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The Church and the Poor.

A SERIES OF HISTORICAL SKETCHES.

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X.

The First Half of the Eighteenth Century.

THERE are two facts, both unhappy ones, which at the present time call for serious examination and equally serious thought. These are, first, the actual condition, economic and religious, of a great number of poor people in this country; and, secondly, the actual relationship of these people to what may be termed "organized Christianity"—the Church or "the Churches." Both the condition of these people and their relationship to the Church must be considered extremely unsatisfactory. Both are, of course, very largely the product of the past, and they have not come to be what they are in the course of the last fifty or even the last hundred years. Actually, they are by-products of that great movement which is usually and rightly known as the "Industrial Revolution," during which side by side with an immense growth of national wealth, there was an immense increase of poverty, and also of degradation and oppression of the poor. But these evils, which accompanied the Industrial Revolution, were not inevitable; there was no inherent necessity why they should have come to pass. Actually, they were to a great extent due partly to certain conditions existing when that Revolution first began; but much more to a want of wisdom in both Church and State during the first century of its progress.

In my last chapter I carried down our history to the death of William III., in 1702. The Industrial Revolution began some fifty years later. It is to this half-century, which covers the reign of Anne and the first two Georges, that the present chapter must be devoted. It was during this half-century that

conditions were permitted to develop which caused a large proportion of the evils of the period which succeeded it.

Nothing is more difficult than to sketch the characteristic features of any age in the compass of a few sentences. The attempt, from the inevitable complexity both of the circumstances and of the various forces at work, is almost bound to be misleading; yet it is essential, if our present subject is to be adequately studied, that there should be at least some clear idea of the general conditions in Church and State in the background.

At the opening of the eighteenth century the position of the English Church was undoubtedly strong; her life was vigorous and her zeal was at least considerable.[1] She was certainly popular in the nation, and both Romanism[2] and Nonconformity[3] were relatively far weaker than they had been for some time past. During the reign of Anne the Church's energy, spirituality, and earnestness were at least maintained. But as the century proceeded there came a rapid decline in every one of these qualities. The Church became more or less a tool of the State, and enthusiasm, indeed earnestness of any kind, rapidly died away. A period of lethargy succeeded a period of vigorous life; and by the middle of the eighteenth century the condition of the Church was in some respects as evil, if not indeed worse, than at any period in her history. The condition of the State offers an instructive parallel. At the death of Anne the country had been almost continuously at war, either within her own borders or with foreign Powers, for nearly a century. Hence, when Walpole came into office, his principle of *quieta non movere*, which he imposed upon the Church, was not unwelcome in the State.

It will be best for me first to notice what steps were taken

[1] "Never since her Reformation had the Church of England given so fair a promise of a useful and prosperous career as she did at the beginning of the eighteenth century. . . . Look at the Church's history in retrospect, as it is pictured by many writers of every school of thought, and a dark scene of melancholy failure presents itself" (Abbey and Overton, "The English Church in the Eighteenth Century," p. 279).

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 153. "Rome shared in the strange religious apathy which was dominant, not only in England, but on the Continent."

[3] See Dale's "History of English Congregationalism," chapters v. and viii.

by the State—which was then still practically the Church acting in a civic capacity—for the relief of the poor during the reign of Anne. In the first year of the reign we have an Act[1] against "truck," a form of oppression which still demands the watchful eye of the Legislature. The object of this Act was "to prevent the oppression of the labourers and workmen employed in the manufactures"; it orders that "all payments for work done by them shall be in lawful coin of the realm, and not by any commodities in lieu thereof." As Sir G. Nicholls says—and this is my reason for mentioning this Act—"this enactment proves that the welfare of the working classes was an object of solicitude to the legislature at that time."[2] In the following year an Act[3] was passed for apprenticing boys who, or whose parents, were chargeable to the parish, to the master or owner of any English ship until they were twenty-one years of age. In the same year we have an Act[4] for "erecting a Workhouse and for setting the Poor on work in the City of Worcester." This, from its provisions, was a very important Act, for it ordered that "the mayor and certain of the city authorities, with four persons to be annually chosen in each of the several parishes out of the ablest and discreetest inhabitants, shall be a corporation to continue for ever, under the designation of 'The Guardians of the Poor of the City of Worcester.'"[5] These Guardians are to relieve the poor of all the various parishes as if they were one parish; they may also contract with other parishes in the same county for receiving and setting their poor to work; they may provide all things necessary for this; they may compel beggars and idle people to come into the workhouse and set them to work there; also they may compel children found begging, or whose parents are chargeable, to do the same; and, then, when these children are fifteen years of age, they may bind them as apprentices.

Here we have something approaching the present-day work-

[1] 1 Anne, statute 2, cap. 22.
[2] Nicholls' "History of the Poor Law," i., p. 362.
[3] 2 and 3 Anne, cap. 6. [4] *Ibid.*, cap. 8.
[5] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

house, but with two great differences: First, the workhouse here described seems to have been arranged more for the purposes of police than as a means of relief; and, secondly, in this, as in all the original workhouses, work is provided with a view to profit—that is, in order to turn pauper labour to account. It is interesting to notice that already some misgivings of the effects of pauper labour upon free labour must have been felt, for in the thirtieth section of the Act it is provided that "no cloth or stuff, either woollen or linen, manufactured in the workhouse or houses of correction, shall be sold by retail within the City of Worcester or the liberties thereof."[1] Consequently, goods made in the workhouse must either be used there or sold at a distance. But it does not seem to have struck those who framed the Act that these pauper-made goods would displace those made by free labour just as surely in one place as in any other.

In the sixth year of Queen Anne a similar Act[2] was passed for Plymouth, but with one very striking addition, which is again indicative of the spirit of the age. This Act orders the appointment of "some pious, sober, and discreet person, well qualified for a schoolmaster, who shall in some convenient room within the workhouse read daily morning and evening prayers at certain hours, to be for that purpose fixed and stated to the poor people and others belonging to the said workhouse; and also shall, by catechizing and otherwise, every Saturday in the afternoon, and upon holy days, instruct the poor children and other poor persons belonging to the said house in the fundamental parts of the Protestant religion, according to the doctrine of the Church of England; and shall teach every the said poor children to read and write and cast accompts."[3]

In the tenth year of Queen Anne an Act[4] was passed for Norwich, constituting "a corporation under the name of Guardians of the Poor for the City of Norwich." In this, as in previous Acts, the chief object seems to have been to provide employment which would be remunerative; from which it must

[1] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, p. 366.
[2] 6 Anne, cap. 46.
[3] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, p. 367.
[4] 10 Anne, cap. 15.

have been assumed that employment could not be obtained by the poor themselves. Evidently the truth that this kind of employment penalized the best class of workmen for the sake of the worst class was not yet recognized, no more, indeed, than has the same truth been recognized by those who proclaim the doctrine of "the right to work" to-day. There is no other Act of this reign which seems to call for mention here.

I would now turn to what charity, apart from the State, was doing during this period. It was the time when the so-called "religious societies" flourished.[1] The history of these and their influence, especially as they inspired John Wesley[2] with the idea of the society which ultimately became so famous, should be studied; but it is only the philanthropic side of their activity that concerns us here. This was evidently extensive, for we are told that they visited the poor in their homes and relieved them; they fixed some of these in various trades; they were instrumental in setting prisoners free; and they assisted in establishing nearly one hundred Charity Schools in London, besides others in various parts of the country.[3] The Charity Schools,[4] in which poor children, besides being taught, were lodged, fed, and clothed, were, like the religious societies, a creation and peculiar feature of this age. It is not certain to which of them belongs the honour of being first established, but, largely owing to the help afforded them by the S.P.C.K.,[5] they multiplied rapidly. In 1704 there were fifty-four such schools in and around London, and 2,131 children were present at the first anniversary service. By 1712 the number of these schools had risen to 117 in London and Westminster, but, like everything else connected with religion, they suffered during the Georgian period.

Another movement at this time for the benefit of the poor was the erection of hospitals[6] in the present sense of the term, and many of the hospitals situated in our great towns date from this period. Yet another method of assisting the poor then in

[1] See Overton, "Life in the English Church" (1660–1714), pp. 207 *et seq.*
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 212. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 211. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 224 *et seq.*
[5] This was founded in 169$\frac{8}{9}$.
[6] Overton, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

vogue was by issuing "briefs" for collections on their behalf.[1] Taking all these various movements and methods into consideration, it must be admitted that during the opening years of the eighteenth century the spirit of Christian philanthropy was more than usually active. The work which was then done for the poor was actually the expression in practice of the very real and very considerable religious earnestness existing at that time.

With the death of Queen Anne we enter upon a very different phase of the Church's life. I will not here attempt to enter at length into the causes of the unhappy change which came over the religious spirit of the nation, and which, apart from a few brilliant exceptions—of individual men and women and in individual parishes—persisted for more than a hundred years. So far as it bears upon our present subject, I will deal with it in the next chapter. Perhaps the most peculiarly characteristic feature of the age was the remarkable absence of almost any form of self-sacrifice.[2] It may have been held that there was nothing specially to call for it; certainly among those in high places, both in Church and State, there were very few examples of it, and there were equally few exhortations towards it. In a very true sense the age was a "sordid" one.[3] During its course there was a large amount of material prosperity,[4] even if this was not generally diffused. Certainly the aggregate wealth of the nation largely increased, but at the same time, in another sphere, there was an even greater increase—one of moral and spiritual poverty.

There are few Acts of Parliament passed during the reign of George I. which claim attention here, though a study of those dealing with social matters throws much light on the condition of

[1] Overton, *op. cit.*, pp. 194 *et seq.* "Briefs" are really Royal Letters Patent for collections for special purposes.

[2] Which cannot exist apart from "enthusiasm." On the decline of missionary zeal, both home and foreign, see Abbey and Overton, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

[3] One of the worst features of the age was the widespread and often shameless seeking for preferment.

[4] Proofs of this will be given later.

the people at the time. More than one Act[1] was passed in the early years of the reign which was designed to prevent disorder. This evidently shows that a somewhat lawless spirit among the people was then prevalent. In 1718 an Act[2] was passed by which the property of persons deserting wives or children, whereby these became chargeable, was to be sold and the profit applied to their maintenance. Then, in 1720, a curious Act[3] was passed forbidding "the wearing and using of printed, painted, stained, and dyed calicoes in apparel, household stuff, furniture, and otherwise," because this "does manifestly tend to the great detriment of the woollen and silk manufactures, and to the excessive increase of the poor, and if not prevented may be the utter ruin and destruction of the said manufactures and of many thousands whose livelihoods do entirely depend thereupon." This is only one instance of much restrictive legislation, whose shortsightedness and folly have been amply proved by experience. Ostensibly, some of this legislation was in the interests of the poor, but actually the protection of the existing interests of the manufacturers were not forgotten. In 1720 we have an Act[4] which, because of its effect upon the spirit or temper, as well as upon the material welfare of the working classes (as detrimental to this), demands a more extended notice. The Act is entitled "For regulating Journeymen Tailors." I am going to quote from this Act because it so clearly reveals the point of view from which Parliament at that date—which we must remember was then entirely unrepresentative of the working classes—was inclined to approach any attempt on the part of these classes to improve their position. The Act states that "great numbers of journeymen tailors . . . and others who have served apprenticeships . . . have lately departed from their services without just cause and have entered into combinations to advance their wages to unreasonable prices and lessen their hours of work, which is of evil example." The Act then

[1] 1 George I., statute 2, cap. 5 (the "Riot Act," which is still in force); also 1 George I., cap. 11, and 6 George I., cap. 16.
[2] 5 George I., cap. 8.
[3] 7 George I., cap. 7.
[4] 7 George I., cap. 13.

declares that "all covenants or agreements between such persons for advancing their wages or for lessening their usual hours of work are illegal and void, and that every person offending therein is, on conviction, subjected to two months' imprisonment with hard labour." But the Act goes even farther than this: it prescribes the hours of work—from six in the morning until eight at night—and also the rate of wages, which from March 25 to June 24 are not to exceed two shillings a day, and for the rest of the year one shilling and eightpence.[1] It is the existence of such laws as this which explains the appalling conditions under which we find a large proportion of the working classes living for at least a century after this time. Such laws also go far to explain the attitude of these classes to the Church, which in those days was largely associated in their minds with the class represented in Parliament. This Act continued in force until 1768.

Two years later we have an Act[2] making general for the whole kingdom what had already been permitted in certain large towns—*i.e.*, that parishes might combine to erect workhouses and might "have the benefit of the labour of the poor." Also by this Act all persons declining to go into workhouses were no longer to be entitled to ask or receive relief from the churchwardens or overseers.[3] From this and other Acts passed during this period it is quite clear that the problem of the relief of the poor was constantly becoming a more and more difficult one. We can also see how, from a want of foresight in those responsible for making the laws, evils, which came to a head a century later, were gradually accumulating. The permission to erect workhouses—especially with a view to deriving profit from the labour of their inmates—was widely adopted. Within a very few years more than a hundred were erected. Here, certainly, the seeds of future evils were being sown. The workhouse was more and more used as

[1] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 10, 11.

[2] 9 George I., cap. 7. By this same Act (one of considerable importance) Justices were not to give relief without first communicating with the overseers. See Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 12 *et seq.*

[3] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., p. 14.

a manufactory in which, at the cost of the Poor Rate, the worst class of people—the dearest of all forms of labour—was being employed, and every increase of this kind of labour was an additional burden upon the best class of workers, who ultimately paid the cost. Here is another example of the future being mortgaged for the present.

Two years before the death of George I. the principle of the Act relating to "Journeymen Tailors" was enlarged so as to prevent "unlawful combinations of workmen employed in the woollen manufactures," then apparently the chief existing industry, except, of course, agriculture. In this Act[1] we are told that "great numbers of weavers and others have lately entered into unlawful combinations to regulate the price of goods, to advance wages . . . and by force protected themselves and their wicked accomplices against law and justice." "All covenants and by-laws for regulating the prices of goods, or advancing wages, or lessening the hours of work, are and shall be illegal and void." Those who were guilty of contravening the provisions of this Act were very severely punished. We can easily see at what a disadvantage workmen were placed when it was absolutely illegal for them even to agree together and peaceably combine to obtain an increase of wages. Actually they were simply at the mercy of those who made the laws, and who did these represent? Certainly they did not in any sense of the word represent the working classes.

Because I want to make as clear as possible the causes of our own present so-called social difficulties, I am anxious, as far as I am able, to trace the origins and the developments of these. In the eighteenth century Parliament was in no sense of the word representative of the people. Towns like Manchester and Birmingham had no representatives; in Bath there were thirty-five voters. At the close of the eighteenth century, out of a population of 7,000,000 only 300,000 had votes. In the middle of the century Lord Lonsdale had nine "pocket" boroughs, the Duke of Norfolk had eleven, and the Duke of Newcastle could

[1] 13 George I., cap. 34. See Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 19 *et seq.*

practically nominate fifty members to the House of Commons.[1] Consequently there was legislation simply *for*[2] the people, but in no sense *by* the people. The working classes had no means of making their opinions heard, much less felt. The Church in its corporate capacity was in the same position. The Bishops in the House of Lords were the nominees of the Prime Minister, and, since Convocation was silenced in 1717, the voice of the Church, as a Church, was absolutely dumb. Then the stability of opinion in those days was far greater than at present, and consequently changes—whether in the nature of reforms or otherwise—were far less easily effected. In the earlier part of the eighteenth century the Whigs were almost continuously in office for forty-five years; and from 1769 to 1830 the Tories were almost as continuously in power. With both parties the landed interests, and especially those of the larger proprietors, were supreme.

The Acts of Parliament passed in the reign of George II., like those of the previous reign, are interesting chiefly for two reasons: First, as throwing light upon the actual social conditions prevailing at the time; and secondly, as indicating how those in authority thought that these conditions should be dealt with.

About the beginning of this reign there seems to have been formed a certain "charitable corporation for the relief of the industrious poor by assisting them with small sums upon pledges at legal interest." Sir George Nicholls thinks it probable that many worthy, if unwise, persons may have assisted in its formation. But eventually "it became worked for the benefit of a few designing men at the cost of their dupes and followers."[3] The number of sufferers must have been considerable for two Acts[4] of Parliament to be necessary for appointing (and amending) a Commission for taking and determining all claims made by the creditors of this (so-called) "charitable corporation," and for requiring its promoters to appear before the Commissioners

[1] Warner and Marten, "The Groundwork of British History," p. 480.
[2] Though not in the sense of *for* their benefit.
[3] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., p. 23.
[4] 5 George II., cap. 31, and 6 George II., cap. 2.

of Bankruptcy. The very possibility of the formation of a society or company for this purpose, or rather of getting a number of people to form such a company, shows a strange ignorance of the true methods of assisting "the industrious poor." The last thing we should wish them to possess is any further inducement to borrow "small sums upon pledges," for this is to destroy provident habits among them.

The evil conditions under which many of the people must have been living are revealed by more than one further Act[1] against robbery and violence. That this prevalence of disorder was in part due to these evil conditions (themselves due in some measure to iniquitous class legislation), is proved by the fact that at least a measure of this disorder arose through bounties being paid upon the export of corn. This exportation of corn at a premium was clearly to the advantage solely of the landed proprietors, and tended to make the food of the people both scarce in quantity and high in price.[2]

In 1740 we have the Act[3] by which the Foundling Hospital was incorporated. By this Act the governors are authorized "to receive, maintain, and educate all or as many children as they shall think fit;" further, no churchwarden or overseer is to stop or molest any person bringing such children; also the governors are "authorized to employ the children in any sort of labour or manufacture, or to hire or let out the labour of such children, or to bind them as apprentices to any person willing to take them."[4] Here, again, we have an institution established (and a practice assisted) which is now recognized as actually increasing the evil which it was intended to diminish. Where no Poor Law exists there may be some excuse for the existence of foundling hospitals, but a Poor Law properly administered should provide for the really destitute, whether these be infants

[1] *E.g.*, 7 George II., cap. 21, and 11 George II., cap. 22.

[2] The winter of 1739-40 was exceptionally severe, and was followed by a very deficient harvest. Corn was sold in 1738 at 20s. 2d.; in 1740 it rose to 59s. The instability of prices, depending on the nature of the harvest at home, was in those days one of the great trials of the poor.

[3] 13 George II., cap. 29. [4] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 27.

or adults. To have the two working side by side is not only an extravagance, it is an incitement towards an evil which it is, in the true interests of society, to check as far as it possibly can.

Other Acts which are indicative of the evil social conditions existing, and of the inability of those in authority to check them by the right measures, are certain cruel Acts[1] against various forms of stealing; and where stealing is rife it will generally be found that such poverty as implies actual hunger is at least common. In 1741 it was enacted that persons found guilty of stealing sheep "shall suffer death, as in cases of felony, without benefit of clergy." In the following year this penalty was extended to those stealing "any bull, cow, ox, steer, bullock, heifer, calf, and lamb, as well as sheep." The well-known Vagrancy Act of 1744[2]—which is still the basis of the law on that evil—also indicates a state of things for which it was deemed necessary to take strong measures. Lastly, in 1747[3] the power of Justices of the Peace "to fix and determine the rate of wages" in all kinds of occupations was so far enlarged as to authorize them "to judge and determine whatever differences may arise between the employers and the employed, either with respect to wages or any other cause of complaint."

I have drawn attention to these various Acts—and their number might easily be enlarged—in order to show how generally the legislation of this period was in favour of a particular class—the class which was alone then represented in Parliament. Also I have shown that a very large proportion of this legislation was purely and simply repressive. There seem to have been very few attempts to remove the causes of the evils, which the very fact of the legislation itself shows were at least recognized. And, unfortunately, where we do find remedies proposed they are such as would tend to aggravate rather than cure the disease.

[1] 14 George II., cap. 6; 15 George II., cap. 27. Balleine, in the "History of the Evangelical Party," p. 10, states that at this time "there were 253 capital offences on the Statute Book."

[2] 17 George II., cap. 5. See Nicholls, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 34 *et seq.*

[3] By 20 George II., cap. 19.

It may be contended that we have no right to blame people for the results of a want of knowledge which they did not possess, that we ought not to condemn those who lived a hundred and fifty to two hundred years ago for being ignorant of sociological laws, and of the action of sociological forces which were not then discovered. This may be true; at the same time the causes of poverty, and consequently of disorder and crime, might have been far better known at that time than they apparently were, and they might have evoked a much more general sympathy than they seem to have done. When we compare the solicitude for the poor shown by the Church in the early ages of Christianity, and (if not always wisely) during the greater part of the Middle Ages, with the apparent callousness towards their condition and their needs during the eighteenth century, we cannot hold the Church of that age guiltless. It must, of course, be remembered that since 1717, when Convocation was silenced, the Church had no official means of voicing its collective opinion. Also, the general character of the Bishops during the century, the qualifications for which they were appointed, and the line of policy or conduct they were expected to pursue, were all such as precluded them from being in any way active in social reform. To maintain quietness, in fact to do as little as possible, was the chief demand made upon them by Walpole and the Ministers associated with his particular line of policy. It was, too, the age of pluralities, and pluralities inevitably meant a large amount of non-residence,[1] which in turn meant ignorance of the real condition of the poor, and so inability to improve that condition. For the sake of the poor, we saw that the earlier Stuart Kings demanded the residence of noblemen and squires upon their estates; the earlier Hanoverians did not demand even the residence of the clergy. Whatever may have been the causes of it, this is certain, that when the Industrial Revolution began, about the middle of the

[1] A Bishop of Llandaff was at the same time Rector of nine parishes in England and seven in Wales, while he himself resided in Westmorland (Balleine, *op. cit.*, p. 11).

century, the Church of England proved herself to be hopelessly unequal to meeting the demands which that great change in the economic and social conditions of life produced. From the results of a dereliction of her duty, which can only be called appalling, during the first eighty or even hundred years of the course of the Revolution, the Church is still suffering to-day. Individuals, both clergy and lay people, here and there did excellent work in their immediate neighbourhoods, but, as a whole, the Church ignored the true needs and the just claims of the poor. Consequently the Church alienated the poor, and from the effects of that alienation the Church has never entirely recovered. Undoubtedly the most difficult task before the Church at the present time—a task which has been bravely and widely undertaken—is to prove to the poor that she does care for them; that not only is she in sympathy with their legitimate aims, but that she is ready to do all in her power to further these.

In my next paper I shall deal with the opening years of the Industrial Revolution, but before doing so it may be well to state a few facts concerning the conditions which then existed, for, apart from some knowledge of these as a background to our picture, it will be impossible to understand what actually did take place.

Roughly speaking, the population of England and Wales in 1700 was 6,000,000, and in 1750 was 6,500,000;[1] but in 1801 it was nearly 9,000,000, in 1811 it was over 10,000,000, while in 1851 it was no less than 17,900,000. In other words, the rate of increase during the second half of the eighteenth century was five times as rapid as during the first half, while during the first half of the nineteenth century it was eighteen times as rapid as during the first half of the eighteenth

[1] There is some difference of opinion on this figure. Sir G. Nicholls places it at 7,000,000. See also Thorold Rogers, "The Economic Interpretation of History," pp. 55 *et seq.* Of the general increase of national prosperity during the first half of the eighteenth century there are abundant proofs. See Nicholls, *op. cit.*, vol. ii., pp. 53 *et seq.*; also Meredith, "Economic History," pp. 231 *et seq.*

century. But this increase of population was not spread evenly over the entire country; it was largely confined to certain somewhat limited areas, especially to the coal and manufacturing districts of the North and the Midlands, and more especially to the large towns within these.[1] But trade increased even more rapidly than population. In 1700 it is calculated that the trade of the United Kingdom (imports and exports) worked out at £1 2s. 6d. per head; in 1750 it was £2 14s. per head; in 1800 it was £4 4s.; and in 1850 it was £6 10s. But this must not be held to imply that everybody became better off; on the contrary, with the increase of aggregate wealth we find a startling increase in the aggregate amount of poverty. The amount raised for the Poor Rate at the death of Queen Anne has been estimated at £950,000 a year; in 1776 it had risen to £1,500,000; in 1785 it was more than £2,000,000; in 1802 it was £4,000,000. Thus, while in a century, in round figures, the population had increased by half as much again, the amount raised for the Poor Rate had become quadrupled; or, to put it in another way, while at the beginning of the eighteenth century the cost of poor relief was about 4s. per head per annum of the population, at the end of the century it was nearly 9s. These figures show what an enormous increase in poverty had taken place; and when we pursue our investigation into the early years of the nineteenth century, we shall find an even greater increase.[2]

But probably by far the most fertile source of the various social evils which flourished during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first two quarters of the nineteenth was an immense change which gradually took place in public opinion—a change which intimately affected every sphere of national life. Briefly, this change was the acceptance of the

[1] In 1760 probably not one of our largest manufacturing towns—Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield—contained more than 35,000 people; to-day the population of the smallest of these is ten times that amount. In 1750 Lancashire had 156 people to the square mile; in 1881 it contained 1,813 people to the square mile.

[2] In 1813 the cost of relief rose to £6,656,106, and in 1818 to £7,870,000.

doctrine of an almost unlimited individualism as the rule of conduct. It came to imply nothing less than the right of each individual to make the utmost of his opportunities, irrespective of the cost of his doing so to other people, especially of those poorer and weaker than himself. The growth and the consequences of the translation into practice of this doctrine—that generally known as *laissez-faire*—must be the subject of the next two chapters.