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**"THOSE WHO ARE OBLIGED TO PRETEND THAT THEY
ARE GENTLEFOLK": THE CONSTRUCTION OF
A CLERKING IDENTITY IN VICTORIAN
AND EDWARDIAN LONDON**

By

GEOFFREY DAVID SPURR, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

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**"THOSE WHO ARE OBLIGED TO PRETEND
THAT THEY ARE GENTLEFOLK"**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the means in which an identity was constructed by male clerks of the lower middle class through shared work, social and cultural experiences during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Because clerks displayed characteristics of the middle and working classes, historians have not fully explored the common culture that bound them together. While individual clerks varied significantly in incomes, socio-economic backgrounds and job descriptions, they had a set of attributes that helped them create a common cultural experience. This study explores the culture of clerks through work and office experiences; educational and commercial training; social activities in London; the discourses of self-improvement and respectability; and the culture of the suburban lifestyle. Although clerks failed to realize their ambition of becoming substantive members of London's middle class, they did construct a distinct identity. An identity built neither on reaction nor agitation, but on work, masculine and social experiences, dominated by an ideology of self-improvement. This ideology of self-improvement served as the central means clerks used to counter their material anxieties and an office culture based on deference and docility. In addition, this dissertation also explores the interaction between this identity and the Victorian and Edwardian "visions" and portrayals of the clerk in the press, social criticism and literature. This portrayal by the middle classes which clerks aspired to join, was overwhelmingly negative and condescending. Its veracity served to conceal the various positive aspects of the clerk's identity from contemporary opinion and, unfortunately, later scholarship.

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Introduction

Class! Yes, it's still here. Terrific staying power, and against all the historical odds. What *is* it with that old, *old* crap? The class system just doesn't know when to call it a day. Even a nuclear holocaust, I think, would fail to make that much of a dent in it. Crawling through the iodized shithouse that used to be England, people would still be brooding about accents and cocked pinkies, about maiden names and *settee* or *sofa*, about the proper way to eat a roach in society. Come on. Do you take the head off first, or start with the legs?¹

The English still consider themselves as living in "the most class-ridden country under the sun,"² despite the various attempts from politicians of both the left and right over the past one hundred years to construct a classless society.³ The attempts of the Labour Party to build such a society from below, through the nationalising of some of the means of production and the general improvement of the lot of industrial workers, failed as the party of the British working class saw its political influence decline in concert with the collapse of Britain's traditional industries in the 1970s and 1980s. The Labour Party believed that it had failed to create a classless and egalitarian society because its class electoral base had been sufficiently eroded. It was only able to reverse the trend of its declining political fortunes and regain its ability

¹Martin Amis, London Fields (London: 1989), 24.

²This phrase has been used countless times, but most memorably by George Orwell in The Lion and the Unicorn 52.

³After 1945, until Thatcher, the Conservative Party preached "consensus" and largely gave in to furthering the construction of a "classless" welfare state. Thatcher, although claiming that she also sought a classless society, merely sought to remove the issue of class from British political discourse. Interestingly, neither Labour or Conservative governments before Thatcher rid Britain of, arguably, the greatest signifier of class in Britain—the Public Schools.

to win general elections by reinventing itself. Today the Labour Party under Tony Blair has replaced its mantras of class consciousness and class conflict with community and cooperation. Blair refers to the electorate as individual "consumers" and "citizens" rather than collective "workers", "producers" or "classes". However, the successful broadening of Labour's base through the abandonment of its commitments to the Fabian ideal of the "common ownership of the means of production" or to "Marxist intellectual analysis" has, by no means, rid Britain of its class perceptions.

In many ways the electoral triumph of Blair, like those of Thatcher and Major before him, has helped to highlight the fact that class distinctions in Britain are only partly rooted in economic circumstance and that Britain's three classes are a rather heterogeneous bunch. The continued persistence of class identity in Britain, despite the profound structural shifts in the British economy since the Second World War, suggests that the original base of the class system was not as economically determined as the Marxist social historians of the 1960s and 1970s would have had us believe. In fact, Labour's decline in the 1970s and 1980s was not so much a consequence of its withering industrial working class membership base as it was a result of Thatcher's success in banishing the language of class from British political discourse. As David Cannadine has argued in his recent book, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*:

She attacked the trade unions, because they represented organized, collective, productive labour. She stressed the market, the public, the customer, and the individual, which undermined the language of social solidarity based on productive classes. She offered hope—in a way that Labour never had—to the working and lower classes of escaping the constraints of impoverished expectations and irremediable subordination. And by wrapping herself in the flag, she very effectively marginalized the politics of sectional interests and class conflict. As a result of her policies

and rhetoric, Thatcher thus went a long way toward achieving her ambition of banishing the language of class from political debate about the structure and nature of British society. And the fact that Tony Blair has no wish to resurrect this language is a measure of her achievement in changing the way people think about social structures, social relations, and social identities today.⁴

Thatcher's new political language had been successful not because Britain had become a "classless society," or that she had built one, but because of her recognition that British class distinctions and identities were far more sophisticated, diffuse and ever-shifting than definers of class derived from economic reductionism have detected. Being the daughter of a lower middle class greengrocer probably helped her in this recognition.⁵ Britain has been and remains largely class-ridden, but that condition has as much derived from social and cultural factors such as dress, sport, music, accent, regionalism, literature, housing, education, race, and ethnicity as it is from economics. These factors play significant roles in how individuals and groups identify themselves and others in relation to Britain's class system. Interestingly, when qualifying his assertion in his 1989 novel *London Fields* that the British class system is as strong as ever, Martin Amis refers to class signifiers such as manners, pronunciation and accent, but makes no mention of economics. He goes so far to suggest that these class distinctions would remain even if all buildings, presumably including those containing the means of production, were destroyed in a nuclear war.

The identity of the Victorian and Edwardian London clerk, in all its

⁴David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: 1999), 14 and 175-184.

⁵This is not to suggest, however, that certain individuals, groups and institutions did not materially benefit in Thatcher's Britain, often at the expense of others.

diverse forms, is the focus of this thesis. This examination will aid in the understanding of the nature of the large and disparate lower middle class with which clerks were identified. At the end of the nineteenth century the number of clerks in Britain grew rapidly. Their numbers in England and Wales in private employment grew from 68,000 in 1851 to 350,000 in 1891, and reached 686,000 in 1911. Growth was also witnessed in the public service, where their numbers grew from 27,000 in 1851 to 64,000 in 1891, reaching 157,000 in 1911. In 1851 clerks only accounted for 1.2 percent of all workers, but by 1911 they accounted for 4.6 percent.⁶ This swift expansion created problems for their own class identification and for later historiography. As C Wright Mills argued: "white-collar people slipped quietly into modern society . . . So before an adequate idea of them could be formed, they have been taken for granted as familiar actors of the urban mass."⁷ With most of them coming from the upper working classes and petite bourgeoisie, but not sharing the material or social rewards of the middle class, although identified with them through the nature of the work, they were lumped into the growing lower middle class of teachers, shop assistants and commercial travellers by their contemporaries and later historians.

The late nineteenth century British middle classes were a large group, and, as Alan Jackson suggests, "formed not one-tight band but a many-layered conglomerate of sub-classes or categories, sharing some common attitudes and principles and mostly working for a living, although working in a way which clearly distinguished them from the proletariat."⁸ The primary

⁶F. D. Klingender, The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain (London: 1935), 108-9.

⁷C. Wright Mills, White Collar: The American Middle Classes (New York: 1956), ix.

attribute which separated the lower middle class clerk from the "proletariat" was his work, which relied solely on the clerk's cerebral might, as opposed to the physical might of the manual labourer. While many other factors went into the identification of individuals and families as middle class in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, such as the keeping of servants, the payment of income tax, resources for public schooling, the capacity for respectable housing, the development of the "right" accent and the achievement of respectable behaviour, they were not required for lower middle class "membership". Work was enough to identify the male clerk as inhabiting the lowest stratum of the middle class, not only through his intellectual labour, but also through his dress, "salary", and physical proximity to his employer.

The lower middle class in Britain first came under rigorous historical investigation in the 1970s, as was reflected in the publication of a collection of articles edited by Geoffrey Crossick in 1977, *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914*.⁹ Peter Bailey has labeled Crossick's introduction to the collection as, "the classic discussion of the lower middle class problematic for historians."¹⁰ Crossick examined the reasons behind the failings of the new social historians "to attend to the development of the lower middle class" and its "ideas and beliefs".¹¹ He argued that social historians from the early 1960s

⁸Alan A. Jackson, *The Middle Classes, 1900-1950* (Nairn, Scotland: 1991), 11-12. For the purposes of his study, Jackson regards "all salary earners and wage-paid non-manual workers" as middle class.

⁹Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain* (London: 1977).

¹⁰Peter Bailey, "White Collars, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited", *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 38, July 1999, 273-4.

on, usually politically motivated, were largely concerned with examining the working class movements and popular experiences which had been almost entirely neglected by British historians until the publication of E. P.

Thompson's groundbreaking 1963 work, *The Making of the English Working Class*.¹² Crossick rightly doubted that this "history from the bottom up" would ever see its way to an examination of a class that was arguably closer to the bottom of Britain's class system than to its top. Why? Simply put, as a topic, and as a group, they did not appeal to most British social and labour historians. They were perceived as the reactionary, jingoistic and unheroic upholders of the status quo, while being a highly diverse and somewhat ambiguous group which did not easily lend itself to study under the highly empirical methods of British historiography.¹³

Crossick and the other contributors to his book were undoubtedly influenced by Arno Mayer's landmark article on British and European lower middle class historiography of two years earlier.¹⁴ Mayer sought to locate the ideologies, characteristics and commonalties of this class. Were they, he ruminated, a distinct social class, or a vague and heterogeneous grouping of

¹¹Ibid., 11-12.

¹²E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: 1964). First published in 1963.

¹³Crossick cited C. Wright Mills's comments on American white collar workers as a possible explanation for the scant attention paid to the lower middle class by British historians. "Whatever history they have had is a history without events; whatever common interests they have do not lead to unity; whatever future they have will not be of their own making." C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: 1956), ix. Cited in Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion", In Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class In Britain, 1870-1914*, 52.

¹⁴Arno Mayer, "The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem," *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 47, Sept. 1975, 409-36.

occupations? Or were they, perhaps, really part of the working class, a "salaried proletariat,"¹⁵ disguised by their middle class blackcoats and posturings? How did the lower middle classes relate to each other and to other classes? Did the common stereotypes and caricatures of them as pathetic establishment lap-dogs crumble under closer scrutiny? Although not setting out to directly address Mayer's queries, Crossick hoped his book would spark similar investigation into the British lower middle class. He divided his lower middle class into two main wings: the "classic petty bourgeoisie" of shopkeepers, highly-skilled artisans, and small businessmen (the entrepreneurial wing), and the newer and rapidly growing white collar salaried occupations of clerks, commercial travellers, schoolteachers, shop assistants, and minor professionals (the salaried wing).¹⁶ They were economically designated groupings with the first group having control of the means of production through their business ownership and/or labour, and the second having to sell their labour for a salary. Crossick did not ascertain, however, whether there was a single lower middle class, although he hoped the articles in the book would lead to a clearer understanding of lower middle class composition and characteristics. They did somewhat, but primarily in regard to the economic and occupational circumstance of clerks.

¹⁵For works which make the argument that the clerk was gradually becoming de-skilled and proletarian see M. P. Kelly, White Collar Proletariat: The Industrial Behavior of British Civil Servants (London: 1980); Rosemary Crompton, White-Collar Proletariat: Deskilling and Gender in Clerical Work (Philadelphia: 1984); Richard Sobel, White Collar Working Class: From Structure to Politics (New York: 1989); and Martin Oppenheimer, White Collar Politics (New York: 1985).

¹⁶Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain," 12-13; and Harold Perkin, The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880 (London: 1989), 1-26 and 359-404.

Unfortunately, subsequent work on the lower middle class has been disappointing. Studies specifically on clerks have tended to focus their attention primarily on changes in office structures, new technologies, unionization and de-skilling that played a significant role in changing clerical labour after 1914, but had little impact on the clerking experience of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.¹⁷

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the lower middle class was its instability. As Crossick observed, "British society, having created this aspirant lower middle class, was incapable of guaranteeing it stability of status or offering the real chance of continued mobility."¹⁸ This was particularly true for its men prior to the First World War. Clerks, shop assistants, teachers, commercial travellers and other groups of non-manual workers, neither working class nor comfortably established middle class, struggled within cultural and societal systems and structures in which advancement was extremely difficult. Susan Pennybacker has noted that: "Though a single homogeneous lower middle class never existed, the ethos of advancement in all its vicissitudes, remained a universal aspect of what was otherwise a fragmented set of experiences."¹⁹ Therefore is class, or at least a narrow economically derived definition of it, really the best framework on which to

¹⁷A recent example of this is R. Guerriero Wilson's work on office structures in Glasgow. While it does a fine job in examining office work, it does little to further an understanding of a wider clerical identity. Disillusionment or New Opportunities? The Changing Nature of Work in Offices, Glasgow 1880-1914 (Aldershot: 1998).

¹⁸Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain," 39.

¹⁹Susan Dabney Pennybacker, A Vision for London, 1889-1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment (London: 1995), 48.

build entirely our understanding of the clerking experience? Fortunately, the "new cultural history" of recent years has highlighted non class based approaches and methods of exploration into social and cultural systems of experience.

Since the employment of the "linguistic turn" in history many British historians no longer view class simply as stemming from the relations between capital and labour and the political conflicts arising from them. They instead see class as the study of the language people used, because it is words that represent the experience that was the source of their social and political identities.²⁰ While the "lower middle class" was definitely more than a rhetorical construction, there existed a multitude of individual and outside subjective social descriptions and categorizations in which, for clerks, class was "only one among a multitude of competing and frequently changing categories."²¹ Although clerks were definitely part of an upwardly-mobile minded group within British society who hoped to improve their material position, their cultural experience was fashioned almost entirely by their distinct social and occupational experience. If they often compared their situation to other groups within the British "lower middle class system," they

²⁰ For a discussion of this turn in British history see David Cannadine, The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain 11-13. For work employing the linguistic turn see Stedman Jones, Gareth, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982 (Cambridge: 1983); R. Rorty (ed.), The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method (London: 1967); Roy Porter and P. Burke (eds.), The Social History of Language (Cambridge: 1987); Joyce, Patrick. Visions Of The People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914 (Cambridge: 1991); L. Berlanstein (ed.), Re-Thinking Labour History: Essays and Discourse on Class Analysis (Urbana-Champaign, IL: 1993); P. Schoffler, "Historians and Discourse Analysis," History Workshop No. 17, 1989, 37-65; and Raphael Samuel, "Reading the Signs," History Workshop No. 32, 1991, 88-109.

²¹Cannadine, The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain, 12.

rarely identified their experience as in any way similar.

Although little attempt has been made thus far to employ post-structuralist methods in examinations of clerks, the nature of their social and cultural experiences makes them ideal candidates for such analysis. Debate, however, has been especially fierce within British social history regarding the introduction of post-structuralist principles. Sides have been taken between those lauding the virtues of the "linguistic turn" in history and those, often 'new' social historian Marxists and liberals, who have characterized post-structuralist practitioners as traitors to the cause of "history from the bottom up."²² The animosity that has been produced by this debate is, however, unnecessary. Post-structuralism has helped to revitalize social and cultural history by forcing all historians to question the degree to which we are able to reconstruct reality given the multiple versions of it which we encounter in our sources. This is particularly true in the case of the social historian of Britain, who has often fallen victim to the tendency to fit his or her subject into the paradigm of the economically and socially marginalized group struggling against agencies of "social control." By ridding themselves of this

²²An example of a direct debate between the two camps is that which appeared in the British journal *Social History* in the mid-1990s. See David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, "Social History And Its Discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones And The Politics Of Language," *Social History* Vol. 17, No. 2, May 1992, 165-188; Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor, "The Poverty Of Protest: Gareth Stedman Jones And The Politics Of Language—A Reply," *Social History* Vol. 18, No. 1, Jan. 1993, 1-15; Patrick Joyce, "The Imaginary Discontents of Social History: A Note of Response to Mayfield and Thorne, and Lawrence and Taylor," *Social History* Vol. 18, No. 1, Jan. 1993, 81-85; James Vernon, "Who's Afraid of the 'Linguistic Turn'? The Politics of Social History and Its Discontents," *Social History* Vol. 19, No. 1, January 1994, 81-97; Neville Kirk, "History, Language, Ideas And Post-Modernism: A Materialist View," *Social History* Vol. 19, No. 2, May 1994, 221-240; Patrick Joyce, "The End Of Social History?" *Social History* Vol. 20, No. 1, Jan. 1995, 72-91; Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Starting Over: The Present, The Post-Modern And The Moment Of Social History," *Social History* Vol. 20, No. 3, Oct. 1995, 353-364; and Patrick Joyce, "The End Of Social History? A Brief Reply To Eley And Nield," *Social History* Vol. 21, No. 1, Jan. 1996, 96-98.

economically determined template, social historians are free to examine groups which do not fall easily into a strict materialist interpretation—such as clerks of the lower middle class who were often paid less than members of the working classes. As a result, all historians are now forced to consider the extent to which categories such as class, gender, race and identity are socially, culturally or linguistically constructed.²³

However, what is really meant by an awareness, and adoption, of the methods and theories of post-structuralism? For example, discourse is often used by historians to convey their perception of a particular historical occurrence without subscribing to, or addressing, the works of Michel Foucault.²⁴ In such cases the formation of a distinct discourse is cited as the central feature of a given group, organization or institution without an explanation of how the term is being applied. In the case of this study the term is employed to distinguish the system of meaning created through language and other symbolic systems by clerks and their contemporaries to convey a range of ideas, perspectives, and views regarding the identity of clerks. Identity is composed of what individuals say about themselves and what they do (inner identity), and also what others say about these individuals and what they do to them (outward identity). At times these

²³Discussions on these issues can be found in Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young, eds. Post-Structuralism and the Question of History (Cambridge: 1987); Fred Weinstein, History and Theory After The Fall: An Essay on Interpretation (Chicago: 1990); and Christopher Kent, "Victorian Social History: Post-Thompson, Post-Foucault, Postmodern," Victorian Studies Vol 40, 1996. For a loud voice of dissent against the application of post-structuralist methods see Bryan Palmer, Descent into Discourse (Philadelphia: 1990).

²⁴Foucault's name is, of course, synonymous with the term discourse. The most easily accessible account of the development of his ideas on discourse is Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction (New York: 1980).

inner and outward identities were complementary, and at other times contestatory, but both served to shape the identity of the clerk. Discourse was one of the primary means through which clerks constructed notions of their private, public and work experience and its distinct nature. The term, however, also implies a set of social relations in which power is possessed by those with certain types of knowledge and influence, in this case the secure middle class, formulated within given systems of meaning and often inaccessible to 'outsiders' or 'others' such as the lower middle class clerk.²⁵

Although employing Foucaultian theory on discourse, this study is not an attempt to attack, or break from, the methodology of the 'new' social history of the 1960s. It attempts to complement it. One of the most important contributions of this history was its willingness to draw its sources from a wide range of subjects and disciplines, such as statistics, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, semiotics, and feminist theory, in order to effectuate a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the past. This interdisciplinary approach, or what Clifford Geertz has defined as "genre mixing,"²⁶ has greatly enriched our understanding of society and culture, as the works of such scholars as E. P. Thompson, Joan Scott, Natalie Davis,

²⁵For other efforts to define this term see Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History After the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society Vol. 19, No. 2, 1994, 379-381; and Lynda Nead, Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (Oxford: 1988), 4-6.

²⁶See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: 1973), 3-30; and, "Blurred Genres: The Reconfiguration of Social Thought," in Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology (New York: 1983), 19-35.

Judith Walkowitz and Geertz have illustrated.²⁷ Nonetheless, caution must be exercised in adopting an interdisciplinary approach as random and excessive theoretical jargon can just as easily serve to obfuscate the historical evidence as illuminate it. As E. H. Carr argued forty years ago, "history means interpretation,"²⁸ and when utilizing outside disciplines and theories it is prudent to consider the types of questions certain theories and methods raise in order to construct an individual interpretive framework for our subject--rather than simply slotting it into one created by someone else.

Fortunately, previous work on society has employed this approach. For example, Suzanne Desan has noted how Natalie Zemon Davis's work on religious practices and trade unions in early modern France analyzed customs which had "a particular function and meaning for the community," such as riots, festivals and the charivari.²⁹ Anthropological methodology aided Davis's quest to interpret the pattern of social relations within French society and culture. "By interpreting the symbolic patterns and significance of these cultural phenomena, the historian can uncover how the social system fits together and how its participants perceive themselves and the outside

²⁷These works have included E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: 1964), Customs in Common (London: 1991), and "Folklore, Anthropology, and Social History," The Indian Historical Review 1977; Joan Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: 1988); Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford: 1975) and Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France (Stanford: 1987); Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: 1992); and the two works of Geertz's indicated above.

²⁸E. H. Carr, What is History? (Harmondsworth: 1987), 23. The book is a publication of the *G. M. Trevelyan Lectures* Carr delivered at Cambridge in 1961.

²⁹Suzanne Desan, "Crowds, Community, and Ritual in the Work of E. P. Thompson and Natalie Davis," in Lynn Hunt ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley: 1989), 52-53.

world."³⁰ In the case of clerks the social and cultural phenomena of their low-paid but genteel occupation determined a pattern of social and cultural relations at work, home and society which shaped their identity.

This dissertation has thus been influenced by the interdisciplinary nature of the "new cultural history" of the past two decades, and is not confined to a single theoretical or methodological approach. For, as Lynn Hunt has noted, the essence of this history consists of several important components, such as the analysis of discourse, representation, and the meaning ascribed by individuals to their actions and activities.³¹ The search for meaning in a world of work and in a society in which they were marginalized individuals was central to the identity of the clerk. It was, in fact, a cultural system that shaped and formed the identity. Raymond Williams and later scholars, such as Patrick Brantlinger, have urged scholars to depart from previous [Matthew] Arnoldian conceptions of culture, high society's quest for perfection and its "passion for sweetness and light," and explore the ordinary culture found in everyday life.³² This departure has opened up a large academic field where "'everyday life' or the structures and practices within and through which modern society constructs and circulates meanings and values," is examined and interpreted.³³ It is within these

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, and Text," in Lynn Hunt ed., The New Cultural History, 22.

³²See Patrick Brantlinger, Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994 (Ithaca, NY: 1996); Patrick Brantlinger, Crusoe's Footprints: Cultural Studies in Britain and America (New York: 1990); and Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1971).

³³Brantlinger, Crusoe's Footprints, 37.

structures and practices that clerks attempted to situate and define their experience. Although this culture did have a common and shared experience, it also consisted of countless individual identities which sometimes complemented, but often conflicted with, that of common experience. However, this culture was by no means static and predetermined, for clerks and outsiders continually attempted to reconfigure this system through discourse and activity. For example, self-improvement was continually used by clerks as a means to change not only their material situation, but also their status in the eyes of society and their employers. This conception of culture is also based on the perspective that experience and identity were also transmuted and prescribed to clerks by their own discourse within the popular press and through the literature of middle class novels, essays and guidebooks. The image of the clerk in these representations did not always reflect the clerking experience directly but also served to shape the experience of the clerk. Novels such as Forster's *Howards End* or Gissing's *The Town Traveller* may not have been an accurate representation of the clerking experience, but they had a significant impact on the outward clerking identity and the larger clerking cultural experience through the reinforcement of the clerking stereotype of the "pathetic little man."³⁴

The distinct cultural system in which the clerk operated was thus largely concurrently represented and created through language.³⁵ Joseph and

³⁴See Chapter Five.

³⁵For studies involving the "linguistic turn" in history see Hayden V. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: 1978); Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: 1987); Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: 1985); and Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts Contexts. Language* (Ithaca: 1983). For a balanced application of

Timothy Kelly have highlighted how the post-structuralist methods of social history and literary criticism can be employed to highlight the constitutive, and not merely the reflective, function of language.³⁶ Language can shape as well as define experience, and the Kellys urged "social historians not to dismiss those deliberate cultural constructions in their efforts because they constitute rich cultural sources to mine. Certain evidence, for example newspapers, should not be considered merely to *indicate* or *reflect* mentalité but to *form* mentalité."³⁷

Care must be taken, however, not to neglect the role of agency within the cultural system inhabited by the clerk. Either consciously or unconsciously, clerks used the discourses available in attempting to improve their material and social situation. Joan Scott has reminded us that the manner in which "subjects are constituted discursively" also needs to be considered.³⁸ Deconstruction can be taken too far and the social context and

these principles to British social history see Walkowitz, Judith, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: 1992); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: 1992); and Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge: 1991).

³⁶Joseph Kelly and Timothy Kelly, "Social History Update: Searching the Dark Alley: New Historicism and Social History," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 25, No. 3, Spring 1992, 677-694.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 689.

³⁸Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 17, Summer 1991, 793. She elaborates on this point, arguing that the study of experience "entails focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of "experience" and on the politics of its construction. Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political. The study of experience, therefore, must call into question its originary status in historical explanation. This will happen when historians take as their project *not* the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be

historical period in which this clerking discourse was produced remains important—for example, the British class system's emphasis on respectability and the unique experience of working and residing in Victorian and Edwardian London. These factors also played significant roles in the construction of a clerking identity.

As indicated, the clerk's class and material position does not fully explain and account for the clerking experience, particularly in regard to his identity—the way in which the clerk viewed and represented himself, and how other Londoners viewed and represented him. It should not, however, be neglected entirely. Recent work has indicated that identity formation is not merely insular, but is constructed through intersection with external forces. As groups, nations, individuals or institutions define themselves within their cultural system they are simultaneously being defined externally. In the case of the clerk, these outside forces included their representation in the press, novels, and by middle class commentators. Nonetheless identity studies have also noted that the manners in which class, national, gender, racial, occupation and ethnic identities are constructed are sometimes partially materially determined and are always socially assembled within a constantly shifting and changing historical setting.³⁹ This was particularly

arrived at through experience, but the analysis and production of that knowledge itself." *Ibid.*, 797.

³⁹Gender identity studies have particularly made this point. On masculinity see John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: 1998); John Tosh, "What Should Historians do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 38, Autumn 1994, 179-202; and Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London: 1991). On the construction of ethnic and national identities see, particularly, Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: 1991); and Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: 1992).

true for the clerk. His changing occupational and educational situation, brought on by the expansion of clerical occupations and the increased educational opportunities at the end of the nineteenth century for the working and lower middle classes, had a profound effect on his social and cultural environment.

The internal and external forces influencing the clerk's cultural system created, as Cynthia Herrup has observed in regard to national identity, identities that were both relational and oppositional.⁴⁰ These identities were formed and expressed in terms of distinct shared qualities, such as low pay, but often in relation to what the clerk was not—the 'other'. This 'other' could be a positive identity, such as that the clerk was not working class, or negative, in that he was not materially, socially or culturally truly middle class. The identity of the clerk was thus often predicated on where he fit within the British social and class system. For example, his genteel but shabby clothing separated him from both the working and solidly middle classes. As Linda Colley has recognized in reference to identity formation, "we usually decide who we are by reference to who and what we are not."⁴¹ Clerks continually (both positively and negatively) defined themselves against the working and middle classes, while middle class commentators concurrently identified clerks as of an 'other' social and cultural standing. Regenia Gagnier has noted in her work on self-representation in Britain that:

⁴⁰Cynthia Herrup, "Introduction," Journal of British Studies Vol. 31, No. 4, October 1992, 305-308.

⁴¹Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," Journal of British Studies Vol. 31, No 4, October 1992, 311.

the subject is a subject to, and of, others; in fact, it is often an "Other" to Others, which also affects its sense of its own subjectivity. This construction of self in opposition to others . . . is a characteristic of groups, communities, classes, and nations, as it is of individuals, as in the self conceptions of the Chartists, or 'the working class,' or schoolboys, or ladies, or, today, 'Women,' or 'the Third World.'⁴²

As will be illustrated, the 'others' of the British working and middle classes played a vital role in the clerk's identity formation. This was predicated on the circumstance that clerks often came from working class or artisanal backgrounds and became clerks with the belief that they would ultimately achieve membership within the middle class. As a result clerks continually questioned the masculine status and position they had achieved by entering the clerking trade. Meanwhile, the middle class began their own process of identifying these new and numerous applicants to their exclusive class as the 'other', often in terms adult masculine social, cultural and material achievement.

The identity of male clerks was frequently contrasted, by themselves and outsiders, against the middle class masculine ideal—that of a materially substantive head of a household.⁴³ Largely unable to achieve this ideal, or at least for numerous years, an identity of clerking emasculation was formed. This identity of emasculation played two important roles in the clerking

⁴²Regenia Gagnier, Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920 (New York: 1991), 8.

⁴³The development and practice of this ideal is the subject of John Tosh's, A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England. For other works on masculine identity see Peter N. Stearns, Be a Man!: Males in Modern Society 2nd ed., (New York: 1990); Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America (Chicago: 1990); Michael Kimmel, Manhood in America: A Cultural History (New York: 1996); and E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution of the Modern Era (New York: 1993).

experience. First, it reinforced the 'otherness' of clerks from members of the middle class who were able to achieve the masculine ideal and, second, it impelled clerks to attempt to fashion a positive masculine identity for their distinct material and social experience. As John Tosh has maintained, manliness represented an ideal to which men of Victorian Britain aspired. It was characterized by success, virtue and, most significantly, in the complete absence of 'effeminacy'.⁴⁴ Many middle class commentators consistently attempted to identify the clerk as completely lacking in these first two characteristics, while suggesting that the clerk's domestic situation and undeveloped culture and physical stature reeked of effeminacy.⁴⁵ While clerks often obsessed about the perception that they lacked "masculine traits", they did attempt to establish their own masculine experience inside their homes and through social institutions, such as the Y.M.C.A. Although their masculine identity was important, the clerking identity was by no means constructed exclusively in terms of gender difference. The discourse of the clerking cultural experience drew on the multitude of ideas, opinions, and images within and outside of clerkdom and was further significantly influenced by the distinct social urban context of London.

London was a unique setting for the formation of a clerking identity. By the late-Victorian and Edwardian era it was unlike any other city in the world, let alone Britain. London's unique position was the result of three factors. First, it was economically no longer an industrial city, but a financial

⁴⁴John Tosh, "What Should Historians do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 38, Autumn 1994, 180-193.

⁴⁵See, particularly, Chapters One and Five.

and commercial one, "although its gasworks, railways, and, above all, the great dock companies employed many thousands in massive factories and yards."⁴⁶ London's large factories were generally found on her outskirts and if all the trades employing factory production were combined, "they probably accounted to no more than a sixth of the adult labour force in the period up to the 1890s."⁴⁷ This produced what Gareth Stedman Jones has described as a "de-industrial city" made up of small masters working in consumer-oriented enterprises primarily organized in small specialty workshops and, increasingly by the end of the nineteenth century, white-collar workers in law and insurance offices, banks, and warehouses. Although there was an enormous casual unskilled labour force, London's large numbers of highly-skilled labour aristocrats and petite bourgeoisie provided excellent social and cultural groups from which to draw clerical workers.⁴⁸ Clerical workers vastly grew in numbers in London from 1870 to 1914, in conjunction with Britain's maturing industrial economy. The City of London,⁴⁹ the financial

⁴⁶Jonathan Schneer, London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis (New Haven: 1999), 4.

⁴⁷Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society (London: 1984), 29.

⁴⁸Stedman Jones book examines the distinct nature of London's economy and the vast gulf between its unskilled casual labour force and its labour aristocracy. See Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London, 19-32. For an examination of the movement of the children of the petite bourgeoisie in white-collar occupations in Britain and Europe see Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe, 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence (London: 1995), 82, 83-86 and 219-20. For the movement of the children from the labour aristocracy and petite bourgeoisie into clerical occupations see Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁴⁹For studies on the City of London and its financial and commercial institutions see David Kynaston, The City of London. Volume I: A World of Its Own, 1815-1890 (London: 1994); and David Kynaston, The City of London. Volume 2: Golden Years, 1890-1914 (London: 1994).

and commercial centre of the metropolis, increasingly provided Britain (along with her empire, Europe, and the industrialized world) with the "specialist financial services to secure investment capital and insurance protection to support the industrial infrastructure."⁵⁰ By 1871, with a population of fewer than 75,000 residents, more than 170,000 workers poured daily into the City of London.⁵¹

London's second distinct characteristic was as a city with enormous bureaucratic institutions. London was the political and administrative seat of the national government and empire, and, especially after 1889 with the formation of the London County Council, the site of immense municipal services and government. As the role of the national and imperial government greatly increased in scope at the end of the Victorian age, a vast army of civil service clerks streamed into Whitehall and its government departments, inhabiting the area in central London directly south and west of Trafalgar Square. Not only did government departments, such as the Home and Colonial Offices, the Board of Trade, and the Local Government Board require more clerks for their increased administrative responsibilities, but departments fulfilling direct public services, particularly the Post Office, demanded a much larger labour force for rudimentary clerical sorting and filing. The increased role of national and municipal government was pronounced in a series of education reforms, beginning in 1870, producing a

⁵⁰P. L. Garside, "London and the Home Counties," in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950: Volume 1: Regions and Communities (Cambridge: 1993), 491-492.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 508.

grade of young men with the skills necessary for careers as clerks.⁵² However, most entered the lower clerical grades. As was noted by the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1903, the "London Board School boys who entered the higher civil service . . . were still worth recording by name."⁵³ The role of municipal government was not confined solely to educational activities and, with a majority of radicals and socialists as members of the London County Council by the turn-of-the-century, it took steps to level slums, erect decent and affordable public housing, guarantee union rates for London's workers, and municipalize services such as gas and water.⁵⁴ The demands placed on the administration of these projects swelled the Council labour force from 3,368 in 1889 to 11,190 in 1905.⁵⁵

These first two characteristics combined to help produce the third distinct characteristic of London, namely, a vast population. It was the largest city the world had ever known and, arguably, the most modern.⁵⁶ By 1891 London had a population of over 5.5 million, five times more than either of

⁵²See Chapter Three.

⁵³"Prospects in the Professions: XI. The Home Civil Service," *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1903, Vol. 88, No. 1, 118-130.

⁵⁴See Schneer, Pennybacker and Martin Wiener, *Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford: 1971).

⁵⁵Pennybacker, 38.

⁵⁶For studies of London and its distinct social and cultural makeup in relation to other cities see H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (Two Volumes) (London: 1973); H. J. Dyos, *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History* (Cambridge: 1982); Derek Fraser, "The Edwardian City," in Donald Read (ed.), *Edwardian England* (London: 1982), 56-74; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1968); and James H. Johnson and Colin G. Pooley (eds.), *The Structure of Nineteenth Century Cities* (London: 1982).

its largest provincial rivals, Liverpool and Manchester. It was not just a city whose enormous centre was comprised entirely of public departments and offices and private financial and commercial institutions, but also contained stores, shops, markets, and, popular attractions and amusements. The clerk not only had to find his way within the urban juggernaut during his hours at work, but he also had to carve out a program of leisure and self-improvement activities in a city where the line between proper and improper activity was not always clearly defined.⁵⁷ Surrounding central London was a vast suburban landscape connected to the centre by the most advanced urban transit system of its time. The clerk was a creature of this modern urban environment, working in the offices, and partaking in the leisure diversions found in the heart of London, and residing largely in its ever-expanding suburbs. As Crossick has recognized, despite the "self-righteous superiority" of middle class commentators, such as T. H. Crosland, on the phenomenon of the suburban clerk, it is difficult to disagree with assertions such as Crosland's that the "mass suburbia was a creation of the lower middle class"--particularly clerks.⁵⁸

The maelstrom of this new modern urban experience influenced countless novelists and commentators who both reflected on this experience and suggested avenues where the modern man, often the clerk, could find his way. Just as the early era of industrialization inspired the "industrial novel," focused on the English working classes, the London modern urban experience

⁵⁷See Chapters Two and Three on the difficulties the clerk faced in finding respectable leisure activities.

⁵⁸Crossick, 32-33. See Chapter Five for a discussion of Crosland's attitude towards the suburban clerk.

created a literature that attempted to represent and reflect the experience of the Londoner.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, a whole publishing genre was created, largely for the urban lower middle classes, with the clerk in mind as the typical reader. This was, what Matthew Arnold labeled in 1887, the "new journalism" of "Penny Weekly" journals, and newspaper broadsheets such as T. P. O'Connor's London evening *Star*, W. T. Stead's *Pall Mall Gazette*, C. A. Pearson's *Daily Express*, and Alfred Harmsworth's *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*.⁶⁰ The new popular weekly journals were led by George Newnes's *Tit-Bits: From All the Most Interesting Books, Periodicals and Newspapers of the World* in 1881, followed by Harmsworth's *Answers to Correspondents* in 1888, and C.A. Pearson's *Pearson's Weekly: To Interest, To Elevate, To Amuse* in 1890. As their titles and subtitles suggested, these halfpenny publications were carefully crafted to satisfy a new mass of readers, recently educated at Board schools, eager for tidbits of simple information and amusement. As Newnes promised in the first issue of his journal, "Any person who takes *Tit-Bits* for three months will at the end of that time be an entertaining companion, as he will then have at his command a stock of smart sayings and

⁵⁹B. I. Coleman, (ed.), *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: 1971).

⁶⁰ While Arnold admitted that this new journalism was "full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation sympathy, [and] generous instincts," he also lamented that "its one great fault is that it is *feather-brained* . . . The democracy, with abundance of life, movement, sympathy, good instincts, is disposed to be, like this journalism, *feather-brained*; just as the upper class is disposed to be selfish in politics, and the middle class narrow." Matthew Arnold, "The New Journalism," *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 21, May 1887, 638-9. For studies on the popular press and this "new journalism" see Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press, 1855-1914* (London: 1976); and Michael Harris and Alan J. Lee (eds.), *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (London: 1986).

a fund of anecdote."⁶¹ It was the perfect reading material for a clerk commuting from his suburban home to his work in the City, Whitehall, or the LCC offices on London's South Bank.⁶² In fact, the three competing Penny Weeklies offered a tube or rail travel life-insurance of £100 if a current copy of their journal was found on the deceased. By the mid 1890s *Answer*, *Tit-Bits*, and *Pearson's Weekly* were each selling 400,000-600,000 copies a week.⁶³ While they were continually labeled as trivial, shallow, and possibly corrupting, not all middle and upper class commentators viewed these weeklies negatively. In an interview even Gladstone, the omnivorous reader of classical texts, stated that he considered "the gigantic circulation of *Answers* as an undeniable proof of the growth of sound public taste of healthy and instructive reading. The journal must have vast influence."⁶⁴ The journal and its rivals did indeed have a significant influence, particularly for the clerks who read them and continually directed the discourse contained within their correspondent and advice columns through the hundreds of letters they wrote. The journals responded by publishing articles of a direct interest to clerks, such as on employment and examination advice, the value of skills such as shorthand and proper dining and leisure locales in London.

This study is divided into five thematic chapters, each analyzing different aspects of the clerk's identity formation. Chapter one explores the

⁶¹*Tit-Bits*, 22 October, 1881, 1.

⁶²Now the home of the London Aquarium.

⁶³Donald Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* Revised edition, (London: 1994), 274.

⁶⁴Cited in *Ibid.*, 275.

clerking identity that was gradually formed during the early and mid-nineteenth century within a gradually shifting social and cultural experience . A clerk was generally identified as anyone who wrote, read and did a little "arithmetical" to earn a living. Clerks were recognized as men possessing a degree of culture and education beyond that of the working class. The late-Victorian description of this earlier age of "true clerking respectability and status" helped to cultivate the image of the noble and well-educated clerk of yesteryear. This was a sharp contrast to publicly educated clerks of the later-nineteenth century who were increasingly coming under attack for their allegedly slovenly penmanship and work habits. What is significant is that by the late-nineteenth century the clerk's outward identity was not only shaped against what he was not in the present, but also by the contrast between him and the nostalgic vision of a former and more "gentlemanly" age of clerking. In the early-to-mid-nineteenth century clerks were usually portrayed by observers, and by themselves, as men who led a hard-working life of daily drudgery. For example, Charles Lamb, Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope portrayed clerks as upright individuals upon whose heavy shoulders rested the weight of the government and business of the nation. They were portrayed as the "ground troops" of good government and commerce and, hence, were treated with respect. Concurrently, however, this same discourse also helped to shape the clerk's identity as an insignificant and marginal individual through representations of clerks struggling under the tutelage of malevolent employers. Meanwhile, the identity of the clerk as a respectable individual gradually changed as the number of clerks increased and began to appear more regularly from "less than desirable" backgrounds.

In the 1830s and 1840s the clerk began to be ridiculed in middle class periodicals such as *Punch* and *Bentley's Miscellany* which associated him with the absurd urban creature known as "The Gent"—the subject of numerous short stories. They were becoming increasingly identified as poorly-bred urban fops fifty years before George and Weedon Grossmith published *The Diary of a Nobody*. I argue that these negative and positive identity components of the early and mid-nineteenth century were carried into and through the late-Victorian era and had a profound effect on how society, and clerks themselves, envisioned the world of clerking and its members.

Chapter two investigates the formation of a clerical culture and identity through shared work and office experiences. The British Library's extensive collection of "success" manuals and guides to proper clerking behavior were useful in my examination of the clerk's work and office culture. The office environment, with its strict regulations of dress, punctuality, manners, deference to the "guv'nor" and proper work routine, shaped and formed the clerk's self-identity and the way in which he was perceived by the world outside the doors of his office. The office is where the clerk initially acquired a sense of work and, later, an individual identity. The office helped to form the clerk's perceived identity as a "respectable" middle class male and provided a set of rules and regulations that brought order and function to the clerk's working life. These rules and regulations helped to provide the young clerk with a set of cultural components that were distinctly clerical. Meanwhile, self-help and personal improvement were upheld as the keys to entrance into the world of the clerk's employers. However, the language of these guides and handbooks to proper clerking behavior in the office and,

significantly, private life reveals an identity that, in the end, was rather tenuous. The clerk's office experience not only provided him with an identity which granted him an identification with his middle class superiors, but it also began to construct a concurrent identity of deference, docility and material privation which isolated him from these same middle class "betters". The rewards promised by a life of proper office conduct and self-improvement rarely materialized. The London Guildhall Library's extensive collection of insurance, bank and merchant records enabled me to compile a database of work and salary histories of over 5,000 clerks from several City of London businesses. A quantitative analysis of these records indicates that few clerks who entered these offices reached a salary of £150 per annum—the base salary of middle class "membership".

Chapter three examines the educational background and social activities of clerks and their roles in creating a common experience and identity. The culture of the clerical life began at school, especially after Forster's Education Act of 1870. Classes in shorthand, book-keeping and languages, and the emphasis placed upon good handwriting, mathematical skills, punctuality and the importance of proper dress, all helped to instill lower middle class values into the boys and girls of the labouring classes—who were thus encouraged to choose non-manual careers. The records of the London County Council's Technical Education Board have been of particular use in this regard. Meanwhile, the London County Council's staff records highlight the common family, education and work experiences of its entry-level clerks. The social activities and clubs for clerks which existed in London, and their related discourse, also helped to create a common clerical

bond and experience. Institutions such as the Y.M.C.A., were largely dominated by clerical membership and served as vehicles in the fashioning of shared characteristics of culture and identity.

In chapter four I have evaluated the impact that late-Victorian social and cultural experience had on clerical discourse and identity. London's financial, commercial and governmental sectors grew dramatically and demanded clerks for their ever expanding offices. The process of the clerk's identity formation hastened as shared occupational and cultural experiences were increasingly recognised by clerks and late-Victorian and Edwardian observers. During this era clerks were becoming increasingly concerned about their marginal material existence. Penny Weeklies and countless popular and office journals provided a medium for discourse on this and other subjects of interest to clerks. My examination of discourse concerning clerks' income and employment prospects reveals an identity that cannot be merely defined as either working or middle class. This discourse not only highlights the grievances of clerks but also indicates that clerks were voicing their concerns far more habitually than in the "rare outbursts of frustration and resentment" that Gregory Anderson has suggested. Letters, articles and diaries written by clerks indicate that they were overwhelmingly anxious about their toehold within the middle class. While the nature of their work and their "salaries" distinguished them from wage labourers, their social and cultural experience continued to distance them from their middle class employers. Although a few clerks were in comfortable positions with formal or informal salary scales, there were large numbers of clerks earning meagre salaries that served to reinforce the vision of the clerk as a liminal figure.

Low pay not only continued to prevent clerks from acquiring the material trappings and lifestyle of the middle class, such as marriage, a home and family, but it also introduced a culture of anxiety and emasculation into the world of clerking. This sense of emasculation heightened by the Edwardian era as women began to enter into clerical positions in significant numbers and, in the opinion of many clerks, robbed them of their livelihood and masculine identity.

Chapter five explores the late-Victorian and Edwardian "vision" of the clerk and its role in shaping the clerk's outward identity. Novelists, social critics and reformers, editors, politicians and other spokesmen of the solidly middle class all constructed their own vision of the clerk. While their visions may have been derived from existing stereotypes, and further helped to fashion them, the end result was usually unflattering and, occasionally, insidious. While clerks may not have all been cast from the same mold, these observers overwhelmingly represented these "little urban men" as anonymous souls living in the maelstrom of turn-of-the-century London. Meanwhile, by the late-nineteenth century it had become commonplace for clerks to be chided for a false sense of respectability. Curiously enough, many of these new commentators, such as H. G. Wells, George Grossmith and George Gissing, came from the same working or lower middle class backgrounds of most clerks. While earlier writers, such as Dickens and Trollope did little to equate clerking with a false sense of respectability, and often even praised lower middle class culture, these new critics and writers not only began to challenge the positive identities of the clerk, but also helped to contribute to their destruction. This is not to suggest, however, that clerks

were without their supporters. Some commentators made efforts to depict clerks accurately and honestly. Unfortunately, while helping to enlighten London to the "plight of the clerk", these same commentators undermined the clerking identity by exposing its many vulnerabilities. By the Edwardian era clerks had not only become the subject of ridicule but were now perceived by some observers, such as, T. W. H. Crosland, C. F. G. Masterman and E. M. Forster, as a possible danger to the "Condition of England".

Chapter One
An Identity Comes into Focus:
The Shaping of a Clerking Identity, 1800-1870

The clerking identity and outward "vision" of the clerk was gradually formed during the early and mid-nineteenth century within a gradually shifting social and cultural experience . Nowhere was this vision more strongly represented than by opinion leaders of the period. Novelists, social critics and reformers, editors, politicians and other spokesmen of the solidly middle class all constructed their own vision of the clerk. While their visions may have been stereotypical, results were usually unflattering and, occasionally, insidious. While clerks may not have all been cast from the same mold, these observers represented these "little urban men" as anonymous souls living in the maelstrom of turn-of-the-century London.

In 1890 an author in *The Clerk* reflected that a clerk's identity was one that had been shaped and formed over the centuries and had its roots linked to anyone who wrote, read and did a little "arithmetical" to earn a living.

What does "clerk" mean? We know in the "days of old" clerk signified scholar, and a "right clerkly gentleman" was one who knew some little book learning, and could, at any rate, write his name legibly. For centuries the only educated man in the country parishes was the priest, and often he was called the parish clerk, or, at any rate, officiated in that capacity, hence the word clerk came to mean not only a scholar generally, but also particularly the priest of clergyman. But know what a vast change has come over the meaning of "clerk." Its old import of scholar and priest has been relegated to the obsolete, and the significance now is incomprehensive and diversified. Under the heading of clerk may be arranged shorthand writers, typewriters, telegraphists, correspondents, book-keepers, copyists, secretaries, etc., and when the word "clerk" is now used, it may include any one or all of these.¹

¹The Clerk, 15 May, 1890, Vol. 1, No. 2, 20.

A "clerk" however was more than an occupational identity. While the pre-Victorian era identity of the clerk was linked closely to work done by scholars and gentlemen, this portrayal had witnessed a radical transformation by the outbreak of the Great War. This transformation was so dramatic that John Dale was not far off the mark in suggesting in 1962 that over the past 200 years clerks consistently had the outward identity of pathetic little men scribbling furiously in dimly-lit offices at starvation "salaries" while struggling for respectability.² It must be maintained, however, that this new clerking identity did not occur overnight. Rather it was gradually formed throughout the nineteenth century by economic, social, cultural and educational circumstances.

In the early to mid 19th century clerks were usually portrayed by observers, and themselves, as men leading a hard-working life of daily drudgery. For example, Charles Lamb, Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope portrayed clerks as reasonably upright individuals upon whose heavy shoulders the weight of the government and business of the nation rested. They were the ground troops of good government and commerce and, hence, should be treated with respect. Concurrently, however, these writers also helped to shape the clerk's identity as a marginal individual through representations of clerks struggling under the tutelage of malevolent employers. Meanwhile, the identity of the clerk as a respectable individual

²Dale argued that: "The clerk of tradition is not an impressive figure. In the literature of the last two centuries he has rarely appeared in a robust or romantic role, being more frequently treated as an object of pity or derision, pursuing an inferior occupation in undesirable conditions." John Rodney Dale, The Clerk In Industry: A Survey Of The Occupational Experience, Status, Education, And Vocational Training Of A Group Of Male Clerks Employed By Industrial Companies (Liverpool, 1962), 2.

gradually changed as the number clerks increased and began to come more regularly from less than desirable backgrounds. In the 1830s and 1840s the clerk began to be ridiculed by the middle class periodical press and identified with an absurd urban creature know as "The Gent". This was more than fifty years before the Grossmiths published *The Diary of a Nobody*.³ Clerks were becoming increasingly identified as poorly-bred urban fops.

In 1883 R. Kennard implied in *London Society* that clerks of earlier days were rightfully well-respected. In discussing the diary of an 18th century clerk Kennard commented that:

The first thing which strikes one on glancing at the hand-written portion is the extreme legibility of the writing, and general neatness of the book. No doubt the writer's clear and finished style of penmanship is explained by the fact that he was a clerk in the old South Sea Company, and that good handwriting was an antecedent necessity; but it is also universally true that those who *did* write in that age, as a rule, wrote better than the same class of persons, at the present day, have time to write.⁴

To Kennard the diarist was his equal. He would have been hard pressed to find a writer in the late-Victorian era who would have considered a contemporary clerk as a cultivated individual, let alone an equal. This description of an earlier age of accepted clerking respectability and reasonable status helped to cultivate the image of the noble and well-educated clerk of yesteryear. This was a sharp contrast to publicly educated clerks of Kennard's time who were increasingly coming under attack for their allegedly slovenly penmanship and sloppy work habits.⁵ What is significant is that by the late 19th century the clerk's outward identity was not only shaped against what he

³See Chapter Five of this dissertation for an examination of this novel.

⁴*Ibid.*, 146.

⁵See below.

was not in the present, but also by the contrast between himself and the vision of a former and more "gentlemanly" age of clerking.

It is noteworthy, however, that this vision of a "golden age of clerking" was carried into and through the Victorian era. Works such as Charles Lamb's had a profound impact on how society and clerks themselves envisioned the world of clerking. Lamb worked as a clerk in the East India House Account's Office for thirty-three years but is generally typified as an early 19th century Romantic writer and essayist.⁶ His accounts of this life did a great deal to shape the Victorian vision of the clerk.

Lamb's social background helped to shape the view that a clerk coming from a working or lower middle class background could find prominence and a place in the world of the middle classes. With friends and acquaintances such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Hazlitt, Lamb rubbed shoulders with the cultural elites of his time. Unfortunately Victorian and Edwardian clerks who dreamed of such a life through clerking did not recognize the distinct and privileged upbringing of this son of a "Scrivener". Charles was born in London and in The (Inner) Temple,⁷ where his father, John Lamb, was Samuel Salt's (a Bencher) general factotum for fifty-five years. He acted as a

⁶Lamb, although the most recognized, was by no means the only writer who toiled as a clerk in the East India House during this period. Some of these were James Cobb, playwright; John Hoole, the translator of Tasso; Peter Auber, historian; the two Mills; Thomas Love Peacock, poet and novelist; and Walter Wilson, who wrote on Daniel Defoe and was a good friend of Lamb's. Claude A Prance, Companion to Charles Lamb: A Guide to People and Places, 1760-1847 (London: 1983), 100-101.

⁷This property was originally owned by the medieval order of the Knights Templar and consisted of two of the four Inns of Court—the Middle and the Inner Temple. By the late 18th century the members of the Temple were barristers, Masters of the Bench (Benchers) and students. Approximately sixty Benchers ran the Society of the Inner Temple where one of its functions was the training of lawyers. Senior members usually occupied offices and residential flats in the Temple. Winfred F. Courtney, Young Charles Lamb, 1775-1802 (London: 1982), 1.

valet, clerk, scribe, protector and, most importantly, a friend to Salt. This brought access to a world and intellectual culture to which the son of an average clerk had little access.⁸ In Salt's vast library, introduced to Lamb by his sister Mary, he spent innumerable hours in this "spacious closet of good old English reading, without much selection or prohibition and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage."⁹ However, Lamb's education was by no means restricted to the books provided to him through the patronage of Salt. In 1782, following in his elder brother John's footsteps, Lamb began his principal education as a Blue-coat boy in Christ's Hospital in Newgate Street.¹⁰

Once again Samuel Salt played the key role in furthering Lamb's education. Salt was a governor of Christ's hospital and had his friend Timothy Yeats sponsor Lamb, as Salt had done for Lamb's brother John. This was an enormous opportunity for these sons of a 'Scrivener'.¹¹ Winifred Courtney has even proposed that "Christ's Hospital was the best thing that ever happened to Charles Lamb. It gave him a liberal education, sensitive to

⁸Courtney, Young Charles Lamb, 1775-1802, 3-4.

⁹Charles Lamb, Elia, in Charles Lamb. "*Elia and The Last Essays of Elia*," E. V. Lucas ed., The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb Volume II (London: 1903),76.

¹⁰Christ's Hospital was originally founded by Edward VI in 1552, "to take out of the street all the fatherless and other poor men's children that were not able to keep them and to bring them to the late dissolved house of the Greyfriars, which they decided to be a Hospital for them, where hey should have meat, drink, and clothes, lodging and learning, and officers to attend upon them." Brimley R. Johnson (ed.), Christ's Hospital: Recollections of Lamb, Coleridge, and Leigh Hint, with Some Account of Its Foundation (London: 1896), xii.

¹¹'Scrivener' was the occupation listed by Charles's father on Charles's admission application. It was maintained that the petitioner "has a Wife and three children; and he finds it difficult to maintain and educate his Family without some Assistance." Johnson, Christ's Hospital 5.

moral issues, and it gave him gifted friends, chief of whom was Samuel Taylor Coleridge."¹² As a Blue-coat boy Lamb's distinctive clothing commanded a great deal of respect as the Lord Mayor of London and the King were patrons of the school.¹³ This set him apart from the other "charity-boys" of London, while also differentiating him from boys of public schools. Years later Lamb reflected on the distinct nature of this position.

The Christ's Hospital or Blue-coat boy, has a distinctive character of his own, as far removed from the abject qualities of a common charity-boy as it is from the disgusting forwardness of a lad brought up at some other of the public schools. There is *pride* in it, accumulated from the circumstances which I have described as differencing him from the former; and there is a *restraining modesty*, from a sense of obligation and dependence, which must keep his deportment from assimilating to that of the latter.¹⁴

Despite his unique background, through his writings, particularly through his pseudo-autobiographical clerk *Elia*, Lamb played a significant role in creating a comprehensive outward clerking identity that had an impact on forming clerks' outward and inward identities throughout the Victorian era. Throughout the Victorian era his name was synonymous with clerking.

In an article, "The Good Clerk, a Character; with some account of *The Complete English Tradesman*," published in *The Reflector* in 1812, Lamb commented on the clerking identity of his day. Lamb noted that this identity had not simply sprouted up during his lifetime but was one that had been partially shaped and manipulated by clerks' employers and prescribed in eighteenth century guides of proper behavior for English clerks and

¹²Courtney, Young Charles Lamb, 34.

¹³*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴Charles Lamb, "Recollections of Christ's Hospital, 1813." George Gordon (ed.) Charles Lamb: Prose and Poetry (Oxford: 1930), 63.

tradesmen.¹⁵ Lamb's rather satirical comments on this early nineteenth century outward clerking identity helps to highlight the similarities between the clerking identity of the Victorian and pre-Victorian eras.¹⁶ It was an identity that clerks adopted, but often only under the incessant prodding of those whose primary intents were to mold clerks into respectable representatives of England's trade, commerce and government.

The Good Clerk.—He writeth a fair and swift hand, and is completely versed in the Four First Rules of Arithmetic, in the Rule of Three (which is sometimes called the Golden Rule) and in Practice. We mention these things, that we may leave no room for cavaliers to say, that any thing essential hath been omitted in our definition; else, to speak the truth, these are but ordinary accomplishments, and such as every understrapper at a desk is commonly furnished with. The character we treat of soareth higher.

He is clean and neat in his person; not from a vain-glorious desire of setting himself forth to advantage in the eyes of the other sex (with which vanity too many of our young Sparks now-a-days are infected) but to do credit (as we say) to the office. For this reason he evermore taketh care that his desk or his books receive no soil; the which things he is commonly solicitous to have fair and unblemished, as the owner of a fine horse is to have him appear in good keep.

He riseth early in the morning; not because early rising conduceth to health (though he doth not altogether despise that consideration) but chiefly to the intent that he may be first at the desk. There is his post, there he delighteth to be, unless when his meal or necessity, calleth him away; which time he always esteemeth as lost, and maketh as short as possible.

He is temperate in eating and drinking, that he may preserve a clear head and steady hand for his master's service. He is also partly induced to this observation of the rules of temperance by his respect for religion and the laws of his country; which things (it may once for all be noted) do add special assistance to his actions, but do not and cannot furnish the main spring or motive thereto. His ambition (as appeareth all along) is to be a good Clerk, his next a good Christian, a good Patriot, &c.

Correspondent to this, he keepeth himself honest, not for fear of the laws, but because he hath observed how unseemly an article it maketh in the Daily Book, or Ledger, when a sum is set down lost or missing; it

¹⁵In the case of this article, Lamb was referring particularly to Daniel Defoe's, The Complete English Tradesman (London: 1745).

¹⁶See Chapter Two for a discussion of the role which late-nineteenth century employers and handbooks for clerks played in the construction of the clerking identity.

being his pride to make these books to agree, and to tally, the one side with the other, with a sort of architectural symmetry and correspondence.

He marrieth, or marrieth not, as best suiteth with his employer's views. Some merchants do the rather desire to have married men in their Counting Houses, because they think the married state a pledge for their servants' integrity, and an incitement to them to be industrious; and it was an observation of a Late Mayor of London, that the sons of Clerks do generally prove Clerks themselves, and that Merchants encouraging persons in their employ to marry, and to have families, was the best method of acquiring a breed of sober industrious young men attached to the mercantile interest. Be this as it may, such a character as we have been describing, will wait till the pleasure of his employer is known on this point; and regulateth his desires by the custom of the house or firm to which he belongeth.

He avoideth profane oaths and jesting, as so much time lost from his employ; what spare time he hath for conversation, which in a Counting House such as we have been supposing can be but small, he spendeth in putting seasonable questions to such of his fellows (and sometimes *respectfully* to the master himself) who can give him information respecting the price and quality of goods, the state of exchange, or the latest improvements in book-keeping; thus making the motion of his lips, as well as of his fingers, subservient to his master's interest. . . .

Lastly, his dress is plain without singularity; with no other ornament than the quill, which is the badge of his functions, stuck under the dexter ear, and this rather for convenience of having it at hand, when he hath been called way from his desk, and expecteth to resume his seat there again shortly, than from any delight which he taketh in foppery of ostentation. The colour of his clothes is generally noted to be black rather than brown, brown rather than blue green. His whole deportment is staid, modest, and civil. His motto is Regularity.¹⁷

The clerk was to be earnest, temperate, deferential, sober, industrious and without any pretensions to ostentation in his manners and appearance. In fact, in many ways, the language Lamb used indicated that clerks were not to have any individual masculine identity that was not conferred directly upon them by their employers. While his own privileged position granted him considerable advantages to improve his own material well-being and sense of

¹⁷Charles Lamb, "The Good Clerk, a Character; with some account of "The Complete English Tradesman,"" *The Reflector*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1812, 432-434.

self, the language of the far more common clerking experience intersected with his own.

Such depictions of the clerking experience were further refined by Lamb in his writings under his Elia pseudonym. Lamb was by no means the first writer to employ a fictitious name for his writings. Creations such as Isaac Bickerstaff, Roger DeCoverly, Adam Fitz-Adam, and Lien Chi Altangi were well known to Lamb.¹⁸ Meanwhile, he greatly enjoyed essays written under pseudonyms in the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, the *Connoisseur*, the *World*, the *Adventurer* and the *Rambler*.¹⁹ Lamb claimed that he took the name Elia from a clerk who had worked at the South-Sea House during Lamb's brief sojourn there from 1791-92.²⁰ Lamb explained his using of this pseudonym in a letter to John Taylor, editor of the *London Magazine*, who published Lamb's first Elia essay, 'The South-Sea House'.

The fact is, a person of that name, an Italian, was a fellow clerk of mine at the South Sea House, thirty (not forty) years ago, when the characters I described there existed, but had left it like myself many years; and I having a brother now there, and doubting how he might relish certain descriptions in it, I clapt down the name Elia to it, which passed off pretty well, for Elia himself added the function of an author to that of a scrivener like myself.

I went the other day (not having seen him for a year) to laugh over with him at my usurpation of his name, and found him, alas! no more than a name, for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it.

So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think; and 'tis all he has left me.²¹

¹⁸E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London: 1905), 417-415,

¹⁹Robert Frank, *Don't Call Me Gentle Charles! An Essay on Lamb's Essays of Elia* (Corvallis, Oregon: 1976), 17; George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia* (Bloomington, Indiana: 1964), 94-95; and George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Boston: 1976), 43.

²⁰E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 73-74 and 442-459.

Lamb's identification with a former clerical worker and his concern for his brother's feelings is the most probable explanation for using Elia as his pseudonym, although some critics take a more literal meaning from the word and propose that Elia simply meant "a lie".²²

In many of his *Elia* essays Lamb meditated on his clerking identity. Lamb was acutely conscious of his identity as a "clerk", particularly in regard to how it was used to depict Lamb's station and work. He may have been recognized as a literary writer and friend of the Wordsworths and Coleridges of England, but this identity component remained submerged below his external clerking identity. In his second *Elia* essay, "Oxford in the Vacation", Lamb displayed his awareness of this external stamp,

Casting a preparatory glance at the bottom of this article--as the wary connoisseur in prints, with cursory eye (which, while it reads, seems as though it read not,) never fails to consult the *quis sculpsit* in the corner, before he pronounces some rare piece to be a Vivars, or a Woollet--methinks I hear you exclaim, Reader, *Who is Elia?*

Because in my last I tried to divert thee with some half-forgotten humours of some old clerks defunct, in an old house of business, long since gone to decay, doubtless you have already set me down in your mind as one of the self-same college--a votary of the desk--a notched and cropt scrivener--one that sucks his sustenance, as certain sick people are said to do, through a quill.²³

Lamb, however, continued this passage by turning the tables on those who might simply have viewed him as one whose only form of sustenance was by driving a quill through columns in a ledger book.

²¹Letter from Charles Lamb to John Taylor, June 30, 1821, in E. V. Lucas ed., The Letters of Charles Lamb: To Which are Added Those of his Sister Mary Vol. II (London: 1935), 302.

²²Gerald Monsman, "Charles Lamb's 'Enfranchised Quill': The Two First Essays of Elia" in Criticism, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1981, 232. See also David Cecil, A Portrait of Charles Lamb (London: 1983), 148-157; and Robert Frank, Don't Call Me Gentle Charles! 13-34.

²³Charles Lamb, "Oxford in the Vacation" in Elia, 7-8.

Well, I do agonize something of the sort. I confess that it is my humour, my fancy—in the forepart of the day, when the mind of your man of letters requires some relaxation—(and none better than such as first sight seems most abhorrent from his beloved studies)—to while away some good hours of my time in the contemplation of indigos, cottons, raw silks, piece-goods, flowered or otherwise. In the first place * * * * * and then it sends you home with such increased appetite to your books * * * * * not to say, that your outside sheets, and waste papers of foolscap, do not receive into them, most kindly and naturally, the impression of sonnets, epigrams, *essays*—so that the very parings of a counting-house are, in some sort, the settings up of an author. The enfranchised quill, that has plodded all the morning among the cart-rucks of figures and cyphers, frisks and curvets so as its ease over the flowery carpet ground of a midnight dissertation.—It feels its promotion. * * * * * So that you see, upon the whole, the literary dignity of *Elia* is very little, if at all, compromised in the condescension.²⁴

As witnessed, Lamb, ever conscious of his clerking identity, was able to employ his sense of humility and self-effacement within the *Elia* essays. Although Lamb is rightfully placed as part of the Romantic movement²⁵ he was rarely confessional and regularly displayed a considerable degree of wit and mirth in his writings. There was a familiarity with the past in his writings, such as in his account of his schooling at Christ's Hospital, his reflections on the South-Sea House and in his musings on Oxford, old newspapers and Shakespeare.²⁶ *Elia* allowed him the room to ruminate as a subjective individual who not only shared Lamb's memories of the past but, more importantly, his wisdom, essential genuineness and human sympathy.²⁷ *Elia* was simply the comfortable old shoe that Lamb wore to plod over the memories and issues of his past and present. They shared a

²⁴Ibid., 7-8.

²⁵For an examination of Lamb's links to English Romanticism see Fred V. Randel, *The World Of Elia: Charles Lamb's Essayistic Romanticism* (Port Washington: 1975).

²⁶Charles Lamb, *Elia*, 1-7, 7-12, 12-22, 132-141, and 220-225.

²⁷George L. Barnett, *Charles Lamb* (Boston: 1976), 111-113.

common identity as clerks--Lamb set up Elia not to be taken too seriously-- which helped to fend off critics of Lamb from the subjective and self-reflective nature of his Elia writings. Meanwhile Lamb's countenance was continually remarked upon by his contemporaries and later writers. Although by no means a genius, this tragic clerk had achieved, in the minds of literary critics, "literary immortality."²⁸

Despite the fact that the work of the clerk may have been seen as one of responsibility and importance, the clerk's life of drudgery was continually invoked by writers and clerks of the pre-Victorian and early Victorian eras. Reflecting on his retirement Lamb proclaimed in a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson that, "I have left the damned India House for Ever! Give me great joy."²⁹ Lamb, speaking through Elia, viewed this retirement as an escape from the days of drudgery which had robbed him of his youth.

If peradventure, Reader, it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life--thy shining youth--in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, without hope of release of respite; to have lived to forget that there are such things as holidays, or to remember them but as the prerogatives of childhood; then, and then only, will you be able to appreciate my deliverance.³⁰

²⁸Alice Law, "Charles Lamb," The Contemporary Review, Vol. 146, December 1934, 712.

²⁹Letter from Charles Lamb to Henry Crabb Robinson, 29 March, 1825, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. II (London: 1904), 673. Robinson noted a month later (April 22, 1825) in his diary that he called on Lamb and his sister and found them in excellent spirits. "He has obtained his discharge from the India House, with the sacrifice of rather more than a third of his income. He says he would not be condemned to a seven years' return to his office for a hundred thousand pounds. I never saw him so calmly cheerful as now." Cited in Edmund Blunden (ed.), Charles Lamb: His Life Recorded by his Contemporaries (London: 1934), 141.

³⁰Charles Lamb, The Last Essays of Elia, 193.

He despised the nature and subject of his work, and often complained that the hours spent in the East India House were slowly destroying his soul and intellect: "Why the devil am I never to have a chance of scribbling my own free thoughts, verse or prose, again? Why must I write of Tea & Drugs & Price Goods & bales of Indigo?"³¹ In a letter to Wordsworth in 1818 Lamb proclaimed that, "I loathe and detest her [the East India Company] as the Scarlet what-do-you-call-her of Babylon," and reminded his friend to be thankful of his "Liberty" from such work as that of a clerk.³² Lamb viewed the hours he was confined at his office as a drain on his gentility. He envied friends and acquaintances who were able to indulge their literary and gentlemanly pursuits unfettered by work and material concerns--as witnessed in a letter to Thomas Manning, who was living in Hertfordshire:

I have not had such a quiet half hour to sit down to a quiet letter for many years. I have not been interrupted above four times. I wrote a letter the other day in alternate lines, black ink and red, and you cannot think how it chilled the flow of ideas. Next Monday is Whit-Monday. What a reflection! Twelve years ago, and I should have kept that and the following holiday in the fields a-Maying. All those pretty pastoral delights are over. This dead, everlasting desk--how it weighs the spirit of the gentleman down! This dead wood of the desk instead of your living trees!³³

Lamb was by no means the first clerk to remark that life in an office was one of unending boredom. Before seeking refuge in the army in 1783

³¹Letter from Charles Lamb to Matilda Betham, Late Summer, 1815, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I (London: 1904), 478.

³²Letter from Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, February 18, 1818, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I, (London: 1904), 510-514.

³³Letter from Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, May 28, 1819, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I (London: 1904), 522-524.

William Cobbett spent nine months as a lawyer's clerk--the only portion of his life, he claimed, which was "wholly unattended by pleasure."

The office (for so the dungeon where I wrote was called) was so dark that on cloudy days we were obliged to burn candles. I worked like a galley slave from five in the morning till eight or nine at night, and sometimes all night long. I never quitted this gloomy recess except on Sundays, when I usually took a walk in St. James's Park to feast my eyes on the sights of trees, the grass and the water.³⁴

Despite the insufferable boredom experienced by Cobbett, Lamb's office drudgery was probably not nearly as stifling as one might gauge by his comments upon his retirement. During Lamb's time the East India Company was not only a commercial power, but a colonial one as well.³⁵ It not only resembled a government agency, but it also had a superfluous number of clerks that typified and stereotyped the civil service prior to its mid-century reforms. Thomas Love Peacock, in depicting his own afternoons as a clerk in the East India House, amusingly quipped:

From twelve to one, asked, "what's to be done?"
From one to two, found nothing to do;
From two to three began to foresee
That from three to four would be a damned bore.³⁶

While an excess of free time may have not alleviated the drudgery of Lamb's work,³⁷ it did allow him to write. Although there were distinct class and

³⁴Cited in W. Baring Pemberton, William Cobbett (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1949), 14.

³⁵Parliament supervised the company's political power. Gerald Monsman, "Charles Lamb's Elia as Clerk: The Commercial Employment of a Literary Writer," in The Wordsworth Circle, Vol. 21, No. 3, Summer 1990, 97.

³⁶Thomas Love Peacock, The Works of Thomas Love Peacock. Volume VII: Poems and Plays (London: 1931), 236. Peacock described the job as being, for the most part, a "damned bore." Carl Dawson, His Fine Wit: A Study of Thomas Love Peacock (London: 1970), 58.

³⁷Any Ph.D. candidate can easily qualify this assertion!

status divisions between Lamb and his employers, his identity was not one of a Mr. Pooter or Leonard Bast. A clerk in his position (his salary reached £750 per annum at retirement) in the East India Company was in a distinctly different world than the average clerk in the late-Victorian era. Lamb was employed by the East India Company in its Accountant's department—an office well known for its efficiency and speed.³⁸ His office conditions were reasonably good, if aesthetically sparse. He worked in a room divided into compartments of six clerks each, which Lamb was widely known to punningly refer to as "compounds," and, "a collection of simples."³⁹ He sat on the typical high stool at a desk laden with inkwells containing the red ink he referred to as "clerk's blood."⁴⁰ Here, Lamb sat, "gravely casting up sums in great Books, compare sum with sum, and write 'Paid' against this and 'unpaid' against to'other."⁴¹ However, he did state that he was able to occasionally "reserve in some corner of my mind some darling thoughts of my own."⁴² During free-time at his desk, in his "candle-light fog-den at

³⁸Lamb's work centered on the periodical auction sales where commodities of all kinds from the East were sold. He also often audited warehouse accounts and wages for some 4000 labourers employed by the Company. Letter from Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, August 9, 1815, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I (London: 1904), 469-472.

³⁹Letter from Charles Lamb to Walter Wilson, February 24, 1823, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. II, (London: 1904), 600-603; Henry Crabb Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence Vol. I (London: 1869), 333-334.

⁴⁰Letter from Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, 28 May, 1819, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I, (London: 1904), 522-23.

⁴¹Letter from Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, 20 March, 1822, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. II, (London: 1904), 562-564.

⁴²Letter from Charles Lamb to Thomas Manning, 28 May, 1819, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I, (London: 1904), 522-23.

Leadenhall," Lamb often found time to write private letters and other scribblings.⁴³ He was, however, quick to point out that "his true works may be found on the shelves of Leadenhall Street, filling up some hundred folios."⁴⁴ Lamb's position, which was often outwardly viewed as one of great responsibility and trust, was meanwhile enhanced by his literary accomplishments, intelligence and wit. This helped to distinguish him from his fellow workers. The outward identity that was partially constructed by Lamb through *Elia* and by readers of Lamb may have been one of drudgery, blood and sweat, but it was also one of that of intelligence and employer/employee trust and mutual respect.

Unfortunately would-be clerks of the later nineteenth century increasingly became the only members of society who even remotely thought of clerking in this manner. Moreover, despite a familiarity with employers and the moderately higher status of the clerk in Lamb's time, he was still often portrayed as a writer and "poor clerk." After Lamb's death, Crabb Robinson noted that, "Mary [Lamb's sister] does not like any allusion to his being a Clerk--not even dear Mary can overcome the common feeling that would conceal lowness of station."⁴⁵ Lamb's literary achievements and connections never completely separated him from his lower middle class work and background.

⁴³Letter from Charles Lamb to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, December 24, 1818, in E. V. Lucas (ed.), The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb Vol. I (London: 1904), 517-518.

⁴⁴Charles Lamb, "*Elia* and *The Last Essays of Elia*," in E. V. Lucas, ed. The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb Volume II, 197.

⁴⁵Cited in J. M. Hope, "Charles Lamb As A Business Man," The Charles Lamb Society Bulletin, No. 94, March 1950, 4.

Despite the moderate degree of status that clerks held during Lamb's time, they were also a rather disparate stratum. With the exception of the Bank of England, which employed over 900 clerks by 1813, the majority of clerks in the City of London worked in small firms, where clerks usually received salaries of less than £100 a year, of which there were over 8,500 by 1815.⁴⁶ By the 1830-40's the hardship endured by many clerks gradually worked its way into public discourse. An article appearing in *Fraser's* magazine in 1835 lamented the increasingly unfavourable situation of clerks and their fellow lower middle class workers. It was noted that as this class of men grew in London their hardship seemed to be increasing exponentially. However, as was common with most discourse concerning the plight of clerks at this time, the blame was placed entirely at the feet of the employers of "respectable" labour. Just as critics of industrialism waxed romantically about the lost virtues of the organic rural society,⁴⁷ the article harkened back to the age of a half-century earlier where "the expected reward for steady and faithful conduct was a share of that business which a man's industry had mainly contributed to make."⁴⁸ It commemorated an age when, "throughout London, nothing could be considered so much a stain upon a mercantile firm, or a greater reproach upon the establishment, than suffering a faithful auxiliary in trade to want in his old age, after his sinews and bones had been

⁴⁶David Kynaston, The City of London. Volume I: A World of its Own. 1815-1890 (London: 1994). See Chapter Two of thesis for a further account of the growth in clerking in the 19th century.

⁴⁷For an excellent study of this see Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London: 1973).

⁴⁸Anon, "A Few Words of Advice to Clerks, Shopmen, and Apprentices," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 12, Sept. 1835, p. 267.

worn out in service."⁴⁹ A time of mutual respect, partnership and trust was being replaced by a far different and troubling relationship between the clerk and his employer.

The employer now thinks, that if he pays those in his employ sufficient to feed, clothe, and lodge them, there needs no contingent stimuli to industry and fidelity. Abstractly considered, it may be asked, Who can complain of this? Weighed and tested in the scales of Astræa, she may approve of it as a dry principle of justice; although, in many cases, *moral* is sacrificed to *legal* right. . . . Confidants in trade, and those who have gone through a long life, becoming grey in one service, receive their stipends, and are told to be thankful that they are allowed to eat, and are occasionally commiserated with the epithet of "Poor old fellow!" and at last, as the high-mettled racer is sent to the knacker, they are consigned of the workhouse, there to finish (or be finished), as regards their moral career, as speedily as possible.⁵⁰

Clerks, *Fraser's* argued, deserved more for their honest labour and service. Behind this was a longing for an earlier time where it was perceived that men who earned their living through their brains and not their brawn were treated as respectable members of urban society. However, as voices of concern over the plight of clerks increased in number, a portrait of the clerk as a pathetic figure began to form and shape his outward identity.

Nowhere was this more evident than in *Punch* during the 1840s and 1850s. Here humour was often used to highlight the plight of the, underpaid, under-respected, under-fed and over-worked clerk. In a counterfeit letter to Mr. Babbage, the inventor of a calculating machine, in which the question of the hardship imposed on law clerks was discussed, *Punch* wryly mused that clerks were ill-suited to an office environment.

The misery of the Clerk at present in use is, that his frame is composed of flesh and blood; that there is a heart in his breast, a brain in his skull;

⁴⁹Ibid., 268.

⁵⁰Ibid.

there are nerves, pulses, and other delicate and touchy structures in his anatomy; and emotions and sensibilities in his moral nature. This constitution of his ill qualifies him to work on an oak seat, leaning against a hard desk from morning till near midnight, and to exist on some few shillings a week, with an old widowed mother, it may be, or perhaps a wife and children to support out of that. It creates, also a demand for an occasional holiday; a demand which, for six-and-eightpenny considerations, cannot, for the most part, be acceded to, even in the Long Vacation.⁵¹

Punch continued with a solution to the inconveniences suffered by the lawyers as a result of their inefficiently designed clerks. All that was needed was for Babbage to design and construct an "Automaton Lawyer's Clerk."

Mahogany has no nervous system, springs and wires do not vibrate with sensations; and to the Attorney's wrong and the Solicitor's contumely, the whole clockwork would be impassible. The machine could not contract matrimony and have to keep a family; and were you, Sir, its Parent, (which Heaven avert!) to fall into distress, it would not be called upon to maintain you. It would bear all kinds of indignity and ill-treatment without a murmur; it would call no meetings, write no letters to the newspapers. Like master like slave, it would be wholly unfeeling. It would work all day, and night too, if necessary, uncomplaining, till it got out of order; and then it might be mended. Here is a Clerk that would work incessantly, and neither eat, sleep, want payment, or grumble; thus, I apprehend, exactly supplying the Attorney's grand desideratum.⁵²

Although such articles called for employers to treat their clerks with respect and to pay them a living wage, visions of clerks as pathetic individuals leading lives of drudgery were continually reinforced. While journals such as *Punch* reminded its readers that "a copying machine--if human--requires food, shelter, and clothing, to keep it in motion," it benevolently noted that "the word clerk was also becoming synonymous with 'half-starved drudge'."⁵³

⁵¹"The Ingenious Mr. Babbage": The Lawyer's Clerk Question Settled, "*Punch*, 1844, Vol. 7, 194.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³"Pity the Poor Copying Clerks," *Punch* Vol. 26, May 6, 1854, 193.

In an 1852 pamphlet J. S. Harrison, a London clerk, attempted to combat this increasingly more common vision by emphasizing the middle class status and nature of clerks. In short, he wanted the respectable components of the clerk's identity recognized:

The qualifications usually required of clerks and book-keepers are, that they should be men of respectability, education and address: these are more or less indispensable according to the nature of the engagement. It will no doubt be allowed as a general fact. that their occupation or position are necessarily of a more improving or elevating tendency, involving a greater degree of respectability of habit and appearance, and too often more anxiety and mental effort than most regular mechanical occupation. And this being the case, a constant and unavoidable influence is thereby exerted in respect to their position and connection in society.⁵⁴

Despite Harrison's assertions emphasizing the middle class nature of clerks and their work, his pamphlet clearly exposed the rather schizophrenic nature of the clerical identity. If clerks were indeed middle class, why would Harrison have had to argue so forcefully? Moreover, in Harrison's account of clerks' actual circumstances he concluded that their "deterioration and absorption into the lower class is imminent."⁵⁵ Harrison noted that clerks were almost entirely lacking in the components necessary upon which to build a middle class identity: providing their children with a good education, accumulating savings, contributing to charities and, most importantly, the employing of domestic servants. Like most spokesman for clerks during this period, Harrison argued that despite their material circumstance clerks should be treated as middle class equals by their employers, as "a clerk's duties bear greater similarity to those of the principal, and are, of a more

⁵⁴J. S. Harrison, The Social Position and Claims of Clerks and Book-Keepers Considered (London: 1852), 4.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

enlightening and improving nature than manual work."⁵⁶ Meanwhile, regarding temperament, clerks had far more in common with their employers than manual labourers as, "their tendency is not to keep up but decidedly to induce a more susceptible and sensitive state of mind than rougher and less mental pursuits."⁵⁷

Some would have argued with Harrison's claim that most clerks were not members of the middle class—materially or temperamentally. An anonymous Edinburgh law clerk argued in an 1848 pamphlet that most members of society identified him and his fellow writer's clerks as belonging to a caste quite separate from that to which respectable members of the city belonged. Meanwhile, he noted that these writer's clerks were men of rather disparate and often rather common backgrounds that prevented the formation of a cohesive and socially positive identity.

A north-country farmer selects the most intellectual of his spawn, and sends him off. Jock soon finds himself in Edinburgh, and sets himself to work; and it is very wonderful indeed if Jock doesn't get a footing in the long run. Decayed teachers furnish their quota. Deceased Advocate Clerks, who have been foolish enough to marry, add to the heap. They are an heterogeneous mixture—ill to define; and yet they are a most intellectual and well-educated race.⁵⁸

Education and intellect were not enough, however, to shape these men into middle class representatives. In fact, the pamphlet maintained, they were not only scorned by the middle class co-workers, but also by the lower ranks of society.

⁵⁶Ibid., 13.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Anon, The Natural History of the Writer's Clerk. By one of Them (Edinburgh: 1848),

They are but a race of modern Jews; for even a tradesman hath his sneer against the "Penny Clerk;"--the wealthy Writer to the Signet calls them "the people in the office." It is true the Writer to the Signet's son plays by stealth at pitch and toss with the Writer's Clerk in the office: but, oh! the adverted look when he meets him in Princess-street; or should he be betrayed into a nod, he remarks to his friend McGrowler, younger, of Toplaw, a son of his friend's client, "It's one of my Governor's clerks!" Should a Writer's Clerk by any means get into an assembly, he might as well have stayed at home: Miss Anybody sneers; Captain Swiveller quizzes; even a Grocer comes a little better off. In these distressing circumstances, the Writer's Clerk "takes it out" of the refreshments, and is at last found joking with one of the fiddlers whom he has met at a fish-dinner. Finally he goeth home danceless; but this doth not prevent him the next day stating in the office that Lady Ogilvie would have danced with him if she could, and that Miss Anybody gave him very particular glances.⁵⁹

The self-loathing tone of this pamphleteer not only signified the gradual shift in the way society identified clerks, but more significantly, in how clerks identified themselves. Scorn had generally been centered on the employers of clerical labour who had been chided for paying Malthusian wages to men of respectability, education and responsibility. Previous scholarship has touched on this point, but meanwhile generally supports the notion that clerks of the mid-Victorian era were of far higher stations than those of the *fin-de-siècle*.⁶⁰ Depictions of clerks as ragged social-climbers aspiring to heights well above any reasonable expectation may have been somewhat less common in 1848 than in 1900. However, the similarity between this portrayal of a clerk's night on the town and Mr. Pooter's attendance at the Lord Mayor's Ball in 1892's *The Diary of a Nobody* is striking.⁶¹ In both cases they were depicted as "little men" attempting to act well above society's ranking.

⁵⁹Ibid., 5-6.

⁶⁰Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain*, 1-24.

⁶¹See Chapter Five.

This aping of middle class betters was viewed in the perceived attempt of clerks to adopt the dress and deportment of men such as their gentlemanly employers. However, this exercise served to produce a sharp contrast between the identity to which clerks aspired and their outward identity.

The Writer's Clerk is well known. . . . He hath often a hat with a straight rim, vulgarly known as a "Ramsay Scraper." It would be a difficult task to find out when this hat was bought, or if it were paid for; but it has always a greasy appearance.

The Writer's Clerk has long hair, and his face is pale, with blotches--for the Writer's Clerk is dissipated. He hath generally a cravat, to hide his one change of line. (His two shirts, by the way are numbered 1 and 10.) His vest is tartan, and it is often the fragment of one of his sister's gowns in the north. His breathe-nots are tight, and not too long; and he is passionately attached to gaiters. Married Writer's Clerks have often white gaiters, made by their unfortunate wives out of worn out sheets or towels.⁶²

This Edinburgh clerk was by no means on his own in ruminating on the futility of clerks to adopt the characteristics and dress of the Victorian gentleman. The 1830s and 1840s witnessed numerous unflattering portrayals in the periodical press of clerks and their misguided attempts to ape the character and deportment of the English gentleman. In *A Passage in the Life of Mr. Nosebody*⁶³ the clerk, Julius Nosebody, is scolded for his struggle to

⁶²Anon. The Natural History of the Writer's Clerk, 8.

⁶³Davus, "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Nosebody," Bentley's Miscellany, Vol. 11, April 1842, 378-383. The author of this story made a point of highlighting Nosebody's rather humble origins and his and his family's delusive attempts to reach the ranks of the bourgeoisie. "Mr. Nosebody had been left an orphan when very young. His parents, though scant of means, determined to give their boy--their only child--a "liberal education," as it is termed, and qualify him for something better than trade or business. With this object, they sent him to Merchant Tailors' School [a Public School], where he made some progress in classical learning, and had even mastered some of the odes of Horace; but, as soon as he had been deprived of his natural protectors, his uncle, a regular London tradesman, whose ledger was his Bible and Psalter, thought that, while acting as guardian to the lad, he might turn him to good account. Accordingly, young Nosebody was transferred from school to his uncle's own establishment, where he was employed in the capacity of, nominally, junior clerk, but, virtually, as errand-boy. But Julius Nosebody did not like the shop--he had a soul above it, and as he grew up, his

affect "a smattering of antiquarian knowledge" through the purchase of a silver watch attached to "a huge appendage, like a gilt dog-chain, terminating in a couple of seals of gigantic dimension--'real gold'." Nosebody's material affectations are not, however, at the heart of this story. It is his attempt to identify himself with London society's learneds that was roundly chastised. Nosebody falls victim to an upper-class "friend" who introduces Nosebody to a night of London's intellectual culture. This is done in order that he and fellow prankster can ply the unsuspecting Nosebody with alcohol and watch and laugh as the unsuspecting clerk makes a spectacle of himself as he attempts to convince those around him that he is a true member of London's cultural society.

In Nosebody's story the clerk is represented as receiving the humiliation he deserves in his attempt to aspire to a status far above his own. In *Regular Habits*⁶⁴ the exceedingly habitual and frugal clerk Jeremiah Augustus Fubkins is also broken and humiliated. In his story he falls victim to a pretty seamstress who manipulates the unsuspecting Fubkins into financing a night of drinking and dining with another man and her cousin. Fubkins falls victim to drink and is beaten and robbed on his journey home by the seamstress's male friend. While Fubkins may not have been as consumed by the overly pretentious affectations of Nosebody,⁶⁵ he had clearly

distaste increased, so that at sixteen years of age, he obtained a situation in a banking-house in Lombard Street."

⁶⁴"Regular Habits," *Bentley's Miscellany*, Vol. 14, 1843, pp. 393-400.

⁶⁵There is in this story, however, a description of Fubkins's rather foppish costume for his date with the seamstress. "He had taken great pains in adorning his person, and was dressed in a grass-green coat, with a velvet collar of the same colour, embossed metal buttons bearing a faint resemblance to silver; a brimstone-coloured waistcoat, and lightish drab trousers. The collar of his shirt was very erect, and round his neck he wore a tie, and in which

stepped beyond the safety of the "Regular Habits" of his lower middle class lifestyle. His is a simple world of diligent routinisation; affairs of the heart are represented as so beyond his character and grasp that in the end he, like Nosebody, is unaware that he has been duped.

The stories of Nosebody and Fubkins are quite typical of the ways in which the clerk was portrayed in periodical publications during this period. He was an inept and naive little man who continually humiliated himself by stumbling into absurd situations, often in an attempt at upward mobility. Other stories reinforced this identity. In *The Man in the Mackintosh Cape*⁶⁶ Alfred Stokes is so obsessed with his penmanship that he almost loses his girlfriend. Meanwhile, in *Malachi Meagram, The Teatotaler*⁶⁷ an overly self-righteous clerk is plagued by a series of absurd and terrifying nightmares after bingeing on tea. The clerk's outward identity was not, however, merely restricted to that of a pathetic bumbler. By the mid-century he was ever-increasingly identified with "The Gent".

"The Gent" was a figure that achieved a high degree of notoriety thanks to the attention paid to him by writers and artists in the periodical press of the 1830s and 1840s. The Gent, according to Ellen Moers's history of *The Dandy*, "was a label pasted on young men at the very bottom of the respectable class, the scrubby clerks, apprentices and medical students who

was inserted a very large garnet-pin;—whether this last article of dress was symbolic of the ardour of his passion, or whether it was merely a matter of taste, was never exactly known."

⁶⁶J. B. Buckstone, *The Man in the Mackintosh Cape*, New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal, Vol. 50, 1837, 265-71.

⁶⁷Paul Pindar, *Malachi Meagram, The Teatotaler*, Bentley's Miscellany, Vol. 11, 1842, 228-232.

scraped along in the backwaters of London."⁶⁸ He was not, as Thackeray liked to dub Regency dandies, a "genlman". Nor was he part of the new breed of bourgeois Victorian "gentlemen". He was categorised as a new sort of city dweller who was the product of the ever increasing commercialisation of London in the 1830s and 40s.⁶⁹ Albert Smith remarked in 1846 that:

After much diligent investigation, we find no mention made of the Gent in the writings of authors who flourished antecedent to the last ten years. In the older works, we meet with "bucks" and "gay blades," with "pretty fellows," and, later, with "men upon town," "swells," and "knowing coves;" but the pure Gent comes not under any of these orders. . . . He is evidently the result of a variety of our present condition of society,—that constant struggle to appear something more than we in reality are, which characterizes everybody at this time, both in their public and private phases.⁷⁰

Gents were identified as a pretentious, ubiquitous, shiftless and tawdry bunch. They were, as Arlene Young suggests, "a degraded version of the dandy."⁷¹ *Punch* often stretched absurdity to its limits in identifying this new urban genus.

Gents! Gents! ye are horrible things
With your slang-looking coats, and gaudy rings:
Where shall a gentleman wander or dwell,
Horrible Gents, but ye come there as well?
Ye swarm at the theatres' half-price to the slips.
And think your style doth all others eclipse;

⁶⁸Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: 1960), 215.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*; and, Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: 1989), 274-278. Charles Kingsley observed that this new animal was, most distinctly, "a creature of the city; as all city influences bear at once on him more than any other class," and one who displayed "the best and worst effects of modern city life." Charles Kingsley, "Great Cities and their Influence for Good and Evil," *Miscellanies*, Vol. II, 1859, 334. Cited in Cowling, 277.

⁷⁰Albert Smith, "The Gent: Popular Zoology, No. I", *Bentley's Miscellany*, Vol. 20, 1846, 316.

⁷¹Arlene Young, "Virtue Domesticated: Dickens and the Lower Middle Class," *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 40, Summer 1996, 487.

With glaring handkerchiefs tied round your neck,
 And coarse common trowsers of violent check;
 Ye fall the best prey to the cheap tailor's lures,
 Whose pitiful doggerel your custom procures.

Horrible Gents! they have coupled thy names
 With cheap gaudy things in the bright window frames.
 We have "Gent's newest Berlin," and "Gent's Opera Ties,"
 With "Gent's Patent Alberts"—unnumber'd supplies.
 The slop-selling clothesman has blouses quite rife
 For "Gents" who are leading "a business life;"
 And similar objects are everywhere vended,
 For Gents—not Gentlemen—always intended.

Dismal attempters! upbraid ye I must,
 Oh! where is the eye but is dulled with disgust
 As it watches your trimmings--your cut-away coats,
 The pins in your bosoms, and stocks at your throats.
 Oh! I would not wish as the old ballads sing,
 To be fairy or butterfly--rich man, or king;
 I only would pray that the Fates might consent
 To save me from ever becoming A GENT!⁷²

As seen, they were particularly identified through their dress which, although they may have taken great pains to put together, exhibited, in the eyes of their critics, very poor taste. They were ridiculed for their love of the latest "fashion", their calico shirts, false fronts and phony jewelry. Cheap ready-to-wear clothing shops thrived during this time and their windows commonly displayed clothes ticketed as "Gent's. Newest Fashion".⁷³ The tailors of these clothes took great pains to label their clothes with names synonymous with high society. A large variety of such garments were signified after D'Orsay, the "Patron Dandy of the Gent."⁷⁴ Individual clothes had such monikers as the "Byron tie," the "Chesterfield" great-coat and the

⁷²"Gents", *Punch*, Vol. 5, 1843, 234.

⁷³Moers has suggested that, "the name for the Gent species probably originated from this derisive abbreviation." Moers, 215.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 216-217.

"Gent's Patent Alberts." Although most of these clothes were cheaply made, Gents accessorised themselves with colours and bobbles. Bright handkerchiefs, rings, large stick-pins and tartan waistcoats (often worn with one or two others) completed the outfit.⁷⁵ In the minds of the Gent's critics, however, this absurd costume was, more significantly, a reflection of his other ill-formed characteristics, particularly those regarding deportment and culture.⁷⁶

In the story of *The young Gentleman who never did anything*⁷⁷ the son of a government clerk is representative of this caricature as he is merely content with eating, drinking, sleeping and appearing respectable. He has fantastic notions of obtaining a command position in the army or navy as anything else would be far too common for this "gentleman". After his father died he was content to live with his mother on their small annuity and keep up the appearance of a gentleman. His income waned further following his mother's death, "but still his handkerchief and shirt were as white as ever—but his coat and hat were certainly more worn, yet did he still carry the same appearance of respectability, and took his accustomed chair nightly and his usual allowance of stimulants as was his wont."⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., 217.

⁷⁶For further examinations of class and identity in relation to clothing see Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas : Class, Gender, and Identity Clothing* (Chicago: 2000); and Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: 1992). For an examination of a middle class American family and its attempts to construct meaning through dress see Carol Ann Colburn, "The Dress of the James J. Hill Family, 1863-1916," Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1989.

⁷⁷Alfred Crowquill, "The young Gentleman who never did anything" *Bentley's Miscellany*, Vol. 18, 1845, 517-522.

⁷⁸Ibid.

Gents, fictional and real, were a target of ridicule and derision because of their apparent concern for appearance over substance. Arlene Young has suggested that caricature of the Gent was created by the middle class as a method of social control over London's growing lower middle class of clerks and shop assistants. With bourgeois identity threatened it was necessary to create an "other" from which the established middle class could disassociate itself. "By disparaging and literally belittling the lower middle class, members of the Victorian middle class could define themselves against it and at the same time aggrandize themselves."⁷⁹ This action of distinguishing the "Gent" from the true "gentleman" was evident in an 1848 issue of *Punch* where "The Model Gentleman" was outlined to its readers.⁸⁰ This character was clearly identified as what he was not, as opposed to what he actually was. In regard to his dress:

He has never been known to dress up as a jockey, . . . He shuns cross-barred trousers, horticultural scarfs, overgrown pins, and can wear a waistcoat without a cable's-length of gold chain round it. His linen is not illustrated, but beautifully clean. . . . He is unobtrusive in his dress, and very retired in his jewelry.⁸¹

Dress, however, was only one means in which to separate this truly upright individual from his pretenders from below. Gentlemen were described as being able to carry themselves with a high degree of deportment, an attribute suggested to be contrary to the culture of the "Gents" of the lower middle class.

⁷⁹Arlene Young, "Virtue Domesticated," 486-491.

⁸⁰"The Model Gentleman," *Punch*, Vol. 14, 1848, 226.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

He can look at a lady without the aid of an eye-glass. He allows a performer to talk louder than himself at the Theatre, and does not spring on the stage if there is a row at the Opera. . . . He does not think it essential to his reputation to keep late hours, to pull down signs, bait policemen, and besiege toll-keepers, during the night. . . . He is fond of amusements, but does not install himself at the Opera every night, because it is fashionable. . . . His golden rule is never to hurt the feelings of anybody, or to injure a living creature by word or deed. All his actions, all his sentiments are shaped to that noble end; and he dies, as he lives, *sans peur et sans reproche*.

Indeed, a gentleman's character was apparently of such heights that even "his aversion for a Gent is softened by pity."

Pity, however, was far from Albert Smith's mind in his book *The Natural History of the Gent*.⁸² Smith viewed this "species of the human race" to be "of all others the most unbearable, principally from an assumption of style about him—a futile aping of superiority that inspires us with feelings of mingled contempt and amusement, when we contemplate his ridiculous pretension to be considered "the thing."⁸³ The book was an expansion of his previous labours of the preceding "three of four years, to bring the race of Gents into universal contempt" through "direct attacks in *Punch and Bentley's Miscellany*."⁸⁴ He asked the readers of his book for "co-operation towards the great end of putting Gents out altogether. For they form an offensive body, of more importance than you would at first conceive; and both public and private society will be much benefited by their extinction."⁸⁵ Smith's book was a pseudo-scientific study of this "race's" nature, habits and

⁸²Albert Smith, *The Natural History of the Gent* (London: 1847).

⁸³*Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, vi-vii.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, viii.

culture. There was more, however, to Smith's and his contemporaries' observations regarding the Gent than simply contempt and amusement. Although Smith himself was from a lower middle class background, discourse such as his attempted to reinforce the view that these men were middle class pretenders.

A bastardization of middle class culture and gentility threatened to destroy the foundations on which the middle class identity of a "gentleman" was based.⁸⁶ In *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, William Thackeray noted that on the surface a common clerk could appear as a gentleman. An insurance clerk named Gus, for instance, "really looked quite the genteel thing, and was taken by everybody to be a person of consideration."⁸⁷ Bourgeois identity had only recently defined itself as industrious and morally superior to the aristocracy and the growing urban

⁸⁶Smith was particularly delighted with a police report published in the newspapers in May 1846 that typified middle class prejudice concerning Gents:

Marylebone

A "Gent."—A respectable-looking man, named James Dickenson, was charged by Brooks, 169 S who said, "Please your worship, at two o'clock yesterday morning (Monday), I found this 'gent' drunk in Park Road, and took him into custody."

Mr. Rawlinson: Who do you say you found drunk?

Constable: This "gent," your worship.

Mr. Rawlinson: What so you mean by "gent?" There is no such word in our language. I hold a man who is called a "gent" to be the greatest blackguard there is. (To the Prisoner): What do you say to this? I hope you are not a "gent."

Prisoner: I am not, sir, and I trust that I know the distinction between "gent" and a "gentleman."

Mr. Rawlinson: I dare say you do, sir, and I look upon the word "gent" as one of the most blackguard expressions that can be used.

The prisoner was fined 5s., which he directly paid.

Ibid., v-vi.

⁸⁷Fraser's Magazine, June 1841, 67-70.

lower middle class threatened this. Smith argued that, "the main object of the Gent is to assume a position which he conceives to be superior to his own," but without the culture and manners of a true gentleman⁸⁸ A separation of these pretenders from the true gentleman was essential.

Smith detailed the characteristics of the Gent that had been touched on by himself and his contemporaries in the periodical press and helped to bring this figure into clearer focus. Gents were identified as boors and cads. They loudly filled the half-price boxes at the theatre, after which, they took over taverns with their cheap whiskey, cigars and songs while their loud voices filled the air with half outdated Tom-and-Jerryisms and half dateless Cockney. They bet heavily at the races, had coarse courting rituals, and were outrageously vulgar in society and at the seaside. Smith sardonically concluded his study with a call for a new form of taxation.

We think it would be an excellent plan for respectable electors to make members pledge themselves to vote for the heavy taxation of various articles in which Gents chiefly delight. In this tariff we would have blue stocks; large breast-pins; snaffle coat-studs; curled hair; collar galled hacks; Spanish dances; Cellarius waltzes; Caledonian quadrilles; lithographed beauties, plain and coloured; cheap cigars; large pattern trowsers; gay under-waistcoats or "vests;" thick sticks; short canes; walking-ships; and boxes of omnibuses, as distinguished from omnibus boxes. If the Gents could not enjoy these things without paying heavy prices for them they would go without; for a great effect at a small outlay is the main intention of all their follies⁸⁹

Through his call for extinction, Smith's ultimate goal was a separation that would belittle the Gent and reinforce bourgeois identity. A distinction was necessary to distinguish the black-coated employer from his black-coated clerk. While the Gent was typified by ostentation, the cheapness of his outfit

⁸⁸Albert Smith, The Natural History of the Gent, 16.

⁸⁹Ibid., 99-100.

fit easily into the contemporary identification of the clerk. By no means were all clerks Gents, but the thriftiness of dress was common to both groups. This cheapness helped to define the social and personal limitations of these lower middle class men.⁹⁰ If not dressed as Gents, clerks were identified as inferior middle class pretenders by their scuffed boots, tattered umbrellas and hats, frayed collars and cuffs and their shiny pants. Meanwhile, both clerks and Gents were clearly identified as effeminate creatures, Gents through their extravagant colours and baubles and clerks through the meagreness of their dress. Confinement was necessary to define clearly the lower middle class as to what they were not—bourgeois.

The identification of clerks as insignificant and marginal men with a precarious toe-hold within the middle class dominated the mid-Victorian era. Even critics sympathetic to clerks' grievances helped to underscore the liminality of the clerical identity. Charles Dickens, more than any other writer of this period, illustrates this point. His depiction of clerking primarily focused on clerks who were well below the status and material comfort of anything like Charles Lamb. His clerks scraped to make ends meet and were continually at the mercy of their employers' generosity. Dickens was the first major novelist to recognize that clerks were not always upwardly mobile men of connection. He had first hand knowledge of this as a child when his father, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, was temporarily incarcerated in Marshalsea prison for failure of paying his debts.⁹¹ Moreover, Dickens began his working

⁹⁰Caricatures of Gents and clerks are found in numerous periodicals, such as *Punch*, *Fraser's* and *Bentley's Miscellany*, during the mid-nineteenth century. Common to almost all of these sketches is the diminutive nature of these men's culture and physical appearance.

⁹¹Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: 1990), 68-74.

life as an office boy and shortly thereafter became a clerk to a solicitor in an office in Gray's Inn. He later described this as "one of the most depressing institutions in brick and mortar, known to the children of men."⁹² Dickens came in charge of the petty cash book where he entered his own salary of 13s 6d. per week. In order to improve his situation Dickens made the effort to learn shorthand. This skill was not only useful for him a clerk but also as a reporter in the law courts, the job he took up when he left Gray's Inn after 18 months of employment. His employer at Gray's Inn, Mr. Blackmore, commented many years after Dickens had decided to employ his quill in pursuit of slightly more imaginative uses, "that several incidents took place in the office off which he must have a keen observer as I recognized some of them in his *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*, and I am much mistaken if some of his characters had not their originals in persons I well remember."⁹³

The drudgery and hardship suffered by Dickens' fellow law clerks were becoming increasingly evident in the 1840s. In 1842, a year before Dickens introduced Bob Cratchit to the world, *Punch* furnished a caricature of lawyers' clerks that depicted them as anything but men of material substance.

The Lawyer's Clerk is zoologically speaking one of the lower class of animals; and if we follow the arrangement of Cuvier, who divides the animal kingdom into *vertebrata*, *articulata*, *mollusca*, and *radiata*, we think we can succeed in bringing the Lawyer's Clerk partially within every one of the four subkingdoms alluded to. He belongs to *vertebrata* by virtue of his backbone, which ought to be terrible strong, when it is considered how heavy are the burdens put upon it; he may also frequently be considered as coming under the class *articulata*, the peculiarity of which consists in having the bones outside (and the bones of many Lawyers' Clerks are almost coming through their skin); while their claim to be

⁹²Cited in Henry Spray, *Lawyers' Clerks: Real and Fictitious* (London: 1894).

⁹³*Ibid.* For an account of Dickens's early working life see Robert Woodall, "Charles Dickens, Faithful Stenographer," *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 328, No. 1982, 1980, 454-464.

sometimes regarded as *mollusca* consists in their extraordinary softness; and they may be said to partake in some degree of the *radiata*, for as this class often obtain nourishment by absorption, so does the Lawyer's Clerk occasionally obtain a dinner by standing near a cook's-shop, and absorbing the steam from it.⁹⁴

Many of Dickens's law clerks, such as Bart Smallweed in *Bleak House*, typified this new sort of diminutive urban male. "Young Smallweed (metaphorically called Small and eke Chick Weed, as it were jocularly to express a fledgling) . . . is a town-made article, of small stature and weazen feature; but may be perceived from a considerable distance by means of his very tall hat."⁹⁵ It is difficult to find a work of Dickens's that fails to have a clerk, particularly a law clerk, as a character. Dickens had become familiar with the routine of the law office and its work as a result of his clerical and reporting work and his numerous suits against publishers who had pirated his works.⁹⁶ This furnished him with a distinct vantage point from which to comment on law clerks in all their various configurations. In *The Pickwick Papers*, for example, Dickens was able to provide his readers with an effective description of the various grades of law clerks.

Scattered about, in various holes and corners of the Temple, are certain dark and dirty chambers, in and out of which, all the morning in Vacation, and half the evening too in Term time, there may be seen constantly hurrying with bundles of papers under their arms, and protruding from their pockets, an almost uninterrupted succession of Lawyers' Clerks. There are several grades of Lawyers' Clerks. There is the Articled Clerk, who has paid a premium, and is an attorney in perspective, who runs a tailor's bill, receives invitations to parties, knows a family in Gower Street, and another in Tavistock Square: who goes out of town every Long Vacation to see his father, who keeps live horses

⁹⁴"The Zoology and Architecture of Lawyers' Clerks," *Punch*, 1842, Vol. 3, 182.

⁹⁵Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: 1985), Chapter 20, 327. First published in 1853.

⁹⁶Robert D. Neely, *The Lawyers of Dickens and Their Clerks* (Boston: 1936), 9.

innumerable; and who is, in short, the very aristocrat of clerks. There is the salaried clerk—out of door, or in door, as the case may be—who devotes the major part of his thirty shillings a week to his personal pleasure and adornment, repairs half-price to the Adelphi Theatre at least three times a week, dissipates majestically at the cedar cellars afterwards, and is a dirty caricature of the fashion which expired six months ago. There is the middle-aged copying clerk, with a large family, who is always shabby, and often drunk. And there are the office lads in their first surtouts, who feel a befitting contempt for boys at day-schools: club as they go home at night, for saveloys and porter: and think there's nothing like 'life.' There are varieties of the genus, too numerous to recapitulate, but however numerous they may be, they are all to be seen, at certain regulated hours, hurrying to and from the places we have just mentioned.⁹⁷

Dickens, however, depicted far more "quill drivers" than merely law clerks in his writings. In Dickens's first published volume *Sketches by Boz*⁹⁸ he depicted several individuals of the clerking order.⁹⁹ In "Thoughts About People" he commented on the daily drudgery of a clerk named Mr. Smith who "has no variety of days."¹⁰⁰ He noted that individuals of this sort were ubiquitous, if at the same time unnoticed.

It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; his existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself; he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive. There is a numerous class of people in this great metropolis who seem not to possess a single friend, and whom nobody appears to care for.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1979), Chapter 31, 504. First published in 1837.

⁹⁸Charles Dickens, *Sketches By Boz* (London: 1911). First published in two volumes in 1836. Dickens first began publishing these writings in periodical form in December 1833. His illustrator, George Cruikshank, did not provide his illustrations until the 1836 publication. See Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography* (London: 1988), 62-76.

⁹⁹See, in *Sketches* (in addition to "Thoughts About People") "The Boarding-House," 247-281; "Mr. Minns and his Cousin," 281-291; and "Shabby-Genteel People," 234-238.

¹⁰⁰Dickens, *Sketches*, 192-197.

Mr. Smith was clearly a liminal individual whose life was one routine and quiet reserve. Dickens does not provide this man with thoughts of his own—he merely exists.

"He was a tall, thin, pale person, in a black coat, scanty gray trousers, little pinched-up gaiters, and brown beaver gloves. He had an umbrella in his hand—not for use, for the day was fine—but, evidently, because he always carried one to the office in the morning."¹⁰²

He exerts no agency, is deferential, and is as predictable as the tides. Dickens sees this man as such an identifiable type that upon noticing Mr. Smith an image of his life can immediately be conjured up.

We thought we almost saw the dingy little back-office into which he walks every morning, hanging his hat on the same peg, and placing his legs beneath the same desk; first taking off that black coat which lasts the year through, and putting on the one which did duty last year, and which he keeps in his desk to save the other. There he sits till five o'clock, working on, all day, as regularly as the dial over the mantelpiece, whose loud ticking is as monotonous as his whole existence: . . . About five, or half-past, he slowly dismounts from his accustomed stool, and again changing his coat, proceeds to his usual dining-place, somewhere near Bucklersbury. . . . He has a small plate to-day, because greens are a penny more than potatoes, and he had "two breads" yesterday, with the additional enormity of "a cheese" the day before. . . . He then walks home, at his usual pace, to his little back-room at Islington. . . . Poor, harmless creatures such men are; contented, but not happy; broken-spirited and humbled, they may feel no pain, but they never know pleasure.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 192. Cruikshank provided an illustration of Mr. Smith at his dinner for the February 1836 two-volume edition of *Sketches by Boz*. David Parker has noticed that this identifiable type appeared in a Phiz (Dickens's later illustrator) illustration for chapter twenty of *Bleak House*. In this dining-house scene Mr. Smith appears sixteen years later. "There he is on the right of the picture, the same lean figure, more bent by sixteen years, the same bald skull, balder by sixteen years, the same bony profile, bonier by sixteen years, *Time* still propped as before, the next bite on his fork as before, knife still poised as before." See David Parker, "A Phiz Tribute to Cruikshank," *The Dickensian* Vol. 84, No. 414, Spring 1988, 2 and 7-8.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 194-95.

As will be seen in an examination of Dickens's later works, he regularly depicted clerks of this sort. Although Dickens hoped for solutions which would bring pleasure to men of this sort, he continued to identify them as liminal individuals.

Dickens championed clerks' causes in speeches, and often took an active hand in an attempt at improving their material circumstances. For example, in the 1830s he and several friends helped found the United Law Clerks' Society.¹⁰⁴ More significantly, however, Dickens's novels and other writings signify his affection for the clerks of the lower middle class and illustrate the contempt he held towards their middle class employers. Employers of clerical labour were usually portrayed as cruel-hearted and penny-pinching, such as Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, or as patronizing, such as the Cheerybles in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Dickens, however, makes no revolutionary call to arms. His vision of England is organic and paternalistic and he continually chides his middle class characters for their disparaging attitude towards the lower middle class. In so doing, his novels highlight clerical identity in the early and mid-Victorian era in two respects. First, his novels depict middle class greed and hypocrisy that, in his view, undermined the material comfort and quiet respectability and virtue of the lower middle class. Second, however, his novels also underscore the Victorian vision of the clerk as a marginal and insignificant creature.

In *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit is depicted as a liminal character, perched on the edge of poverty. He carries himself, however, with a degree of

¹⁰⁴See, for example, "Charles Dickens's Address to the United Law Clerks' Society, 19 June, 1849" in K. J. Fielding (ed.), *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: 1960), 97-98.

virtue and humility that commands respect--despite the fact he toils in obscurity and lives in constant fear of the Poor House. In introducing Cratchit to the reader, Dickens makes it clear who is to blame for Cratchit's insignificance.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk who in his dismal little cell beyond a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller, that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself as the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.¹⁰⁵

At work Cratchit's identity is subjugated to the demands and needs of his employer. He must deferentially beg for leave on Christmas day, which Scrooge reluctantly grants.¹⁰⁶ Scrooge is even aware that he has played a role in producing such a marginal individual when he responds to an outburst of "Merry Christmas" by Cratchit: ". . . my clerk, with fifteen shillings a-week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."¹⁰⁷

Scrooge represents the greed and callousness of the middle class. The paternalist relationship between employer and clerk has been destroyed by Malthusian capitalism. Although Dickens never studied the "dismal scientific" works of Ricardo, Malthus or Smith, he understood the human

¹⁰⁵Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol", in Charles Dickens: Four Great Novels (Bristol: 1995), 493. First published in 1843. For a good examination of *A Christmas Carol* and its significance over time see Paul Davis, The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge (New Haven: 1990).

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 497

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.* 495.

consequence of their theories--the context in which people like Cratchit lived. The ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* help to rehabilitate Scrooge into what Ronald DeBacco has characterised as a "moral-mercantilist hero."¹⁰⁸ The Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge of the benevolence and charitable capitalism of his former master Fezziwig. After witnessing Fezziwig's charitable nature towards his clerks, Scrooge, in the grips of his transformation, explains to the ghost the significance of Fezziwig's actions.

He has the power to render us happy or unhappy: to make our service light or burdensome: a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then! The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.¹⁰⁹

The ghosts help Scrooge to face his paternal social responsibilities but, more importantly, provide him with a sense of place within Dickens's vision of an organic society. Scrooge recognises his own social insignificance through his visit to his former fiancée's family and the Cratchit's. In the end, however, it is his concern for Tiny Tim that completes Scrooge's transformation from a capitalist indifferent to the sufferings of his workers to a charitable one.¹¹⁰

In the Cratchits' home Dickens's vision of the clerk is brought into sharper focus. Although marginal and insignificant to the world outside his doors, Bob is the father of a model Christian family. He even reprimands

¹⁰⁸See Ronald Eugene DeBacco, "Dickens and the Mercantile Hero," Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania--Indiana, 1980.

¹⁰⁹Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 512.

¹¹⁰Alan Johnson has effectively argued that Tiny Tim is the key to Scrooge's transformation as he has suffered the heaviest under Scrooge's Malthusian business methods, and, "because, of allusions which associate him with both the infant and the crucified Christ, Tim symbolizes the Christian love which should temper capitalism." See Alan Johnson, "God Bless Tiny Tim : The Uses of Sentimentality in *A Christmas Carol*," *Center Journal* Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter 1982, 101-114.

Mrs. Cratchit at Christmas dinner for refusing to toast Scrooge as "the Founder of the Feast."¹¹¹ This family unit is based on self-sacrifice, community, love and sympathy and has transcended the competitive nature of Scrooge's laissez-faire capitalism.

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawn broker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time.¹¹²

Dickens shows a family who, despite living a marginal existence, have respectable characteristics and virtues. Peter, who plans to become a clerk, takes great pride in affixing his shirt with a collar, which was "Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day."¹¹³ Father and son were, however, no Gents. The collar identifies Bob as a clerk and the conferring it upon Peter symbolises as rite of passage for his son. There is no need to ape the bourgeoisie as the Cratchits have a distinct, if subdued and deferential, respectability of their own.¹¹⁴

It is the respectability of families like the Cratchits that Dickens wanted capitalists to recognise. His novels continually reinforce his position that the clerk suffered because the bourgeoisie had not taken up the paternalistic responsibilities they had inherited from the aristocracy. Scrooge's conversion at the end of the novel brings order to society and mutual respect between the classes. In *A Christmas Carol* and his later novels, however, this solution for

¹¹¹Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 522-523.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 523.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 519.

¹¹⁴Young, 493.

society's ills is predicated on the depiction of the lower middle class individual, usually a clerk, as an insignificant creature. He may display respectability through his deference and humility, but he is identified as a liminal individual. The clerk cannot exercise any meaningful agency until the bourgeoisie recognise their responsibilities to society. This, however, rarely occurs in a Dickens novel, and as a result clerks end up being depicted as passive, marginal and insignificant. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Ralph Nickleby's clerk, Newman Noggs, is identified in a such a manner.

He was a tall man of middle-age, with two-goggle eyes whereof one was a fixture, rubicund nose, a cadaverous face and a suit of clothes (if the term be allowable when they suited him not at all) much the worse for wear, very much too small, and placed upon such a short allowance of buttons that it was marvelous how he contrived to keep them on.¹¹⁵

A tall man is rendered diminutive in character by his manner of dress; his child-like suit and his deficiency of buttons. His respectability is thwarted by this but the blame clearly rests on the shoulders of his malevolent employer, Ralph Nickleby. In contrast, the Cheerybles represent a truly charitable and benevolent employer. They are cast in the same mold as the reformed Scrooge. They may be patronizing, but their hearts are pure in their kindly treatment of Tim Linklater, their old and faithful clerk.¹¹⁶ He is treated with respect and handsomely rewarded for his faithful service, providing the reader with a sharp contrast to the relationship between Noggs and his employer. Linklater's position is still, however, conditionally linked to his employers. The relationship is almost feudal.¹¹⁷ His success or failure is in

¹¹⁵Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: 1968), 8. First published in 1839.

¹¹⁶Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, chapter 35, 415-431.

their hands and his identity, although somewhat heightened through the respect granted to him, is still one of marginality, diminutiveness and effeminacy. It is indeed symbolic that at the end of the novel, although now married, he continues to live in the attic of the company's offices.

As noted earlier, Dickens was not the only voice during this era that called for employers to respect and reward clerks. Although various clerk's handbooks called on clerks to exercise agency through self-improvement,¹¹⁸ the onus for producing material rewards, not to mention self-respect, was still in the hands of the employers. A short book published in 1848 by a clerk of seventeen years' experience is representative of this discourse.¹¹⁹ After providing clerks with numerous self-improvement tips, he reminded employers that there was a great deal of room for improvement in the treatment and remuneration of their clerks. Employers were encouraged to do their utmost to promote zeal and integrity amongst their clerks as it would, he argued, only help to improve the situation of their business. Promotion and monetary reward for excellent service were the most important ways of doing this, and Dickens therefore implored employers to reward clerks who displayed a far greater importance to the company than

¹¹⁷Robin Gilmour makes much of this relationship in her article, where it is asserted: "Part of Dickens's intention in creating the Cheerybles seems to have been to present them as classless figures in a class-driven world, . . . with their counting-house in its deserted square, and their elderly clerk whose chief notion of business seems to be to keep the book neat, they seem old-fashioned figures, and the banquets they throw for Tim Linklater are positively feudal, down to the workman who comes in tugging his 'single lock of grey hair in the middle of his forehead as a respectful salute to the company' (ch. 37) to make his speech of thanks to the brothers." Robin Gilmour, "Between Two Worlds: Aristocracy and Gentility in *Nicholas Nickleby*", *Dickens Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 3, Sept. 1988, 110-118.

¹¹⁸For a discussion of this see Chapter Two.

¹¹⁹By An Experienced Clerk, *Advice to Clerks, and Hints to Employers. Showing the Road to Preferment and Comfort* (London: 1848).

that to which their salary indicated.¹²⁰ While clerks were encouraged to improve themselves through integrity, zeal, industry, and perseverance,¹²¹ their future material comfort and respectability were conditional on what their employers provided them.¹²²

In his later novels Dickens's vision of achieving lower middle class respectability through the benevolence of employers began to change. He wrote less of paternalistic employers such as Scrooge and the Cheerybles and focused more on the quite respectable nature of the lower middle class itself. For example, in *The Chimes*, the second of the Christmas Books, social meliorism is achieved without the aid of a middle class benefactor. Trotty Veck, a ticket porter, learns self-improvement on his own while the actions of the reformist minded Alderman Cute, are clearly misguided.¹²³ More significantly, in *Our Mutual Friend*,¹²⁴ Dickens portrays Reginald Wilfer (known in his office as Rumty) as a clerk whose character allows him to transcend contemporary clerking stereotypes. He is identifiably a clerk, but without the pretensions and foibles commonly critiqued by middle class observers. He signed his name "R. Wilfer" as "he was shy, and unwilling to

¹²⁰Ibid., 29-42.

¹²¹Ibid., 21-22.

¹²²Ibid., 29-42. These pages accounted for a quarter of this book.

¹²³Charles Dickens, "The Chimes," in Eleanor Farjeon (ed.), *Christmas Books* (London: 1974), 77-154. For fuller examination of this work see Debacco, Chapter 1; and John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: 1928), 350-356.

¹²⁴Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: 1979). First published in 1864-65.

own of the name of Reginald, as being too aspiring and self-assertive a name."¹²⁵ He was impoverished but was a man with dignified aspirations.

... the Reginald Wilfer family were of such commonplace extraction and pursuits that their forefathers had for generations modestly subsisted on the Docks, the Excise Office, and the Custom House, and the existing R. Wilfer was a poor clerk. So poor a clerk, through having a limited salary and an unlimited family, that he had never yet attained the modest object of his ambition: which was, to wear a complete new suit of clothes, hat and boots included, at one time. His black hat was brown before he could afford a coat, his pantaloons were white at the seams and knees before he could buy a pair of boots, his boots were worn out before he could treat himself to new pantaloons, and, by the time he worked round to the hat again, that shining modern article roofed-in an ancient ruin of various periods.¹²⁶

Dickens makes it clear that Wilfer's desire for a complete new set of clothes was not based on an attempt to ape his middle class [supposed] betters. He may, despite his poverty, be trying to identify himself as part of a social grouping, but it is clerks, like himself, that he aspires to emulate.¹²⁷ This language suggests that the clerking identity was not solely based in relation to other classes and groups in society, but was, just as importantly, being constructed within its own distinct experience. This was not just being increasingly recognized by Dickens in his later novels,¹²⁸ but also by Anthony Trollope.

Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks*¹²⁹ not only stresses the identity of the clerk as a marginal individual, like Dickens, but also underscores the

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, Part 1, Chapter 4, 75.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷Arlene Young, 494-5.

¹²⁸*Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations* are two such examples where minor clerking characters, such as Arthur Clennam and John Wemmick, inhabit a distinct clerking set of experiences.

difficulties facing clerks within their distinct clerking circumstance. Trollope used his experience as a clerk in the Post Office in London from 1834 to 1867 as impetus for his story.¹³⁰ The three main characters in this novel are continually faced with moral dilemmas resulting from their complex interactions with their work and each other. It was how individuals responded to such dilemmas that was of interest to Trollope.¹³¹ The three young clerks of the title, Henry Norman and Alaric and Charley Tudor, all face distinct dilemmas and difficulties as a result of their positions as clerks in the Civil Service. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into all of the ramifications of the problems faced by the title characters, the novel points to some significant problems facing clerks in their quest to construct a positive clerking identity.

The two older clerks, Henry and Alaric, lodge together and work in the Weights and Measures Office. Trollope characterizes it as the most "well-conducted public office" in the civil service, and contrasts it sharply against the notoriously inefficient civil service "Circumlocution Office" of Dickens's

¹²⁹Anthony Trollope, The Three Clerks (London: 1981). First published in 1857.

¹³⁰For an account of Trollope's career in the Post Office see R. H. Super, Trollope in the Post Office (Ann Arbor, Michigan: 1981). For Trollope the "psychological 'truth to life' is the indispensable ingredient of fiction," and believed that the novelist's only means to uncover this truth was through a character-centered approach to his fiction. Karen Esther Faulkner, "Characterization in the Novels of Anthony Trollope," Ph.D. thesis, Temple University, 1981, 1-3.

¹³¹Karen Faulkner has argued: "that attempts to describe Trollope's novels in thematic or structural terms tend to give distorted readings of the novels, and that a character-centered approach yields a more accurate reading of his novels than any other. . . . Trollope's psychological perspicuity and his ability to communicate it in his characterizations were the *sine qua non* of his genius." *Ibid.*, 3.

Little Dorrit.¹³² Moreover, he highlighted the importance of the work done in the office to interests of Britain.

All material intercourse between man and man must be regulated, either justly or unjustly, by weights and measures; and as we of all people depend most on such material intercourse, our weights and measures should to us be a source of never-ending concern.¹³³

Trollope was obviously having a bit of fun in lauding the seriousness of the work done in *Weights and Measures*, and noted that "the great body of clerks attached to other offices, regard their brethren of the *Weights* as prigs and pedants, and look on them much as a master's favorite is apt to be regarded by other boys at school."¹³⁴ Within clerkdom there was the recognition that even those working in the most-highly recognized and paying office of the civil service were still just clerks. Henry, the senior of the clerks, was the second son of "a gentleman of small property" but was forced to leave university as his father was "unable to bear the expense of a university education for his two sons."¹³⁵ Like Henry, Alaric, also entered the civil service due to the financial difficulties of his own middle class family.¹³⁶ A civil service career allowed both clerks to maintain the appearance of gentility through their government white-collar work.

Meanwhile, the third clerk, Charley, worked at Somerset House in the office of the Commissioners of Internal Navigation. Trollope described this

¹³²Trollope, *The Three Clerks*, 7.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 11-15.

branch of the civil service as having "little else to redeem it from the lowest depths of official vulgarity than the ambiguous respectability of its material position."¹³⁷ Charley is representative of the young Trollope, who had entered the civil service twenty-three years prior to the publication of *The Three Clerks*.¹³⁸ In the gloomy confines of the "Infernal Navigation", Charley is overwhelmed by the drudgerous nature of his work and seeks solace in London's more risqué delights with his fellow clerks during his off-work hours.

The men of the Internal Navigation are known to be fast, nay, almost furious in their pace of living; not that they are extravagant in any degree, a fault which their scale of salaries very generally forbids; but they are one and all addicted to Coal Holes and Cigar Cellars; they dive at midnight hours into Shades, and know all the back parlors of all the public-houses in the neighborhood of the Strand. Here they leave messages for one another, and call the girl at the bar by her Christian name. They are a set of men endowed with sallow complexions, and they wear loud clothing, and spend more money in gin-and-water than in gloves.¹³⁹

Charley was in danger of becoming a "Gent", but Trollope makes it clear that it is Charley's occupation which has placed him in the position where his soul and morals were in danger of being forever corrupted. Writing years later in *An Autobiography*, Trollope reflected that he and his friends in the civil service wished to be identified as anything but clerks: "Over and above the money view of the question, I wished from the beginning to be

¹³⁷Ibid., 15. In describing Somerset House Trollope outlined a brief hierarchy of civil service offices and buildings: "Somerset House is a nest of public offices, which are held to be of a less fashionable repute than those situated in the neighborhood of Downing Street, but are not so decidedly plebeian as the Custom House, Excise, and Post Office."

¹³⁸For a study of this experience see R. A. W. Rhodes, "Wilting in Limbo: Anthony Trollope and the Nineteenth Century Civil Service," *Public Administration* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1973, 207-219.

¹³⁹Ibid., 16.

something more than a clerk in the Post Office. To be known as somebody,—to be Anthony Trollope if it be no more,—is to me much."¹⁴⁰ As a young man who "had not been the most diligent of school-boys," and had barely passed his civil service entrance examination, Charley did not have the qualities necessary to rise within the civil service or carve out a niche for himself elsewhere in respectable society.¹⁴¹ This portrayal of clerks, who entered the profession out of its notions of gentility, but who lacked the qualities or perseverance to rise to a respectable station or who had been forced into clerkdom because their family had fallen onto hard time, is found in other works of Trollope, such as *Marion Fay*.¹⁴² These representations were largely drawn from Trollope's own experience in the Post Office. After seven years' service his salary had only risen to £140, and he was heavily in debt. He had not yet begun his career as a novelist and "hated the office, hated his work, and more than all hated his own idleness."¹⁴³ Trollope's fictional creation Charley Tudor, who likewise entertains thoughts of becoming a writer, goes through this same youthful period of self-loathing, boredom and poverty and is thus tempted by the seamier pleasure of London. A single life in London lodgings until a salary was reached that could support a wife and family was a long and arduous journey.

¹⁴⁰Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* Vol. 1 (London: 1883), 143. First published in

¹⁴¹Trollope, *The Three Clerks*, 15-25.

¹⁴²Anthony Trollope, *Marion Fay* (Oxford: 1992), Chapter VII, 60-69. First published in 1882.

¹⁴³Cited in Anon, "Autobiography of Anthony Trollope," *Blackwood's Magazine* November, 1883, Vol. 134, 584.

Charley had lately been leading a very mixed sort of life. One week he would consort mainly with the houri of the Norfolk Street beer shop, and the next he would be on his good behaviour, and live as respectably as circumstances permitted him to do. His scope in this respect was not large. The greatest respectability which his unassisted efforts could possibly achieve was to dine at a cheap eating-house, and spend his evenings at a cigar divan. He belonged to no club, and his circle of friends, except in the houri and navy line, was very limited. Who could expect that a young man from the Internal Navigation would sit for hours and hours alone in a dull London lodging, over his book and tea-cup? Who should expect that any young man will do so? And yet mothers, and aunts, and anxious friends, do expect it—very much in vain.¹⁴⁴

Charley's career and financial position prevent him from being able to immediately effect a major change in his domestic life. While Norman and Alaric, the other two clerks, eventually find domestic comfort through marriage to the daughters of a suburban home which they frequently visit, Charley languishes in his lodgings and activities in the city.

Charley was a dissipated, dissolute rake, and in some sense had degraded himself; but he had still this chance of safety on his side, that he himself reprobated his own sins. He dreamt of other things and a better life. He made visions to himself of a sweet home, and a sweeter, sweetest, lovely wife; a love whose hair should not be redolent of smoke, nor her hands reeking of gin, nor her services at the demand of libertines who wanted a screw of tobacco, or a glass of "cold without."¹⁴⁵

This language suggested that domesticity was a locale where the young clerk could eventually hope to acquire respectable comfort—something his station and income prevents him from acquiring in the public sphere of London society prior to marriage. As Mrs. Henry Wood argued in *Danesbury House*, what lonely young men required was "a bright, pleasant evening home, where [they] will find amusement, merry society, and loving faces."¹⁴⁶ This

¹⁴⁴Trollope, *The Three Clerks*, 111.

¹⁴⁵Trollope, *The Three Clerks*, 176.

¹⁴⁶Anthony Trollope, *Danesbury House* (1860). Cited in John M. Robson, *Marriage or Celibacy? The Daily Telegraph on a Victorian Dilemma* (Toronto: 1995), 159.

was not easily achieved, as the case of Charley reflects, no matter how desirous young clerks were of finding matrimonial harmony and comfort.

Although clerks such as Charley were depicted as facing a multitude of social and material difficulties, the language of Trollope and Dickens indicates that a distinct clerking experience was being formed and represented by the mid-Victorian age. The perception that clerks were of a similar cultural station as that of their employers, which a careful reading of Lamb indicates was not really the true experience, had been completely undermined. Critics and writers of the "Gent" of the 1830s and 1840s had gone a long way to undermine the belief that clerks were respectable men of business. However, an important representation of the clerking experience and identity emerged from writers who not only recognized the mean-spirited attacks made against clerks as an attempt to culturally marginalize them, but the material and social difficulties facing clerks themselves. Dickens's works highlighted the unique clerking experience with its distinct set of values, meanings and culture that existed during this time and celebrated them in order to contrast them against society's corrupt bourgeois values. Perhaps even more than Dickens, Trollope highlighted the fact that the difficulties clerks faced were not solely grounded in their material circumstance, but also in society's general attitudes towards manners and proper masculine behaviour in the public and private spheres of London.

Chapter Two
**The Culture of the Office and the Formation of an Occupational
Associated Clerking Identity**

By 1870 the identity of the clerk was formed in a number of different ways and locations. These included his distinct lower middle class home and suburban lifestyle, his work and leisure connections in the City of London and his educational upbringing. Nowhere, however, was the formation of a clerical culture and identity more strongly initially shaped than through the office. The office environment, with its strict regulations of dress, punctuality, manners, deference to the gov'nor, and proper work routine continually shaped and formed the clerk's self-identity and the way in which he was perceived by the world outside the doors of his office. The office is where the clerk initially acquired a sense of a work and, later, an individual identity. The office helped to form the clerk's identity as a "respectable" middle class male and provided a set of rules and regulations that brought order and function to a clerk's working life that ultimately followed him out of the office and into the public sphere of society and the private sphere of his home. These rules and regulations helped to provide the young clerk with a set of cultural components that were distinctly clerical. However, the clerk's work experience and guides and handbooks to proper clerking behavior, to be followed in the office and the entire public sphere, reveal an identity that, in the end, was rather tenuous. By the end of the Edwardian age the distinct clerking identity and the "culture of respectability" had begun to weaken owing to a number of factors, notably increased educational opportunities for

the lower classes, the importation of foreign clerks, and the gradual feminisation of clerical labour.¹ But the ultimate erosion of clerks' respectable middle class identity primarily resulted from their failure to truly become members of, and obtain the respect from, the class that they wished to emulate and ultimately join—the middle class of their employers and office managers. The clerk's office experience not only provided him with an identity that granted him an identification with his middle class superiors, but it also began to construct a concurrent identity that isolated him from these middle class "betters".

Junior clerks entered into their period of apprenticeship for a number of different reasons. In the early and mid-Victorian eras before the expansion of clerical occupations,² the likelihood of a junior being the relative or son of a colleague or partner in the firm was greater than during and after the late-Victorian period. These clerks came from well-connected mercantile or financial backgrounds and were often more concerned with acquiring business skills and experience than in making a career out of clerking. If they did plan to stay on in the firm their chances for promotion were reasonably

¹For studies on the feminisation of clerical labour in Great Britain see Gregory Anderson (ed.), The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870 (New York: 1988); Hilda Martindale, Women Servants and the State, 1870-1938: A History of Women in the Civil Service (London: 1938); Steve McKenna, "The Feminisation of Clerical Work, 1870-1914", Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 1987; Josephine Mary Abbott, "The Socio-Historical Development of Secretarial Work in England 1870-1910: A Study in Vocational Socialisation and Occupational Ideology", Ph.D. thesis, University of Southampton, 1994; Rosemary Crompton, White-Collar Proletariat: Deskilling And Gender In Clerical Work (Philadelphia: 1984); Samuel Cohn, The Process Of Occupational Sex-Typing: The Feminization Of Clerical Labor In Great Britain (Philadelphia: 1985); and Samuel Cohn, "Clerical Labor Intensity and the Feminization of Clerical Labor in Great Britain, 1857-1937," Social Forces Vol. 63, No. 4, June 1985, 1060-1068.

²See Gregory Anderson, Victorian Clerks (Manchester: 1976), Chapters 1-3; and, Chapter One.

fair as they more than likely had picked up the social and educational skills necessary for a financial or governmental career through their family and educational upbringing. Coming from respectable middle class families and, perhaps, public schools these juniors usually gained their position through family connections, almost certainly continued to live at home, and started with salaries of £70 to £80 per annum.³

An example of such clerks is those who were employed by the National Discount Company Limited, and their high salary levels continued into the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. It was a discount banking firm founded in 1856, and the first joint-stock company, other than the short-lived Gurney and Company Limited, in a sector dominated by private partnerships. Almost all its clerks had public school, if not university, educations and were usually hired at a starting salary of at least £60 a year.⁴ Table 2.1 highlights the steady rise in salary these clerks received during their career in the firm.

³An Experienced Clerk, Advice to Clerks, and Hints to Employers, Showing the Road to Preferment and Comfort (London: 1848), 6.

⁴Guildhall Library Manuscripts (hereafter designated GLM), National Discount Company Ltd., Board of Directors' Minute Books, MS 18,132, Vols. 1-11, 1856-1917; and Declarations Signed by the Directors and Employees of the Company, MS 18138, Vol. 1, 1856-1950.

Age Class	Number Observed	Salary (Mean)	Minimum Salary	Maximum Salary	Salary (Median)
15-17	18	45.78	26	60	45.8
18-20	61	62.95	39	100	62.5
21-25	96	106.72	30	300	104.1
26-30	116	167.61	50	400	160
31-35	124	262.6	150	1100	235
36-40	112	369.43	150	1210	320
41-45	99	464.45	200	3000	350
46-50	84	712.18	50	3000	360
51-55	81	887.72	200	4400	414
56-60	59	662.88	300	2400	450
61-65	21	518.29	360	1100	440
66-70	9	385.22	360	440	378

Table 2.1: National Discount Company, Ltd., Salaries by Age Group, 1879-1914.⁵

Only a handful of clerks worked for the firm before their eighteenth birthday. This was also not typical of clerks in London, as will be observed below. Most firms hired clerks at younger ages and paid them far less. Clerks hired by the National Discount Company usually came with a letter of introduction from a member of its Board of Directors—a connection that the young member of the lower middle class did not have. Moreover, as Table 2.2 indicates, clerks at the National Discount Company had a high degree of job stability, and tended to stay with the firm for several years, if not their entire career.

⁵Ibid. The dates here, as in all further tables regarding different firms, represent clerks hired between these years.

Length of Service	Number of Individuals
0.00-1.00	12
1.01-2.00	7
2.01-3.00	3
3.01-4.00	3
4.01-5.00	1
5.01-6.00	3
6.01-7.00	0
7.01-8.00	2
8.01-9.00	0
9.01-10.0	2
10.0-15.0	6
15.0-20.0	2
20.0-25.0	3
25.0-30.0	3
30.0-35.0	4
35.0-40.0	8
40.0-45.0	9
45.0-50.0	8
mean = 20.10	
median = 13.35	

Table 2.2: National Discount Company Ltd., Average Length of Service, 1856-1914.⁶

Although there were other firms of similar composition, they represented only a small fraction of employers. However, these members of the "aristocracy of clerks" were routinely provided as examples of what any clerk could become.

Prior to the mid-Victorian era most clerks had little concern in regard to their middle class identity as their work-status was similar to that of

⁶GLM, *National Discount Company Ltd., Declarations*, Signed by the Directors and Employees of the Company, MS 18138, Vol. 1, 1856-1950; and Board of Directors' Minute Books, MS 18,132, Vols. 5-11, 1879-1917. In this table, and further "Average Length of Service" tables for different firms, dates of departure after 1914 were included in the data for clerks still employed in 1914.

professional men. Prior to the arrival of compulsory free state education, their well-developed reading, writing and arithmetic skills, not to mention language training, were at a premium. Although there were numerous clerks struggling on the margins of middle class income and status, as observed in Chapter One, clerks working in the City of London for large banking and insurance firms, and those working for the civil service, were generally well paid and from respectable middle class backgrounds. These clerks had constructed a middle class identity before entering their office for their term of apprenticeship.

After the rapid expansion of Britain's financial and commercial industries and central and local government bureaucracies, by the late 1880s junior clerks were largely recruited from newspaper advertisements, through connections with Board schools and private commercial training institutions, and, in the case of public service employment, through competitive examinations. Even as early as 1848 John Stuart Mill, who spent thirty-five years in the office of the East India Company, argued in the *Principles of Political Economy* that clerical employment was gradually being transformed. Mill noted that until this time "all employment which required even the humble education of reading and writing could be recruited only from a select class, the majority having no opportunity of acquiring those attainments."⁷ Mill believed that these positions were overpaid in relation to "the ordinary remuneration of labour."⁸ He noted, however, that since "reading and writing have been brought within the reach of the multitude, the monopoly

⁷J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (York: 1961), 392. First published in 1848; and F. D. Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* (London: 1935), 3.

⁸Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 392.

price of the lower grade of educated employments has greatly fallen."⁹ Clerks with public school education maintained their respectable middle class status and salaries while a large mass of poorly paid clerks from lower middle class backgrounds began to form. As the number of banks, insurance offices, and public service institutions increased during the Victorian era in London there was a further need for what Mill classified as this "lower grade of educated employments." The disparity between the clerk who would undoubtedly rise to a high position in the firm owing to his superior educational training and family and business connections, and the large majority of clerks from lower middle class and working class backgrounds with very little educational training, was already beginning to become visible before the Education Act of 1870.¹⁰ Increased educational opportunities helped to magnify the differences between the public and state educated clerk.

By 1871 B. G. Orchard, after surveying clerical employment in Liverpool, was able to identify two types of clerks based upon opportunity and income.

£150 and £80 point to two distinct classes of clerks, distinct in their education, business prospects, and various things, but chiefly in the social usages which custom has made the framework of their daily life. Each sum may be taken as the test of class. Those in bank, insurance offices and other public companies, who, while living on their salaries, mix in respectable society, go sometimes to the opera, shrink from letting their wives do household work, and incur, as unavoidable, the numerous personal expenses connected with an endeavour to maintain this system. At 28 years of age they receive about £150 and hope someday to reach £350 or more, . . . below them and forming a much more numerous body come the young men who (if in many cases well read, well mannered and

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Stuart Maclure, A History of Education in London, 1870-1990 (London: 1990); and Margaret E. Bryant, The London Experience of Secondary Education (London: 1986); and also see Chapter Three.

religious) still are not in society, place little value on gloves, lunch in the office on bread and cheese, clean their own boots, and are not alarmed by the prospect of doing without a servant when married, of lighting the fire each morning before they go out, and of never entering a theatre or buying a bottle of wine. These are they whose salaries, averaging £80, are unlikely ever to exceed £150.¹¹

Orchard was astute in pointing to this £150 ceiling above which, by the late-Victorian era, a vast army of clerks was unable to rise. In the civil service, for example, the salary scales of the second division clerks¹² made it difficult for the clerk of only a state-sponsored education to rise above the £150 plateau.¹³ This plateau was significant as it was generally regarded as the level at which a clerk could afford to hire a domestic servant—the sign of middle class membership. Moreover, the strict first-division examinations with their emphasis on public school educational criteria such as Greek and Latin prevented a foothold in the solid middle class for the clerk from a lower middle class or working class background.¹⁴ Clerks working for private institutions such as banks, insurance companies and warehouses were faced

¹¹Benjamin Guinness Orchard, The Clerks of Liverpool: Being Ten Chapters on Their Numbers, Distribution, Salaries, Grievances, Marriage, &c., &c. (Liverpool: 1871), 64.

¹²Lower Division Clerks (Copy of Correspondence between the Treasury and Colonial Office with regard to the Petition of certain Lower Division Clerks as to their position and prospects under the Order of Her Majesty in Council of 12 February 1876), Parliamentary Papers 1886 [C. 4665] XXXIV.

¹³For a detailed listing of the various grades of civil and municipal service salaries in the 1890s see Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London Second Series, Volume 4 (New York: 1970), 9-25.

¹⁴ For the division between upper and lower grade clerks in civil service departments see Jill Pellew, The Home Office, 1848-1914 (London: 1982), 33-119; and Ray Jones, The Nineteenth Century Foreign Office: An Administrative History (London: 1971), 102-110. For studies on civil service examinations see Robert John Montgomery, Examinations: An Account Of Their Evolution As Administrative Devices In England (London: 1965); John Roach, Public Examinations In England, 1850-1900 (Cambridge: 1971); Gillian Sutherland, Ability, Merit, And Measurement: Mental Testing And English Education, 1880-1940 (Oxford: 1984); and Stephen Wiseman, Examinations and English Education (Manchester: 1961).

with similar, if less formally structured, difficulties. The salary and minute books of various London private establishments employing clerks indicate that after 1880, as the numbers of clerks working in London finance and insurance began to multiply in numbers, few men who entered service as clerks in these institutions ever reached the £150 plateau--particularly before the age of thirty.¹⁵

The records of male clerks employed by the Law Union and Rock Insurance Company at their head office in London between 1885 and 1914 reflects this pattern. Table 2.3 highlights the youthful nature of the company's employees at this time, and indicates that it was only when they were into their late-twenties or early-thirties could clerks afford to support a home and family while maintaining even the bare trappings of a middle class lifestyle.

¹⁵GLM, Accident Insurance Company Ltd., Board of Directors' Minutes, MS 14,056, Vols. 1-6, 1871-1906; GLM, Alliance Assurance Company, Board of Directors' Minutes, MS 12,162A, Vols. 12-20, 1880-1904; GLM, Francis, Nicholls, White and Company, Staff Address Book, MS 28,879, 1907-1947; GLM, Gillett Brothers Discount Company Ltd., Miscellaneous Papers Concerning Staff, MS 24,698; GLM, Law Union and Rock Insurance Company Ltd., Registers of Salaries and Staff at Head Office and Branches, MS 21276-21278, 1896-1931; and Schrodgers Archive (hereafter designated as SA), Schrodgers Bank, Salary Books, 1879-1914, JHSCHRO/JCSCHRO, Box 32, Documents 1 and 2.

Age	Number	Salary	Minimum	Maximum	Salary
Class	Observed	(Mean)	Salary	Salary	(Median)
15-17	153	37.56	30	121.7	30
18-20	314	54.68	30	120	50
21-25	420	90.58	30	170	90
26-30	341	135.89	70	500	130
31-35	240	177.46	78	600	170
36-40	155	227.77	65	700	215
41-45	130	246.4	78	950	215
46-50	92	257.94	100	500	230
51-55	58	214.88	65	500	210
56-60	43	201.99	84.5	310	210
61-65	23	264.72	130	475	260
65-70	4	260	260	260	260

Table 2.3: Law Union and Rock, Salaries by Age Group, 1885-1914.¹⁶

Not only does this table highlight the long time it took clerks to reach a respectable salary, but it also indicates that, unlike the clerks of the National Discount Company, their salaries leveled-off once they reached middle-age. An analysis of the salary records from two other employers yields similar results.

¹⁶GLM, Law Union and Rock Insurance Company Ltd., Registers of Salaries and Staff at Head Office and Branches, MS 21276-21278, 1896-1931.

Age Class	Number Observed	Salary (Mean)	Minimum Salary	Maximum Salary	Salary (Median)
15-17	10	29.5	25	60	25
18-20	29	54.48	25	100	50
21-25	24	91.88	25	160	90
26-30	5	150	120	190	150
31-35	9	195.56	150	295	195
36-40	3	186.67	160	220	180
41-45	7	369.29	240	700	260
46-50	5	288	245	320	280
51-55	6	195.83	120	300	187.5
56-60	4	307.5	270	400	280

Table 2.4: Alliance Assurance Company, Salaries by Age Group, 1900-1904¹⁷

Age Class	Number Observed	Salary (Mean)	Minimum Salary	Maximum Salary	Salary (Median)
15-17	62	33.5	20	60	30
18-20	99	53.1	25	120	50
21-25	97	83.3	11	170	80
26-30	47	111.8	40	200	115
31-35	34	186.5	80	350	180
36-40	24	305.6	85	700	210
41-45	6	403.5	156	750	370
46-50	11	260.1	156	750	370
51-55	16	248.8	80	400	235
56-60	1	400	400	400	400
61-65	6	240.8	205	400	210
66-71	8	264.4	205	420	217.5

Table 2.5: Accident Insurance Company Ltd., Salaries by Age Group, 1871-1906¹⁸

As witnessed, by the time these clerks reached their thirties they were generally earning salaries of over £150 per annum, with some of them

¹⁷GLM, Alliance Assurance Company, Board of Directors' Minutes, MS 12,162A, Vols. 12-20, 1880-1904.

¹⁸GLM, Accident Insurance Company Ltd., Board of Directors' Minutes, MS 14,056, Vols. 1-6, 1871-1906.

earning a lot more. However, this is not an accurate representation of the clerical labour force as these tables also indicate that this labour force was largely composed of clerks under thirty years of age. A further analysis of the average salary received by each clerk (85 in total) during their period of employment at the Accident Insurance Company Limited reveals a rather different picture.

Average Salary pounds per annum	Number of Individuals
30.1-40.0	15
40.1-50.0	17
50.1-60.0	10
60.1-70.0	6
70.1-80.0	6
80.1-90.0	3
90.1-100.0	3
100.1-110.0	4
100.1-120.0	1
120.1-130.0	0
130.1-140.0	2
140.1-150.0	1
150.1-160.0	2
160.1-170.0	1
170.1-180.0	1
180-200	0
200-250	3
250-300	0
300-350	1
350-400	1
400-450	2
mean = £55 -/-	
median = £87 14/-	

Table 2.6: AIC Ltd., Career Average Individual, Yearly Salaries, 1871-1906¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid.

These low salary averages over an entire course of employment are not surprising given the youthful age, as Table 2.7 indicates, at which most of these clerks were hired and the time it took to reach a respectable salary at, on average, the standard rise in salary of £10 a year.

Age of Entry	Number of Individuals
15	10
16	16
17	10
18	10
19	9
20	9
15-20	64
21	4
22	2
23	1
24	2
25	2
21-25	11
26-30	4
31-35	2
36-40	0
41-45	1
46-59	0
50+	1
mean = 19.65	
median = 18.0	

Table 2.7: Accident Insurance Company Ltd., Average Age Hired, 1871-1906.²⁰

This still does not completely account, however, for the low career average yearly salary. Most clerks hired by the company did not remain with the company long enough to rise to a "respectable" salary level. Only ten of the

²⁰ibid.

eighty-five clerks hired during this period remained with the company by time they reached the age of forty.

As Tables 2.3 to 2.5 indicate, there were clerks who rose to a respectable salary and status, but these clerks were a distinct minority. Lengths of service tables from the Law Union and Rock, Schrodgers Bank, and Francis, Nicholls, White and Company indicate the difficulty young clerks faced in maintaining a position in medium to large scale business establishments in London.

Length of Service	Number of Individuals
0.00-1.00	35
1.01-2.00	12
2.01-3.00	8
3.01-4.00	4
4.01-5.00	5
5.01-6.00	2
6.01-7.00	1
7.01-8.00	0
8.01-9.00	2
9.01-10.0	0
10.0-15.0	1
15.0-20.0	1
20.0-25.0	3
25.0-30.0	2
30.0-40.0	1
40.0+	2
mean = 4.97	
median = 1.36	

Table 2.8: Francis, Nicholls, White and Co., Average Length of Service, 1907-1914.²¹

²¹GLM, Francis, Nicholls, White and Company, Staff Address Book, MS 28,879, 1907-1947.

Length of Service	Number of Individuals
0.00-1.00	70
1.01-2.00	48
2.01-3.00	32
3.01-4.00	18
4.01-5.00	20
5.01-6.00	15
6.01-7.00	12
7.01-8.00	13
8.01-9.00	5
9.01-10.0	4
10.01-11.0	8
11.01-12.0	3
12.01-13.0	4
13.01-14.0	13
14.01-15.0	3
15.01-16.0	5
16.01-17.0	3
17.01-18.0	3
18.01-19.0	1
19.01-20.0	3
20.01-25.0	2
25.01-30.0	3
30.01-40.0	4
40.01-50.0	9
mean = 6.66	
median = 3.05	

Table 2.9: Law Union and Rock., Average Length of Service, 1885-1914.²²

²²GLM, Law Union and Rock Insurance Company Ltd., Registers of Salaries and Staff at Head Office and Branches, MS 21276-21278, 1896-1931.

Length of Service	Number of Individuals
0.00-1.00	25
1.01-2.00	20
2.01-3.00	8
3.01-4.00	10
4.01-5.00	5
5.01-6.00	1
6.01-7.00	1
7.01-8.00	4
8.01-9.00	1
9.01-10.0	3
10.0-15.0	7
15.0-20.0	6
20.0-25.0	2
25.0-30.0	0
30.0-35.0	4
35.0-40.0	1
40.0-50.0	1
50+	2
mean = 7.75	
median = 3.00	

Table 2.10: Schroders Bank, Average Length of Service, 1880-1914²³

These tables appear to confirm the common complaint of clerks that employers were not interested in older clerks with experience or were looking to hire clerks who could rise to a top position. There was a vast amount of work to be done in banks, insurance companies and warehouses that demanded little experience, such as copying, and the employment of junior clerks at low salaries was the most economical way for employers to pay for this labour. After the standard three year period of apprenticeship, only the exceptional clerks steadily rose in most firms, if they were kept on at all.

²³SA, Schroders Bank, Salary Books, 1879-1914, JHSCHRO/JCSCHRO, Box 32, Documents 1 and 2.

Clerks working for smaller firms generally fared even worse, very rarely ever earning more than £100. Moreover, they were more susceptible to the mercy of an individual employer and the instability of London's commercial climate.²⁴ For the clerk who found himself out of work his lot was especially difficult. The "Situations Vacant" columns of London newspapers regularly ran advertisements for vacant clerkships and the *Daily Mail* had a separate category for vacant clerkships, but these positions rarely paid more than 30s per week and were, more often than not, temporary. The sad lot of the out of work clerk was reflected in these newspapers' "Situations Vacant" columns where out of work clerks begged for work at less than working men's wages.²⁵

Despite the increasing disparity between clerks earning £80 to £150 a year and those earning far greater amounts, to some degree, a common clerical identity remained. The great mass of clerks earned, as Charles Booth pointed out, a salary comparable to the wages of a skilled artisan.²⁶ Lockwood has maintained, however, that, "the larger part of these clerks were socially on an entirely different footing than the artisan class."²⁷ Although the lifestyles of the two grades of clerks were markedly different, representing the vast range of income and material comfort within the middle class, the lower grade of clerk attempted to construct an identity in the mold of a respectable

²⁴Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion," 21-27.

²⁵See Chapter Four.

²⁶Booth noted that the lower class of clerk tended to be paid "£75 to £150 a year comparing with 30, 40, 50 and 60 shillings a week," of the skilled artisan. Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* First Series, Volume 2, 277.

²⁷Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker*, 28.

middle class gentleman—of an income and status he would more than likely never reach. Booth's observations illustrate how this distinct clerical identity was partially constructed in relation to the 'other'. In the case of the clerk the 'other' was the artisan or labourer.

From top to bottom clerks associate with clerks and artisans with artisans—but comparatively seldom with each other. A clerk lives an entirely different life from an artisan—marries a different kind of wife—has different ideas, different possibilities, and different limitations. A clerk differs from an artisan in the claims each make on society, no less than in the claims society makes on them. It is not by any means only a question of clothes, of the wearing or not wearing of a white shirt every day, but of differences which invade every department of life, and at every turn affect the family budget. More undoubtedly is expected from the clerk than the artisan, but the clerk's money goes further and is on the whole much better spent."²⁸

The image of the respectable clerk, which Booth identified and helped to propagate, was attractive to young men and parents of less "respectable" labouring and artisanal upbringings. As one clerk asserted in 1890, "parents wish to see their sons in a broadcloth instead of fustian; they think a clerk is a gentleman and an artisan not."²⁹ By the late-nineteenth century, however, many clerks no longer recognized that a clerk's life was more respectable and that his money went further (See Chapter Four). Nonetheless, clerking, which often required little more than intermediate reading, writing and arithmetic skills, was viewed as the most accessible route for entry into the middle class. It increasingly became viewed as a route for possible entry as education became more accessible to greater numbers after 1870 as the expansion of London's public service and commercial industries required the expansion of their clerical staffs. As one clerk of a working class upbringing

²⁸Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People First Series, Volume 2, 277.

²⁹The Clerk's Journal, 1 August, 1890, 2.

informed Mary Macarthur of the National Union of Clerks, "his parents had put him into a clerk's position to make a 'gentleman' of him."³⁰ Meanwhile, George Bernard Shaw noted, as Trollope indicated in *The Three Clerks*, that for poorer middle class families clerking was a last resort for the son who wished to maintain a semblance of gentility and respectability for himself and family.

Of all the qualities of man I find nothing so astonishing as his sheepishness, his docility, his cowardice. When these qualities are developed to their utmost by civilization and poverty in the middle class, you get the clerk. You cannot make an Arab a clerk. You cannot make a North American Indian a clerk. But you can make an Imperial Englishman a clerk quite easily. All you have to do is to drop him into a poor middle-class family, with a father who cannot afford to keep him, cannot afford to give him capital to start with, and cannot afford to carry his education beyond the elementary stage, but who would yet be disgraced if his son became "a working man." Given these circumstances what can the poor wretch do but become a clerk?³¹

By the late-nineteenth century the majority of young men entered clerkships in an attempt to enter the ranks of the middle class, unlike those of Shaw's background who wished to prevent a slide into the ranks of the labouring classes. One clerk, the son of a working man, wrote to *Tit-Bits* in 1885, stating that, as the "brightest of a family of three sons, my fond parents determined to make me a clerk, while their other duller sons" went into the manual trades.³² His parents saw clerking as the means to achieve

³⁰Account of Memorial Hall Meeting, December 4, 1907: Speech of Miss Mary Macarthur, *The Clerk*, January 1908, Vol. 1, No. 1, 3.

³¹George Bernard Shaw, "Bernard Shaw as a Clerk: By Himself," *The Clerk*, January 1908, Vol. 1, No. 1, 7-8. Shaw asserted that he became a clerk "in the genteel modification of this course," when his uncle found him "a stool in a very genteel office." Shaw, never one to succumb to humility, maintained that he would have remained there "if I had not broken loose in defiance of all prudence, and become a professional man of genius—a resource not open to every clerk."

respectability for their son and for themselves. "In their opinion a clerk's was a most genteel occupation, and the thought that their dear son would not have to soil his white hands with manual labour gave them untold satisfaction."³³ The notion that the life of a clerk was one of respectability and gentlemanly characteristics was pressed on young men and their parents in an increasing number of lower middle class journals such as *Tit-Bits*, *Pearson's Weekly*, and *Answers*. An article on bank clerks in *Tit-Bits* in 1886 argued that "a gentleman who is 'in a bank' is regarded as one who is the fortunate possessor of a stamp of respectability."³⁴ Moreover, combined with the respectability obtained from the occupation was the belief that a bank clerk would inevitably rise to a position of wealth, power and prestige within the bank.

Taken as a class—and a very large and very important class—bank clerks are gentlemen of great respectability and discernment. They have a recognised position. Taking a prospective glance one can but feel that many individual members of the great army of bank clerks of to-day are destined to become the bankers and bank managers of the future.³⁵

Despite the failure of most bank and other clerks to become managers, they tended to place themselves within the same class as their employers and other members of the "respectable" middle classes. The Quaker and socialist S. G. Hobson, writing in *The Clerk* in 1908 noted that when he entered employment in an office twenty years earlier he was "vividly 'class-conscious' as a clerk" and regarded those who worked with their hands "as

³²Correspondence: "The Germans Abroad", by 'A Ledger Hack', *Tit-Bits*, 25 July, 1885, 237.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Anon, "Bank Clerks", *Tit-Bits*, 4 September, 1886, 330.

³⁵*Ibid.*

my social inferiors."³⁶ This snobbery existed despite the fact that labourers' "apprenticed sons were earning more than I, men whose wages ranged from 36s. to 60s. a week."³⁷ Although Hobson's fellow clerks were aware that they earned less than members of the labour aristocracy: "The atmosphere of the office reeked of smug respectability."³⁸

Hobson maintained that he and his fellow clerks believed themselves to be members of the same class as their employers and the managers of the office. The chimera that a clerk's identity was, like that of middle class professionals and merchants, one of "character", "respectability", and "gentlemanliness" helped clerks to ignore the fact that in many cases they were not even the material equals of the men they looked down upon. It was not until the 1900's that clerks began to combine on any significant scale and even then this combination was primarily limited to the public sector, such as in the Post Office, and in industries with large numbers of unionised manual workers, such as the railways.³⁹ A respectable member of the middle class would never unionise. Many "clerks spoke of themselves," as Councilor Muggeridge told the National Union of Clerks in 1912, "as the members of a 'profession'."⁴⁰ Although many middle class professionals belonged to professional associations, such as the Royal College of Physicians and

³⁶S. G. Hobson, "The Retrospect of a Clerkly Malcontent", The Clerk, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1908, 49.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹See Lockwood, The Blackcoated Worker, 30-35.

⁴⁰"Annual Demonstration: Essex Hall, December 8, 1911—Address by Councilor Muggeridge," The Clerk, January 1912, Vol. 5, No. 49, 3-4.

Surgeons, the Law Society, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Royal Institute of British Architects, and the Institutions of Civil and Mechanical Engineers, these had an aura of middle class respectability that, in the eyes of the middle class, a trade union did not possess.⁴¹ Clerks were, therefore, reluctant, even in times of hardship and dearth, to join a union—an act considered very common and ungentlemanly. Shaw observed that when he was a clerk, had a trade union existed for clerks in Dublin, he never would have considered joining:

Not only would it have been considered a most ungentlemanly thing to do—almost as outrageous as coming to the office in corduroy trousers, with a belcher handkerchief around my neck—but, snobbery apart, it would have been stupid, because I should not have intended to remain a clerk. I should have taken the employers' point of view from the first.⁴²

Unlike labourers and other members of the working class, clerks believed that they shared similar interests, values and cultural characteristics with their employers. The employer or manager was often viewed as the type of man the young clerk would ultimately become. Guides and handbooks for junior clerks encouraged this belief.

Among the many commercial men of this country, who have founded their own fortunes, raised themselves by trade to affluence and honour, and ultimately become the giants of the mercantile world, perhaps the most distinguished have at one time occupied the humble position of juniors in the office; and though their success be secured by few, it is open to all, which should be remembered as an encouraging fact by those who have a laudable ambition of advancement, and are willing to submit to the regulation of conduct, the self-denial, and the labour which such a result requires.⁴³

⁴¹See Harold Perkin, The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880 (London: 1989).

⁴²Cited in Lee Holcombe, Victorian Ladies at Work (Hamden, Connecticut: 1973), 152-153.

Gregory Anderson has argued that it was this success ideology that induced many young men to become clerks in Liverpool.⁴⁴ Clerks in London were no less immune than their Liverpoolian counterparts to the widely popular theories of personal success promulgated during the Victorian era by writers such as Samuel Smiles in *Self Help*, a book of which more than a quarter of a million copies had been sold by the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ His and similar guides, such as J. C. Ransom's *The Successful Man in his Manifold Relations with Life*, promised the first and later generations of young men coming out of Board schools that economic independence and advancement were within their grasp.⁴⁶ Smiles held up the careers of pre-Victorian and Victorian entrepreneurs as examples of men who had managed to rise despite their meager economic or social backgrounds. More significantly, however, he provided a model of character and behavior for literate working class and lower middle class youth to follow and provides a keen reflection of the nature of Victorian success ideology. Smiles emphasized character and gentlemanly virtues, informing his readers that character "is the noblest possession of a man, constituting a rank in itself, and an estate in the general

⁴³W. R. Gray, *The Young Clerk's Instructor and Counting-House Companion*, (London: 1867), 41.

⁴⁴Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, 41-49.

⁴⁵Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: 1958), 7. First published in 1859. J. F. C. Harrison has shown how prevalent success ideology was and how it was aimed, and appealed to, a wide variety of social groups. J. F. C. Harrison, "The Victorian gospel of success", *Victorian Studies* Vol. 1., December 1957, 155-164.

⁴⁶J. C. Ransom, *The Successful Man in his Manifold Relations with Life* (Baltimore: 1886). Other guides included William H. Maher, *On the Road to Riches: Hints for Clerks and Young Business Men* (Chicago: 1878); and Gavin Douglas, *How to Make Money: For Capitalists, Traders, Merchants, Clerks, and Working-Men* (London: 1910).

goodwill; dignifying every station, and exalting every position in society."⁴⁷ It did not matter if he was a poorly paid clerk or artisan, "if his character be of sterling worth," Smiles maintained, "he will always command an influence, whether it be in the workshop, the counting-house, the mart, or the senate."⁴⁸ Character had little relation to wealth, but to hard work and perseverance. In the world of the office a clerk, unable to achieve wealth and fame, had ample opportunity to acquire character and the badge of respectability through proper conduct and the acquisition of sound business skills.

Attention, application, accuracy, method, punctuality, and despatch are the principal qualities required for the efficient conduct of business of any sort. These, at first sight, may appear to be small matters; and yet they are of essential importance to human happiness, well-being, and usefulness. They are little things, it is true; but human life is made up of comparatively small trifles. It is the repetition of little acts which constitute not only the sum of human character, but which determine the character of nations. And where men or nations have broken down, it will almost invariably be found that neglect of little things was the rock on which they split. Every human being has duties to be performed, and, therefore, has need of cultivating the capacity for doing them; whether the sphere of action be the management of a household, the conduct of a trade or profession, or the government of a nation.⁴⁹

By emphasizing temperance, solid work habits and perseverance Smiles and others not only helped to instill ambition into the young men of the Victorian age, but were also partially responsible for providing them with a dogged sense of duty and deference.

Upon entering office employment the junior immediately attempted, and was heartily encouraged by his employer, to emulate his employer

⁴⁷Smiles, *Self-Help*, 360.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 267.

through such forms as manners and dress.⁵⁰ The career ambitions discussed by Anderson and the quest of middle class respectability, emphasized through middle class cultural characteristics such as dress and manners, further inhibited clerical union and imparted a sense of middle class individualism. Moreover, as Crossick has stressed, most firms prior to the Great War were relatively small-scale enterprises which dispersed clerks throughout London. Meanwhile, because of the varieties of clerical work the skills and aspirations of clerks varied greatly from firm to firm.⁵¹ A wider consciousness was ultimately inhibited by these circumstances that underline the individualistic and isolated identity and culture of the clerk that caused him to identify more with the individualist nature of his middle class betters than the collective actions of his working class material equals.

The "gentlemanly" virtues which clerks believed they possessed provided them with an identity component that helped to separate them from the wage-earning class. These virtues were strongly supported by the nature of their work and the training they received as juniors. Here they were inundated with a value system that was perceived to be similar to that of their employers and other members of the middle class. Harrison maintained in 1852 that: "a clerk's duties bear a greater similarity to those of the principal, and are of a more enlightening and improving nature than manual work."⁵² The white-collar world of the clerk centered on his mental

⁵⁰See below.

⁵¹Crossick, *The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion*, 25.

⁵²J. S. Harrison, *The Social Position and Claims of Book-keepers and Clerks Considered*, 21.

abilities, as opposed to the physical abilities of the working-classes, and allowed him to view himself as a "gentleman". Although most clerks could not support a proper middle-class style of life, gentlemanliness, through work identification, appeared within reach. Lockwood argues that because gentlemanliness was "sufficiently vague as a value," it could play a major role in a somewhat confused lower middle class culture.⁵³

Although the clerk's cultural and identity components such as "respectability" and "gentlemanliness" may have been somewhat vague they did help to form the nature and temper of the clerk and instilled in him a high degree of deference in regard to his employers and "acted as a powerful social control over any intransigence or insurrection on the part of the clerk."⁵⁴ In providing an explanation for the inability of clerks to agitate for better salaries and working conditions Charles Parsons observed that:

Clerks are, as a rule, of decent address and gentlemanly habits, patient and long-suffering, not given to noisily "insisting on their right" and are possessed of some delicacy when requesting an advance of salary, not unnaturally believing that their employers ought to recognize their merits and reward their careful guardianship of trade secrets and the valuable information they frequently obtain, without requiring somewhat humiliating reminders.⁵⁵

A clerk's identity, one partially constructed on the rock of respectability, made it impossible for him to openly face his employer and petition for a higher salary or promotion. Moreover, the relationship that existed between the clerk and his employer was one built on the notion that they were cut of the same cloth (even if the employer did not always view his clerks in this

⁵³Lockwood, The Blackcoated Worker, 29.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Charles Edward Parsons, Clerks: Their Position and Advancement (London: 1876), 12.

manner) which prevented the clerk from openly confronting his employer, a fellow respectable gentleman. This type of relationship flourished, especially in private firms, where the clerk often mixed with the sons of their employers. It was therefore widely believed that: "The clerks in established and well-known merchants' offices yield to no one in gentlemanly deportment, cultivated proficiency and self-respect; and in appearance there is but little difference between many of them and the employers they serve."⁵⁶

The perception of clerking as a respectable occupation where the clerk was viewed as the equal of his middle class employers helped to create a climate where young men of the working class and lower middle class, fresh from London's Board schools, often with strong encouragement from their parents, began to see clerking as a possible route to the financial and social success as promised by Victorian success ideology. Although by the 1880s there was substantial evidence to suggest that the average clerk seldom fared materially better than members of London's labour aristocracy, parents in the working and lower middle classes continued to push their sons into the respectable world of the office. Although most clerks failed to rise to a truly middle class lifestyle and status it was often maintained that this was either due to a lack of vigor and temper on the part of the clerk, or, as was often suggested, the clerk had entered into the wrong branch of the profession.⁵⁷ For example, it was suggested by Charles Jones in *The Solicitor's Clerk*, that the office of a solicitor was the best venue for the young clerk to prove his worth.

⁵⁶Orchard, *The Clerks of Liverpool*, 33-34.

⁵⁷See Chapter Four.

Since the introduction of school boards, it has often been urged that the labour market for clerks is overstocked by the anxiety of parents, and by the desire of boys to obtain a genteel occupation. This is probably true of the mere copying clerk, the office "writing machine" of merchants and others; but it is also true that the services of a good solicitor's clerk are in as great demand as ever, while at the same time his salary has not as a general rule exhibited any downward tendency, in fact quite the reverse.⁵⁸

Although the potential for a clerk's material and social advancement was under greater scrutiny by the late-Victorian era the promise of entry into a respectable middle class world remained. The young clerk was informed that, unlike the clerks of the past, he would have to make great strides to improve his position in the office. This meant perseverance through hard work and continual training, and, as Jones suggested, a bit of common sense.

The junior's first day in an office placed him immediately within a world of strict hierarchies in which his chances for vertical movement were limited. He was informed during his office training and in guides for junior clerks that he had to be loyal and deferential to his employer at all times. It was maintained that if a clerk was loyal and trustworthy he could count on kindly paternalism on the part of his employer. "One of the first lessons the clerk should learn," stressed Haslehurst Greaves in *The Commercial Clerk and His Success*, "is that of loyalty to his employer, . . . A man who is loyal to his employer can depend on the loyalty of his employer."⁵⁹ A clerk from humble origins had to prove his worth to his middle class employer or department supervisor through loyalty and deference, a process that would

⁵⁸Charles Jones, *The Solicitor's Clerk: A Handy Book Upon The Ordinary Practical Work Of A Solicitor's Office. With Precise Instructions As To The Procedure In Conveyancing Matters And The Practice Of The Courts* (London: 1891), 5.

⁵⁹Haslehurst Greaves, *The Commercial Clerk And His Success* (London: 1909), 13.

take several years. Clerks were informed that they could prove themselves loyal through a number of specific and general office practices. Greaves pointed out that such practices included: ensuring that office affairs remained private, being frugal in their use of office supplies, showing energy and zeal in regard to the office's business, being courteous to anyone he had business dealings with from outside the office, being neatly dressed, being punctual and, most importantly, being civil and courteous to his employer.⁶⁰

For the junior clerk of a working class or lower middle class background the office was his first introduction to the adult world of work and identity. The junior was immediately bombarded with rules, regulations and instructions on proper clerical behavior and manner that applied not only to his office life, but his entire existence. The junior clerk was, in many ways, still a pupil—a pupil who, he was constantly informed, had a great deal to learn. It was widely maintained that the junior needed to be molded immediately if he was to succeed as a clerk. One guide for junior clerks stressed that the young clerk does not often realize that his education was only beginning and if he is to succeed he needed to be aware of this as it was maintained that he would not last long as a clerk if he did not. It was believed that too often young men were unable to escape their schoolboy habits and did not give the proper degree of deference and respect to their seniors in the office.⁶¹ It was upheld that the young clerk needed, above all else, to exercise "patience, perseverance, courtesy, cheerfulness, and perhaps

⁶⁰Ibid., 13-17.

⁶¹Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library. No. 7: The Clerk: A Sketch in Outline of His Duties and Discipline (London: 1878), 14-15.

more than any other quality, a humble distrust of self and a deferential respect for the judgment of others."⁶²

These qualities were deemed important not only for the formation of a young clerk's character, manner and identity, but for the ultimate benefit of the office in which he was employed. An idle or lazy junior would not only hurt his own chances for success, but could possibly damage the business and reputation of his employers. Juniors were continually admonished to become useful to their employers as this would not only bring better rewards to the firm, but to the clerk himself. The young clerk was warned that even in regard to the "most trifling matters" of his work, he could damage the business of the firm if he did not take a careful interest.

... the unsuccessful search for a letter or a book--the bad ruling of an account--the hopeless mending of a pen--each is a sufficient excuse for an irritable clerk to feel disconcerted, and then his peevish dissatisfaction with himself, and his frequent and petulant appeals for petty aid, interrupt important occupation and derange all the order of the counting house. If such fits are often shown he becomes first disagreeable, then odious to his fellow-clerks, and is reported as a positive nuisance to his employer.⁶³

In short, the exercise of patience, sobriety, efficiency and good temper were deemed necessary for the junior to succeed. The cultivation of these qualities would not only improve the "character" of the junior but also allow him to rise in the firm.⁶⁴

Young clerks were encouraged by their managers and employers, and often by their fellow clerks, to devote themselves entirely to their new trade.

⁶²Ibid., 16.

⁶³Ibid., 17-18.

⁶⁴Ibid., 18-19.

This went a lot further than acting in a deferential, respectable and gentlemanly fashion while in the office. For example, marriage before receiving a base salary of £100 a year was treated with scorn. The junior was expected to devote his attention to his clerking education and career advancement and the distraction of marriage, especially a marriage filled with the constant struggle to maintain the illusion of middle class respectability on a small salary, was viewed as a hindrance to success as a clerk.⁶⁵ Marriage was by no means the only preoccupation viewed as an unnecessary distraction for the young clerk. James McBey found it difficult to engage in his self-training as an artist while employed as a clerk.

All those belonging to the parochial world in which I was enmeshed were intensely preoccupied with the grim business of survival on their meagre salaries. They had their own shrewd and canny standards, and viewed with slight tolerance and vinegary scorn anyone indulging in unremunerative activity. To spend time and energy on the study or practice of art was considered as frivolous—the diversion of a trifle. Consequently, I went about the making of my first etching with all secrecy.⁶⁶

McBey went to great lengths to hide his "frivolous" artistic endeavours from his fellow clerks and employers. Thus, as his choice of artistic expression, he chose etching.

Etching had one advantage; it did not necessitate the carrying about of bulky gear. I had not dared to sketch or paint out-of-doors. For a junior bank clerk to be seen with a sketching outfit in the streets would be, I knew well, certain to arouse the derision of my fellow clerks and would be regarded with at least suspicious curiosity by the higher officers of the bank, should it ever come to their knowledge.⁶⁷

⁶⁵See Chapters Four and Five.

⁶⁶James McBey, The Early Life of James McBey: An Autobiography, 1883-1911 (Oxford: 1977, 42.

⁶⁷Ibid.

Young clerks, such as McBey, were bombarded with literature and office regulations designed to turn them into efficient and respectable components of the office. One journal, *The Insurance Agent and the Insurance Review*, informed young clerks in 1880 that: "The clerk who takes sufficiently deep interest in his daily work to study it as a science, will make advancements which will distance his fellows who have no ambition beyond the earning of their salary."⁶⁸ A sure way of rising in the office, it suggested, was to become familiar with the work of the office:

Each [young clerk] should for himself follow the example of a lad recently placed in a City office. He has, by close attention, following up entries day by day, come to see the method of this office, and will soon be equal to a responsible place in it. While writing up books, it is requisite to exercise an intelligent interest in each transaction so as to understand it, and know actual costs, because it is the difference between that and the selling price or return. that constitutes the profit or the loss.⁶⁹

It was continually maintained that the education of the junior was far from complete. In fact, most employers and journals that echoed these sentiments argued that clerks' real education, that pertaining to the world of business and adulthood, was only just beginning.

Too many youths consider that their education is completed when they start on the battle of life, by entering a City office as juvenile clerk or office boy. They seem to think that they have made a sudden jump from boyhood to manhood, simply because, instead of taking pocket money from their parents weekly, they take it from their employers. Whether they are or ever will be competent to fill the responsible positions their employers do, never enters their heads.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Anon, "A Hint to the Young Men", *The Insurance Agent and the Insurance Review*, 1 June, 1880, Vol. 15, No. 173, 90-91.

⁶⁹R. M., Moir, "Commercial Education", *The Young Men's Review*, May 1889, Vol. 6, No. 5., 71.

⁷⁰Anon, "Useful at 15, Useless at 25!", *The Office Journal*, 6 March, 1909, 15.

Juniors soon learned that any prior commercial knowledge that they had obtained in their schooling was useful, but was only a brief introduction to the rules, regulations and work of the office. Employers demanded lumps of raw clay that they could easily shape and mold into respectable and hardworking representatives of their business concerns. Mr. E. Bousfield, a London auctioneer, maintained that:

To make a good clerk time is required and patience on the part of the employer. A boy who has had a commercial training after 15 may possibly command a better salary, but will not be so useful to his master. It is undesirable to have someone coming into the office and lording it over those who have worked from the bottom, and perhaps thinking he knows more than his master.⁷¹

These sentiments were widely shared by employers in regard to their junior clerks. Although there was a growing concern about England's deficiencies in commercial education, especially in relation to England's competitiveness with Germany, most employers simply demanded that their juniors have little more than "a sound elementary education." Mr. P. Brown, an exporter, told the Technical Education Board of the London County Council in 1899: "If you teach the boys to read, write, figure properly and work with a willing spirit, we can train them for what we want."⁷² Employers demanded basic rudimentary skills, which the Board Schools provided, but for the most part they preferred their clerks without a secondary education. Languages and skills such as shorthand were deemed important, but could be obtained

⁷¹London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter designated as LMA), TEB/80/4, London County Council Technical Education Board: Report of the Special Sub-Committee on Commercial Education, February 20, 1899, 27.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 33.

through evening colleges. Far more important was an eagerness to learn and a willingness to conform to the routines, habits and culture of the office.

Upon entering his period of apprenticeship the junior clerk quickly realized that his training would take several years or, perhaps, decades. For example, bank clerks were informed that it would take a number of years before they could truly call themselves bank clerks, let alone bankers. Juniors were told to work hard to learn the business of the bank and to exercise patience in acquiring the necessary skills that would allow them to rise and flourish in the firm. Moreover, these skills could only be acquired through the junior's term of apprenticeship within the bank.

There is no legal term of apprenticeship prescribed for a banker, as there is in other professions, yet a person must practically serve a very long apprenticeship, and acquire a thorough knowledge of business, before he can become qualified for the higher offices in a bank.⁷³

A junior clerk in a bank, or any other office, had to take great care in learning the skills of his trade and the manners suitable for a member of his vocation. While it was continually maintained that the junior needed to cultivate skills such as book-keeping, shorthand, proper writing, etc., what was just as valuable to the employer was a clerk of a solid moral fibre. For this the junior needed to cultivate good character and behavior. This was stressed in *The Banker's Clerk*, where it was stated:

Punctuality, foresight, and prudence—a continual sense of the nature of the duties he has to perform—and the strictest integrity in all transitions, whether minute or important—are qualities for which he must obtain character.⁷⁴

⁷³Houlston and Sons, *Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 2. : The Banker's Clerk. Comprising The Principles And Practice Of Banking* 5th ed. (London: 1877), 124.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 130.

Signs of proper conduct, such as punctuality, meant far more than the ability of a young clerk to arrive at the office at the appointed hour. It was also a reflection on his skills and performance in the office. More importantly, it was a reflection on his character and temper. *Nibs and Quills*, a clerk's journal, informed juniors that: "One of the first things he should aim to attain is a reputation for punctuality--punctuality in the office and out of it, and not only in punctually arriving at the office in the morning and at midnight, but in attention to every detail throughout the day."⁷⁵ Juniors who arrived late were perceived as the sort whose office work would be of a substandard quality.

Punctuality was not the only virtue of the successful young clerk, and much other character building advice was prescribed. While clerks needed to be of high value and service to their employers they were also, as they were continually reminded, a reflection on their office to the outside world, and, most importantly, to clients. Young clerks were to be "attentive to their inquiries and wishes, and address them quietly and not too familiarly."⁷⁶ Proper character and gentlemanly behavior were essential if a clerk were to succeed. As *Nibs and Quills* stressed: "character is to you what capital is to the merchant."⁷⁷ Employers stressed the importance of good character and gentlemanly behavior in their advertisements for open situations. While it was commonplace to see employers asking for a junior with good arithmetic and writing skills, far more common was the stipulation that the young man

⁷⁵Anon, "A.B.C. Of Office Work", *Nibs and Quills*, 1 December, 1898, Vol. 1, No. 1, 10.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

applying for vacant situations have "gentlemanly" attributes and proper manners. Meanwhile, in the "Situations Wanted" columns of newspapers, young men and experienced clerks desiring clerical work regularly underlined their gentlemanly attributes along with any skills and experience that they held. A clerk's identity was firmly linked to these "gentlemanly" manners of behavior and proper character. The cultivation of these attributes was instilled through formal and informal office rules, regulations and unwritten practices. Underlying these regulations and practices were the interests of the employers, who desired hardworking, competent and respectable representatives of their business concerns. For example, young clerks were advised to avoid missing work due to illness, as it was argued that repeated sick leaves would damage a junior's prospects of promotion.

Few things occasion more dissatisfaction and annoyance to the superiors in a bank than the absence of clerks on every slight attack of illness. Unless a clerk feels himself quite unable to perform his duties, it is very injudicious for him to absent himself. It interferes with his promotion, for his superior will be reluctant to advance him to any post where his absence would be more inconvenient than while he is engaged an inferior situation. In addition to this, the superior in the office may attribute the attack of "bile" or "indigestion" to the indulgence of a convivial taste, which it will be well for a clerk to avoid obtaining a character for; and, under any circumstances, a man who continues at his post as long as he is able will stand much higher in the estimation, both of his employers and his fellow clerks, than he who forsakes his duties on every trivial occasion.⁷⁸

Repeated illnesses reflected on the character of the clerk, which was deemed to be of as great an importance as his job skills.

One way in which a clerk was expected to show proper character and manner was through his dress and appearance in the office. The dress of the

⁷⁸Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 2. : The Banker's Clerk, 131-132.

clerk was not only an outward expression of his class and status, but was firmly linked to his own inner identity. William McBey noted in his autobiography that upon receiving his position as a junior clerk he was forced to purchase the standard armour of respectability that consisted of "a grey suit with long trousers, six white dickeys, six pairs of white cuffs, a hard black ugly-looking bowler hat and a pair of shoes."⁷⁹ On discussing his thoughts on the night before his first day as a clerk in a bank he remarked that these new clothes represented his entrance into the clerking world of middle class respectability and a set, if constraining, identity.

My new toggery lay on chest beside my bed. The long trousers were symbols of manhood; the hard black hat, the dickeys and cuffs were the livery of respectability. Tomorrow and possibly for the rest of my life I would have to be inside that armour, designed apparently to constrict and harness the wearer.⁸⁰

McBey and his fellow juniors were continually warned that poor dress may cause the clerk to be the subject of ridicule and not only might cause them to be looked down upon by their fellow clerks, but what was more important, by their employers.⁸¹ Clerks were induced to dress in as gentlemanly a manner as possible and to avoid any trappings of pretension or foppery. Many employers, meanwhile, insisted that their clerks be cleanshaven and not wear coloured ties.⁸² They were to avoid any trappings of the "Gent" or "Swell". Dressing in a respectable a manner was undoubtedly difficult on the meagre wages of most clerks and the appearance

⁷⁹McBey, 23.

⁸⁰Ibid., 24.

⁸¹Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library. No. 7: The Clerk, 45.

⁸²"Answers to Correspondents", Tit-Bits, 16 May, 1908. p. 207.

of these ragged "gentlemen" was regularly caricatured in newspapers, journals and fiction.⁸³ Dress was a reflection of good manners, character and judgment.

... the clerk owes it to his employer to be ever neat and particular as to his personal appearance, not overdressed nor extravagantly attired in any degree, but dressed as though he respects his firm, himself, and his calling. To appear at the office unshaven, or with unbrushed coat and dirty boots, proclaims at once a lack of respect to one's employers.⁸⁴

Poorly or foppishly dressed clerks were each, in their own way, displaying a lack of respect for their employers and trade. A poorly dressed clerk did not conform to the standards of the gentlemanly nature of his occupation and reflected badly on his employer. Shabby clerks implied a shoddily run office. Houlston's *The Clerk* informed young clerks how to dress without going too far in the direction of pretentious foppery:

The dress of every man, the young especially, ought to conform to the fashion of the day: he cannot afford to be an exquisite, and it is not desirable that he should; a fop rarely proves a good man of business, nor can the clerk indulge in a new coat as often as his vanity and his tailor may desire; but he can avoid any thing remarkable either in the colour of the cut of it. To be quiet and unassuming in dress argues a becoming modesty of mind; the contrary extreme implies vulgarity. An affected peculiarity of any kind in dress is objectionable.⁸⁵

In *The Diary of a Nobody*,⁸⁶ George and Weedon Grossmith provide an example of a clerk, Mr. Pooter, struggling to be respectable in his dress. Pooter, however, never quite manages to be fashionable. Pooter wears the standard uniform of the clerk. He regularly wears a frockcoat, a double

⁸³See Chapter Five.

⁸⁴Greaves, 17.

⁸⁵Houlston and Sons, *Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 7: The Clerk*, 46.

⁸⁶George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (Ware, Hertfordshire: 1994).

breasted coat reaching to the knees, when gentlemen were increasingly adopting single breasted short skirted morning coats, and he orders a pair of 'Dittos' (matching jacket and trousers) although, as *The Tailor and Cutter* pointed out, "by 1888 Dittos have become so common that the higher circles have ceased to wear them."⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the tight slacks Pooter regularly wears to the office, which were mocked by a younger clerk in the office, were long out of fashion.⁸⁸ Nonetheless Pooter, earning far more than the average clerk, is, in his dress, fairly representative of a clerk as he struggles to maintain the allure of respectability through his dress.

Employers generally insisted that their clerks adopt a standard form of dress and, while a clerk such as Pooter may not have conformed to the latest fashion, he did, like all clerks, conform to the standard uniform—black clothes. Until the 1910's clerks continued to wear the knee-length cut-away or double-breasted frock coat, or, perhaps, the less formal morning coat. Both coats were worn with a waistcoat, a high-winged and stiff collar, a tie or silk stock, and narrow trousers of a lighter or matching tone. The clerk, meanwhile, was rarely seen outside the office without a top or bowler hat. Younger clerks, or those concerned with up to date fashions, could be viewed wearing short black jackets and waistcoats with matching or, possibly, pinstripe trousers of a lighter tone. This particular outfit was also furnished with a stiffly starched white shirt with a neck-concealing winged or rounded collar decorated by a dark and sober tie.⁸⁹ While these standard forms of dress

⁸⁷Cited in Geffrye Museum, *Mr. Pooter's London* (London: 1988), 13.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹Jackson, *The Middle Classes 1900-1950*, 156-159.

provided the clerk with a middle class identity and a sense of respectability, it was often a financial hardship for the junior or clerk of modest means. For example, in 1897 several clerks wrote letters of complaint to *Answers* in regard to the cost of dressing as a "respectable city gentleman."⁹⁰ The clerk earning an average or below average wage was hard pressed to maintain a respectable image through proper non-ragged dress. Uniforms consisting of frayed collars, tattered and shiny coats and worn shoes were all that many clerks could afford. Nonetheless, clerks were induced to adopt the dress of the chief employees of the firm, the managers, the accountants, the treasurers, but were paid a small fraction of their salaries. While the identity of a clerk was partially formed through his dress, as it helped to enforce the image of a respectable and responsible member of the middle class, the meagreness of his dress was a constant reminder of the distinction between himself and the truly respectable members of the middle class.

The cultivation of proper manners of dress was only one of the ways in which the young clerk was to conform to the proper codes of conduct of the office. Above all, a young clerk was implored to exercise good sense and a firmness of mind. The office was for work. The young clerk, fresh out of a Board school and probably still living with his parents (which would continue for a number of years), needed to quickly realize this. Houlston's *The Clerk* stressed this point and implored the junior to remain "resolute and steadfast" in the application of his duties at all times. He was not to dwell

⁹⁰Answers' Parliament (Letters to the Editor): 'W.P.', "Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" *Answers*, 24 July, 1897, 178.

on domestic difficulties or other sorrows while at the office. His mind was to be focused thoroughly upon his work.⁹¹

The young clerk of London undoubtedly faced a number of distractions, and was warned against developing habits that might prove hazardous to work and career. Houlston's *The Clerk* devoted a whole chapter to proper "Occupation and Relaxation Out of Business Hours." Clerks were ordered to partake in gentlemanly pursuits and to avoid unnecessary excitements. Proper carriage and temper were to be maintained at all costs. Straying from this path would cause the clerk to be unfocused and agitated at the office. It was implied that this would not only hurt a clerk's standing in the office, but also his happiness.⁹² It was believed that a clerk's office work was directly affected by his leisure habits. Clerks were encouraged to adopt respectable and sober leisure habits that would undoubtedly lead to proper manners and temper within the office. Houlston's *The Clerk* was one of many guides for junior clerks that followed this line of reasoning.

It is the systematic distribution of the whole twenty-four hours among the several duties which, at whatever age, form the daily work of life. It seems harsh to deprecate all indulgences in the ordinary amusements of youth; and it would not only be harsh, but unjust and improper, so long as they are pursued in strict subordination to a system of daily labour: but when they are followed beyond these limits, the mischief is not confined to the loss of time which they directly involve--the indirect consequences are yet more lamentable: amusement is no longer sought as a relaxation, but as an excitement; the recollection of the dance of yesterday, the anticipation of the play of to-night, or the excursion of to-morrow, haunts the mind all the day, and abstracts attention from the grave duties which require it.⁹³

⁹¹Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 7: The Clerk, 46-47.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 23.

⁹³*Ibid.*

Undue excitements, let alone ungentlemanly pursuits such as drinking and gambling, were to be avoided at all costs.

The clerk was continually encouraged to partake in sober and "respectable" activities throughout his career.⁹⁴ It was the clerk who avoided excitements that might cause him to become distracted from his duties who was deemed to be of most use to his employers and himself. While some clerks undoubtedly refused to follow this strict code of conduct, it was impressed upon them that sober and proper behavior was expected from men of their position. Sharpness of mind was what separated them from manual labourers. Even the skilled workman could afford to occupy his mind with thoughts of sport, music, dance, women or gambling. By contrast, the clerk could not as his work depended upon a focused mind. This was merely one of the ways that separated the clerk from the manual worker and provided him with a higher status and a sense of respectability. Employers and those writing guides for clerks continually stressed this point. This is not to suggest that clerks were advised to avoid leisure activity entirely. Organisations such as the various branches of London's Young Men's Christian Association were deemed to provide suitable activities that became a clerk.⁹⁵ Clerks were also encouraged to join one of the daily prayer groups that met in the City of London. Recreation and brotherhood were encouraged, just as long as work was not affected. Too much excitement was viewed as a threat "to the existence of a calm a cheerful temper."⁹⁶

⁹⁴See Chapter Three for a more detailed analysis of this point.

⁹⁵See Chapter Three.

Many a time have we seen a trifling loss at cards, a defeat at chess or billiards, a jealousy of some envied glance, or even the whining catastrophe of some sentimental novel, carry its traces of vexation into the morning cast and aspect of a man's features, whence neither the perplexities of book-keeping, nor the copying of eternal correspondence, could remove it for the day. Gloom, sorrow, and agitation, have gradually acquired undisputed sway over the silly, though unhappy, victim of an excited feeling; and its reiterated attacks have changed a temper, generous and gay, into habitual moroseness and peevish selfishness.

There are many reasons for repudiating gaming, levity, and sensational reading, even in their slightest forms, far more weighty than this; but were they objectionable solely for their effects on temper, a young man of common sense would resolutely eschew them all.⁹⁷

The junior was informed that he was a vital component of the office. He was told that he had to work hard and study not only to achieve career success but, more importantly, so that the office would not suffer. *The Office Journal* instructed the junior that his "employer's business is his own, you have no right to give it away" and that the junior could make himself "good at any price by turning out good work."⁹⁸ The junior's work was not only a reflection of himself, but of the office and all of its clerks and officers. It was the clerk who quickly conformed to the routines of the office and studied its business in his spare time who would be "sure to rise to an honourable position."⁹⁹ This type of advice was continually bombarding the young clerk in the office and in journals that commanded a lower middle class readership. *Tit-Bits*, for example, regularly published letters from clerks and employers that provided advice on how to rise as a clerk. Most often, this

⁹⁶Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 7: The Clerk, 24.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸"Notes", The Office Journal 6 March, 1909, 13.

⁹⁹"A Hint to the Young Men," The Insurance Agent and the Insurance Review, 1 June, 1880, Vol. 15, No. 173, 90-91.

advice encouraged clerks to do their best to serve their employers and to take a keen interest in the duties of the experienced clerks in the office. One clerk told juniors to "aim for perfection" in their duties and be willing to perform any countless number of office tasks and obligations.¹⁰⁰

The junior had to adapt to the work routines, rituals and structures of the office. This process served not only to shape the junior into a "responsible" adult but it provided him with an inward and outward identity. As mentioned, the young clerk's training was only just beginning and he needed to learn and use a multitude of new business skills and procedures. Guides, such as Houlston's, helped to mold the young clerk into a responsible and respectable man of business. Houlston's maintained, in regard to banker's clerks, that:

A banker's clerk is not usually taken into an establishment until he has passed the age of boyhood; he has very often, therefore, been previously engaged in some pursuit, and may probably have acquired a very fair knowledge of business. But it is necessary, on his entering a bank, that he should possess certain requisites, and assiduously cultivate many business-like qualities, which, always valuable, are absolutely essential to his success in his new employment.¹⁰¹

Young clerks were told that their new job would require a high degree of competency in arithmetic, book-keeping and writing.¹⁰² It was also recommended that language skills and shorthand would prove invaluable to the young clerk who wished to eventually rise in his office. Although the young clerk may have picked up rudimentary, perhaps even satisfactory,

¹⁰⁰Letters to the Editor, "What Will Pay Best For Clerks?," *Tit-Bits*, 10 March, 1888, 344. See Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of the clerking quest for self-improvement.

¹⁰¹Houlston and Sons, *Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 2. : The Banker's Clerk*, 126.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 128-130.

writing, arithmetic and language skills in school he was informed that now that he had entered the adult world of business he had to conform to the manner in which this world of the office operated. This meant that not only was he to conform to gentlemanly practices and manners of dress, but his work also had to be of a sufficient and rigorous standard.

Upon entering an office the clerk was immediately informed, formally and informally, that his work, above all, was to be accurate, methodical and thorough. It was necessary for him to recognize that he was no longer in school and his job was not to find "answers" to problems, such as in the adding up of columns of figures. William McBey's noted that on his first day as a clerk he made the mistake of presenting his calculation of the sum of six columns of figures of thirty-three amounts each to his superior, a Mr. Grieg, as an "answer". McBey very sternly informed by Grieg that: "We don't have answers in a bank; we have totals."¹⁰³ "Answers" were for schoolboys, for whom an error meant a lower mark. In an office an error could prove to be disastrous for the firm and the clerk. This was repeatedly stressed in firms, such as McBey's bank, and in guidebooks for junior clerks. A lack of accuracy not only meant wasted time, but it could prove financially costly to the business.¹⁰⁴ A methodical approach to work was one way in which the clerk was informed that he could prevent error and improve efficiency. It was maintained that: "Method in business saves time, room, error, worry, and

¹⁰³McBey, 28-29.

¹⁰⁴By A Confidential Clerk, What a Business Man Ought to Know: Being The Daily Business Life In A Merchant's Office. from the duties of the Office Boy to the operations of the Principal (London: 1904), 4.

provides for emergency."¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the qualification of thoroughness was one way in which the clerk could ensure accuracy and help him develop a solid methodological approach to the business of the office. Thoroughness implied, as John Carrington maintained in a Pitman guide for local government clerks, a "concentration of thought." This was to be applied "whether it be fair-copying, typing a letter, press-copying, calling-back, filing, indexing, or in any other of the numerous duties of the junior."¹⁰⁶ A thorough clerk, with his mind firmly set on his office work, seldom made mistakes due to his careful attention to detail.¹⁰⁷

While clerks were instructed that the accurate, methodical and thorough clerk was the type that was placed in high demand, above all else the clerk who had a knack for hard work was the most highly valued. In order to be viewed as a clerk who put in a solid day at the office, the clerk was told that he had to be punctual, produce accurate work and be willing to accept new duties and obligations. Hard work, however, meant more than the ability to merely attempt to be thorough, accurate and methodical during business hours. As one clerk informed young clerks in a handbook on proper business habits, it also meant the acquisition of useful office skills through study outside the office.

Continually overhaul your weapons and improve them. Your knowledge of shorthand to-day should be improved upon three months hence. If you have learnt French, start on German. Spanish can follow German; for although you may not see its necessity to-day, to-morrow may find you

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁰⁶John Broyden Carrington, The Junior Corporation Clerk. A Guide For Junior Clerks (London: 1911), p. 3.

¹⁰⁷By A Confidential Clerk, What a Business Man Ought to Know, 8.

wishing you had studied it, as a vacant post is brought to your notice, but you cannot compete for it, as a knowledge of Spanish is required, and a step forward is therefore lost.¹⁰⁸

The ability for self-improvement was a necessary identity component for a successful clerk. By the late 19th century the clerk who was reluctant to undergo training in shorthand or languages was in danger not only of finding himself without the skills necessary for advancement in his office, but, more seriously, of being viewed as unambitious. As Haslehurst Greaves told junior clerks in *The Commercial Clerk And His Success*, it was not luck that caused some clerks to rise in their office while others were left behind, but hard work.

Hear what Addison said about luck. He wrote: "I never knew an early-rising, hardworking, prudent man, careful of his earnings, and strictly honest, who complained of bad luck. A good character, good habits, and iron industry are impregnable to the assaults of all the ill-luck that fools ever dreamed of."

Luck may certainly be the means of securing a good post for a clerk, but no amount of luck will enable him to retain it if he be not qualified to fill it.

The writer has met with clerks of more than average ability and of sound moral character who have begun their business careers at the age of sixteen or seventeen, and yet who, after twenty-five years of service, have still been contentedly and happily jogging on with an income of £80 or £100 per annum! If they were asked the reason of their lack of success they would probably ascribe it to the fact of luck having been against them, and they would very likely add that they were hoping to drop into something good one day. It is deplorable to see such lives wasted and such intellects thrown away merely for the want of that impetus and energy which leads men on to success.¹⁰⁹

In citing Addison, Greaves echoes the view, previously discussed, by many of the guides for junior clerks, that in order to avoid failure the clerk needed to be a bastion of proper character and habits. He also pointed out, however,

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁹Greaves, 10-11.

that just as significant as these characteristics was the importance of hard work and industriousness, without which, the young clerk was just as sure to fail.

The general characteristics of the successful clerk, mentioned above, were to be applied to their specific office duties. The junior's first few years were largely spent performing routine office duties common to most offices, private and public. Duties such as indexing and copying correspondence provided the junior with an introduction not only to the business of the office, but helped to shape his identity as a responsible man of business. Carrington stressed the importance of the accurate and thorough indexing of letter books, registers, minute books, or any other office books peculiar to their department. Efficiency in indexing meant efficiency in the office, where letters, minutes, etc., had to be found quickly.¹¹⁰ This type of training was part of the distinct nature of the education of the clerk as it required him to learn a skill rarely "taught" in school and helped to instill in him a large degree of concern for accuracy, proper method and efficiency. The thorough and proper learning and use of this skill was one area in which the junior was judged by his office superiors.

Intelligently pursued, indexing is a most interesting occupation. Indeed, to the earnest worker, it may become delightful. But time, and thought, and enthusiasm, must be given to the work. A "chief" can often judge—to a certain extent—of the general character of the junior, by the style of his indexing.

When reference has to be made to an important letter, nothing is more annoying than to find that some error, or omission, has been made in the indexing; and that, as a consequence, considerable delay is caused in finding the document required.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Carrington, 5-7.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 7.

While it is doubtful that indexing was as "delightful" as Carrington implied it could become, it was an important part of the junior's duties and was one of many ways that he was initially evaluated. It also helped to introduce him to office methods and practices and provided him with a sense of responsibility. Lost documents could cost a firm thousands of pounds and for the junior, although only earning from £20 to £60 per annum, this newly-formed skill helped him to cultivate a sense of duty and, subsequently, importance within the office. This sense of importance was significant as it allowed the young clerk to begin a process of identification with the work of his fellow clerks, some of whom were from far higher social backgrounds than his own. Subsequently, the junior's training began to provide him with more than necessary job skills, and began to aid him in his quest for middle class identification and respectability.

Once a junior had mastered a skill such as indexing, he was given other duties and obligations, such as copying and correspondence or was placed in charge of a ledger, or a series of ledgers. This furthered his training as a clerk and continued the process of shaping his identity as a responsible and important member of the office. Guides, such as Carrington's, informed the junior that to be a useful correspondence clerk he was to have good spelling, punctuation, handwriting, composition and grammar.¹¹²

Despite the widespread belief that the world of the office was an entrance into the middle class and a better life, the clerk of humble origins rarely reached the status, let alone the income level, of his employers. The clerk's relationship with his employer was a distinctly different experience,

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 10-18.

however, from that of other lower middle class or working class employees. He was to dress in a respectable manner in order to reflect well on his employer. He was to perform all his duties with a high degree of care and attention as he was now a trusted member of the office. Poor work on his part could, perhaps, cause irreparable harm to its business. He was to be loyal, tactful, trustworthy and of the highest moral character. Responsibility provided the clerk not only with a sense of importance, but it helped him to identify with the work and world of his middle class superiors. He dressed like them, he worked with them, he was often entrusted with matters of enormous financial importance, but he still remained separated from the world of middle class respectability. He did not live near his employers, he did not eat with them, and he could barely afford even a shabby version of the middle class uniform. For the clerk these distinctions were maintained and magnified during his hours at the office. Office hierarchies and codes of conduct in regard to superiors ensured that the clerk knew his place and responded accordingly. Employers and managers continually stressed the importance of character and gentlemanliness, not because they viewed their clerks as current or future business partners, but because it helped to instill a powerful degree of deference amongst clerks toward their office superiors. By the late-Victorian and Edwardian era clerks were no longer members of the office by virtue of their previous middle class status and connections. They were still, however, identified as part of the middle class, but only by virtue of their work association with their employers. If thrown out of work, as countless clerks were during the various downturns of the London business cycle, their middle class status and identity was threatened, as it was entirely

associated with what was believed to be their important, respectable and gentlemanly white-collar office work.

Chapter Three **Education, Socialization, Association and the Young Clerk**

The educational background and social activities of clerks played an important role creating a common experience and identity. The culture and identity of clerks were strongly influenced by their distinct educational experience. The culture of the clerical life began at school, especially after W. E. Forster's Education Act of 1870 and its creation of economically accessible Board schools at the primary school level. Classes in shorthand, book-keeping and languages, and the emphasis placed upon good handwriting, mathematical skills, punctuality and the importance of proper dress, helped to instill lower middle class values into the boys and girls of the labouring classes—who were thus encouraged to choose non-manual careers. Meanwhile, the social activities and clubs for clerks that existed in London, particularly the Y.M.C.A., helped to further develop clerks' cultural experience and cater to their distinct social needs. Once the aspiring clerk had left school and had found work, or began looking for work, institutions such as the Y.M.C.A. not only furthered his identity formation, but offered a locale where he could play a role in shaping and forming it. With marriage usually delayed until their mid-to-late twenties, the Y.M.C.A. promised a social, spiritual, and communal brotherhood to the clerk—the ubiquitous member of England's genteel urban poor. It pledged to meet the social and business needs of clerks, and their appearance-conscious employers, by offering leisure and educational self-improving services in a "respectable" Christian environment.

The Elementary Education Act of 1870, one of the major reforms of Gladstone's first government (1868-74), began the modern state system of education in Britain. Attempts had been made since the great decade of reform, the 1830s, to pass an elementary education act. They had all failed because of strong opposition from the Church of England, which feared state intervention, and from Nonconformists and radicals who were worried about a potential clerical monopoly on education.¹ Although religious issues dominated the debates in Parliament regarding the bill, it was recognized increasingly that voluntary effort, particularly in the cities, was unable to effectively and affordably universally educate Britain's children. It was estimated that between a half and a quarter of all children were out of school.² The Education Act brought about the election of the first School Board for London, which held its first election on 29 November 1870. In its discussion of this significant event, *The Times* remarked that: "No equally powerful body will exist in England outside Parliament, if power be measured by influence for good or evil over masses of human beings."³ The London School Board quickly used its powers to transform popular education in London. By 1903 voluntary schools still had just over 200,000 pupils on their rolls, about the same as 1871, while the number of pupils enrolled in the Board's schools had grown from 1,117 in 1871 to 549,677. In December 1871, nine years before being made universal by Parliament, the London School Board instituted a compulsory minimum leaving age of ten. This was

¹Maclure, *A History of Education in London. 1870-1990*, 11-22.

²*Ibid.*, 15.

³*The Times*, 29 November, 1870.

gradually raised over the years, and by 1900 almost all of London's children were educated at school full-time until they were fourteen.⁴

Although upper working class and lower middle class parents were at first reluctant to send their children to board schools, their attitudes gradually changed during the 1870s as it became clear that the London School Board could provide schools with facilities superior to those of many private and voluntary schools. Meanwhile, the London School's system of differential fees for the various social grades of schools appeased rate-paying labourers who were worried about their children mixing with the lice-ridden children of London's slums. The social diversity of the Board's elementary schools thus ended up reflecting the social gradations within London's working and lower middle classes themselves.⁵ This was hardly surprising, for Forster argued in the House of Commons in 1870 that those labourers who wanted universal compulsory education were "among the most intelligent and upright of their class," but that, "they formed only a small minority of the working men in the country."⁶ This division was more than recognized by labour aristocrats and socially-upward aspiring workers themselves. The leader of the skilled carpenters, Robert Applegarth, an advocate of the Education Act, maintained in a 1869 speech that:

⁴David Rubinstein, "Socialization And The London School Board 1870-1904: Aims, Methods And Public Opinion," in Philip McCann (ed.), Popular Education And Socialization In The Nineteenth Century (London: 1977), 231-233.

⁵Charles Booth examined the relationship between the social category of the elementary London Board Schools and the social class of the children. His findings highlighted the profound ghettoization of the schools along divisions within London's labouring classes. C. Booth, Life and Labour First Series: Poverty III, 1902, 197.

⁶Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, CCII, 8 July, 1870, 1736.

No one knows better than the men themselves that there are amongst the working people two classes. There is the careless and indifferent man, who has been so long neglected and degraded that he does not understand the value of education; and him the other class, the better class of working men, have to carry on their backs. Those men who do not understand the value of education must be made to understand it.⁷

While labour aristocratic trade unionists such as Applegarth undoubtedly saw universal compulsory education as a means to educate and politicize the lower orders of the working classes, improved educational opportunities were also concurrently viewed as a route of escape from the world of manual labour and into a life of white-collar respectability.

By the turn of the century the changes in education in London since the beginning of the reform era were striking. As Sidney Webb, the Fabian economic theorist and political activist, noted in his 1904 book, *London Education*, the "transformation effected in the course of three-quarters of a century in the manners and morals of the London manual working class is one of the most remarkable chapters of social history."⁸ Most of this real work began, as Webb rightly ascertained, with the foundation of the London School Board.

Not until the establishment, under the Education Act, 1870, of the London School Board, was there any systematic attempt to rescue the whole of the children of London. By the persistent efforts of its army of attendance officers it has, at last, got London's 800,000 children to school. The voluntary schools stand, numerically, almost precisely where they did in 1870. It is the School Board which has provided the buildings for the half a million additional scholars brought under the wonderful discipline of the public elementary school. . . . It is, in the main, to the School Board that London owes the transformation which had, in these thirty-three years, come over its elementary schools—the change from

⁷Cited in A. W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth: Trade Unionist, Educationist, Reformer* (London: 1913), 211.

⁸Sidney Webb, *London Education* (London: 1904), 3.

drowsy, dark, and unsanitary rooms, practically destitute of apparatus or playgrounds, in which teachers, themselves, mostly untrained, mechanically ground a minimum of the three R's required by the wooden old code into the heads of their scanty pupils, to the well-lighted and admirably decorated school buildings of the present day, with ample educational equipment, with pianos, school libraries, extensive playgrounds, etc., served by a staff of trained professional teachers, encouraged to develop the growing intelligence of their scholars in whatever subjects and by whatever educational methods they find best.⁹

Over time London's board schools had become increasingly accepted by London's labouring classes and their children. The increasing demand for clerks caused many working-class children to enter occupations quite different from those of their parents. As early as 1878 George R. Sims imagined, in his ballad *Polly*, what a London coster would think if his son, influenced through his schooling, became a clerk.

There, he's off! the young varmint, he's needled;
 whenever I talks about work
 He puts on his cap and he hooks it; he's a notion he'll
 go for a clerk.
 The green-stuff ain't up to his 'ighness; he don't like
 to serve at the stall;
 He fancies hisself in a orfice, a fillin' o' books
 with his scrawl.
 It's the School Board what gives 'em these notions,
 a stuffin' boys heads full of pride,
 And makes 'em look down on their fathers—these
 School Boards I ne'er could abide.
 When I was his age I was workin', a-wheelin' the
 barrer for dad,
 And a-fetchin' the stuff from the markets, when
 hosses was not to be had.¹⁰

It was not, however, until the last two decades of the century that Board schools undertook even the most modest of efforts to turn the children of London's lower classes into clerks. The Education Act's purpose was merely

⁹Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁰George R. Sims, *The Referee* No. 62, 20 October, 1878, 2.

designed to "fill the gaps" in the existing voluntary system of education, thereby ensuring that all children had access to a basic elementary education.

The Board established the following curriculum for its schools in the summer of 1871:

In infants' school instruction shall be given in the following subjects:

- (a) The Bible and the Principles of Religion and Morality . . .
- (b) Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.
- (c) Object Lessons of a simple character, with some such exercise of the hands and eyes as is given in the Kindergarten System.
- (d) Music and Drill.

In Junior and senior Schools certain kinds of instruction shall form the essential part of the teaching of every school; but others may, or may not, be added to them at the discretion of the Managers of individual schools, or be added to them at the discretion of the Board. The instruction in the discretionary subjects shall not interfere with the efficiency of the teaching of the essential subjects.

The following subjects shall be essential:

- (a) The Bible and the Principles of Religion and Morality
- (b) Reading, Writing and Arithmetic; English Grammar and Composition and the Principles of Bookkeeping in the Senior schools; with Mensuration in Senior Boys' schools.
- (c) Systemised Object Lessons, embracing in the six school years a course of elementary instruction in Physical Science and serving as an introduction to the science examinations which are conducted by the Science and Art Department.
- (d) The History of England.
- (e) Elementary Geography.
- (f) Elementary Social Economy.
- (g) Elementary Drawing.
- (h) Music and Drill.¹¹

The 'three R's' were the backbone of a system which was not overly concerned with providing students with the means to rise above their class. As H. G. Wells remarked, the system was designed primarily to educate "the lower classes for employment on lower class lines."¹²

¹¹Cited in Maclure, A History of Education in London, 1870-1990, 41-43.

¹²Cited in Pamela Horn, The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild (Gloucester: 1989),

The emphasis on the promotion of skills used by clerks largely stemmed from concerns over Britain's commercial education system in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1881 the London Chamber of Commerce was established and began the promotion of "an improved system of Commercial Education."¹³ The belief that England was in danger of losing its commercial and industrial supremacy, reflected in the perception that German clerks were far superior to their English counterparts,¹⁴ induced the Chamber to embark on a campaign to improve the quality of English clerks. "[T]he need for more practical education as a business proposition was fully realised on a comparison of the attainments of foreign clerks with those of our own nationality."¹⁵ Pressure from the National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education helped to pass the Technical Instruction Acts of 1889 and 1891 which enabled local authorities to establish Technical Education Committees and provided them with the power to grant rate aid in support of manual, technical, commercial and secondary instruction. Meanwhile, the 1890 Local Taxation (Customs and Excise Act) empowered county councils with the right to use the residue of the spirit and beer tax for technical education purposes. In 1897 the Technical Education Board of the London County Council established a special sub-committee on commercial education, chaired by Sidney Webb, "to consider and appoint upon the special

¹³Charles E. Musgrave, The London Chamber of Commerce. From 1881 to 1914: A Retrospective Appreciation (London: 1914), 9. The London Chamber of Commerce was established in October 1881 and Musgrave was its Assistant Secretary from 1884-1909, and its Secretary since May 1909.

¹⁴See Chapter Four.

¹⁵Musgrave, The London Chamber of Commerce, 10.

agencies which exist within the County of London for giving 'commercial education,' and to suggest plans for establishing other agencies and increasing the efficiency of those already in existence."¹⁶ Efforts of agencies such as the London Chamber of Commerce had done little to bring about a broad scheme of commercial education to London. The board was not only interested in increasing the education level of its own already well-trained clerks, but was also particularly concerned with the commercial training available to would-be commercial clerks in London. It was maintained that London required a broad scheme of commercial education if she was to compete with the growing commercial strength of the continent and America. The scheme would only be successful through the cooperation of educators, government and business.

... the question of commercial education is one of national importance. But we are of opinion that it is a question which concerns the citizens of London more than any other British subjects. For London stands alone as the greatest commercial centre in the world and as the heart of the British Empire. London has not only a larger population of "clerks" than any other city in the world; it has probably also a larger proportion of clerks to the whole population than most other cities. Everything which affects British trade must affect London in a special degree; and it is only fitting that any measures which are taken for the defense of our commercial supremacy should be put forward in the first instance by the merchants and citizens of London.¹⁷

The 1899 Report of the committee concluded that a good general education was the foundation of a good commercial education and rejected the idea of separate publicly-funded commercial schools. It did, however, recommend that London's secondary schools play a more significant role in providing

¹⁶LMA, TEB/80/4, London County Council Technical Education Board: Report of the Special Sub-Committee on Commercial Education, February 20, 1899, i.

¹⁷Ibid., ii and iii.

subjects of commercial education, such as modern languages, book-keeping, shorthand and commercial geography, for boys before they reached the age of 16.¹⁸ Commercial departments were to be established at several upper grade secondary schools where young men were to be trained for a career in business. Meanwhile the general curriculum of elementary and secondary schools was redesigned to ensure that the training received in the 3Rs could be readily applied to basic business skills, such as letter-copying. Evening classes in commercial subjects were to be expanded at the polytechnics to ensure that boys hired early as clerks could receive a continued and standardized training in commercial subjects.¹⁹ The committee concluded that "The Kind of Education That is Needed" was one that complemented and expanded the type of general education already present in London's elementary and, especially, secondary schools in order that London's clerks could be as well-trained as their continental rivals.

The introduction of such a system does not by any means necessitate the establishment of a number of "commercial schools" side by side with the present "secondary schools." We rather incline to the view of Sir John Lubbock [a wealthy banker], . . . that the best policy to adopt is the "perfecting of existing agencies." . . . What is required is to still further strengthen such schools, and to encourage others to develop on similar lines. Much of our "modern" work is still hampered by old literary traditions; much is rendered ineffective by lack of proper teachers. We must face the problem, as other nations have had to do, of combining in a "modern" education the two essentials of sound training and adaptation to actual life. How successful Germany has been in solving this problem is shown by several papers in the special reports on educational subjects recently issued by the Education Department. If we would hold our own in the commercial struggle for existence, we must set ourselves to remedy our defects, and develop, if possible, an even better system than our neighbours.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., xv.

¹⁹Ibid.

These recommendations, implemented during the next few years, reflected the general desire of London's business, government and educational leaders to improve the quality of training received in commercial subjects in London's schools. It was not, however, the broad scheme that the committee initially called for, as those interested in commercial education were of several minds regarding the education they believed clerks should have at the time of their appointment. In June and July 1898 E. H. Fishbourne, a barrister, had interviewed 42 businessmen in London in order to obtain their views on commercial education for the committee's 1899 report. He interviewed a wide range of employers of clerical labour, such as tradesmen, bankers, estate agents, brokers, actuaries, engineers and manufacturers. While many complained that clerks lacked sufficient language, shorthand and book-keeping skills, others expressed concern that a high level of training would make young clerks dissatisfied with routine office tasks as they learned the business procedures and accounts of their particular office.²¹ A fairly typical response, in its ambivalence, was that expressed by the architect, Walter Emden, who had an office on the Strand.

The boys who offer themselves for employment are sadly deficient in spelling and writing. They do not recognise technical words used in dictation, and instead of inquiring put down some word having a similar sound. The feeling of business men is that the education of the present day is deficient for the purpose of those intended for a business career, but it is doubtful whether it would be better to extend the old or create new educational agencies. Some of Mr. Emden's clerks attended evening classes with good results.²²

²⁰*Ibid.*, v-vi.

²¹*Ibid.*, Appendix II: Report of Mr. Fishbourne's interviews with Employers, 25-36.

²²*Ibid.*, 26.

A general improvement of basic skills needed to be balanced with employers' desire that their clerks be flexible and easily moulded. As Finch Bellbrough junior, an insurance broker, maintained, "what was wanted was that a boy should write well and rapidly, be well grounded in arithmetic, and be quick at figures, and if possible know foreign languages."²³ Too much specialization created difficulties. For example, "it was useless teaching book-keeping, owing to the methods adopted in the different houses varying so much, the object in all cases being to simplify methods as much as possible."²⁴

Meanwhile, it was feared that too much prior training would raise the salary and career aspirations of clerks, the majority of whom would only find work of a routine and often drudgerous nature that required only basic office skills. Margaret Bryant has noted this fear of London employers, who were "perhaps unprepared to pay for a good article," and has rightly suggested that this "gave an unstable foundation to the effort of the leaders of the London business community to define both content and standards of secondary education."²⁵ Nonetheless, in the end a "scheme" of commercial education was introduced in London's schools which reflected the basic desire of the Technical Education Board and employers to improve the quality of commercial education in Britain's commercial and governmental capital. This infusion of commercial education with general education not only served to broaden

²³Ibid., 29. Bellbrough worked at Messrs. Arthur Bellbrough and Co., Insurance Brokers, 23, Roodlane, E.C.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Bryant, The London Experience of Secondary Education, 396.

the business skills of potential clerks in London's schools but, more importantly, it served to augment the already large and ready population of young boys whose school training made the life of a clerk the best means in which to utilize the skills and knowledge which they had received in London's schools.

Classes in shorthand, book-keeping and modern languages were increasingly added to the curriculum of London's elementary and secondary Board schools.²⁶ Many schools which adopted such courses found themselves singled out by London businesses as good training grounds for clerks. It was noted, for example, in the School Inspector's report of 1900 on the boy's department of Lauriston Road elementary school in Hackney, that since the introduction of general commercial subjects in the curriculum, the school had received an "increasing number of applications from large City firms for boys to fill junior office positions. The letters received bear witness to the excellent training the boys have received."²⁷ A solid general education and rudimentary commercial skills, such as the classes in book-keeping which were taught at Lauriston Road,²⁸ meant a boy often had enough basic

²⁶One report on the progress of commercial education in London schools noted that commercial subjects were needed "to prevent boys being taken away early and sent to Colleges (Clark's or Skerry's) to be crammed." Public Record Office (hereafter designated as PRO) ED/12/40: Ministry of Education: Secondary Education, General Files, 1878-1945, Commercial Subjects, 1903-1911, "Memorandum of 7th March, 1910, by H.M.C.I. Mr. Fletcher on Commercial Instruction in Secondary Schools." A later Ministry of Education Memorandum on "Commercial Subjects in Secondary Schools" expressed similar concerns and highlighted the numerous attempts taken in London to include commercial subjects in the secondary school curriculum. PRO ED 12/208: Ministry of Education: Secondary Education, General Files, 1878-1945, Commercial Subjects, 1913-1914, "Memorandum: Commercial Subjects in Secondary Schools, 17 November, 1913."

²⁷LMA, LCC/EO/PS/12/L12/18, Inspector's Report of Lauriston Road, Victoria Park, Board School (after May 1904 a LCC School), South Hackney, Manager's Yearly School Report, School Year Ended April, 1900.

office skills to begin work as a junior clerk by the time he was 14 or 15. However, it was also noted that this increased emphasis on commercial subjects might not be in the best long-term interest of the boys. The junior clerkship required little formal training and promised immediate remuneration for "clean and respectable" work.

This school still maintains the high position it has gained for thorough good work and attendance. City firms are constantly applying for lads to fill junior office positions and letters received bear witness to the appreciation felt of the good training the boys have received, yet it may be well a question whether parents are not over eager for immediate benefits on their boys leaving school, rather than give time for their learning a skilled trade of hand as well as brain, and thus securing better earnings in the long run. Boys from this school at the Manual Training Centre would have been easily eligible for the scholarships offered by the Technical Institute, had not the parents objected to the sacrifice of immediate earnings, which seems very regrettable.²⁹

The nature of the education received and the concentration of aspiring upper working class and lower middle class children together in upper grade Board schools produced a culture in these same schools in which social mobility was viewed as obtainable through entrance into the world of non-manual clerical work. As witnessed, the curriculum of the schools

²⁸LMA, LCC/EO/PS/12/L12/22, *Inspector's Report of Lauriston Road, Manager's Yearly School Report, School Year Ended April, 1902*. A 1900 letter from the Clerk of the School Board for London to the Secretary of the Board of Education argued that the success witnessed in schools such as Lauriston Road was vital for the future of London and the nation. "For London stands alone as the greatest commercial centre in the world and as the heart of the British Empire. London has not only a larger population of "clerks" than any other city in the world; it has probably also a larger proportion of clerks to the whole population than most other cities. Everything which affects British trade must affect London in a special degree; and it is only fitting that any measures which are taken for the defence of our commercial supremacy should be put forward in the first instance by the merchants and citizens of London." PRO ED/102: London General Files, 1870-1923, Higher Elementary Schools, 1900-1902, "Letter from Clerk of the School Board for London to The Secretary of the Board of Education (Whitehall), June 29th, 1900."

²⁹LMA, LCC/EO/PS/12/L12/24, *Inspector's Report of Lauriston Road, Manager's Yearly School Report, School Year Ended April, 1903*.

emphasized, particularly for the boys, skills whose utility could best be optimized through office work. This experience was enhanced in 1892 when a scholarship scheme was established by the LCC Technical Education Board to help working class and lower middle class elementary school pupils, whose parents earned less than £150 a year, get into London's secondary and technical schools and polytechnics. In 1893, 500 junior county scholarships were awarded to thirteen-year-olds from London's elementary schools to cover secondary school fees, plus a £10 a year maintenance "intended to compensate parents to some extent for the loss of earnings which their children might otherwise obtain".³⁰ This number was increased by 1903 to 600 junior scholarships, 100 intermediate scholarships for pupils aged 16-19 whose parents earned less than £400 a year, forty-five senior scholarships, thirty art scholarships, and 800 miscellaneous awards for various types of technical instruction.³¹

Although the intermediate and senior LCC scholarships were available to pupils whose parents whose household income could be well above that of the upper working or marginal middle class, these scholarships were still largely awarded to children of the same Board school social origins as the junior scholarships. A 1905 LCC report from the Education Officer's Department noted this trend.

It is . . . interesting to note that the county scholarship system has really formed a ladder to carry on the junior scholars from the public elementary schools. In the last competition for intermediate county scholarships 61 per cent were obtained by junior scholars, while in the competition for senior county scholarships and exhibitions 21 out of 28 awards were

³⁰Cited in Maclure, *A History of Education in London, 1870-1990*, 72.

³¹LMA, LCC/EO/PS/3/1, London County Council, Report of the Education Committee on the Scholarship Scheme, February, 1905.

made to intermediate county scholars and out of these 14 scholarships and exhibitions, including all the five full scholarships, were obtained by candidates who had originally been junior county scholars and pupils of public elementary schools.³²

An examination of these London County Council scholarship holders points to a high degree of movement of children of manual labouring backgrounds into clerical occupations. Table 3.1 shows a list of occupations desired by junior county scholars whose scholarships expired in July 1896.

Desired Occupation	Boys	Girls
Clerks and civil servants	80 (14 places obtained)	35
Journalist or reporter	1	--
Librarian	2 (2 places obtained)	--
Auctioneer	1	--
Shop Assistant	1 (has obtained place)	--
Teachers	8 (1 place obtained)	19 (6 places obtained)
Telegraphists	3	4
Engineers and draughtsmen	12 (3 places obtained)	--
Electrical engineers	8	--
Marine engineers	1	--
Machinists	1	--
Chemists	3	--
Lithographic Printer	1	--
Pottery workers	2 (2 places obtained)	--
Plumbers	3	--
Carpenter	1	--
Dressmakers	--	5
Nursemaid	--	1
Total Scholars	128	64

Table 3.1: "Showing the occupations in life chosen by those Junior County Scholars whose scholarships expired in July, 1896"³³

³²Ibid.

³³LMA LCC/TEB/80/23, London County Council Technical Education Board, "Employment For Junior County Scholars," 30 October, 1896.

This list was distributed by the Technical Education Board to various employers in London in the hope that they might employ these recent scholars.

The Board is unable by statute to devote any of its funds to apprenticing its scholars, and it is therefore anxious to secure the co-operation of all who are able to assist in finding situations for these boys and girls. It must be remembered that these scholars have had the advantage of having been at school for two years at a secondary or upper grade school, and thus considerably supplementing the teaching and training which they received at the ordinary elementary schools, and they may also be regarded as having been the pick of the elementary school children at the time of their appointment to the scholarships.³⁴

As illustrated, almost two-thirds of the boys and over half of the girls desired jobs as clerks in private offices or the civil service. Only six of the 128 boys desired occupations in which they would be performing manual labour—pottery, carpentry and plumbing. Obtaining a secondary education instilled in the pupils the dream of a future, regardless of their socio-economic origins, in non-manual labour, or, at the very least, entrance into the labour aristocracy. Appendix 3.1 highlights this through a listing of the father's occupation and career ambitions of each male Junior London County Council scholar selected in December 1893 and July 1894.³⁵ Although few of the scholars came from homes maintained through unskilled labour, these scholars clearly aspired to non-manual labouring occupations, particularly clerical, regardless of their upbringing. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 indicate the background of junior and intermediate scholars in all of England between 1896-9 and in London in 1905,

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵The data for Appendix 3.1 is also derived from the report on the "Employment For Junior County Scholars, 30 October, 1896."

respectively indicating that London was not distinct in drawing its county scholars largely from lower middle class and upper working class families.

	Junior Scholars	Intermediate Scholars
Professional and general	544	93
Clerks, agents, warehousemen	495	60
Building trades	477	42
lodgings	385	55
Engineering and metal trades	304	23
Railway and transport service	287	14
Widows, 'No occupation'	256	41
Official	242	33
General labour	234	11
Domestic and personal service	204	18
Other miscellaneous trades (incl. agriculture and mining)	1,168	122

Table 3.2: Occupations of parents of county scholars in England, 1896-9³⁶

	Junior	Intermediate	Senior
Building Trades	220	9	2
Engineering, Shipbuilding and Metal Trades	163	5	5
Wood and Furniture Trade	105	5	1
Jewellery and Fine Instrument Trades	27	2	0
Leather Trades	78	2	3
Textile Trades	4	0	0
China, Glass and Pottery Trades	10	0	0
Printing and Publishing Trades	144	8	5
Clothing Trades	124	7	3
Food, Drink and Tobacco Trades	183	4	3
Artistic and Fancy Trades	17	1	1
Miscellaneous Trades	63	5	1
General Labour	276	3	1

³⁶Record of Technical and Secondary Education, Vol. 10, 1901: 23, 360, from "Return showing the occupation of the parents of the winners of county scholarships during the past three years (1896-9)," Parliamentary Papers, LXIII, 59-224. Table reproduced in John Roach, Secondary Education in England, 1870-1902 (London: 1991), 112.

Officials	193	12	2
Domestic and Personal Service	111	4	0
Railway and Transport Service	137	0	0
Seafaring, Dock and Waterside Service	25	0	0
Retail Dealers and Salesmen	80	1	0
Clerks, agents and Warehousemen	256	11	7
Subordinate Professional	99	15	5
Widows, 'No occupation'	60	6	7

Table 3.3: Occupations of parents of Junior, Intermediate and Senior London County Council Scholars elected in July 1905.³⁷

John Roach has estimated that most of these scholars "went into clerical occupations or posts in industry and commerce," and that this was representative of the changing "social fabric" which had been influenced by the increased opportunities brought about "through better education."³⁸ The prevalence of previous London County Council scholarship holders amongst successful candidates for London County Council clerical positions in the 18 month period between July 1904 and December 1905, along with the results displayed in Appendix 3.1, supports Roach's assertions. Of the 173 clerks hired for positions, 34 were former or current London County Council scholarship holders—20% of successful applicants.³⁹ However, only 128 of the 173 clerks hired were originally from London and had been eligible for a London County Council scholarship. Thus, of the clerks schooled in London

³⁷LMA, LCC/EO/PS/3/8, London County Council Education Committee Report of the Higher Education Sub-Committee: Returns showing incomes and parents of the county scholars elected in July, 1905, May 4, 1906.

³⁸Roach, *Secondary Education in England, 1870-1902*, 112-116.

³⁹LMA LCC/CL/Estab/4/1, London County Council, Clerk's Department, Establishment Committee: Staffing, management, accommodation and organisational matters, Miscellaneous, Examination Papers, 1904-5.

27% had been either junior or intermediate London County Council scholars-most had been both.⁴⁰ A listing of the father's occupation of male fourth class LCC clerks hired between 1897 and 1906 in Appendix 3.2 further supports the evidence that these clerks largely came from families where the father was of white-collar, skilled-labouring or artisanal background.⁴¹ These findings complement the work of Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt who have argued that it was generally children from the labour aristocracy and petite bourgeoisie who moved into the expanding clerical occupations of Britain and Europe during this time.⁴²

Appendix 3.3 provides additional insight into the educational and career background of these same clerks.⁴³ Almost all of these clerks had some secondary schooling, and the average age at which they left formal schooling was at 16.9 years. There was an average gap of almost three years between the time which these boys left school and the beginning of their careers as LCC clerks. Outside of a few boys who went directly from their secondary schooling into LCC clerkships, the previous occupations of the clerks fall into two categories; one, those who were employed in junior lower middle class

⁴⁰Of the clerks hired from outside of London no record was supplied indicating if any of them had been a county scholarship holder of their home locale.

⁴¹Data for Appendix 3.2 is derived from LMA LCC/CL/Estab/4/1, London County Council, Clerk's Department, Establishment Committee: Staffing, management, accommodation and organisational matters, Miscellaneous, Examination Papers, 1896-1906.

⁴²Crossick, Geoffrey and Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard. The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe, 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence (London: 1995), 82, 83-86 and 219-20.

⁴³Date for Appendix 3.3 is also derived from LMA LCC/CL/Estab/4/1, London County Council, Clerk's Department, Establishment Committee: Staffing, management, accommodation and organisational matters, Miscellaneous, Examination Papers, 1896-1906.

positions, usually for several years, before becoming a LCC clerk; and, two, those who spent their post-secondary schooling period preparing for the LCC examination, either through private study, or, as a student at a commercial training centre. Clerks of the first category had been largely previously employed in junior clerical positions or, in a few cases, as teachers. Their average yearly salary at the time they left their position for the LCC was £55 12s. per annum. The London County Council thus provided a significant rise in pay for the vast majority of these young men. It also offered job security and a salary scale which guaranteed yearly raises. Fourth-class clerks started at a salary of £80 a year, rising by annual increments to a salary of £100 a year.⁴⁴ Of clerks from the second category, the period between when they left school and were hired by the London County Council tended to be shorter. A large number of the clerks had been trained at private commercial training centres which specialized in civil and public service examination preparation. King's College was the main locale for this training, with 76 clerks indicating that they had received training at this centre.⁴⁵ Many other of the clerks in this category simply indicated that they had spent their time since leaving formal

⁴⁴The classification of clerks at the London County Council was as follows:

Fourth Class, commencing at £80 a year and rising by £5 annually to £100.

Third Class, commencing at £100 a year and rising by £10 annually to £150.

Second Class, commencing at £150 a year and rising by £12 10s. annually to £200.

First Class (first section), commencing at £200 a year and rising by £15 annually to £245.

First Class (second section), commencing at £245 a year and rising by £15 the first year and afterwards by £20 a year to £300.

LMA, LCC/CL/Coun/2/109-142, London County Council, Clerk's Department, Council Clerk, Miscellaneous, London County Council Pocket Books, 1890-1914.

⁴⁵Other training centres indicated were Pitman's Metropolitan School of Shorthand, Clark's College, Warner's Commercial College, and Skerry's College.

schooling preparing for the London County Council entrance examination. It is probable that some of these young men, although not indicated on their application, also took classes in preparation for the examination either at commercial training centres or at other facilities with classes designed for examination preparation, such as the Y. M. C. A..

The London County Council examinations for fourth-class clerkships emphasised a level of reading, writing and mathematical skills that could only be achieved with a significant measure of secondary education. In 1900 the obligatory section of the examination was as follows:

Subjects	Marks
1. Handwriting	150
2. Orthography	150
3. English Composition	150
4. Arithmetic	200
5. Compound Addition	100
6. Geography	100
7. Shorthand or Book-keeping	150 ⁴⁶

While these obligatory subjects could perhaps have been acquired with a tertiary secondary education, the optional subjects on the examination, of which candidates were required to take at least two and not more than four, required a level of schooling and/or training well above that of an elementary school level. The optional subjects were shorthand or book-keeping, Algebra, Latin, French, German, Theoretical Mechanics, and Chemistry. Most successful applicants did three or four of these optional

⁴⁶LMA, LCC/CL/Estab/4/1, London County Council, Clerk's Department, Establishment Committee: Staffing, management, accommodation and organisational matters, Miscellaneous, Examination Papers (1896-1906), January 1900, Fourth-Class Clerkships, (a) Particulars as to Clerkships. Shorthand was mandatory for clerks on the general clerical staff and book-keeping for those in the Account branch.

subjects on their examination. Applicants had to be over 18 years and under 23 years of age at the time of their examination and British-born. As Appendix 3.3 indicates, the average age at which clerks entered the LCC (often several months after their examination) was 19.85 years. While previous clerical employment may have proven beneficial to those writing the examination, the candidates' written examination results and the passing of a medical examination were the only criteria for appointment.⁴⁷

What, however, happened to clerks such as these and their brothers in the national civil service and private London businesses once they had obtained a position? As they were continually informed by guidebooks, journals, employers and each other, the clerk's education was not over simply because he had left the Board school and had entered an office. With marriage usually delayed until their mid-to-late twenties by material and occupational circumstance, where would single clerks spend their off-work hours? Meanwhile, where could the young man who had not yet found a position improve his skills? The Y.M.C.A. promised a locale where the social and business needs of clerks, and their appearance-conscious employers, could be realized through the offering of self-improving leisure services in a "respectable" Christian environment. Moreover, it was a site where young clerks had the opportunity to improve themselves in the level of their education and training. An assessment of the Y.M.C.A. as a centre of lower middle class fraternalism uncovers important issues regarding the identity of London's impoverished and unmarried clerks of the lower middle class.

⁴⁷Interestingly, several successful written examination candidates in the period studied failed their "medical" examination. Common reasons for failure were pronounced stammering, or poor hearts, lungs or kidneys.

They generally worked in environments that demanded a docile and deferential deportment. This, along with their precarious economic position, resulted in an identification by their contemporaries as emasculated and solitary "little men". Did the Y.M.C.A. merely reinforce workplace habits of deference and docility through the guise of programs offering self-improvement and association, or was it an agency where young clerks could find comforts in a public space which they helped to mold?

The Y.M.C.A. was founded in 1844 by George Williams,⁴⁸ a young lower middle class draper's assistant, as an ecumenical Christian support and leisure society for London's young commercial men. The self-improving nature of the Association was the driving force of its founders, who were concerned with the moral and physical suffering of the young unmarried clerks and shop-assistants of London who often lived in the very business establishments in which they toiled: "whatever may be the necessities of business, the fact that large numbers of Young Men thus live together, frequently in compelled celibacy, operates with melancholy effect on moral character and habit."⁴⁹ Upon the opening of its new buildings on Aldersgate Street in 1854, it was proclaimed that its new buildings' rooms had been established,

with a view to provide a suitable place of resort for young men after business hours; and to combine, with some elements of domestic comfort, the advantages of respectable and improving society, of a well-selected library, reading-rooms supplied with the best periodical literature, and

⁴⁸For an examination of George Williams and his work in the Y.M.C.A. see Clyde Binfield, George Williams and the Y.M.C.A.: A Study in Victorian Social Attitudes (London: 1973).

⁴⁹"9th Annual Report of the Y.M.C.A.," 1853-4, 17. Cited in Binfield, 65.

classes for instruction in various branches of learning, conducted by professors of ability and character.⁵⁰

Two decades later *The Athenæum* noted that the Y.M.C.A. had completely fulfilled the promises of this announcement and that its London headquarters was "a good clubhouse for the young men whose welfare was the object of its originators."⁵¹ *The Athenæum* also noted that although Christian in purpose and nature, the Y.M.C.A. was able to provide young clerks with secular, as well as spiritual, progress in an environment not entirely free of worldly interests and comforts.

For the yearly payment of one guinea the city clerk may have the instruction of an excellent staff of lecturers, access to a comprehensive library, and the use of a reading-room, whose tables are liberally furnished with the best reviews, magazines, and political papers. Flippant gentlemen, who imagine that an association, emphatically designating itself Christian, must necessarily be characterized by sectarian narrowness and gloom, will perhaps not thank us for assuring them that the list of papers and other periodicals taken at this Institute demonstrates that its members are no enemies of mirth, fancy, and mental freedom.⁵²

Much of the Y.M.C.A.'s religious work was tied directly to issues relative to London's temporal plane. The London West Branch argued in 1879 that its temperance work was of the highest priority, as the recent "depression in business has had the effect of unsettling young men," and was pleased to report that its branch's Temperance Society numbered over 100 young men.⁵³ Meanwhile, the 1870s had witnessed a remarkable growth in

⁵⁰Cited in *The Athenæum*, No. 2318, 30 March, 1872, 400-402.

⁵¹*The Athenæum*, No. 2318, 30 March, 1872, 401.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes*, July, 1879, 1.

the number of education classes offered to London's young clerks. They readily responded by enrolling in increasingly larger numbers, from 133 registrants in 1873 to 1,010 in 1879.⁵⁴ Secular leisure activities were also gradually becoming commonplace within the central association and its various London branches. For example, in 1879 the Southwark branch established a Rambling Club that undertook monthly walks in London's suburbs, noting that:

The suburbs of London are so beautiful and so readily accessible, that we heartily recommend "The Rambling Club" to the consideration of all London Branches. In addition to the recreation, it affords an excellent opportunity of increasing acquaintance, cementing friendships, and speaking earnest, loving words to our new friends.⁵⁵

However, the majority of the central and branch association scheduled activities were still devoted to lectures, prayer meetings and temperance work, while its education classes focused on general topics, such as French, German, Latin, Arithmetic and Scripture, rather than specific subjects of interest to clerks, such as shorthand.⁵⁶ In 1879 the only mandatory meetings to be held at each branch were a devotional meeting every week, and a bible class on another evening of the week or on Sunday afternoon.⁵⁷

⁵⁴The Times, 4 May, 1881, 5.

⁵⁵Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, August, 1879, 6.

⁵⁶Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, July 1879, 1-2; and, November, 1879, Vol. 3, 23-24.

⁵⁷Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, September, 1879, Vol. 1, 10. In 1879 rules for membership in any London Y.M.C.A. stated: "That any person should be eligible for Membership who gives decided evidence of his conversion to God. That he shall be proposed by a Member of the Association at any of its meetings, and elected by the Committee, after satisfactory inquiry as to his suitability." Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, August, 1879, 5.

Although its regularly scheduled activities concentrated on Bible study and prayer meetings, by the 1880s its focus increasingly turned to more secular activities such as educational classes, lecture series, sports and athletics, hobby clubs, and numerous other activities of physical and mental self-improving natures. Some branches, such as the City branch of the Central London Y.M.C.A. that opened in 1880, merely hoped to be able to provide a locale where clerks could relax in comfort and safety from their work and the vices of the City.

There were young men in the city . . . who often felt the want of a place where they could profitably pass a portion of the dinner hour in reading, or perhaps in doing nothing--the true test for many engaged in the city. The bar and the billiard room always had their door open, and this door would be open too, and counter attractions offered in the shape of Reading and Coffee rooms, and, hopefully, eventually lectures and classes.⁵⁸

In noting the objectives of this branch it listed "the material and social conveniences of young men" as its first purpose, and "their religious benefit" as its second.⁵⁹ The purchase of the massive Exeter Hall,⁶⁰ located on the Strand, in July 1880 as the new central headquarters of the Y.M.C.A. reflected the Association's intent to expand upon its secular activities and services. Not only did the building contain three halls, numerous meeting rooms and offices, which enabled the central London Y.M.C.A. to greatly expand its

⁵⁸Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, April, 1880, Vol. 8, 84.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Binfield has remarked that from its construction in 1831 until its purchase by the Y.M.C.A. in 1881, Exeter Hall "was the centre of Evangelical England, the very portals of Orthodoxy." It had been where "the great May Meetings of the Nonconformist sects, the Missionary Societies, and all the triumphant paraphernalia of Evangelicalism were held." The purchase by the Y.M.C.A saved it from being turned into a Music Hall. Binfield, George Williams and the Y.M.C.A., 95 and 305.

current programs, but the basement was large enough to accommodate a double gymnasium--a first for the Y.M.C.A..⁶¹

The physical, leisure and cerebral oriented programs of the Y.M.C.A. quickly increased in popularity and numbers. In January 1882, shortly after the creation of its first gymnasium, gymnastics exhibitions were held at Exeter Hall and Aldersgate Street by the young men of who had begun to take classes in gymnastics at Exeter Hall. This was the first formal recognition by the Y.M.C.A. that it was seeking to improve the physical, as well as moral and intellectual, condition of London's young commercial men.⁶² By 1885 gymnasium membership at the central branch had reached 230, with an average daily attendance of 36 young men. This success inspired the creation of gymnasiums at several other branches throughout London, such as in Hampstead and Finsbury Park.⁶³ The London press was quick to notice the Y.M.C.A.'s expanded focus, and the *Daily Telegraph* offered its congratulations in December 1885.

Through the adoption of a broader and more liberal policy of management the Young Men's Christian Association, while still having in view its chief end, is no longer a society for the holding of Bible-classes

⁶¹Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, April, 1881, Vol. 20, 69. The Aldersgate Street buildings were retained by the Central Branch which in 1880, prior to the purchase of Exeter Hall, had been discussing the installation of a gymnasium at Aldersgate Street. After Exeter Hall and its gymnasium were opened, Aldersgate Street was expanded to accommodate increased membership and education class sizes. A large coffee and dining room was also added. Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, March, 1880, Vol. 7, 77; July, 1880, Vol. 11, 120; and, October, 1880, Vol. 14, 153.

⁶²Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, February, 1882, Vol. 30, 31-32.

⁶³"Statistics, &c., of London Young Men's Christian Associations", The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, November, 1885, No. 23, 244-245. This chart divided Y.M.C.A. activities into three different categories: Spiritual, Intellectual & Social, and Physical.

and prayer meetings, but an organisation for the promotion of every species of culture which young men require. Its moral work is supplemented by mental education in almost every department of knowledge, and by systematic physical training.⁶⁴

An explosion in recreational club activity coincided with the construction of gymnasiums. Athletic clubs were founded to utilize the new indoor facilities, while outdoor recreational activities increased in number at all Y.M.C.A. branches. Rambling, cricket, football, cycling, rowing, and lawn tennis clubs became so commonplace that in May 1885 a monthly athletic column began appearing in the Y.M.C.A.'s London journal, which maintained that:

... every YMCA should promote healthy recreation for young men in the shape of cricket, cycling, rowing, swimming, and other clubs, and, if possible, provide a good gymnasium. We do not see why the Metropolitan YMCA's should not, from their various cricket clubs, put forth a good all-round eleven, and also a first-class football team. Only let it be shown young men that the YMCA really is an Association seeking their physical and social welfare, as well as their spiritual happiness, and it will become a great power in London.⁶⁵

The central, metropolitan and suburban London branches soon began securing outdoor athletic grounds for their club activities, while the Exeter Hall branch was soon forced to transfer its gymnasium to a much-needed larger site in Long-acre.⁶⁶ It was opened in June 1888 by the Prince of Wales, who proposed that physical recreation was "necessary for the maintenance of

⁶⁴Cited in "Gymnastics at Exeter Hall", The Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations, January, 1886, Vol. 3, No. 1, 8-10. Other offering similar support in December 1885 were the *Daily News*, the *Globe*, and the *Westminster Times*.

⁶⁵The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, May, 1885, No. 17, 65-66.

⁶⁶The Times, 8 June, 1888, 4. *The Times* noted that the new gymnasium was "in a great room of the buildings which, near Endell-street, formerly contained the St. Martin's-hall of political meetings four decades back, then became the Queen's Theatres, where Phelps last played Bottom the Weaver, in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and were last used for commercial purposes."

the national physique, and beneficial in offering young men counter attractions to the many temptations which existed in a great city like London."⁶⁷ There was, however, some debate in regard to the lengths to which the Y.M.C.A. should have proceeded in allowing more vigorous physical and competitive athletic activities into its domain. Nonetheless, even potentially vicious sports such as football were deemed beneficial to the health and morale of Y.M.C.A. members.

Great controversy in certain YMCA circles is being indulged in with regard to football. The matter is simple. One must judge of the whole, not part. Weigh the advantages of the game against its hurtfulness. Nothing is easier than to argue on the abuse of anything. More persons die from over-eating and drinking than any two other causes, yet no one starves if they can avoid it. Youth must and will have vent for their energies--better on football fields than in a vitiated atmosphere, and playing billiards with a pipe in full swing, and learning to gamble.⁶⁸

While sports and recreations continued to grow in favour as suitable activities, the Y.M.C.A. also began to strongly focus on the self-improving and material assistance it could provide to London's young commercial men. By the 1880s commercial education taught in their educational classes had become one of the most popular Y.M.C.A. programs. Although in 1879 the Central Y.M.C.A. only offered five classes in French, German, Latin, Arithmetic and Scripture, by 1888 it was offering over 60 courses, in such subjects as Spanish and Portuguese; advanced to beginner shorthand; English; elementary and advanced book-keeping; various mathematics; science; and, civil service examination preparation, of which there were six.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸The Young Men's Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations, August, 1887, Vol. IV, No. 8, 150.

Y.M.C.A. drummed up interest for their classes by emphasising the importance of self-improvement to its members through lectures and articles in its journal by well-known authorities on commercial subjects. In 1881 the fall educational classes were opened with a lecture by Herbert Pitman on the value of shorthand to clerks who wished to improve their situations.⁷⁰ Three years later an article appeared in the London Y.M.C.A.'s journal advising that education and culture were not just the preserve of the University men from the metropolis, but that they were also available for the self-improvement of London's lower middle classes.

... times are changing, and for a young man to be engaged in a counting-house, a warehouse, or a retail shop, there is understood to be no reason why he should be debarred from the opportunities of mental improvement. It was a happy thought to make Exeter Hall the headquarters of our Christian young men of business, and the methods in which this idea is being wrought out into reality are deserving of the attention of youths who wish to qualify themselves for intelligent companionship.⁷¹

The Y.M.C.A. increased its emphasis on commercial education in 1885 when it replaced its standard Tuesday evening religious lectures with ones focusing on commercial subjects, such as: Marine Insurance; Commercial Geography; Book-keeping and Audit; and Free Trade.⁷² *The Grocer's Chronicle*

⁶⁹"Programme of Educational Classes," *The Young Men's Review*, October, 1888, Vol. 5, No. 10, iv.

⁷⁰*Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes*, November, 1881, Vol. 27, 165. For an account of the development of Pitman shorthand and the Pitman family see Alfred Baker, *The Life of Sir Issac Pitman* (London: 1908). One of Pitman's more popular handbooks for commercial education students was Robert W. Holland, *Pitman's Commercial Self-Educator: A Comprehensive Guide To Business Specially Designed for Commercial Students, Clerks, and Teachers* 2 Vols. (London: 1914). Pitman's also published from 1866-1891 the extremely popular journal, *The Shorthand Magazine*.

⁷¹*The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal*, February, 1884, No. 2, 28-29.

responded to this attempt to increase the opportunities available to clerks for occupational self-improvement with enthusiasm.

These lectures are open to all commercial men, and the admission is by free ticket, to be obtained of the secretary, Exeter Hall. Such work as this cannot be too highly praised, as it is the very help that many young men require to enable them to get on in life. The knowledge they gain whilst at school is, as a rule, not suitable for those who will have to engage in commercial pursuits, and many a young man finds himself handicapped at the beginning of life by his lack of knowledge of a practical character. If the YMCA will continue and extend this class of lectures, the committee will add another to the many obligations which the young men not only of London, but the provinces, owe to it.⁷³

The Y.M.C.A. not only continued its lectures on commercial subjects, but furthered its commitment to commercial education in 1888 with a regular series of essays on commercial education in its journal by commercial educators and "leading merchants of the day."⁷⁴ These essays continually underscored the merits of the continued pursuit of educational self-improvement not only for the clerk, but for the nation as a whole, often citing the 1886 *Royal Commission on Depression of Trade and Industry* report's judgment that British commerce was at a competitive disadvantage with the continent as she was deficient in "the ordinary commercial education which is required in mercantile houses."⁷⁵ If the clerk could not compete with the foreigner in the domestic labour market, he need look no further than the Y.M.C.A. to improve his value to a prospective employer.

⁷²The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, April, 1885, No. 16, 60-61.

⁷³Cited in *Ibid.*

⁷⁴The Young Men's Review, April, 1888, Vol. 5, No. 4, 74

⁷⁵Report of Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry (London: 1886). Cited in "Commercial Education--Paper II," The Young Men's Review, May, 1888, Vol. 5, No. 5, 83-84. For an examination of the commercial education movement in London at this time see Margaret E. Bryant, The London Experience of Secondary Education (London: 1986), 386-396.

Young men in town are complaining of the number of foreigners who come into the City offices. It is explained by the fact that employers of labour say that foreigners are better educated men, as far as their purposes are concerned, than the average young Englishman, therefore he takes them into his employ. We hold special classes for commercial practice and foreign correspondence with a view to overcoming this difficulty.⁷⁶

The success of the Y.M.C.A.'s program of increased emphasis on commercial education and expansion of its educational classes was not only witnessed in tributes in the press and increased enrollment in classes, but, probably more importantly, in the results achieved by its students on civil service examinations. In the two years prior to August 1885, 97 students from the Civil Service Classes at Exeter Hall had secured clerkship appointments within the civil service.⁷⁷ Moreover, the students often received the highest marks on the civil service examination. For example, on the February 1886 examinations for Lower Division civil service clerkships, students from Exeter Hall placed first, second, fifth, sixth, eighth, and eleven other places. This was the fourth time in which students from Exeter Hall had attained the top two places on these exams.⁷⁸ By the turn of the century the Y.M.C.A. had become major centres of the initial and continued training of clerks in London, often running close to a hundred different courses in commercial subjects and examination preparation at a time at the Central branches alone

⁷⁶The Young Men's Review, May, 1891, Vol. 8, No. 5, 68.

⁷⁷"Civil Service Examinations at Exeter Hall," The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, August, 1885, No. 20, 134.

⁷⁸"Exeter Hall Civil Service Classes," The Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations, April, 1886, Vol. 3, No. 4, 64.

for their over 3,000 members and associates--up from the three to four hundred of two decades earlier.⁷⁹

Clerks who were members of the Y.M.C.A. did not just have to rely on self-help to improve their situation. The Y.M.C.A. also offered services to improve the work and domestic situation faced by clerks in London. In the 1880s employment and apartment registries were created in order to assist clerks in finding suitable work and lodgings in London.⁸⁰ Well-remunerated work would of course ease the material sufferings of clerks, while, as the Y.M.C.A. was pleased to announce in 1882, their locating of "comfortable and well-recommended apartments," had already assisted hundreds of provincial clerks, as well as Londoners, "coming as strangers to the Metropolis."⁸¹ Commenting on its enormous popularity, the Y.M.C.A. noted in 1884 that the "employment register is a useful but anxious department, especially when trade is dull, as it has been in the past year." It did indicate, however, that "by kind co-operation of many friends, situations have been found for a large number of young men."⁸² By 1887 the employment registry had been transformed into an employment bureau that did not merely list clerkship vacancies but allowed clerks to register their qualifications with the bureau which in turn helped match their abilities with the needs of suitable

⁷⁹The Times, 1 May, 1901, 16; The Times, 25 April, 1903, 11; and, The Times, 16 June, 1906, 6.

⁸⁰Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, May, 1881, Vol. 21, 88.

⁸¹Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, May, 1882, Vol. 33, 61.

⁸²The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, May, 1884, No. 5, 69.

employers.⁸³ While the numbers of apartments found for young men each year soon numbered into the thousands, the employment bureau's success was far more modest, reflecting the hardship suffered by clerks in London's extremely competitive clerical labour market during this time. In the year preceding June 1889 the Exeter Hall Y.M.C.A. had 516 clerks register at its employment bureau and found positions for only 133 of them.⁸⁴ Two years later it expanded its hours and staff and, in order to ensure serious applicants, it began charging 5s. to register with the bureau, half of which was returned if employment was not found within two months. Its greater energy and scope helped it secure positions for 139 clerks in the first three months of 1891, and three months later it had secured a total of 277 positions for the 382 clerks placed on its registry.⁸⁵ The employment bureau and apartment registry continued to be regular features of the Y.M.C.A., and in the following years secured; 1,300 apartments and 360 situations in 1895; 4,100 apartments and 258 situations in 1901; and, 4,300 apartments and 309 situation ins 1908.⁸⁶

As witnessed, the Y.M.C.A. achieved a great deal of success in its attempts to provide a wide range of beneficial recreational, material and self-

⁸³The Young Men's Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations, December, 1887, Vol. 4, No. 12, 237. For an examination of the employment bureau of the Manchester Y.M.C.A. see Gregory Anderson, Victorian Clerks (Manchester: 1976), 78-80.

⁸⁴The Young Men's Review, June, 1889, Vol. 6, No. 6, 96.

⁸⁵The Daily News, 24 October, 1891; The Young Men's Review, May, 1891, Vol. 8, No. 5, 68; August, 1891, Vol. 8, No. 8, 116; and, November, 1891, Vol. 8, No. 11, 150. In reflecting on the work of the bureau, and undoubtedly plugging its educational classes, the Y.M.C.A. noted: "The coming commercial assistant--indeed he has already come--with some technical knowledge, and capable of correctly writing, and clearly and plainly transcribing from shorthand, German and French, is frequently sought after."

⁸⁶The Times, 7 June, 1895, 5; 1 May, 1901, 16; and, 8 April, 1908, 11.

improving programs for its members. Meanwhile, at a time when the number of clerks began to greatly increase in London, the Y.M.C.A. also began to turn its attention more firmly to the public and social needs of its young men. For example, in 1882 the Central branch's Aldersgate-street Y.M.C.A. organized a Christmas dinner for lodging-house men on Boxing Day, at which 150 men attended.⁸⁷ A greater degree of comfort and respectable public activity was required as, with low salaries and delayed marriage, young unmarried clerks could not retreat into the haven of middle class respectability after work—a private household. The Y.M.C.A. offered not only a locale where respectability could be maintained, but, as witnessed in their educational classes, also offered the self-improving means to achieve a better position and thus, perhaps, marriage and a respectable middle class household. The diary of William Burges Evans (1867-1938), a City of London law clerk, illustrates the way in which the Y.M.C.A. served young Evans's individual/spiritual and social/respectable needs. The rather earnest and chaste Evans kept a diligent diary of his daily activities from 1889-1900, a time in which, but for the last two-and-half-years, he was single and lived in the family home in Hackney. A devout Congregationalist, Evans was involved in a number of religious-oriented groups and activities in Hackney and the City, such as: the Grove Young Men's Institute⁸⁸, where he joined its mutual

⁸⁷Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, February, 1883, Vol. 42, 17.

⁸⁸The institute was founded in 1876, and stated that its object was: "to enable Young Men of the neighborhood to spend a pleasant evening with their friends and companions; and Chess Draughts, Dominoes, and other Games, with the principal daily and weekly papers, are provided for their amusement and recreation." The Institute also had football and cricket clubs, an instrumental band, a mutual improvement and debating society, a library, and provided class in shorthand. From 1880-1890 the Institute had between 100 and 150 members a

improvement and debating society and later became the Institute's librarian; the Clapton Park Congregational Church's Sunday School, at which place he had been a student and later became a teacher; the Brett Road Mission, where he also taught Sunday School; the Band of Hope; the Temperance Band; the Law Clerks Christian Union; and, of course the Y.M.C.A..

The Y.M.C.A. differed from these other societies, save for the Grove Institute (whose purpose was similar to the Y.M.C.A.'s), in that individual religious and moral uplift was not its chief function. Working Men's Institutes such as the Grove promised respectable and self-improving recreations and socializing opportunities for the "young men of the upper working classes" at a local level, as maintained by its President in 1883:

There is about it a quiet old-fashioned homeliness rarely to be met with; and for all this there is no lacking of energy, or enterprise, of culture, or of talent. Could such a spirit reign among the thousands of our youthful commercial men as dwells here, the manhood of the nations would soon have been so materially raised as to place beyond all fear the distressing elements and communistic threats which will soon shake society to its foundations in more counties than one.

The very spot—the very name—of our Institute has had its influence in softening and in refining us. It has been to us a retreat from the worries and cares attending life. And what "Grove" is not a restful retreat? It has shaded us from the scornful blast and withering glare of atheism and infidelity, for here we have found a steady shelter and great defence.⁸⁹

The Grove, however, closed its doors in April 1891, perhaps owing to the fact that young men such as Evans had begun to seek refuge in the far better connected and established Y.M.C.A.⁹⁰ After several visits to the Hackney

year. Hackney Archives D/E/233 CLA/41 (Grove Young Men's Institute Committee Minutes Book, 1887-1888); D/E/233 CLA/51 (Information Leaflet—post 1876); and D/S/41/1 (The Grove Young Men's Institute: Monthly Magazine, 1882-1883).

⁸⁹The Grove Young Men's Institute: Monthly Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1883, 3.

⁹⁰Diary of William Burges Evans, 18 April, 1891.

Y.M.C.A. to attend socials and hear lectures, Evans officially became a member in February 1890 and it quickly became a part of his after-work life.⁹¹ He regularly attended committee meetings, evening entertainments and socials, rambling expeditions throughout London, and athletic club activities. Judging by Evans's diary entries, his Y.M.C.A. activity appears to have been the one area where Evans allowed himself a considerable degree of secular recreation and socialisation. Outside of the occasional weekend rambling expedition with friends, the Y.M.C.A. was his sole venue for physical self-improvement. He became a member of its rowing club in Hackney and attended its practices before work at 6am on Mondays and Wednesdays and after work on Saturday afternoons.⁹² In February 1891 Evans was elected a Committeeman of his branch and continued to be extremely active in the life and work of the branch until the time of his marriage in 1897.⁹³ The Hackney Y.M.C.A.'s activity was quite typical of that of a branch Y.M.C.A. in London. It opened in November 1883 and by 1886 was deemed to be "a model Association in its work."⁹⁴ In addition to the social and recreational activities of which Evans took advantage, it also offered educational classes in civil

⁹¹Ibid., 29 November, 1889, 12 December, 1889 and 19 February, 1890.

⁹²Ibid., 23 April, 1890.

⁹³Ibid., 21 February, 1890.

⁹⁴The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, January, 1884, No. 1, 15; and, 'Junior', "A Ramble Among the London YMCA's," The Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations, February, 1886, Vol. 3, No. 2, 23.

service examination preparation, shorthand, typewriting and Tonic Sol-fa (elementary singing).⁹⁵

Evans, who was a firmly established and trusted clerk earning £2 a week by the age of 23, did not utilize the educational classes. He did, however, make a great deal of use out of the Y.M.C.A.'s network of seaside/holiday homes on his annual holidays and work trips. On his first two-week holiday at the end of the summer of 1889 he traveled alone to Scarborough where he stayed at a Y.M.C.A. home for single commercial men. The itinerary of his trip was in agreement with the nature of Evans's usual social and recreational activities. The Y.M.C.A. home offered a brotherhood of like-minded young single men who could spend their holiday fortnight in an atmosphere conducive to entertainments and relaxations safe from society's vices. At the home he met numerous other young clerks with whom he enjoyed several days visiting local attractions such as a museum and aquarium, walking along the seaside cliffs and in the country, sailing in the ocean, singing in the evenings in preparation for the Y.M.C.A. home's Sunday service, and visiting many of the local chapels.⁹⁶ Upon returning to London, he reflected that his vacation had been quite enjoyable:

I spent a very pleasant holiday at Scarborough. The Y.M.C.A. home is very well managed by Mr. and Mrs. Heaton who try to make you as happy as possible. I am very glad I met Mr. Trowsdale (of Stockton) who is a very nice fellow. I enjoyed his company, though for a short time, very much.⁹⁷

⁹⁵Hackney Archives, 379P-Y.M.C.A.: Handbill Advertising Evening Classes, late 19th century.

⁹⁶Diary of William Burges Evans, entries of 14 August, 1889 to 28 August, 1889.

⁹⁷Ibid., 28 August, 1889.

These yearly vacations, and stays in Y.M.C.A. holiday homes in such places as the Isle of Wight, Llandudno, Lowestoft, Hastings and Scotland, became a regular feature of Evans's life, of which he always noted his satisfaction with his lodgings and the brotherhood they furnished him with. The English Y.M.C.A. began establishing its network of seaside holiday homes in the early 1880s, modeling them on the already established Christian holiday lodging houses such as the popular 'Hazelwood', "A home of Rest and Recreation for Commercial Young Men", on the Isle of Wight which had been routinely advertised as a suitable holiday locale to Y.M.C.A. members in their journal.⁹⁸ In April 1882 Shaftesbury House in Margate was purchased and by February of the next year it had already received 511 visitors.⁹⁹ By the end of the decade three more homes were established with prices ranging from 21 to 30 shillings per week, depending on the age of the visitor and the home.¹⁰⁰

Through the establishment of its network of holiday homes the Y.M.C.A. hoped to steer its members away from a path that would turn them into what had become an archetype of the holiday clerk of the period—the "seaside snob". This creature was an offspring of "Gents" and "Swells" of earlier eras,¹⁰¹ and was represented by the Grossmiths in *The Diary of a*

⁹⁸Invalids or junior clerks paid 10s 6d. per week and all other visitors paid 15s 6d. or £1 1s. per week. In 1881 over 800 young men made use of its accommodations. Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, January, 1881, Vol. 17, 22, and May, 1882, Vol. 33, 61.

⁹⁹Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, February, 1883, Vol. 42, 24.

¹⁰⁰The Young Men's Review, July, 1888, Vol. V, No. 7. Page 135.

¹⁰¹See Chapter One; and, Peter Bailey, "Champagne Charlie and the music hall swell song," in Peter Bailey Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City (Cambridge: 1998), 101-127.

Nobody in the character of Pooter's son Lupin. "Swells" could supposedly be encountered at the seaside on bank holidays, or on their summer holidays, absurdly strutting around with an Apollo-like air trying to feign a higher degree of social status than their class or occupation warranted. Like the usually upstanding modern businessman or conference attendee who so often turns into a lecherous, drunken and pretentious boor on a work-related junket, a usually temperate late-Victorian clerk could presumably metamorphose from a Jeekyll into a Hyde simply by visiting the seaside.

What a charm that magic word "holiday" has to the jaded, weary, City clerk, and what visions of delight does it conjure up as the period approaches when the drudgery of a close London office is about to be exchanged for a brief sojourn at the seaside. But on some young men the sense of freedom seems to have anything but happy results. . . .

Once arrived at the seaside, a remarkable change takes place: the steady-going 'quill-driver' seems to belong to another world as he emerges in all the glory of a many-hued blazer, huge stand-up collar, and overpowering jewelry. Even the 'governor' or the 'boss,' as he familiarly terms his master, would fail to recognise in this loudly dressed young man his sleek, respectable, and well-bred representative.

On the promenade he favours young ladies whom he has never met before with a wink and smirk, and especially regards with emphatic glances of affection those with any pretensions to beauty of form or feature.¹⁰²

Such holiday clerks who "smoked and polluted the air, swaggered about in a state of self-aggrandizement, and generally annoyed everyone they met," were probably smaller in numbers than contemporary literary caricatures intimated.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, the Y.M.C.A. hoped to keep such possible behaviour in check through its network of moral and respectable holiday sanctuaries for London's single young men of the desk.

¹⁰²"Seaside Snobs: A Picture From Life," Forward!: The Official Organ of the Church of England Young Men's Society, August 1890, Vol. 3, No. 17, 145.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

Despite the Y.M.C.A.'s concern that its members maintain a respectable deportment on their holidays, it was the environment faced in the city by the "large numbers of young men . . . coming to London to seek their fortunes in business circles," which was of primary importance to the Y.M.C.A. and its undertakings.¹⁰⁴ The work of the central London Y.M.C.A. was deemed to be of utmost importance in maintaining young lower middle class men in respectable pursuits, and away from the ever-present dangers of sin and vice in the heart of the great metropolis. The Archbishop of Canterbury noted in 1893 that Exeter Hall was ideally located, noting the widespread contention of the Strand being "the wickedest street in the world," to wage war against the corruptions facing young clerks.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, employers were often reminded by such Y.M.C.A. benefactors as the Earl of Aberdeen of the value and positive influence that the organization exercised "in providing the social resorts which young men living in lodgings greatly needed."¹⁰⁶ London's young commercial men were continually warned of the dangerous pleasures found in saloons, billiard halls, theatres, and music halls.¹⁰⁷ One of the most popular guide books for clerks tried to suggest alternatives to the city's more dangerous entertainments. It noted that "the resources of

¹⁰⁴Letter to the editor by Edmund J. Kennedy, General Secretary, Central Young Men's Christian Association, concerning, "The Welfare of Young Men in London," The Times, 26 September, 1890, 11.

¹⁰⁵The Times, 22 April, 1893, 6.

¹⁰⁶The Times, 21 April, 1899, 14.

¹⁰⁷The Y.M.C.A. continually reminded its members of these dangers in such journal articles as "The Night Life of Young Men," Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, June, 1881, Vol. 22, 106.

domestic and social life" would go a long way in helping clerks to maintain self-control. However, it also recognized that "young clerks rarely have the resources to get married, while many of them, for one reason or another, have had to leave their parental home," and that they "should find companionship somewhere, as loneliness is not conducive to good temper."¹⁰⁸ They were warned to be cautious as to how they spend their time and told to choose companions who were interested in cultured activities such as science and reading, and not companions who were interested in theatres, saloons and cards.¹⁰⁹ Certain pleasures could be dangerous to the clerk and the services supplied to his employer.

In a certain sense it may be admitted, that neither gaming, nor novel reading, nor theatrical entertainment, is an evil per se. For who will condemn the billiard player or the whist player that limits his possibility of loss to a shilling, during the whole hour that he allows to the display of his skill? Or who would not condemn the narrow-mindedness of the bigot that would exclude the novels of Scott and Dickens and Lord Lytton from the library or the boudoir? or the illiberality of the moralist that would anathematise the stage where Siddons and Macready gave life to the character that Shakespeare portrayed? But here lies the evil: it is scarcely within the compass of juvenile resolution to partake of such indulgences in moderation; and yet of all the amusements in which London abounds, none are more easy of access than these. Every street has its billiard-room and its circulating library; every district, and almost every night, has its drama; and all are open precisely at the hour when young men are released from official duty, to follow their own inclinations, and go where pleasure leads them. Nor is this all: the billiard-room has its private tables it is true, but it also has its public tables, where betting is often carried to excess, holding out a temptation to the looker-on that he would do well to avoid.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library. No. 7: The Clerk: A Sketch in Outline of His Duties and Discipline (London: 1878), 24-25. Several earlier and later editions of this guide were published.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 32-33.

As Peter Bailey and the sociologist Nels Anderson have recognized, in the late-Victorian era, particularly for the middle classes, "the new social space [of leisure] was something of an embarrassment."¹¹¹ This was particularly true for the clerk, who Charles Kingsley noted in 1880, "is distinctly a creature of the city; as all city influences bear at once on him more than any other class, we see in him at once the best and the worst effects of modern city life."¹¹² How could one balance an earnest work-related deportment with recreation? In 1905, recognising that finding suitable recreation was still difficult for the clerk after the turn-of-the century, the editor of *The Office and Commercial Student's Journal* cautioned clerks that a careful balance was in order between work and play.

The love of pleasure too often proves a hindrance to success. Relaxation is necessary—as necessary as work. Saturday's football cricket, or tennis, a cycle ride or a visit to the theatre, each and all are antidotes to over-work. The evil lies, however, in the usurpation of every spare moment, and even of employer's moments, by pleasure and thoughts of pleasure. To enter the office in the morning with the wish that it was evening renders work not a pleasure but a burden. To enjoy life, work should be highly pleasurable to the worker, for does not work constitute a large portion of a man's life, and if the working hours are barely tolerable and their return regarded with an instinctive dread, life is robbed of half its happiness.¹¹³

Unfortunately, the upwardly-mobile minded, but impoverished, lower middle class clerk, eager to distance himself from the perceived indolent and sordid nature of working class leisure, could not afford the refuge of his

¹¹¹Peter Bailey, "The Victorian middle class and the problem of leisure," in Peter Bailey Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City (Cambridge: 1998), 19-21.

¹¹²Charles Kingsley, Sanitary and Social Essays (London: 1880), 217-210. Cited in Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England 2nd ed. (London: 1987), 103.

¹¹³The Office and Commercial Student's Journal, February, 1905, No. 3, 33.

middle class betters --the private club.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile pubs, as there were many along the Strand,¹¹⁵ could be used at lunch time as a brief, and therefore respectable, respite from work. They were not, however, as the work of Brian Harrison indicates, a proper locale for after-work leisure, as by the Victorian era "drinking at home, and private, as opposed to public, drinking was becoming a mark of respectability."¹¹⁶ In 1887 *Tit-Bits*, well aware of the interests of its largely lower middle class readership, published an article on "The Clerk and His Dinner", analyzing the difficulties facing clerks in locating respectable dining and social venues in London on a meagre salary. It argued that clerks needed a clerk's club; "a club which should not only provide good food at a cheaper rate, but a club which should give the stranger and the lonely ones some opportunity to make acquaintances."¹¹⁷ A locus in which to exercise respectability within the public sphere.

Rich men club together and those who have known poverty *in extremis* club together also; why, then, should there not be a great institution for clerks? An institution which, neglecting political aims, should be promoted by the great traders for those who work under them, and should be managed with such just economy and financial skill that the clerks would get a better dinner, a more comfortable room, and a higher moral tone than he must now get in the public-house or the cookshop.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴Richard Sennett has explained how the middle class of the late-Victorian era was able to combine public and private spheres, "public privacy", through clubs. This was accomplished through silence, making "it possible to be both visible to others and isolated from them." Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: 1978), 217.

¹¹⁵For a detailed study of pubs in 19th Century London see Brian Harrison, "Pubs," in H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City* Vol. 1, (Boston: 1973), 161-190.

¹¹⁶Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (London: 1971), 45.

¹¹⁷*Tit-Bits*, 15 October, 1887, 8.

¹¹⁸*ibid.*

While such a club was not established, a clerk responding to the article pointed out that clerks could find most of the club attributes desired by *Tit-Bits* at the Y.M.C.A.—an organization which mixed leisure and sociability with respectable and self-improving recreations at an affordable membership fee, and was in the process of establishing restaurants for lunch and dinner—albeit without the availability of intoxicating beverages.¹¹⁹

Clerks did not simply allow the Y.M.C.A.'s old-guard members and benefactors to dominate the discourse concerning "respectable" behaviour within the Y.M.C.A. There was some opinion within clerkdom that, although, "the Y.M.C.A.'s and kindred institutions do excellent work, . . . their aims are too 'goody-goody' for many men."¹²⁰ In a letter to *Pearson's Weekly* in 1891 "A Clerk", from Hackney, argued that not all clerks, despite most still desiring respectable entertainments, felt comfortable within the confines of the Y.M.C.A.

One of the greatest wants is the lack of cheap clubs of a social character where clerks might spend their evenings without being led into extravagance. The Young Men's Christian Association endeavours, and to a certain extent succeeds, to remedy this evil, and I cordially recognise its usefulness and applaud its many efforts: but it is undoubtedly the case that many youths who are no less "Christian" than their fellows, experience a certain amount of diffidence in stamping themselves with a title which to their reasoning savours of arrogance, or lays them open to charges of hypocrisy.¹²¹

¹¹⁹*Tit-Bits*, 29 October, 1887, 40.

¹²⁰W. Roberts, "Life On A Guinea A Week", *The Nineteenth Century*, March 1888, Vol. 23, 464-467. Roberts, a clerk, did however maintain that joining the Y.M.C.A. was a much wiser choice than that made by clerks who spent their leisure time in theatres or music halls. In responding to Roberts's remarks, The Church of England Young Men's Society (an organization similar in purpose to the Y.M.C.A.) quipped that: "Surely this cannot be said of the C.E.Y.M.S.! We desire to uphold amongst young men a high religious tone, but we wish it to be manly, not "goody-goody."" *Forward!: The Official Organ of the Church of England Young Men's Society*, (London) April, 1888, Vol. 2, No. 1, 7.

He wished that some other sort of "Young Man's Friendly Association" be established, as a respectable sanctuary for clerks, "which did not interfere with religion, but which provided miscellaneous libraries and smoking-rooms, which did not taboo cards, or even billiards, which got up monthly concerts or entertainments among its members, which encouraged discussions on various subjects, and which, moreover, never inflicted "lectures" upon its members."¹²² The response to the letter was fierce and swift. A clerk and Y.M.C.A. member from Wandsworth maintained that the association provided important spiritual and material needs for clerks, and that its Christian nature did "not necessarily mean "goody-goodness," nor entail very strict religious observances."¹²³ He did believe, however, that Y.M.C.A.'s were justified in banning card-playing from their premises, as "gambling has become associated with card-playing to such an extent that it is scarcely possible to sit down to a game of cards without some money changing hands."¹²⁴ Furthermore, he argued that "the miscellaneous libraries and smoking-rooms for which 'A Clerk' seems to long," were already supplied by his own Wandsworth branch of the Y.M.C.A.¹²⁵

The issue of providing smoking and billiard rooms caused a considerable debate within London Y.M.C.As. One side of the dispute were

¹²¹Our Reader's Letter Box: "The Hardships of Clerks," by 'A Clerk', Pearson's Weekly, 17 January, 1891, 406.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Our Reader's Letter Box: "The Hardships of Clerks", by 'A Member', Pearson's Weekly, 24 January, 1891, 422.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid.

newer members, particularly young clerks, who argued that men would go elsewhere for these pleasures if the Y.M.C.A. did not install them, and these places would be of a rather unhealthy environment. The other side, generally represented by older members, did not want to witness the Y.M.C.A. becoming a place where young men would learn to smoke and play billiards.¹²⁶ In 1890 it was decided to let continue the informal procedure of allowing individual branches to determine their policy on smoking and billiards, but, with most refusing to allow such questionable activities (particularly billiards) into their Associations, the debate continued and reflected the degree to which clerks sought to construct a respectable, but agreeable, public haven for their leisure pursuits. One young clerk writing to *Pearson's Weekly*--aptly identifying himself as "Cigarette Smoker"--noted that although he found most Y.M.C.A. branches to have comfortable reading-rooms, he was dismayed at their dearth of smoking rooms. This, he ruminated, was contrary to the spirit and function of the Y.M.C.A.

The object of the Y.M.C.A. is to draw young men to the rooms to keep them out of bad company, and to accomplish this object the Association should make their places as attractive as possible. Now-a-days, I suppose, eighty per cent of young men smoke. Many would join the Y.M.C.A. if they knew that there was a nice comfortable smoking-room attached to the local branch. Smoking is not a crime, a smoker is not a social outcast, and the weed will scarcely harm the Christianity of a man, so I cannot understand why the Y.M.C.A. does not make so small a concession as a smoking-room to those members who wish to smoke.¹²⁷

This letter prompted a response from numerous clerks who believed that the Y.M.C.A. needed to adopt a more liberal attitude to smoking and billiard rooms. As one clerk argued : "Why not make Y.M.C.A. branches more

¹²⁶The Young Men's Review, February, 1890, Vol. 7, No. 2, 25.

¹²⁷Pearson's Weekly, 8 August, 1891, 48.

attractive, homely, and comfortable--more in fact like a respectable social club?"¹²⁸ The average clerk could not afford the membership fees, usually between £50 and £100 a year, of an established and distinguished club, but the clerks writing these letters hoped to successfully petition the Y.M.C.A. to adopt many of their practices--although obviously recognising that drink would be forbidden. Only practices deemed sufficiently respectable could enter the controlled and temperate sphere of an institution such as the Y.M.C.A., definitely not those found in a pub, saloon or tavern.

Surely, after his day's work is over a young man may be allowed some relaxation, some amusement to divert his mind from the everlasting work of the counting-house, warehouse, or shop--as the case may be--and under the influence of a place of this description he would, I believe, be very much more likely to keep himself within rational limits than by frequenting public-houses and other such resorts for the lack of it. There are thousands of most eminently respectable men who after the business of the day is over enjoy a pipe and an occasional game of chess, a rubber at whist, or a game of billiards; and in a temperance place, such as, of course, Y.M.C.A. would be, this could be had without the temptation of seeing the waiter entering the room with a variety of drinks on a tray. Get a number of young men together and *thoroughly amuse* them, and they would not be in such a hurry to go out to the public-house.¹²⁹

In the following years the Y.M.C.A. gradually became more amenable in providing the leisure comforts desired by these clerks. However, its primary growth was in providing new fraternal assistance and self-improving services to its members. One new feature of the 1890s was its establishment of an "introduction" service to assist young men emigrating from London. The Central branch supplied over 5,000 introductions in 1894.¹³⁰ Meanwhile, its

¹²⁸Pearson's Weekly, 29 August, 1891, 96.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰The Times, 7 June, 1895, 5.

educational activities were greatly expanded to offer training and examination preparation for numerous clerical occupations. The discourse involving the purpose and scope of Y.M.C.A.'s also began to change, reflecting the Y.M.C.A.'s increasing emphasis on fulfilling the various secular and temporal pursuits of its members. In 1897 the Duke of Fife noted that when Victoria had ascended to the throne there had been no such organization in which young commercial men could improve their prospects through educational classes, and now they were "able to obtain advantages which, 60 years ago, could only be obtained by the few and the fortunate."¹³¹ Ten years later Lord Kinnaird, although congratulating the Y.M.C.A. on its successful work in providing comfortable rooms, appealing entertainments, and material support through employment and lodging services, noted that he was somewhat disheartened that spiritual matters had been placed on the back burner by its council members: "it was easy to carry on the social side, but they had to take care not to neglect the mental, and above all, the spiritual part of their work, the difficulties of which were not less than they were 20 or 30 years ago."¹³² But at its annual meetings the Central London Y.M.C.A. continued to celebrate its social, recreational and self-improving activities, and in 1908 the secretary did not even report on the Association's religious and spiritual activities.¹³³

¹³¹The Times, 31 March, 1897, 6.

¹³²The Times, 12 January, 1907, 8.

¹³³The Times, 8 April, 1908, 11. His report listed the following yearly statistic for the three central London associations: "Members, 2043; associate, 987; classes and gymnasium entries, 3,106; junior section members, 110. Situations secured for young men, 309; young men

In 1909 the Central London Y.M.C.A. moved into new buildings constructed in the Tottenham Court Road after Exeter Hall's lease could not be renewed and it was demolished. A campaign in 1912 to raise £100,000 in a fortnight from City business to pay-off the new headquarters, "A first class club for London's younger men,"¹³⁴ enabled the Y.M.C.A. to defend itself against the long-standing assumption that its nature was somewhat "goody-goody". It did this by focusing on the self-improving and character-building qualities it provided clerks, of an inestimable value to any employer, and downplayed its religious work. *The Times*, a supporter of the campaign, argued similarly:

Of criticism in the past the Young Men's Christian Association has had at least its full share, partly, no doubt, because of a mistaken impression as to the strength of the "goody-goody" element in its policy and *personnel*. Those who took the trouble to investigate discovered that even in the atmosphere of Exeter Hall an amazing amount of the manliest sort of work was being done in the development of physical and intellectual power, as well as in the strengthening of character.

In other parts of the Empire, business men have been far more generous than here to the Association. Even where they have had no interest in religious work, they have realized the immense value of such an institution in providing the qualities that every business needs—diligence, sobriety, enterprise, technical capacity, and general trustworthiness."¹³⁵

The new building itself had been built with its members' material and social comforts, and recreational and self-improving interests in mind. It had room to accommodate 10,000 members, a large gymnasium, a 33 yard swimming pool, a bowling alley, rooms for a boy's branch, a 75 foot rifle range, two large meeting halls, a public restaurant, a club restaurant, a large reading room, a

afforded temporary relief, 563: young men visiting convalescent and holiday home, Margate, 960."

¹³⁴*The Times*, 4 January, 1912, 4.

¹³⁵*ibid.*

social room (where smoking was allowed), a games room, a lounge, a second floor entirely devote to the educational classes of the Y.M.C.A. commercial college, and third and fourth floors where up to 238 young men could be lodged in bedrooms for 5s. a week, or in a dormitory for 3s 6d per week.¹³⁶

The Times noted, that although a building did not make a club,

... this building promises to house a club of the most vigorous and many-sided kind. The classes and branch societies for recreation as well as education are too many to be catalogued here; and it is good to know that some of these organizations will take the young men away even from their beautiful house—away to the open road, the river, and the field.¹³⁷

The Daily Telegraph was quite right in its reporting of this new building as a "splendid pile".¹³⁸ The fortnight campaign of 1912 to eliminate the debt incurred in building the new headquarters fell just short of its goal, but a Mr. Garnstein was able to solicit three £500 contributions from London businessmen on the condition that billiard tables be installed in the games room. The Y.M.C.A. chairman, Mr. Arbethnot, finally agreed that such entertainments would not harm the Association's work, being forced to recognise that "billiards was one of the best kinds of amusements, and that the sport kept young fellows from worse places."¹³⁹

The Y.M.C.A.'s programs and activities were not merely prescriptive, but adapted to the needs and concerns of clerks in late-Victorian and Edwardian London. It provided respectable recreations and self-improving

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸*The Daily Telegraph*, 5 March, 1914. Cited in Binfield, 9.

¹³⁹*The Times*, 21 January, 1912, 4.

services which allowed clerks to maintain and develop aspects of a middle class masculine life at a time when they were materially little better off than their working class contemporaries. It created a distinct cultural experience for its largely young clerking membership, who had often just left school and came from non-clerking families, and responded to their needs by constructing a unique space of intersection which balanced respectability and self-improvement with leisure and comfort. Its members found and formed a locus in which to exercise aspects of adult masculinity—quiet repose, self-culture and fraternalism—while maintaining a safe and cautious distance from the dreadful delights of London.

Chapter Four

The Construction of an Inner and Collective Clerking Identity

By the late-Victorian era changes in London's commercial and governmental affairs began to have a significant impact on clerical occupations. London's financial and insurance sectors grew dramatically and demanded clerks for their ever expanding offices. The change to the City of London was dramatic, as noted by Arthur Munby in 1869.

In the afternoon, I rambled through some of the old backstreets of the City: the best substitute, on Sundays, for a quiet country walk. The course of the broad new [Queen Victoria] street which is to run from Blackfriars northeastward, is marked by heaps of ruin; but these were quiet and lovely, and full of meaning and pathos. The old houses that encircled S. Ann's Blackfriars are gone, and the church stands high and bare above the open clearing. Just beyond it, are lines of tall costly building, facing at present nothing but ruined cellars and the débris of streets destroyed.¹

While the world's financial and commercial center continued to develop, evolve and suck clerks into its commercial juggernaut, a vast army of clerks were also required to fill new posts within national and municipal government offices as the role of government, predicated by the reforms of the early and mid-Victorian eras, continued to expand.² From 1851 to 1881 the number of clerks in England and Wales more than tripled, from 95,000 to

¹Cited in Derek Hudson (ed.), Munby: Man of Two Worlds (London: 1974), 264-5. In an 1882 article W.J. Cotton commented on this trend. He noted that the population of the City had dropped from 74,897 in 1871 to 50,526 in 1881. W. J. Richmond Cotton, "The City of London: Its Population and Position," The Contemporary Review, Vol. 41, Jan. 1882, 72-87.

² For studies on the growth of the British civil service see Moses Abramovitz and Vera F. Eliasberg, The Growth of Public Employment in Great Britain (Princeton: 1957); and S. G. Checkland, British Public Policy, 1776-1939: An Economic, Social, and Political Perspective (Cambridge: 1983). For the growth of municipal government in London see Susan Dabney Pennybacker, A Vision for London, 1889-1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment (London: 1995).

318,000. As a percentage of all occupations they grew from 1.2% to 2.9%.³ As these numbers multiplied the process of the clerk's identity formation began to hasten as shared occupational and cultural experiences were increasingly recognised by clerks and late-Victorian and Edwardian observers.

During this era clerks were becoming increasingly concerned about their marginal material existence. Penny Weeklies⁴ and other papers catering to a clerking readership provided a medium for discourse on this and other subjects of interest to clerks. Letters and articles written by clerks indicate that clerks were overwhelmingly anxious about their toehold within the middle class. While the nature of their work and their "salaries" distinguished them from wage labourers, their material existence continued to distance them from their middle class employers. Many clerks argued that above all else, employers demanded cheap clerical labour.

Since Dickens in his inimitable style first published his tale of Scrooge and his unfortunate clerk, many changes have taken place; but it is to be feared that this character created in fiction is still reflected in some realities. . . . Clerk-labour would seem to be frequently employed at the lowest possible price for which it can be procured.⁵

While some clerks were in comfortable positions with formal or informal salary scales,⁶ there were large numbers of clerks earning Malthusian salaries

³2,000 of these clerks were women in 1851 and 14,000 in 1881. To this day Klingender's 1935 study provides the most accurate data on the growth of clerical labour from 1851–1931 through his employment of census records and statistics recorded in the *Bankers' Magazine*. Klingender, The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain, 108-9.

⁴The most popular of these papers were *Tit-Bits*, *Answers* and *Pearson's Weekly*. See the introduction of this thesis for a discussion of this publishing genre.

⁵Anon, "Clerks: By One Of Them", Chamber's Journal, 8 September, 1877, Vol. 14 (Series 4), 570-573.

⁶See Chapter Two.

which reinforced the vision of the clerk as a liminal figure. Low pay not only continued to prevent clerks from acquiring the material trappings and lifestyle of the middle class, but it also introduced a culture of anxiety and emasculation into the world of clerking, clearly identified in Mark Merydyth's poem, *The City Clerk*.

You can't mistake him in the light,
Nor even in the dark;
I'm sure you know him well by sight,
The patient City Clerk.

His face looks worried, pale and lined,
And furrowed deep with care;
For oft there's something on his mind
Which no one else can share.

His wife is sick, his children ill,
And *his* health broken too;
While in his hand an unpaid bill--
His rent is overdue.

His coat, though threadbare is well brushed,
And neatly darned, I know;
His collar frayed, but never crushed,
But starched as white as snow.

His boots are blacked, and shine and gleam,
Though worn and patched the soles;
And not a soul would ever dream,
His gloves are all in holes.

The cheery workman at his side
Can earn a bigger wage;
And he can well afford to ride,
Beyond the "penny stage"!

He does not work his brains all day,
Nor tax an aching head;
He labours for better pay,
With shorter hours instead.

The City Clerk can't get a job
At forty, so I hear;
Then either he must steal or rob,

Or starve, it would appear!⁷

This anxiety helped to create an inward identity that was distinctly clerical. Clerks struggled to adopt the semblance of a middle class lifestyle on incomes that were often below those of the labour aristocracy.⁸ An examination of discourse concerning their income and employment prospects reveals an identity that cannot be merely defined as either working or middle class. This discourse not only highlights the anxiety and grievances of clerks but also indicates that clerks were voicing their concerns far more habitually than in the "rare outbursts of frustration and resentment" that Gregory Anderson has suggested.⁹

While ranked by present scholarship and contemporary observers within the lower middle class, their culture and identity were as separate and distinct as that of a middle class employer, a working class labourer or, indeed, as Charles Booth noted, a lower middle class artisan.

From top to bottom clerks associate with clerks and artisans with artisans—but comparatively seldom with each other. A clerk lives an entirely different life from an artisan—marries a different kind of wife—has different ideas, different possibilities, and different limitations. A clerk differs from an artisan in the claims each make on society, no less

⁷Mark Merydyth, "The City Clerk," The Clerk, Vol 1, No. 4, April 1908, 47.

⁸There is a great deal of literature dealing with the labour aristocracy. See especially, E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy," in Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (London: 1964), 272-315; E. J. Hobsbawm, "Artisan or Labour Aristocrat," English Historical Review, Second Series, Vol. 37, 1984, 355-72; E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Aristocracy of Labour Reconsidered," in Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour (London: 1984), 227-51; A. J. Reid, "Politics and Economics in the Formation of the British Working Class," Social History, Vol. 3, 1978, 347-56; R. Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian England (Oxford: 1976); R. Q. Gray, The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth Century Britain, c. 1850-1914 (London: 1981); and Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880 (London: 1978).

⁹Gregory Anderson, "The Social Economy of Late-Victorian Clerks," in Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class In Britain, 1870-1914, 120.

than in the claims society makes on them. It is not by any means only a question of clothes, of the wearing or not wearing of a white shirt every day, but of differences which invade every department of life, and at every turn affect the family budget.¹⁰

Occupational and societal pressures shaped the clerk's habits and routines and formed a clerking culture which bound clerks into an identifiable stratum. Integral to this culture was the appearance of respectability and clerks attempted to shield their shared material sufferings from society's gaze. However, as Robert White pointed out in 1897 in a solicitation for affordable eating establishments in the City of London, clerks were far from successful in their pursuit of an image of middle class comfort and respectability.

Go into the cheap coffee-houses in the City and its environs and note the appearance of the young men who patronise them. The sort of life they are forced to live is proclaimed in the shiny black coat, the frayed collar, the shabby cuffs, and, above all, in the pale, haggard, 'washed-out' look in their faces. From the miseries of lodgings they sometimes seek relief in matrimony, only to find very frequently that their last state is worse than their first. The perpetual struggle to make ends meet and to reconcile gentility with poverty is heart-breaking. And it is the more bitter because it is concealed. In short, their privations are past finding out.¹¹

Such material concern dominated clerking discourse, especially regarding their "heart-breaking attempts" to "reconcile gentility with poverty".

Clerks had little choice but to sell their labour for the market rate, as did the working class. As Charles Parsons noted in an 1876 pamphlet, "the too general practice has been, and still is, for an employer to secure office assistance of the best description possible for the very lowest salary that the

¹⁰Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London. Vol. VII: Population Classified by Trade, 277.

¹¹Robert White, "Wanted: A Rowton House For Clerks," The Nineteenth Century, Vol. 42, October, 1897, 594-601.

applicant can be induced to accept."¹² Meanwhile clerks toiled in the world of commerce and government—a world which demanded that its employees adopt the dress and deportment of the middle class even beyond the doors of the office. Parsons argued that these demands were partly responsible for society's antipathy regarding the material sufferings of clerks.

Skilled and unskilled workmen and labourers have, by the general adjustment of their wage-scales, derived pecuniary, social, educational, recreative, and sanitary advantages—the value of which to the nation it would be well-nigh impossible to exaggerate, but consideration for the case of the clerk (having a middle-class position to maintain, and compelled to appear respectably attired if he hopes to retain his situation), has ever been deferred until “ a more convenient season.”¹³

It was common for clerks to compare their economic struggle with that of the working class and to suggest that the working class lived far more satisfied lives.

I don't growl at the working man, be his
Virtue strict or morality lax,
He would strike if they gave him my weekly wage,
And they never ask him for income tax.
They take his little ones out to tea in a
Curtained van when the leaves are green.
But never flower, field nor fern, in the
Leafy lanes have my children seen.
The case is different, so they say, for I
Am respectable—save the mark!
He works with the sweat of his manly brow
And I with body and brain—poor clerk!¹⁴

¹²Charles Edward Parsons, Clerks: Their Position and Advancement (London: 1876), 8-9.

¹³*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴The Clerks' Journal, 1 July, 1891. Cited in Gregory Anderson, "The Social Economy of Late-Victorian Clerks," 120-1.

As was argued by this clerk, clerks complained that the respectability achieved through "brain work" was not worth the material struggle that so many clerks and their families faced.

Clerks were obsessed with trying to adopt respectable middle class lifestyles on, what were often, working class incomes. In 1867, describing himself as "an old City Clerk", "Mark Lane" ruminated that: "It has always been a wonder to me that intelligent men, such as form the great body of clerks in the City of London, should have allowed themselves to drift into an abject state of serfdom. They are nearly all, in their respective positions, most miserably underpaid."¹⁵ An anonymous City Clerk, writing in 1880, helps to answer Lane's query.

There is something humiliating beyond expression in the consciousness that the steady pursuit of a lifetime has resulted in failure. The step which led up to it has been taken many years ago, and, with the time since lost, every possibility of retrieving it has gone for ever. The retrospect of such a career has nothing to cheer the heart.

As a rule, resignation in one's fate, and the knowledge that there is nothing left but to patiently toil on in the path once chosen, keeps out any spirit of resentment, and accustoms one to a course of desponding plodding on, which, however mournful it may be, is the only one open to him. Thus you can see many a man, who at one time had bright prospects, and whom a fine intelligence had induced to look forward to a successful career, brought down to the level of those whom at the outset he had every reason to consider his inferiors.

There is no class to whom this applies more than the commercial clerks.¹⁶

¹⁵Mark Lane, "Letters to the Editor," The City Service Gazette, 8 January, 1873, 4. To improve their lot Lane advocated "the creation of a "Company of Clerks," the backbone of which association shall be a monthly subscription, assessed at, say, for argument, threepence in the pound on the income of each member, who, after having been on the books for a certain period, shall, if discharged from his employment for no fault of his own, be entitled to pecuniary assistance from the funds of the Company until such time as he is either provided with a similar berth to the one he had before, to an equivalent in some other shape."

¹⁶Anonymous City Clerk, The City Clerks: The Difficulty of Their Position, and Its Causes. With Some Suggestions How To Remove Them. By One of Them (London: 1880), 3-4.

As this anonymous clerk made clear, although poorly paid, they had little choice but to remain clerks as the nature of their work and, most significantly, their training had conditioned them for little else. Very few clerks abandoned the stool for the bench. These conditions had significant repercussions on how clerks identified themselves.

... by the time the apprenticeship is served out the clerk has reached an age where the more fortunate manual labourer is an independent member of society, and has his craft, which will at all time guarantee to him and his own a livelihood; he earns his living without assistance, and without having to forego his own dignity, so dear to everyone.

Not so the clerk. For many years to come he must be reconciled to the thought of being chargeable to his father, himself in receipt of a limited, often scanty income. To an honest, well-meaning youth this thought must be very humiliating, and it must be for him a bitter pill to swallow, to find no way out of a fate which is, in a great measure, of his own making.¹⁷

This passage is representative of the melancholy and deep sense of resignation which dominated clerical discourse. Clerks were acutely aware of their marginal existence but saw no way out of their occupation and its pitfalls. Occupational conditions made upward, downward, or even lateral movement within society next to impossible and were partially responsible for turning even more young men into clerks:

Society' ... 'makes believe very much' that a man who spends his days copying letters is superior to a skilled artisan. ... The false estimate that considers the mere clerk as being above the skilled mechanic, is the secret of overcrowding in a wretchedly-paid 'genteel' vocation.¹⁸

Lacking occupational mobility and agencies to press for better pay and working conditions, clerks were forced to struggle within the confines of their world. Although a profound sense of victimization is reflected in their discourse clerks were overwhelmingly resigned to a destiny which was a

¹⁷Ibid., 4.

¹⁸Ibid., 40-41.

sharp contrast to the expectations of upward-mobility and respect which had induced young men to become clerks.¹⁹ This fate was not, as Parsons noted, an easy one for a clerk to abide with.

Underpaid, with a great deal of very laborious and monotonous work, in addition to heavy responsibilities and anxieties as his position gradually "improves," his constitution frequently impaired (often ruined) by sedentary duties and confinement in ill-ventilated back offices, without either time or means to enjoy the recreations necessary to everyone so employed, he grows up an unhealthy, dissatisfied man—oppressed by a consciousness that he would have done better had he but had opportunities—his nervous susceptibilities highly wrought upon by the worries of business, the fear of losing his precarious situation, and, lastly, the anxieties of a home-life often destitute, as he increases in years, of the comforts which render middle-age enjoyable to other classes.²⁰

Language such as this dominated the clerking discourse concerning his distinct social and cultural experience. Although clerks worked in an occupation of limited material rewards, as Parsons recognized, they still sought methods to not only improve their material positions, but their social and psychological ones as well.

The pursuit of employment at a respectable salary set many a clerk on a Quixotic adventure. One clerk took great issue with an 1877 article in the *Daily Telegraph*²¹ which claimed that even the most ordinary clerk could find a position paying a salary of £150 per year. This middle-aged clerk explained that he had come to London three years earlier in pursuit of work. He

¹⁹See Chapter Two.

²⁰Parsons, *Clerks: Their Position and Advancement*, 9.

²¹*Daily Telegraph*, 20 February, 1877. The article was in response to a remark by Gladstone, which this clerk heartily supported, that "...working men should for themselves, and especially for their children, try more to elevate handicraft, and less to escape from it into the supposed paradise of pen and ink." Cited in Anonymous Clerk, *"Off The Track" In London: Being Actual Experiences in a Hunt After Employment By a Clerk out of Work* (London: 1878), 13.

believed his chances were good of obtaining a position as he had twenty years' experience as an assistant in a book selling business and continually viewed advertisements for vacant positions in the London papers for various types of clerical positions. He also had certificates in arithmetic and book-keeping from the "Society of Arts".

My ardour was somewhat nourished by the conviction that I had good references. I knew that in those usually English qualities--sobriety, honesty, and industry--my character would bear the most searching investigation. Having formerly held situations of trust, in which I had discharged my duties to the entire satisfaction of my employers, there was every probability, I argued with myself, that amongst the thousands of London Business establishments, I would certainly soon meet with an engagement.²²

He tried obtaining a position at a business establishment with which his previous employer had done business, but was told that he was too old for a position. This establishment only hired young clerks on small salaries "and then usually dismissed them after a few years, thus filling up the ranks of the unemployed clerks in London."²³ After exhausting his "contacts" he turned to answering advertisements for "Vacant Situations" in the London newspapers. He estimated that he had responded to over four hundred advertisements for positions and received answers to two percent of them, all of which proved to be fruitless. Such was the demand for positions that one employer, "although he had stated in his advertisement that the hours were long and the salary moderate, informed me that he had received over a hundred replies."²⁴ By the time he wrote his pamphlet this clerk was in a high state of anxiety as a result of being out of work and the fact that "a kind

²²Anonymous Clerk, "Off The Track" In London, 3.

²³Ibid., 3-4.

²⁴Ibid., 4-6.

of lottery fever" had been bred into him as a result of his search for work through newspaper advertisements.²⁵

This clerk identified himself as a marginal and emasculated individual and provided reflections on the cause of his and other clerks' difficult predicament, claiming that "working men should for themselves, and especially for their children, try more to elevate handicraft, and less to escape from it into the supposed paradise of pen and ink." He believed that he would have been far happier as a "working man" and maintained that as a "class" they were better off than clerks.²⁶ Despite these assertions he remained a clerk and recognised that, however problematic, he was obliged to deal with the hand that he had been dealt.

The problem of finding suitable occupation for those of the professional or commercial classes who have once got out of their original groove, is one still waiting for solution. Perhaps the experiences detailed in this paper may indicate some errors to be avoided in the apparently hopeless season of work, even if they suggest no immediate way out of the difficulty.²⁷

In their material struggles clerks often asked each other how to survive on their meagre salaries. In a letter to *Answers*, "Nemo" asked if "any of your correspondents" could "inform a junior clerk how to exist on 11s. per week? He is expected to be well dressed."²⁸ A clerk identifying himself as "GLYN", a teetotaler, responded that he was able to survive on 10s. per week through self-restraint and sacrifice.

²⁵Ibid., 6-7.

²⁶Ibid., 12-14.

²⁷Ibid., 15.

²⁸Letter from 'Nemo', "How to Live on 11s a week," *Answers*, 16 November, 1889, 397.

For my two rooms, fire, light, potatoes, and attendance I pay 5s. a week. I limit myself to smoke 1 oz. of Bristol Shag weekly, which I find is a lone man's sole companion, a bachelor's friend. Every other Saturday, after work is over, I go out of town to spend Sunday with some friends in the country who do my washing for free. . . .

There now remains 4s. 8 1/2 d. to live on. This is how I managed it weekly in November according to my account book:-

Sugar 2 1/2 d., tea 4d., coffee 2d., cocoa 2d., milk 3 1/2d., oatmeal 2 1/2d., syrup 2d., butter 6d., bread 5d., beef 9d., bloaters 1 1/2d., bacon 8d., collections, paper and stamp 4d., – total 9s. 1/2d. Balance 11 1/2d., 7d. of which I pay to my insurance premium; then I will only have 4 1/2 d.²⁹

GLYN's budget outlines the month in the life of a clerk on the extreme edge of poverty with little comfort other than his allotment of tobacco and his evenings free to "spend reading, writing, or attending some meeting or lecture."³⁰ With a few pennies left for the clothing needed to supplement his life of "respectability", he could not hope to marry, let alone start a family, purchase a house and hire the servants necessary to place him within the confines of the middle class.

Clerks, anxious about their status, continually fretted over how to budget their salaries so that they might be considered men of respectability. W. Roberts argued in *The Nineteenth Century* that there was a great need for clerks to learn how to get through "Life On A Guinea A Week", "and how the two ends are made to meet upon so small a sum."³¹

It is upon clerks more particularly that the principles of economy fall hard when supplemented by an imperative demand for respectability. They must present a decent appearance and possess a very fair education, . . . but very rarely does it command an appreciably higher rate of salary. These and many other collateral matters have scarcely any place in the

²⁹Letter from 'GLYN', "Is Life Worth Living," *Answers*, 14 December, 1889, 45.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹W. Roberts, "Life On A Guinea A Week," *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 23, March 1888, 464-467.

calculations of a mechanic or artisan, who preferably selects the coarsest and most wearable material as clothing. . . . If one of the latter class buys a three-and-sixpenny felt hat he makes it last for many months for Sundays, and after that it is 'good enough' for a couple of years for everyday wear. With a clerk it is different; self-respect, or nothing else, would be sufficiently strong to prevent his going 'to business' in a battered hat. Very few journeymen mechanics are paid so little as a guinea per week, which is a very common salary for clerks who have long passed the junior stage.³²

As is common in identity formation, the clerk's identity was partially formed in contrast to an "other". In Roberts' case the other was the lower middle class artisan or labour aristocrat. For one clerk, writing to *Answers in 1885*, this other was represented within his own family. He strongly resented his parents for forcing him into becoming a clerk, and compared his material success as a clerk with that of his two "duller" working class brothers.

After a lapse of twenty years let us compare the positions of the three sons. The youngest is now a chief engineer with a salary equal to about £4 a week, the second is a pattern maker earning £2 a week, whilst the eldest, the pride of the family, at the age of forty-five, a book-keeper in a mercantile firm is in receipt of a munificent salary of 28s a week. How a poor clerk manages to dress decently and bring up a family respectably is a puzzle which those unacquainted with the eternal fret and worry of such an existence will never understand. After twenty years experience, if my opinion was asked as to the advisability of making any intelligent lad a clerk, I should unhesitatingly say that the most charitable course would be to drown him first.³³

While his work and its corresponding culture separated the clerk from labourers and artisans,³⁴ the clerk's material condition was often on a lower scale than the artisan or labour aristocrat whose wages during this period generally averaged close to two pounds a week. A. C. Thornton, a clerk from

³²Ibid.

³³Correspondence: "The Germans Abroad", by 'A Ledger Hack', *Tit-Bits*, 25 July, 1885, 237.

³⁴See Chapter Two.

Hampstead, wrote to *Answers* in 1898 and provided another example of this, and reflected that:

There's nothing in this world we like to inculcate upon ourselves than the superiority of brains over muscle where money making is concerned. We take it as a matter of course nowadays that the man who works with his muscles cannot earn so much as the man who works with his brain.³⁵

Thornton found fault in this line of reasoning by pointing out the case of the Hampstead Vestry which had raised the salaries of the workmen from 35s to 37s a week and had authorised the appointment of an accountant's clerk to look after these men at a salary of 20s a week. He noted that the clerk who was hired "is a gentleman well on in life, and of good education, being higher up the social scale than the men he has been appointed to boss," yet he received almost half their salary. Examples such as these bred a condition of anxiety and melancholy into clerks in regard to their position within society as they struggled to keep up the illusion of respectability which, as Roberts pointed out, the nature of their work demanded. This concern over "keeping up appearances" dominated clerking discourse and was often combined with the more general need of subsistence. Roberts and other clerks sought to teach each other how to budget so that life would "not be a burden and a perpetual misery to the individual."³⁶

In July 1897 clerks voiced their concern in *Answers* over being forced to spend a substantial portion of their salaries on their dress after a retired clerk, "R.T.E.", complained that, out of need to "gratify his own silly vanity", the

³⁵*Answers*' Parliament (Letters to the Editor): 'A.C. Thornton', "Brains v. Muscle," *Answers*, 26 February, 1898, 294.

³⁶Roberts, "Life On A Guinea A Week," 467. See Appendix 1 for Roberts's budget.

City clerk of London dressed too well.³⁷ Clerks complained to *Answers* that proper office attire was a necessity that stretched their already meagre budgets to their limits. As one clerk from Battersea noted, there was "a rule that a clerk in any old-established City house must appear scrupulously well dressed, no matter whether his salary be £100 or £1,000."³⁸ Financial and social pressures rarely evened out for clerks.

. . . the majority of clerks are a hard-working, persevering lot of fellows, and are compelled to appear in the City well dressed, no matter whether their wives and children have to go without something to enable the bread-winner to keep up appearances.³⁹

Conscious of dressing beyond their means, their uniform was a continual reminder of their marginal membership within the "respectable" classes. They "suffered for all this magnificence on next-to-nothing a year."⁴⁰ As one clerk explained, he would have liked to have devoted far less of his budget to his appearance.

I am, though a well-dressed clerk, really the victim of circumstances. I am in a bank, and my salary is £3 per week. I have no desire to appear elaborately dressed, and I think that neatness in attire

³⁷Letter from 'R. T. E.', "Answers Parliament: Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" *Answers*, 3 July, 1897, 125. He argued that clerks of his day did not succumb to the vanities of dress and maintained that: "Long-ago, when I was a City Clerk on two-pounds-ten a week, our get-up was a modest one. Our wardrobe then—twenty-five years ago—was of the scantiest and very few clerks in big firms possessed more than three suits at most, and our silk hats—if we had any—possessed nothing like the shimmering gloss of Lead-peace which seems to be one of the dearest ornaments of the young man who toils on the business side of Temple Bar. . . . Judging from the variety of his get-up, the present City clerk seems to devote more attention to shining toppers, fancy waistcoats, and buttonholes than to business." This earnest and temperate clerk was clearly not the "Gent" referred to in Chapter One.

³⁸Letter from "Comp.", "Answers Parliament: Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" *Answers*, 31 July, 1897, 198.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Letter from "Seth Barker", "Answers Parliament: Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" *Answers*, 24 July, 1897, 78.

for a man who works for wages—or salary, if you like—is quite sufficient for all intents and purposes. But this my manager will not allow; he has a weakness for seeing his subordinates very well dressed, and the result is that I have to spend £50 a year on my clothes where otherwise I would not think of spending more than £20.⁴¹

Although in most cases clerks were not forced to spend such a large amount on clothes, they regularly had to make do with a rather shabby version of a middle class man's wardrobe which only served to reinforce their liminality.

Despite the budgetary constraints presented by dress, clerks continued to wear their middle class uniform. It was central to their identity and was often a source of pride. One clerk even maintained that the entire country had a stake in the appearance of the clerk.

We should soon become a ragged nation if all our clerks were allowed to dress like beggars. When the employer insists on his clerks being well dressed, he is doing his country a good turn by helping to keep up its respectability.⁴²

Dress was symbolic of their "respectable" lifestyle—a lifestyle which often demanded a level of financial expenditure far above that of the working classes. Both clerks and employers played a role in enforcing these expenditures, as one clerk explained—

Everyone engaged in commercial pursuits will admit it as a necessity to be decently dressed, and no one, who possesses any self-respect, would so far forget himself as to sin against this most appropriate rule of society. But custom, the people one is surrounded by, and many other circumstances, engender only too often habits of extravagance involving needless expenses, which many a man would refrain from, if he knew of a way how to effect this escape. Insignificant as this matter seems, it is often the source of mental suffering of no small degree, because a family man with limited means will often rather subject himself to some extra expense, in order to escape from the taunts which he would have to

⁴¹Letter from "W.P.", "Answers Parliament: Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" Answers, 24 July, 1897, 178.

⁴²Letter from "S.S.", "Answers Parliament: Do Clerks Dress Too Well?" Answers, 24 July, 1897, 178.

encounter, if he failed to comply with the rule. The writer has within his own knowledge that a poor man was insulted by his juniors, because they said his hat was somewhat rusty; and in another instance a principal asked a father of a numerous family, whom he paid at a rate of £150 per annum, to don a gold watch chain, in order to make a good appearance for the house.⁴³

This culture of conformity to dress norms was lampooned by Victorian and Edwardian observers such as the Grossmiths. In *The Diary of a Nobody* juniors in the office chided Pooter for his outdated and sometimes tattered habits of dress. It was perceived by clerks, however, that "proper dress" was essential if they were to find success. As G. S. Layard noted in a *Cornhill Magazine* series on "Family Budgets".

It is more and more recognised as an axiom in those businesses and professions which are in immediate touch with the client, that the employees, whether they may be salesmen in shops or clerks in banks or offices, must be habited in what may be called decent professional garb. The bank-clerk who is content to ignore the fact and looks needy, or the solicitor's clerk who is out-at-elbows, will find that he has little chance of retaining his position.⁴⁴

Layard was not, however blind to the fact that these circumstances forced the clerk "into an extravagance in the matter of clothes out of all proportion to his income," and that clerks "may well exclaim with Teufeldröckh: 'Clothes which began in foolishness of ornament, what have they not become!'"⁴⁵

Respectability through dress conformity, which symbolized a "genteel" status, was so infused into their identity that clerks often went to extreme

⁴³Anonymous City Clerk, *The City Clerks*, 11. See also Chapter Two for an examination of employers' desire to have their clerks reflect well on their business concerns.

⁴⁴G.S. Layard, "Family Budgets: A Lower-Middle-Class Budget," *Cornhill Magazine*, Vol. 83, May 1901, 660.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 660-661.

lengths to maintain the facade of gentility and material substance. One clerk lamented this fact in a self-pitying poem in *The Clerks' Journal*.

When some gaunt mendicant, whose tattered clothes
 Bespeak the misery of outward woes,
 Craves from our generous hand some small relief,
 We feel our pity quickened by his grief.
 Yet how much misery unparaded lies
 Beneath the surface of genteel disguise.
 The needy clerk, from long employment thrown
 Through no base fault or failing of his own
 Whose shiny garments, much the worse for wear,
 Are yet adjusted with judicious care
 Boots newly polished, neckties trimly tied,
 Outward semblance of his inner pride.
 And yet he keeps himself aloof from those
 Who ostentatiously parade their woes,
 Whose only crime is that they strive to hide
 Their utter wretchedness in genteel pride.⁴⁶

That clerks managed to keep up an illusion of gentility even bewildered one County Court judge who presided over the case of a clerk who was behind in his payments for milk—"How these clerks manage to keep up an appearance on 25s a week I cannot understand."⁴⁷ Keeping up the appearance of gentility was as important at home as it was through dress and deportment in the office. Although the cost of living had fallen by 25 per cent between 1881 and 1896, which helped clerks to maintain their image of respectability, it recovered two-thirds of its fall by 1914 while the total number of clerks competing for positions continued to rise.⁴⁸

Clerks were extremely anxious about competition for clerical positions. Although the number of clerical positions was steadily increasing, by the end

⁴⁶*The Clerks' Journal*, December 1888. Cited in Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, 67-8.

⁴⁷"Sweating", *The Clerk*, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1908, 26. Judge Owen ordered that the clerk pay 1s. per month, "as much as he can pay", to the plaintiff until the debt was paid.

⁴⁸Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain*, 18.

of the 19th century the demand for clerks was being outstripped by the availability of young men, boys and women, products of compulsory elementary education, who met the requirements necessary for clerical employment.

The clerical labour market has been overstocked, apart altogether from competition, consequently the salaries of clerks are only prevented from falling by the addition of fresh branches of knowledge which were not, but are now, exacted. Few amongst the new generation of clerks have not added shorthand, and at least one language, to their qualifications.⁴⁹

By 1881 more than half of England's commercial clerks were under twenty-five years and by 1911 the proportion was still 47 per cent.⁵⁰ This supply of relatively cheap clerical labour pushed down salaries and made positions difficult to obtain for all but the most specialized clerks.

Competition from foreign clerks, particularly German, was often viewed as a cause of unemployment and low pay. London clerks complained that Germany flooded the clerical labour market with young men who were willing to accept salaries at lower than subsistence levels.

The German clerk has become a conspicuous feature in the city and tends to bring down still the scanty salaries of the class to which he belongs. There are eating houses in the neighborhood of Mark Lane where the mid-day visitor might fancy himself transported into Hamburg, so general are the guttural interjections around him.⁵¹

This foreign threat highlighted not only the anxiety facing clerks regarding their precarious material condition, but also their concern over their commercial utility and social status. With Britain in the midst of the Great

⁴⁹Chamber of Commerce Journal, 5 August, 1887.

⁵⁰Klingender, The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain, 19.

⁵¹"The German Abroad," Tit-Bits, 27 June, 1885. 167.

Depression in the 1880s, many in commerce, education, and government argued that Britain was losing its economic lead over the continent. The 1886 "Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry" reported that cheaper production costs and tariffs were only partly responsible for the depression. It also concluded that France, Belgium, and, most significantly Germany, produced young business men whose technical, commercial, and linguistic education were vastly superior to that of British clerks.⁵² The *Spectator* maintained that: "Educate, educate, educate, is the burden of the lesson from Germany,—technical education for workmen and manufacturers, modern languages and science for commercial men, and manufacturers and workers alike."⁵³ In response, in July 1886 at the Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the British Empire, the London Chamber of Commerce sponsored a conference "to consider the best means of educating young men intended for a commercial career, so as to fit them for competition with those of the continent."⁵⁴ Bernhard Samuelson argued that although the British business house provided British clerks with a sound training, the clerk's general education was far inferior to his continental rival's reading, writing, arithmetic, and language abilities.⁵⁵ Answering to Samuelson's report, in 1887 the London Chamber of Commerce established a Special Committee to "ascertain the exact or approximate number of foreigners employed by our

⁵²Report of Royal Commission on the Depression of Trade and Industry, (London: 1886).

⁵³The Spectator, 26 June, 1886, 842.

⁵⁴Chamber of Commerce Journal, Supplement, 5 August, 1886. For an examination of the commercial education movement in London see Margaret E. Bryant, The London Experience of Secondary Education, 386-396.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

business establishments" and the reasons for the numbers.⁵⁶ Charles Musgrave, the Assistant Secretary of the London Chamber of Commerce, noted that:

As a result of their investigations it came to light that upwards of 40 per cent. of the staffs in many City offices were foreigners, the greater proportion of them being Germans. The reason assigned by employers for this condition of things was that these foreign clerks were better qualified for the work than those of British nationality. Their general education was of a superior character; they possessed a greater knowledge of Continental languages, thus making them of special value in business correspondence with foreign countries; and they were prepared to work longer hours and at less remuneration than Englishmen.⁵⁷

During the 1880s and 1890s, as Britain's commercial and political rivalry with Germany heated up, the press was quick to paint the German clerk as the representative of Germany's economic strength and cunning. The *Spectator* maintained that, "The Germans are winning now by much the same qualities as we won by in the past. Success has made us fat and sleepy. If we would retain our manufacturing, our trading, our carrying supremacy, we must give our youth as good an education as the German youth."⁵⁸ The presence of large numbers of German clerks in London who appeared to out-compete British clerks for positions seemed to confirm the belief that German education and commerce had surpassed that of the British. *The Fortnightly Review* argued that knowledge and skill would be the deciding factors in

⁵⁶Charles E. Musgrave, *The London Chamber of Commerce. From 1881 to 1914: A Retrospective Appreciation*, (London: 1914), 66-69; *Journal of London Chamber of Commerce*, Vol. VI, No. 66, 5 August, 1887.

⁵⁷Musgrave, *The London Chamber of Commerce*, 66. Musgrave held the position of Assistant Secretary from 1884-1909.

⁵⁸*The Spectator*, 14 August, 1886, 1078.

Britain's competition with Germany and that the German clerk was representative of Germany's current competitive edge.

There can be little doubt that the country is at last alive to the fact that the doctrine of competition has developed a new phase. Thirty years ago we rejoiced in the competition of goods; today, however, we are confronted with another form of competition—that of men with intellect and well adapted to fight the battle of today. Our opponent in this new war is the German clerk; he assumes many forms and plays many parts, but in one and all of these he steadily makes his way in every country and in every large city in the world against his English rival.⁵⁹

Clerks were encouraged to keep up with their German rivals and were often harshly scolded for their complaints that they could not compete.

One of the abominations of modern life is the frequent use of the word "Can't." "I really can't do it." "Really, my dear fellow, I can't!" "Why?" "I haven't time!" Such answers as these one is accustomed to hear if anything in the shape of work or study is suggested. In these days of keen competition, when everything moves at high pressure on the go-ahead principle, there is no room for the word "can't." It must be torn out of our vocabulary and cast from us as an "unclean thing".

Nowhere does one hear more of this objectionable word than among young men, where its enervating influence is often apparent. We hear much in the present day of the difficulty young men have in competing with foreigners, especially in offices and warehouses.⁶⁰

It was up to the individual clerk to be competitive as it was suggested that the modern labour marketplace would employ the best clerks, regardless of national origin.

We hail the presence of the foreigner amongst us, and we don't object to his coming; what we do object to is his willingness to work for less wages than we if he is fitter to do our work than ourselves, we don't grudge him the distinction, but rather we look upon his presence as an incentive to raise our professional status by aiming at a higher standard of qualification.⁶¹

⁵⁹Fortnightly Review, Vol. 66, 533.

⁶⁰"I Can't," Forward!, November, 1887, Vol. 1, No. 8, 90.

⁶¹Cardinal Manning, Lady Dilke, John Morley, and Sir Benjamin Browne, Clerks' And Shop Assistants' Of Both Sexes. Their Grievances, Position, And Advancement. With Hints For Self-Culture And Valuable Suggestions Thereon (Gateshead: 1890), 17.

In promoting the strengths and virtues of the German clerk, to which the British clerk was to aspire, the identity of the British clerk ultimately suffered. Although those promoting a rigorous system of commercial and technical education rarely directly blamed the British clerk for his shortcomings, he was clearly perceived to be competitively deficient and educationally malformed in comparison to his superior continental counterpart.⁶² This led to the suggestion by some that the competition and realities of the modern international marketplace demanded that clerks, regardless of the premium their skills commanded in the past, be paid in accordance with their present worth to business.

Nothing is more natural or more common than to see sympathy asked for and bestowed upon the clerk who works hard with his pen for forty years, and yet never earns more than a hundred a year. It seems to many people utterly unjust that clerical work should not somehow or other be able to command a greater share of the good things of life than it in fact does command. While other forms of labour are not regarded as underpaid so long as the competition of the market leaves those engaged in them at least enough to support life, the clerk with £2 a week is looked on as an object of compassion by all classes. Yet in truth, the feeling is chiefly a sentimental one. In a country where education has become universal, mere clerk's work is not skilled labour; and the man who uses the pen has, in the nature of things, no better right to expect high pay than has he who uses the chisel or the trowel.⁶³

Foreign competition for clerical positions was a reflection of greater structural changes in clerical employment. The clerical labour market was

⁶²In the same editorial in which the editor of *Forward!* chastised British clerks for complaining that they could not compete with foreigners he also took great pains to point out their weaknesses. "English clerks find it difficult to compete with foreigners, especially Germans. Why? The case may be simply stated thus:—Say, for instance, a German enters an office or warehouse as a clerk; he brings a high-class education, a knowledge of two languages at least, and is therefore of great value to his employer. With the Englishman, as a rule, there is not such a high-class education, and rarely does he bring into the market knowledge of more than one language, and that imperfect." Ibid.

⁶³"Education and Wages," *The Spectator*, 2 October, 1886, 1303-1304.

growing, businesses were increasing in size, international trade was expanding, and universal education was providing a new class of young men with rudimentary clerical skills. A broad labour base and the beginning of the gradual shift in the office structure from an organic and paternalistic unit to a rigid hierarchy made pre-learned office skills more valuable. The hiring of highly-skilled German clerks by many London firms indicated that salaries were becoming primarily contingent on the skills brought into the clerical labour market. For, as "Codanus" harshly enlightened his fellow clerks in a letter to *Tit-Bits*,

The average English clerk gets as much salary as he is worth, and that is certainly not so much as the average German clerk . . . ought to get; surely you would not expect a man who has barely managed his multiplication table, and knows little or nothing of decimal fractions of the "rule of three," and takes a couple of hours to compose a short and simple business letter, to be paid at the same rate as a man who has received a college education, and is capable of corresponding in half-a-dozen different languages? The English clerk does not suffer from the "German" invasion," simply "because the German clerk does not compete with him, but does the work which the English clerk cannot or will not do!"⁶⁴

As mentioned, however, the common charge by British clerks, was that German clerks, despite any advantage in skill, were willing to work for salaries at lower than subsistence levels. "Umberto" complained to *The Clerk* in 1890 that the practice of German clerks coming to London to work for a few years to gain British business experience had robbed London clerks of their livelihood.⁶⁵

The anxiety resulting from unemployment, whatever the perceived cause, continually haunted clerks as they struggled to find positions that paid

⁶⁴"Correspondence: The Germans Abroad", *Tit-Bits*, 11 July, 1885, 200.

⁶⁵*The Clerk*, 1 August, 1890, Vol. I, No. 4, 62.

enough to maintain the attributes of a respectable lifestyle. In 1873 *The City Service Gazette* maintained that because of unemployment clerks "are exposed to the bitterest privations," and "at least in too many instances, reduced to a state bordering on starvation."⁶⁶ It argued that clerks were hit harder by unemployment than artisans and labourers as such workers were "not in nearly such a hopeless and helpless plight as those who, by the nature of their habitual work and their training, are unable . . . to eke out their subsistence by odd jobs or by casual work."⁶⁷ Although clerks appear to have suffered from similar levels of unemployment as other workers in the Great Depression of 1873-1896, they suffered heavily as their training and nature, which prevented them from turning to shovels or pickaxes during economic downturns, limited them to jobs which called for mental rather than physical abilities.⁶⁸ There were few avenues of lateral mobility open to clerks even in times of low unemployment. Most clerks had the experience of only one particular office or trade and were often unsuited for the work in other businesses or industries. An unemployed bank clerk in his twenties would have had little luck in obtaining a position as a law or insurance clerk and would have been too old to enter the civil service or local government.

Pearson's Weekly, Answers and *Tit-Bits* were filled with letters from clerks complaining of a dearth of well-paying clerical positions. Their letters highlight the hardships faced by unemployed clerks but also indicate that

⁶⁶"Clerks Out of Work", *The City Service Gazette*, Vol. 1, No., 8 January, 1873, 3.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸For an examination of unemployment rates during the Great Depression see S. B. Saul, *The Myth of the Great Depression, 1873-1896* (London: 1969), 30.

clerks overwhelmingly sought to better their situation through individual action rather than combination. A clerk identifying himself as "Ajax" writing in *Pearson's Weekly* in September 1890 asked why so many "honest and industrious" clerks were out of work. Instead of focusing his blame on economic downturns or clerical employers, (he noted that he was "not a Political Scientist or Social Democrat"), he argued that there was clerical unemployment: "*Because workers do not make themselves useful enough*".⁶⁹ The era of Lamb, where it was perceived that clerks were hired and kept on as long as their writing and arithmetic skills were satisfactory, had long since passed. Ajax maintained that clerks had to show self-reliance, discipline and perseverance if they were to succeed in late-nineteenth century England.

How many clerks, for instance, content themselves with writing a fairly good hand and being able to total up a column of figures, when a little persevering and push would place them in command of shorthand, typewriting, and, perhaps, a language or two. If a clerk thus equipped is out of work it is his own fault, for there will always be plenty of employment for him if he chooses to seek it.⁷⁰

Men of respectability when faced with hardship did not complain and wear their sufferings on their sleeves, but bettered themselves, so argued "Ajax" and other clerks. "A. G. B.", a clerk living in Kensington, thought "Ajax's" answer to clerical unemployment "sensible enough", and stated that "(w)e should hear a great deal less of the distress which lack of employment brings, if only men . . . who are dependent upon their own exertions for a livelihood

⁶⁹Readers' Letter Box: Why Are So Many Out of Work?" *Pearson's Weekly*, 6 September, 1890, 102.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

could make themselves useful 'all round'".⁷¹ This belief in self-reliance was an integral part of clerking culture. Material improvement was to come through self-help and, for the most part, solitary perseverance. Faith in self-improvement helped to tranquilize clerks against their ever present anxieties regarding low pay, unemployment, and unachieved ambitions.

Schooled in the principles of self-help propounded by writers such as Samuel Smiles,⁷² many clerks argued that it was up to the individual clerk to improve his position. Like Smiles, they offered examples of men who had escaped their humble origins through disciplined office work and training. In an article on "The Clerks Who Rise" which appeared in *Tit-Bits* in 1885 the author maintained that certain clerks found themselves out of work or in subordinate office positions "all their lives", because they were "of no special value to their employers." The onus for advancement and material improvement rested with the clerk, as it was upheld that "he must make his services so valuable to the house that they [his employers] cannot afford to do without him."⁷³ An example of such a man was provided in the figure of the wealthy Liverpool merchant, Sir Joseph Walmsley, who began his career as a clerk to grain merchants on a £40 per year salary. Walmsley, it was argued, first gained the trust and confidence of his initial employers by acquiring, through diligent study, a knowledge of the grain trade better than anyone else in the office. From here he was able to rise in the office and eventually

⁷¹"Readers' Letter Box: Why Are So Many Out of Work?" *Pearson's Weekly*, 13 September, 1890, 118.

⁷²See Chapter Two.

⁷³Anonymous Clerk, "The Clerks Who Rise," *Tit-Bits*, Vol. 7, No. 176, 28 February, 1885, 320.

establish a business of his own. It was pressed on clerks that this was but one of countless opportunities "which are constantly being neglected by clerks . . . who will not take the trouble to find out how they can be of special use to their employers."⁷⁴

Despite examples such as Walmsley's to follow, clerks struggled to position themselves for well-paying and stable positions. Writing to *Tit-Bits* in 1888, "John Clerk" commented on the distinct situation facing clerks during economic downturns. Although conceding that unemployment brought grief to all concerned workers, he nonetheless maintained, "that there are two equally large and deserving sections of unemployed, and that one section gets all the attention, whilst the other generally gets none."⁷⁵ Defining one section as "clerks" and the other as "artisans" ("men who earn their living by their muscle") he argued that artisans had caught the public's ear and that clerks needed to find and exercise agencies of their own.

Now, as the artisans seem to be getting so much attention and clerks so little, I feel sure that *Tit-Bits*, an old friend to them, will be willing to further open its columns for their benefit. "Clerks" may be half-starving, but no Lord Mayor of London will open up a list of subscriptions for their aid; no form of relief works will probably be opened or suggested to keep their body and soul together.⁷⁶

In distinguishing clerks and their avenues of agency from those who earned their living through their muscle, "John Clerk" highlighted a significant component of clerking identity--self-improvement. Clerks joined together for advice and mutual support (in the case of benevolent and social

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵"Correspondence: What Will Pay Best?" *Tit-Bits*, 18 February, 1888, 296.

⁷⁶Ibid.

institutions) but they rarely combined to demand alteration in the employer/clerk relationship.

"John Clerk's" call for a discussion in *Tit-Bits* on the ways in which clerks' positions could be improved, such as in regard to work habits and "the advantages and prospects of the different qualifications (i.e. languages and shorthand) which it is in the power of clerks to go in for. . . .", met with an enthusiastic response.⁷⁷ A former clerk, currently employed as a "Town Traveller", maintained that ambition and self-improvement would "pay best for clerks" as "the best situations are kept by what are generally termed good all-round men."⁷⁸ He reasoned that a clerk would only advance and obtain security of employment through his own actions. For example, he argued that "a clerk who has taken an interest in the duties of his fellow clerk, so as to be able to take their place in their absence, would be, I think, one whom his employer would hesitate to part with."⁷⁹ He used his own employment situation as a model for clerks as he propounded the virtues of self-reliance.

. . . I have been in my present situation 15 years, and though I am now travelling for the firm, yet I can (and do, when required) go into the office, to do work in any department that may be in arrears with its work. During the term of my service I have seen clerks come, and clerks go, who, had they been able to or willing to do work other than what they choose to particularize as their own, might have kept their situations. . . .

My advice, then, to clerks who are in situations is, aim at perfection in your own particular duties, and learn to, and be willing to, perform the duties of your fellow clerks, even of the manager himself, if there is one; and to those unfortunate ones who are not in employment I would say, review your past experience, find out in what you were deficient, and resolve that when you do get another situation you will not

⁷⁷*Ibid.*; *Tit-Bits*, 10 March, 1888, 344; and, *Tit-Bits*, 24 March, 1888, 376.

⁷⁸"Correspondence: What Will Pay Best?" *Tit-Bits*, 10 March, 1888, 344.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

lose it through inability to do whatever circumstances in reason demand.⁸⁰

Charles Burrows, a former clerk and head of the Pitman's shorthand school's Situation Bureau, readily agreed with "Town Traveller's" emphasis on diligence and self-reliance. He argued that clerks needed to be more aware of the requisite attributes to be hired and kept on in well-paying situations as clerking demanded far more than the basic reading and writing skills developed in the London Board schools.

If you advertise for a clerk you often get hundreds of answers, and yet if you took the trouble to read them through, you would be astonished to find that anyone who is out of a situation considers himself just the man to apply for the post of clerk, even if he can only read and write, and sometimes with very little of the latter. If you weed out the incompetent and those who cannot write a business hand, a comparatively small number will remain, amongst whom the choice will really lie.⁸¹

The clerk's individual effort would allow him to effectively compete for a position, so reasoned Burrows. He went on to suggest that in many ways "a good clerk is a business man," as "many a young fellow who has entered an office . . . has, by his ability in executing little commissions accidentally added to his work, and his ability being thus recognized and every occasion improved upon, . . . has often become indispensable, and in some cases the factotum of his principal, and his pay and position have improved accordingly."⁸² The perceived means to success was individual, not class or group effort for, as Geoffrey Crossick has rightly ascertained, "the white collar

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

work situation encouraged the conception of a social order in which achievement and failure depended upon individual initiative and energy."⁸³

As discussed in Chapter Two, proper office behavior and character were continually emphasized through clerical training. The emphasis placed on individual effort and self-discipline regarding office conduct was just as pronounced when issues concerning clerical employability were discussed. In some cases female and foreign labour, miserly or indifferent employers and lack of public support for their plight were blamed for the economic hardship of clerks. Far more often, however, clerks blamed themselves for their failings and explored avenues for self-improvement. In 1888 *Young Men: A Journal Specially Devoted to the Interests of Young Men*⁸⁴ argued that far too often clerks simply assumed they were suitable candidates for positions because of a cursory education in reading, writing and classical literature. Such an education was deemed to be quite unsatisfactory in producing clerks with a proficiency in business. London was teeming with clerks "who, having been imperfectly trained to business habits, or not allowing business requirements their due supremacy, become half-hearted dawdlers, neither

⁸³Geoffrey Crossick, "The Emergence of the Lower Middle Class in Britain: A Discussion," 46.

⁸⁴This journal ran from January to April 1888. It had articles dealing with emigration, physical exercise, football, clerking, and other activities of interest to young men in London. Most significantly, it emphasized self-improvement, as witnessed in its introductory number. "It is our ambition to assist in making our readers the finest all-round fellow in the world,—or rather, as already there are none finer than those in the Islands, the finest they are capable of becoming,—whether in college, home, or business. As all-round improvement includes the moral, the intellectual, and the physical faculties, and necessitates knowledge of what has been and may be achieved, our field of action is wide; yet whatever great pursuit in active life interests young men, will interest us, and we intend to ignore nothing." *Young Men: A Journal Specially Devoted to the Interests of Young Men*, 7 January, 1888, 1.

hot nor cold, and consequently the reverse of what an employer seeks."⁸⁵

One's educational background was deemed insignificant as "'well-educated clerks are those, and only those, who can perform clerky duties well."⁸⁶ The onus was placed on the clerk, not the employer, to meditate on how to become indispensable to the office and to set out a plan of study and habits to ensure his future success.

At one time—and perhaps even now—it was customary to speak of 'finishing' one's education, but no youth, not born a fool, is likely to expect success in life unless he (or she) is prepared to 'scorn delights and live laborious days' for many years after ordinary instruction in the day school has ceased. The leisure hours of the first few years of office life should be almost exclusively devoted to studies directly bearing upon the business in which a young man is engaged, as the qualifications acquired before the age of, say, 23 will materially influence his prospects of promotion.⁸⁷

Houlston's handbook *The Clerk* reinforced the notion that continual and diligent training was the only avenue to clerical success. Naive acceptance of a position, once attained, was to be avoided at all costs.

To be well acquainted with all the subjects usually taught at school is no sure road to the performance of the technical duties of an office, and if a boy has not the *aptitude* for the groove in life into which he has been pushed, and be very clever, as well as very industrious, this friendly introduction to a counting-house, or success in a competitive examination for a Government post, may too often prove a wet blanket to all his ardent aspirations. . . .

It is to be feared that this is a correct outline of the history of ninety-nine out of a hundred of the "clerks" in this great metropolis. . . . They are educated by chance—they are educated in the technicalities of their duties by chance—and it is a mere chance if they ever earn more than

⁸⁵"Well-Educated Clerks," *Young Men: A Journal Specially Devoted to the Interests of Young Men*, 24 March, 1888, 7.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Thomas E. Maw, "The Public Library in Commercial Life," *The Office and Commercial Student's Journal*, March, 1905, No. 4, 55-56. Maw was the Chief librarian of King's Lynn.

enough to maintain themselves, or if they ever deserve even these scanty earnings!⁸⁸

Employability and promotion would not, it was argued, be achieved through the benevolence of an employer or industrial action. Even the clerk's liminality and hardships were often blamed on clerks' lack of self-discipline and career ambition.

To a great extent the insignificance of the clerk rests with that individual alone. He gets into a more or less contented state, travelling through life in a groove; and at the time he reaches middle age he is no better off than when he started, excepting that his exchequer is increased by a few pounds annually.⁸⁹

Intelligence and ability would only carry the product of a lower middle or working class background so far. The gospel of self-improvement was preached to, and by, clerks as the only means in which agency over their precarious work and social positions could be exercised. Self-improvement would, however, require untiring ambition and energy.

It is not so much the question of ability that decides whether or not a clerk shall succeed in business, as a matter of whether or not he possesses that indomitable determination to success, and whether he is willing or not to use such untiring energy as is necessary to sweep from his path all those minor difficulties, the eradication of which will bring out and develop those qualities in a man which make for success. the man who can conquer small difficulties can overcome big ones, and the man who has the patience to grapple with the smaller details of business becomes capable of negotiating larger affairs. Above all, the clerk must be keen on his business, keen as a razor, and he will carve his way to success.⁹⁰

Clerks who complained about harsh working conditions, low pay, unemployment, and competition from women or foreign clerks were scolded

⁸⁸Houlston and Sons, Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 7: The Clerk, 8-9.

⁸⁹Haslehurst Greaves, The Commercial Clerk And His Success, 8-9.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 10.

for their failings. Hardship resulted from internal, not external factors. When one clerk, identifying himself as "An Anxious One", complained to the editor of *Forward!: The Official Organ of the Church of England Young Men's Society*, that although twenty-six years of age, his salary was too low for him and his fiancée to marry, he was sharply rebuked by a fellow clerk for not improving himself and instead griping about his employer's unwillingness to raise his salary.⁹¹ A larger salary and marriage were for clerks who helped themselves.

Far better would it be for such young men to postpone the idea of marriage for the present, and seek to spend their leisure time usefully. There is plenty of work in the Church and in the world for willing hands to do. "An Anxious One" complains that his "governor" (his employer, I presume) will not raise his salary to the extent of £20. In these days of competition employers have, more than ever before, to take into consideration the value of their servants, and if "An Anxious One" desires to know how he may earn a larger salary, I would advise him to drop "rinking" in the winter, and devote his leisure hours to the acquisition of shorthand, book-keeping, French, German, or anything that may prove valuable in business.⁹²

London teemed with thousands of black-coated young men whose salaries would not support marriage until their late twenties. Although single and emasculated by years of celibate living, these clerks seldom found sympathetic ears to their plight. Once again they were often chastised, this time for not bettering themselves before they entertained thoughts of matrimony. One writer suggested that marriage before self-improvement reflected selfishness and poor business sense.

It has been said by some that a clerk should not be married till such time as he is in a proper financial state to keep a wife and family,

⁹¹"An Anxious One" was asking for a raise of £20 per annum. "Letters to the Editor: 'An Anxious One'," *Forward!* Vol. 1, No. 5., August 1887, 60.

⁹²"Letters to the Editor: 'X.Y.Z.'," *Forward!* Vol. 1, No. 6., September 1887, 72.

and although it may at first glance appear a somewhat selfish law to lay down, it is a certainty that very many clerks do make this fatal mistake, with the result that they are continually in financial trouble. No one can foresee misfortune, but a man of moderate income should not, in fact has no right, to run into danger and blame others if calamity comes later on.⁹³

The language of numerous handbooks and guides instructed young clerks on the financial responsibilities of marriage and encouraged them to delay engagement until a promising clerical future was realized.

... engagements are to be avoided as incompatible with clerical dependence of early life, and opposed to the steadfastness of application that business demands. If freedom from anxiety and uniform cheerfulness of temper are to be maintained, no superfluous cares will be undertaken.⁹⁴

While some employers forbid marriage until a salary suitable for sustaining a marriage was reached, the culture of respectability usually provided enough of a check against a clerk marrying before he could afford to "keep" himself and his wife in a respectable lifestyle. Shan Bullock's *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk* reflected this practice in the low-paid Thorne's concealment of his wedding and marriage, for fear of rebuke and mockery, from his superiors and fellow civil service clerks.⁹⁵ For London's vast population of single male clerks the parental home or lodging house provided shelter until a marriage-sustainable salary was achieved. They served as continual reminders of the clerk's delayed entry into adulthood.

A means by which clerks sought to improve their prospects was through the study and attainment of new skills, such as shorthand, languages

⁹³Anonymous, "Clerks' Wages: Are Things As Black As They Are Painted?" *The Office Journal*, 6 March, 1909, 18.

⁹⁴Houlston and Sons, *Houlston's Industrial Library, No. 7: The Clerk*, 39.

⁹⁵Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, 168-170.

and, in a few cases, typewriting. With reading, writing and arithmetic available universally since 1870, many clerks sought talents which would provide them with an advantage in obtaining and flourishing in a position. The value of acquiring such skills was, however, a subject of considerable debate amongst clerks. Indeed it is difficult to find a journal with a significant clerical readership during these years that did not at some point have an article or an ongoing discussion on the value of shorthand and languages to clerks. Countless books and journals were published under the patronage of Pitman's and other shorthand schools lauding the virtues of their systems to clerks.⁹⁶ Although the influence of such partisan literature is difficult to gauge, a widespread debate on the importance of shorthand to a clerk's self-improvement had developed by the 1880s. Clerks were bombarded with tales of how a knowledge of shorthand would lead to higher salaries and respect by the office principal. For example, representatives of Pitman's regularly gave lectures to the educational classes of the YMCA on the significance of shorthand in London's offices. In some cases Herbert or Isaac Pitman personally addressed such gatherings.⁹⁷ The promised financial gain to the young junior clerk earning £30 -£50 a year was considerable. For, as H. C. Nisbet of Pitman's promised the young men of the Y.M.C.A. at Exeter Hall in November 1881, "if I teach a young man shorthand, as I have often done by the help of others, I consider that it is *the equivalent of giving him an annual*

⁹⁶Some of the more popular guides were By a Law Clerk, An Easy and Rapid Method of Learning Shorthand at Sight (London: 1899); Frederick Pitman, How to Get Speed in Shorthand (London: 1884); and Isaac Pitman, The Phonographic Railway Phrase Book: An Adaptation of Phonography to the Requirements of Railway Business and Correspondence (London: 1889).

⁹⁷Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, November, 1881, Vol. 27, 165; and The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal, November, 1885, No. 23, 252.

annuity of £20 to £30 for the rest of his natural life."⁹⁸ One journal maintained that shorthand's "usefulness is second only in an office to that of accountancy."⁹⁹ Voices promoting the acquisition of shorthand by clerks did not just come from those who stood to gain from the expansion of its teaching. In 1884 *Cassell's Family Magazine* in an article on "Remunerative Employments for Gentlemen" commented on the increased emphasis being placed on shorthand; noting that "the subject is one which is already receiving a large and increasing share of attention from managers and . . . good shorthand writers are even now in considerable demand." The article went on to suggest that such was the demand that a good shorthand writer could even pick up an extra one to three guineas an evening as a reporter.¹⁰⁰

The acquisition of shorthand was represented as a concrete and tangible means of self-improvement. It promised employability, higher pay and respect. Clerks had it in their power to improve their job and, thus, alleviate their material anxieties by showing their worth to their employers through their shorthand skills.

Shorthand is amongst the first of the necessary accomplishments of the modern Clerk. The immense advantage it gives to the business and professional man has brought it into universal use, and it has come to stay with us.

In these times, when Clerks strive to fit themselves for higher positions, Shorthand must not be neglected. The Clerk who

⁹⁸Young Men's Christian Association: Monthly Notes, December, 1881, Vol. 28, 175. Emphasis is from the original.

⁹⁹"Qualifications For Office Work," The Office: A Weekly Journal Devoted to the Writing World—Manual and Mechanical, 13 October, 1888. 4.

¹⁰⁰Anon, "Remunerative Employments for Gentlemen," Cassell's Family Magazine, June 1884, 366-367. The next year Cassell's sponsored an "Amateur Shorthand Championship", judged by Pitman's, and awarded five guineas to the winner. Cassell's Family Magazine, February 1885, 128 and Sept. 1885, 576.

does not include it in his list of accomplishments stands but a poor chance in the competition of the present day.¹⁰¹

This exposé, published in the journal of the General Railway Clerks' Association in 1898, typifies the pro-shorthand discourse of the period in its assertion that shorthand was a necessity in the office as competition for clerical positions increased. Some writers, however, took their argument a step further and suggested that shorthand was a means by which fit clerks could be separated from the unfit.

If shorthand were universally required of clerks I believe it would have the good effect of diminishing the constantly large numbers of unsuitable candidates for clerkships; hence the prospects and status of competent clerks would be improved and there would be gradual diminution of that heavy fringe of clerks who are wretchedly poor all their lives owing to their not having the natural ability to take, or perseverance enough to prepare themselves for higher positions as their years and responsibilities increase. Were shorthand required of every clerk it would improve in many cases the faculty of perseverance. Most young men are aware that, even in these days, it is a great advantage to know shorthand, yet how many thousands begin to learn it, but from lack of perseverance never thoroughly acquire it!¹⁰²

Not only was shorthand a useful tool, but the *perseverance* required to learn it would act as measure of a clerk's worthiness for employment. Clerks had to be willing, adaptable, and self-reliant enough to learn shorthand or any other skills which the office of the present or future required.

. . . I fear that the non-success of a large proportion of clerks arises from natural causes or indifference; a want of brain power, a lack of self-confidence, ambition, industry, perseverance, order, punctuality, and so on. Though I believe that the thorough acquisition of French, Spanish, German or Italian is sure in these days to improve the prospects of clerks, a perfect knowledge of

¹⁰¹"Shorthand," *Nibs and Quills*, 1 December, 1898, Vol. 1, No. 1, 7.

¹⁰²Arthur James Cook, *Shorthand Clerks* 2nd edition (Hendon: 1912), 7-8. This is a reissue of the first edition of this pamphlet, which was published in 1888 as "A Paper Read Before The "Shorthand Society."

shorthand will always be more universally required. The clerk of the future will undoubtedly have to be a shorthand writer. Salaries do not perhaps always increase in strict proportion to the accomplishments required of clerks, for greater accomplishments are penalties exacted from us by the progress of civilization, which introduces new and more scientific modes of working; still, the acquisition of shorthand will considerably improve the prospects of a clerk.¹⁰³

Clerks were drawn into the discussion about the value of shorthand, sometimes on a discussion of the various methods, but more significantly on its value. Many clerks found that shorthand was not the stepping-stone to employer-confidence and promotion that its proponents had promised. In 1894 a clerk identifying himself as "M.P.S." asked *Answers* to open up its columns to a discussion on "whether shorthand is useful to a clerk?"¹⁰⁴ He maintained that shorthand was an impediment to promotion as employers assigned clerks with shorthand skills to letter writing and copying and tended to keep them employed at these tasks. Thus, the average clerk found himself "with little chance of proving his value to the employer."¹⁰⁵ Instead of empowering the clerk, he argued, shorthand furthered the life of dearth and drudgery faced by London's clerks.

Should he venture to ask for an increase of salary he is gently reminded that there are many others who would gladly fill his place at even a smaller sum. Night after night the phonographer who has devoted time and money to the acquirement of the 'winged art', will be found the last to leave, as experience teaches that no sooner has he got his hat and coat on than he is called back down to take another letter.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁴The debate which this first letter prompted raged in *Answers* from March 24 until May 19, 1894.

¹⁰⁵"Editorial Chat: Letter to the Editor from 'M.P.S.,'" *Answers*, 24 March, 1894, 322.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

Most clerks agreed with "M.P.S.'s" depiction of the typical shorthand clerk. John Jukes argued that shorthand prevented junior clerks from acquiring new and necessary office skills.

At the end of a three years' occupancy of a situation he [the junior clerk] is just as valuable to his firm as he was at the beginning, or at least at the end of the first month.

During these years he has got no insight into real business. he has learnt nothing.¹⁰⁷

A similar sentiment was voiced by an anonymous clerk in *Pearson's Weekly* four years later as he warned clerks of the dangers of shorthand and the short-term gains it provided.

Clerks consider that although a man may obtain a pretty good salary, for a commencement, over others in the office, owing to his knowledge of this subject, yet in the majority of cases he is kept at his work all his life, everlastingly sticking to the role of taking down letters and transcribing them, whilst the others are getting accustomed to general office work, and becoming familiar with all the details of business routine.

When, therefore, a vacancy occurs, or there is need for promotion, the shorthand clerk has not much chance of obtaining it, and is passed over, owing to his inability to do other work than that of transcription.¹⁰⁸

Jukes and this anonymous clerk recognized that their fellow clerks needed to exercise self-reliance and to quickly communicate their utility to their employers. Although employers required shorthand clerks for taking and copying letters, they did not demonstrate a sense of obligation to ensure that they were trained for anything more. Meanwhile, the competition for shorthand positions, brought about by an oversupply of applicants, kept salaries low.¹⁰⁹ Jukes cautioned his fellow clerk to avoid being trapped in a

¹⁰⁷"Answers' Parliament (Letters to the Editor): John S. Jukes, 'Is Shorthand Worth Learning?,' *Answers*, 7 April, 1894, 355.

¹⁰⁸Anon, "Is Shorthand Desirable?" *Pearson's Weekly*, 5 November, 1898, 274. This article touched off a debate in the correspondence column of the magazine in following issues under the heading "Is Shorthand Desirable?"

situation where he simply "finds he is qualified to work from eight to nine hours a day, driving his pen over paper as hard as he can scratch, for the magnificent salary of from twenty to thirty shillings a week!"¹¹⁰ One writer to *Answers* suggested that with vast numbers of shorthand clerks obliged to settle for salaries of one pound per week or less, that perhaps the time had come "to inquire whether or not it is possible to even avoid starvation by a knowledge of shorthand."¹¹¹ "Briton", a Glasgow shorthand clerk before his firm went bankrupt, supported these assertions that shorthand was not a harbinger of substantive remuneration or employment.

Though I can write 115 words a minute comfortably, and 140 at a pinch, though I held my first and only appointment four years, and have excellent testimonials, I have been "out of collar" ever since. I have inserted nineteen advertisements in Glasgow papers, and have answered over 600 others without result. I was offered fifteen shillings a week a short time ago. . . . It is not a living wage.¹¹²

Not all clerks, however, considered a knowledge of shorthand as sentence to a lifetime of low pay, career stagnation, and monotonous work. Some agreed with the argument that it enabled the ambitious clerk to make contact with, and prove his usefulness to, his employer. "J. K. L." maintained that he would never have been able to rise to the position of business manager in his office had he not had a knowledge of shorthand.

¹⁰⁹Jukes claimed that he was "told that there are now estimated to be over 100,000 people in the islands who have attained and are attaining proficiency in shorthand". Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹*Answers*' Parliament (Letters to the Editor): "Is Shorthand Played Out," *Answers*, 9 February, 1895, 211. This was the first letter in another debate on the value of shorthand, this time under the heading "Is Shorthand Played Out?", which ran in *Answers* until 6 April, 1895.

¹¹²*Answers*' Parliament (Letters to the Editor): By 'Briton', "Is Shorthand Played Out," *Answers*, 23 February, 1895, 247.

. . . shorthand is an excellent stepping stone, inasmuch as it often enables one to get in the thin of the wedge, where otherwise one might have been obliged to stand aside and look on. In my case, I entered the firm in which I am now employed, at the age of seventeen as shorthand clerk at a salary of fifteen shillings a week. By keeping my eyes skinned, I was able, by reason of frequent contact with the heads of the firm, to pick up many useful bits of knowledge, and it was not long before I was offered a much better position in which shorthand played no part.¹¹³

If a clerk found himself stagnating, the problem was not shorthand, but what he did with it. Once again an ideology of self-improvement infused many clerks with the belief that they alone determined their fate. Self-improvement did not end with competence in shorthand. As "J. K. L." explained, "if a fellow learns shorthand and then goes into an office as correspondence clerk, with no ambition to rise higher, and with no perceptive faculties, he is likely to remain a correspondence clerk for the best part of his life."¹¹⁴ By the 1900s when a knowledge of shorthand was commonplace and male clerks faced increased competition from female shorthand writers, the debates over the value of the "winged art" were just as fierce and undecided. A debate was launched by a clerk identifying himself as "Experientia Docet" in *The Law Clerk* in September 1906 after his own polling on shorthand's value found clerks in profound disagreement on the subject. "The views that were held were curiously divergent, some saying that Shorthand was an incalculable advantage, while others contended that it amounted to a hindrance, having regard to the fact that a good shorthand-typist was usually kept in that position and not allowed the opportunity of

¹¹³Letter to "Page 20" (Correspondence Page), by 'J. K. L.', *Pearson's Weekly*, 19 November, 1898, 328.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

showing his capacity in any other office work."¹¹⁵ The debate that followed in the next few months' issues of the journal reflected this difference of opinion concerning shorthand's value.¹¹⁶ Underlying both sides of the argument, however, was the unwavering conviction that it was up to the individual clerk to make his mark within the office. In short, the point of the debate was over "whether it would not be better to apply one's energies in some other direction."¹¹⁷ The editors of *The Law Clerk* jumped into the debate in January 1907 with an editorial on "The Value of Shorthand, The Stenographer's Status, and What is to be done!"¹¹⁸ Once again it was maintained that it was up to the individual clerk to make his mark within the office and that shorthand, while perhaps limiting the unambitious clerk to a life of drudgery, would not impede, and perhaps aid, the ambitious clerk's career.

The question . . . arises "what is best to be done?" In the first place, it seems to be unwise, if it be possible to avoid it, to take a situation merely as a shorthand clerk at all. If, however the situation is taken, the thing most urgently to be guarded against is that of getting into what we may class the "shorthand groove." The clerk must watch for opportunities to take in hand other work—indeed, he must seek for these opportunities. An offer to assist other clerks in their duties (when they do not seriously interfere with his own) will always be welcome. A hint

¹¹⁵Letter from 'Experientia Docet': "Is Shorthand Worth Learning," *The Law Clerk*, September 1906, Vol. 1, No. 7, 97. "Docet" went on to explain why he believed a debate on the question "Is Shorthand Worth Learning" was of importance to clerks. "As the acquisition of a knowledge of shorthand involves a considerable expenditure of time, work, and expense, it seems to me that a discussion of the question whether this particular game is really worth the candle, would prove of distinct service to the general body of law clerks, and if my fellow clerks, who are readers of your paper, would contribute their views, there would be, perhaps, a chance of arriving at the right conclusion."

¹¹⁶*The Law Clerk*, October 1906, Vol. 1, No. 8, 115; November 1906, Vol. 1, No. 9, 129-130; December 1906, Vol. 1, No. 10, 149; and, January 1907, Vol. 1, No. 11, 163.

¹¹⁷*The Law Clerk*, November 1906, Vol. 1, No. 9, 130.

¹¹⁸Editorial: "Whereas: The Value of Shorthand, The Stenographer's Status, and What is to be done!" *The Law Clerk*, January 1907, Vol. 1, No. 11, 155-156.

can be dropped delicately to those above him that he would like the opportunity of showing his capabilities in other directions. As a last resource he must even go direct to the principal. The fact that he is brought more than the other clerks into contact with his principal should help him in this.¹¹⁹

As seen, central to this argument was the conviction that employers would recognize and reward individual merit. While most clerks maintained their faith in this they were also more than aware of the employer's desire to economize. By the 1890s clerks believed that this was increasingly achieved through the hiring of female clerks.

The gradual feminisation of clerical work began in the late-nineteenth century but, as Jane Lewis has recognised, "women were not hired *en masse* to replace male clerks. The process of feminisation was slow."¹²⁰ This may have been true, but from the 1851 census, when they accounted for only 2,000 of the 95,000 clerks in England and Wales, women clerks' numbers had grown to 166,000 of the 843,000 clerks in 1911.¹²¹ Most of this growth occurred after 1890. For example, in London the number of female commercial clerks grew from 6,792 in 1891 to 31,920 in 1911.¹²² They were generally hired to perform specific office tasks, such as typing, and were rarely salaried. Moreover, in larger private and public offices they were usually separated

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Jane Lewis, "Women Clerical Workers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in Gregory Anderson, The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870 (New York: 1988), 31. For a further examination of women joining the British workforce see Jane Lewis, Women In England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change (Brighton, Sussex: 1984).

¹²¹Klingender, 235; and, 1911 census returns.

¹²²1891 and 1911 census returns.

from their male counterparts and placed into "Ladies Departments". Even then they were forced to leave their positions once they married. Less than one percent of female clerks in 1911 were married. However, as the work of R. Guerriero Wilson has indicated, complementing previous scholarship on the feminisation of clerical labour, this influx of women clerks did not play much of a role in the low salaries paid to their male counterparts.¹²³ Female clerks probably only brought clerical salaries down by their presence in a labour market that had a large low end at which entry could be achieved by means of a rudimentary Board school education. Work that demanded anything more than the most basic skills of the "3Rs" placed women into different categories, often based on skills such as typewriting, but largely due to gender, and paid them less. In the civil service,¹²⁴ for example, "Women Clerkships", started at £55 annually, while "Men Clerkships" started at £70. Both faced a £190 maximum salary, and while it was usually quite difficult for the male clerk to rise into a higher grade, it was a possibility available to men that was denied to women.¹²⁵ The experience of female clerks at the Law

¹²³R. Guerriero Wilson, Disillusionment or New Opportunities? The Changing Nature of Work in Offices, Glasgow 1880-1914 (Aldershot: 1998), 234-285.

¹²⁴For a good and detailed, but older, examination of women in the civil service see Martindale, Hilda, Women Servants and the State, 1870-1938: A History of Women in the Civil Service.

¹²⁵"Civil Service Appointments Open to Competition," The Civil Service Aspirant: A Weekly Journal, Review, and Coach for Civil Service Candidates, 4 July 1885, 2-3; and A. J. Lawford Jones, "The Brains of H.M. Civil Service," Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush Weekly Express, 6 July, 1906, 4. It was also argued by some educators that girls were being turned unnecessarily into clerks by their education, much the same as their brothers. At a conference dealing with the education of female clerks in 1913, Mrs. O'Brien Harris, Head Mistress of Cassland Road Girls' School in South Hackney, argued that pushing young girls to pursue a civil service career usually ended in failure—"Hundreds of our girls crowd into these not very well paid posts in the Civil Service; and thousands prepare for these posts which they will never reach, and spend the years from fifteen to eighteen—perhaps they will begin

Union and Rock typified this experience in a private business. They were first hired in the 1890s and once there were significant numbers of them they were placed in a separate department largely performing basic clerical duties such as shorthand, copying and typing. Their numbers grew considerably by 1914, and although many of them had been with the company for several years, they were still considered "temporary clerks" and paid weekly wages instead of salaries. It was not until a shortage of clerks faced the company during the war that the company moved these women into departments and positions previously occupied solely by male clerks.¹²⁶ After the war those who remained in the service of the company stayed in these departments and began receiving salaries.¹²⁷ However, these women clerks, like their earlier counterparts still received lower pay than their male counterparts.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the presence of the large and growing number of female office workers was no longer considered unusual. As clerks, more than in any other occupation, women were performing, or at least were perceived to be performing, work similar to that of their male

earlier—preparing for these examinations in which, as I have indicated, the range of subjects is narrow and limited. A small proportion succeed, the rest are left in the open clerical market; they may be well trained in the particular subjects they have spent years acquiring, but in regard to the rest of their education they have practically wasted their time; The figures for 1907-1909 show that 76 per cent., 81 per cent., and 86 per cent. respectively of the candidates of secondary school age were thrown on the open markets as rejections." Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, Report of Proceedings at a Conference on The Best Methods of Training for Women Clerks and Secretaries. Held at the University of London on 22nd May 1913 (London: 1913), 14.

¹²⁶For a study of women's experience in previously male work environments during the war see Gail Braybon, Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience (London: 1981).

¹²⁷GLM, Law Union and Rock Insurance Company Ltd., Registers of Salaries and Staff at Head Office and Branches, MS 21276-21278, 1896-1931.

counterparts. Books, pamphlets and newspaper and magazine articles continually informed women of the jobs available as clerks.¹²⁸ Novels, such as Olive P. Raynor's, *The Type-writer Girl*, published in 1891, began to depict this social phenomenon. In the novel the heroine, Juliet Appleton, is forced to earn a living after the death of her lower middle class father. The ease in which a woman can become a clerk in London is represented in her belief that "every girl can write shorthand and that typewriting as an accomplishment is as diffused as the piano."¹²⁹ She obtains a position as a shorthand clerk and typist and notes that women, or at least women clerks, were just as capable as their male counterparts.

I had justified myself before the impartial tribunal of political economy. I could earn my own bread. In the struggle for life I had obtained a footing. This magnificent post of shorthand clerk and typewriter had been thrown open for advertisement to public competition. In that competition I had won the day. I had proved myself the fittest by the mere fact of survival. The sole remaining question was could I adapt myself to my environment? If so, I had fulfilled the whole gospel of Darwinism.¹³⁰

Male clerks were not just concerned that female clerks were winning such Darwinian struggles at their material expense, but at their masculine expense as well. Just as the male clerking identity was partially formed by contrasting

¹²⁸An example of one of these books was M. Mostyn Bird, *Woman At Work: A Study Of The Different Ways Of Earning A Living Open To Women* (London: 1911). Some examples of the numerous journal and magazine articles were M.B.H., "The Employment of Girls," *Cassell's Family Magazine*, May 1881, 274-276; Ardern Holt, "The Art of Type-writing," *Cassell's Family Magazine*, November, 1888, 659-660; Miss Billington, "How Can I Earn My Living?: III.-In the Civil Service," *The Young Woman: A Monthly Journal and Review*, No. 19, April 1894, 228-230; and "Employment: Female Clerkships in the Post-Office Savings Bank," *The Englishwoman's Review*, 15 October, 1880, Vol. 11, No. 10, 467. For secondary studies on occupations opening up to women at this time see Martha Vicinus (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington, Indiana: 1977).

¹²⁹Olive P. Raynor, *The Type-writer Girl*, (London: 1891), 17.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 27.

their work experience against that of others, such as their employers and the labouring class, it was also formed in contrast with that of the middle class masculine ideal of the Victorian and Edwardian era--working in a masculine exclusive occupation with sufficient remuneration to provide substantive domestic comforts for their households.¹³¹ As John Tosh has noted, manliness represented an ideal to which men of this period aspired. It was characterized by success, virtue and, most significantly, the complete absence of 'effeminacy'.¹³² While, as witnessed, their material situation made this extremely difficult, the infusion of women into their occupation further magnified this sense of emasculation.

Male clerks attempted to differentiate themselves from their female counterparts by depicting them as temporary anomalies who were not true representatives of clerkdom. They were portrayed as working merely for "pin money" for their personal fashions and entertainments until they found a husband to take them out of the family home. J. C. Arrandale, a clerk writing to *Tit-Bits* in 1887, expressed these sentiments in his argument that women should not be allowed to become clerks.

In the first place, I hold that it unfits them for the position which all women hope sooner or later to gain, that of a wife. A girl whose life is passed in an office will not stay home at night to learn how to knit, sew, darn, bake and clean. She can hardly hope for a husband who will be able to provide her with servants to do these things, and the consequence is a life of misery and contention. In the second place, it tends to lower

¹³¹For an examination of the development of this ideal see John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*; and, Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man!: Males in Modern Society*.

¹³²John Tosh, "What Should Historians do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," 180-193.

the wages of men and to prevent them taking upon themselves the duties of heads of families.¹³³

Arrandale believed that a great deal of injury was being done to male clerks by the employment of women, and saw "no reason why women should crowd into this profession in the manner they are doing, as there are many walks of life which are entirely given up to them."¹³⁴ He wished to preserve the clerking experience as an entirely masculine one and suggested that women should stick to occupations where they would damage neither the pay of men or their masculine identities, such as "millinery, dressmaking, under-clothing making, embroidering, shop assistants, etc." The language of such discourse reveals a profound sense of this male clerk's anxiety over his masculine status. Differentiation from his female counterparts was becoming an essential component of the male clerk's identity.

In 1890 several clerks wrote to *Pearson's Weekly* agreeing with the opinion of a London employer that women clerks could not do the work of men.

I have not yet come across one woman who was anything more than a mere machine. Give her a piece of work, and she does it in a certain style with doubtful precision, thinking, no doubt, that plodding is a commercial energy.

The real fault of the lady clerk lies on this: that she goes into business for the single purpose of earning pocket-money. She hopes to be married some day, then good-bye to business; consequently she does not strive as an employer of labour would wish her to strive.

It is different with the girl of poorer circumstances. A factory girl, a dressmaker, etc., knows she has a life of work before her. Even after marriage she must toil; therefore she must be alive and capable.¹³⁵

¹³³*Tit-Bits*, 30 April, 1887, 40.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*Pearson's Weekly*, 25 October, 1890, 214.

Several of the clerks who responded to this diatribe, although generally agreeing with all the opinions expressed, most heartily supported the last two sentences. They argued that their work could only be performed by serious minded men, and that while manual labour could be performed by women throughout their lives, clerical work demanded a serious masculine temperament.¹³⁶ A similar view was expressed in a letter to *Answers* by the clerk A. J. Naylor in 1897. He argued that office work could only be effectively done by men, in that it demanded "a much greater mental and physical strain than the generality of women can lay claim to." He believed that women who wished to work should allow clerking to preserve its masculine status and stick to their domestic duties within the home, and "thus preserve the time-honoured home-life of dear old England."¹³⁷

In 1894 C. Arthur Pearson brought up the issue of the emasculation of male clerkdom directly in an editorial, entitled "The Last Days of Mr. Clerk."¹³⁸ Although later, after several letters from outraged and anxious male clerks, he reaffirmed his belief that "the woman's sphere is in the home,"¹³⁹ his original editorial spoke to the clerks' fears that women were dramatically changing the clerking experience.

Already a writer in a Canadian magazine has declared the man clerk doomed to absolute and ignominious extinction. He announces, with tears in his eyes, that if the women continue to hurl themselves into the cities during the next twenty years as they have since 1880, half the businesses of Canada and the United States will be in their hands. And

¹³⁶Pearson's Weekly, 9 and 16 November, 1890, 252, 268.

¹³⁷Answers, 9 October, 1897, 378.

¹³⁸C. Arthur Pearson, "The Last Days of Mr. Clerk," Pearson's Weekly, 6 January. 1894, 396.

¹³⁹Pearson's Weekly, 27 January, 1894, 448.

the men, one may presume, will be found making the beds, washing up plates, nursing the children, darning the family stockings, and on their knees scrubbing the floors.

A similar cloud darkens the horizon at home. There was a time, and not very long ago either, when men would turn round to see a woman in Mincing Lane, and the rustle of a skirt in Throgmorton Street would cause quite a flutter in the market. But now, not content with thronging the streets, they actually challenge the right of the man to work in an office at all, and then end by quietly ousting him.¹⁴⁰

The language of this editorial reflects the profound sense that the clerking experience was changing, and that an exclusively male clerking identity was being challenged by the movement of women into the office. This process of emasculation would not, however, merely be confined to his occupational identity but, according to Pearson, would envelop his entire masculine identity as the bread winning head of the household. In fact, he went so far as to suggest that gender roles would become entirely reversed.

At the present time the man at the office can earn enough to keep a wife and family and maintain a home, but . . . if she [the female clerk] ever does become established to the exclusion of mankind, she will be able to demand higher wages, and then the position of the sexes, being entirely reversed, things will go along very much as they did before. Only the women will do the work and the men stay at home.¹⁴¹

Of course, there was little chance that Pearson's concerns would be realized. Nonetheless, male clerks continued to complain that women were concurrently robbing them of their livelihood and masculine status. One clerk complained to *The Office Journal* in 1909 that women were "gradually taking away the living of the male clerk," arguing that a willingness to work for lower pay made it difficult for the male clerks to reach adult maturity. "Who has to provide the home later on?" Not the female clerk, he

¹⁴⁰Pearson's Weekly, 6 January. 1894, 396.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

ruminated.¹⁴² Even the language of the National Union of Clerks, whose speakers and writers often expressed token sentiments of the equality of the sexes, reflected the assertions of male clerks that their experience as a clerk was of profound seriousness in comparison to that of their female counterparts. The pages of its journal continually depicted the male clerk in a constant struggle for a positive clerking identity and his family's survival. Even its socialist principles could not undermine the widely held notion that a male clerk had to dress in a respectable manner. "The clerk must go to his office with a nice clean collar, clothes that look up to the mark, otherwise he might feel a draught, because his behaviour is not correct."¹⁴³ The material, social or cultural needs of female clerks were rarely mentioned in the pages of its journal or by its speakers. Meanwhile, the nature of his distinct dress was just one of countless reasons, the most important being his ability to maintain a household, that were given for the clerk to join a union that would petition for a higher salary. This was not done for the female clerk, in fact the primary reason that was given for them to receive the same wages as men was so that they would not bring down the wages of male clerks by competing with them at a lower salary level.¹⁴⁴ While reflecting society's general assumptions about women and work, the Union's rhetoric highlighted the fact that male clerks were not only concerned that women were competing with them for jobs, but, more significantly, were seriously challenging their masculine occupational experience and individual identity.

¹⁴²The Office Journal: Business Topics For Business Men, 8 May, 1905, 25.

¹⁴³The Clerk, Vol 3, No. 35, November 1910, 176.

¹⁴⁴The Clerk, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1908, 54; The Clerk, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1908, 1; The Clerk, Vol. 4, No. 41, May 1911, 69; and The Clerk, Vol. 5, No. 49, January 1912, 3-4.

As witnessed, the clerk's identity was multi-faceted and formed through a number of intersecting experiences. He saw himself as a marginal and emasculated individual, and was thus riddled with material and status anxieties. Meanwhile, the promise of rewards through continued self-improvement helped to provide hope and meaning to his present sufferings. The language of this self-improvement discourse, however, further underscored the concerns clerks had over their marginal status in society. Even potential solutions, such as the acquisition of a new set of skills, seemed to create just as many problems as they solved. At a time when these concerns and anxieties appeared to overwhelm the positive aspects of the clerk's experience, such as being a man with a respectable non-manual vocation, the influx of women into his workplace furthered the process of emasculation that had begun with the difficulty he faced in creating a comfortable domestic sphere. The discourse surrounding these issues indicates that clerks went to great lengths to combat the social, cultural and material difficulties they increasingly faced, but a reading of the language used suggests that there was a great deal of uncertainty that they would fashion the masculine adult clerking private and public experience they desired.

Chapter Five
The Outward Identity of the Clerk, 1870-1914

I wish I could write a drama of official life I would show you the Mill at work. Up above, the Masters and Gangers. Down below, the Slaves at work, they too with whimsicalities of their own, but always beneath them a spirit of ferment that at last, in the third great act of my drama, breaks out furiously and drives the Slaves swarming up in fierce attack upon those who sit above the big thick Line. I see interludes in my drama and scenes in the Shakespearean manner, wherein might be depicted the realities of life in a Kennington lodging house or in the home of a Man clerk and his wife. . . . All of my drama I see unfolding in some large, orderly and quite magnificent way--thereby showing how vain may be the imaginations even of a Twopenny clerk and how much finer than any doings of his. A magnificent drama indeed the author of this record would write! Besides, supposing it written, who in this world would find interest in it? God help us, we all nowadays help at the grinding in some mill or another, and it is to escape from it all that we crave, in our times of leisure. Men hunched over desks in dreary rooms; telephones, revolving stamps, fire buckets; a pale-faced youth eating bread and cheese in a suburban bed-sitting-room; a foolish couple bending over a cradle in a kitchen in Dulwich; tumult of Slaves crying for a Chance and a Living wage: what subjects, great heaven, for drama in the Twentieth Century! Why, all that is only life--a page from the awful Day-book of London town.¹

The public image of the clerk began to gradually change as the number of clerks increased and began to come more regularly from, what the upper classes deemed to be, less than desirable backgrounds. Although the 1830s and 1840s witnessed the mocking of the clerk by the middle class periodical press and an identification with the absurd urban creature know as "The Gent", it was primarily his outward pretensions which were ridiculed. By the late-nineteenth century it had become commonplace for clerks to be chided for their false sense of respectability. Meanwhile, the literary discourse which depicted the culture of a clerk in a sympathetic manner, such as that of

¹Shan F. Bullock, Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk (London: 1907), 216-217.

Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, was replaced with one that was acutely disparaging. Ironically enough, many of these new commentators, such as George Grossmith and George Gissing came from the same working or lower middle class backgrounds as most clerks. These new critics and writers, which also included E. M. Forster, C. F. G. Masterman and T. W. H. Crosland, not only fiercely lampooned the culture of the clerk and exposed his numerous vulnerabilities, they also began to maintain that clerking culture was a threat to society and British national culture. This is not to suggest, however, that the discourse concerning clerks was entirely negative in scope. There still remained a discourse which sympathized with the marginality of clerking life and attempted to depict clerks accurately and honestly, while suggesting avenues of agency. However, these suggestions, such as emigration and abandoning the clerking occupation, were often in direct conflict with the clerking notion of agency through self-improvement, as discussed in the preceding chapter.

The satire on clerking life *The Diary of a Nobody*,² written by the Savoyard actor George Grossmith³ and illustrated by his brother Weedon, was first serialized in *Punch* in 1888-9. It was first published as a book in 1892

²George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (Ware, Hertfordshire: 1994). Its first appearance was *Punch*, 17 November, 1888, 233. The dates given in the diary are different than the actual dates in which it appeared in the magazine. For a study of the book's literary heritage and later influence see Roger B. Henkle, "From Pooter to Pinter: Domestic Comedy and Vulnerability," *Critical Quarterly* Vol. 16, 1974, 174-189.

³For studies on his life in the theatre of Gilbert and Sullivan see Stanley Naylor, *Gaiety and George Grossmith* (London: 1913); and, Tony Joseph, *George Grossmith: Biography of a Savoyard* (Bristol: 1982). Mike Leigh's movie *Topsy-Turvey* showed Grossmith in one scene injecting himself with an opiate. Although it was well known that he suffered from severe stage-fright, especially on opening nights, there is no concrete evidence that he used opium to help alleviate his anxieties.

and soon became a minor classic. The *Diary* portrays the supposed transparent claim of Charles Pooter, a City clerk living in suburban Holloway, to the status of a gentleman and continually gently mocks his aspirations to be something more than a "nobody." It suggests that clerking culture is riddled with pretension, weakness, and diminished masculinity--particularly in its domestic sphere.⁴ In many respects he and his son Lupin, who also becomes a clerk, have inherited the status of the mid-nineteenth century "Gent".

In his experiences Pooter continually faces situations which highlight that his status as a clerk often pales in comparison with that of other members of the lower middle class and even working class labourers. His failure to recognize this only serves to reinforce his image as weak and ridiculous. A run-in he has with his buttermilk provides an example of this:

*April 6. Eggs for breakfast simply shocking; sent them back to Borset [the buttermilk] with my compliments, and he needn't call any more for orders. In the evening, hearing someone talking in a loud voice to the servant in the downstairs hall, I went out to see who it was and was surprised to find it was Borset . . . who was both drunk and offensive. Borset, on seeing me, said he would be hanged if he would ever serve City clerks any more--the game wasn't worth the candle. I restrained my feeling, and quietly remarked that I thought it was *possible* for a City clerk to be a *gentleman*. He replied he was very glad to hear it, and wanted to know whether I had ever come across one, for he hadn't. He left the house, slamming the door after him which nearly broke the fanlight; and I heard him fall over the scraper, which made me feel glad I hadn't removed it. When he had gone, I thought of a splendid answer I ought to have given him. However I will keep it for another occasion.⁵*

⁴For an examination of lower middle class masculinity in reference to Pooter see James Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920," *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1999, 291-321. I would also like to thank him for the useful suggestions he provided me for this chapter and thesis.

⁵George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody*, 5.

The fact that a drunk buttermilk can get the better of Pooter, a City of London clerk as he constantly reminds us, says little for the intellect of this supposed "brain worker". However, it is not merely in intellectual prowess that his supposed inferiors get the better of him. For several days in his *Diary* Pooter makes a great fuss over the fact that he and his wife Carrie have been invited to a ball by "the Lord and Lady Mayoress to the Mansion House, to 'meet the Representatives of Trades and Commerce.'"⁶ He believes that he has finally arrived as clerk and, most significantly, as a man as is witnessed in the words he uses to express his pride to his wife. "Carrie darling, I was a proud man when I led you down the aisle of the church on our wedding day; that pride will be equaled, if not surpassed, when I lead my dear pretty wife up to the Lord and Lady Mayoress at the Mansion House."⁷ Great care is taken by Pooter and his wife to prepare for the event and much fuss is made over replying to their invitation and the selection of proper attire. Pooter's self-image soon takes a tremendous blow when they arrive at the ball to discover that they have simply been part of an en-masse invitation made to the members of Pooter's office. In fact, the Lord Mayor does not even know Mr. Perkup, the principal of Pooter's firm, who arranged for the invitations. In the end the only person at the ball that Pooter recognizes is his ironmonger, Farmerson, whom Pooter previously harbored pretensions of superiority towards. This did not, however, last long.

... one of the sheriffs, in full Court costume, slapped Farmerson on the back and hailed him as an old friend, and asked him to dine with him at

⁶Ibid., 35.

⁷Ibid.

his lodge. I was astonished. For five full minutes they stood roaring with laughter, and stood digging each other in the ribs. They kept telling each other they didn't look a day older. They began embracing each other and drinking champagne.

To think that a man who mends our scraper should know any member of our aristocracy!⁸

The blows against Pooter's identity as "gentleman" have nothing to do with Pooter's material circumstance. While Grossmith portrays the Pooter home as one of cheap vulgarity, the Pooters are comfortable and can even afford to employ a maid.

While ridiculing, rather than celebrating clerking lower middle class virtues as Dickens did, the popularity of Grossmith's book indicates that society at large had recognized that a clerking experience was forming for an ever larger number of men who had become clerks during this era. As mentioned, however, by no means were all clerks portrayed as subjects deserving of derision in regard to their under-developed masculinities and pursuit of respectability. In popular fiction clerks were frequently portrayed as hard-working, honest and noble individuals struggling under a system dominated by miserly employers and hierarchical structures in which the clerk of a common Board school education had little chance for upward mobility. *Mr. Spivey's Clerk*, published in 1890 by J. S. Fletcher, is a good example of this literature.⁹ The hero of the novel, Thomas Christmas, is a clerk who works for a weekly newspaper and book publisher in offices located on Paternoster Row. He is the only son of a poor country parson and has a mother and sister to support on his small income of a guinea a week.¹⁰ The

⁸Ibid., 41.

⁹J. S. Fletcher, *Mr. Spivey's Clerk*.

¹⁰Ibid., 63-68. Within six years it eventually rose to 50 shillings a week.

novel is narrated by a fellow clerk of Christmas's, Leonard Tempest, who provides several accounts of Christmas's gentlemanly heroics on behalf of several individuals who have been shabbily treated by so-called "respectable" members of society. Their employer, Spivey, is a man of low origins who has succeeded economically, but is portrayed as a nouveau riche without culture. Like Dickens, Fletcher suggests that it is men of Spivey's ilk who are responsible for the hardship suffered by the genteel poor as: "Men of the Spivey persuasion never do pay great salaries. Their method is to secure the largest amount of work at the smallest possible cost, and it matters little to them that the necessary balance is paid out in human flesh."¹¹ Christmas, although poor, is a man of "proper" upbringing, culture and manners, but is forced to toil underneath a man who is far less of a gentleman than himself.¹² Fletcher's description of Tom makes it clear that despite his humble appearance, Tom is a kind and forthright individual.

He is above the average height; he is not good looking; he is badly dressed. Beginning at his boots, you will notice that they are patched in more than one place, that his trousers are very much bagged at the knees and white at the seams, that his vest is also the worse for wear, and his coat old-fashioned and shiny. Nevertheless there is nothing untidy about him. His clothes are darned here and there, but they are not torn; his boots are patched, but the soles are thick and the heels are not down. His linen is clean and good, his black tie is new, and he wears an old-fashioned hair-chain to his watch. In spite of his well-worn clothes and unfashionable appearance he looks what he is—a gentleman. Certainly, it is not handsome looks which bestow the stamp of gentility upon him, for he is not handsome. His hair is suspiciously auburn, his nose is a snub, his mustache slight and sandy. His cheeks are much freckled, and his ears, like his hands, are large and red. But his eyes are soft and gentle and kindly, and there are lines about his mouth which mean, properly read, that Thomas Christmas is patient and forbearing and just.¹³

¹¹Ibid., 24.

¹²Ibid., 16-19.

Christmas may be found wanting materially but Fletcher, like Dickens, posits that clerks can have culture and civility—perhaps to even a greater degree than many established members of the middle class. It is Tom who spends his free time in the Guildhall Library reading Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, and Comte, not Spivey.¹⁴ It is what is beneath the outward appearance which makes a man a true gentleman. It is Christmas's temperament, work-ethic, and manners which if, in Fletcher's view, are "properly read", make him a "gentleman". However, although a proud individual, a great deal of anxiety is still present within this clerking experience.

George Gissing's life and novels reflect this self-conscious malaise within clerkdom in the late nineteenth century. Gissing, the son of a lower middle class chemist, had sought upward-mobility as a scholarship holder at Owens College, Manchester. In his fourth year of studies, however, he was expelled and sentenced to one month hard labour for stealing money from his fellow students to support a young prostitute with whom he had fallen in love.¹⁵ With his career as a socially respected and stable scholar aborted, he

¹³Ibid., 8-9.

¹⁴Ibid., 37-39.

¹⁵This only began Gissing's lifelong problems with women and relationships. From this experience he went on to have two disastrous marriages with "totally unsuitable" wives, the first being the young prostitute, whom he attempted to conceal from his friends. One wife committed suicide, while the other died in a lunatic asylum. At the end of his life he was involved in a bigamous relationship with a French woman which he also attempted to hide from his English friends, while attempting to pass off the relationship as a real marriage in France. J. M. Blom, "George Gissing; Seventeen Papers Read at Centenary Conference, Groningen, 15-16 Jan. 1986" in G. H. V. Bunt, E. S. Kooper, J. L. Mackenzie and D. R. M. Wilkinson (eds.) *One Hundred Years of English Studies in Dutch Universities* (Amsterdam: 1987), 225. For an interesting assessment of the relationship between Gissing's personal life and the depiction of women in his novels see Martha M. Johnson Hember, "George Gissing's Females: Fictional Women, Factual Wives", Ph.D. thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991.

spent years struggling in poverty as a working writer. He wrote for the class from which he had been dismissed, but still "in exile" from them "intellectually, socially, and psychologically".¹⁶ It is, perhaps, this background which explains Gissing's contempt, although tempered with a profound sense of empathy, for lower middle class longings of upward mobility. His novels highlight the fruitless lower middle class quest of respectability and status. Clerks and other lower middle class members are portrayed as naively struggling against an inalterable social structure.¹⁷ Meanwhile, his novels highlight the cultural environment which produced these upward mobility urges and its psychological impact on clerks.

John Carey has maintained that Gissing was appalled by the "leveling down" of culture by the masses and "hated lower-middle-class pretensions to education because they were a vulgar travesty of the refinement he held dear."¹⁸ In his attack on fin-de-siècle intellectual snobbery, Carey is far too selective in his interpretation of Gissing's writing. While Gissing was clearly concerned with the impact of universal education was on mass culture, Carey ignores Gissing's interest in the condition of the lower middle classes and the negative effect that the pursuit of respectability had on them. Carey wrongly confuses Gissing's attack on mass culture as an attack against the consumers of that culture. Gissing had a great deal of admiration for Dickens and his

¹⁶Patricia Alden, "Gissing's Mimic Man", The Gissing Newsletter Vol. 17, No. 3, July 1981, 1-3.

¹⁷For a fuller discussion on this point see Alan Swingewood, The Novel and Revolution (London: 1975), 124-130.

¹⁸John Carey, The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939 (London: 1992), 93 and 97.

non-condescending sympathy for the poor and the lower middle classes and defended him against late Victorian critics who argued that "he was a mere caricaturist, a vulgarian in fiction, ridden by stereotypes and a shallow philosophy." He praised Dickens for his "unique ability to show the lower middle classes in a very human light", and recognised his genius in showing "the beauty of moral virtues," and in his suggestion "that these could be found in all kinds of men, irrespective of birth and education."¹⁹

Gissing sought to contribute to the late Victorian consciousness in the same manner that Dickens had done for the earlier era.²⁰ He had a pronounced psychological interest in individual and group behavior, caused largely by his urge to debunk pretenses. Through his fiction he sought to bridge the gap between appearance and reality. The lower middle class, particularly clerks, with their genteel appearance but shabby clothes and deferential manners, their material privations but notions of respectability, and their dreams of upward mobility through self-improvement provided Gissing with a perfect subject on which to direct his interests. As noted by Hammerton in his discussion of Gissing's milieu, "his own novels and short

¹⁹David L. Derus, "Gissing and Chesterton as Critics of Dickens," The Chesterton Review (Saskatoon, Sask.) Vol. 12, No. 1, Feb. 1986, 74-5 and 78; and Gissing, George, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (New York: 1898), 277-78.

²⁰For an assessment of Gissing's Dickensian inheritance see Michaelle Elaine Persell, "George Gissing and the Dickensian Inheritance," Ph.D. thesis, University of California-Santa Barbara, 1996; John Halperin, "How Gissing Read Dickens," South Atlantic Quarterly Vol. 83, November 1984, 312-322; Richard Julian Allen, "The Rise and Decline of Conscientious Realism in English Fiction: A Contextual Study of Novels by Charles Dickens and George Gissing," Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1978; Mabel W. C. Donnelly, "Convention and Invention From Dickens to Gissing," Ph.D. thesis, Radcliffe College, 1950; John Sloan, "The Literary Affinity of Gissing and Dostoevsky: Revising Dickens," English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920 Vol. 32, No. 4, 1989, 441-453; and Penelope A. LeFew, "Evidence of a Dickensian Gissing in 'Joseph Yates' Temptation'," English Language Notes Vol. 26, No. 3, March 1989, 82-87.

stories were among the few that demonstrated an understanding of the rich and varied social and cultural range of the lower middle class."²¹ This understanding is witnessed in Gissing's 1895 short story *A Freak of Nature or Mr. Brogden, City Clerk* in which Gissing explores the psychological effects that social and class appearance-keeping have on a middle-aged London clerk.²² Brogden is concerned with the appearance of respectability. Gissing does not, however, treat this concern as farcical as the Grossmiths do in the case of Pooter. He locates Brogden in Pooter's Holloway and notes of him that "no more respectable man paid rates" there. He lives on a quiet and decent street on which "his house stood with railings and areas, and only one genteel notice of Apartments to let; where tradesmen called for orders, and the itinerant vendor of coals or vegetables had no chance of a customer."²³ He is a genteel suburban who takes pride in his family, as is evident in Gissing's depiction of them as they set off for church on Sunday.

All were so nicely dressed, a pattern to Holloway households: from the father's silk hat (antiquated in form, but well preserved) to the pretty shoes of the youngest girl. Mrs. Brogden's attire could not be called fashionable, but it was faultlessly neat, and such as became a self-respecting matron who has her regular seat half way down the nave. Such families, linked together, make the back-bone of English civilisation.²⁴

²¹James Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 305. See also Pierre Coustillas's introduction to: George Gissing, *A Freak of Nature, or, Mr. Brogden, City Clerk: An uncollected short story* edited by Pierre Coustillas (Edinburgh: 1990).

²²George Gissing, "A Freak of Nature, or, Mr. Brogden, City Clerk," in *The Day of Silence and Other Stories* Pierre Coustillas ed. (London: 1993), 113-125.

²³*Ibid.*, 113.

²⁴*Ibid.*

He lives comfortably enough (as respectable men have little alternative), but is always responsible and frugal, as "his expenses are calculated, year in and year out, down to the uttermost farthing; an uncovenanted tuppence would have thrown the budget into disorder."²⁵ By practicing the strictest economies and routines (such as in taking the Tube instead of the Nag's Head omnibus) he and his family just manage to remain solvent and preserve their image of respectability. After sixteen years of marriage, however, Brogden begins to suffer from a nervous disorder, commonly having attacks when discussing the household budget with his wife. As he lies in bed after such an attack he remembers what life was like before notions of self-improvement, respectability and upward mobility had taken control of his life.

His mind was possessed with unwonted reminiscences ; boyhood and bachelor days came vividly back to him. He saw himself a young fellow of somewhat warm temperament, and ambitious of success in life. He remembered peccadilloes, utterly forgotten in the routine of a respectable existence. A certain Lizzie--fie! And the night when he and a sportive friend tied a cord at hat-height across a gloomy suburban street. Then his resolves to become rich; the certainty that he would some day ride in his carriage; the municipal dignities he might attain.²⁶

In an attempt to recover from his nervous fits Brogden takes a week in the country. At an Inn, Brogden encounters a clergyman and a boy of sixteen, and, being dressed in his finest City garb, they mistake him for far more than a common London City clerk. He "looked what he had every claim to be considered, a most respectable man of business."²⁷ Unfortunately for

²⁵Ibid., 113-114.

²⁶Ibid., 115.

²⁷Ibid., 117-118.

Brogden his anxieties over his status one again surface when he finds himself lying to his dinner companions regarding his travel experiences and position within the City. Before he can catch himself, he claims to be Mr. Truscott, a senior partner in his firm.

A mist was before his eyes; the blood sang in his ears. From step to step of deception he had proceeded without power to check himself. An abnormal vanity hungered within him. He had set himself on all but the highest pinnacle in the world when, through life, he had played a humble part. ²⁸

Indeed it was his vanity which was abnormal for Brogden. He is portrayed as a sympathetic individual who has come unhinged by the pressure to uphold a respectable image on a far from respectable salary. It has caused him to deceive his new companions and then to steal away from the Inn (by jumping through his bedroom window) in the middle of the night into the countryside when he becomes overwhelmed at the thought of what he has done. But these actions are largely part of an unconscious process, in which Brogden is attempting to escape from his own stereotyped and socialised clerking ego.

Gissing's works are filled with sensitive lower middle class suburban men such as Brogden who suffer through the horrors of commercial society and its rigid and often hypocritical class system obsessed with appearances.²⁹ George Orwell, who in the inter-war era examined the hardships facing impoverished clerks in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and the suburban

²⁸Ibid., 118-119.

²⁹Evelyn Toynton has noted that these obsessions of Gissing's fiction were also those of his own life, and describes him as "a morbidly sensitive man incapable of either promoting his material well-being or coping effectively with practical necessity." Evelyn Toynton, "The Subversive George Gissing", *The American Scholar* Vol. 59, No. 1, Winter 1990, 126-138.

environment of the lower middle class in *Coming Up For Air*, agreed with Gissing's perception that the lower middle class suffered under greater economic and social hardships than the working class. "Gissing's novels", he noted, "are a protest against the form of self-torture that goes by the name of respectability".³⁰ In *The Town Traveller* the "minor clerk" Christopher Parish suffers because he is courting a young woman, Polly, who desires a man of respectability. Parish is forced to woo Polly in a style far above the economic and social means of one who "belonged to the great order of minor clerks", who earned, "two pounds a week".³¹ His suffering is clearly evident during a dinner at a posh restaurant.

... they were seated amid plush and marble, mirrors and gilding, in a savory and aromatic atmosphere. Nothing more delightful to Polly, who drew off her gloves and made herself comfortable, whilst the young man—his name was still in the company's service in Christopher Parish—nervously scanned a bill of fare. As his bearing proved, Mr. Parish was not quite at home amid these splendours. As his voice and costume indicated, he belonged to the great order of minor clerks, and would probably go dinnerless on the morrow to pay for this evening's festival. The waiter overawed him, and after a good deal of bungling, with anxious consultation of his companion's appetite, he ordered something, the nature of which was but dimly suggested to him by its name. Having accomplished this feat he at once became hilarious, and began to eat large quantities of dry bread.³²

Polly is only interested in Parish because he appears respectable and can be easily manipulated. On several occasions Parish spends lavish sums in support of Polly's pretensions of respectability. She will not entertain thoughts of matrimony regarding Parish, however, until it is evident that he

³⁰George Orwell, "George Gissing", *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus eds., Vol. IV, (New York: 1968), 429.

³¹George Gissing, *Town Traveller* (Sussex: 1981), 24.

³²*Ibid.*, 32-33.

will be able to support her in a manner of respectability. At the end she finally agrees to marrying Parish once it appears that he will be rising steadily in his firm and, more importantly, after he wins £550 in a penny weekly's contest. It is respectability, not love, she seeks from a husband, as witnessed in her contemplation of Parish's marriage proposal.

All the time she was thinking that this sum of money would furnish a house in a style vastly superior to that of Mrs. Nibby's. Mrs. Nibby would go black in the face with envy, hatred, and malice.³³

Unfortunately for Parish, Gissing does not intimate that Polly's obsession with respectability will cease once Parish and Polly set up their home.

In many of Gissing's novels lower middle class men appear to suffer at the hands of women with dreams of upward-mobility and respectability.³⁴ However misogynist this may be, the female characters are often used as a device which Gissing uses to explore the ways in which lower middle class men are themselves "completely subject to the psychological authority" of the late-nineteenth century patriarchal code, which demanded that men be "paragons of passive-aggressive egoism and masculinity."³⁵ Clerks such as Brugden or Parish may have benefited from the societal privileges of the individual Victorian male, but were concurrently under restrictions which

³³Ibid., 306-307.

³⁴C. F. G. Masterman summed up Gissing's portrayal of women rather well. "The women--what an awful picture-gallery of women appears in Gissing's tales of suburban existence!--nag and hate, are restless with boredom and weariness, pursue ignoble, unattainable social aspirations, desire without being satisfied. The whole offers a vision more disquieting and raucous than any vision of the squalor of material failure." C. F. G. Masterman, In Peril of Change: Essays Written in Time of Tranquillity (London: 1905), 71-72.

³⁵John R. Harrison, "The Emancipated: Gissing's Treatment of Women and Religious Emancipation", The Gissing Newsletter Vol. 17, No. 2, April 1981, 4; and, Annette Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing (Rutherford: 1991), 27.

prevented them from publicly revealing their personal and domestic fears, desires and insecurities. They sometimes even launched attacks against those who attempted to examine these consternations. Gissing's examination of this paradox of male privilege in *The Town Traveller* produced a loud response from London clerks in a series of letters to the *Daily Chronicle* in 1898. Many were critical of the way they had been characterized by Gissing in the character of Parish.

I am in the position of a minor clerk, till within a few months ago, in the receipt of the identical salary indicated above [two pounds a week], my friends and acquaintances are largely drawn from the same class, and I am utterly unable to find amongst them any one resembling in any way "Christopher Parish."

We--the great order of minor clerks--are not in the habit of dropping our aitches, we do not pronounce "rain" as "rine," we do not seek our wives from the in many ways estimable but somewhat uncertain class of young women employed as barmaids and program sellers, and when we are dining out we are not usually overawed by the waiter, neither do we become hilarious, and eat large quantities of dry bread when we have given our orders: this, in spite of the intense delight of your able reviewer at Mr. Gissing's statement that we do.

Mr. Gissing's picture of our home life is as strikingly inaccurate as the rest of his description. I should like to take him on a tour of inspection round our homes, where I can assure him that he will find a standard of refinement and culture which, though he might very probably style it suburban, nevertheless is certainly not the environment which breeds a "Parish."³⁶

This lower middle class male, identifying himself as "A Minor Clerk", defended his class against what he perceived to be Gissing's attack on his culture and masculinity. Hammerton suggests that it was "Gissing's deeper grasp of the social anguish and pretensions suffered" by clerks which might help to explain the bitter response to his novel as opposed to the apparent silence which greeted such stereotyped caricatures of clerks as Pooter [and]

³⁶Daily Chronicle, 29 September, 1898, 6.

Bast."³⁷ Whatever their reasons for focusing their venom on Gissing, the force with which clerks defended themselves in letters to the *Daily Chronicle* indicates a high degree of sensitivity to a public assessment of their culture and masculinity.

In 1898, the same year that London clerks voiced their dismay regarding their portrayal by Gissing in *The Town Traveller*, Arnold Bennett published his first novel, *A Man from the North*.³⁸ It is a loosely autobiographical story about Richard Larch, a young North Country man from the Potteries (the locale of Bennett's *Clayhanger* trilogy), who comes to London to work as a clerk in a solicitor's office. Larch has dreams of becoming a novelist and comes under the wing of his understanding and sympathetic boss, Mr. Aked, who has literary ambitions of his own. Aked seeks to write a story of the true London and claims that such a story can only be found in the suburbs.

The suburbs, even Walham Green and Fulham, are full of interest, for those who can see it. Walk along this very street on such a Sunday afternoon as to-day. The roofs form two horrible, converging straight lines, I know, but beneath them is character, individuality, enough to make the greatest book ever written. Note the varying indications supplied by bad furniture seen through curtained windows . . . listen to the melodies issuing lamely from ill-tuned pianos; examine the enervated figures of women reclining amidst flower-pots on narrow balconies. Even in the thin smoke ascending unwillingly from invisible chimney-pots, the flutter of a blind, the band of a door, the winking of a fox-terrier perched on a window-sill, the colour of paint, the lettering of a name, —in all these things there is character and matter of interest,—truth waiting to be expounded. How many houses are there in Cartaret Street? Say eighty. Eighty theatres of love, hate greed, tyranny, endeavour; eighty separate dramas always unfolding, intertwining, ending, beginning,—and every

³⁷Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership?," 305.

³⁸Arnold Bennett, *A Man From The North* (Phoenix Mill, U. K.: 1994). First published in 1898.

drama, a tragedy. No comedies, and especially no farces! Why, shil, there is more character within than a hundred Balzacs could analyse in a hundred years.³⁹

For Bennett, speaking through Aked, the suburbs may have their tragedy, but it is not characterized by farce as Grossmith would have us believe. The lives of clerks, such as Bennett himself experienced, may be mundane and unremarkable, but to Bennett they were real and just as worthy of examination as any other segment within society.

His expose of his hero Richard Larch's clerking experience is such a story and was arguably the best attempt made by any author of the period to explore the clerking identity. It highlights the clerk's hopes and aspirations alongside his feelings of regret over the course his life as a clerk had taken him. Although Richard fails to become the writer he aspires to be, he accepts his life as a clerk and attempts to find ways to improve his experience. For Richard, although still receiving a low salary and at the mercy of his employer's charity, finds satisfaction through marriage and suburban domesticity

In the future he would simply be the suburban husband—dutiful towards his employers, upon whose grace he would be doubly dependent; keeping his house in repair; pottering in the garden; taking his wife out for a walk, or occasionally to the theatre; and saving as much as he could.⁴⁰

Bennett recognized that clerks could have their own culture without any fear that the culture of the middle class or Britain would be debased. This was in many ways an affirmation of Gissing's own recognition of a distinct clerking masculine culture, but without the concern that marriage or domesticity

³⁹Ibid., 44.

⁴⁰Ibid., 113-114.

would interfere with a positive construction of it. Unfortunately if an individual clerk was to construct such an identity, he would have to find some way to overcome the outside forces working strongly against him which began increasingly appearing in the early 1900s.

Only a few years after Bennett's novel was published two of the most vicious attacks against the culture of the lower middle class, particularly its suburban environment, appeared. T. W. H. Crosland's *The Suburbans* (1905) and Masterman's writings throughout the decade linked lower middle class culture and attitudes with England's national and social degeneration.⁴¹ In many cases the terms "suburban" and "lower middle class" were interchangeable with "clerk". Crosland estimated that "it is more than probable that seventy-five per cent. of the male denizens of Suburbia have some business in offices or other places of trade."⁴² Crosland identified "suburban" as a broad "sort of label which may be properly applied to pretty much well everything on the earth that is ill-conditioned, undesirable, and unholy."⁴³ Those who lived in suburbia were, "on the whole, a low and inferior species" who, in their private and public spheres, readily consumed what Crosland designated to be the worst attributes of modern mass culture:

Oyster-bars, Methodist chapels, free public libraries, small shops,
ha'penny newspapers, cheap music-halls, police and county courts,

⁴¹ T. W. H. Crosland, *The Suburbans* (London: 1905); C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: 1909). For a study on the concern of the degeneration of the British "race" during the Edwardian era see Geoffrey Russell Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Oxford: 1971).

⁴²Crosland, *The Suburbans*, 44. The individual whom Crosland characterizes as the typical "suburban male" is clearly a clerk. See below.

⁴³Crosland, *The Suburbans*, 7-8.

billiard -matches, minor race-meetings, third-class railway-carriages, public museums, public baths, indifferent academies for young ladies: whatever, in short, strikes the superior mind as being deficient in completeness, excellence, and distinction . . .⁴⁴

Pretensions of respectability and severe economy had produced nothing but vulgarity, "the keynote of the region."⁴⁵ Their cultural institutions were middle-brow theatre, music halls and, the obligatory fixture of every suburban home's parlour, the poorly played "perambulating, itinerant, green-carpet-covered piano-organ."⁴⁶ Their homes were filled with books, but these were merely unread low-priced classics and little more than "furniture".⁴⁷ The homes and shops of suburbia had no architecturally redeeming values as their inhabitants were only concerned with what was "showy and garish and cheap."⁴⁸ According to Crosland many Suburbans attempted to adopt the chimera of respectability by employing servants, but this was routinely undermined by their "dreadfulness". The employment of servants by Suburbans was absurd to Crosland because, "nine times out of ten, they belong to the same class as their mistresses, who, not to put too fine a point upon it, were born to wrestle, not to reign."⁴⁹

Crosland saw a danger to the health of England's masculinity in suburbia, as "on all days except Sunday it is a country whose population

⁴⁴Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁶Ibid., 159-176.

⁴⁷Ibid., 185-195.

⁴⁸Ibid., 137.

⁴⁹Ibid., 151-152.

consists almost wholly of women, children, and tax-gatherers."⁵⁰ The suburban male had few powers and responsibilities in his own house other than providing his small income to its barely continued maintenance. Crosland chided the suburban-dwelling clerk over his lost domestic authority. "All day shall you toil at your galley-slave's desk, what time the domesticities of Suburbia continue themselves without your aid or supervision." This resulted in the "household and all that dwell therein" being under "the unquestioned rule of women," and the emasculation of the suburban male in his private sphere.⁵¹ This turned the male suburban into "a hen-pecked, shrew-driven, neglected, heart-sick man."⁵² In Crosland's eyes, marital deceit and acrimony ran rampant in suburban domestic partnerships, often induced by occupational and social failure. Wives of clerks did not defer to their husbands out of respect for a substantive bread-winner, for if asked if respect was deserved, he reasoned that they would more than likely reply: "'Most certainly not. As for poor Charlie's important position, it has never run to more than a hundred and fifty a year, though he told me he was making three hundred before he married me.'"⁵³ Meanwhile, the suburban clerk's outward appearance did little to improve his masculine identity in the public sphere. He was, in many ways, simply a slightly shabbier version of the Victorian 'Gent'.

⁵⁰Ibid., 20-21.

⁵¹Ibid., 21-24.

⁵²Ibid., 50.

⁵³Ibid., 51.

You can tell the male suburban whenever you meet him. Consider him. Look at the unscrupulous respectability of him. Regard his well-brushed silk hat, his frock-coat with the pins in the edge of the lapel (they are always there) and the short sleeves, the trousers that are forever about to have a fringe on them, the cuffs with paper protectors and a pocket-handkerchief stuffed up one of them, the 'gamp' and its valuable case, the cheap ring, the boisterous watch-chain, the dainty side-whiskers, and the blue shaven jowl. The man's coats decline to sit properly on his back, because, truth to tell, he is all back; his trousers bag at the knees, because he is largely knees; and his boots burst at the sides, because he always buys them too small.⁵⁴

In contrast to numerous clerks and other critics who blamed this shabby-genteel appearance on an office culture and system which demanded a gentlemanly appearance on an ungentlemanly income, Crosland blamed the clerk and his poorly developed and pretentious suburban culture which caused him to believe himself "to be the glass of fashion and the mould of form."⁵⁵ All in all, in Crosland's estimation, suburbia was a blight on culture and civilization, as witnessed in his 1908 poem "Shepherd's Bush".

Preposterous stucco, naughty ropes of light,
The drunken drone of twenty-two brass bands,
A flip-flap and some hokey-pokey stands;
Smith on your left, and Lipton on your right.
And Lyons, Lyons, Lyons; and that bright
Particular marvel, which, be sure commands
Respect from fools of all and sundry brands--
The Press our Harmsworth prints from every night.
Here, noble London, dost thou prowl and yell,
Or cause to disappear with horrid zest
The Meat and drinks provided by the Jew;
Here flickereth thy paltry, shadowful hell--
And like a silver feather in the West,
And fair as fair, the moon that Dido knew!⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., 37-38.

⁵⁵Ibid., 38.

⁵⁶*The Academy*, August 15, 1908, Vol. 75, 149. This poem was later published in T. W. H. Crosland, *The Collected Poems of T. W. H. Crosland* (London: 1917). Many of Crosland's other poetry showed a similar disdain for mass culture. See "The Public" and "The Man in the

While Crosland attacked suburbia for its inability to keep its women properly supervised and its detrimental effects on English culture and masculinity, his voice was somewhat tempered by the satirical nature and purpose of his writing. Like the 'Gent' of the Victorian era, the 'Suburban' clerk was characterized and ridiculed by Crosland so that this 'other' could be readily distinguished from London's higher middle and cultured classes. Masterman, a New Liberal politician and social commentator, went much further than Crosland and not only attacked the suburbs for their cultural baldness, but also for their role in contributing to the spiritual, social and political decline of the whole of England. The suburb was the home of the detached and self-centered clerk.

Here are districts so far removed from the place of work as to have become gigantic dormitories. Man rises up a great while before day to go forth to his work and to labour until the evening. The whole margin of life of the labourer disappears in transit. The scuffle into the city, the prolonged and odorous journey, the scuffle out again, the hastily wolfed-up meal, curtailed sleep, represent the home life of the people. . . . The population clothes itself in black coats, entertains yearnings after rest, and attends on Sunday places of public worship. This is Clerkdom: Dulwich and Clapham and Haringy; where pale men protest Imperialism and women are driven by the tedium of nothingness into Extension Lectures or the Primrose League.⁵⁷

In the suburbs these small-minded men dwelled with little vision and little concern for social reform. Democracy had provided them with the vote and educational reformers had supplied them with Board schools, but they had become an impediment to change, as they had "no faith in progress."

Street" in T. W. H. Crosland, *The Five Notions* (London: 1903). Shepherd's Bush is located in the west-London borough of Hammersmith and became the terminus of the Central Line (Tu'penny tube) in 1900.

⁵⁷Masterman, *In Peril of Change*, 162.

Masterman reviled them as merely "a mob drifting from the cradle to the grave, without ever rising to articulate speech."⁵⁸

Masterman's 1909 book, *The Condition of England*⁵⁹, contained his most direct and heated attack on the banal inhabitants of the suburbs. He demanded that the "Suburbans" shake off their complacent and materialistic individualism and join together to uphold their civic, national and collective duties. He seriously doubted, however, whether the suburban's culture had enough positive attributes for this to ever occur.

He is labouring at his dismal sedentary occupation so many incredible hours a day, while these [working class] men are parading their woes in exuberant rhetoric at the street corner. And as he labours there enters into his soul a resentment which becomes at time almost an obsession; in which all the disability of his devitalised life is concentrated into revolt against the truculent demands of "the British working man."

He has enough of it. He is turning in desperation to any kind of protection held out to him. His ideals are all towards the top of the scale. He is proud when he is identifying his interests with those of Kensington, and indignant when his interests are identified with those of Poplar. He possesses in full those progressive desires which are said to be the secret of advance. He wants little more than he can afford, and is almost always living beyond his income. He has been harassed with debts and monetary complications; and the demands of rent and the rate-collector excite him in a kind of impotent fury. In that fury he turns round and suddenly strikes down the party in possession, glad to vote against the working man, whom he fears; and for a change, which he hopes may lighten his present burden; and against a Socialism which he cannot understand.⁶⁰

Without "organisation, energy and ideas" they would end up acting (reacting), "only when their grievances have become a burden impossible to

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 162-3.

⁵⁹Sections of the book had previously appeared in *The Nation*.

⁶⁰Masterman, *The Condition of England*, 73-74.

be borne."⁶¹ They would thus "rise suddenly, impervious to argument, unreasoning and resolute" with results that would be cataclysmic for England and her political and social systems. Masterman thus viewed these Suburbans as a reactionary and conservative force, claiming that they had been responsible for the Progressive Party's defeat in the 1908 London County Council election because their individualist nature had caused them to resent collectivist New Liberal and Fabian programs on behalf of the working class.⁶² What Masterman failed to realize, or did not want to recognize, was that the experience of these Suburbans, largely made up of clerks, was very different than that of the working class man. The language of the clerking experience reveals a distinct culture with its own set of concerns and problems.

Two lengthy novels written ten years apart by clerks, *The Story of a London Clerk: A Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told* and *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk*, provide invaluable insights into the problems facing clerks resulting from their London material, social and cultural experience. *The Story of a London Clerk: A Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told*, published in 1896 by an anonymous clerk, depicts the struggles of Osmond Ormesby, a young man from a small English town who seeks work and success in London.⁶³ Ormesby is identified as one of the countless young men who

⁶¹Masterman, *The Condition of England*, 68-9.

⁶²The best examination of these programs is found in Pennybacker's book *A Vision for London, 1889-1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment*.

⁶³Anon, *The Story Of A London Clerk: A Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told* (London: 1896).

naively believed that success was his for the taking in England's metropole. Smiles and his ilk have clearly influenced this decision.

He had pursued a rigorous course of self-improvement, and that he had grown wise in his conceit may be judged, when it is stated that he had first grown too big for his boots, then too big for his parental roof, then too big for his native town.

No place smaller than London was large enough to hold Osmond Ormesby at this time of his life. He cherished dreams of treading the "paths of progress" and making "headway in life;" and where but London could he get the opportunity? What chance had he as a clerk on ten shillings a week in the quiet county town of his birth? It was preposterous, the idea of applying the knowledge already attained to the work already in hand: he was content to learn, and study, and read, and neglect his present situation in an illusion of a vague distant future of success.⁶⁴

Ormesby's plans for "headway in life" are quickly shattered upon his arrival in London. He is disappointed by the arrangements he has made for work and lodgings and is overwhelmed by London's rapid pace and confusion. His initial lodgings consist of a cold and bare room in Bloomsbury at a greater expense than he calculated.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, his arranged clerkship turns out to be a front for the unscrupulous business activities of his employer. He has been hired as a mere supplicant to two existing clerks in order to provide a heightened air of legitimacy to the "Anglo-American Steadfast Insurance

⁶⁴Ibid., 1.

⁶⁵In 1879 Tom Hood's *Life in Lodgings* portrayed Bloomsbury as the center of numerous lodging-houses of a "shabby-genteel" nature. "The shabby-genteel lodging-house is to be found in the immediate neighbourhood of the Bloomsbury-squares—at times, in the squares themselves. The Bloomsburial region has long been left high and dry by the tide of fashion, which sets ever westward. But it still contrives to retain something of its old grandeur—a pinchbeck or mosaic semblance of it; for it is largely inhabited by rich parvenus, who, by lavish and vulgar displays of wealth, arrogate an importance which neither their birth nor their breeding warrants. They buy the right (or acquire it by questionable means) to hang on to the extreme fringe of society, and cling to it as dying men cling to straws. And so the shabby gentility of this quarter commences with them; for as a gentlemen in a threadbare coat is still a gentleman, so a snob in a velvet waistcoat is still a shabby snob, and the gentility he confers on his quarter is a shabby gentility." Tom Hood, *Life in Lodgings* (London: 1879), 33-34.

Company, Limited".⁶⁶ Despite his initial scheme to become a "model of industry" to his fellow clerks and his employer, Ormesby's work environment begins to rapidly rob him of his will and determination to be a diligent and ambitious worker.

Poor Osmond! He really wanted to work, and to work hard, and, had it been offered to him, in the enthusiasm of his new resolves to tread the "paths of progress" and make "headway in life," there is no doubt he would have exerted himself, for the time at least, right manfully; but as it was, his expectations were extinguished; and while he continued to convince himself that he was nobly indignant at being put to such work as mere scribbling in the presence of applicants, he found himself, in spite of his great resolves and mighty determinations, drifting slowly into the habit before the day was ended.⁶⁷

Despite Ormesby's grand notions of self-improvement he finds that diligence alone will not improve his situation. The author is critical of the impact that notions of "Self-Help" have had on young men such as Ormesby. It has induced him to leave a stable work and family life in the country for the uncertainties, anxieties, and dangers of the city. Ormesby's desire for respectability and upward-mobility is so pronounced that he is willing to suffer through countless unnecessary hardships. The profound loneliness and solitude that Ormesby faces in his attempt at "treading the 'paths of progress'" is explored. Central to Ormesby's liminality are his intense feelings of insecurity and anxiety over his position. "Here he was, with very little money, young and unknown; so little regarded in his business that had he never put in another appearance no one in the office would have minded in the least."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, his home-life provides few comforts from which

⁶⁶Anon, The Story of a London Clerk, 13-18.

⁶⁷Ibid., 14 and 17.

his anxieties can be ameliorated. The author emphasizes the "loneliness, the strangeness," and "the absence of certainty of always having one secure place—a house, a home—to go" which Ormesby faced in his life in the lodging house.⁶⁹ This experience reinforces Ormesby's sense of his liminal nature. "At night-time, when he sat thinking or reading," alone in his lodgings, "it was always with a feeling of being very very small in a great city".⁷⁰

Just when Ormesby attempts to improve his material circumstances by moving to a cheaper lodging house he finds himself out of employment when his employer closes the office and flees to America with the business's accounts overnight. With only five pounds in savings, he faced ruin and "was prepared to undergo any hardship in attempting to secure work, and to sell his labour at almost any price, in almost any market."⁷¹ With no connections and little experience Ormesby, not for want of effort, cannot find work. The experience of failing to secure a livelihood reinforces his feelings of insignificance and desperation. Ormesby suffers at the hands of the city and its dearth of employment, but as he struggles with unemployment he internalizes his failings.

To be out of work in London! Oh, the sad feelings of the stranger-youth, who has come to the great city in the flush of first convictions and enthusiastic aspirations, when he finds himself rejected of men on every hand; the bitterness, the mortification of discovering his insignificance, and realizing how little his ability avails, how slightly his industry is treated, and how London would as lief be without him; the chagrin of being cast aside, unheeded and unknown, when the hand is ready and the

⁶⁸Ibid., 21.

⁶⁹Ibid., 22.

⁷⁰Ibid., 26.

⁷¹Ibid., 32.

heart is strong; the anguish of failing to secure a footing where so many stand, and many, too with less aptitude and feebler energy; the agony of being compelled each day to witness the vastness of the business going on around, while the eager wish to join the throng remained ungratified!

To be out of work in London! Day after day, the morning of hope followed by the evening of disappointment; living in expectations that rise simply to be extinguished; writing one day, searching the next; trusting a vague promise of consideration in one place, expecting favour or success in another; waiting, working, worrying,—until the glad young hopeful heart sinks in despair.

To be out of work in London! No one to turn to for a word of cheer; mixing among millions, and yet as lonely as living in a wilderness; in all that teeming throng from Paddington in the west to Poplar in the east, from Parliament Hill on the north to Penge on the south, not single soul to know or to be known of either; people, people everywhere, but not a friendly look or word from any one.

To be out of work in London—cruel, lonely London!⁷²

The nature of Ormesby's disillusionment and liminality is explored by the author throughout the book. Ormesby is representative of clerks with cursory educations and connections who naively believe that ambition alone will be the harbinger of occupational, material, and, most significantly, personal growth. Naiveté is, however, Ormesby's only pronounced negative personality trait. Ormesby's struggle to survive, let alone rise, is portrayed by the author with sympathy. The reality of clerking life and employment prospects in London simply do not correspond to this young clerk's high ambitions and dreams. After being unemployed for three weeks Ormesby eventually procures employment as a solicitor's clerk at 10 shillings a week, but once again his hunger for promotion and upward-mobility is far from satiated. The position offers little opportunity for advancement and he finds it difficult to balance his actual opportunities with his aspirations. It is his frustration over this which hinders his personal and occupational development.

⁷²Ibid., 39-40.

Where was the opportunity of arduous energy in a situation of this kind? There was not the slightest prospect of the "paths of progress" in those dreary offices in Devereux Court. Still Osmond was hopeful, not to say sanguine, of success; but how or where the success was to be achieved he was unable to see, since it was manifest there existed no chance whatever under Messrs. Tonks and Scutworth. His recent experiences had awakened him to the consciousness of imperfections he had never dreamed of; while he was taking for granted his own superiority, he began to find himself as an everyday worker inferior in many respects; he was hindering his own true progress by rash assumptions as to the extent of his ability, and the certainty of succeeding at some time or other. A vague, distant future of rewarded industry still hampered the development of his better nature. Instead of living in the present, and recognizing the stern realities and actual conditions surrounding and affecting him, he allowed his imagination to carry him continually into the future, and conjure up ideals only calculated to stimulate selfishness and create conceit. Thoughts of what he might be and what he would like to be, instead of what he was and what he ought to be, occupied his attention.⁷³

His ability to continue his fruitless pursuit of respectability is explained by his imagination of a better position and, thus, life, which "though injurious to his best welfare, nevertheless had the effect of saving him from the slough of despair, and of lifting him out of his present situation."⁷⁴

Although a faint belief in future material rewards and a lack of alternative prospects provided Ormesby with the motivation to continue as a clerk, he suffered through extreme poverty as he attempted "to live on next-to-nothing a-year". The author devotes a lengthy chapter to the creative ways in which Ormesby stretches his salary. He makes do on a frugal diet and sells all the supplementary items of his meagre wardrobe in the interests of economy.⁷⁵ This poverty is treated with disdain by his landlords after he tells

⁷³Ibid., 60.

⁷⁴Ibid.

them to stop supplying him with breakfast and tea. Not only must Ormesby suffer from a dearth of proper food and attire, but his poverty reinforces his solitude by the limits it places on his recreational activities. His "leisure" time is spent either walking London's streets or reading in public libraries or his "cold comfortless room up the six short flights of stairs in Great College Street."⁷⁶ His books are his most valuable possessions and are his only real escape from his ever present anxieties.

He had brought his favourites from home, and they had pierced the gloom and loneliness of his London life like a radiant light. When all London seemed to spurn him, and no voice among the millions was meant for his ear, and no face like a friend's met his own, they had been welcome comforters; they had chided, counselled, and cheered him.⁷⁷

His sense of loneliness is compounded one day as he witnesses the wedding ceremony of a "well-to-do-artisan" and his bride. "'A fellow could never marry on next-to-nothing a-year,' said Osmond, as he turned away" from the sight of the happy couple. He is emasculated in his inability to support himself in a manner of respectability--let alone a wife and family.⁷⁸

Ormesby's fortunes gradually improve and in three years he is in the receipt of a respectable income. Despite this now comfortable salary, Ormesby

⁷⁵Later in the novel Ormesby tells his friend George Middlesworth how he managed to live on ten shillings a week: "'Half of it went for rent; two shillings for the week's dinners; other two shillings covered breakfast and tea, which I always made myself; leaving me a shilling for general expenses--occasional treats, you know, and little luxuries.'" Ibid., 163.

⁷⁶Ibid., 146 and 67.

⁷⁷Ibid., 154. One book in Ormesby's library was Smiles's *Self-Help*. At the half-way point of Ormesby's story his faith in the book's principles, previously resolute, began to waver after a far less naive acquaintance, the con-man Rowan, comments on the volume. "He [Rowan] threw aside a volume called "Self-Help" with a contemptuous chuckle, which made Osmond distrust the book ever after, although on Rowan's asking whether he believed in it, he replied, 'Certainly,' with great vehemence. 'So do I,' said Rowan, dryly." Ibid., 155.

⁷⁸Ibid., 74.

has become alienated from his previous urges to make "headway in life" along the "paths of progress". His employers are unscrupulous speculators who make use of Ormesby's clerical talents in their swindling of investors. Although the novel is not a critique of clerks, the author questions the social utility of the profession. This is witnessed in Ormesby's disillusionment with his job.

He was now making that "headway" he had striven for years to make; but the satisfaction and contentment he anticipated it would bring were absent. Sometimes he doubted whether he was as happy as when living on next-to-nothing a-year. . . . He began to feel now, that it mattered not whether he lived in poverty or plenty, so long as he lived truly. Happiness lay in true living, not in striving for better positions, or higher salaries.⁷⁹

He is now overtly questioning the belief system of Smiles and his fellow self-improvement proponents. He comes to believe that work with a moral or social purpose is far more fulfilling than work merely undertaken to advance.

Work by all means, and work well; for shoddy work is the first sign of shoddy men. But what had he worked for? He had worked to get on; he had got on because he had worked well; he had worked well for the sake of getting on, not for the sake of good work. Good work, he was forced to admit, had been to him solely the stepping-stone to higher positions. He had forgotten it was a duty to do all things well, because it was right that all things, in the hands of true workers, should be done well, let the consequences follow as a matter of course.⁸⁰

After running into an old schoolmate from his country-town, now employed as an engineer on a ship, he is struck by the lack of meaning his own work provides.

And he had counted manual labour mean! And he had thought himself so much superior to the work of men's hands! And he dared at one time to look upon his old schoolfellow with contempt! What mistaken ideas he had held! Here was his friend now engaged in far more

⁷⁹Ibid., 215.

⁸⁰Ibid.

honest, far more responsible, far more useful labour than he had ever been able to undertake. What a man it had made of his old companion, too!⁸¹

In the end Ormesby escapes from the meaninglessness of his work by returning to his country town and opening up a book-shop. He has turned his back on attempting to better himself for the sake of a higher salary, not because he has failed as a clerk, but because he has found success to be just as unrewarding as the poverty he suffered upon arriving in London. Ormesby's decision has been influenced by the friendship he has made with a London bookseller whom he has "told of his growing discontent with modern business methods, and of his inveterate dislike of his present calling" as a clerk.⁸² The bookseller's advice serves as the means by which Ormesby's working life is steered from one of disillusionment as a clerk to a positive new course as bookseller.

"... above all, the world wants good workers; but no good worker need become rich. Riches often bring as big a curse as poverty." ...

"And so you would become a bookseller, my son, would you? ... If your inclinations lie in that way, by all means become one. But take heed! A good deal of what I have said applies equally to the bookselling business as to any other. I have little doubt you could achieve success in the trade, but if you labour in it merely for the sake of developing the business to bring bigger and bigger returns, you may as well stay where you are. A bookseller working for profit alone is only another kind of speculator."⁸³

Ormesby finds his status as a liminal and emasculated individual transformed through his decision to enter into his new and honest profession. He finds the courage to marry his sweetheart, the bookseller's niece, because he has turned his back on the anxieties which haunted him

⁸¹Ibid., 292.

⁸²Ibid., 309.

⁸³Ibid., 309-314.

over his status as a clerk. Moreover, he has turned his back on London and its intensively competitive and soul-destroying environment. For, as the bookseller tells Ormesby, what London may provide in financial possibilities, it equally lacks in social and emotional sustenance.

In nine cases out of ten young men can live healthier and more useful lives out of London than they can live in London. London life tends towards secretiveness and selfishness; it is too vast to enable you to know many people well, or take more than a passing interest in their lives; but in smaller communities you can live and feel, and you can joy and sorrow with others, and you can feel that you are a member of the whole. In London, few, if any, people can feel that; they only feel they are units of millions; they stand alone, knowing little of each other, and loving each other little. The whole is too big in London to allow of the individuals who make it doing much for the common good.⁸⁴

This theme of London clerical life as one of soul-destroying drudgery is also witnessed in Shan Bullock's 1907 novel *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk*.⁸⁵ The Anglo-Irish Bullock, a civil service clerk and writer of novels and short stories, had entered the civil service twenty-three years earlier at 19 years of age.⁸⁶ As in Osmond Ormesby's tale, at the end of the novel Thorne turns his back on an unfulfilled life as a clerk. He finds his salvation by emigrating to New Zealand to begin a new life as a farmer. Like

⁸⁴Ibid., 314-315.

⁸⁵Shan F. Bullock, *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk* (London: 1907).

⁸⁶Shan F. Bullock (1865-1935) remained in the civil service until his retirement despite the publication of over twenty books and his position for many years as the London correspondent for the *Chicago Evening Post*. He served on the Secretariat at the Irish Convention in Dublin in 1917-18 and was later, in recognition of his faithful service, made a Member of the Order of the British Empire. At the end of his life he was elected to the Irish Academy of Letters. Robert Greacen, "Shan F. Bullock: Laureate of Lough Erne," *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* Vol. 14, No. 4, 1979, 109-124; Vivian Mercier and David H. Greene (eds.), *1000 Years of Irish Prose: The Literary Revival* (New York: 1952), 596; and Robert L. Selig, "Gissing and Shan F. Bullock: The First Reference in the Chicago Press to Gissing's Chicago Fiction and Adventures," *The Gissing Journal* Vol. 28, No. 4, Oct. 1992, 1-6.

Ormesby, it was ambition and an enthusiasm for the promises of the city's stimulants which induced Thorne to leave his village, Helscombe in Devon, to become a clerk in London. At the beginning of the novel he befriends a young War Office clerk, Jack Hinde, who convinces Thorne that his future and fortune are to be sought in London.

... the more I thought the more I liked Jack's counsel. He was himself a constant incentive, bright, contented, well-dressed, charming in manner. I had discretion enough to see that following his steps might be more difficult and perhaps less glorious than he pictured; still I thought it possible to follow at a humble distance. I had education as good as his. I felt more than his equal in character. Already ambition, such as it was, moved me, and with it a certain determination to achieve. What Jack Hinde had done I could do, and would do if doing were possible. ... London--London: how the place attracted me! How it coloured my dreams!⁸⁷

Young Thorne fails to heed the wisdom of his father who tries to convince his son that a clerk is not a man, but a "slave". His father would prefer to see his son "carrying letters" or "serving cheese" behind a counter than as a clerk--"a creature with a pen behind its ear!"⁸⁸ A foreshadowing of Thorne's impending life of drudgerous liminality and emasculation is witnessed in the scorn his father heaps on clerks.

"A clerk," he said, a scoffing note in his voice; "you're studying to be a clerk. You think you're fit for nothing else. ... You want to be like him [Jack], perched on a stool all day with your nose to a ledger. You want his pale face, and his slouch, and his simper. I suppose he's been telling you about his London experiences too and all the devilments he's learnt. ... Sir," cried father at last, "haven't I told you better. Haven't I taught you that what a man owes to himself is to strive after manhood. A clerk with a clerk's narrow little soul--is that your idea of a man!"⁸⁹

⁸⁷Ibid., 5.

⁸⁸Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹Ibid., 6.

Nonetheless, young Thorne sets off to London to study for the civil service examinations at "Goddard College" and to make his fortune as a clerk. He is successful on his second attempt at writing the entrance examinations and believes, like the rest of his village, that success and financial rewards will soon follow in London.

I was something of a wonder in the village. Neighbours came to sit by the hearth and hear of my adventures. For them I was on the road to glory and affluence. One day I should have a thousand a year and a house in London big as Parson's. That was more than I might ever find in Helscombe. Ah, learning was the thing, and it was I who was the lucky boy, and London for certain was the place. . . . "90

In London Thorne has befriended Bertie Willard during his civil service examination studies and is introduced to the Willard family. Herbert is the son of the wealthy self-made shoe merchant, Joshua Willard. Thorne quickly becomes a regular visitor to the Willard household and is in awe of the Willard family's comfort and wealth. However, he believes that now that he has gained entrance into the civil service a similar life will eventually be his. All that would be required was an unwavering commitment to self-improvement.

I had dreams and ambitions of my own. I meant to study in London, to resume work presently with Goddard. A Man clerkship in the Civil Service would not always content me. Who knew that one day I should not be something worth while. See what I had already done. It was not every youth in Devon or elsewhere could claim success like mine in a handful of months. I should strive in my office and gain reward for good service. Soon I should be able to hold my head as high as any Bertie Willard; have clothes fine as his, have money of my own; after a while, who knew, have a house somewhere with steps to the door and mahogany furniture in the rooms and gilt-mirrors standing behind ormolu clocks. A self-made man: was Joshua Willard the only one who might vaunt the name?⁹¹

⁹⁰Ibid., 29.

⁹¹Ibid., 30.

Not surprisingly, Thorne's dreams of success and upward mobility are clouded upon his first day in the Tax Office in Somerset House⁹²—a locale with which Bullock was more than familiar. Despite this familiarity Bullock avoids a detailed examination of the specifics of work within the offices of the civil service. He instead concentrates on how the civil service career path structure and hierarchy turn clerical life into one of unrealized ambition and monotony.⁹³ Thorne's high ideals and expectations are a sharp contrast to the pessimistic remarks of Oliver, a fellow Tax Office clerk whom Thorne ultimately befriends. "A man gets no chance. What chance have we, anyway? They take us and call us Men clerks. Men clerks! Just as they talk of Buck niggers."⁹⁴ Oliver, through his observations and personal

⁹²See the section in Chapter One for a discussion of the significance of Somerset House.

⁹³Interestingly, two reviewers of the novel, neither realizing Bullock's ties to the civil service, differed in their opinions regarding Bullock's treatment of work within the civil service. The reviewer in *The Athenæum* believed that "the best thing in the book is the account of the machinery of a Government office." The reviewer in *The Academy*, however, believed Bullock's account of the culture of the civil service office to be too anecdotal. "He has caught the spirit of the clerk as a class, but he has not caught that subtle distinctive note which makes the civil servant quite different from his fellows in the mercantile houses. He is more concerned with the accidents than the essence . . . Office-coats fastened with pink tape and paper-fasteners, lunch in the restaurant in the basement, tea-clubs in the afternoon—all these are familiar to those who know Somerset House, but they do not of themselves make up that strange product of the departmental system, 'the Somerset House young man.' . . . Whether he writes of the life from personal experience we do not know, but the fact remains that his picture of the Camberwell home of the Willards or of the Kennington lodging-house is far truer in spirit than is his central and most important scene—the Mill." *The Athenæum*, 5 October, 1907, No. 4171, 400; and *The Academy: A Weekly Review of Literature and Life*, 28 September, 1907, Vol. 73, 951-952.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 40. In a footnote Bullock provides an explanation on how this term supposedly came into existence. "I have heard Thorne say that the name was invented by a certain society dame, who, about the time his class was formed, interviewed a prominent official with a view to getting a post for the son of her game-keeper. 'The very thing,' said the lady. 'I must see about it at once. What name do you give these new clerks, Mr. De Vere?' 'Well, I can hardly say,' answered the official. 'We have created the men, but we can't find a name for them.'

characteristics, emphasizes the way in which clerking in the civil service emasculates men by turning them into materially deprived, marginal and shabby creatures. Oliver, who appears shabby, worn and unclean, has come to realize the insignificance of his position and work. "D' you think if we were men We'd be content to sit here toasting our toes at an office fire? Not likely! We'd be doing something--policemen, or driving a bus or something?"⁹⁵ Oliver informs Thorne that all that second division civil service clerks such as he and Thorne can look forward to is the "prospect of two-fifty a year some time when we're grey headed, and the kick-out at sixty with what they call a pension."⁹⁶ He points out that clerks such as he and Thorne have little prospect for advancement as an unbreachable line separates them from the first division clerks who are eventually able to become "the top-hats of this establishment--Commissioners, Chiefs, Principals, Heads of Sections, and all the rest."⁹⁷

We aren't class enough. Look at us, a hundred and twenty Men clerks all in a bunch like sheep in a pen. Do you see how we're labeled, each man with his little *Mister*, and his little salary? That's official etiquette. Above the Line you're an Esquire, below it you're plain Mister and be damned you! . . . Here's my name down here. Yours will be there at the bottom one of these days. And there we'll stay, never any higher--not a derved inch except someone above us cuts his throat.⁹⁸

'Oh, that's easy,' said the lady. 'Let me see. Civil servants--men servant.--maid servants. Why not call them Men clerks?'"

⁹⁵Ibid., 41.

⁹⁶Ibid., 40.

⁹⁷Ibid., 41-42.

⁹⁸Ibid., 42.

No amount of studying or extra work and effort would enable these "Men Clerks" to rise to positions of respect and privilege within the civil service. Administrative positions were only accessible to clerks of privileged educations and backgrounds.

Despite Oliver's discontentment with his job he is happy in his home and marriage. Oliver and his wife represent the noble and humble nature of lower middle class matrimony. Although morose and frustrated in the office, Oliver is able to exercise a significant degree of positive masculine agency through his role as a contented husband and breadwinner. Thorne is struck by Oliver's ability, despite his poverty, to nobly escape from the anxieties of the office.

He did not drink, waste time, or squander money. Poor fellow, he had little to squander. Not long ago I had spent an evening in his home at Peckingham. Only two rooms I found, small, poorly furnished, right at top of a long stair, no pictures on the walls, just cocoa-nut matting on the floor of the living-room, and the coals in a box in a corner. Yet there, at home, free of the office and its cares, Oliver seemed fully content. . . . He got quite jolly over supper. He kept us amused with all kinds of nonsense, and afterwards he put on an old hat and sang a comic song, and made his wife cry with laughter.⁹⁹

Thorne desires this same domestic harmony, as he has fallen in love with Nell Willard, Bertie's sister. Thorne still believes, however, that he needs to make a success of himself before he can entertain thoughts of matrimony. Thorne even outlines a rigorous course of rules of self-improvement which he believes will carry him to success in his work and life.

(1) To study at least ten hours a week. (2) To work hard in the office. (3) To save every penny I can. (4) To cut down on expenses in every way possible--but no newspapers--stop smoking--walk to and from the office--limit luncheon money to tenpence per diem--drink cocoa with supper--be very careful with clothes--stop amusements. (5) To put away

⁹⁹Ibid., 62-63.

something every pay day in the Post Office savings bank, and to keep it there. (6) To note all expenditure as it occurs and to balance accounts each Saturday night. . . . (9) To read at least one good book every month (10) To spend a Saturday afternoon now and then in the National Gallery, the British Museum, or some other instructive place. . . . (13) To write to father every Sunday morning. (14) To read my Bible before going to bed. . . . (17) To do my best.¹⁰⁰

Joshua Willard, sensing Thorne's interest in his daughter, continually lectures Thorne on the necessity of materially-motivated self-improvement and serves to reinforce Thorne's notion that men are judged by their occupational success and, thus, incomes. Moreover, Willard's advice on marriage reaffirms Thorne's status-conscious contention that marriage is only for those young men who can support a wife in middle class style and comfort.

"Presently, like all young men, you will be considering the question of—shall we say marriage. Foolishness, of course, pure foolishness for one in your position. But you will. And my advice is: Don't look higher than yourself. It will save you disappointment and trouble. . . ."¹⁰¹

Willard is the archetypal self-made man; the kind depicted in the countless success manuals of the period which filled the heads of young clerks such as Thorne's with shibboleths of self-improvement. When Thorne tells Willard of the difficulties facing clerks in regard to promotion within the civil service he is sternly lectured.

"Indeed!" Mr Willard dabbed his face with his handkerchief, pushed back his hat, raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. "I am sorry to hear that, Mr Thorne. I fancied—indeed I may say I think that in Her Majesty's Service, as elsewhere, is certainty of promotion for competent men. There must be. It is a law of life. You cannot keep under a capable man who means to rise. I dislike talking of myself, and particularly in any laudatory manner: but I must again instance my own case. I had much opposition. Had I been less determined I might easily

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 67.

to-day be nothing. Nothing. But I meant succeeding. And you see the result. It would have been the same in any line of life. Had it been my lot to find myself in--shall we say your position, Mr. Thorne--I must have risen. You cannot hold back the determined man."¹⁰²

Although Willard helps to keep Thorne's anxieties inflamed, his daughter Nell tries to advise Thorne that a man does not have to be a financial success for him and his wife to enjoy their lives and marriage. When Thorne is surprised that Oliver does not seem embarrassed about maintaining an impoverished household, Nell remarks: "It isn't what people have that makes them happy; it's themselves."¹⁰³ Nell, through her own experiences, knows that money and occupational success are not the only keys to happiness. Unfortunately for Thorne, his own beliefs, reaffirmed by the influence of Nell's father, were not yet ready to be challenged by her wisdom and influence.

Bullock takes great care to chart Thorne's working life and his gradual disillusionment with clerking. John Carey is quite right in his estimation that the novel is a "sympathetic treatment of clerkdom", and that it is, perhaps, an answer to Crosland's *Suburbans*.¹⁰⁴ However, the novel also reveals the dangers of the clerk's life and how its incessant drudgery and liminality, only made bearable through the faint hope of advancement, can hinder the development of the clerk's individuality and masculinity. There is a danger of Thorne merely becoming merged into London's masses: "generally he goes unnoticed through the throng. There are thousands like

¹⁰²Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰⁴John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 60-62.

him. There they go, hurrying for the bridges, each in his cheap black coat, each with his pale face and uneven shoulders: thousands of them. Slaves of the desk. Twopenny clerks."¹⁰⁵ Bullock, however, also highlights Thorne's growing consciousness of his liminality at work and the necessity of taking control of the soul stirring under his office coat,

I felt sometimes like a machine, a thing grinding out its daily portion, mechanically turning leaves with cold grimed fingers, writing, casting, carrying forward, the sun peering in at long intervals upon me through grimy windows or the fog hanging drear about the candles. The work was dull, everlasting. Over it my brain toiled or some part of my brain. but it never stirred my wits, hardly my interest. Yet I was content. I was young, submissive, uncritical. Always sitting with me on the stool, before the ledger, was another self--the self that at four o'clock flung off its office coat and strode manfully out.¹⁰⁶

Thorne does not relinquish his individuality to modernity and eventually finds his role in life as husband and companion to Nell. He turns his back on the narrow views of the Joshua Willards who believe that clerks who have not quickly risen are unsuitable for marriage. When Willard discovers Nell and Thorne's secret love he refuses to allow Thorne to see her on the grounds that Thorne has gone behind his back in the courtship of his daughter. Thorne is, however, more than aware of Willard's actual reasons for his objections to him.

Isn't your real objection to me not so much that I'm a blackguard and a cad as that I'm what you call a twopenny clerk? Suppose I had been in a good position with a good income, wouldn't that have made all the difference?¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, 137-138

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 73-74.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 121.

Despite Willard's condescending attitude towards Thorne's occupation and status, his rank as successful self-made man is soon shattered. *The Ajax Society*, in which Willard was a director, collapsed after he and his fellow directors accumulated large losses through speculating with the funds entrusted to them by thousands of small-time investors. The self-made man, who had lectured Thorne on the virtues of self-improvement and judged him as being unsuitable material for his daughter, turned out to be little more than a common thief. Overwhelmed on the day that news of the scandal is made public, Willard collapses and dies. Shortly after his death other secrets emerge, and "the world heard of gambling debts, of a mortgaged business, of secret dissipation, of unfaithfulness."¹⁰⁸

The *Ajax* episode and Willard's death instills in Thorne a belief that success and happiness in life can be achieved through avenues other than financial gain and obtaining a high social and/or occupational status. Bullock, like Dickens, does not treat the domestic poverty of clerks of the impoverished middle classes with scorn, as Forster, Crosland and Gissing, but with a celebration of their virtue and humility. Thorne, having seen what is so often behind the facade of respectability, is now ready to accept the counsel and wisdom of his father who advises him to marry Nell. "Poverty won't hurt you. It's the happiest condition in life. I'm sure of it. Given health, shelter and food, and young people who trust each other needn't fear that blessings will be withheld."¹⁰⁹ Thus Thorne and Nell set out to establish a home. The trials they face in their plans to set up a household are treated in a

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 153.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 156.

very serious manner. Thorne earns only 95 pounds a year when he marries and has managed to save very little, therefore great care is taken regarding the purchase of furniture for their new home. They eventually purchase furniture on "the Hire system" for £28 15s. 6d, and are happy and proud of their new furnishings. They find frustrated amusement in an article from a middle class journal on "*How to furnish for £250*" and are struck by the insularity of the author who seems to believe that the only class of people worth mentioning live in London's West End. They wonder what a snob such as this would think of their new home in East Dulwich.

"Yes, by Jove he would stare, Nell. Can't understand a fellow writing like that. But I suppose in his calculations he never got within miles of a Twopenny clerk."

"Of course not," said Nell. "He thinks people like ourselves grub through life in one furnished room. How dare we have a home! The idea of our spending five pounds ten on a plush-covered suite. . . ."110

The Thornes soon add a son to their family, an event which fills Robert with enormous pride. He was now the patriarch of a family, which helps to bring meaning and purpose to his life. Reflecting on how he felt the day after his son was born, he exclaims: "I felt six inches higher . . . I felt like a man. . . . Life had opened."¹¹¹ He has found happiness in a locale looked down upon, if not objected to, by the arbiters of society and culture—the family of the second division civil service clerk. After running into two senior clerks on an afternoon stroll with his new heir, Thorne imagines the contempt which will be targeted at him after he parts their company. "By Jove—little Thorne married—and with a kid. Whew! And the fellow can't have much more

¹¹⁰Ibid., 159-168.

¹¹¹Ibid., 200.

than a hundred a year. Little boulder in his silk hat, and wheeling a perambulator like any counter-jumper. This is how the Service is let down by bringing in these Board School cads."¹¹²

The Thorne's married life is, however, a sharp contrast to that of Leonard and Jacky Bast which E. M. Forster, in *Howards End*, depicts as one of impoverished misery and deception. In answer to skeptics, perhaps critical of lower middle class matrimony, Bullock's Thorne happily reflects on his married life. "We really did enjoy ourselves. Our affection for each other continued, grew. Poverty did not make life grey. We romanced without forgetting to be practical."¹¹³ They took pride in their home, especially their parlour, despite their recognition that "the walls needed pictures and their cheap yellow-flowered paper was in bilious contrast with the dark green carpet; . . . the overmantel was too small, and the plush suite filled the room with an odour of musty hay".¹¹⁴ Most significantly, unlike Eliza and her husband and Mr. and Mrs. Pooter, they are equals. They take equal delight in formulating the household budget and discovering new, frugal and enjoyable ways to entertain themselves.¹¹⁵ However banal this may appear to middle

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 211.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 172.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 173.

¹¹⁵Great care is taken to outline the methods employed by the Thornes to stretch their household budget. "Nell herself was a famous cook and manager. She had the art of creating, of making dishes out of nothing, of turning an old dress or hat into something better than new; and the way she kept the rooms and filled them with cheap and beautiful things, and the gift she had of always appearing neat, and the tact she showed in marketing, and the skill with which she made both ends of her fifteen shillings a week meet and sometimes tie in a bow--all this to me was something nearly miraculous. On Saturdays I hurried home to three o'clock dinner (steak and kidney pudding it usually was), and in the evening we both went to Rye Lane

class observers, the care and attention that the Thornes take in planning their budget is celebrated. For, as Thorne observes:

The difference between us and any Chancellor of the Exchequer was only one of degree. Perhaps indeed it takes not much less financial skill to handle an income of Ninety-five pounds per annum than it takes to handle an income of Ninety-five millions.¹¹⁶

Thorne is not emasculated through matrimony; indeed it is his marriage which begins to make him a man.

Thorne makes an attempt at cultural self-improvement through reading and visits to art galleries and museums. Like Leonard Bast, his intellectual pursuits are disparate and undirected. The Thornes own the standard sixpenny editions of Scott, Dickens, Dumas and Jane Austen—the form of literature so often sneered at by Crosland and Gissing.¹¹⁷ When attempting "to satisfy more intellectual cravings", Thorne turns to Shakespeare's plays, Carlyle's histories, Bacon's essays and Tennyson's poems. Unlike Bast, however, he finds satisfaction, not tragedy, in his humble intellectual endeavours. In fact, Thorne argues that cerebral pursuits can have results for even the humblest cave-dwelling clerk, and should not be the sole preserve of upper and middle class philosopher kings.

... I ventured farther afield, discovered Huxley's essays, the theological writings of Matthew Arnold, even *The Origin of Species*—with results that may appear. Then too, in due course of time and growth, I dabbled a little in elementary science, read *Modern Painters*, Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, and some Horace and Virgil.

and did the shopping. Our business was to get the utmost value for every penny, the best half-leg of mutton in the market, the largest bunch of watercresses, the most tempting smoked haddock for our Sunday morning breakfast." *Ibid.*, 177.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 178.

¹¹⁷Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 61-2 and 94.

All this I record, not aiming at self-praise but desiring to inform, my notion being that you may care to see even the intellectual cravings of a Two-penny clerk. We really do have minds, we black-coated slaves, and souls of a kind, and we strive and crave. And sometimes into our little homes comes a sense of the mystery of things, and then we ask questions and maybe send up feeble cries for light. Funny little people, groping in the dark! Better keep our eyes perhaps on the great mystery of insufficient bread and butter.¹¹⁸

This self-education is not induced by vain or pretentious motivations, but through a quest for self-fulfillment; it ultimately provides Thorne with the wisdom to reflect positively on his life and experience. He is content with his home and marriage, but finds the drudgery of office work and its low pay and poor prospects unfulfilling and emasculating. It makes him "feel small . . . and not much of a man."¹¹⁹ These feelings subside when he escapes to the comfort of domesticity, but he worries about the long-term effects of such a life on his soul.

I'm not tired of the office, but I'm beginning to see it differently. The gilt has worn off, . . . I have a notion now of what it all means. Forty years of drudgery, and then, when I'm bald-headed and worn out, a bit of a pension to keep us out of the workhouse. I wouldn't mind so much if things were easier now—I mean if there was more money and a better chance. But what chance is there? Eighty or ninety fellows above me and all of them as good as myself, I suppose, and all of us, like the prisoners in the Black Hole of Calcutta, fighting and begging to get out. 'Tisn't encouraging is it, Nell? And then there's the money business—money—money—never enough—always struggling and grinding. . . . Do you think men were created for that sort of thing? I mean sent into the world to settle into a kind of rut, and keep there always, and never see anything, and never be anything?¹²⁰

Thorne struggles to find the same degree of meaning and purpose in his work which he has found in his domestic sphere. He compares his life and poor

¹¹⁸Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, 181.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 190.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 190-191.

physical condition, with his narrow chest and game shoulder, to that of working class men, such as omnibus drivers, bricklayers and navvies, who "were men, and looked men, and led men's lives."¹²¹ Meanwhile, although he is in the eyes of such men merely "a ---- little pen-driver", he is forced to adopt the pretense of being of a higher caste "by conforming to its traditions in the matter of appearance."¹²² He is generally happy, and eventually adds two more children and a part-time domestic servant to his family, but dreams of an existence apart from his fellow suburban-dwelling civil service clerks with their jerry-built homes, shoddy clothes and adulterated food.¹²³

Thorne's decision to emigrate to New Zealand and become a farmer with his brother is predicated on his desire to become the complete man that he cannot become through the world of clerking. His frustration at being emasculated by clerking is witnessed in an exchange between him and Nell.

"... You're not clerks always. Why should seven hours a day affect your whole lives? You have homes and children and wives and plenty of interests. You can make life what you like. You can be men as well as clerks."

"Ah, but can we Nell? That's just the point. Don't we lose our manhood? What do we see of real life? What do we know of the world?"

¹²¹Ibid., 219-220.

¹²²Ibid., 220 and 202.

¹²³Ibid., 249. Although Bullock is clearly depressed in regard to the long-term impact of such a life on clerks, he continues to treat their domestic ambitions and dreams of respectability not as pretentious foolery, but with a great deal of respect. For, as Thorne maintains that, "despite circumstances, we were finding our feet in the social world, making the best show we could. The brass knocker, the bay window, the dining and drawing rooms, establish the fact; whilst the Study gives evidence that already we had in view the great suburban ideal of being superior to the people next door. I can see nothing petty in all this. When a man attains to the privileges of a voter and ratepayer, when his wife reaches the servant standard, when it comes to living in a dining-room and receiving in a drawing-room, I think pretensions are excusable. They are harmless. They give tone. They relieve monotony and supply diversion." Ibid., 249-250.

What do we know of anything? I'm not thinking of our fellows only. It's all of us—all—all. We're a small breed. We aren't real men. We don't do men's work. Pen-drivers—miserable little pen-drivers—fellows in black coats, with inky fingers and shiny seats on their trousers—that's what we are. Oh, you may laugh Nell; but it's true, all the same. Think of crossing *i*'s and dotting *i*'s all day long. No wonder bricklayers and omnibus drivers have contempt for us. We haven't even health. That fellow turning an organ outside is more of a man."¹²⁴

Thorne does not willingly accept a dismal future but searches for agency and continually asks, "How can I help myself?" He is shackled by his occupation, however, and is unable to find a method of agency to break his chains within the structures of the office and the civil service. For, as a reviewer of the novel for *The Clerk* noted, "he had to contend with killing monotony; his life from (office) cradle to the grave was mapped out for him with cold, inhuman, official exactitude; all element of chance or opportunity was removed."¹²⁵ Thorne could not find a way "to be both a man, and a clerk." Bullock, like many other clerks, such as Dickens, Shaw and Bennett, turned to writing, but Thorne, despite a fertile imagination and a determined spirit, lacks this skill. For him the only means to fulfill his desire to become a complete man and give his children the "chance of being something more than typists and clerks", is to escape to the New Zealand countryside of "freedom, life" and, "the open air".¹²⁶

The escape to the pastoral is what liberates Thorne from the structures of the office and the confines of urban modernity. This theme of urban white-collar emasculation is also witnessed in Forster's *Howards End*.

¹²⁴Ibid., 275-276.

¹²⁵Book Review: "Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk", *The Clerk*, February 1908, Vol. I, No. 2, 18-19.

¹²⁶Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, 275-291.

Leonard Bast lives a life of drudgery and privation because, in Forster's estimation, modernity has herded those best-suited for a simple life in the countryside into England's cities.

One guessed him as the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization had sucked into the town; as one of the thousands who have lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit. Hints of robustness survived in him, more than a hint of primitive good looks, and Margaret, noting the spine that might have been straight, and the chest that might have broadened, wondered whether it paid to give up the glory of the animal for a tail coat and a couple of ideas. Culture had worked in her own case, but during the last few weeks she had doubted whether it humanized the majority, so wide and so widening is the gulf that stretches between the natural and the philosophic man, so many the good chaps who are wrecked in trying to cross it. She knew this type very well—the vague aspirations, the mental dishonesty, the familiarity with the outsides of books.¹²⁷

Forster speaks through Margaret Schlegel in his questioning of the ability of men of Bast's type to achieve respectability and culture. Although sympathetic to Bast's material deprivations, Forster was not overly concerned with the sufferings or ambitions of clerks. He, like many other Edwardian intellectuals, was worried about the "condition of England", or, as Lionel Trilling suggested, "who shall inherit England?"¹²⁸ Clerks such as Bast were perceived as a threat to England's physical, moral, cultural and spiritual health. John Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* argues that it was the modernist movement in literature which was responsible for this increasingly common representation of the clerk. He maintains that a loathing of the masses and a fear of mass education and democracy caused writers such as Forster, Gissing, Wells, Shaw, Nietzsche, Ortega y Gasset, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Ezra Pound and Graham Greene to

¹²⁷Forster, Ch. 14, p. 345.

¹²⁸Lionel Trilling, *E. M. Forster* (New York: 1964), 102.

attempt to preserve their class position by traducing suburban men, frequently clerks, in their literature.¹²⁹

Bast's attempts to achieve culture are portrayed as farcical, inappropriate and dangerous. Modernity, with Henry Wilcox as one of its conspirators, has victimized and displaced a man who, in Forster's view, should have been a contented farmer but instead became an impoverished lower middle class clerk. He may have a spirit of adventure and a desire for self-improvement, but in his circumstance these are a detriment to his happiness. His desire to be viewed as genteel will be his downfall.

The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it, and at times people whom he knew had dropped in, and counted no more. He knew that he was poor, and would admit it: he would have died sooner than confess any inferiority to the rich. This may be splendid of him. But he was inferior to most rich people, there is not the least doubt of it. He was not as courteous as the average rich man, nor as intelligent, not as healthy, nor as lovable. His mind and his body had been underfed, because he was poor, and because he was modern they were always craving better food. Had he lived some centuries ago, in the brightly coloured civilizations of the past, he would have had a definite status, his rank and his income would have corresponded. But in his day the angel of democracy had arisen, enshadowing the classes with leathern wings, and proclaiming: "All men are equal—all men, that is to say, who possess umbrellas," and so he was obliged to assert gentility, lest he slipped into the abyss where nothing counts and the statements of Democracy are inaudible.¹³⁰

Bast is discontented and desperately attempts to find a way, "not so much out of poverty as out of the meaninglessness and superfluity of his circumstance, . . . by somehow becoming cultured".¹³¹ He believed that culture would

¹²⁹John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*. For a good appraisal of Carey's book see Jonathan Rose, "Intellectuals Among the Masses: Or, What Was Leonard Bast Really Like?," *Biblion: The Bulletin of The New York Public Library* Vol. 2, No. 2, 1994, 3-18.

¹³⁰Forster, *Howards End*, Ch. 6, p. 296.

improve him and make him a man, "and that if he kept on with Ruskin, and the Queen's Hall Concerts, and some pictures by Watts, he would one day push his head out of the gray waters and see the universe."¹³² "Culture", however, cannot improve Bast's position because his cursory education, socialization and poverty have placed a comprehension of culture beyond his understanding. Bast believed in a sudden and miraculous conversion that would transform him into a man of cultured gentility, a belief which, in Forster's opinion, "may be right, but which is peculiarly attractive to a half-baked mind."¹³³ He attempts to better himself by reading Ruskin but "the rich man who speaks to us from his gondola" is ripe with irony.¹³⁴ Sadly, when Bast attempts to copy the style of Ruskin's prose in his depiction of the wonders of Venice to describe his own experience, the best he can come up with is: "My flat is dark as well as stuffy."¹³⁵

Forster's concern with England's inheritance focuses on the relationship between the Schlegel and Wilcox families and which of the two will become the inheritor of the house, Howards End--"the symbolic representation of civilized England."¹³⁶ Instead of a power-struggle between

¹³¹Frederick J. Hoffman, "Howards End and the Bogey of Progress," Modern Fiction Studies Vol. 7, No. 3, Autumn 1961, 252-255.

¹³²Forster, Ch. 6, p. 299.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Forster, Ch. 6, p. 298. For a good discussion of Bast's attempts to become cultured see K. W. Gransden, E. M. Forster (2nd. Edition), (Edinburgh: 1970), 62-64.

¹³⁵Forster, Ch. 6, p. 299.

¹³⁶Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson "A Literature For England," in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920 (London: 1986), 137.

the liberal, cultured and cosmopolitan Schlegels and the conservative and materialistic Wilcoxes, in the end Forster proposes a union of these two very different, but necessarily important branches of the middle class. In short, England requires both money and cultural humanism and this is signified in the novel's epigraph--"only connect". Clerks such as Bast are only vaguely part of this connection. He sires the heir to Howards End, but is killed off by Forster before the child is born. He adds a "spirit of adventure", a link to England's rural past and a drive for self-improvement to the middle class connection, but this, in Forster's vision, is only prudent if under the watchful eye of the Wilcox and Schlegel union. Forster, like so many other liberals, believed that mass democracy needed to be carefully moderated by the appropriate classes. Clerks such as Bast, with their rough culture, habits and unrealizable ambitions, were rapidly growing in numbers and represented a threat to England's health. With the advent of mass democracy in England they needed to be included in Forster's "connection", but in such a way as to safeguard themselves and England against what Forster perceived to be the dangers of modernity.

It is, perhaps, rather appropriate that Bast's child is the inheritor of Howards End. In many ways this is symbolic of the clerking experience. Although the most honest attempts to portray the clerk in a positive light recognized the material, social and cultural difficulties he faced in his attempts to maintain a certain level of comfort, societal respect and self-respect, even Forster was forced to recognize the spirit of ambition and adventure that could not be completely subjugated by a life of drudgerous work and limited possibilities. Clerks sometimes found this in their work,

but as discourse concerning the home life reveals, it could also be achieved through marriage and domesticity. Clerks could construct their own distinct and positive identity and culture as long as they recognized it as such. Middle class commentators often sneered at such attempts, but usually failed to recognize it for what it was—distinctly clerical and in no way a threat to their own exclusive middle class status and culture.

Conclusion

Since the publication of Crossick's classic work on the lower middle class almost twenty-five years ago, historians have continued to note the diverse nature of the lower middle class. A recognition of this diversity has forced historians to re-examine specific groups and their cultural and social experiences within this "class". For example, recent work by John Tosh on Victorian middle class masculinity and James Hammerton on Victorian and Edwardian lower middle class marriage has examined the comforts that the private sphere of the household provided for married men of the English middle classes.¹ Hammerton's work has been particularly important for lower middle class historiography as it has helped to correct the stereotype of the pretentious "nobody" trapped in a vulgar and effeminate suburban home and marriage. He has shown that a lower middle class marriage was far more likely to be that of an affable partnership than a tedious and bickering union of failed aspirations. Domestic authority, while hardly absolute, was at least partial compensation for the diminished masculinity the married lower middle class male experienced in his work and public life. Meanwhile, as Chris Hosgood has clearly illuminated, in the case of shop assistants trapped in their "Mercantile Monasteries," an inability to marry seriously compromised lower middle class notions of manliness and identity.² What

¹John Tosh *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: 1998); and James Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920," *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1999, 291-321.

these works have illustrated is that individual groups within the lower middle class responded to challenges in relation to their distinct social, cultural and historical experience. They imply that the lower middle class cannot be merely understood through a simple analysis of its members' relationship with the modes or means of production. This scholarship, however, has not occurred within a lower middle class historiographic vacuum. It has been influenced by working class scholarship on class and culture that has shown that experience is not solely grounded in material and economic circumstance. Rather it can be formed and expressed through cultural modes such as dress, accent, religiosity, leisure activity, reading material, hobbies, community life, ethnicity, gender and race.³

Post-structuralism and the "new cultural history" have greatly contributed to our understanding of class, culture and society and have served to further highlight the multitude of experiences and identities of the lower middle class. Peter Bailey has suggested that perhaps the best means to tie the lower middle class together is a recognition of their unique status as the first victims of the marginalizing processes of modernity.

Conventional denominations of collective identity seem to have dissolved, not the least because the fundamental category of social class is itself under attack. Yet the lower middle class, however named,

²Chris Hosgood, "'Mercantile Monasteries': Shops, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," Journal of British Studies Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1999, 322-352.

³The father of this cultural approach is, of course, E. P. Thompson. See The Making of the English Working Class (New York: 1964). For more recent studies which make a more complete break from economic reductionism and incorporate considerations such as gender, ethnicity, leisure, community life and hobbies into their analysis of working class experience, see Joanna Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960 (London: 1994); Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918 (Oxford: 1993); Peter Bailey, Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City (Cambridge: 1998); and Ross McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1850-1950 (Oxford: 1990).

remains manifestly *there*, a layered, recomposing, pluralistic aggregation that is nonetheless the untidy sum of its many parts. Arguably, what provides unity in diversity is a common cultural mode of popular modernism. This was a class of uneasy pathfinders . . . reaching for a competence that might contain, resolve, or exploit the large ambiguities of life on the exposed and atomized new terrain of modernity. Socially and politically marginal, the lower middle class was in many ways culturally central, perhaps the closest we get to "ordinary" people.⁴

Bailey makes a good point, especially in regard to the diffuse and marginalized nature of the lower middle class. Moreover, his suggestion that this class is the closest approximation the historian can make to "ordinary" people has some ring of truth to it when it is noted that by 1981 one in seven workers in Britain was a clerk.⁵ However, modernity is just as vague and problematic a category as class and an examination of the lower middle class through its lens will probably only serve to highlight the reactionary characteristics of this (as in any) class rather than its attempts to seek accommodation with the experience of being modern. Some historians, such as Richard Price, have portrayed the lower middle classes as the reactionary and belligerent failed members of Europe's petty bourgeoisie—the victims of modernity and thus the jingoistic supporters of the yellow press and of demagogues such as Mosley, Mussolini, and Hitler.⁶ This study, however, argues that although clerks failed to realize their ambition of becoming

⁴Peter Bailey, "White Collars, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited," Journal of British Studies Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1999, 289-290.

⁵R. Guerriero Wilson, Disillusionment or New Opportunities?, 298.

⁶See Richard N. Price, "Society, Statues and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism," in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914 (New York: 1977), 89-112; and Richard N. Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class (London: 1972). For a study that links the rise of modernity to the rise of fascism see Modris Eksteins, Rites Of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age (Boston: 1989).

substantive members of London's middle class, they did construct an identity: an identity built neither on reaction nor agitation, but on a shared experience. Clerks identified themselves as clerks, and only rarely as members of a lower middle class. They did, however, often contrast their experience with social and occupational groupings outside of what historians have traditionally labeled as the lower middle class.

Bailey's point regarding the modern historical experience should not, however, be completely ignored. As witnessed, the distinct historical experience of the establishment of compulsory elementary education by 1879, the growth and influence of the popular press, and London's distinct economy and environment played significant roles in the shaping of a clerking culture and identity. In exploring the language of guides and handbooks, newspapers, pamphlets, Penny Weeklies, novels, memoirs, clerking and office journals, and occupational and educational experience, this study has more fully examined the clerking experience than studies focused almost entirely on the clerk's occupational position.⁷ Clerks were not only preoccupied with their status within British society, but how their many distinctly clerking attributes set them apart from others. They were consumed by this quest to find and define their identity, and this was often done in relation to societal notions of what it meant to be a man. The fact that clerking was a growing occupation largely composed of young men, often

⁷Such studies include R. Guerriero Wilson, Disillusionment or New Opportunities? The Changing Nature of Work in Offices, Glasgow 1880-1914 (Aldershot: 1998); Alan Delgado, The Enormous File: A Social History of the Office (London: 1979); Alec Spoor, White-Collar Union: Sixty Years of NALGO (London: 1967); Samuel Cohn, The Process Of Occupational Sex-Typing: The Feminization Of Clerical Labor In Great Britain (Philadelphia: 1985); and Gregory Anderson (ed.), The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870 (New York: 1988).

from non-white-collar households, undoubtedly contributed to the clerk's anxiety over his identity within British society as he attempted to attach meaning to his clerking experience.

The clerk's experience was expressed through a multitude of forms, modes and actions, such as dress, material circumstance, job identification, education, socialization, association, domestic location and, most significantly, language. This culture and identity sometimes complemented, but was often in conflict with, the outward identity of the clerk expressed by middle class observers through their representations of the clerk in critical commentary and fiction. Unfortunately, this predominantly negative and condescending outward identity, created by observers such as Grossmith, Forster, Masterman and Crosland, served to largely conceal the various positive aspects of the clerk's inner identity from contemporary opinion and, unfortunately, later scholarship. As identity is located both inwardly and outwardly, the "true" identity of the clerk is best viewed as an intersection of these identities. Although clerks struggled materially, the ways in which they and outsiders assigned meaning to their work, social, cultural and domestic sides of their life played an equally significant role in creating the clerking experience. In recognizing their marginality in countless letters in the popular press, clerks reinforced the outward perception of them as emasculated little men. In response to this recognition, however, they also attempted to find ways, materially and socially, to improve their situation. Self-improvement, through continued skills training, promised future occupational and material rewards. Association, most notably through agencies such as the Y.M.C.A., provided clerks with locales not only in which

to pursue such self-improvement, but also to socialize and escape from the drudgery of their work lives. Meanwhile clerks, and some outside observers, increasingly came to recognize that the home, even on a clerk's meagre salary, was a locale where a considerable degree of comfort and domestic harmony could be achieved if the clerk was able to accept and, perhaps, even celebrate his distinct set of cultural experiences.

Appendix 3.1-- Chapter Three

Register of Junior County Scholars

I.--Male Scholars elected in December, 1893, who received extensions
of their scholarships until July, 1896.

#	Name	Age	Occupation of Parent	Future Occupation
*3	Copping, Henry James	15.4	Shoemaker	Wishes to become a clerk
4	Millar, James William	14.2	Society Secretary	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
8	Jewell Bertie	15.1	Sewing Machine agent	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
10	Hibberd, Percy	14.9	Carpenter	Competing for Int. Scholarship
11	Cook, Charles Edward	14.11	Skinner	Still on Junior Scholarship
12	Stillwell, Edward	15.5	Scale Manufacturer	Staying at School
13	Dennis, Frederick	15.7	Police sergeant	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
17	Edwards, Thomas	15.2	Upholsterer	Still on Junior Scholarship
18	Krauss, Charles	15.4	Baker	Staying at School
20	Hurren, Frederick H.	15.1	Glazier	Staying at School
*21	Seaby, Henry Ernest	15.8	Grainger	Wants to enter Accountant's Office
*22	Bear, Francis Alfred	15.4	Grocer	Wishes to Enter Civil Service
23	Whitaker, Frank Percy	13.6	Ship Modeller	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
27	Plumridge, Edward J.	15.2	Police sergeant	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*28	Bristow, William	15.6	Builder	Wishes to Enter Civil Service
29	Emmens, John Howard	14.11	Sugar Boiler	Still on Junior Scholarship
31	Browne, Charles W.	15.2	Mother a dressmaker	Has obtained a situation
35	Brown, Dugald A.	14.10	Gardener	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*37	Roberts, Henry E.	14.1	Carpenter	Wishes to become a clerk
39	Bellsham, Arthur Ewart	15.9	Ironmonger	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
40	Lashbrook, Sidney	15.2	Fitter	Still on Junior Scholarship
*41	Lock, James Alexander	15.7	Upholsterer	Wishes to become a clerk
*42	Noddle, Benoni	15.6	Mother a mantle maker	Wishes to become a clerk
45	Wilkes, William A.	15.0	Clerk	Wishes to become a clerk
*47	Blinks, Percy Edward	14.11	Printer	Wishes to become a clerk
48	Payne, Alfred E.	14.9	Assistant schoolmistress	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
49	Alder-Barrett, Percival	15.1	Tailor's cutter	Has obtained a situation as a clerk
*51	Johnson, Charles A.	14.5	Solicitor's clerk	Wishes to become a clerk
*54	Greenburg, Abraham	15.8	Mother a fruitier	Wishes to become an engineer
57	Bennett, Ernest Hick	13.9	Doorkeeper at Criterion	Is staying in school
*60	Strange, Frederick	15	Grainger	Wishes to become a clerk
*66	Tomlinson, Daniel H.	15.3	Stationer & tobacconist	Wants a sit. in a Railway Office
*67	Foot, Clifford M.	15.9	School Board Officer	Wishes to become a teacher
*68	Hutchings, Francis James	15.7	Carpenter	Wishes to become an engineer
69	Keefe, James	15.5	Mother a nurse	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
72	Cousins, Charles E.	14.1	Cabinet maker	Still on Junior Scholarship
76	Varney, Edward A.	15.5	laundress	Still at School
*77	Hallock, William Albert	14.10	Compositor	Wishes to enter Civil Service
78	Holt, James A.	15.5	Packer	Is working at a linen draper's
*80	Faulkner, Thomas	15.6	Printer	Wishes to enter a city house
*86	Howett, Frank	15.8	Engineer	Wishes to enter the Civil Service
*91	Suter, Spencer	15	Mother a dressmaker	Wishes to become a clerk
98	Glenny, Alexander T.	13.11	Stockbroker's clerk	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
100	Painton, Walter	14.8	Coffee house keeper	Employed as a library attendant
*101	Freeborough, Leonard	15.5	Carpenter	Wishes to enter an architect's office
*102	Blackall, Richard A.	15.5	Carpenter	Wishes to become a pupil teacher
*103	Hawkins, Edward	15.6	Glass and china packer	Wishes to enter electrical trade
104	Clark, Albert Henry	14.3	Railway Ticket collector	Staying at school
107	Ewins, Arthur	14.6	Signalman	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*108	Lloyd, William H.	15.4	Warehouseman	Wishes to become a clerk
109	Yells, John Arthur	14.6	Builder and decorator	Staying at school
114	Vicary, Walter W.	15.4	Labourer	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
125	Jackaman, Arthur F. S.	14.9	Caretaker	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*126	Lincoln, Albert E.	15.9	Waiter	Wants to become a clerk
*127	Jones, Alfred	14.11	Postman	Wishes to become a clerk
129	Clark, Arthur A.	15.2	Engine driver	Staying at school

II--Scholars elected in July, 1894.

Boys #	Name	Age	Occupation of Parent	Future Occupation
1	Bindoff, Charles	13.7	Coachman	Resigned Previously
2	Skeet, Charles	14.0	Cab Proprietor	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
3	Addison, Leonard	14.10	Cadet's servant	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
4	Clelland, Frank	14.0	Mother, law writer	Staying at school(wants to teach)
5	Hopkins, Alfred S.	14.4	Bricklayer	Has a job in a solicitor's office
6	Grantham, Stanley	14.0	Boiler maker	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*7	Shaw, Harold	14.4	House Decorator	Wishes to become a clerk
8	Brown, Ernest	14.4	Mother, widow	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
9	Cass, William	13.3	Overlooker in Arsenal	Staying at School
10	Solkhon, Arthur	14.10	Mother, Machinist	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
11	James, Garnet	14.0	Chemist's Assistant	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
12	Milne, William	15.3	Tinsmith	Preparing for Civil Service
13	Cowell, Edward	15.3	Army pensioner	Staying at school
*14	Croft, Harry	14.2	Police sub-inspector	Wishes to become a clerk
15	Lloyd, Frank	14.11	Mother lets lodgings	Resigned Previously
*16	Wilder, William	14.4	Waiter	Wishes to enter Civil Service
17	Deave, Charles John	14.5	Gasfitter	Has a job as an office boy
18	Payne, George Arthur	14.1	Butcher's foreman	Staying at School
*19	Gulliver, Charles	14.4	Foreman sugar refiner	Wishes to become an office boy
20	Norman, William	14.8	Working Jeweler	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
21	Denham, John	14.6	Carpenter	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
22	Stagg, Albert	13.11	Mason	Resigned Previously
23	Stabrook, George E.	15.1	Carpenter	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
24	Robinson, Ernest	14.6	Machinist in Arsenal	Resigned previously to enter Arsenal
*25	Geer, Arthur	14.10	Writer in Arsenal	Wishes to become a writer in Navy
26	Walling, Ernest	13.9	House decorator	Preparing for Civil Service exam
27	Kingdom, Thomas	14.8	Tailor's manager	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
*28	Hollingdale, Stephen	14.11	Bricklayer	Wishes to enter architect's office
29	Armstrong, Herbert J.	14.7	Gardener	Staying at School
30	Rodd, John Moyes	14.0	Iron Moulder	Staying at School
*31	Allen, Walter	14.11	Signalman	Wishes to become a Railway Clerk
32	Farr, Charles	14.7	Gasfitter	Resigned Previously
*33	Phippard, Harry	13.7	Mason	Wishes to become a clerk
*34	Arnold, Henry	13.10	Fancy Leather Maker	Undecided
35	Benjafield, Frank	14.8	Road car Driver	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
36	Plunkett, John	14.3	Mother, charwoman	Has a job as a Railway Clerk
*37	Banner, William	14.8	Bookbinder	Wishes to become a teacher
*38	Herbert, Sydney	14.9	Railway Signalman	Wishes to become a Railway Clerk
39	Cogswell, Thomas	14.0	Manager in shop	Resigned Previously
40	Hanson, George	15.2	Army pensioner	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
41	Allan, Charles	13.9	Clerk S & A department	Holds a Bancroft Scholarship
42	Burgess, John Charles	13.4	Plasterer	Staying at School
43	Hemmin, Sidney W.	14.0	Compositor	Resigned Previously
44	Littledyke, Richard	14.3	Carpenter	Resigned Previously
45	Turner, James Daniel	14.6	Artist's brushmaker	Resigned Previously
*46	Cornwall, Cyrus	15.1	Coffer tavern manager	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*47	Beeching, Arthur	14.0	Warehouseman	Studying at evening classes
*48	Worthington, William	14.3	Foreman in Arsenal	Wishes to become a clerk
49	Godfrey, William	15.2	Bookbinder	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
50	Evans, Charles	14.1	Pianoforte maker	Scholarship withdrawn
*51	Watson, William Henry	15.0	Carpenter	Wishes to enter Civil Service
52	Yearley, Frank	14.6	Carpenter	Staying at School
53	King, Herbert	13.6	Warehousekeeper (mom)	Staying at School
*55	Matthews, George	14.9	Army pensioner	Wishes to become a clerk
*56	Newman, Harry	15.1	Cabman	Wishes to become a clerk
*57	Whitby, Herbert	14.7	Printer	Wishes to become a clerk
58	Wray, Francis	14.0	House decorator	Holds a Bancroft Scholarship
*59	Schummacher, Frederick	15.2	Uncle, bandsman	Wishes to enter Civil Service
60	Humphreys, Thomas	14.5	Warehouseman	Resigned previously
*61	Jeffery, Wilfred	15.1	Mother, tailoress	Wishes to become an engineer
62	Sacher, Harris	14.10	Tailor	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
*63	Beavin, Albert	14.2	Foreman in saw mills	Wishes to be a machinist in Arsenal
*64	Howland, John	14.8	Clerk of works	Wishes to become a clerk

*66	Taylor, Frank	14.1	Mother, nurse	Wishes to become a plumber
67	Hall, George Alfred	15.3	Brass finisher	Has a job as a draughtsman
68	Seaborn, Edward	14.1	Hairdresser	Staying at School
69	Harry, Fred	13.5	Carpenter	Is staying in School
70	Chambers, John	14.7	Boy an orphan	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
71	Oakley, George	13.5	Blacksmith	Staying at School
*72	Jankowsky, Ernest	14.10	Lithograph artist	Wishes to become a clerk
73	Standish, William	13.9	Stationer's assistant	Staying at School
74	Austin, Alfred	13.8	Laundryman	Staying at School
75	Lyon, Michael	15.1	Furniture Dealer	Wishes to enter auctioneer's office
76	Cowan, Robert	14.8	Mother, widow	Wants to join Woolwich Arsenal
*77	Taylor, Samuel	14.11	Fitter	Wishes to become an engineer
78	Kirk, James Robert	14.11	Coal Merchant's Agent	Staying in School
79	Butcher, Frank	14.5	Canvasser	Staying in School
*80	Catley, Herbert	15.0	Police Constable	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*81	Matson, William	15.2	Coachbuilder	Wishes to become a clerk
82	Stanwell, Noel	14.6	Commercial Traveller	
*83	Campbell, George	14.11	Machinist	Wishes to become a Carpenter
84	Walker, Frederick	14.4	Private Secretary	Staying at School
85	Miller, Walter	13.7	Jeweler's Assistant	Staying at School
86	Simpson, William	14.8	Jeweler	Resigned Previously
87	Chapman, Percy	13.9	Laundress	Studying at King's College for CS
*88	Savage, William	14.3	Engineer	Wishes to enter Civil Service
89	Baldock, George James	15.2	Insurance Agent	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
91	Ewings, Alfred	14.10	Coal merchant's clerk	Has a job as a Railway Clerk
92	Kimpton, Edgar	14.6	Carpenter	Is a clerk to an Insurance Agent
*93	Francis, William	14.5	Father in asylum	Undecided
94	Bryant, William	14.1	Compositor	Has a job as a clerk
*95	Shearman, Frederick	14.8	Father, Invalid	Wants to become a telegraphist
*96	Cundy, John	15.1	Contractor's Foreman	Wishes to become a clerk
*97	Hardy, Alfred	13.5	Carpenter	Wishes to enter Civil Service
98	Ball, James Dudley	14.6	Mother, widow	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
*99	Gooch, Thomas	14.5	Plumber	Wishes to become a clerk
100	Moore, Alfred	15.0	Clerk in Education Dept.	
101	Grant, Francis	12.11	Plasterer	Staying at School
102	Course, Herbert	14.9	Railway Inspector	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship
103	Taylor, Sidney	14.7	Assistant foreman	Staying at School
*104	Camp, Herbert	14.4	Working optician	Wishes to become a Railway Clerk
105	King, Alfred	15.2	Parents dead	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
*106	Filtness, Stephen	14.9	Clerk	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*107	Gilby, William	14.11	Bootmaker	Wishes to become a clerk
*108	Pheasant, Richard	14.11	Tailor	Wishes to become a teacher
*109	Clark, Ernest	14.6	Lithograph Printer	Wants to become a lithograph printer
110	Dick, Herbert	14.10	Commercial Clerk	Staying at School
*111	Tracey, Albert	14.11	Musical string maker	Undecided
*112	Stubbs, Martin	14.8	Leather dresser	Wants to become a telegraph learner
113	Gatter, Frank	15.2	Bootmaker	Has a job as an art pupil teacher
*114	Hawley, Joseph	14.3	Railway guard	Wishes to become a Clerk
*115	Bennet, Herbert	15.2	Boot retailer	Wishes to become a clerk
116	Papworth, Leonard	14.10	Painter	
117	King, James	13.9	Examiner in Arsenal	Staying in School
*118	Clark, Charles	14.0	Stonemason	Wishes to become a clerk
*119	Garrett, David	13.8	Signalman	Wishes to enter Civil Service
120	Forsyth, Charles	15.2	Police constable	Staying at School
*121	Featherstone, Frank	14.2	Painter	Wishes to become a clerk
*122	Prins, Aaron	15.0	Jeweler	Wishes to become a clerk
*123	Bussey, Alan	14.6	Mother, teacher	Wishes to become a journalist
124	Chapman, George	15.3	Railway Guard	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
125	Wright, Frederick	13.10	Wheelwright	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
126	Bossom, Alfred	13.10	Stationer	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
127	Rigden, Thomas	13.11	Clerk and Canvasser	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
*128	Green, Arthur Samuel	15.3	Engineer	Wishes to become a clerk
*129	Newland, Matthew	15.0	Foreman to auctioneer	Wishes to become an engineer
*130	Pearce, Archibald	13.9	Hatter's salesman	Wishes to enter the Civil Service
*131	Frankis, Percy	15.3	Coachman	Wishes to enter the Civil Service
*132	Yates, William	14.6	Locksmith	Wishes to become a clerk
*133	Watkins, Frank	15.1	Gasfitter	Wishes to enter an engineer's office
134	Miller, David	13.9	Cigarette maker	Holds an Intermediate Scholarship

*135	Holliday, Leonard	14.11	Plumber	Wishes to become a plumber
*136	Nye, Frederick	14.5	Clerk	Wishes to become a chemist
137	Black, Alan	15.0	Advertisement canvasser	Staying at School
*138	Chell, Alfred	13.8	Foreman gasfitter	Wishes to become an engineer
*139	Jacobs, William	15.2	Clerk	Wishes to become a librarian
*140	Mackay, Douglas	14.1	Customs House Officer	Wishes to become a clerk
*141	Coe, Frank Thomas	13.10	Fitter	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*142	Pashler, George	15.1	Clerk	Staying at School
143	Hiles, John	14.11	Policeman	Has a job in a drawing office
144	Shelley, William	15.3	Traveller	Has a job in a Surveyor's office
*145	Ballard, Frederick	14.5	Cabdriver	Wishes to become an engineer
*146	Reading, Alfred	14.5	Bricklayer	Wishes to become a clerk
*147	Bark, Arthur	14.0	Blacksmith	Wishes to become a fitter
*148	Duffield, Henry	14.7	Mosaicist	Undecided
*150	Hutchinson, Henry	15.3	Soldier	Wishes to become a pupil teacher
152	Winchester, George	14.1	Draper's Assistant	Staying at School
153	Gaisford, John	14.2	Foreman carpenter	Holds a Bancroft Scholarship
*154	Wells, John Pirie	15.2	Piano-case maker	Wishes to become an engineer
155	Garbanati, Joseph	13.6	Tailor	Staying at School
156	Didcote, Samuel	14.0	Salesman to draper	Staying at School
*157	Yoxall, Stanley	14.5	Printer	Wishes to become a bank clerk
*158	Smith, Edward	14.9	Ticket Examiner	Undecided
159	Jenkins, Benjamin	15.1	Master of light vessel	Staying at School
160	Vivkery, Edgar	13.9	Stonemason	Has a job as a junior clerk
161	Brander, Andrew	12.6	Is an Orphan	Staying at School
*162	Bette, Edgar	12.6	Engine Driver	Wishes to become a clerk
*165	Quick, William	14.0	Schoolmaster	Undecided
*166	Wood, William	15.0	Electrical engineer	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*167	Blount, Albert William	14.10	Fitter	Wishes to become a draughtsman
168	Whittle, Bertram	14.8	Accountant's Clerk	Staying at School
*169	Tobin, James	14.5	Corporal	Wishes to enter Civil Service
*171	Mousley, Ernest	15.3	Boot repairer	Has a job at Doulton's
*172	Paine, Frederick W. R.	15.1	Assistant foreman	Wishes to enter electrical trade
173	Morse, Frederick	14.4	Inspector, M.R.C.	Staying at School
174	Scott, William	15.2	Mom supported by sons	Has a job in an engineer's office
*175	Barber, Herbert	15.0	Mechanic	Wishes to become an engineer
*176	Smith, Edward	15.1	Harness maker	Wishes to enter the Civil Service
*177	Easton, Charles	15.1	Police constable	Wishes to enter the Civil Service
*178	Rowles, Thomas	13.11	Cabinet maker	Wishes to become a clerk
179	Jones, Arthur	13.10	Stonemason	Staying at School
*180	Masters, Herbert	14.11	Carpenter	Wishes to enter architect's office
181	Schmith, Christian	14.4	Watch repairer	Staying at School
182	Walker, Arthur	14.3	Shorthand teacher	Resigned Previously
183	Fletcher, Robert	15.2	Metal Worker	Scholarship extended to July, 1897
*184	Winslow, Nathaniel	15.2	Draper's Assistant	Wishes to become a clerk
*185	Allen, Stanley	14.1	Wheelwright	Is a clerk in a builder's office
186	Fasola, Joseph	15.3	Mother a widow	Staying in school
*187	Kraushaar, William	15.0	Carpenter	Wishes to enter a drawing office
188	Horne, Andrew	14.7	Carpenter	Staying at School
*189	Norris, Robert	14.2	Gardener	Wishes to be a shorthand clerk
*190	Lawrence, Albert	14.7	Signwriter	Wishes to become a clerk
191	Gregson, Henry	15.1	Carpenter	Has a job at Doulton and Co.
*192	Gurling, Richard	14.2	Carpenter	Wishes to be a stonemason
193	Hogben, Albert	14.4	Carpenter	Has a job as a clerk
194	Barnes, Charles	14.10	Printer's reader	Resigned to take job in Civil Service
195	Kirk, Edwin	13.9	Carpenter	Staying at School
*196	Heesom, Walter	15.2	Dock labourer	Wishes to be a telegraph learner
*197	England, Herbert	14.2	Dining-room manager	Wishes to be an engineer
*198	Letchford, John	14.8	Timekeeper	Wishes to enter Civil Service
199	Bride, Henry	14.10	Manager of tea warehouse	Has a job in the Civil Service
200	Hessey, Sidney	14.1	Blacksmith	Has a job as a clerk

—# = "No. on List." (the ranking of the scholar in the examination for the scholarship)

—Age = Age on September 1st, 1896.

—All of the students who "Holds an Intermediate Scholarship" were awarded them in July, 1896.

Appendix 3.2--Chapter Three

Occupations of Fathers of LCC Clerks Hired, 1897-1906

Accountant	6
Actuary	1
Agent for a rubber company	1
Army	1
Artist	2
Assistant Foreman (Royal Arsenal, Woolwich)	1
Assistant Manager (Coach Factory)	1
Baker	3
Barrister	1
Blacksmith	1
Boilermaker	1
Bookbinder	3
Boot and Shoe Manufacturer	1
Brass-Finisher	1
Broker (Ship and Insurance)	1
Builder	11
Builder's Foreman	2
Butcher	2
Butler	1
Cabinet-Maker	4
Cargo Superintendent	1
Carman	1
Carpenter	4
Caterer	2
Chairmaker	1
Chemist	2
Chemists's Packer	1
Clergy	7
Clerk	51
Clerk of Works	1
Colliery Deputy	1
Commercial Agent/ Traveller	11
Dealer	1
Dealer (Stock and Share)	1

Doctor of Medicine	5
Draper	7
Engineer	3
Engineer (Brewer's)	1
Engineer (Civil)	3
Engineer (Fleet, Royal Navy)	1
Engineer and Constructor, War Department	1
Engineer, Marine	1
Engineer, Mechanical	1
Engineer, Mining	1
Estate Agent	4
Examiner, Deputy (H. M. Patent Office)	1
Fancy Leather Case Maker	1
Farmer	9
Fireman, London County Council	1
Fishmonger	2
Fitter (Cycle)	1
Fitter (Engine)	1
Fitter (Shop)	1
Fitter (Stove)	1
Flour and Grain Agent	1
Gardener	1
Goldsmith	1
Grocer	10
H.M. Navy and Dockyard	1
Head Constable, Royal Irish Constabulary	1
Head of Fisheries Branch, Board of Agr. and Fish.	1
Hosier (Retail)	1
Hotel Proprietor and Iron Merchant	1
House Proprietor	1
Inlayer	1
Inspector (of Alkali Works, H. M. Resident)	1
Inspector (Point, M. R.)	1
Inspector (Railway)	1
Inspector (Street, Belfast Corporation)	1
Inspector (Sub, of H. M. Schools, Class 1.)	1
Instructor (Manual Training, LCC)	1
Insurance Agent	3

Insurance Manager for a Friendly Society	1
Ironmonger	5
Ivory Turner	1
Jeweller	1
Joiner	3
Journalist (Editor, "Galloway Advertiser")	1
Library Assistant	1
Licensed Victualler	1
London City Missionary	2
Manager (Assistant, Tabacconist's)	1
Manager (Bank)	1
Manager (Brace Manufactory)	1
Manager (Brewery)	2
Manager (City), Great Northern Railway	1
Manager (Law Stationers')	1
Manager (Silversmiths')	1
Manager (Wine Merchants')	1
Manager of Hotel	1
Managing Director of Cotton Mill	1
Manufacturer (Cycle)	1
Manufacturer (Woollen)	1
Manufacturing Upholsterer	1
Mason (Monumental)	1
Master Mariner	2
Master of Workhouse	1
Merchant (Coal)	1
Merchant (Corn)	3
Merchant (General)	5
Merchant (Leather)	1
Merchant (Wine)	1
Messenger (Office)	1
Minerologist	1
Missionary	1
Non-Commissioned Officer	1
Officer in the Royal Engineers	1
Officer of Inland Revenue	2
Officer of the Gas Light and Coke Company	1
Oilman	1

Overlooker (Cotton-Mule)	1
Overseer (Admiralty)	1
Overseer (Newspaper)	1
Overseer (Post Office)	2
Packer	1
Pastrycook	1
Photographer	1
Plasterer	1
Policeman	4
Postman	2
Printer	6
Professional Musician	1
Professor of Music	3
Railwayman	2
Resauranteur	1
Saddler	1
Schoolkeeper	1
Schoolmaster/Teacher	17
Shipwright	1
Skin Dresser	1
Solicitor	2
Sorter (General Post Office)	1
Stationer	1
Superintendent (Leeds Blind, Deaf and Dumb Inst.)	1
Superintendent (Prudential Assurance Co.)	1
Supervisor of Excise	1
Supervisor of Inland Revenue	1
Surgeon	4
Surgical Instrument Maker	1
Surveyor (Land)	2
Surveyor of Customs	1
Tailor	9
Technical Officer, 1st Class (GPO, London)	1
Template Assorter	1
Umbrella Maker	1
Upholstery	2
Warehouseman	6
Wood Engraver	1

Workertaker (Royal Ordnance Factories, Woolwich)	1
Yeoman Warden	2
"Independent Means"	2
Unknown	6

Appendix 3.3--Chapter Three

London County Council, Clerks Hired, 1897-1906

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
Scarf, Albert W.	5/1/1897	20.1	17.25	SCTC	N/A
Payne, Frederick G.	2/1/1897	18	17.5	Clerk	26
Lepper, John E.	6/1/1897	20.17	15.33	Sorter, Post Office	50
George, Laurence A.	6/1/1897	19.3	13.83	Junior Clerk	55
Yeoman, Maurice H.	10/1/1897	19.95	16.35	Boy Clerk	42
Bull, Gerald T.	1/1/1898	23.77	14.37	Schoolmaster	30
Weeks, Vincent	10/1/1897	20.32	17.09	Clerk	26
Sedgwick, Douglas	11/1/1897	19.66	19	SCTC	N/A
Eogan, Patrick	2/1/1898	21.2	14.44	Clerk	91
Reed, Charles E. N.	3/1/1898	21.04	17.71	SCTC	N/A
Stokes, Henry A.	4/1/1898	23.2	16.94	Clerk	60
Williamson, John R.	6/1/1898	20.15	16.31	Boy Clerk	42
Beaumont, Arthur N.	3/1/1898	22.94	16.69	Clerk	39
Horley, Frederic R.	6/1/1898	22.51	15.01	Clerk	55
Graves, Alfred J.	10/1/1898	21.53	16.7	Studying for Exam	N/A
Loban, Gustavus T.	10/1/1898	20.42	12.67	Clerk	72
Titterton, William R.	10/1/1898	22.03	15.56	Clerk	65
Merrit, George L.	2/1/1899	23.11	17.64	Tapestry Weaver	piecework
Rogers, Frederick V.	10/1/1898	22.15	18.81	Studying for Exam	N/A
Cambridge, John C.	10/1/1898	21.12	17.28	Clerk	52
Powel, Evan T.	1/1/1899	20.96	16.21	Clerk	52
Butler, Lewis W.	1/1/1899	18.9	15.99	Boy Clerk	42
Stevens, Nicholas R.	2/1/1899	20.52	15.85	Junior Clerk	55
Ascoli, Walter M.	2/1/1899	18.99	15.32	Clerk	42
Tapley, John E.	2/1/1899	22.17	16	Shorthand Clerk	72
Allcock, Christopher	3/1/1899	20.52	18.85	Studying for Exam	N/A
Harding, Reginald	5/1/1899	16.74	16.91	Studying for Exam	N/A
Pearse, Martin	5/1/1899	18.8	18.63	Student	N/A
O'Carroll, Michael	5/1/1899	22.6	19.27	Civil Service Tutor	78
Waller, Harry B.	5/1/1899	20.54	16.21	Merchant's Clerk	72
Jones, William J. A.	5/1/1899	19.25	15.9	Junior Clerk	50
Blake, Charles S.	5/1/1899	19.61	16.7	School Board Clerk	60
Lawton, William H.	11/1/1899	20.37	17.04	School Board Clerk	60
Douglas, Hinton	10/1/1899	21.41	16.41	Post Office Clerk	60
Blake, Frances S.	6/1/1899	21.19	16.75	Merchant's Clerk	60
Bellsham, Arthur E.	7/1/1899	18.67	18.33	Student	N/A
Watkins, Charles H.	8/1/1899	18.75	17	Boy Copyist	39
Stanley, Percy T.	11/1/1899	19.38	17.05	School Board Clerk	60
Murrell, Sidney J.	11/1/1899	20.83	16.59	School Board Clerk	60
Tonkin, Thomas S.	11/1/1899	20.54	15.69	Junior Schoolmaster	24
Cooper, John J.	11/1/1899	18.87	16.54	Boy Copyist	39

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
Messenger, George A.	1/1/1900	18.33	17.97	School Board Clerk	60
Alexander, Sydney	1/1/1900	19.45	14.88	Civil Service Clerk	55
Oliver, Laurence H.	1/1/1900	18.88	17.24	Junior Clerk	44
Brennand, Robert	1/1/1900	19.46	17.21	Boy Copyist	36
Edwards, Thomas B.	1/1/1900	18.51	16.01	Clerk	52
Whitaker, Edgar A.	1/1/1900	21.59	18.01	SCIC	N/A
Moran, Gerald F.	1/1/1900	20.41	17.81	SCIC	N/A
Brown, Arthur T. J.	1/1/1900	19.91	18.41	Sorter, Post Office	52
Clifton, John H.	1/1/1900	21.85	16.02	Civil Service Clerk	63
Turner, Henry C. P.	1/1/1900	18.86	17.03	Boy Copyist	39
Cronin, Daniel P.	4/1/1900	23.04	22.46	Studying for Exam	N/A
Turner, Albert R.	1/1/1900	18.5	15.48	Boy Copyist	40
Allbrook, Edward C.	1/1/1900	18.18	18.03	Student	N/A
Sayer, Clarence W.	1/1/1900	20.75	15.73	School Board Clerk	60
Vandersluis, Ben	2/1/1900	21.6	14.93	School Board Clerk	65
Harman, Percival B.	4/1/1900	19.66	16.58	SCIC	N/A
Hoggan, James	4/1/1900	22.58	14.83	Civil Service Clerk	60
Cass, Alexander J.	4/1/1900	20.81	15.55	School Board Clerk	70
Turner, Horace	4/1/1900	19.13	17.85	School Board Clerk	65
Baldcock, George J.	4/1/1900	18.77	18.31	Student	N/A
Brown, Leonard J.	4/1/1900	21.9	13.72	Clerk, Post Office	57
Leitch, William	4/1/1900	19.3	19.43	SCIC	N/A
Nash, Frederick J.	4/1/1900	22.12	13.03	Commercial Traveler	83
Tucker, Henry C.	4/1/1900	19.27	15.48	Boy Copyist	40
Carey, William H.	7/1/1900	19.75	19.25	Ast. Schoolmaster	30
Bick, Percy A.	5/1/1900	18.87	16.96	Ast. LCC Clerk	78
Lowman, William L.	4/1/1900	18.96	16.21	Boy Copyist	40
Reid, John W. J.	7/1/1900	18.98	18.62	Studying for Exam	N/A
Braines, Thomas F.	7/1/1900	19.79	15.79	Junior Bank Clerk	60
Williamson, William	7/1/1900	18.49	15.97	SCIC	N/A
Matkin, Charles	5/1/1900	18.88	14.71	Boy Copyist	45
Affleck, John B.	11/1/1900	22.02	19.77	Studying for Exam	N/A
Liberty, Walter J.	11/1/1900	22.77	12.91	Clerk	60
Shipway, Wilfred P.	2/1/1901	18.76	17.18	Boy Copyist	35
Hamill, John	3/1/1901	21.07	17.31	Ast. Schoolmaster	30
Hannon, John M.	3/1/1901	19.7	18.95	SCIC	N/A
Peake, William H.	1/1/1901	20.3	14.28	Ast. Bookbinder	85
Shrosbree, Albert T.	1/1/1901	20.65	16.24	School Board Clerk	60
Robertson, John	12/1/1900	18.44	16.03	Boy Clerk	39
Barber, John	1/1/1901	18.51	17.09	SCIC	N/A
Smith, Ernest D.	2/1/1901	18.92	16.26	Boy Copyist	35
Balls, Harry K.	3/1/1901	20.63	14.05	Clerk	65
Hedger, George A. W.	3/1/1901	20.7	17.52	School Board Clerk	68
Allum, Alfred J.	4/1/1901	20.8	14.53	Clerk	78

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
Cullis, Frederick W.	3/1/1901	21.2	18	Studying for Exam	N/A
Lake, William F.	7/1/1901	18.85	15.11	Pupil-Teacher	31
Jackson, Herbert R.	7/1/1901	18.73	16.66	SCTC	N/A
Wadsworth, James	7/1/1901	20.66	14.3	School Board Clerk	65
Taylor, Thomas O.	7/1/1901	20.92	17.92	SCTC	N/A
Frost, James K.	7/1/1901	21.45	18.45	Ass. LCC Clerk	66
Reed, Arthur E.	7/16/1901	21.66	15.71	Ast. Schoolmaster	40
Chance, William A.	10/1/1901	22.41	14.63	Clerk, Board of Trade	58
Barrett, Frederick T.	11/1/1901	22.28	16.44	Junior Clerk	70
Cambay, Philip G.	11/1/1901	22.5	15.64	Attendant, British Lbr.	72
Heath, Alfred	11/1/1901	22.36	17.53	Temporary Copyist	52
Joy, Maurice C.	11/1/1901	20.85	17.44	Ast. LCC Clerk	65
Briant, Frank L.	11/1/1901	20.2	16.94	Shorthand Clerk	60
Whitley, Ernest B.	11/1/1901	20.46	19.2	SCTC	N/A
Keys, Harold J.	11/1/1901	20.32	16.17	SCTC	N/A
Smith, David H. W.	11/1/1901	22.58	20.71	SCTC	N/A
Birkbeck, Scott	11/1/1901	22.97	14.7	School Board Clerk	66
Trace, George F.	12/1/1901	22.67	20.26	Private Teacher	40
Parker, Charles G.	12/1/1901	22.8	20.46	Ast. Schoolmaster	40
Moore, Joseph S.	2/18/1902	22.19	18.45	Ast. Schoolmaster	40
White, Phillip S.	2/18/1902	19.86	16.07	SCTC	N/A
Faulkner, Percival L.	2/18/1902	18.65	18.03	SCTC	N/A
Maggs, William	2/18/1902	18.65	17.22	Studying for Exam	N/A
Westwood, Herbert	2/18/1902	20.43	18.36	SCTC	N/A
Porter, Edgar R.	4/1/1902	22.05	17.55	Clerk	80
Marsh, Sydney G.	2/18/1902	18.71	18	School Board Clerk	65
Moreton, Humphrey	5/13/1902	22.95	14.59	Sorter, Post Office	58
Wilson, Frank	4/1/1902	20.55	16.29	Junior Clerk	30
Sanders, Frank C.	7/24/1902	20.76	16.51	SCTC	N/A
Anderson, William B.	4/29/1902	21.34	13.02	Clerk	90
Hookham, John E.	6/24/1902	21.86	15.46	Junior Clerk	66
Jones, Harry	6/24/1902	21.4	15.42	Accountant's Clerk	60
Nott, Frederick	7/8/1902	22.03	15.18	Assistant LCC Clerk	60
Smith, Sydney A. C.	7/8/1902	18.92	15.98	Junior Bank Clerk	25
Schroeder, Edward	7/8/1902	19.51	16.42	Boy Copyist	40
Bailey, George	10/4/1902	22.02	15.76	Shorthand Clerk	68
Jarvis, George H.	10/14/1902	22.79	16.6	School Board Clerk	65
Lee, Henry	10/14/1902	20.76	15.14	Railway Clerk	70
Clarke, Robert	1/20/1903	21.44	19.87	Ast. Schoolmaster	70
Everingham, Chas.	11/11/1902	21.83	17.94	School Board Clerk	70
Hart, John Y.	11/11/1902	18.85	18.64	Student	N/A
Humphreys, R.	11/11/1902	20	18.63	SCTC	N/A
Freeborough, L.	3/3/1903	21.94	16.27	Teacher	45
Levitt, Albert	11/11/1902	20.54	15.92	School Board Clerk	60

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
Butler, John	12/9/1902	18.48	18.13	Studying for Exam	N/A
White, Goodman	11/11/1902	19.45	16.2	Pupil Teacher	40
French, Albert E.	12/9/1902	19.03	17.5	Insurance Clerk	40
Hoskin, Herbert J.	1/27/1903	16.44	15.46	Boy Copyist	40
Bennett, Neville L.	1/20/1903	19.94	17.79	SCTC	N/A
Madden, William J.	1/20/1903	23.31	16.44	Ast. LCC Clerk	65
Wood, Allan R.	5/1/1903	18.36	17.53	SCTC	N/A
Barber, Charles H.	5/1/1903	18.31	15.15	SCTC	N/A
Noble, Frank	5/1/1903	18.34	18.21	Student	N/A
Mason, Ernest J.	5/1/1903	20.68	15.1	Merchant's Clerk	72
Harvey, Douglas M.	5/1/1903	18.3	12.21	SCTC	N/A
Wilson, Arthur	10/1/1903	19.43	18.16	SCTC	N/A
Walker, Percy G.	8/1/1903	18.54	14.94	Studying for Exam	N/A
Evans, John B.	10/1/1903	23.02	12.36	Sorter, Post Office	58
Jones, Percy J.	11/1/1903	19.15	14.13	Invoice Clerk	52
Smith, Stanley G. L.	8/1/1903	18.96	15.88	School Board Clerk	40
Nava, Leo M.	10/1/1903	19.41	15.64	SCTC	N/A
Scothorne, Frederick	11/1/1903	18.94	18.06	Lawyer's Clerk	12
Rayner, George E.	10/1/1903	22.37	14.7	Shorthand-Typist	52
Betts, Edgar H.	11/1/1903	20.55	16.21	Engineer's Clerk	39
Gould, Harry P.	10/1/1903	22.79	15.02	Ast. Schoolmaster	52
Ede, George N.	2/2/04	19.12	16.69	Clerk	18
Brice, John G.	3/19/04	19.17	17.53	Studying for Exam	N/A
Johnstone, James	12/8/1903	18.38	18.13	Studying for Exam	N/A
Clegg, James A.	12/8/1903	20.86	13.13	Civil Service Clerk	55
Edmonds, William	12/8/1903	20.52	18.08	Ast. LCC Clerk	78
Gould, Sydney A.	12/8/1903	18.46	17.51	SCTC	N/A
Willcox, Richard W.	12/22/1903	19.7	15.3	Boy Copyist, Post Off.	42
Walker, Frank W.	12/8/1903	19.51	17.07	Merchant's Clerk	60
Hartmann, Andrew	12/8/1903	19.63	15.2	Boy Copyist, Post Off.	35
Smyth, Edwin H.	12/8/1903	20.54	18.85	Railway Clerk	39
Midgley, Richard	12/22/1903	22.89	15.71	Clerk	65
Eborall, Henry C.	2/16/04	20.23	13.61	SCTC	N/A
Ham, Charles	12/22/1903	18.49	18.49	Still in School	N/A
Holiday, Henry L.	12/22/1903	18.8	16.24	Junior LCC Clerk	55
Allen, Henry E.	12/22/1903	18.47	15.48	SCTC	N/A
Flack, William T.	3/1/04	21.44	14.85	Invoice Clerk	83
Crannis, Philip G.	3/29/04	18.93	14.86	Boy Bank Clerk	45
Weaver, Bertram H.	3/1/04	19.43	18.34	Brewer's Clerk	50
Farrant, Walter C.	3/1/04	18.38	17.47	SCTC	N/A
Daly, Daniel	7/5/04	20.9	20.9	Still in School	N/A
Quinton, Leonard	5/10/04	18.19	16.32	Boy Clerk, Inland Rev.	42
Hoare, Henry J.	5/10/04	18.82	17.96	Merchant's Clerk	52
Taylor, Ernest G.	5/10/04	22.46	14.86	Tea Grower's Clerk	30

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
Bloomfield, Samuel L.	5/10/04	19.05	16.2	Boy Clerk, Post Off.	40
Shields, William C.	5/10/04	19.51	17.64	Studying for Exam	N/A
Keast, Walter J.	5/10/04	22.64	14.71	Ast. Clerk, Inland Rev.	59
Skempton, Ernest J.	6/21/04	22.37	16.4	Shop Assistant	57
Hamlyn, Harold F.	5/10/04	18.84	18.84	Still in School	N/A
Barnes, Leonard	5/10/04	20.17	18.21	SCTC	N/A
Harries, Bertram	5/10/04	20.62	16.23	Studying for Exam	N/A
Salmon, Reginald A.	6/14/04	21.76	17.88	Civil Service Clerk	80
Prophet, Cecil	7/12/04	18.57	17.54	Clerk	52
Starling, Bertram	7/12/04	22.48	15.45	Temporary LCC Clerk	78
Alison, Sidney H.	9/1/04	19.15	19.15	Still in School	N/A
Avis, Frank M.	9/1/04	20.55	17.3	Ast. Schoolmaster	36
Bailey, Joseph	9/1/04	18.3	18.3	Still in School	N/A
Baker, Lionel J.	9/1/04	20.39	20.39	Still in School	N/A
Bracken, Charles L.	9/1/04	20.65	18.06	Ast. LCC Clerk	62
Chinnery, John R.	11/1/04	19.38	16.53	SCTC	N/A
Duncan, George B.	9/1/04	21.29	18.13	At Cambridge	N/A
Gribbin, Henry T.	9/1/04	19.83	17.68	Ast. Schoolmaster	32
Hansard, George A.	9/1/04	19.73	17.05	Studying for Exam	N/A
Harding, William E.	11/1/04	18.77	14.44	School Lab Assistant	30
Harris, Wilfred M.	9/1/04	20.43	16.24	Studying for Exam	N/A
Huggins, William E.	11/1/04	18.99	18.65	Still in School	N/A
Hunt, Robert J.	9/1/04	18.55	17.44	SCTC	N/A
Mahood, Samuel	9/1/04	20.08	17.83	Studying for Exam	N/A
Sanders, Percy T.	11/1/04	18.92	18.92	Still in School	N/A
Scott, Percival H.	9/1/04	20.26	18.84	Clerk, Board of Trade	45
Slater, Robert	9/1/04	19.96	17.38	Studying for Exam	N/A
Smith, Frederic R.	11/1/04	18.72	18.72	Still in School	N/A
Stokes, Evan F.	9/1/04	18.78	18.53	Studying for Exam	N/A
Sutton, Percy T.	9/1/04	22.4	19.22	Studying for Exam	N/A
Toms, Harold G.	9/1/04	19.2	15.03	Boy Clerk, Post Office	45
Trotman, Frank W.	9/1/04	19.98	18.57	Clerk, Board of Trade	45
Turner, William	11/1/04	20.7	19.35	Studying for Exam	N/A
Allan, John R.	1/1/05	18.78	17.76	Clerk, Board of Trade	45
Baylis, Albert J.	1/1/05	20.38	18.71	Clerk	78
Carey, Mansel E.	1/1/05	19.46	17.44	SCTC	N/A
Chick, Trevor P.	2/1/05	18.31	16.81	Studying for Exam	N/A
Connor, Lewis R.	1/1/05	18.4	16.8	SCTC	N/A
Crawford, William	1/1/05	18.52	18.02	Studying for Exam	N/A
Fitzgerald, Thomas	1/1/05	21.59	20.09	Teacher	78
Flynn, Daniel H.	2/1/05	20.26	17.95	Boy Clerk	45
Holyoak, Albert	1/1/05	18.32	18.32	Still in School	N/A
Howell, Tom	1/1/05	18.54	16.52	SCTC	N/A
King, Arthur S.	1/1/05	18.52	18.02	SCTC	N/A

Name Of Clerk	Date Hired	Age When Hired	Age Left School	Occupation Prior To Hiring	Salary Prior To Hiring
McCreath, John V.	1/1/05	18.88	15.21	Boy Clerk, Post Office	50
Mackeown, Samuel	1/1/05	20.57	17.99	Clerk	55
Rice, Thomas H.	1/1/05	18.63	17.14	SCTC	N/A
Stiff, Philip W. H.	1/1/05	19.3	18.97	Studying for Exam	N/A
Stone, Joseph	1/1/05	19.81	17.42	SCTC	N/A
Stutchbury, Herbert	1/1/05	19.84	16.45	SCTC	N/A
Swanson, Ernest	2/1/05	18.55	16.97	Junior Clerk	50
Turner, Samuel	2/1/05	20.64	19.06	Studying for Exam	N/A
Watts, Frank P.	1/1/05	18.17	17.67	Studying for Exam	N/A
Willis, James H.	2/1/05	19.97	17.89	SCTC	N/A
Adcock, Percy J.	3/1/05	18.04	18.04	Still in School	N/A
Avis, Tallis A.	3/1/05	18.37	17.45	SCTC	N/A
Beck, Frank W.	3/1/05	18.48	13.8	Boy Clerk, Inland Rev.	45
Dealer, Sidney R.	3/1/05	17.85	12.85	SCTC	N/A
Dow, Hugh	3/1/05	18.83	18.15	Clerk	70
Duncan, Charles	3/1/05	17.87	16.21	SCTC	N/A
Eames, Frank W.	3/1/05	22.28	17.61	Studying for Exam	N/A
Farrell, Arthur P. J.	4/1/05	19.18	18.9	SCTC	N/A
Fay, Percy J.	3/27/05	23.28	14.46	Assistant Schoolmaster	95
Firth, Harry	3/2/05	21.8	19.22	SCTC	N/A
Garnett, Bernard W.	3/1/05	18.03	14.85	SCTC	N/A
Gaskell, Arnold J.	3/6/05	19.05	15.37	Boy Clerk, Post Office	50
Gee, Sydney H.	2/20/05	18.09	16.44	SCTC	N/A
Gibson, Archie L.	2/27/05	17.98	15.57	Clerk, Board of Trade	45
Gordon, Patrick	3/1/05	23.38	16.62	Sorter, Post Office	64
Gould, Herbert W.	2/24/05	18.29	18.29	Still in School	N/A
Hamlyn, Alfred E.	2/27/05	17.94	17.94	Still in School	N/A
Hardy, Harold I.	2/20/05	18.26	18.26	Still in School	N/A
Heddon, Percy W. S.	2/20/05	17.11	17.11	Still in School	N/A
Hoare, Walter G.	2/20/05	17.66	17.66	Still in School	N/A
Howe, Frederick A.	2/24/05	18.25	18.25	Still in School	N/A
Ingram, Warren M.	2/20/05	19.64	18.48	SCTC	N/A
Irons, Harold J.	3/6/05	19.86	15.27	Boy Clerk	45
Jackson, Frank W.	3/1/05	18.69	15.51	Boy Clerk	47
Keeler, George	2/20/05	19.36	16.21	SCTC	N/A
Kirby, Bernard B.	2/20/05	18.68	16.36	SCTC	N/A
Langley, Frank G.	3/1/05	18.07	17.49	SCTC	N/A
McLaughlin, John	3/6/05	17.64	17.04	SCTC	N/A
Middlemiss, Philip	3/6/05	17.25	17.25	Still in School	N/A
Nicolle, Frederick	3/1/05	17.29	17.29	Still in School	N/A
Paddock, Arnold H.	3/6/05	19.84	18.17	Insurance Clerk	35
Parker, John W.	3/6/05	19.1	17.17	SCTC	N/A
Parsons, Charles S.	2/27/05	18.68	18.68	Still in School	N/A
Perry, Arthur E.	2/27/05	22.95	15.2	Pupil Teacher	45

Name	Date	Age When	Age Left	Occupation Prior	Salary Prior
Of Clerk	Hired	Hired	School	To Hiring	To Hiring
Polley, Joseph S.	2/27/05	18.65	16.98	Clerk	52
Putley, Walter M.	2/27/05	22.46	18.27	Ast. Schoolmaster	95
Ramsay, John	2/27/05	18.08	18.08	Still in School	N/A
Redmond, John R.	2/27/05	21.73	16.55	Civil Service Clerk	65
Schmeisser, Edwin	2/20/05	18.3	17.67	Studying for Exam	N/A
Schulze, Albert E.	2/24/05	17.66	17.49	Studying for Exam	N/A
Shaddick, Charles	3/6/05	19.38	17.78	Clerk	60
Shapcott, Stanley	2/24/05	18.07	17.88	Studying for Exam	N/A
Stead, Betram J.	3/1/05	18.25	18.25	Still in School	N/A
Thorp, Sidney A.	3/6/05	18.55	16.36	Boy Clerk	45
Tripp, Cecil L.	3/1/05	18.38	16.72	SCTC	N/A
Tyson, Gilbert B.	2/20/05	18.42	18.42	Still in School	N/A
Walls, John	2/27/05	18.8	16.72	SCTC	N/A
Wellstead, Percy T.	3/13/05	17.95	17.01	Clerk	30
Williams, Thomas	2/27/05	22.39	17.21	Clerk	45
Willis, William P.	3/6/05	19.77	14.42	Pupil Teacher	50
Wilson, Victor	2/20/05	17.89	16.25	Studying for Exam	N/A
Wise, John H.	3/1/05	18.92	14.76	SCTC	N/A
Young, Frederick G.	3/6/05	17.92	17.92	Still in School	N/A
Adams, William	3/1/06	19.54	15.87	SCTC	N/A
Ashby, Frederick	7/1/05	19.49	18.49	Ast. LCC Clerk	78
Bark, George H.	7/1/05	18.6	15.27	School Board Clerk	45
Bennett, Roland D.	7/1/05	18.43	16.91	SCTC	N/A
Bennett, Stanley J.	7/1/05	22.3	14.21	Pupil Teacher	20
Bolton, Reginald C.	7/1/05	19.89	16.97	SCTC	N/A
Bowles, Richard G.	7/1/05	18.73	18.73	Still in School	N/A
Bricknell, Stanley	8/1/05	18.81	15.21	SCTC	N/A
Brimacombe, A.	8/1/05	18.91	18.66	Pupil Teacher	20
Burgess, Walter	7/1/05	18.51	18.51	Still in School	N/A
Caudle, William H.	7/1/05	18.83	17.5	Studying for Exam	N/A
Chesney, Harry	10/1/05	18.77	18.77	Still in School	N/A
Cook, William G. H.	8/1/05	19.97	14.89	Studying for Exam	N/A
Cross, Albert G.	9/1/05	19.19	16.49	School Board Clerk	45
Duncombe, Herbert	8/1/05	19.76	18.68	Correspondence Clerk	45
East, George	7/1/05	19.42	16.9	SCTC	N/A
Eaton, James J.	7/1/05	19.11	17.36	Accountant's Clerk	40
Ennis, Philip F.	7/1/05	18.42	16.9	SCTC	N/A
Furness, Harold	7/1/05	21.02	15.49	Shorthand Typist	72
Goddard, Sydney	7/1/05	18.84	18.84	Still in School	N/A
Goldie, Donald	7/1/05	20.16	19.13	Assistant Teacher	55
Haward, Edwin	7/1/05	20.73	18.21	Ast. Schoolmaster	60
Hyams, Isidore	7/1/05	18.85	18.85	Still in School	N/A
Jacobs, Frank J.	9/1/05	19.13	15.29	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	50
Jones, Alfred Y. D.	7/1/05	18.34	17.34	Studying for Exam	N/A

Name	Date	Age When	Age Left	Occupation Prior	Salary Prior
Of Clerk	Hired	Hired	School	To Hiring	To Hiring
Jordan, Edwin J.	7/1/05	18.56	15.31	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	45
Ledger, Ebenezer F.	8/1/05	18.99	15.91	Boy Clerk, War Office	45
Lyon, Cecil H.	8/1/05	18.96	15.63	Clerk, Patent Office	45
McKenna, Curtin	8/1/05	19	14.4	Boy Clerk, Admiralty	47
McShee, George	7/1/05	19.5	18.5	Correspondent Clerk	65
Mahony, Henry E.	7/1/05	19.62	18.19	SCTC	N/A
Makeham, Eric N.	7/1/05	18.52	18.52	Still in School	N/A
Mason, Edwin A. Y.	8/1/05	21.74	21.16	Studying for Exam	N/A
Norris, Syney F.	7/1/05	18.7	15.7	SCTC	N/A
Oswald, Harold R.	7/1/05	18.38	17.87	Junior Schoolmaster	20
Roberts, Arthur O.	8/1/05	21.09	17.45	SCTC	N/A
Roberts, Charles K.	7/1/05	19.54	19.54	Still in School	N/A
Robinson, George H.	7/1/05	18.43	17.35	Studying for Exam	N/A
Rossiter, William C.	8/1/05	18.77	14.69	Ast. LCC Clerk	55
Shanly, Augustus B.	8/1/05	18.97	16.64	SCTC	N/A
Suggate, Reginald W.	8/1/05	21.65	14.06	Ast. LCC Clerk	91
Swan, Lionel M.	7/1/05	20.47	19.47	Studying for Exam	N/A
Tisman, Morris	7/1/05	18.3	13.14	Boy Clerk, Post Office	47
Train, Herbert J.	9/1/05	19.69	16.98	SCTC	N/A
White, Edwin C.	8/1/05	18.28	18.28	Still in School	N/A
Willmot, William G.	7/1/05	19.21	18.21	SCTC	N/A
Woolley, Richard	7/1/05	19.58	18.58	Studying for Exam	N/A
Ames, Arthur J.	1/1/06	18.29	17.27	SCTC	N/A
Baker, Arthur L.	1/1/06	18.91	18.42	Studying for Exam	N/A
Blade, Douglas H.	1/1/06	19.18	14.16	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	40
Davis, Cyril W. D.	1/1/06	18.6	17.1	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	40
Edwards, Frederick	1/1/06	19.08	16.05	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	40
Farker, Leslie O.	1/1/06	19.72	16.22	Studying for Exam	N/A
Fowler, Leslie O.	1/1/06	18.68	18.18	Studying for Exam	N/A
Francis, Christopher	1/1/06	18.22	18.22	Still in School	N/A
Glover, Henry T.	1/1/06	19.26	16.76	SCTC	N/A
Guiton, Martin J.	1/1/06	19.14	15.55	Boy Clerk, Post Office	39
Gunn, John B.	1/8/06	22.1	13.58	Clerk, Board of Trade	40
Harding, William H.	1/8/06	21.02	14.35	Ast. LCC Clerk	65
Hartill, Ernest A.	1/1/06	21.4	14.98	Assistant Teacher	70
Hewkley, Stanley G.	1/1/06	20.3	18.8	Merchant's Clerk	78
Hood, Sydney W.	1/8/06	19.76	17.72	SCTC	N/A
Lewis, Harold W.	1/29/06	20.01	17.43	Insurance Clerk	50
Mellor, Samuel H.	1/1/06	20.62	14.87	SCTC	N/A
Nelson, John A.	1/1/06	18.59	18.09	Studying for Exam	N/A
Nicholson, Arthur W.	1/15/06	20.3	17.25	Ast. Schoolmaster	30
Osborn, Henry	1/1/06	18.23	17.8	Studying for Exam	N/A
Potter, Charles G.	1/1/06	19.27	18.85	Studying for Exam	N/A
Snelgar, John T.	1/1/06	18.4	17.38	Junior Clerk	26

Name	Date	Age When	Age Left	Occupation Prior	Salary Prior
Of Clerk	Hired	Hired	School	To Hiring	To Hiring
Stacey, Frederick C.	1/1/06	18.7	15.02	Wholesaler's Clerk	39
Stokes, John H.	1/1/06	19.31	17.73	SCTC	N/A
Thorpe, Thomas V.	1/22/06	19.24	17.17	SCTC	N/A
Turk, George D.	3/1/06	19.09	14.9	Boy Clerk, Civil Serv.	45
Vigor, Harold D.	1/8/06	20.32	17.8	Studying for Exam	N/A
Wallington, Albert	1/1/06	18.74	18.24	Studying for Exam	N/A
Sandberg, Julian	1/12/06	21.47	18.69	Ast. Schoolmaster	65
AVERAGES		19.84803371	16.89870787		55.62295082

Appendix 4.1--Chapter Four

Roberts's Budget

At the starting point a twelve month's outlay upon clothing must be considered and the following table is compiled from the present writer's 'weekly account' books:--

	£	s.	d.
1 overcoat	1	15	0
1 umbrella		7	6
2 hats		5	0
1 silk hat		7	6
1 suit week-day clothes		2	0
1 suit Sunday clothes	2	10	0
4 pairs socks at 10d.		3	4
1 pair boots		10	6
Repairing boots		6	0
2 under vests		5	0
2 flannel shirts		6	0
4 collars		1	8
2 pair cuffs		1	4
Cotton, buttons, & c.		1	0
Total	8	19	10

From this total must be deducted exactly half the prices of the overcoat and umbrella, which brings the actual amount down to 7l. 18s. 7d. Both these articles should last two years. It will be observed that no allowance is made for 'mending,' which most young men, however, learn to do themselves, as the present writer knows from experience. Landladies are not over-anxious to sew on buttons at less than a penny each--a charge which the actual labour expended certainly does not warrant. Most men need flannels, chest protectors, and several other little items, but I am only now concerned with my own positive personal and actual expenditure. The fifty-second part of this amount is, roughly speaking, 3s. 1d.; and the actual weekly payments may be tabulated in the following manner:-

	s.	d.
Rent	6	0
Breakfasts	1	8
Dinners	5	0
Teas	1	0
Boot-Cleaning	0	3
Coals and Woods	1	0
Washing	0	9
Tobacco, &c.	0	6
Total	16	2

This amount, added to the trifle over 3s. above mentioned, comes to 19s. 3d., and of the balance there was none left after an occasional visit to some theater. As regards dinners, there is said to be considerable beauty in variety, and this might have been the case with my dinners; but I cannot call to mind any such implied degree of pleasure, and my experiments are of too recent a date to admit of much doubt on the subject. Five shillings cannot be considered an extravagant sum for seven dinners, the most expensive of which was that on Sunday, and comprised the landlady's 'dollops' of fatty beef, greasy pork, or underdone mutton, with a digester by the way of an extremely small bit of cheese and a huge hunch of bread. The very sight of such a 'spread' was enough to give one an attack of indigestion. On other days if the quantity was smaller the quality was superior; but London landladies of the second grade appear to have no faith in any other than the former element, in the manner of Sunday dinners at all events. I have never detected that very desirable quality in any other direction.

There is a considerable pleasure, and consequent benefit, in dining at a vegetarian restaurant, or in judiciously laying out sixpence or sevenpence in the middle of the day at an aerated bread shop. Everything at these places is scrupulously clean, and the viands there supplied are, in my experience, a sort of incentive to eating when the appetite is sated or absent. I have found two vegetarian dinners in one week quite sufficient in spring and autumn; in winter one would be enough, but, speaking personally, when I had an extra experimental 'fit' on during summer I have taken three. One day in the week

I enjoyed an egg or two with bread-and-butter and tea or cocoa at the aerated bread shop. On another day ninepence would purchase a plate of roast beef, with potatoes, cabbage, and bread; and usually on the following day a fish dinner served as the chief meal. Boiled or roast mutton, and boiled beef, with the usual supply of one or two vegetables, with or without bread, according to the part of the week or the state of the finances, would form the dinners of at least two days out of seven. Breakfast generally came to threepence, which would include an egg, with the chances as to its being good or bad equally balanced. For a change a rasher of bacon was often tried, but its only merits were a savory odor and an evenness and thinness which did the carver great credit from his point of view. 'Tea and two' formed the almost invariable afternoon repast, and, by the way of explanation, it may be stated that the colloquial phrase signifies a cup of tea and two slices of bread-and-butter. The extraordinary dirtiness and griminess of nearly all the English 'dining-rooms' have often caused me to leave a meal untouched. I could not then, and can scarcely now, pass these places without an instinctive shudder. All the dirt of the immediate neighborhood seems to accumulate in and around these pestiferous 'eating houses.' Suppers were either not approved of or resolved themselves into a penny bun, whichever happened to be the more convenient. It will be observed that no allowance is made in the foregoing table for beer or other strong drinks; and the reason is not far to seek. Temperance should form a cardinal point in the creed of a man who wishes to live on a guinea a week and be at the same time respectable. The public-house and the fifty-second-rate billiard-room have proved the ruin of many hundreds of young clerks who desire to be thought that which they are not, and endeavor to live 'fast' without any possible means of keeping it up for long. The ordinary clerk has very few chances of earning an income of 150l. or 200l. per annum, but what slender possibilities he may have had are too often broken beyond all hope through the mediums just indicated.

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The Civil Service Aspirant: A Weekly Journal, Review, and Coach for
Civil Service Candidates

The Contemporary Review

Cornhill Magazine

Daily Chronicle

The Daily Mail

The Daily News

Daily Telegraph

The Englishwoman's Review

Fortnightly Review

Forward!: The Official Organ of the Church of England Young Men's
Society (London)

Fraser's Magazine

The Globe

Grocer's Chronicle

The Grove Young Men's Institute: Monthly Magazine

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The Insurance Agent and the Insurance Review

The Law Clerk

The London County Council Staff Gazette

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The Monthly Review And Young Men's Christian Journal

The Monthly Review: Organ of the English Young Men's Christian Associations

New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal

Nibs and Quills: The Official Organ of the General Railway Clerks' Association and other Clerks' Associations

The Nineteenth Century

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