn Law League could no longer be restrained in January 1840, when a Manchester demonstration resulted in little more than a declaration that the legislature would require to witness more suffering before it would alter its attitude to the Corn Laws. Such fatalism in the face of distress was too much for Smiles to

---

<sup>42</sup> Leeds Times (November 16, 1839).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. (February 29, 1840).

endure. "This passive inactive mode of going to work will never do. It is not enough to eat great dinners together: something must be done - some more active line of policy must be adopted than those heretofore pursued."<sup>44</sup> Subsequently he moved on to a new phase in his relationship with Manchester. At the beginning of 1840 he frequently ridiculed the number of people who proclaimed that they had found a panacea for the national distress, and eventually he put the Anti-Corn Law League into the same category.

It is a mere begging of the question to say that the increased demand for manufactured goods on the continent would give more permanent employment to our manufacturing population, if we agreed to become regular purchasers of their corn. The continental producers are now,<sup>45</sup> making their own apparel, and cutlery, and hardware.

He retained a belief that repeal of the Corn Laws would produce great benefits, but his refusal to accept it as a panacea increased his ardour for a new Radical movement. Looking back to this time, Smiles later described the beliefs of the Leeds Radicals which had given an impetus to their renewed political initiative.

The Corn Law Reformers of the Middle Class on the one hand and the Suffrage Reformers of the working class on the other, have felt themselves to be powerless in working out those ameliorations in our laws and institutions, which they sought, by means of their separate agitation, to accomplish.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Leeds Times (January 18, 1840).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. (February 22, 1840).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. (October 10, 1840).

In such a situation the Leeds Radicals came forward to offer a new rallying cry acceptable to both classes as a means of achieving true radical reforms. The Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was set up as a result of their efforts.

In the early months of 1840 there were good reasons for the confidence with which Smiles placed himself and his newspaper in the forefront of the attempt to make Leeds the centre of a renewed Radical offensive. Throughout 1839, as the fortunes of Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League waxed and waned, he had written a series of leading articles clearly and forthrightly defining the policy of the Leeds Times concerning the political, ecclesiastical and social issues of the age. Measured by circulation, the response had been so encouraging that Smiles was able to point to the stamp returns as evidence that the circulation had returned to the level it had reached in 1837 before the Northern Star emerged as a competitor.<sup>47</sup> By the beginning of 1840 he had also become a public figure in his own right. His encounter with O'Connor has already been mentioned, but Smiles also spoke at Radical meetings, and became a member of the Leeds Literary Institution, where he was a frequent speaker. This body had been set up mainly for the lower middle classes,<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Leeds Times (February 22, 1840).

<sup>48</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (London, 1961), p. 68.

and by joining it Smiles must have become known to many of the most influential in that social group. At the same time he was making himself known to the working class élite of Leeds through his membership of the Manchester Unity of Odd-fellows, and of the Ancient Order of Foresters.<sup>49</sup> The Leeds Times offered to publicise the principles of the Oddfellows,<sup>50</sup> and a year later a letter was published thanking Smiles for reporting their proceedings.<sup>51</sup> Indicative of his aspirations if not of his achievements, his introductory article for the year 1840 claimed the support of the most intelligent members of the working class in the West Riding.<sup>52</sup>

Although Smiles was seeking to launch a new movement in 1840, there was a long history of radicalism in Leeds to which he and his associates could claim to be heirs. Had not the Leeds Times originally been set up as the voice of advanced radicalism in the West Riding during the aftermath of the Reform Bill, and, when the Leeds Radical Association and the Leeds Working Men's Association came into existence, had not Robert Nicoll associated the Leeds Times firmly with

<sup>49</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> Leeds Times (March 30, 1839).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. (August, 1, 1840).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (January 4, 1840).

them?<sup>53</sup> Firebrand though Nicoll had been, there was a considerable element of continuity between his editorial policy and that of Smiles. An admirer of the London Working Men's Association, Nicoll had been a prominent member of that moderate section of its Leeds counterpart, which rejected the leadership of the Owenites and the physical force spokesmen.<sup>54</sup> He can be seen in some respects as a Leeds equivalent of William Lovett, and Smiles, fulminate though he might against O'Connor and the "Pikeists", was always a staunch admirer of Lovett, "a true-hearted man".<sup>55</sup> Under the guidance of Smiles, the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was to adopt in 1841 Lovett's ideas of combining education and politics. Smiles associated more with the middle class than Nicoll, but the earliest biographical account states that Nicoll too was "looked up to by a considerable portion of the ten pound electors and all the intelligent non-electors".<sup>56</sup> Smiles could justifiably claim to be the Radical successor of Robert Nicoll.

Our position, as regards both Chartists and Whigs, will remain the same that it has ever been. . . . The principles of Chartism have been advocated in this journal for many years before the name of Chartist was invented.

<sup>53</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies, pp. 67, 72.

<sup>54</sup>Vide supra, pp. 55-56.

<sup>55</sup>Leeds Times (April 6, 1839).

<sup>56</sup>Poems by Robert Nicoll (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 55.

. . . In so far as the advocacy of these principles may constitute Chartism, then this has been a Chartist journal from its very commencement until now. But in as much as the advocacy of principles including far more than these points may divest us of the appellation, then are we not Chartists but Radicals in the extremest sense of the term.<sup>57</sup>

There were also economic and social factors which made Leeds a possible centre for a united movement of the middle class and working class Radicals. Feargus O'Connor usually drew his support from the working men engaged in those trades which were declining because of the advance of mechanisation, but in the township of Leeds there were few working men of this type. Baker supplied significant statistics when he showed that in Leeds there were only 1289 handloom weavers and 138 woolcombers out of a total working class population of 61675 people.<sup>58</sup> Suffering there was in the ranks of the Leeds working class during the economic depression, but Baker's report showed that Leeds township possessed a more resilient economy than the out-townships and in the past had more easily been able to recover from the effects of the trade cycle.

The linen and worsted trades are rarely both in the same state; each is commonly in the opposite extreme. The woollen is more variable; but . . . the distress of the operative manufacturer is seldom, if ever, so bitter in the town as in the [outlying] townships of Leeds, where as in agriculture, labour is exclusive, and distress,

<sup>57</sup> Leeds Times (November 16, 1839).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. (November 9, 1839).

when it does prevail, is also universal.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, although the surrounding area gave outstanding support to physical force Chartism, the township of Leeds offered a more favourable environment to counsels of moderation, and it was not unreasonable of Smiles to hope that the working men of Leeds would be willing to combine with middle class advocates of electoral reform in preference to supporting O'Connor's philosophy of force.

Smiles was also not without hope that the Leeds middle class would see the need for supporting a Radical movement. At the heart of the West Riding manufacturing area, they could not fail to be greatly disturbed by the social effects of the economic depression, and significantly it was during the winter of 1839-40, when Smiles himself was fearing revolution, that the new movement began in Leeds. Distress remained the background to the activities of Smiles between 1840 and 1843. Thus even in the summer of 1840 foreboding continued to express itself in his leading articles.

After a long period of stagnation in trade and commerce, during which the working classes have experienced the most serious privations, we appear again to be approaching another season of distress and suffering. There is a very general complaint of dullness in business of all kinds; there has been no Spring trade of any consequence; employment is scarce; the wages of operatives are falling; and the prices of the common necessities of life

---

<sup>59</sup> Baker, p. 411.

are rising.<sup>60</sup>

Few areas had protested more strongly against this prolonged distress than the West Riding. Here were to be found large numbers of handloom weavers "fighting a grim losing battle against the machine",<sup>61</sup> and Professor Harrison quotes the figure of ten thousand handloom weavers in the district around Leeds, in addition to "quite considerable numbers in the out-townsheets such as Holbeck, Wortley, Armley and Bramley".<sup>62</sup> O'Connor had won a large following from this section of the population, and the power of physical force Chartism was not to be forgotten easily even in the more placid surroundings of Leeds township. And, if it was, there was always the locally published Northern Star to stimulate a failing memory. Frequently Smiles expressed his fear lest the working class might again heed O'Connor, if their aspirations were ignored. "Chartism is not extinct; neither is it appeased. It exists at this moment under a thousand different forms. Discontent may not be so openly expressed as it was twelve months ago; but it prevails quite as extensively, and is felt still more deeply."<sup>63</sup> With such

<sup>60</sup> Leeds Times (July 4, 1840).

<sup>61</sup> A. Briggs, "The Local Background of Chartism" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs ed., Chartist Studies, p. 71.

<sup>63</sup> Leeds Times (August 1, 1840).

warnings as a goad Smiles hoped that large numbers of the Leeds middle class might be prevailed upon to co-operate with the working class in agitating for a Radical programme, which might oust Chartism even in its West Riding strongholds.

Nor should it be forgotten that the middle class in Leeds as in other Northern towns had strongly-felt grievances during this economic crisis. In support of his call for an alliance of the middle and working classes Smiles frequently emphasised that the economic system bound both classes together, ensuring that working class unemployment was accompanied by middle class bankruptcies.

Is it not a fact that in by far the greater number of instances, the industrious members of the middle classes have been forced to fall back on their past earnings - to recline upon their capital, the earnings of a more prosperous period? But more than this we affirm that at the present moment the small traders are rapidly losing - that hundreds and thousands of them are upon the brink of ruin, and they know it.<sup>64</sup>

Although it could be claimed that Smiles was only seeking to convince the working class that its fate was linked to that of the middle class, logically there is nothing wrong with his statement that middle class enterprises would suffer if the home market contracted, and the research of one historian proves that there was such a trend in Leeds. "Between 1838 and late 1841, 29 woollen, 10 cloth-finishing, 18 flax,

---

<sup>64</sup> Leeds Times (February 1, 1840).

16 engineering, 16 woolstapling and 9 stuff and worsted firms had failed at Leeds.<sup>65</sup> By blaming the aristocracy for this crisis the Radicals hoped to win the support of the Leeds middle class for a new reform movement. Nor were they entirely disappointed, as the Leeds middle class contained active reformers, several of whom became close associates of Smiles.

The most important of these men was J. G. Marshall, the Leeds flax-spinner. Not content merely to accumulate great wealth, Marshall's family had achieved eminence as model factory owners, and their mill appeared in Disraeli's Sybil as Mr. Trafford's mill.<sup>66</sup> Well might Disraeli praise the Marshalls, because, in addition to erecting a factory of considerable architectural embellishment,<sup>67</sup> they sought to improve the condition of their workers by providing a school, a library, changing rooms, baths, efficient air ventilation and medical inspection.<sup>68</sup> A contributor to Tait's Edinburgh Magazine saw J. G. Marshall as "a millionaire mill-owner, a man aristocratically allied, and the manager of the largest factory in the world. Nevertheless a hearty sympathy

<sup>65</sup>J. T. Ward, The Factory Movement, 1830-55 (London, 1962), p. 229.

<sup>66</sup>W. G. Rimmer, Marshalls of Leeds, Flax-Spinners (Cambridge, 1960), p. 206.

<sup>67</sup>Smiles, Autobiography, p. 95.

<sup>68</sup>Rimmer, pp. 215-217.

exists not than his with working-men, or a more cordial advocacy of the liberties of labour.<sup>69</sup> Dedicated to the idea of ending the bitterness between the "Two Nations", Marshall came forward between 1840 and 1842 as one of the leaders of the new Radical movement. He was accompanied by Hamer Stansfeld, an important Leeds merchant, George Goodman, a woolstapler and former mayor of Leeds, and Joshua Bower, a bottle glass manufacturer. These men endowed the new movement with the support of their wealth and position.

There has been some confusion concerning the origin of the Leeds suffrage movement which Smiles helped to establish. Naming the autobiography of Smiles as his source, Professor Cowherd gives the following account:

With the help of Hamer Stansfeld [sic] Marshall organized the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association which included both Chartist and free traders. The platform of the new Association consisted of the repeal of the Corn Laws, complete suffrage, and the expansion of elementary education.<sup>70</sup>

Professor Cowherd claims that the first appeal of the Association was made on August 10, 1840, and the first general meeting followed on August 31, 1840.<sup>71</sup> There are several errors in this account. The correct name of the Association

<sup>69</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (December 1841), p. 779.

<sup>70</sup> R. G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (London, 1959), p. 110.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

was the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, and, although it subsequently transformed itself into a Complete Suffrage Association, its distinctive policy throughout 1840 and 1841 was Household Suffrage. Smiles himself referred to it as the Household Suffrage Association.<sup>72</sup> The account in his autobiography lends itself to confusion, however. There it is stated that Smiles issued an "Appeal to the Middle Classes" in the Leeds Times of August 10, was approached by Hamer Stansfeld, and helped to convene a public meeting on August 31, 1840, when the movement was launched.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the Leeds Times was not published on August 10, 1840, although an important article on the same theme had appeared on August 10, 1839. Perhaps it was then that Stansfeld started to confer with Smiles - Smiles's able analysis of Chartism would certainly interest a middle class reformer<sup>74</sup> - but the movement in Leeds can be traced with certainty only to February 1840, when a leading article warning that Chartism would revive if other movements remained inactive was accompanied by the report of a meeting promoted by the Leeds Times to discuss methods of exerting Radical pressure "at any political crisis which may occur in this borough at any future period". The meeting produced a consensus in

<sup>72</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 96.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>74</sup> Vide supra, pp. 120-122.

favour of household suffrage, the ballot, triennial parliaments, no property qualification of MPs, national education, purity of elections, and removal of abuses in the local government of the town.<sup>75</sup> Smiles also urged Radical associations to adopt a short-term policy of registering as much sympathetic voting strength as possible and to keep up pressure on MPs once elected.<sup>76</sup> When a sub-committee was set up to prepare the rules of the movement, Smiles was elected to membership.<sup>77</sup> In its aims and aspirations this Leeds association belonged to the established pattern of Radical activity, despite the moderation of its franchise programme.

The initiative of the Leeds Radicals precipitated the long impending breach with the Anti-Corn Law League, but by this time Smiles was showing little respect for Manchester. On April 4, 1840 he made a forthright editorial attack on "the tradocracy", in which he accused them of claiming too many benefits for the repeal of the Corn Laws, and cast doubts on their motives for ignoring other factors contributing to the economic and social crisis of the age. Like the Chartists they had failed, and now both agitations should be subordinated to a new movement for suffrage extension.

<sup>75</sup> Leeds Times (February 29, 1840).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. (March 7, 1840).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

The next step was to create a national movement, and the Leeds Radicals sought the guidance of J. A. Roebuck, the most active of the Parliamentary Radicals. Well versed in popular politics - he had helped to draw up the People's Charter - Roebuck accepted the invitation to assist in preparing a code of resolutions to "serve as an exposition of proper Radical doctrine". In a letter to his wife he summed up their intention. "They plainly said (being very moderate Rads, mind), 'We want a new charter without the name, which will unite the now conflicting opinions of the Liberal party.'"<sup>78</sup> Roebuck did not mention Household Suffrage, but presumably this was put to him as the kernel of the new creed, because, when the Whigs rebuffed the demands of the Corn Law repealers, Marshall and Stansfeld convened a meeting in the British Coffee House, London, on April 6, 1840, offering a programme of parliamentary reform similar to that defined in February by Smiles and the Leeds Radicals.<sup>79</sup> It was hoped that the middle class and working class leaders would declare in favour of it. A letter written later by Daniel O'Connell shows that he too was invited to support what was obviously intended to be an agitation of unprece-

<sup>78</sup> R. T. Leader, Life and Letters of J. A. Roebuck (London, 1897), p. 127.

<sup>79</sup> H. McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League (London, 1958), p. 78.

dented proportions.<sup>80</sup>

An attempt was then made to establish the nucleus of the movement in Leeds, and Smiles announced the convening by Marshall, Stansfeld and Goodman of a public meeting to discuss constitutional reform.<sup>81</sup> Their initiative in London had failed, but Marshall and Stansfeld obviously hoped to win the support of a wide range of opinion in Leeds, because, according to Smiles's report, this meeting was attended by "all classes of Reformers, from the liberal Whig to the extreme Chartist".<sup>82</sup> Again they were disappointed. Edward Baines M.P. spoke against extending the suffrage, thereby making it obvious that the influential Leeds Mercury would oppose the new movement. The organisers of the meeting pressed on without Baines, however, and the most important motion of the evening was proposed by Smiles calling for extension of the suffrage, shorter parliaments, vote by ballot, redistribution of electoral districts, and the abolition of the property qualification for MPs. As amended to read "Household Suffrage" the motion was accepted by the meeting - a compromise which Smiles had already shown he would accept.

Now that a point d'appui had been devised capable of replacing the narrower class interests of the Chartists and

<sup>80</sup> Leeds Times (November 28, 1840).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. (April 25, 1840).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. (May 2, 1840).

the Anti-Corn Law League, Smiles for the first time since his arrival in Leeds was associated with a movement of whose aims and methods he could approve.<sup>83</sup> After the revolutionary fervour of Chartism this movement could be offered to the middle class as an eminently respectable means of altering the constitution and removing a government seemingly mindful only of the interests of the landowners. Were not the names of Marshall and Stansfeld sufficient guarantee that the movement would be both safe and effective?

Presented in this way the movement would seem to assign to the working class only the rôle of a mass following, but Smiles and his colleagues were well aware that working class political activity was too far advanced to be ignored, and it was emphasised that the working class was to hold an honoured place in the movement. When the first general meeting of the association set up a provisional committee, it was decided that half of the members should belong to the working class.<sup>84</sup> In his editorials Smiles emphasised his belief that the working class could produce able leaders from their own ranks. Praising Lovett as "the right sort of person for a working class leader", Smiles agreed that he was even capable of upholding the rights of

<sup>83</sup> Leeds Times (September 5, 1840).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

the working class in the House of Commons.<sup>85</sup> An alliance with Lovett would have represented a great triumph for the Leeds Radicals, and it was about this time that Smiles offered him the sub-editorship of the Leeds Times,<sup>86</sup> doubtless in the hope of strengthening the appeal of the newspaper and its new policy to those who had followed Nicoll's lead in the days of the Leeds Working Men's Association. Lovett's connection with London working class radicals would also prove useful to a movement which aspired to become national. Presumably it was for the same reason that Smiles printed a weekly letter from Colonel Perronet Thompson at this time. "The colonel continued to look upon himself as a mediator between the Radicals and the working class among whom he still felt that he had considerable influence."<sup>87</sup>

Significantly, however, behind the democratic veneer of the association executive power lay in the hands of Marshall, Stansfeld and Smiles, who were elected chairman, joint vice-chairman, and joint secretary respectively.<sup>88</sup> Like the Radicals of the eighteen-twenties Smiles and his middle class associates were speaking of collaboration

<sup>85</sup> Leeds Times (July 11, 1840).

<sup>86</sup> W. Lovett, The Life and Struggles of William Lovett (London, 1876), p. 245.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, p. 236.

<sup>88</sup> Leeds Times (October 3, 1840).

between the classes, when, in fact, they meant to bring the force of working class radicalism under middle class control. With more clarity than tact Smiles himself summarised the role of the classes in the Leeds Association. "It will be observed that the present association has as its principle the co-operation of the middle and operative classes. The movement will thus at the same time have heads to direct it, and masses to enable it to act with power and effect."<sup>89</sup> The attitude of J. G. Marshall was probably more rigid than that of Smiles in this respect. According to the historian of the Marshall family "Henry and James thought particularly in terms of a sober, dutiful, self-respecting working-class".<sup>90</sup> Joshua Bower did not hold an important position, but his early support doubtless helped to confirm the belief that the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was the chosen means by which the Leeds middle class was seeking to turn the working class into a docile ally. Bower had previously attempted to set up a similar movement in Leeds with the intention of weakening the demand for a full programme of political reform.<sup>91</sup> Not without justification did the Chartists refer to Smiles, Marshall, Stansfeld and their

<sup>89</sup> Leeds Times (September 5, 1840).

<sup>90</sup> Rimmer, p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> A. S. Turberville and F. Beckwith, "Leeds and Parliamentary Reform 1820-32", Thoresby Society Miscellany, XLI (1943), p. 47.

working class supporters as the "Fox and Goose Club".

The tactics which the Leeds reformers intended to pursue during the second half of 1840 soon emerged. An attempt was to be made to gain as much publicity as possible prior to building up a national movement. Minor successes were recorded by Smiles, and even before the first general meeting he was claiming that the Association had more supporters than the Leeds Political Union of 1831-32.<sup>92</sup> Soon preparations were going ahead for Hume to bring in a bill for household suffrage supported by petitions from the West Riding. 16200 signatures were subsequently obtained for this petition.<sup>93</sup> At the same time the Leeds Radicals were forging links with like-minded people in other areas, where in the second half of 1840 the rise of similar associations was noted. There were even signs of a similar trend in Ulster.

In this activity Smiles played a great part. When the first committee of the Association was elected in August 1840, he became a middle class member,<sup>94</sup> was subsequently elected joint secretary,<sup>95</sup> and, when two representatives

---

<sup>92</sup> Leeds Times (July 18, 1840).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. (August 1, 1840).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. (September 5, 1840).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. (October 3, 1840).

were invited to Belfast for discussions with the Ulster reformers, he was chosen as one of them.<sup>96</sup> An interesting picture of Smiles as an enthusiastic political reformer at this time emerges from a letter written by J. A. Roebuck to the proprietor of Tait's Edinburgh Magazine. Urging on Tait the need to work for Radical unity, Roebuck praised the Leeds Association and referred to a correspondence which he had been carrying on with Smiles, "who is doing good in the North". "He gives me encouragement by describing the spirit of the people as not dead but sleeping; while he excites me and all reformers to action, so that we may sound a trump to awaken these dormant energies."<sup>97</sup> Smiles was obviously seeking to revive the prominent Radicals, and frequent references were made in the Press to the Leeds Times, "the organ of the movement party in England" according to the Chartist Circular of Glasgow.<sup>98</sup>

The climax of this activity was to be a great meeting which, symbolic of its aims, was to be attended by the middle class and working class in equal numbers in the hope that a "powerful coalition" would emerge.<sup>99</sup> Even Daniel O'Connell, it was believed, would give the new movement the

<sup>96</sup> Leeds Times (October 3, 1840).

<sup>97</sup> Leader, pp. 130-131.

<sup>98</sup> Leeds Times (September 12, 1840).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. (October 17, 1840).

support of his experience and mass following.<sup>100</sup> The Leeds reformers were soon left in no doubt that their hopes were extravagant. The Ulster Association, it was reported, had misgivings about an extended suffrage, the Leeds Mercury declared its opposition, and Cobden, like Attwood and Lovett, declined an invitation to the meeting. O'Connell summed up the feelings of those already associated with agitations.

You have high-sounding phrases; you call upon us to relinquish Repeal Agitation; but what strength - what energy - what force can you compensate us with, in favour of mutual and general Reform? You speak as if you were the organs of all the Reformers in England! And yet you are not, I am sincerely sorry and bitter to see, authorised to speak, even for all the Reformers of Leeds alone.<sup>101</sup>

The assumption of the Leeds Radicals that one general programme of political reform could supersede all other movements not only ignored the strength of separatism in these movements; it also ignored personal and sectional antipathy. A movement containing Ulster reformers, Irish repealers, Chartist, and disillusioned middle class Whigs would have been the Noah's Ark of the political world. Strange combinations, it is true, had formed in opposition to entrenched Tory rule, but the political, social, and economic trends of the succeeding age did not continue to favour them. Even Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, which fully endorsed their "holy

<sup>100</sup> Leeds Times (November 21, 1840).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. (December 19, 1840).

cause", prophesied the failure of the Leeds Radicals.

The middle classes will not take up the agitation in other parts of the kingdom, while the Whig Ministers remain in power, and set their faces, as they will continue to do, so long as they are in power, against all Radical (that is, real) Reform. And of the working classes only a small number will join heartily in agitation for less than Universal Suffrage; while the Chartists will even endeavour to defeat the agitation.<sup>102</sup>

With the preparations for their meeting well advanced Smiles and his associates might have been expected to show anxiety when their aspirations encountered opposition and misgivings. Leading Radical spokesmen such as Roebuck, Hume, Colonel Thompson, O'Connell and even some Chartist promised to attend, however, and preparations went ahead.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, neither Smiles nor Hamer Stansfeld expected the meeting to transform the political scene rapidly. Answering the Leeds Mercury Stansfeld conceded that the middle class would consider Baines "in the first instance, to have the best of the argument".<sup>104</sup> Smiles also confirmed the moderation of their hopes in a letter to Roebuck. "Do you observe how our Association has already set the Press a-discussing the question of further Reform? This is the extent of the good it will accomplish. We will ripen public opinion, and this is

<sup>102</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (October, 1840), p. 679.

<sup>103</sup> Leeds Times (January 2 and 16, 1841).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. (December 19, 1840).

certainly doing no small thing."<sup>105</sup> Smiles considered that their most important immediate objective was to retain public interest, and he urged on Roebuck the necessity of devising "some plan of issuing tracts, pamphlets, circulars to try ways of keeping public opinion alive at the present time".<sup>106</sup> This was obviously to be a long-term movement organised in accordance with what were coming to be accepted as the normal methods of respectable agitation. Significantly, Smiles was soon announcing that the much-heralded main meeting would be followed on the next day by another meeting - this time of leading Radicals - which would discuss the setting up of a central organization "to diffuse and extend information on political subjects of all kinds, and to operate upon public opinion by every legal and constitutional means".<sup>107</sup> The letter to Roebuck would suggest that Smiles saw this second meeting as more important than the first. Indicative of his determination to foster the aims of the Household Suffrage meeting, he became part-proprietor of the Leeds Times at the end of 1840.

The main meeting was not unimpressive in its setting,

<sup>105</sup> Leeds City Library, Archives Department, SS/A/IV/8a & b, S. Smiles to J. A. Roebuck, December 23, 1840.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Leeds Times (January 16, 1841).

as Smiles subsequently attempted to show by means of one of the few engravings to adorn the pages of the Leeds Times. A flax mill might be criticised as a choice of setting for a middle class reconciliation with the working class, but this was no ordinary mill. The Chairman of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, J. G. Marshall, had placed his new Holbeck mill at the disposal of the meeting. "The mill had just been erected, and was not yet supplied with machinery. It was built in the style of an Egyptian temple with an immense chimney like an elongated pyramid. . . . It was certainly the largest room in the world; and on this occasion was densely packed."<sup>108</sup> It was estimated that eight thousand people assembled to hear the issue of suffrage reform debated by its various exponents on January 21, 1841.<sup>109</sup> True to form, the Chartists assembled in force to obstruct the meeting, but fortunately O'Connell did not arrive until the next day, as none of the advertised speakers was less acceptable to the Chartists than the erstwhile leader of Feargus O'Connor.

It was to oppose and shout him down that the Chartists were organised in such numbers; and it was for this purpose, too, they had supplied themselves with whistles, the effect of which they first tried upon the Chairman, upon Mr. Hume, and Mr. Roebuck, the last of whom so

<sup>108</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 95.

<sup>109</sup> Leeds Times (January 23, 1841).

properly rebuked them.<sup>110</sup>

When heard, the variety of opinions was more impressive than the agreement, as, in addition to the Charter and Household Suffrage, other policies were urged. Foreseeing this, the tactics of the organisers of the meeting were designed to produce a confrontation of the different schools of thought in the hope that Household Suffrage would emerge as the via media, and the resolution which the assembly subsequently carried, calling for the extension of the suffrage, would seem to have been designed to register any agreement, however vague. The middle class Radicals failed to carry the day, however, and Smiles could not conceal his disappointment with the meeting. "The believers in Household Suffrage were tongue-tied: they lacked utterance; and even those whom they put forth to advocate their principles conceded the main point contended for by their opponents."<sup>111</sup> Nor was the meeting next day of more comfort to the Leeds Radicals despite O'Connell's arrival and warm welcome. Speeches and applause there were, but Smiles could only report that O'Connell continued to insist on the need for providing the movement with a central committee in London, and that

---

<sup>110</sup> Dundee, Perth, and Cupar Advertiser (January 29, 1841).

<sup>111</sup> Leeds Times (January 30, 1841).

Roebuck had spoken of a London body being contemplated.<sup>112</sup>

Those associated with the meeting declined to admit defeat immediately. Roebuck, for example, wrote to William Tait that the meeting was a very successful attempt to unite the middle and working classes,<sup>113</sup> and O'Connell informed a correspondent of his belief that a new reform agitation would soon arise in England.<sup>114</sup> For his part Smiles acted on the implicit assumption that Collins and O'Neill, two of the Chartist speakers at the meeting, were willing to devise an agreed solution to the suffrage dispute, and he conducted a correspondence with them through the columns of the newspaper. Smiles called upon them to follow his example and accept Household Suffrage as a temporary goal, but his hopes were dashed in March 1841 by their firm insistence on "that only safe conductor of the lightning storm, The People's Charter".<sup>115</sup>

This had been the attitude of the moderate Chartists even before the meeting, as Smiles had discovered in the course of a journalistic dialogue with the editor of the Chartist Circular. There could be no doubt that the

<sup>112</sup> Leeds Times (January 30, 1841).

<sup>113</sup> Leader, p. 133.

<sup>114</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick, ed., Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell (London, 1888), p. 256.

<sup>115</sup> Leeds Times (March 20, 1841).

moderates, having examined the Household Suffrage movement, had found it to be an expression of middle class consciousness, and, in the light of recent history, had refused to give their co-operation. Why had the Leeds middle class initiated a new reform movement, the editor of the Chartist Circular had asked?

They now see that, without an extension of the suffrage, they cannot get such alterations in the laws as they think will benefit themselves. The installment granted has been so limited, that the power of the landed aristocracy remains unbroken; and these said "gentlemen" want to have it extended so far as will enable them to carry their own pet measures, but no further. It was not until the motion for repealing the corn laws was so ignominiously disposed of this session that they commenced operations in earnest; and should they succeed in getting as many enfranchised as will enable them to alter these, and carry other measures favourable to themselves, the working classes may wait for the "balance" till doomsday for aught they care.<sup>116</sup>

This working class reaction to the Leeds initiative had been forecast throughout 1840 by Francis Place, who, despite appeals from Roebuck and Stansfeld, had declined to support the Household Suffrage campaign. Referring to the Chartists of London on February 10, 1841, Place bluntly summarised the situation in a letter to Hume: "It was no more possible for them to agree to the words 'Household Suffrage', than it is for your friends to agree to the words 'Universal Suffrage'.<sup>117</sup>" Class consciousness was now too strong a force

<sup>116</sup> Chartist Circular (September 5, 1840).

<sup>117</sup> G. Wallas, The Life of Francis Place (London, 1918), p. 390.

to be withheld.

Although as late as September 18, 1841, Smiles could refer to the great meeting of January as stimulating "a moral influence which has not yet been exhausted", there can be no doubt that the Household Suffrage movement remained in a state of indecision for much of 1841. The firmness of the moderate Chartist was not the only reason for this, because the agitation against the Corn Laws revived, and finally, overshadowing all else, the Whigs plunged despairingly into a General Election campaign in June 1841. There were signs that Smiles wished to see the Association transforming itself into a society for political education, and he prepared a plan for this purpose,<sup>118</sup> but other counsels prevailed at this stage. A closer relationship was established with the Anti-Corn Law League, although the Leeds and Manchester movements had been on the verge of an open quarrel in January 1841 according to a letter written by Cobden to Smiles.<sup>119</sup> Soon the columns of the Leeds Times showed that Smiles was once more involved in the West Riding agitation against the Corn Laws to the extent of speaking in the presence of Cobden at an Anti-Corn Law tea party in Hudders-

---

<sup>118</sup> Leeds Times (February 13, 1841).

<sup>119</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 97.

field.<sup>120</sup> Placing the Leeds Times at the disposal of those who were organising a Leeds Operative Anti-Corn Law Association, he continued to see his rôle as that of a mediator between the middle class and the working class. The agitation for repeal, he now asserted, offered the most likely prospect of achieving a Radical break-through, and his advice to the Chartists reflected this consideration. "Chartists! think, and join the cry of 'No bread tax!' but don't forget the Charter."<sup>121</sup> Already the Chartists had given him their answer by breaking up a meeting at Leeds organised by the Corn Law repealers.<sup>122</sup>

In mid-1841 the main event was the General Election campaign, in which Smiles played an active part. The Leeds election offers a good illustration of the difficulties which faced the Radicals of this era. "The Radicals were outside the charmed circle of the governing class; they could only directly influence a very few Parliamentary constituencies, and even in these few must tread warily and take care to produce acceptable candidates."<sup>123</sup> Smiles was well aware that Leeds was such a constituency. At the end

<sup>120</sup> Leeds Times (March 27, 1841).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. (May 1, 1841).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. (April 3, 1841).

<sup>123</sup> McCord, p. 30.

of 1840 he had written to Roebuck praising him as the most acceptable candidate in the eyes of local Radicals, but warning him that he would find it difficult to secure sufficient support in a Dissenting constituency where his attitude to Sabbatarianism was known. "The influence which it might have on the minds of the less informed Methodists and Dissenters would no doubt be very considerable."<sup>124</sup> Such people were influenced by the Leeds Mercury rather than the Leeds Times, with the result that Smiles was obliged to concede the necessity of an electoral compromise with Baines and the Whigs.

The beginning of the campaign found the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association in considerable disarray and J. G. Marshall in disagreement with Smiles. Marshall had recently formed a Yorkshire Anti-Monopoly Society which advocated the supporting of those candidates who opposed the Corn Laws and commercial monopolies, but Smiles rejected this policy and urged that parliamentary representation should be the leading issue.<sup>125</sup> Eventually Smiles gave way and accepted that "all other questions are, for the time being, absorbed in that of Free Trade versus Monopoly".<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Leeds City Library, Archives Department, SS/A/IV/8a & b, S. Smiles to J. A. Roebuck, December 23, 1840.

<sup>125</sup> Leeds Times (May 15, 1841).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. (June 19, 1841).

A breach with Marshall would have hindered his plans, and, in any case, Marshall's decision might produce some measure of success, because the Whigs were weakening their stand on the Corn Laws in an attempt to court middle class support. Joseph Hume, an avowed supporter of Corn Law repeal and an extended suffrage, was accepted as the Radical candidate for one of the two Leeds seats, and Smiles advised the electors to vote also for Aldam, the Whig candidate.<sup>127</sup>

Smiles threw himself strenuously into the campaign on behalf of Hume, to the extent of producing a special election paper called The Movement,<sup>128</sup> but the Leeds electors did not desire movement during those troubled times, and, although Aldam was returned, Hume was defeated by the Tory candidate. Despite their pact with the Whigs and their advocacy of free trade the Leeds Radicals had received a serious local setback, and their prestige suffered. O'Connell, it was reported, ruthlessly pointed to their weakness. "He had put on his spectacles, and looked over the entire map of England, and he could not find any place there where the cry for Reform was active. An effort had been made, to be sure, in Leeds; but a Tory and a half had been returned at the last election."<sup>129</sup> When the national results were

<sup>127</sup> Leeds Times (June 26, 1841).

<sup>128</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 100.

<sup>129</sup> Leeds Times (August 21, 1841).

announced, once more it looked as if a bleak future awaited the Radicals.

On reflection, Smiles accepted the election results of 1841 as the culmination of a decade of disaster for the Radicals.

Radicalism:- it seemed to have a real (not a charmed) life in 1831; but every subsequent year marked its decline, till now, ten years afterwards, a fell, sweeping, "working", majority in the House of Commons, backed by the Lords and the Bishops, is ready to spring upon and crush it as a moth - a majority powerful enough to exorcise it from the land as an unreal mockery, or an unendurable nuisance.<sup>130</sup>

At this moment of disaster, however, his advice to his readers was that they should prepare for a popular reaction against the Tories by forming and supporting Radical Associations.<sup>131</sup> In this way, but without breaking his links with the Corn Law agitation, Smiles used the electoral setback of 1841 to bring new life to the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association. The time had come, he believed, for the Leeds reformers to renew their bid to establish a national reform movement. His activities during the next eighteen months were to follow a pattern resembling that of his first two years as editor. He devoted much thought to education, was then deeply disturbed by the distress of the trade cycle,

<sup>130</sup> Leeds Times (August 28, 1841).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. (July 3, 1841).

and plunged again into the acrimonious debates accompanying renewed attempts by the middle class Radicals to start a mass movement for parliamentary reform.

Even after the General Election there were still some reform associations formed on the Leeds model - Smiles referred specifically to those at Bradford, Kirkcaldy, Bury, Derby, Rotherham, Luddenden, Bramley and Ackworth - and it was hoped that others would be set up.<sup>132</sup> But after the disaster of the January meeting what were the Leeds Radicals to recommend? Smiles later described their thoughts.

The Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was established for the purpose of furthering the question of Extension of Suffrage, and of securing a full, free, and fair representation of the people in Parliament. As the accomplishment of this object, however, was yet considered as remote, it was resolved to direct the efforts of the Association to immediately useful practical purposes, at the same time that it kept steadily in view the great end for which it was instituted.<sup>133</sup>

Education was deemed to be the most immediately useful of these practical purposes, and the influence of Smiles can be detected in the programme of political education which was drawn up for the winter of 1841-42. Even before the meeting in Marshall's mill he had emphasised the need to educate public opinion, and he had praised the educational ideas expounded by Lovett in Chartism: A New Organization of the

<sup>132</sup> Leeds Times (August 21, 1841).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. (February 5, 1842).

People.<sup>134</sup> Later a plan combining his Scottish experience of Itinerating Libraries with the ideas of Lovett had been published,<sup>135</sup> only to be abandoned in favour of the Anti-Corn Law agitation and subsequent electioneering. Now he welcomed the re-appearance of such ideas, and they were put into practice for nearly a year after October, 1841, the intention being that, under the aegis of the Association, premises should be provided where the Radicals, Chartists, and Whigs of Leeds could meet.<sup>136</sup> Smiles, as Secretary of the Association, gave a full explanation at the General Meeting in September 1841. On October 9, rooms were to be opened as a library and reading room containing London and local newspapers, monthly periodicals and cheap weekly literature. Expansion would take place, and in the future it was intended to establish district and ward libraries. The rooms were also to be used for courses of lectures on social and political matters.<sup>137</sup>

From time to time Smiles noted the progress of the reading room, until in February 1842 he was able to give more detailed reports, the records of which survive not only in the columns of the Leeds Times but in a published speech

<sup>134</sup> Leeds Times (September 19, 1840).

<sup>135</sup> Vide supra, p. 160.

<sup>136</sup> Leeds Times (September 25, 1841).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. (October 2, 1841).

given before the Bradford United Reform Club. His reports were very favourable. "The most sanguine anticipations of its promoters have been realised; and, already instigated by the example, numerous associations have sprung up in the neighbouring towns and districts, with the promise of an equally abundant return of profit and usefulness."<sup>138</sup> The statistics which he mustered in support of his claims were not unimpressive. There were nearly six hundred members of the Leeds Association reading room, of whom two-thirds belonged to the working class, and he was able to report that the similarly constituted Bradford United Reform Club had attained a membership of five hundred. There were two rates of subscription to the Leeds Association's reading room; a payment of three shillings a quarter entitled a member to use the reading room throughout the day, whereas a payment of sixpence a month gave entry from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. In addition to a wide range of newspapers and periodicals a library of three hundred volumes had been built up by gift, and circulated constantly. A programme of lectures on social, political, and moral economy had been carried out on Monday evenings. Significantly, Smiles and his colleagues had also seen the need to provide elementary education for about fifty members who, on payment of sixpence a month, formed an adult class for reading, writing, and arithmetic.

---

<sup>138</sup> Leeds Times (February 5, 1842).

Supplementing these serious pursuits was a well-attended chess club, and it was announced that plans were being drawn up for classes of vocal and instrumental music.<sup>139</sup>

There can be no doubt that the political education given by the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association was, at least in part, middle class propaganda designed to win the working class away from Chartist and Owenite beliefs.

Smiles of course did not define his intentions in this way. Eschewing party politics, he called for a study of the "SCIENCE" of politics.<sup>140</sup> This use of the word "science" may only make Smiles seem to be the child of an age in which the title of science could be accorded to Political Economy, Mesmerism, and Phrenology, but it would not have escaped the notice of a hostile critic that the exponents of the "SCIENCE" of politics whom Smiles praised were Smith, Bentham, Mill and Thompson, pillars of middle class liberalism. Further proof of this propagandist intention was afforded by the Association's lectures which defined the rôle of government in laissez-faire terms and defended the mechanical innovations of the age against Chartists and Tories who wished to restrict their application. Profiting from the mistakes of the Mechanics' Institutes, Smiles and the Leeds Radicals

<sup>139</sup>S. Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes (Leeds, 1842), p. 18.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

had devised an interesting attempt to guide the working class in the paths of reform.

The Leeds reformers pursued their ideas of political education against the background of a worsening economic situation. If a modern historian can see the slump of 1841-42 as probably the worst of the century,<sup>141</sup> Smiles could not be unaware of the prevailing distress in his own day, and his columns abounded with references to it. Emotive language abounded too, but as a good Benthamist Smiles repeatedly referred to statistics in support of his contentions. For example, one week before Christmas 1841 he gave a résumé of the preceding period of depression. In the staple trades of Leeds 98 firms had gone bankrupt during the preceding four years,<sup>142</sup> and many small tradesmen had also been ruined. In the preceding twelve months not one half of the Leeds working class had been in full employment. Further evidence for distress he provided by referring to the statistics of cattle slaughter in the borough, which showed that the figure of 2450 head of cattle slaughtered weekly in 1835-36 had fallen to 1800 in 1841.<sup>143</sup> In June 1842 his sources of information were no less discouraging, as the workhouse

<sup>141</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (London, 1964), p. 74.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. pp. 141-142.

<sup>143</sup> Leeds Times (December 18, 1841).

statistics of families receiving relief during the first three months of 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842 were respectively 2143, 2212, 2670, and 4025.<sup>144</sup> Not surprisingly his conviction in that cheerless winter of 1841-42 was that "during the last fifteen or twenty years, the condition of the working classes has been becoming more and more comfortless, more harassing, and more difficult".<sup>145</sup> Smiles was thus one of the writers who helped to inaugurate the debate on the working class standard of living during the Industrial Revolution, and some of his statements at this time place him amongst those whom E. J. Hobsbawm calls the "pessimistic school".<sup>146</sup> It may be contended that Smiles had no right to make such statements because he had lived in Leeds only after 1838 and the statistics to which he referred covered the same short period. It should be remembered, however, that Smiles had studied in Edinburgh from 1829-32 at a time of sustained unemployment,<sup>147</sup> and that his career in journalism would have given him much relevant information afterwards. Even his first book had quoted social statistics frequently.

<sup>144</sup> Leeds Times (June 25, 1842).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. (December 4, 1841).

<sup>146</sup> Hobsbawm, p. 64.

<sup>147</sup> A. Somerville, Autobiography of a Working Man (London, 1951), p. 58.

But Smiles's awareness of the extent of social distress was shown most fully by his association in the second half of 1841 with the Unemployed Operatives' Enumeration Committee, one of the most significant bodies to be set up in Leeds while he was editor of the Leeds Times.<sup>148</sup> The origins of the committee can be traced to May 1841, when Smiles met a number of unemployed men and supported their suggestion that a meeting should be held on Holbeck Moor to discuss their plight.<sup>149</sup> Indicative of how far the Leeds working class had gone towards adopting middle class attitudes and procedures, the meeting resolved to undertake a statistical account of unemployment in Leeds. Having consulted Smiles, a small group of working men devised the means simply and effectively.<sup>150</sup>

Smiles promised to notice their proceedings in the Leeds Times,<sup>151</sup> and, true to his word, he explained their aims as defined at a meeting attended by sixty delegates from the factories, mills and workshops of Leeds.<sup>152</sup> Their intention was to ascertain the number of those out of em-

<sup>148</sup> The Appendix contains a description of the work of this Committee.

<sup>149</sup> Leeds Times (May 29, 1841).

<sup>150</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 114.

<sup>151</sup> Leeds Times (August 28, 1841).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. (September 11, 1841).

ployment, how long they had been unemployed, to what trade they belonged, and how many people were dependent on them. Once a report had been drawn up, it was to be put before the magistrates to convince them that immediate assistance was required "with a view to permanent amelioration and relief". Having ruled that they should not become associated with the Corn Law agitation, the committee was willing to consider only a call to the workmen of the United Kingdom to ascertain the total number of unemployed men for the information of Parliament. Commenting on this impressive display of working class disciplined protest, Smiles praised the leaders. "The Committee is composed of the most intelligent and trustworthy operatives in their several vocations. Indeed, their appearance and deportment sufficiently indicates that the 'enumeration committee' is composed of the very élite of the operative class in Leeds."<sup>153</sup>

Under their guidance the work proceeded with the necessary speed, and on October 9, 1841, Smiles was able to announce that the enumeration was completed. In order to obtain the utmost publicity for their cause the Committee then rapidly arranged for the holding of a public meeting. This took place in the Leeds Music Hall on October 16, 1841, when the Statistical Report was read to an audience of eight hundred people consisting not only of the working class but

---

<sup>153</sup> Leeds Times (September 11, 1841).

also of the Whig M.P., Aldam, J. G. Marshall, and members of the local middle class.<sup>154</sup> Smiles, who spoke in favour of the work of the Committee, accurately summarised their report in his autobiography. "It was ascertained by personal visitation that out of 4752 families examined, consisting of 19936 individuals, only 3780 persons were in work, while 16156 were out of work; and that the average earnings per head amounted to only 11½d. weekly for each individual."<sup>155</sup>

As a result of the Enumeration Committee's report, the Music Hall meeting accepted several resolutions calling for the adoption of measures to alleviate the distress, and in particular authorising the sending of a deputation to the local authorities. Smiles, who had consistently condemned the New Poor Law, wrote an editorial praising the resolutions adopted by the meeting.<sup>156</sup> The Poor Law administration in Leeds was lacking in compassion, he complained, and he urged the unemployed operatives to put pressure on it to extend the relief provisions. The Unemployed Operatives' Committee should supplement its activities by setting up ward committees to bring deserving cases to the notice of the authorities and to appeal, if necessary, to public opinion. For immediate relief he urged the setting up of a

<sup>154</sup> Leeds Times (October 23, 1841).

<sup>155</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 115.

<sup>156</sup> Leeds Times (October 23, 1841).

fund for middle class contributions, and he recommended an attempt to make Leeds conditions known to the Duke of Wellington and other eminent men. This last device, he thought, would be more likely to succeed, if the unemployed in other towns were encouraged to conduct their own enumerations.

The Leeds Overseers did not share Smiles's admiration for the initiative shown by the unemployed, and an angry exchange of opinion ensued between the supporters and the opponents of the Enumeration Committee. Nonetheless the Committee eventually claimed that some good had come from their investigation, because relief payments doubled,<sup>157</sup> and on February 26, 1842, the Leeds Times reported that the Operatives' Enumeration Committee had voted to disband. That there was still organised dissatisfaction in the ranks of the unemployed soon emerged, however, and a meeting attended by one thousand unemployed men was held in May 1842 at which it was decided to hold a peaceful march in favour of outdoor poor relief. It is indicative of the esteem in which Smiles was held by the working class that he was allowed to address this meeting. Again he showed his sympathy for the plight of the unemployed by suggesting that local ward committees should be set up to bring pressure to bear on the authorities.<sup>158</sup> Nothing seems to have been done to

---

<sup>157</sup> Leeds Times (February 5, 1842).

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. (May 21, 1842).

implement his suggestion, but he was elected to membership of a deputation which was to meet the mayor of Leeds. The only result of this was the provision of a soup kitchen, and, although it was decided to proceed with the march,<sup>159</sup> the initiative of the Leeds unemployed seems to have disappeared.

The support which Smiles gave to the Leeds unemployed was not motivated entirely by altruism, because there can be little doubt that he wished to derive political propaganda from the enumeration. The official policy of the Enumeration Committee excluded partisan politics, and at the public meeting in the Leeds Music Hall the chairman refused to allow political references,<sup>160</sup> but inevitably a controversial issue such as unemployment could not be kept out of politics, and it was observed even at the meeting that both the Leeds Mercury and the Leeds Intelligencer had withheld their support. The Committee claimed later that the local supporters of the two main parties were suspicious because "the Enumeration Committee, being connected with neither party, had had the misfortune to be suspected by both - the Tories suspecting it to be an electioneering trick, and the Liberals that it was got up to injure the overseers".<sup>161</sup> These suspicions were not entirely misguided. Within the

<sup>159</sup> Leeds Times (May 28, 1842).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. (October 23, 1841).

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. (February 5, 1842).

ranks of the Enumeration Committee there was certainly a group in favour of the Radical policies of the Leeds Times. James Rattray, one of the principal initiators of the committee, was an associate of Smiles and subsequently dedicated a book to him.<sup>162</sup> Significantly, after leaving Leeds, Rattray immediately joined the Young Men's Anti-Monopoly Association in Coventry, from where he wrote a letter to the Enumeration Committee, praising Joseph Sturge for seeking to overcome class hostility.<sup>163</sup> Smiles was also praising Sturge at this time, and it is not too surprising that the last appeal of the Leeds Enumeration Committee was for the repeal of the Corn Laws, extension of the suffrage, vote by ballot, short parliaments, no property qualification of MPs, and payment of MPs - the programme of the Leeds Times and Sturge.<sup>164</sup>

The organised protest of the Leeds unemployed stimulated Smiles's search for an acceptable method of social reform, and it was at this time that he announced his re-conversion to the theory of land reform. When he and the other members of the delegation appointed to appeal to the local authorities on behalf of the unemployed carried out their task, they heard J. G. Marshall suggest the adoption

<sup>162</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 120.

<sup>163</sup> Leeds Times (February 5, 1842).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. (February 26, 1842).

of a scheme of spade husbandry to provide employment.<sup>165</sup> The local authorities did not favour the idea, but Smiles did, and he referred his readers to his previous series of articles on home colonies.<sup>166</sup> This was less than honest. Subsequent to writing these articles he had condemned a Dutch land scheme which he had previously praised as exemplary<sup>167</sup> and had denounced Feargus O'Connor's proposal of acquiring waste lands, because it would make a virtual gift of public money to the aristocracy.<sup>168</sup> In June 1842, however, against a background of rising public discontent, the Dutch home colonies returned to favour along with the cultivation of waste lands, which was praised as a good investment of poor relief funds, and an admirable means of saving the working class from the effects of the trade cycle.<sup>169</sup> As in 1839 Smiles was influenced by the reactionary analysis of recent history.

England used to be a country of peace, and plenty and happiness: In olden times it was spoken of as "merrie England": Its labouring classes were contented and comfortable; they had abundance of good and strengthening food, and decent and healthy clothing. But all this is

<sup>165</sup> Leeds Times (May 28, 1842).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. (June 11, 1842).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. (November 20, 1841).

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. (January 15, 1842).

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. (June 11, 1842).

altered now.<sup>170</sup>

There was no attempt made by the authorities to divert poor relief funds to home colonies, and Smiles was only able to report that J. G. Marshall had embarked on a private venture of buying land in Holbeck for division into small allotments.<sup>171</sup> This was less than Smiles would have wished, but he threw his support behind the scheme, and it would seem to have enjoyed some success, because he was later able to report that there was competition to obtain allotments.<sup>172</sup> If it was extended, he asserted, the scheme would be a great boon, especially to the handloom weavers of the district.<sup>173</sup> But again Marshall found how ineffective was the influence of example, and nothing was done to endow Leeds with an allotment system.

The evidence of social distress accompanied by the revival of Chartism raised again the prospect of class hostility and revolution during the winter of 1841-42. It fell to Smiles to offer his readers a radical alternative in the columns of the Leeds Times. The educational activities of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association were frequently

<sup>170</sup> Leeds Times (May 28, 1842).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. (July 23, 1842).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. (January 7, 1843).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. (March 11, 1843).

praised as a means of improvement,<sup>174</sup> but Smiles, well aware that education offered no immediate benefit, was constantly seeking to offer a more vivid prospect of reform as the slump intensified. This placed him in a situation similar to that which he had known in 1839, because, after advocating both Corn Law repeal and franchise reform, he and the other members of the Leeds Association again found that these two reforms were widely regarded as incompatible. Their reaction was similar to that which had led them to organise the meeting in Marshall's mill. They publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Anti-Corn Law League,<sup>175</sup> and attempted to bridge the gulf between the free trade and suffrage agitations. In an address to the "Merchants, Manufacturers, and Operatives of the West Riding of Yorkshire" published in the Leeds Times, October 16, 1841, Marshall invited them to set up reform associations, and Smiles welcomed the decision to hold another meeting in Leeds to promote union among reformers.

It is especially to be regretted that the most active among the Suffrage Reformers and the Anti-Corn Law Reformers have not only stood aloof from each other but have actually occupied antagonistic positions. We say it is to be regretted, because we believe that both these movements might be amalgamated, and each made the means of forwarding the other towards successful

---

<sup>174</sup> Vide supra, pp. 165-168.

<sup>175</sup> Leeds Times (October 2, 1841).

completion.<sup>176</sup>

At this meeting Marshall offered to support the Chartists in demanding an extended suffrage in return for Chartist opposition to the Corn Laws.<sup>177</sup> No more fortunate than in 1841, his initiative was rebuffed, and the meeting failed, leaving Smiles at the nadir of his hopes after three years of strenuous efforts to achieve a reconciliation of the classes. He confided his reasons for despair to the editorial columns. Competing voices offered a multitude of remedies for a social tragedy of increasing dimensions, and there seemed to be no prospect of achieving unity. Even the Anti-Corn Law League was "at its wits end" and could only call for more useless petitioning. "And yet we do not see clearly what other more efficient plan is to be adopted." Indicative of his political bankruptcy, Smiles could only recommend that his readers should wait and see what the Tories did.<sup>178</sup>

Aware by this time of the findings of the Operatives' Enumeration Committee and the strong revival of Chartism, Smiles was obliged to give serious consideration to any platform more likely to gain working class support than that offered hitherto by the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association. Although one of the most prominent members of the

<sup>176</sup> Leeds Times (October 16, 1841).

<sup>177</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (December 1841).

<sup>178</sup> Leeds Times (November 20, 1841).

Association, he had always proclaimed that he continued to support Universal Suffrage in principle while accepting Household Suffrage as an expedient. By the end of November, 1841, Smiles was willing to abandon the unsuccessful expedient and restore the principle, when he heard that Sturge and Crawford were drawing up a declaration in favour of Universal Suffrage.

It is not to be disguised that the Leeds Association, with its basis of "Household Suffrage", has failed to excite that active co-operation on the part of the middle classes, which was intended by its first institution. The question then arises - ought that Association longer to compromise principles, when it is found that the object intended by such compromise has so flagrantly failed.<sup>179</sup>

Hamer Stansfeld and J. G. Marshall being firm in their refusal to go beyond Household Suffrage, Smiles must have known that this would precipitate a crisis, and it occurred almost immediately. At one of the Association's lectures Smiles spoke in favour of Universal Suffrage, only to be opposed by Stansfeld, who asserted that it would give the working class a legislative monopoly.<sup>180</sup> A complete breach was avoided, however. By this time the Association's educational venture was achieving considerable success, and Smiles must understandably have been reluctant to have Stansfeld and Marshall withdraw their support. Thus, although the Leeds Times and

<sup>179</sup> Leeds Times (November 27, 1841).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. (December 4, 1841).

members of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association gave support to Sturge's Complete Suffrage movement, a Complete Suffrage Association was not set up in Leeds for some time.

In the summer of 1842 Smiles was obliged to regard the agitation for Complete Suffrage with greater urgency. The distress investigated by the Enumeration Committee intensified, adding to the bitterness created by the rejection of the second Chartist Petition. "But the most astounding fact that we have to state, and one to which but few of our readers will be prepared to give credence is - that at present ONE FOURTH OF THE POPULATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF LEEDS ARE NOW ON THE OVERSEERS' BOOKS FOR RELIEF!"<sup>181</sup> The time was ripe for the long dreaded revolution, and Carlyle's influence pervaded Smiles's editorials. "Poverty in the mad delirium of famine; Discontent grown fierce and mad by long continued oppression; Sedition, Riot and Rebellion, with their thousand horrid allies; the Torch, the Pike, the Tinder-box; these are now left to be the arbiters of this mighty empire!"<sup>182</sup> In August his prophecies were justified by the Plug Riots, which swept into Yorkshire and provoked military intervention in the Leeds district. Refusing to be panicked into reaction, Smiles completely disagreed with the

<sup>181</sup> Leeds Times (June 25, 1842).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. (July 23, 1842).

Leeds Mercury, and denounced Baines's support of military coercion as an intensification of class warfare.<sup>183</sup> Nor would he accept the outbreaks as entirely the work of Chartist agitators.<sup>184</sup> Far from approving of military intervention,<sup>185</sup> he could not, as a Radical, be other than disturbed by the knowledge that fifteen hundred special constables had been sworn in, and he helped to promote a petition to the Town Council protesting against an increased police force.<sup>186</sup> He even commissioned engraved cartoons to satirise the special constables. "Rome was once preserved from destruction by the braying of an Ass; the Capitol was saved by the cackling of Geese; and Leeds and the West-Riding generally has just been rescued from destruction by the swearing in of Special Constables."<sup>187</sup>

More constructively, he increased his praise of Joseph Sturge, and, as soon as the disorders abated, Smiles and some of his Leeds associates, no longer willing to equivocate, resolved to have the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association transformed into a Complete Suffrage Associa-

<sup>183</sup> Leeds Times (August 27, 1842).

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. (August 20, 1842).

<sup>185</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 121 is inaccurate in this respect.

<sup>186</sup> Leeds Times (September 3, 1842).

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

tion.<sup>188</sup> The cash nexus could no longer hold society together, proclaimed Smiles,<sup>189</sup> and he hailed Sturge's attempt to establish real communication between the middle class and the working class. This change of policy was the more precipitate, because, according to the Leeds Mercury, it resulted in Hamer Stansfeld and J. G. Marshall closing the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association's newsroom in disapproval.<sup>190</sup> The Leeds Times was silent at this juncture, but perhaps the loss of the reading room and its educational activities was less of a blow than might have been expected, as the glowing reports of February 1842 had had no successors, and there is evidence which may indicate that working class support for the venture had dwindled.<sup>191</sup> It is significant that in Leicester Thomas Cooper's more colourful education schemes also came to an end during the depression of 1842, receiving as their epitaph: "What the hell do we care about reading, if we can get nought to eat?"<sup>192</sup>

Certainly in the last three months of 1842 Smiles seems to have been stimulated to support public meetings and

<sup>188</sup> Leeds Times (September 24, 1842).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. (September 17, 1842).

<sup>190</sup> Leeds Mercury (November 19, 1842).

<sup>191</sup> Vide infra, pp. 233-234.

<sup>192</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leicester" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 144.

political activity rather than reflection and instruction. At a Complete Suffrage meeting in Birmingham in April 1842 Lovett and some of the Chartists who had broken their connection with O'Connor showed their willingness to explore means of co-operating with Sturge. Smiles, who had sought in vain for their approval of the Leeds Household Suffrage movement, welcomed the breakthrough, although he was dubious about the attitude of the middle class,<sup>193</sup> and, when Sturge proposed that another conference should be held at the end of 1842 in order to produce a decisive demonstration of class solidarity, Smiles praised the undertaking.<sup>194</sup> Even more rapidly than Sturge, however, he was disillusioned by the inflexibility of the Chartists. At a Leeds meeting to elect delegates to this second major Complete Suffrage Conference, he withdrew his candidature, refusing to accept a resolution which would have obliged delegates to pledge support for the Charter and left them with no scope for independent judgment.<sup>195</sup> A compromise was impossible, and this breach between Smiles and the Leeds Chartists foreshadowed the collapse of the Complete Suffrage conference. Once again the attempt to bring the middle class and working class into one political movement had failed. Smiles's

---

<sup>193</sup> Leeds Times (April 16, 1842).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. (December 10, 1842).

<sup>195</sup> Leeds Mercury (December 24, 1842).

attitude did not change immediately, but henceforward he was to play a less active rôle in support of political reform.

The preceding account of Smiles's involvement in politics between 1839 and 1842 is at variance with the generalisation offered by Miss Lucy Brown. "At Leeds, Samuel Smiles, the editor of the Leeds Times, had originally been sympathetic to the Charter, but in 1840, frightened by the threat of violence in Leeds Chartism, he withdrew his support, and thereafter gave his support to the Anti-Corn Law Association in Leeds."<sup>196</sup> As proof of her statement Miss Brown refers to Professor Harrison's contribution to the same volume. His claim is that from the middle of 1840 "a distinct rightward trend is apparent in the policy of Smiles and the Leeds Times", involving Smiles in abandoning the principles of Chartism and adopting a temporising policy on the suffrage issue.<sup>197</sup> A number of corrections are required in the account given by these historians. At no time did Smiles consistently assign the Leeds Times wholly to the agitation against the Corn Laws. It has been shown that he assisted the birth of the Anti-Corn Law movement in Leeds, but subsequently realised the strength of the working class

---

<sup>196</sup> L. Brown, "Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 344.

<sup>197</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 83.

insistence on suffrage reform and ceased to champion the Corn Law agitation wholeheartedly. His point d'appui for working class and middle class reformers would have to come from outside the Chartist movement and the campaign against the Corn Laws.

His attitude did not change afterwards, although he continued to write and speak on behalf of Corn Law repeal, a long established Radical issue. That his ideas were not acceptable to Cobden, letters received by Smiles abundantly prove.<sup>198</sup> They show that, although Smiles occasionally worked in harness with Cobden in 1841, he and the other Leeds Radicals frequently became involved in the suffrage agitation and sought a rapprochement with the Chartists. Cobden could only regard this as a harmful distraction. The evidence shows not only that Smiles deliberately disregarded Cobden's advice but also that his autobiography is misleading in certain respects. For example, Smiles quoted a letter written by Cobden on November 6, 1841 strongly urging that a coalition with the Chartists should be avoided as "unwise and unpracticable". Smiles did not mention that in the same month he rejected this advice by calling on the Leeds Radicals to support Sturge's attempt to forge close links with the working class suffrage reformers.<sup>199</sup> Like-

---

<sup>198</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 97-119.

<sup>199</sup> Leeds Times (November 27, 1841).

wise, after the Plug Riots, Smiles did not immediately participate in the Corn Law agitation as his autobiography suggests.<sup>200</sup> His first reaction was to help in the conversion of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association into a Complete Suffrage Association, although he did speak at Anti-Corn Law demonstrations late in the year. Perhaps in later life he was more inclined to remember the episodes which had a successful outcome.

Dr. McCord's generalisation is a better statement than those in Chartist Studies. He places Smiles's activities into the context of attempts by the older school of Radicals to revive a broader programme than that offered by the League, and thereby gain the co-operation of working class reformers.<sup>201</sup> Cobden made a similar point when he referred to a distinction between "the Anti-Corn-Law Party, and rational radicals", placing Smiles in the latter category.<sup>202</sup> It would thus seem correct to say that Smiles was often the ally of "the Anti-Corn-Law Party"; he never made it "the centre of interest and agitation".<sup>203</sup>

Nor was his breach with the principles of Chartism

<sup>200</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 123. See also H. Ausubel, In Hard Times (New York, 1960), p. 212.

<sup>201</sup> McCord, pp. 78-80.

<sup>202</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 97.

<sup>203</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 84.

as complete as the contributors to Chartist Studies suggest. Smiles endorsed the accepted Leeds Times policy of Universal Suffrage when he became editor, and as a Benthamist he was probably convinced of its desirability, but in Scotland he had been accustomed to co-operating with less advanced reformers, and this remained his practice at Leeds. The constant factor in his editorial policy was the search for a point d'appui acceptable to the greatest number of reformers, and the Household Suffrage movement was supported, because it seemed to offer a compromise capable of bridging the growing gulf between the reformers of the middle and working classes. When accused of inconsistency his defence was that O'Connor had provoked a reaction, and that a price had to be paid for the support of the middle class.

Hence Chartism, based, though it be, on sound principles, has been almost irretrievably damaged by the intemperate violence of its Physical Force advocates; in consequence of which we are now driven back to the agitation of a political principle, which falls considerably short of that so successfully commenced three years ago, by the Moral Force Chartist leaders.<sup>204</sup>

The formation of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association represented a considerable advance even without Universal Suffrage, according to one Radical writer. "It numbers in its ranks some of the best Reformers in England - men whose names have become familiar beyond the bounds of their proper locality; and its principles go beyond those of any associa-

---

<sup>204</sup> Leeds Times (November 7, 1840).

tion in which the middle classes have taken an active interest."<sup>205</sup> Understandably the sacrifice of principle must have seemed a justifiable manœuvre to Smiles.

Later, when the Leeds movement failed, Smiles was prepared to abandon Household Suffrage as the point d'appui, to make it obvious that he would support any effective alternative to O'Connorite Chartism. His attitude to Chartism, in fact, was the same as that of the Complete Suffrage spokesman who pointed to O'Connor and exclaimed, "We don't object to your principles or your name; what we object to is your leaders."<sup>206</sup> Never fully developed, however, was the Leeds Times article of January 15, 1842, where it was claimed that the essential difference between the middle class and working class Chartist was that they favoured different forms of society.<sup>207</sup> Extolling co-operation with the middle class in a movement working patiently for suffrage reform was not a realistic way to answer "a cry of distress, the shout of men, women and children drowning in deep waters".<sup>208</sup> In the northern towns such people regarded

<sup>205</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (October 1840).

<sup>206</sup> A. R. Schøyen, The Chartist Challenge (London, 1958), p. 121.

<sup>207</sup> yide supra, p. 113.

<sup>208</sup> M. Hovell, The Chartist Movement (Manchester, 1918), p. 112.

themselves as the victims of the middle class industrialists with whom Smiles urged them to co-operate, and the programme of political and social revolution expounded in the speeches and writings of Bronterre O'Brien and other Chartist leaders inevitably seemed more appropriate than the Radicalism of the Leeds Times.<sup>209</sup> It was fundamental social convictions rather than political theory which divided Smiles from the working class political reformers.

For some of the Chartist leaders Smiles professed his utmost respect before and after the dividing line which Professor Harrison establishes in the middle of 1840.

The upholders of old abuses have little to fear from the Chartists of the Northern Star, but let them dread the Chartists of the school of Lovett; for assuredly these men and their successors are the men into whose hands will devolve sooner or later, the direction of the destinies of the British Empire.<sup>210</sup>

Smiles's respect for Lovett's version of Chartism established a continuity of policy between his editorship and Robert Nicoll's. Further proof of this continuity is afforded by the fact that William Rider, the Chartist who denounced Smiles as "the pigmy Doctor",<sup>211</sup> had belonged to a more extreme section of the Leeds Working Men's Association

<sup>209</sup> A. Plummer, "The Place of Bronterre O'Brien in the Working Class Movement", Economic History Review, II, (1929), pp. 61-80.

<sup>210</sup> Leeds Times (May 1, 1841).

<sup>211</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 84.

than Robert Nicoll. The breach in the Radical movement became more evident after Nicoll's death, but it is an exaggeration to claim that Smiles abandoned the principles of Chartism because of men such as Rider. Far from abandoning Universal Suffrage through fear, Smiles strengthened his existing connection with the Complete Suffrage movement after the Plug Riots.

Part of Professor Garrison's evidence for asserting that Smiles placed the Leeds Times on a new course comes from a letter written by the Leeds Short Time Committee and printed in the Northern Star of February 5, 1842.<sup>212</sup> A handbill issued at this time would seem to have expressed the same ideas as this letter. The allegations made against Smiles merit closer study. Briefly, the Committee's assertion was that Smiles had been installed in 1840 as part-proprietor of the Leeds Times by "two Factory-lords of Leeds".

The conditions which were exacted by the money-finders were, that Corn Law Repeal should be worked so as to make it take the precedence of all other measures amongst the working classes, and that the manufacturers should be defended from the complaints of those who groan and smart beneath the "monstrous tyranny" of the Factory system!<sup>213</sup>

The result, they said, was that the Leeds Times, from being

<sup>212</sup>J. F. C. Garrison, "Chartism in Leeds" in A. Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies, p. 84.

<sup>213</sup>Handbill entitled To the Working Men of Yorkshire (Leeds, n.d.).

the supporter of the Short Time Committee, became its opponent. Shrewdly, the Committee described Smiles's personal history in order to show that he could not have provided the money for the partnership himself, and, because of his association with Marshall and Stansfeld, their thesis would assume a convincing appearance. But the evidence of a bargain of the type described by the Short Time Committee is not convincing, if Marshall and Stansfeld were the factory lords. They undoubtedly were wholeheartedly in favour of the Corn Law agitation, but it has been shown that Smiles condemned Marshall's Anti-Monopoly Association in May 1841, a sign of independence,<sup>214</sup> and published his clash with Hamer Stansfeld over Universal Suffrage, an even greater sign of independence.<sup>215</sup> Smiles was the ally and even the admirer of these men, but he was not their puppet. His defence of industrialism and middle class interests was life-long and need not be regarded as the result of a financial transaction.

There is evidence to support some of the assertions of the Short Time Committee. In 1839 and 1840 Smiles had shown his compassion for the sufferers of the prevailing mass unemployment by devising his scheme of land colonies and had conceded the need to protect factory children by

<sup>214</sup> Vide supra, p. 162.

<sup>215</sup> Vide supra, p. 181.

legislation. In 1841, after the alleged agreement with the industrialists, there was a hardening of his attitude, shown by his denunciation of Ashley's attempt to gain support for a Ten Hours' Bill.<sup>216</sup> Smiles did not oppose it in principle, but he regarded the Bill as misguided at a time of great unemployment. In January 1842 he also forthrightly denounced the activities in London of a deputation of the West Riding Short Time Committee,<sup>217</sup> and one week previously he had condemned Feargus O'Connor's ideas of land re-settlement, thus strengthening the idea that he opposed relief plans.<sup>218</sup> It was against this background that the Short Time Committee issued their accusations.

Pushed on to the defensive, Smiles denied that he was in the pay of factory lords, citing the pages of the Leeds Times as evidence. "We have always advocated the shortening of the hours of labour, as well as a repeal of the obnoxious enactments of the Poor Law and devoted many long articles to the subject of Home Colonization on sound principles."<sup>219</sup> This is an unsatisfactory statement, as it fails to make clear the attitude of Smiles to legislative

<sup>216</sup> Leeds Times (August 14, 1841).

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. (January 22, 1842).

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. (January 15, 1842).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. (January 29, 1842).

control of industry. In 1839, when he had conceded the need for legislative protection of factory children, he had been uneasy at the prospect of extending the powers of government. "Provided labour has a free market, and free and equal exchanges, the meddling of legislators can result only in injury to the labouring population."<sup>220</sup> By the end of 1841 other reasons for opposing legislation were undoubtedly present in his mind. He was well aware of the commercial bankruptcies caused by the prolonged depression,<sup>221</sup> and he may sincerely have believed that higher labour costs would only extend the crisis. He was also well aware of a widespread opinion that the further development of machinery should be prevented, and, having recovered from his own pessimism in 1840, he was unwilling to give a Tory government the right to intervene in industrial affairs. It should be remembered that in their detestation of industrialism many Chartists and Tories met on common ground, whereas Smiles took his stand firmly in opposition to those who wished to "go back to spinning by distaff and ploughing by horses' tails".<sup>222</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to exaggerate his opposition to factory legislation even when the Tories returned to power. He was still prepared to concede

---

<sup>220</sup> Leeds Times (July 6, 1839).

<sup>221</sup> Vide supra, p. 169.

<sup>222</sup> Vide supra, pp. 107-108.

the need for the protection of children on humanitarian grounds, as he showed by his agreement with the legislative provisions for women and children in the Mines Report of 1842. Later he was prepared to accept Ashley's Factory Act for the same reason, although remaining resolute in his opposition to legislation for men.<sup>223</sup> The correct conclusion seems to be, not that Smiles changed his attitude in 1840, but that his basic *laissez-faire* convictions could be overcome before and after that date by concern for women and children.

Why then did the Short Time Committee denounce Smiles as a hireling? Part of the answer undoubtedly lies in his condemnation of the delegation sent to London, but a closer inspection of their statement reveals another reason which should prevent the unsupported evidence of the Committee - no sources are given - from being accepted uncritical-  
ly by the historian. They denounced Smiles, because he had "systematically traduced the character of J. B. O'Brien and of Mr. F. O'Connor". He was also condemned for helping to set up the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, the "Fox and Goose Club", in opposition to the Chartist movement.<sup>224</sup> This was the language of the Northern Star, and the state-  
ments of the Leeds Short Time Committee may be mere Chartist

---

<sup>223</sup> Vide supra, pp. 91-92.

<sup>224</sup> To the Working Men of Yorkshire.

propaganda. If the attack on Smiles had weakened his standing with the working class, the Northern Star would have destroyed a rival voice in local working class politics, and there was good reason for such an attack at the beginning of 1842. The Leeds Unemployed Operatives' Enumeration Committee was still in existence, and Smiles had had a great part to play in its activities. It was also in February 1842 that he was boasting of the success of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association's reading room. At no time was Smiles a greater threat to the Leeds Chartists, and at no time was his rôle as a propagandist of industrialism and middle class ideals more evident. It is also interesting to observe that he was under fire from sections of the Leeds middle class at the same time, because his friendship with the Enumeration Committee had led him to condemn the Poor Law authorities of Leeds and to call for the exertion of popular pressure on them.<sup>225</sup> A clearer indication that he had a foot in both camps could scarcely be desired. Seeking to reconcile both classes at a time of intense class hostility, he was denounced by the most extreme members of each. The form of Radicalism which Smiles was expounding no longer accorded with the class consciousness of the age.

Nonetheless, when all flaws in the Leeds Short Time

---

<sup>225</sup> Leeds Times (January 22, 1842).

Committee's evidence are recalled, it must be admitted that one fascinating question had been raised. Smiles's father had died leaving only debts, and Smiles himself had not been able to set up a flourishing medical practice in Haddington.<sup>226</sup> After his journey in Holland he came to Leeds - presumably with little money - accepted a small salary as editor of the Leeds Times, and within two years became part-proprietor. How did he achieve this? Only the Short Time Committee has provided an answer.

---

<sup>226</sup>Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 44, 61.

VI

THE EMERGENCE OF SELF-HELP (1843-45)

At the end of 1842 Smiles relinquished his part-proprietorship of the Leeds Times and resumed practice as a doctor. The demands on his time consequently became greater and more diverse. Looking back on the year 1843, he saw it as his "heaviest year of work", because in addition to his medical practice he revived his aspirations as an author by writing guide books and a book on Irish history.<sup>1</sup> In his autobiography, however, Smiles later exaggerated the extent of the change which took place in his life at this time. His retention of the editorship of the Leeds Times,<sup>2</sup> and his New Year's message for 1844, in which he referred to the burden of carrying out the duties of editor unaided,<sup>3</sup> show that the Leeds Times remained his responsibility if no longer his property.

Between 1842 and 1846 Smiles diversified his interests to such an extent that his involvement in politics

---

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, pp. 126-129.

<sup>2</sup> Williams's Directory of the Borough of Leeds (Leeds, 1845).

<sup>3</sup> Leeds Times (January 6, 1844).

diminished, but it would be wrong to believe that politics suddenly ceased to interest him. Some parts of his creed he was modifying, it is true - his republicanism is perhaps the best example<sup>4</sup> - but to the end of his time as editor Smiles remained a Radical in his sympathies.

The grand problem of civilization is how to secure its advantages without suffering and misery to the helpless classes - how to extend the benefits of good government to all - to the poor man, who has nothing but his labour, as well as to the rich man, who has estates, mills, or realised wealth of various other kinds. . . . We look upon Democracy as the grand lever by which this country is to be raised - we regard a measure of popular enfranchisement as the true healing measure for all - a measure which would sweeten the breath of society, and give fair play to the energies of all the industrious and hard-working.<sup>5</sup>

In 1843 this zeal for the cause of Radicalism was shown by his support of two movements demanding extensive constitutional change - the Complete Suffrage movement and the Irish Repeal movement.

Living in an industrial city, Smiles was surrounded by many proofs of the progress of the age, and he continued to be appalled by the failure of the constitution to keep pace with the economic and social developments of the nineteenth century. Unlike the physical sciences, the science of government seemed to have stood still. "We are still using the old lumbering, stick-in-the-mud state-waggon of

<sup>4</sup> Vide supra, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Leeds Times (January 4, 1845).

pushing for  
constitutional  
and political  
reform.

hundreds of years ago; the nation is still the sport of parties and factions, and the great body of the industrious classes are still a prey to the selfish, the prejudiced, and the unprincipled Few.<sup>6</sup> Reinforcing this impatience of old-fashioned modes of government was an awareness of the revolutionary situation created by the long-continued economic depression. Smiles only admitted the abatement of the distress in July 1843,<sup>7</sup> and during the previous months he detected examples of class hostility which might herald the outbreak of further disorder. Therefore, despite his public quarrel with the Chartists on the eve of the Complete Suffrage meeting in December 1842, Smiles continued to be one of the leading members of the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association, delivering lectures and even acting as chairman at one of their meetings.<sup>8</sup> His hopes of immediate constitutional reform were not high, and his strongly urged advice was that the policy of holding large meetings should be abandoned in favour of a reading room programme similar to that devised by the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association in 1841.<sup>9</sup> He retained his connection with the Anti-Corn Law League in 1843 too, on at least one occasion appearing on the same

<sup>6</sup> Leeds Times (April 8, 1843).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. (July 1, 1843).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. (March 25, 1843).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (January 7, 1843).

platform as Cobden and Bright,<sup>10</sup> but he was consistent in his refusal to align himself wholeheartedly with their attitude.

The Anti-Corn-Law question is a secondary matter, compared with the Suffrage. Electoral Reform comprehends all other Reforms - Corn-Law repeal included. But Corn-Law repeal includes nothing but itself: though it were carried tomorrow, the gross evils of misgovernment would still continue: the power of re-inflicting the evils of the Corn Laws in some other form would still remain in the hands of the aristocracy, and the agitation against their abuse of power would fall to be re-commenced anew [sic].<sup>11</sup>

Even on the local scale favoured by Smiles the cause of Complete Suffrage made little progress in 1843. The Leeds committee, of which he was a member, was not inactive - it took rooms, held lectures and promoted a soiree attended by Sturge, Crawford, Vincent and Collins<sup>12</sup> - but its efforts were in vain. Smiles sought the reason, and, conscious of the part played by the seventeenth century Dissenters in the struggle for liberty, he lamented the failure of the Dissenters of his own day to support Sturge, who was thus deprived of essential middle class support in a town such as Leeds.<sup>13</sup> This belief in a political movement supported by middle class Nonconformists is a greater tribute

<sup>10</sup> Leeds Times (December 16, 1843).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (April 22, 1843).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (October 21, 1843).

to Smiles's passion for the history of the seventeenth century than to his assessment of class consciousness in the nineteenth. In Leeds that stalwart champion of the Nonconformist conscience and scourge of the Owenites, the Rev. J. E. Giles, did become a prominent supporter of Complete Suffrage,<sup>14</sup> but Smiles should have known that this was not likely to make the Leeds branch acceptable to class-conscious proletarians.<sup>15</sup> The return to prosperity in 1843 also did not aid the cause of political reform, and at the end of that year the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association could report little progress at their annual meeting.<sup>16</sup> Their numbers were not increasing rapidly enough, and, their funds being inadequate, they had been unable to carry out their intention of arousing public interest. A small number of tracts had been issued, but the intention of opening a reading room had been abandoned. By May 1844 the Complete Suffrage movement was moribund.<sup>17</sup> Without knowing it, Smiles had at the end of 1843 written the obituary of his political activities in the town.

Leeds is usually a dull, spiritless and inert town. It is awanting in social as well as political activity and

<sup>14</sup> Leeds Times (March 25, 1843).

<sup>15</sup> Vide supra, pp. 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> Leeds Times (November 25, 1843).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (May 25, 1844).

energy. It is an inert mass, always difficult to be moved. It wants the enthusiasm of Manchester, the enterprize of Glasgow, the volatile gaiety of Liverpool, the intense feeling of Birmingham, and the power of London. . . . Neither the middle, nor the working class ever allow themselves to be "carried off their feet" by enthusiasm. Thus Anti-Corn-Lawism has never obtained any strong hold on the minds of the middle classes of Leeds, nor has Chartism ever led to the same vagaries among the working classes of this town that it has done in other places.<sup>18</sup>

This was written at a time when Leeds at last showed some signs of supporting the Anti-Corn Law League, but such a prospect soon vanished, leaving only the criticism. Henceforward Smiles was seldom prominently involved in local politics.

Although Leeds showed few signs of political progress while he was associated with the Complete Suffrage movement, Smiles had derived some comfort from the activities of the powerful movement led by Daniel O'Connell, whom he regarded as the natural ally of the English Radicals. Smiles's belief in the bonds uniting the Irish and Radical causes in 1843 was shown above all by his History of Ireland and the Irish People under the Government of England, which sheds as much light on Radicalism as on Irish history. The monarchs of the past, church establishments, the Glorious Revolution, protectionism, State controlled education, and standing armies were fitted into a predetermined ideological pattern by Smiles, and a rising tide of liberalism was

---

<sup>18</sup> Leeds Times (December 16, 1843).

followed through the centuries. The culmination of this was the career of Daniel O'Connell. Not hesitating to draw lessons freely from his narrative, Smiles saw his History as an essential tool for a reforming administrator.

If History be regarded as it ought to be, as the grand store-house of Experience of the human race, - not as a mere record of tyranny and slaughter, but a general accumulation of experiments, successful and unsuccessful, all tending towards the solution of the grand problem - how mankind can be governed so as to secure for the mass the largest possible amount of happiness and liberty, - then a careful perusal of the history of Ireland cannot fail to teach a most impressive and instructive lesson.<sup>19</sup>

This lesson was that reform must be conceded if civil war was to be avoided. In the hands of Samuel Smiles Irish history thus became both material for a text-book of applied Radicalism and the means of giving the faltering Radicals an issue on which to gain powerful support in challenging the governing classes.

In the course of 1843 Smiles expressed these opinions in the columns of the Leeds Times to such an extent that the Leeds Mercury accused its rival of being "almost the only English journal" to advocate repeal for Ireland.<sup>20</sup> Smiles reasoned that the Irish movement provided the best hope of achieving a Radical breakthrough, as O'Connell was the only reformer of the previous decade who had retained

<sup>19</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland and the Irish People under the Government of England (Dublin, 1844), p. ix.

<sup>20</sup> Leeds Mercury (September 23, 1843).

his power and prestige. It was thus as a Radical that Smiles advocated Irish self-government, and in the middle of 1843 he wrote a series of articles calling on his fellow Radicals to support O'Connell, who had demanded an Irish Parliament elected by an approximation to Universal Suffrage. "We believe," he claimed, "that Ireland, is the ground on which the great struggle between the Aristocracy and the People of Britain is to be determined."<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century the demand for Irish self-government put British liberalism to its most severe test, and his editorial policy serves to illustrate how advanced Smiles was at this time. No less than the Liberals of the second half of the century, however, he found himself in a dilemma on this issue. His respect for public opinion and his knowledge of Irish suffering obliged him to sympathise with Irish demands for self-government; his belief in the brotherhood of man and his respect for supra-national co-operation prevented him from being a wholehearted supporter of Irish nationalism. A study of Smiles's attitude to the Irish problem thus sheds light on an interesting aspect of British liberalism in the first half of the nineteenth century and provides an example of enlightened British opinion on the eve of the great Irish famine.

---

<sup>21</sup> Leeds Times (August 5, 12, 19, 26, 1843).

In his History of Ireland Smiles clearly stated his reasons for devoting considerable attention to the affairs of that nation.<sup>22</sup> The Irish were plunged in the deepest degradation, and they blamed the political and social régime controlling the destinies of their island. A state of disorder was thus endemic, and he warned his readers that coercion had never produced the solution for Ireland's problems in the past. Unless new methods were devised in keeping with the enlightened ideas of the age, the Irish, a third of the British population, would merely continue to overflow into England herself, extending their wretchedness wherever they went. A climate of opinion conducive to the redress of Irish grievances had to emerge if disaster was to be averted, but the necessary information relating to the historical roots of Ireland's problems could not easily be obtained, because there was no single book describing Irish history. A great national problem was shrouded in ignorance, and Smiles, typical of the era, took upon himself the task of diffusing the required useful knowledge.

The knowledge that Ireland was part of the "Condition of England" problem was not his only reason for demanding the redress of Irish grievances. Smiles studied the Irish problem in the context of European liberalism, because

---

<sup>22</sup>Smiles, History of Ireland, Preface.

he was convinced that as long as Ireland was ruled by coercion a charge of hypocrisy would be levelled against Britain whenever she sought to conduct a liberal foreign policy in sympathy with subject nationalities on the European mainland. "Russia answers, 'Before you vituperate the wrongs of Poland, redress the worse wrongs of Ireland!'. . . Everywhere is it the same. When we denounce foreign wrong, and urge its redress, the answer of the despot is always ready, 'Begin at home! Look to Ireland!'"<sup>23</sup> Although only the editor of a provincial newspaper, Smiles obviously regarded himself as being in the mainstream of European liberalism.

But it was in his History of Ireland that he wrote his paean in honour of international union and cosmopolitanism, declaring moreover that the Act of Union was not undesirable per se.<sup>24</sup> Thus, although Smiles was prepared in August 1843 to call for the complete separation of Ireland rather than accept the continuance of misgovernment,<sup>25</sup> his position was less clearly defined than the Leeds Mercury's editorial would indicate. The opinion of a reviewer in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine was not unjust. "Dr. Smiles is not altogether a Repealer, we imagine; yet he should be one,

<sup>23</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, p. ii.

<sup>24</sup> Vide supra, pp. 101-102.

<sup>25</sup> Leeds Times (August 5, 1843).

for he believes that the Union has been of little or no advantage to the mass of the Irish people. . . . His history ought, at all events, to please the Irishry."<sup>26</sup>

This reluctance of Smiles to support the repealers despite his wish for an alliance with them had been evident even during his early days as an editor. One of the paradoxes of nineteenth century liberalism was its demand for both national self-determination and international unity. According to one thesis which influenced Smiles, it would be a reactionary step for Ireland to break away from the rest of Britain when good liberal government might be obtained for the whole country. Sentimental nationalism, of course, was alien to a way of thinking influenced by Benthamism. There was also a personal reason for Smiles favouring the unity of the British Isles. As a Scot he came from a nation which had freely accepted the idea of union with the English and subsequently seemed to have been rewarded by an accelerated rate of economic growth.<sup>27</sup> The Irish, he believed, were capable of following the same path as the Scots. Thus even in his first two years as editor Smiles called on the Irish to unite with other reformers for a revision of the constitution which would bring in good government for all.

---

<sup>26</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (June, 1844), p. 402.

<sup>27</sup> Leeds Times (September 10, 1842).

parts of Britain.<sup>28</sup> In such conditions industry would rise in Ireland, and the great problem of unemployment would be diminished.<sup>29</sup> This expectation that, in conditions of free trade, industry would rise in Ireland during the steam era is a greater tribute to his faith in industry than to his earliest assessment of Ireland's difficulties.

Between 1839 and 1844 the problem that presented itself to Smiles was how to reconcile the demands of Irish public opinion with his belief in international unity. As far back as 1839 he seemed to have found the ideal policy. Echoing Sharman Crawford, he announced a solution of the problem which might be acceptable to reformers on both sides of the Irish Sea. This was the policy which would later be called "Home Rule All Round", and it was an obvious adaptation of admired American principles to British conditions. Explaining the theory to his readers, Smiles praised Crawford's statement that

local legislation may be so incorporated with imperial legislation, as to secure the true interests of Ireland, while it would be equally applicable to other portions of the United Kingdom. The inefficiency of the imperial parliament to legislate for the mass of local bills which come before it, has long been too apparent.<sup>30</sup>

In 1843, despite his praise of O'Connell and the

<sup>28</sup> Leeds Times (September 5, 1840).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. (June 13, 1840).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (October 26, 1839).

indications which he gave of agreeing with the Liberator's demands, Smiles again showed an obvious preference for Crawford's interpretation of self-government, and in the course of 1843 and 1844 he wrote several articles in favour of a federal structure of government for the British Isles. Federalism was praised as an excellent antidote for the centralised government which Smiles had frequently condemned, because liberty seemed more likely to be protected, if as much power as possible was devolved to elected regional administrations. "The favourite dogma of Whig and Tory politicians of the present day, is Centralization of Power - the true democratic idea is Distribution of Power, as the only sure guarantee for the preservation of the public liberties."<sup>31</sup>

Peel's firmness late in 1843 and the growing disunity of the Irish reformers destroyed Smiles's hopes that the Irish movement might achieve a breakthrough which could be exploited by the Radicals, and in 1844 Smiles gradually devoted less attention to the issue of Irish self-government, shifting his emphasis to the land problem which he claimed was more important than parliamentary institutions. What was required, he affirmed, was an agrarian policy designed to establish the Irish as free-holders.<sup>32</sup> This was a sign

<sup>31</sup> Leeds Times (December 2, 1843).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. (February 24, 1844).

that his attitude to the Irish problem was more realistic than it had been earlier, when he had thought that industrialism was the best answer. During the evolution of his Irish policy-making Smiles had succeeded only in illustrating the extreme complexity of the Irish problem even for advanced British liberals, and he had raised many of the issues which would again return to confront liberal consciences during Gladstone's administrations.

The disillusionment with political activities which can be detected in Smiles's writings after the failure of the Complete Suffrage and Irish movements was no sudden development. It had been growing since 1842 when all the evidence showed that the Radical movement which had developed during his youth was a declining force in national politics. "Besides, we confess it with shame, there is at present no Radical party in England worthy of being united with. The 'Imperial Chartist', hallooed on by their savage organ, the Northern Star, have effectually damaged Radicalism for a long time to come."<sup>33</sup> Place had been ignored when he said the same in 1840,<sup>34</sup> but since then the lack of success attending the activities of Smiles and other Radicals had proved the validity of this assessment. At the end of 1844 Smiles conceded the defeat of the movement. "Radicalism, as

---

<sup>33</sup> Leeds Times (July 29, 1843).

<sup>34</sup> Vide supra, p. 159.

once understood, has also died out. . . . The Economic part of the old Radical creed has been absorbed by the League, the democratic part by the Charter.<sup>35</sup> The work of reunion to which he had dedicated himself in 1839 had failed, and the "Two Nations" remained divided in their political aspirations.

In the second half of 1843 when Smiles's involvement in politics seemed increasingly fruitless, the depression at last lifted. For the remaining two years of his editorship he was presented with a totally different situation to that which he had analysed in 1839. The Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartist movement did not vanish, but their agitation assumed different forms and commanded less attention. Popular politics became less prominent than at any time since 1837. In this situation the Leeds Times did not cease to support established Radical theories, but Smiles recognised that the return to full employment had killed political activity in the town population.

*Bust + boom of economy.*

While their mouths are stuffed with pudding, as at present, and their hands are employed early and late, Opinion remains at a dead stand still; and in all probability, it will only be set a-going again, by the recurrence of another of those periods of national calamity and distress, with which unfortunately, we have been but too familiar during these last thirty years.<sup>36</sup> That they will recur again, there can be little doubt.

<sup>35</sup> Leeds Times (November 16, 1844),

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. (October 5, 1844).

To accord with the new situation Smiles embarked on courses of action between 1842 and 1845 which differed in certain respects from those of his earlier years as an editor and public figure in Leeds. The change, however, was one of emphasis and method rather than a basic change of aspiration. He remained a Radical who found much to condemn in the society of the day, despite the improvement of the conditions investigated by the Operatives' Enumeration Committee in 1841, but he recognised that it was the duty of the reformer to keep pace with changing conditions and to take heed of movements of public opinion. Thus in May 1844 Smiles conceded that free trade and Complete Suffrage were not causes likely to achieve success, and he turned to an issue which was exciting more attention. He called for a shortening of the hours of labour.<sup>37</sup>

Well aware of the working of the trade cycle, Smiles knew that the years of mass unemployment were being succeeded only by a time of excessive labour. Although he had clashed with the Leeds Short Time Committee in 1842, he had never been in favour of seeing the working class abandoned to the extremes of the trade cycle, and even in his first book he had deplored the "mere ginhorse round of labour and fatigue" which constituted so large a part of the existence

---

<sup>37</sup> Leeds Times (May 25, 1844).

of parents and children in industrial areas.<sup>38</sup> Smiles did not discuss the political remedy for this in his book, but his early editorials upheld the right of the State to intervene on behalf of factory children.<sup>39</sup> The revival of commercial and industrial prosperity meant that Smiles could not repeat his fears of 1841 and 1842 that shorter hours would entail mass bankruptcy, and in 1844 he gave his support to the Factory Bill which was introduced by Ashley. In The Constitution of Man, which had influenced Smiles in Scotland, George Combe had pointed to the physical and moral degradation inherent in a life of excessive labour and had stated his belief that the proper use of machinery would set the working class free to improve their conditions.<sup>40</sup> In 1844 Smiles advanced similar reasons for opposing long hours and ended by denouncing the impersonal arguments derived from Political Economy by the opponents of the 1844 Factory Bill. "The laissez-faire policy has had its time. Pressing evils demand prompt remedies."<sup>41</sup> The principle had been established, he believed, that the State should protect

<sup>38</sup> Smiles, Physical Education or, the Nurture and Management of Children, Founded on a Study of Their Nature and Constitution (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> Vide supra, pp. 193-196.

<sup>40</sup> G. Combe, The Constitution of Man (Edinburgh, 1828), pp. 226-228.

<sup>41</sup> Leeds Times (March 30, 1844).

women and children engaged in industry, although men could be left free to negotiate their own terms of service.<sup>42</sup> He still expressed misgivings lest State regulation might harm certain industries, and he continued to emphasise the need for free trade to prevent this from happening.<sup>43</sup>

Although Smiles still betrayed some uneasiness at the prospect of State regulation of labour, he had no hesitation in welcoming and fostering the trend towards the voluntary restriction of hours. In 1844 examples occurred of employers granting a weekly half-holiday to their employees, and Smiles frequently commended their action as worthy of emulation. A committee would seem to have been directing the half-holiday campaign in Leeds, and their activities received the encouragement and aid of the Leeds Times as they acknowledged in a letter expressing their gratitude.<sup>44</sup>

The end of the depression and the possibility of extending the leisure-time of the working classes encouraged Smiles to proclaim his belief that they should strive for their own improvement. Now that an income was assured to most of the population, Smiles, for the first time since his arrival in Leeds, could envisage an immediately successful attempt to improve the quality of working class life by

<sup>42</sup> Leeds Times (April 20. 1844).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. (April 6, 1844).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. (June 15, 1844).

means of well-directed leisure activities. The situation, in fact, must have borne some resemblance to that which he had known in Scotland when he was associated with Brown, Murray and Combe.<sup>45</sup> Smiles had not forgotten his Scottish experience, and many of his activities after 1842 fit into a similar pattern culminating in his exposition of the self-help message.

Although his famous lecture to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society in 1845 is normally regarded as the genesis of Self-Help,<sup>46</sup> Smiles showed an awareness of the theme in some of his earliest writings in Leeds. As a youth he had been deeply interested in Craik's Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties,<sup>47</sup> and during his days in Scotland he had witnessed the attempt to stimulate the popular quest for education. He remained loyal to this mission when he began his career as editor of the Leeds Times.

The desire of bettering one's condition - of rising in the scale of society, is one of the noblest springs of improvement. This desire is founded on intelligence, and it is invariably found that the working man who really does elevate himself above his primary condition, has owed it, besides industry and honesty, to knowledge and information. Now what individuals have done singly we conceive they may as easily do collectively. . . . It yet remains for the working classes to take the matter

<sup>45</sup> Vide supra, pp. 19-47.

<sup>46</sup> A. Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 129.

<sup>47</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 222.

into their own hands, and did they but set about it with good spirit and with energy, we doubt not of the most happy and beneficial results. They must bring their power of combination to bear upon the matter.<sup>48</sup>

Thus at a time when Feargus O'Connor was leading the working class in a protest against industrial society Smiles started to explain how to adjust to that society and secure the means of improvement.

It has been claimed that the Great Exhibition set the tone of the age in which Samuel Smiles saw his Self-Help and other major works become best-sellers,<sup>49</sup> but it should be remembered that the Great Exhibition was preceded by smaller exhibitions which stimulated considerable interest and comment. One of these exhibitions was organised by the Leeds Mechanics' Institute soon after Smiles became editor, and it represents a milestone on his road to fame as the industrial biographer and author of Self-Help. In a speech which Smiles delivered during the exhibition he publicly hailed the great inventors as working men who had triumphed in life.

promote & invention, invention etc.  
(Courtier's Maxx)

And, he would ask, who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing about all this? Had it not been working-men and mechanics - from James Watt, who first set the steam-power in operation, to the commonest artificer, who fabricates a valve or moulds a piston. Such men as Watt, Compton, Smeaton, and Arkwright, and all our mechanics were the true pioneers of national civilisation and intelligence. . . . Was it not a fact that it was from the

<sup>48</sup> Leeds Times (February 2, 1839).

<sup>49</sup> Briggs, Victorian People, p. 22.

ranks of mechanics and labouring men that art and genius often recruited itself?<sup>50</sup>

Exhibitions like the one held at Leeds, he believed, could enable many more of the working class to follow the example of such men.

Why, then, did Smiles not develop the self-help theme immediately? The economic depression provides the answer. Social distress became so acute that he ceased to propagate the ideas of his 1839 speech during the two years which followed, and he recognised that to call on the working class to improve themselves would be a mockery during a time of mass unemployment. By the end of 1839 he was even denouncing the type of education which Thomas Murray, for example, had been providing.<sup>51</sup>

There is at present in existence a numerous school of educators, who conceive that all the sufferings of the working classes are to be referred to their ignorance of certain principles in political economy; and with the view of dispelling such an ignorance, they have set about publishing a series of cheap works on the subject, which they have named "Useful Knowledge". They teach mechanics how to save money - how to husband and increase their resources - how to live comfortably and frugally upon their earnings. All this was right and proper in its way; and highly benevolent on the part of those who undertook the task of instructing the industrious classes. But they proceeded on a most erroneous supposition; familiarly speaking they put the cart before the horse. These teachers of useful knowledge proceeded upon the supposition that the classes to which they addressed themselves had anything to save over and

<sup>50</sup> Leeds Times (August 3, 1839).

<sup>51</sup> Vide supra, pp. 28-34.

above their animal necessities.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, although at the end of 1839 he did call on his youthful readers to make a study of great models and to carry out a mission in life guided by "self-power and SELF-DEPENDENCE",<sup>53</sup> the reforms he campaigned for were the extension of the suffrage and the repeal of the Corn Laws - the means of obtaining necessary reforms likely to improve the material conditions of the people.

Surprisingly, however, he revived the theme of self-improvement in 1842 while extensive suffering still prevailed. Trans-Atlantic literary influences would seem to have caused his change of attitude. In the more favourable conditions of America the message of self-help was being preached by a group of reformers inspired by Unitarian and transcendental influences. Smiles soon became aware of this, because shortly after he became editor of the Leeds Times he reviewed a book by W. E. Channing entitled Self-Culture. Smiles praised Channing's sentiments as the worthy aspirations of a rapidly progressing society in America, but he would not at first agree that they could succeed in Britain while social distress prevailed.

The mental part of our nature is built up on the physical; and to secure that attention to self-culture which

<sup>52</sup> Leeds Times (October 5, 1839).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. (December 7, 1839).

alone can lead to the full development of the rational being, the body must be fed, it must have comfort, and be allowed sufficient rest and relaxation from the occupations of mere bodily labour and exertion.<sup>54</sup>

Although he at first conceded the force of the objections to Channing's theories, subsequent experience and thought brought Smiles increasingly under Channing's influence. Despite the social ravages of the economic depression, the reading room programme of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association involved Smiles actively in the work of adult education during 1841 and 1842, and it would seem that Hamer Stansfeld corresponded with Channing about their plans. Significantly Smiles added a letter from Channing to the report which he delivered before the Bradford United Reform Club in 1842.<sup>55</sup> In this letter Channing praised Lovett and Collins for realising that "the laborious classes must rise from brutal intemperance and ignorance if they would cease to be treated as brutes". Indicative of his agreement, Smiles, in addition to his educational activities, was soon to be found praising the work of the temperance movement as a sign of "the progress of man towards sobriety, temperance, self-control, and self-emancipation".<sup>56</sup> This was not a

<sup>54</sup> Leeds Times (March 23, 1839).

<sup>55</sup> S. Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes (Leeds, 1842), p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Leeds Times (May 28, 1842).

demonstration of puritanism on the part of Smiles - he had too often condemned the religious cant of the age - it was an understandable preliminary to social reform in a town where it had been calculated that there was one inn or beer house for every 180 of the population.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of 1842 Smiles had obviously devoted considerable attention to the writings of Channing and his disciples, because in a long article he declared that their teachings were of fundamental importance to those who were seeking to find a remedy for the social malaise of the era. Society, it seemed to Smiles, was being torn apart by a selfish spirit of competition in which the poor were left to their own devices, but he detected a reason for hope in the emergence of a philosophy capable of combatting the prevailing worship of "Pelf". "Thus we have Carlyle and his co-labourers in this country, and Channing, Orville Dewey, and Emerson in America."<sup>58</sup> In particular, Smiles praised Emerson's essay on "Man the Reformer" as it seemed to contain the kernel of truth which should inspire a truly reformed society. Emerson, who shared the same liberal beliefs and the same basic distrust of government as Smiles, had reached

<sup>57</sup> R. Baker, "Report upon the Condition of the Town of Leeds and of its Inhabitants, by a Statistical Committee of the Leeds Town Council, October 1839", Journal of the Statistical Society of London, II (1839), p. 414.

<sup>58</sup> Leeds Times (October 15, 1842).

a clearly defined attitude to reform. "No perfection of organized authority, it was clear, but the perfection of individuals was the supreme end in view.) Government, politics could at best be only incidental aids.<sup>59</sup> "Can we not learn the lesson of self-help?", Emerson asked in his essays,<sup>60</sup> and quoting these words Smiles defined the ideas which he would one day transform into a "Gospel of Work" inseparably associated with his own name.<sup>61</sup>

Smiles in  
Emerson

He teaches the nobility of manhood, the dignity of labour, the honourableness of industry, economy, and the domestic virtues. . . . Emerson contends that all men owe a duty to society - that all men should work as well as eat - that it is imperative on all men to labour in order to enjoy in peace and satisfaction. . . . He urges the duty of economy, of carefulness, of thrift.<sup>62</sup>

The praise which Smiles bestowed on Emerson and Channing showed more than his respect for the idealism expressed in their writings; it was a token of his very deep admiration of the United States. This admiration was not uncommon, but it was controversial.

The issue was democracy. To the radicals America was either the land of promise or, more judiciously, the test of their ideals. Many middle-class radicals particularly had fault to find, with slavery, the tariff,

<sup>59</sup> R. L. Rusk, The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson (New York, 1949), p. 304.

<sup>60</sup> R. W. Emerson, "Man the Reformer", The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (London, 1913), III, 460.

<sup>61</sup> Briggs, Victorian People, p. 124.

<sup>62</sup> Leeds Times (October 15, 1842).

or American manners, yet they kept high hopes, admired American institutions (or lack of them), and hoped to copy those they liked in Britain.<sup>63</sup>

Praise of the United States was a recurrent theme in the columns of the Leeds Times while Smiles was editor, and two weeks after his discussion of Emerson's ideas he wrote a long article in defence of "America and its Democratic Institutions". In this article he hailed "the foremost country on the earth" as an example of self-help at work.

See how, in less than a century, they have cut an empire out of the old primeval forests. . . and built up a nation, ranking with the mightiest in the world, - whose flag is in every water, riding in the fearlessness of its own self-achieved greatness, and whose intelligent and enterprising sons are on every soil, gathering in its fruits by the power of their own intellect and enterprize.<sup>64</sup>

Nine months later the first draft of his Self-Help appeared, encouraged by indications that despite the long years of suffering there were still some members of the British working class who were aspiring to be educated. In July 1843 Smiles was reported as addressing the Holbeck and New Wortley Youths' Guardian Society on "the duty of self-reliance, self-respect, and perseverance in the attainment of knowledge, on the part of the young, illustrating his subject with numerous anecdotes from the biographies of

<sup>63</sup>R. K. Webb, Harriet Martineau, A Radical Victorian (London, 1960), p. 134.

<sup>64</sup>Leeds Times (October 29, 1842).

distinguished men."<sup>65</sup> He had thus produced a synthesis of his 1839 Leeds Exhibition speech and the teachings of Emerson. Thereafter in conditions of improving prosperity accompanied by pressure for shorter hours the theme was not allowed to lapse, and in November 1843 under the heading of SELF-MADE MEN appeared a list of important people in history and their original condition in life.<sup>66</sup> In 1844 and 1845 the theory was elaborated further in a number of articles and in his address to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society.<sup>67</sup>

Samuel Smiles never regarded the theory of self-help merely as a series of pious injunctions; it always had practical applications. As one who had been influenced in youth by Craik's Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties and in adult life by Channing's Self-Culture he inevitably regarded education as an important means of self-help. It is necessary, however, to define what he meant by education, because Smiles, like many of his contemporaries, reacted strongly against the forms of education which prevailed in nineteenth century schools. His first definition was given in Physical Education,<sup>68</sup> where he deplored what seemed to be an excess-

<sup>65</sup> Leeds Times (July 15, 1843).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. (November 11, 1843).

<sup>67</sup> Vide infra, pp. 236-238.

<sup>68</sup> Smiles, Physical Education, pp. 166-170.

sive concentration on book-learning. He wanted to see education regarded as a means of stimulating the interest of the student in preparation for an active life. Children, he believed, should receive as much out-of-door teaching as possible, supplemented by drawing and journal writing. His attitude did not change subsequently; an education devoid of student interest and participation was always unacceptable to Samuel Smiles.

This opposition on the part of Smiles to the inculcation of inert ideas contributed to his suspicion of any education system controlled by the State. He was not opposed to a system of public education, but he was resolute in his opposition to any form of education which could become a means of indoctrination controlled by a despotic government.<sup>69</sup> Few themes were voiced more consistently in the columns of the Leeds Times while he was editor, and it was the realisation that a system of education free from governmental or ecclesiastical control was unlikely to be established for a considerable time that encouraged him in his insistence on self-culture. In the months before the self-help lecture which he gave to the Holbeck and New Wortley Youths' Guardian Society Smiles had been mounting a fierce editorial attack against Graham's Education Bill, which promised the Church of England a privileged position

---

<sup>69</sup> Vide supra, pp. 92-93.

in a proposed national system of education.

Let it not be supposed for a moment that we are opposed to Secular Education, to Religious Education, or to a National Education, because we resist this bill of the Tory government. We would have an education for all; but not such an education as a Tory government based on corruption would give us.<sup>70</sup>

This political consideration made Smiles an advocate of the voluntary provision of education, and thus even during the years of distress he sought to stimulate the working class to a zeal for their own education. But, before he could extol working class self-help as an educational technique, he had first to abandon the idea that the education of the working class should be controlled by the middle class. He did not do this quickly, and, although he issued an early appeal on behalf of working class combination for educational purposes,<sup>71</sup> it required further experience of adult education to convince him finally that middle class patronage was unacceptable to the majority of the working class. This experience he gained as a result of his interest in the Mechanics Institute movement and the educational work of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association. The self-help addresses to the Youths' Guardian Society of Holbeck and New Wortley and the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society were the fruits of his subsequent reflection at a

---

<sup>70</sup> Leeds Times (April 15, 1843).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. (February 2, 1839).

time when he was strongly influenced by Channing, Emerson and their disciples.

It might have been expected that Smiles would loyally support the Leeds Mechanics' Institute as a result of his activities in Haddington, where he had given lectures in the School of Arts, but this was not the case. Smiles did not believe that the Mechanics' Institutes had found the secret of popular education, and in one of his first editorials he expressed his conviction that with four or five exceptions they were "either extinct or dragging out a painful and melancholy existence". The Mechanics' Institutes, he added, had been "formed on too narrow a basis" and had never won the support of the working class.<sup>72</sup> Harsh though these criticisms were there can be no doubt that he was expressing a widely held opinion.

When the Mechanics' Institutes had come into existence in the eighteen-twenties they were strongly influenced by the lively interest in science shown by all classes during that decade, and the teaching emphasis was almost exclusively scientific. It was subsequently realised, however, that mentally exacting science courses were beyond the abilities and interests of working men whose hours were long and whose elementary education was often deficient.<sup>73</sup> The

<sup>72</sup> Leeds Times (February 2, 1839).

<sup>73</sup> Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (August, 1838), pp. 524-525.

well-attended Chemistry and Physiology lectures conducted during 1833 by Smiles would seem to have been exceptional by that date, and the reason for his success was probably that universal literacy had been achieved in Haddington, enabling large audiences to profit from the lectures. When he went to Leeds, however, Smiles entered a different environment in which the deficiency of elementary education was as obvious as the failure of the Mechanics' Institute to win support for its science lectures.

Controlled by the middle class and entirely dedicated to science at its foundation, the Leeds Mechanics' Institute possessed little attraction for the working class while Smiles was editor of the Leeds Times.<sup>74</sup> An attempt had been made to extend the scope of its activities, but Smiles in his article of February 1839 obviously considered that too little flexibility had been shown in offering education to the working class, and, although he was an enthusiastic supporter of the exhibition of industry and art which the Mechanics' Institute organised in 1839,<sup>75</sup> he found little to praise subsequently. What he wished to see in the adult education movement was shown by the warm welcome which he offered to an attempt made in 1839 by some Leeds educa-

<sup>74</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (London, 1961), p. 69.

<sup>75</sup>Vide supra, pp. 218-219.

tionists to depart from the Mechanics' Institute precedent.

We are also happy to state that, as a most valuable auxiliary in the improvement and instruction of the working classes, the aid of AMUSEMENT is to be called in. This we consider, indeed, as indispensable to the success of the scheme, in attracting the people to the pursuit of elegant and rational enjoyment, instead of their resorting to the more degrading and sensual stimulants.<sup>76</sup>

No less enlightened in his approach to adult education than in his earlier theory of elementary education, Smiles had realistically assessed the nature of the working class environment in Leeds and wished to see the provision of education adapted to it. His search for a suitable form of adult education continued.

In his 1842 report to the Bradford United Reform Club he discussed at length the characteristics which would have to be possessed by an adult education movement seeking to win working class support.<sup>77</sup> The Mechanics' Institutes, he believed, exemplified a mistaken assessment of the age which had produced the first national working class movement. Their main defect was that science lectures were offered to the working class instead of the subjects which interested them, especially politics; newspapers were usually forbidden, although newspaper reading was one of the characteristics of the age according to Smiles; amusements, including music,

<sup>76</sup> Leeds Times (October 12, 1839).

<sup>77</sup> Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, passim.

were also forbidden; and the middle class patronage lavished on the Mechanics' Institutes alienated independent working men. The result was that the Mechanics' Institutes had failed to achieve their objects.

In Leeds, containing a population of about 150000 inhabitants, the average number of members during the last 10 years has not been more than 250; of whom less than one-half have belonged to the working classes. At present, it is in contemplation to unite the Literary and Mechanics' Institutions; and when this is accomplished, the Leeds Mechanics' Institute may then be considered as a society of persons belonging to the middle class.<sup>78</sup>

The first major effort made by Smiles to participate in the education of the Leeds working class was a conscious attempt to profit from the mistakes of the Mechanics' Institutes with the help of ideas derived from the experience and ideas of William Lovett, the educated working man par excellence. Smiles helped to establish the reading room programme of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association as a bridge between politics and education.<sup>79</sup> The reading room was established primarily for political reasons, but Smiles also regarded it as an educational venture capable of adoption on a national scale.

We regard this project as capable of general extension. This local movement may be only the first ripple of the tide, which shall overspread the general face of society. While the Whigs talk of the necessity of education, and do nothing to advance it, why should not the people

<sup>78</sup> Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> Vide supra, pp. 166-169.

seize upon the means of educating themselves? Instead of a governmental system of education, why should not the people work out for themselves a system of national education?<sup>80</sup>

An additional advantage of such a system of local voluntary societies was that it would prevent an unrepresentative government from securing its ascendancy by means of a State-controlled education with "the power of directing public opinion".<sup>81</sup>

In his speech at Bradford in February 1842 Smiles asserted that political education societies had the best opportunity of holding the interest of the working class in the prevailing climate of opinion.<sup>82</sup> From the premise that the British people were giving their attention to social and political matters he urged on his listeners the need to set aside the example of the Mechanics' Institutes and make such matters an integral part of education. A number of benefits would result. Citing Lovett, Collins and Vincent as working men whose education had developed with their involvement in politics, Smiles claimed that the study of politics would interest the working class sufficiently to give them the incentive to overcome their defective elementary education. Let them satisfy their interest in politics and at the same

<sup>80</sup> Leeds Times (September 11, 1841).

<sup>81</sup> Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., passim.

time improve their education by reading newspapers, "the great agent of political education, the chief bulwark of liberty, and the most active pioneer of public intelligence". The additional benefits of such an education were that the working class would see clearly to what extent their poor conditions were attributable to misgovernment, and, aided by a sound political education in accordance with middle class Radicalism, they would work for the improvement and strengthening of the social and political fabric. Already he could detect "a better and kindlier feeling" arising between the middle class and working class supporters of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association. By means of indoctrination he sought to confirm this tendency. Smiles was thus participating in an attempt to fashion the working class in the middle class image. Much of his subsequent life was spent in the same cause, and his association with the political education programme of 1841-1842 forms an interesting episode in his career.

The experience of 1842 would seem to have convinced Smiles that public interest in political reading rooms was less than he expected. In 1844 the Irish repealers devised a scheme of reading rooms for their supporters, and Smiles warned them of his experience in Leeds, which, he claimed, showed that the zeal of members would cool and subscriptions

fall.<sup>83</sup> It is likely that he was referring to the reading room of the Parliamentary Reform Association. Surprisingly, however, it was in 1842 that Smiles became a member of the Leeds Mechanics' Institute. This did not represent any change in his attitude, because his sole reason for joining was that the Leeds Literary Institution, of which he had been a member since 1839, amalgamated with the Mechanics' Institute, making him a member of the joint body. The Leeds Literary Institution drew its support from the lower middle class,<sup>84</sup> and the amalgamation merely strengthened his conviction that the Mechanics' Institutes were unlikely to succeed in winning working class support.

When he had first come to Leeds he had probably been impressed by the desire of the Literary Institution to give its members educational leisure pursuits of a broad nature which enabled him to speak on general subjects in which he was interested. Reports in the Leeds Times show that he became an active member, delivering lectures on the Penny Post, the rôle of woman, rational amusement, Natural History, female education, the human voice, locomotion, the character of Mirabeau, and the humour of England, Scotland, Ireland and America. This form of adult education presents a dilettante appearance to the modern eye, but Smiles had

<sup>83</sup> Leeds Times (August 24, 1844).

<sup>84</sup> Harrison, Learning and Living, pp. 68-69.

always been a person of wide interests, and his lectures undoubtedly helped to develop that ability of expressing himself well on a wide variety of subjects which enabled him to write the best-sellers of his mature years. There was no change in his activities after the amalgamation with the Mechanics' Institute, and he lectured on Dickens, Mesmerism, and the Seventeenth Century Commonwealth. Although he became a member of the committee in January 1845,<sup>85</sup> his assessment of the Mechanics' Institutes had not altered. "In very few cases, indeed, are they really and truly the Institutes of Mechanics, but of the middle and higher classes. In almost all the Institutions, the mechanics will be found in a minority; and those mechanics who do enter, are all of the higher class, best-paid description."<sup>86</sup> The most recent historical research has upheld this conclusion.<sup>87</sup>

By the end of 1842 his association with the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and the Leeds Mechanics' Institute had made Smiles aware of the failure of the middle class to win working class support for their educational ventures. The self-culture extolled by Channing and Emerson

<sup>85</sup> Leeds Times (January 25, 1845).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., (October 26, 1844).

<sup>87</sup> M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851 (Manchester, 1957), p. 258; T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool, 1962), p. 128.

finally gained the support of Smiles, a conversion which was confirmed by the events of 1843 and 1844. Prosperity increased, political activity subsided, and the voluntary education movement gained ground in the industrial districts. In these circumstances the Youths' Guardian Societies of Yorkshire provided an example of working class voluntary education which met with the full approval of Smiles.<sup>88</sup> Even in 1839 he had shown an interest in their activities,<sup>89</sup> but it was in 1843 and 1844 that he began to extol their virtues, and it was partly to help their work that he supported the attempt to shorten the hours of labour.<sup>90</sup> The Youths' Guardian Societies impressed Smiles by their example of co-operation in a self-help venture. There were several of these societies near Leeds, and, discussing a report prepared by one of them, he emphasised that it was "a society conducted exclusively by working men".<sup>91</sup> Smiles was a guest of the Holbeck and New Wortley Youths' Guardian Society when the annual report was read at the Zion School in 1843. According to this report the society had been established nine years previously for the education of the young men and

<sup>88</sup> Harrison, Learning and Living, p. 52.

<sup>89</sup> Leeds Times (May 25, 1839).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. (September 14, 1844).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

women employed in the neighbouring mills. In the following years considerable support had been won for an educational programme making use of libraries, lectures and Sabbath schools.<sup>92</sup> It was after he had seconded the adoption of this report that Smiles delivered the first of the lectures which led to the publication of Self-Help.<sup>93</sup>

When Smiles looked back on his experience of voluntary education in Leeds, it was not the Youths' Guardian Societies that came to mind, interested though he had been in their work. He expressed his admiration for the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society, which was less well-organised but seemed to exemplify even more the determination of the working class to be educated at all costs. This was the society which he described in Self-Help<sup>94</sup> and in his autobiography.<sup>95</sup> Typical of many others which were coming into existence at this time, this society started when four young men met in February 1844 to further their elementary education without any assistance. Their numbers increased throughout that year, and, progressing from a cottage room to an old garden house, they eventually hired a former cholera hospital as accommodation for their members. In

<sup>92</sup> Leeds Times (July 15, 1843).

<sup>93</sup> vide supra, pp. 224-225.

<sup>94</sup> S. Smiles, Self-Help (London, 1859), Introd., p. iv.

<sup>95</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 131.

1844 Smiles was well aware of the existence of such societies, and he called on the young men of every district to form their own "Mutual Instruction Clubs". "You need but the will. WILL that you shall be educated, and it shall be so, provided you apply yourself, and persevere. You have an hour, perhaps two or three hours a day, to spare; apply them in this noble work of self-education."<sup>96</sup> The first sign of a connection between Smiles and the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society appeared in January 1845, when he published a letter from the Committee under the title "Self-Education - An Example for All".<sup>97</sup> Probably as a result of this sign of approval he was invited to address the Society at its first anniversary meeting in March. Smiles considered his speech sufficiently important to have it printed by Frederick Hobson, and, revised in an enlarged form, it subsequently became Self-Help. Quoting Channing and Craik as well as biographical examples in support of self-culture, Smiles urged the members of this and other societies to seek education not only to improve their material conditions but to raise the quality of working class life. Their mission, he claimed, was to extend liberty itself to the working class.

The main use of instruction in schools, and in a society such as this, is to enable men to become their own

<sup>96</sup> Leeds Times (September 28, 1844).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. (January 4, 1845).

teachers, and to instigate them to activity in the acquisition of truth. It is to give them the means of working out their own development. They are helped to help themselves.<sup>98</sup>

It must not be imagined that by calling for education by self-help Smiles was patronisingly abandoning the working class to its own devices. If there was a call for help, he was prepared to participate actively in educational ventures. For example, the Holbeck and New Wortley Youths' Guardian Society was associated with the non-sectarian Zion Sabbath School where Smiles taught during and perhaps before 1845. He was enthusiastic in carrying out his voluntary duties, and he would seem to have enjoyed considerable success in teaching the young men who became his pupils. In Haddington he had been a resourceful lecturer,<sup>99</sup> and his pedagogic zeal did not desert him in Leeds, according to one of his pupils.

He was a most excellent teacher, and gave us some very interesting lessons on Comparative Anatomy, Natural History of beasts, birds, fishes and insects; he also occasionally gave us lectures in the class on Geography and its kindred subjects. He was always full of anecdote, and illustrated his biblical lessons in such a plain, homely manner, that made his teachings instructive, interesting and also amusing.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> S. Smiles, The Education of the Working Classes (Leeds, 1845).

<sup>99</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 52.

<sup>100</sup> B. A. Kilburne, Annals of Zion Schools, New Wortley (University of Leeds Library Manuscript).

Smiles believed that a similar attempt might be made to attract the services of educated men as lecturers in adult education institutions, and he praised the example given by the Sheffield People's College, which had been founded in 1842. This college would seem to have given a better education than the Mechanics' Institutes, because it sought "to establish more co-ordinated studies and to take a more personal view of its students".<sup>101</sup> In 1844, it was proposed that a People's College should be started in association with the Leeds Mechanics' Institute, and Smiles welcomed this as an attempt to profit from the previous mistakes of the Institutes.<sup>102</sup> Political Radicalism had foundered, but the Radical ideal of educating the working class seemed more attainable than ever before.

Even during the economic depression Smiles had shown an awareness that the principle of working class self-help was capable of extension to more than education. Doubtless influenced by his association with the Leeds Friendly Societies, he transformed his previous occasional references into a fully-developed theory of co-operative economic advancement after the problem of mass-unemployment receded in 1843. But, sincere though he may have been in his wish for working class social improvement, Smiles was no less mindful

---

<sup>101</sup> Tylecote, p. 74.

<sup>102</sup> Leeds Times (October 26, 1844).

of middle class interests than he had been during his political activities in Leeds, because the desirability of devising a theory of co-operative self-help for the guidance of the working class was increased by his detestation of strikes, a form of working class co-operation which flouted Political Economy and harmed the interests of the middle class. Smiles was too firm an adherent of the laws of supply and demand to remain neutral in this matter. From 1839 to 1841 he had given little attention to the problem of strikes, because the depression did not facilitate the formation of trade unions, but the Plug Plot of 1842 forced him to devote more attention to this form of working class protest, and his opposition was unequivocal. "Strikes can have little or no control over wages, except to give a stimulus to the invention of machinery, and thus in the end dispense with men's labour. The case is very rare indeed, in which wages have been kept up by a strike."<sup>103</sup>

After 1843 the revival of the staple industries and the development of the railway boom created an increasing demand for labour which enabled the working class to resort more freely to the use of the strike weapon. Smiles devoted considerable care to the exposition of alternatives which they might be prepared to accept. Firm in his belief that

---

<sup>103</sup> Leeds Times (September 24, 1842).

the interests of the working class and the middle class were complementary, he praised a French experiment in setting up boards of masters and men for the settlement of industrial disputes. This example could be followed in Britain, he claimed.<sup>104</sup> More emphasis, however, was given to his call for the use of co-operation as a means of enabling the working class to invest in their own social improvement. In 1839-40 he had proposed that the experience of the Rappites and Shakers should be adapted for use in his scheme of land colonies,<sup>105</sup> but his intention in 1844 and 1845 was to give the working class a stake in industry and in town amenities instead of seeking to return them to the land. It is possible that he may have owed something to Fourier, whose theories were favourably received in a book-review at the end of 1842. Expressing his conviction that even a well-constituted government would not banish all forms of social distress, Smiles praised Fourier's co-operative system as a means of improving society.

It is to all intents and purposes a Joint Stock Association for the extension of individual property and the production of a common well-being. . . . All men are becoming convinced that while the science of producing wealth has reached almost its ultimatum, the science of distributing wealth, so as to produce the largest amount of happiness in the community, is yet in its infancy.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Leeds Times (February 15, March 29, 1845).

<sup>105</sup> Vide supra, p. 131.

<sup>106</sup> Leeds Times (November 19, 1842).

Smiles had called for the study of social economy in almost the same words in 1840.<sup>107</sup> His book-review suggests that Fourier helped to convince him that co-operation would achieve the ends he desired, and in 1843 it would seem that the Leeds Times became associated with an attempt to propagate Fourier's ideas.<sup>108</sup>

By the middle of 1844, a year of many strikes, Smiles was offering a programme similar in some respects to that contained in Thrift. Commenting on the failure of a colliers' strike in August of that year, he urged the working class to abandon their reliance on strikes, and he anticipated their response.

What ought the labourers to do, then, to be FREE? They ought to strive to become capitalists. Their endeavour should be to save and to economise when it is in their power; and to endeavour to lay by the means of subsistence in time of adversity or old age;

Not for to hide it in a hedge,  
Nor for a train attendant;  
But for the glorious privilege  
Of being independent.<sup>109</sup>

The similarity of this to a section of the lectures of his former editor, Thomas Murray, is so striking that Smiles may have been referring to one of the fifty printed copies when

<sup>107</sup> Vide supra, p. 90; Leeds Times (April 25, 1840).

<sup>108</sup> Leeds Times (September 23, 1843).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. (August 24, 1844).

he wrote this editorial.<sup>110</sup> Murray's attempts to show his working class audiences how to adapt themselves to a capitalist society would have seemed more acceptable than they did in the years of the depression.

Leeds conditions in the mid-forties encouraged Smiles to give a much wider interpretation to this theory than Murray had envisaged. Professor Harrison has described the diffusion of Robert Owen's ideas which helped to produce a multitude of societies offering the working class the means of improving their own conditions. From this environment came James Hole's theory of associationism.<sup>111</sup> Smiles was certainly impressed by a number of the schemes devised by working class societies for the provision not only of education but also of public baths, pleasure grounds and other amenities. Praising the "self-respect" indicated by such schemes, he urged their acceptance as the best form of working class co-operation.

Let the working-men try the full powers of co-operation - they have never yet done so unless in strikes, in which within a few years past, they are said to have spent three millions of pounds sterling. Let them try the same principle in works of public utility, in mutual helpfulness and co-operation, and what noble and enduring triumphs over the evils incidental to their position

<sup>110</sup> T. Murray, Summary of Lectures on Political Economy (Edinburgh, 1837), p. 15.

<sup>111</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, "Social Reform in Victorian Leeds. The Work of James Hole, 1820-1895", Thoresby Society Monographs III (1954), passim.

may they not achieve?<sup>112</sup>

Having spent the years since 1839 voicing a political creed which was rejected by the working class, Smiles could feel that his words did not go unheeded in 1844, because he was subsequently able to report considerable progress in "co-operation in Temperance, in Education, in Mutual Assurance, and lastly in the accumulation of Capital and the production of wealth".<sup>113</sup> The extent to which his ideas had taken the form usually associated with the name of Samuel Smiles was shown by what must have been one of his last editorials. In "Hints to the Working Man" he stated what with minor verbal changes would become the kernel of the introduction to

### Thrift.

Every working man should strive to elevate himself in his social position, and become independent. With this view, every working man in times of prosperity and good wages, should strive to save something, and accumulate a fund in case of bad times - in short, should endeavour to become a Capitalist.<sup>114</sup>

The "Gospel of Work" had emerged.

<sup>112</sup> Leeds Times (September 14, 1844).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. (July 5, 1845).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. (October 25, 1845).

## VII

### CONCLUSION

At the end of 1845 Smiles embarked on his career as a railway administrator and ceased to play an active part in political journalism. This change in his personal fortunes coincided with the beginning of an era when the nation was making the transition to the stability of the mid-nineteenth century after experiencing three decades of social and political malaise. The new railways symbolised and in part caused the change which occurred at this time; almost in step with the advance of the "Railway Mania" during the eighteen-forties unemployment diminished and interest in popular politics subsided. Significantly, during the months of political stagnation which preceded Smiles's acceptance of railway employment the Leeds Times contained more and more columns of railway advertisements. The circumstances which had brought him to Leeds as a Radical editor were changing, and Smiles was shrewd in seizing the means of changing with them.

It is thus in the context of the "great drama" of "the thirty years from Waterloo"<sup>1</sup> that the editorial career

---

<sup>1</sup>G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age (London, 1960), p. 42.

of Samuel Smiles must be assessed. The old economic, social and political structure had been breaking down in Britain during his youth, and when Smiles came of age a climate of opinion was forming in which the middle class Radicals could believe that by means of political reform Britain was about to complete her breakthrough into an era of limitless progress.

Who does not remember the period of the Reform Bill, when the Tory Party was laid utterly prostrate, and their power seemed for ever at an end. Then glorious visions of political emancipation, and social deliverance, and freedom of industry, and general enlightenment, and equal justice to each and to all, floated before the eyes of the people.

The Whigs of 1832 could not fulfil such expectations, but this statement shows that their campaign for the Reform Bill had established in the mind of Smiles a close connection between political reform and national progress. This conviction was reinforced by the influence of Philosophical Radicalism, and Smiles made journalism his career prompted by the desire of completing the work of 1832. Aware that the Reform Bill had been preceded by a vigorous campaign relying on education, journalism and political pressure, he believed that the same means could be used to secure the fulness of Radical reform.

The lack of success which attended his political

---

<sup>2</sup> Leeds Times (August 26, 1843).

endeavours in Leeds may be attributed to his acceptance of this inheritance from earlier middle class Radicals. It was the misfortune of Smiles that the decade after 1832 failed to provide the circumstances in which the middle class Radical creed could be fulfilled by political agitation, and he arrived in Leeds as the spokesman for a movement which had already lost most of its vigour. The rising tide of class consciousness accounted for this. Before the Reform Bill it had been generally assumed that working class reformers would be prepared to support a mass movement led by upper class Radicals and Liberal Whigs, but this assumption did not long survive the advent of the Whigs to office. Industrialism and ideas of political democracy, the two most potent agents of change in that era, interacted violently to produce an unprecedented awareness of class conflict, and Disraeli's "Two Nations" drew apart. The middle class Radicals lost much of the working class support on which their influence had been based. As editor of the Leeds Times Smiles consciously made it his aim to reverse this trend and revive the broadly based movement which had hastened the "March of Mind" in the eighteen-twenties.

Although Smiles derived his concept of a mass movement from the recent past, when theories of class warfare were less prominent in working class movements, he did not simply ignore these theories, but on the contrary sought to adapt them to his own purposes. Repeatedly he informed his

readers that there were "Two Nations" and that a class struggle should be waged. Unlike Disraeli, Smiles saw the aristocracy and the "industrious classes" as the "Two Nations", and, fortified by the teachings of Political Economy, he emphasised that the middle class and the working class could satisfy their complementary aspirations, if they united to overthrow the aristocratic ascendancy. All that was required was a point d'appui and both classes could advance towards the political, social and economic Millenium envisaged in 1832. Between 1839 and 1843, by means of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association he attempted to gain support for this interpretation of the class struggle.

If the form of Radicalism to which Smiles subscribed had represented the interests of both classes equally, these movements might have received more popular support than they did, but Smiles himself was influenced by middle class consciousness, and the political philosophy which he propagated differed in essentials from that of the working class Radicals. An indication of what Radicalism meant to Smiles at the commencement of his political activities in Leeds is provided by his first book, in which he gave a clear statement of his attitude to progress and tradition.

The present system of management of the young, though considerably improved with the growing intelligence of late years, is still radically bad. It is conducted on no rational principle, but after mere custom and fashion;

and though it has been proved again and again by reason and from experience, that certain practices are bad, and ought therefore to be abandoned, yet they are adhered to with all the native inveteracy of prejudice in favour of what is old, and the clearest principles of organized nature continue to be most deliberately neglected and set at defiance.<sup>3</sup>

The important words in this statement are "rational principle", "mere custom and fashion", and "organized nature", because the use which he made of these words places Smiles in the company of those who drew on the ideas of the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment to condemn the inheritance from the past. His subsequent writings in Leeds show that the study of History reinforced these ideas by teaching him that progress was inevitable, and that it was the task of the reformer to remove obstacles in its path. Government had little to contribute, because, if society was released from the civil and ecclesiastical régime inherited from previous ages, progress would take place automatically. For Smiles Radicalism was the creed of progress, and he accepted in essentials the exposition offered by Bentham and the Classical Economists.

The working class, however, was less convinced than Smiles that they were living in an age of progress, and, like many in the Tory Party, they looked for guidance to

<sup>3</sup>S. Smiles, Physical Education; or, The Nurture and Management of Children, Founded on a Study of Their Nature and Constitution (Edinburgh, 1838), p. 8.

that "wisdom of our ancestors" which Smiles called on them to cast aside. The best proof of this basic opposition of ideas is afforded by the handbill which was circulated in Leeds denouncing Smiles.<sup>4</sup> There the Leeds Short Time Committee fully expressed their fear of mechanical advances and claimed that the working class was "loudly calling out for measures of regulation and restraint". They also wrote strongly in favour of the paternalism of the Elizabethan Poor Law and called for the acceptance of "the principle that LABOUR NEEDS PROTECTION".<sup>5</sup> Between this backward looking attitude on the part of the working class and Smiles's professed optimism concerning the future of an industrial society there was a gulf which could not be bridged at a time of instability and social distress. The columns of the Leeds Times show that Smiles realised the strength of this current of working class opinion, but that his attempts to give it expression in his editorial policy on factory legislation and land reform involved him in contradictions, misgivings, and evasions. Working class consciousness had produced a form of Radicalism to which Smiles could not subscribe.

Like his Radical predecessors of the eighteen-

---

<sup>4</sup> Vide supra, pp. 192-193.

<sup>5</sup> Handbill entitled To the Working Men of Yorkshire.

twenties and eighteen-thirties Smiles sought to gain an ascendancy over the working class by means of education. The careers of Charles Knight, James Mill, Henry Brougham, Harriet Martineau and Thomas Murray show that popular education had been turned into a class weapon, by means of which working class consciousness could be made to accord with the ideology of the middle class, and Smiles followed their example in his address to the Bradford United Reform Club. When it was published in 1842 this address was introduced by a quotation attributed to James Mill, and the rest of the address, although this was not acknowledged, was in the line of descent from Brougham's Practical Observations upon the Education of the Working Class. Thus, although Smiles sincerely believed in extending education for the sake of the working class, the political studies which he helped to devise as an educational technique were also a form of indoctrination. In his Bradford address he stated that the study of ideas derived from Smith, Bentham, Mill and their disciples was to constitute not only "one of the best means of social and political advancement" but also "one of the best means of social and political strength and security". The British people must be brought to realise that political reforms could not do everything for them. "While we knock the fetters from their limbs, we must teach them also how to enjoy and improve their liberty. We must give them the

means of forming their own judgment, reason and character.<sup>6</sup> This helps to explain why Smiles's claim to be the advocate of the working class was brushed aside and the accusation - whether true or not - hurled against him that he had taken "Free Traders' Gold" as payment for duping the working class.<sup>7</sup> His own public utterances showed that he accepted a propagandist rôle, and, as Cobden claimed, the basic aspirations, if not the tactics, of Smiles were similar to those of the Anti-Corn Law League.<sup>8</sup> Far from being an example of class collaboration on a basis of equality, the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, of which Smiles was the spokesman, was a middle class movement financed by J. G. Marshall, Hamer Stansfeld and their middle class associates.

Despite the support which he obtained from these men Smiles surprisingly enjoyed little success in arousing the Leeds middle class to support his political cause. The laws of the "science" of Political Economy taught that the bourgeois and proletarian components of "the industrious classes" were bound together inseparably, and that the two irreconcilable "Nations" were the industrious classes and the aristocracy, but experience showed that this was incorrect.

<sup>6</sup> S., Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes (Leeds, 1842), pp. 5-8.

<sup>7</sup> To the Working Men of Yorkshire.

<sup>8</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 97.

Although Smiles voiced the aspirations of the middle class, they refused to join him in the attempt to co-operate with the working class in a movement for political reform. According to his own analysis of the situation this doomed him to failure, because he believed that, if a powerful movement was to be initiated, it was at least necessary for the middle class to concede a sufficient measure of electoral reform to satisfy a large section of the working class.

There were several reasons for the failure of the middle class to accept the form of mass movement advocated by Smiles and other Radicals. The 1832 Reform Act and subsequent Whig legislation satisfied some sections of the middle class, and even those sections which remained dissatisfied did not need to accept the dangerous policy of allying with working class political reformers. By 1840 the Parliamentary Radicals were being swept aside by a new generation of middle class leaders, who devised the agitation against the Corn Laws as the safest means of weakening the aristocratic ascendancy. Cobden and Bright were Radicals, and they sought working class support, but they made no pretence of admitting the working class to a share in conducting the affairs of the Anti-Corn Law League. Moreover, by calling for the reform of economic policy alone, they removed the danger of giving political power to the working class, many of whose leaders were propagating anti-industrial

concepts. Smiles had little chance of winning the support of the British middle class for a more hazardous policy of political reform, even when he was prepared to press for less than universal suffrage. The account of his career from 1839-43 shows that their relationship with the League was often strained, but that influential members of the Leeds middle class who associated with Smiles were unable to withstand the temptation of agitating for an essentially middle class programme, although this would diminish their chance of winning working class support. The election campaign of 1841, when Smiles failed to keep political reform as the highest priority, is a good example of this tendency.

Although for a time Marshall, Stansfeld and certain other members of the Leeds middle class were prepared to co-operate with the working class in the hope of establishing the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association as the kernel of a national movement for political reforms, the support which Smiles received from them served only to illustrate the fundamental lack of trust shown by the Leeds middle class in the working class. These men had been disturbed by the overt expression of class hostility in the industrial districts and wished to have a moderate statement of Radicalism promulgated to supersede both Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League. Marshall, Stansfeld and their associates had distinguished and would distinguish themselves by their efforts to bridge the gulf between the middle class and working

class, but they were not democrats. When Smiles and other Leeds Radicals declared for Complete Suffrage, Stansfeld frankly opposed them on the grounds that this reform, if successfully implemented, would transfer the political ascendancy to the working class. Behind a façade of statements about the complementary interests of the industrious classes, Stansfeld obviously believed in the class struggle, and would not concede any reform which could harm middle class interests.

The climate of religious opinion in Leeds was also not conducive to middle class co-operation with Smiles in the task of political reform. This must have come as a great disappointment to Smiles, who was a keen student of the seventeenth century and believed that Dissent was firmly associated with civic liberty. "Every Dissenting congregation is, in fact, a little republic, self-governed, self-protecting, and self-supporting. Every member is alike interested in the welfare of the body, and accordingly every member is alike invested with the full privileges of membership."<sup>9</sup> Strongly influenced though they were by Dissent, Smiles and some of his associates derived their form of Radicalism mainly from the secular rationalism of Bentham, and he was obliged to clash with the Leeds Dissenters when

---

<sup>9</sup> Leeds Times (October 29, 1842).

their religious zeal outran their concern for liberty. As he admitted, this cost him valuable support. Enclosed in narrow sectarianism and sternly puritanical in their insistence on sabbatarianism, such men fell far short of the standards of liberalism which Smiles extolled, and he had well-justified doubts concerning his ability to carry the "less informed Methodists and Dissenters" with him.<sup>10</sup> Methodism, it should be remembered, was the greatest religious influence in Leeds, and the involvement of its adherents in Radical politics was officially discountenanced, although this ruling was not always observed. By 1843 Smiles had come to the inevitable conclusion: the Nonconformists of his day were not inclined to struggle for civil and religious liberty unlike Milton, Vane and the seventeenth century Independents.

And it is now high time that Dissenters were doing something to vindicate themselves from the charge of luke-warmness with which they have so often been found chargeable since the passing of the Reform Bill. The impression indeed has got abroad, and now generally prevails, that as regards political and social movements of all kinds, Dissenters<sup>11</sup> are exceedingly backward, apathetic and indifferent.

Championing Nonconformity, "warts and all", the Leeds Mercury, not the Leeds Times, spoke for such people.

<sup>10</sup> Leeds City Library, Archives Department, 33/A/IV/8a & b, S. Smiles to J. A. Roebuck, December 23, 1840.

<sup>11</sup> Leeds Times (October 21, 1843).

Smiles was thus never able to create at Leeds that union of reformers which would have presaged a vigorous movement for a second Reform Bill. His connection with the Unemployed Operatives briefly seemed to show that the gulf between the classes could be bridged, but at a time when working class and middle class aspirations were drawing apart it became harder to maintain a foot in both camps, and he found himself attacked by spokesmen of both classes. The history of the Household Suffrage movement and the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association shows that the Chartist movement was the most significant factor in popular politics. Fearful of Feargus O'Connor, the middle class recoiled from political Radicalism, whereas, even to those working class Chartists willing to engage in amicable debate with Smiles, the Charter remained "that only safe conductor of the lightning storm". The time had passed when a middle class Radical could write political articles which "went off like a great gun, echoing all over the country".<sup>12</sup> A political impasse had been reached even before the return of prosperity killed all prospect of successful political endeavour.

Denied success in his attempts to revive the fortunes of political Radicalism, Smiles dedicated himself to different means of furthering the progress of the nation

---

<sup>12</sup> E. Barrington de Fonblanque, ed., The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque (London, 1874), p. 38.

during his last three years as editor. It was at this time that his earlier thoughts on the theme of self-help began to take their mature form, and he urged the working class to seek improvement by means of education societies and co-operative ventures. This change, it should be emphasised, was one of means, not of ends, and it is important to recognise certain differences between self-help in 1845 and self-help in 1859. By the latter year the message of self-help had acquired a conservative character well illustrated by Smiles's call for personal reform rather than political reform<sup>13</sup> and by his praise of the British nobility because it had been recruited in great part from "the ranks of honourable industry".<sup>14</sup> Obviously this was not the editorial policy of the Leeds Times while Smiles was a leading member of the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and the Complete Suffrage Association. In his 1842 Bradford address he clearly stated that "however serviceable personal reforms may be, still political affairs ought to claim a portion of every man's attention".<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1845, despite his earlier lack of success, Smiles was still very much the political Radical and that many of the refer-

---

<sup>13</sup>S. Smiles, Self-Help (London, 1958), pp. 35-36.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>15</sup>Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, p. 13.

ences which he made then had to be omitted in 1859. His 1845 address to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society in fact represents a transitional stage between his 1842 address to the Bradford United Reform Club and the Self-Help of 1859.

It will be remembered that in 1842 Smiles attempted to make political education the kernel of a plan for the progress of the nation and the enlightenment of the working class. By 1845 Smiles had lost his faith in political education societies and realised that the apathy of the time rendered any immediate prospect of constitutional reform impossible, but he continued to see a close connection between education and the involvement of the working class in political reform. The members of the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society were left in no doubt about this when he delivered his famous address. "It is alleged that education would give them aspirations to rise above their present position, and might endanger institutions now established among us, and held to be 'glorious'. Welcome to all such aspirations!"<sup>16</sup> Nor was his hostility to the aristocracy muted in his 1845 address as it was to be in Self-Help. "I regard the dignity of the labourer as higher by far than that of the titled idler; and the grimed fustian of the one more honourable and ennobling [sic] than the glittering star

---

<sup>16</sup>S. Smiles, The Education of the Working Classes (Leeds, 1845).

and garter of the other."<sup>17</sup> It would thus be wrong to regard Smiles's advocacy of self-help in 1845 as an attempt to turn the working class away from politics, and there can be no doubt that Professor Briggs is correct in claiming that "the creed of self-help grew out of radicalism and was not designed as an antidote to it".<sup>18</sup> The same idea was expressed more forcefully in a letter to Smiles where William Howitt praised his activities on behalf of self-help education, because they afforded a good protection against "tyranny, Toryism, priesthood".<sup>19</sup> Only in the stable conditions of 1859 did such themes recede.

Relegated to the background by the desire for political reform, the self-help theme had been implicit from the beginning in the Radical dogmas which Smiles expounded as editor of the Leeds Times. The Political Economists and Bentham had made Radicalism the creed of individual liberty, and, schooled by the history of the eighteenth century, Radicals could reasonably believe that as means of social improvement the voluntary activities of individuals and groups were preferable to legislation by unrepresentative politicians whose interests were served by corruption,

<sup>17</sup> Smiles, The Education of the Working Classes.

<sup>18</sup> A. Briggs, Victorian People (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Leeds Times (October 12, 1844).

inefficiency and discriminatory legislation. Even in the eighteen-forties proofs of positive misgovernment were not hard to find, and shortly before Smiles delivered his praise of voluntary education before the Holbeck and New Wortley Youths' Guardian Society the religious bias in Graham's education bill had occasioned widespread protest. According to Radicals such as Smiles only the United States of America possessed a system of government worthy of admiration, and even there prosperity and self-help seemed to be closely associated. His Radicalism, it is true, taught Smiles that at local government level an educational system could safely be instituted even in Britain, because such a system could be "under the control of the people, and not of the Government - under the management of districts and parishes, if you will, but not of a centralized power - free and open to all, and not exclusive and sectarian, whether as regards teachers or taught."<sup>20</sup> Graham's scheme seemed to show that this was not likely to be achieved for some time, and Smiles had to resort to self-help education as a substitute. The selfish interests of the middle class did not alone create Smiles's concept of self-help; in the circumstances of the day voluntary activities appeared to be the most certain means of real improvement.

---

<sup>20</sup>Smiles, The Education of the Working Classes.

The evidence suggests that the elaboration of a policy of social reform based on self-help enabled Smiles to resolve a conflict of ideas in his own mind. Soon after his arrival in Leeds he had openly doubted the desirability of allowing society to be dominated by blind economic forces. He was too much the man of his class to give up the basic middle class attitudes of the day, but his writings show that he had been deeply disturbed by the condition of the working class in Leeds, and that in his unwillingness to accept unbridled laissez-faire he had shown considerable respect for Thomas Carlyle's call for a philosophy which would admit social reform. Partly because of this indecision vacillation became one of the characteristics of Smiles's editorials on social problems before 1843. His attitude to factory legislation is an example. His plight was not exceptional. "The basic techniques of modern industrial production had been largely worked out, and accepted; but the creation of satisfactory human relations in the resulting urban-industrial society was a problem which still baffled the most thoughtful men of the time."<sup>21</sup> The warm welcome which Smiles accorded to Emerson's writings is thus understandable. A philosophy of social improvement was at last being expounded which took heed of Carlyle's opinions

---

<sup>21</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, A History of the Working Men's College 1854-1954 (London, 1954), p. 4.

but did not violate the teachings of the economists. The union of the "dismal science" with idealism had been achieved.

At least as important as these literary influences was the Leeds environment in which Smiles devised his theory of self-help, and it would be no exaggeration to claim that he was only recognising a fait accompli when he delivered his addresses and wrote his articles between 1843 and 1845. The working class had emphatically shown that it would no longer accept the patronage of the other classes, and had resorted to the Chartist movement as an independent means of seeking improvement. As Smiles knew, there had been many attempts by representatives of other classes to forge an alliance with the working class, and little success had been recorded. The Mechanics' Institutes and the Anti-Corn Law League had offered middle class leadership, and the Tories had offered Operative Conservatism, but the working class had given significant support only to the class-conscious Chartist leaders. Smiles himself had failed to have the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and the Leeds Complete Suffrage Association accepted as instruments of equal co-operation between the classes, with the result that by 1843 he was in the interesting position of having unsuccessfully offered the working class his co-operation for all political reforms short of O'Connorite Chaptism. The

working classes obviously would not accept the leadership of the other classes in any movement. Further proof of the independence of even the well-disposed members of the Leeds working class was provided by the Unemployed Operatives' movement which had been conducted throughout by its own leaders. These men had insisted that they were demanding only their rights, and, when it had been proposed at one of their meetings that they should appeal for a collection in the churches and chapels of Leeds, "this opinion met with little sympathy".<sup>22</sup> Closely associated with their work, Smiles was undoubtedly impressed by these independent working men. What man of sensitivity in Victorian Britain could be unmoved by the sight of a working class committee meeting daily, "Sabbath excepted", to count the number of men unemployed during one of the greatest depressions ever experienced? "It is impossible to look upon the conduct of the working-men of England without feeling proud of one's countrymen. Suffering from increasing and appalling destitution . . . they still preserve unbroken the peace and order of society."<sup>23</sup>

Here was an example of independent working class action which, unlike O'Connorite Chartism, did not threaten law and order. From his earliest days in Leeds Smiles had

---

<sup>22</sup> Leeds Times (September 25, 1841).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (October 23, 1841).

written in support of working class co-operation by means of institutions such as the Friendly Societies, and his association with the Leeds Unemployed Operatives could not have failed to reinforce his conviction not only that the working class rejected patronage, but also that it could supply sufficient energy and ability from its own ranks to overcome the dire problems of the age. When, during the better conditions between 1843 and 1845, he was introduced to the work of the Youths' Guardian Societies and the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society, his acclamation of self-help as a worthy form of working class improvement is not surprising. Far from devising self-help as an abandonment of the working class to a sauve qui peut society (his personal endeavours on behalf of working class education remained extensive, and he was strongly in favour of active municipal government), Smiles addressed his advice to a working class which had shown beyond doubt that it wished to devise the means of its own improvement. Middle class propagandist motives were not absent from his mind, because he wished to counsel the working class against trade unionism and other attempts to violate current economic thought, whereas the Friendly Societies and the voluntary education movement, by enabling the working class to overcome the worst aspects of life in the manufacturing districts, would consolidate the acceptance of an industrialised society. There is no doubt, however, that he offered his advice as a conscious exhortation that the

working class should proceed with the work which it had independently commenced. In the writings of Craik, Murray, and the school of Channing Smiles had seen self-help expounded, but it was in Leeds that he saw self-help practised, and it was the Leeds environment of 1844 and 1845 which induced him to give his famous theme its trial runs.

The heartening signs of progress which Smiles detected in Leeds were scarcely less evident on a national scale. Originally he had been encouraged to enter Radical journalism by the conviction that the progress of the nation could be assured only if the political obstacles were removed. Fundamental to this analysis had been the belief that the constitution bestowed excessive power on the aristocracy, enabling the aristocratic parliamentary parties to promote their own interests at the expense of the nation. Although Smiles had not completely relinquished these ideas, by 1845 he was willing to concede that progress need not await the political reforms for which he had striven. The Radical Party had vanished as an effective parliamentary force, but progress had found unexpected allies in the ruling Conservative Party. This obliged Smiles to revise his early opinion of Peel and his colleagues, whom in 1839 he had denounced as members of a corrupt oligarchy. "And first we must define what the 'Conservative party' means; which is this - those who, having got what does not belong to them,

intend to keep it, by hook or by crook!"<sup>24</sup> In 1843 he could not resist the temptation to make similar references in his History of Ireland,<sup>25</sup> but his opinions were altering, mainly because Peel had embarked on a programme of reforms, many of which were in accordance with the ideas of the middle class Radicals. Even at the end of 1842 when the condition of the nation seemed otherwise menacing, Smiles found it possible to praise Peel's willingness to advance towards free trade.

SIR ROBERT PEEL and his colleagues have taken to their bosoms principles which have long been spurned, despised and spit upon, by the Tory party - the principles of Free Trade - and done all that they could in one session of Parliament, to carry them into effect. . . . And, now, where is Toryism - the Toryism of thirty or fifty years ago? It is no more. It has been inoculated [sic] of democracy and ceased to exist.<sup>26</sup>

It should not be assumed that Smiles was becoming a Conservative - he was advocating Complete Suffrage at the time when he praised Peel - but the evidence does show that he recognised a transformation of the political scene which necessitated a re-adjustment of attitude. No longer did it seem likely that the representatives of progress and conservatism would stage the final clash which had been expected since the days of his youth. The modernisation of Toryism by Peel showed on the contrary that the ideas of the

<sup>24</sup> Leeds Times (October 12, 1839).

<sup>25</sup> S. Smiles, The History of Ireland and the Irish People under the Government of England (Dublin, 1844), p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Leeds Times (September 17, 1842).

earlier Radicals were triumphing gradually, and that a not unpromising development was taking place in the parliamentary party system. A more triumphant vindication of the "March of Mind" could not have been found unless it was the creation of the railway system in the mid-eighteen-forties, which demonstrated finally that mechanisation would transform the nation with beneficial results. Thus even before the repeal of the Corn Laws it is possible to see in the writings of Smiles why some men of Radical opinions could take a less active part in politics and with a comparatively easy mind transfer their attention to other progressive movements. Smiles's aims did not alter immediately, but their emphasis shifted. A good example of this was provided by the article giving the reasons for the establishment of Howitt's Journal, a periodical publication to which Smiles and like-minded Radicals contributed.

Amid the million there lies enormous need of aid, of comfort, of advocacy, and of enlightenment, and amongst the million, therefore shall we labour, with hand and heart, with intellect and affection. To promote their education, and especially their self-education - a process full of the noblest self-respect and independence - to advocate their just rights, to explain their genuine duties, to support the generous efforts of those many wise, good and devoted men and women who are now everywhere labouring for their better being and comfort: these will be the dearest employments of our lives, the utmost pleasures that we can experience. . . . To all the onward and sound movements of the time - a great and glorious time! - to the cause of Peace, of Temperance, of Sanatory reform, of Schools for every class - to all the efforts of Free Trade, free opinion; to abolition of obstructive Monopolies, and the recognition of those great rights which belong to every individual of

the great British people - our most cordial support shall be lent. Everything which can shorten the hours of mere physical labour, and extend those of relaxation, of mental cultivation, and social domestic enjoyment - everything which tends to give to labour its due reward, and to furnish to every rational creature his due share of God's good gifts - food, raiment, a pleasant fireside, and the pleasures of an enlightened intellect - as it must have the approbation of every good man, so it must have our best and unremitting exertions for its establishment.

\* \* \* \* \*

We shall say to the people, inform your minds on your rights; combine to maintain them; be industrious and get money; be temperate and save it; be prudent and invest it to the best advantage; but learn at the same time to respect the rights of your fellow men. Look around and be at once firm and patient. . . . How the old dogmas of a stereotyped condition slide away into oblivion; how these popular rights are acknowledged; and what men and women, too, of rank, and wealth, and intellect are zealous to put a shoulder to the wheel of peaceful progression.<sup>27</sup>

When the decade after this re-statement of Radicalism brought not only the Library Commission, in which Smiles himself participated, but also the Great Exhibition of 1851 and above all the spread of prosperity it is not difficult to understand why political agitation ceased to have its former importance for some exponents of progress. The fortunes of the middle class had advanced immeasurably within living memory, the upper classes had accepted the need for change, and the working class was at last showing signs of adjusting to industrialism and urban life. A society had emerged in which Smiles and other men of humble background

<sup>27</sup> Howitt's Journal, vol. I (1847), pp. 1-2.

could prosper and achieve recognition. The transformation of Samuel Smiles from a bitter social critic into a social apologist and propagandist could take place in such circumstances. When Self-Help appeared the controversial creed of progress to which he had given his early allegiance was becoming the orthodoxy of the day.

Belief in progress was never stronger than in the year of Darwin. In the orthodox Victorian creed, progress was an undoubted metaphysical force which it was the duty and privilege of a reforming society to assist in every possible way. Education, cheap books and papers, and free libraries could refine the taste and enlarge the intellectual capacities of the common man, making him a thoughtful, well-informed, socially responsible citizen, receptive to good literature and impatient with all inferior varieties. Substantial progress had lately been made in respect to certain of his social habits: drunkenness was declining, the deposits in Savings societies were increasing, domestic sanitation was gradually improving. Why, then, should he not also, in those other realms of mind and taste, "Move upward, working out the beast,/ And let the ape and tiger die"?<sup>28</sup>

To his early career Smiles owed not only his message of self-help but also the experience which helped to make him one of the best-known didactic writers of the Victorian era. He was introduced to the adult education movement from the earliest age at which he could play a part. In the course of his medical apprenticeship in Haddington he assisted with the experiments conducted in one of the earliest Mechanics' Institutes, and he lectured with zeal and ability

---

<sup>28</sup>R. D. Altick, "The Literature of an Imminent Democracy", in P. Appleman, W. A. Madden and M. Wolfe, eds., 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 216.

in his native burgh after completing his medical studies. His association with the thriving education movement in Edinburgh subsequently led him to take the important step of writing his first book at a time when the popularisation of educational literature was in its infancy. It was in Leeds, however, that Smiles gained abundant experience of journalism and lecturing which he could turn to good account. His second book showed a great improvement, because Smiles wrote well and feelingly - he could even enliven his account of Ireland's woes by introducing a humorous reference to Nell Gwynn - thereby avoiding the unrelieved erudition offered in his first book. Examples could also be found of that "neatness of phrase" which Professor Briggs detects in his mature works - "Richard lived like a madman, and died like a fool", Charles I "knew just enough of religion to be a bigot, and of state craft to be a despot".<sup>29</sup> Further experience of life and writing during the next decade could produce the world-famous writer of Self-Help.

---

<sup>29</sup> Smiles, History of Ireland, pp. 25, 115, 164.

## APPENDIX

The statistical report prepared by the Leeds Operative Enumeration Committee is one of the most important documents relating to the extent of social distress in Leeds during the Hungry Forties, but its importance is greater even than this. The enumeration gives an indication of the discipline and sophistication with which one group of working class leaders could imbue a pressure group by that time. Smiles was obviously greatly impressed, and it is from his writings that the history of the Enumeration Committee may be learned.

The two most important promoters of the enumeration would seem to have been the secretary, James Rattray, an operative stuff printer, and the chairman, James Speed, a handloom weaver.<sup>1</sup> Using the Old George Inn, Briggate, as their headquarters, they and their associates arranged two meetings in August 1841, at which they devised means of undertaking the enumeration. It was proposed that the survey should be financed by those still in employment and that every factory and workshop in and around Leeds should have a collector and treasurer to obtain one penny a week from contributors. The treasurers were to form a central committee

---

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 114.

to supervise the conduct of the enumeration.<sup>2</sup> These recommendations were accepted at a meeting of thirty representatives of various trades.<sup>3</sup>

A settled pattern of weekly activity soon emerged. Preceded by sub-committee meetings, a delegate meeting took place each Tuesday evening at the Old George Inn, where the collected contributions were submitted. These were published weekly in the Leeds Times. For example, on September 25, 1841, 765 contributions were recorded totalling £10.3.3, and subsequently it was stated that there were 1600 operative contributors in all.<sup>4</sup> Although this was a working class organisation, interested members of the middle class were permitted to witness the proceedings, and donations were recorded from them.

At the Music Hall meeting on October 16, 1841 Ratt-ray explained how the enumeration was conducted. An enumeration book was provided for each of the wards of the town, twenty "good penmen" were selected from the unemployed operatives, and two were assigned to each ward. An unemployed man was engaged to draw up an analysis of the information received, and the sub-committee met every evening,

---

<sup>2</sup> Leeds Times (August 14, 1841).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. (August 28, 1841).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. (October 23, 1841).

"Sabbath excepted", to supervise the enumeration. Once the enumeration had been completed, tables of statistics were drawn up in which the number of families, the number of persons, the number of unemployed, the number of dependents, the total weekly income, and the average income per head were stated. Those in the town whose average income was more than four shillings a week were not included in the statistics.<sup>5</sup>

Wisely the Committee acknowledged that doubts would be expressed concerning the accuracy of the report, and before the Music Hall meeting took place Smiles and James Green, a manufacturer, were permitted to verify it. They selected one part of the report relating to the East Ward and checked the findings. At the meeting Smiles stated that he could not accept the figures as entirely accurate, but he denied that there had been exaggeration.

In order to be as impartial as possible, they turned to the first page of the enumeration book, and said, "let us just go over every case on this sheet, in order to ascertain the correctness of the statements". They did so, and so far from their being over-stated, he must say in some cases families had been overlooked, and cases had been omitted in order not to present anything like exaggeration before the public. The cases of distress, of extreme distress, that had come under his notice that morning, he must say had harrowed up his very soul.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently he repeated his conviction that the

---

<sup>5</sup> Leeds Times (October 23, 1841).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

enumerators had underestimated the extent of unemployment in Leeds, giving it as his opinion, derived from the statistics relating to poor relief, that there were in the borough "nearly 20000 persons subsisting on an average of not more than three-half pence per head per day!"<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, doubt was cast on the report when the Leeds Overseers were given the records of the enumeration. Declining to accept the report uncritically, the Overseers conducted their own investigation under the leadership of a Mr. Luccock, and on January 29, 1842 the Leeds Mercury published a report giving a more favourable picture of distress in the town. Subsequent enquiries by the Enumeration Committee revealed that this revised estimate was the work of Mr. Luccock himself, and that he had wilfully disregarded important information given to him both by other Overseers and by the Enumeration Committee.<sup>8</sup> For a time the members of the Committee considered undertaking another enumeration in order to prove the trustworthiness of their statistics, but this was not found to be necessary, and, having adopted a petition in favour of Corn-Law repeal and electoral reform, they voted to disband.<sup>9</sup>

The success of the Leeds working men in organising

<sup>7</sup> Leeds Times (March 12, 1842).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. (February 5, 1842).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (February 26, 1842).

their statistical investigation did not go unheeded elsewhere in the winter of 1841-42. James Rattray, the secretary of the Enumeration Committee, left Leeds before the Committee was disbanded, and settled in Coventry, where, according to his own testimony, he caused a similar investigation to be carried out. He summarised the results in a letter to his former associates in Leeds. "There is a remarkable coincidence in relation to one of the wards of Coventry, and the gross average of Leeds, viz., 11½d. per head, although the whole amount is not so low as Leeds." Other towns too had followed the example of Leeds, according to Rattray.

I was present at a conference of working men held at Manchester on New-years-day, when about thirty of the delegates handed in statistical details of the condition of the people. These tables were arranged, and the language of their report couched almost uniformly according to the Leeds report.<sup>10</sup>

Rattray later informed Smiles that Peel himself had learned of the Leeds enumeration and had therefore selected the Leeds Conservative MP to move the address relating to commercial reform at the beginning of 1842.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Leeds Times (February 5, 1842).

<sup>11</sup> Smiles, Autobiography, p. 119.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Altick, Richard D. The English Common Reader. Chicago: University Press, 1957.
- Anderson, John. A History of Edinburgh. Edinburgh, 1856.
- Ausubel, Herman. In Hard Times. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Beer, Max. A History of British Socialism. 2 vols. London: Bell, 1948.
- Bowring, Sir John. Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring. London: Henry S. King and Co., 1877.
- Briggs, Asa. Victorian People. 3rd ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965.
- Buckle, H. T. History of Civilization in England. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1903-04.
- Carlyle, Thomas. Chartism. London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.
- . Past and Present. London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.
- Chambers, William. Story of a Long and Busy Life. Edinburgh: W. and R. Chambers, 1882.
- Clark, G. Kitson. The Making of Victorian England. London: Methuen, 1962.
- Cockburn, Henry. Journal of Henry Cockburn. 2 vols. Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874.
- Cole, G. D. H. Chartist Portraits. London: Macmillan, 1941.
- . A Short History of the British Working Class Movement. London: Allen and Unwin, 1932.
- , and A. Filson. British Working Class Movements. London: Macmillan, 1951.

- Combe, George. The Constitution of Man. Edinburgh, 1828.
- Comrie, John Dixon. A History of Scottish Medicine. London: Balliere, Tindall and Cox, 1932.
- Cowherd, Raymond G. The Politics of English Dissent. London: The Epworth Press, 1959.
- Dobbs, Archibald Edward. Education and Social Movements, 1700-1850. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. 5 vols. London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1913.
- Engels, F. The Condition of the Working Class in England. Translated by Henderson and Challenor. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958.
- Fawcett, M. Life of the Right Hon. Sir William Molesworth. London: Macmillan, 1901.
- Fay, Charles Ryle. Life and Labour in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge: University Press, 1920.
- Fitzpatrick, William John, ed. Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell. London: John Murray, 1888.
- Flugel, John Care. A Hundred Years of Psychology. London: Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1951.
- Fonblanque, Edward Barrington de, ed. The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque. London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1874.
- Gibbon, Charles. The Life of George Combe. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1878.
- Greene, T. Bowden. The Life and Work of Samuel Smiles. London: The Betterment of London Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1904.
- Halevy, Elie. The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1949.
- Hamburger, Joseph. James Mill and the Art of Revolution. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Hammond, J. L. and B. Hammond. The Age of the Chartist, 1832-54. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930.

- Harrison, J. F. C. A History of the Working Men's College, 1854-1954. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954.
- , Learning and Living 1790-1960. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. Labouring Men. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964.
- House, Humphry. The Dickens World. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1960.
- Hovell, Mark. The Chartist Movement. Manchester: University Press, 1918.
- Johnson, L. G. General T. Perronet Thompson. London: Allen and Unwin, 1957.
- Kelly, Thomas. George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education. Liverpool: University Press, 1957.
- , A History of Adult Education in Great Britain. Liverpool: University Press, 1962.
- Leader, Robert Baden, ed. The Life and Letters of J. A. Roebuck. London: Edward Arnold, 1897.
- Lovett, William. The Life and Struggles of William Lovett. London: Trübner and Co., 1876.
- Maccoby, Simon. English Radicalism. 5 vols. London: Allen and Unwin, 1935.
- McCord, Norman. The Anti-Corn Law League. London: Allen and Unwin, 1958.
- Mackay, Charles. Forty Years' Recollections. 2 vols. London: Chapman and Hall, 1877.
- Marlowe, John. The Puritan Tradition in English Life. London: Cresset Press, 1956.
- Martineau, Harriet. History of the Thirty Years' Peace. London: W. and R. Chambers, 1858.
- , Biographical Sketches (1852-75). London: Macmillan, 1877.

- Mather, F. C. Public Order in the Age of the Chartists. Manchester: University Press, 1959.
- Mill, John Stuart. Autobiography. New York: Doubleday, n.d.
- Miller, George. Latter Struggles in the Journey of My Life. Edinburgh, 1833.
- Morley, John. Life of Richard Cobden. 2 vols. London: Chapman and Hall, 1881.
- The New Statistical Account of Scotland. Vol. II. Edinburgh and London, 1845.
- New, Chester W. The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
- Nicoll, Robert. Poems by Robert Nicoll. Edinburgh, 1843.
- Patterson, Alfred Temple. Radical Leicester. A History of Leicester 1780-1850. Leicester: University Press, 1954.
- Pigot, J. and Co. Pigot and Company's Royal, National and Commercial Directory and Topography of the Counties of York, Leicester and Rutland, Lincoln, Northampton and Nottingham. London: J. Pigot and Co., 1841.
- Read, Donald. Press and People 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities. London: Arnold, 1961.
- . The English Provinces c. 1760-1960: a Study in Influence. London: Arnold, 1964.
- , and Eric Glasgow. Feargus O'Connor. London: Arnold, 1961.
- Rimmer, W. G. Marshalls of Leeds. Flax-Spinners, 1788-1886. Cambridge: University Press, 1960.
- Robertson, W. The History of Scotland. 3 vols. London, 1818.
- Rusk, Ralph L. The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1949.
- Saunders, Laurance J. Scottish Democracy 1815-40. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1950.
- Saville, John, ed., Ernest Jones: Chartist. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1952.

- Schoyen, Albert Robert. The Chartist Challenge. London: Heinemann, 1958.
- Simon, Brian. Studies in the History of Education. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960.
- Simpson, James. The Philosophy of Education. Edinburgh, 1836.
- Smiles, Aileen. Samuel Smiles and His Surroundings. London: Robert Hale, 1956.
- Smiles, Samuel. Physical Education; or, the Nurture and Management of Children, Founded on a Study of Their Nature and Constitution. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1838. Also re-issue edited with additions by Sir Hugh Beever. New York: Walter Scott, 1905.
- . History of Ireland and the Irish People under the Government of England. Dublin, 1844.
- . Self-Help. London: John Murray, 1859. Also Centenary edition with introduction by Asa Briggs. London: John Murray, 1958.
- . Thrift. London: John Murray, 1880.
- . The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles, LL.D. Edited by Thomas Mackay. London: John Murray, 1905.
- Snowden, Philip. An Autobiography. 2 vols. London: Nicholson and Watson, 1934.
- Somerville, Alexander. The Autobiography of a Working Man. London: Turnstile Press Ltd., 1951.
- Stephens, W. R. W. Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook. London: Richard Bentley and Sons, 1878.
- Stranks, C. Dean Hook. London: A. R. Mowbray, 1954.
- Taylor, R. V. Biographia Leodiensis. London: Simkin, Marshall and Co., 1865.
- Tylecote, Mabel. The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851. Manchester: University Press, 1957.
- Wallas, Graham. The Life of Francis Place. London: Allen and Unwin, 1918.

- Ward, John Trevor. The Factory Movement 1830-55. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- Wearmouth, Robert F. Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century. London: The Epworth Press, 1948.
- Webb, R. K. The British Working Class Reader. London: Allen and Unwin, 1955.
- , Harriet Martineau, a Radical Victorian. London: Heinemann, 1960.
- West, Julius. A History of the Chartist Movement. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920.
- White, William. Directory and Topography of the Borough of Leeds. Sheffield, 1842, and following edition, 1843.
- Wickwar, William Hardy. The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press 1819-32. London: Allen and Unwin, 1928.
- Williams's Directory of the Borough of Leeds. Leeds, 1845.
- Woodward, E. L. The Age of Reform, 1815-1820. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946.
- Young, G. M. Portrait of an Age. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- , and W. D. Hancock. English Historical Documents. Vols. VII and XII. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953-59.

#### Modern Articles and Parts of Books

Altick, Richard D. "The Literature of an Imminent Democracy", in P. Appleman, W. A. Madden, and M. Wolff, eds., 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959.

Annan, Noel. "Science, Religion, and the Critical Mind: Introduction", in P. Appleman, W. A. Madden, and M. Wolff, eds., 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959.

Aspinall, Arthur. "The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, XXI (1945), 216-232.

- . "The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century", Review of English Studies, XXII (1946), 29-43.
- Beckwith, Frank. "An Account of the Leeds Intelligencer", Publications of the Thoresby Society, XL (1953), 1-61.
- Briggs, Asa. "Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846", Past and Present, no. 9 (1956), 65-74.
- . "The Local Background of Chartism", in his, ed., Chartist Studies. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- Brown, Lucy. "Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League", in Asa Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- Clark, G. Kitson. "The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties", Economic History Review, 2nd series, IV, no. 1 (1951), 1-13.
- . "Hunger and Politics in 1842", Journal of Modern History, XXV (1953), 355-374.
- Fairley, Henry J. "Oratory in Public Life", History Today, X (1960), 3-13.
- Glasgow, Eric. "The Establishment of the Northern Star Newspaper", History, XXXIX (1954), 54-67.
- Gray, W. Forbes, and J. H. Jamieson. "East Lothian Biographies", Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society, IV, Haddington: May, 1941.
- Harrison, J. F. C. "Social Reform in Victorian Leeds. The Work of James Hole, 1820-1895", Publications of the Thoresby Society, Monographs, III (1954).
- . "The Victorian Gospel of Success", Victorian Studies, I, no. 2 (1957), 155-164.
- . "Chartism in Leeds", in Asa Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies. London: Macmillan, 1962.

- . "Chartism in Leicester", in Asa Briggs, ed., Chartist Studies. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- Marwick, W. H. "Early Adult Education in Edinburgh", The Journal of Adult Education, V, no. 4, April 1932, 389-404.
- . "Adult Educationalists in Victorian Scotland", The Journal of Adult Education, VI, no. 2, April 1933, 130-138.
- . "Mechanics' Institutes in Scotland", reprinted from The Journal of Adult Education, VI, no. 3, October 1933.
- Phythian, Mabel. "January Searle in Yorkshire", The Journal of Adult Education, I, no. 1 (1926).
- Plummer, Alfred. "The Place of Bronterre O'Brien in the Working Class Movement", Economic History Review, II (1929), 61-80.
- Salter, F. R. "Political Nonconformity in the Eighteen-Thirties", Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (1953), 125-143.
- Turberville, A. S., and Frank Beckwith. "Leeds and Parliamentary Reform, 1820-32", Thoresby Society Miscellany, XLI (1943), 1-88.

#### Nineteenth Century Pamphlets, Articles and Newspapers

- Baker, Robert. "Report upon the Condition of the Town of Leeds and of Its Inhabitants, by a Statistical Committee of the Leeds Town Council, October 1839", Journal of the Statistical Society of London, II (1839), 397-424.
- Bethune, Alexander, and John Bethune. Practical Economy Explained and Enforced in a Series of Lectures. Edinburgh, 1839.
- Brougham, Henry. Practical Observations upon the Education of the People, Addressed to the Working Classes and Their Employers. 13th ed. London, 1825.
- Brown, Samuel. Some Account of Itinerating Libraries and Their Founder. Edinburgh, 1856.

Brown, Samuel (Senior). To the Electors, Burgesses, and Other Inhabitants of Haddington. Haddington, 1835.  
2nd ed., 1836.

Brown, William. Memoir Relative to Itinerating Libraries. Edinburgh, n.d.

Chartist Circular.

Combe, George. Lectures on Popular Education; Delivered to the Edinburgh Association for Procuring Instruction in Useful and Entertaining Science. Edinburgh, 1833.

A Country Gentleman. The Consequences of a Scientific Education to the Working Classes of This Country Pointed Out; and the Theories of Mr. Brougham on That Subject Confuted; in a Letter to the Marquess of Lansdown. London, 1826.

Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser.

Howitt's Journal.

Kingsley, Charles. "Burns and His School", The North British Review, November 1851, 170-171.

Leeds Mercury.

Leeds Times.

Murray, Thomas. Summary of Lectures on Political Economy. Edinburgh, 1837.

Simmonds, P. L. "Statistics of Newspapers in Various Countries", Journal of the Statistical Society of London, IV (1841), 111-116.

Sketch of the Late Mr. Samuel Brown of Haddington. Edinburgh, 1839. Extracted from the United Secession Magazine (December, 1839).

Smiles, Samuel. The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes. Leeds, 1842.

-----, The Education of the Working Classes. Leeds, 1845.

-----, "The Story of Robert Nicoll's Life", Good Words. London, 1875, 313-318, 414-419.

Tait's Edinburgh Magazine.

To the Working Men of Yorkshire Generally and of Leeds in Particular. Handbill. Leeds, n.d. In the Bradford City Library, Document Collection. DB 27 case 1, page 88.

Manuscripts and Records

Edinburgh. Register House. [Haddington Burgh Registers, Excerpts from Council Books, 1669-1861.

Leeds City Library, Archives Department. Letter from R. C. Hall to Samuel Smiles, SS/A/IX/66, and letter from Samuel Smiles to J. A. Roebuck, SS/A/IV/8a & b.

Leeds University Library. Annals of Zion Schools, New Wortley. Undated ms. by B. A. Kilburne. Zion Schools Collection.

Leeds University Library. Memorial to Samuel Smiles, by E. Kilburn Scott. Zion Schools Collection.

Leeds Technical College. Yorkshire Union of Institutes Reports, 1840-46.

National Library of Scotland. Itinerating Libraries in East and Mid-Lothian under the Superintendence of Mr. Samuel Brown, Haddington. Haddington, n.d.

National Library of Scotland. Report of the Society for Establishing Itinerating Libraries in the City and County of Edinburgh. 1826.

National Library of Scotland. Third Report of the Committee of the School of Arts in Haddington for 1825-26, Being the Fifth Session. Haddington, n.d.

Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries. 1849.