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GREEN, CHARLOTTE KRACK
THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851 AND THE
MID-CENTURY WORKS OF DICKENS, KINGSLEY, AND
CARLYLE.

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, PH.D., 1978

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1978
THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851 AND THE MID-CENTURY
WORKS OF DICKENS, KINGSLEY, AND CARLYLE

Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Charlotte Krack Green, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * *

The Ohio State University
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1. The Great Exhibition</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2. Prosperity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3. Class Unity</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4. The Dignity of Labor</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5. Peace</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6. Religious Strength</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7. The Literature of Reality</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8. Bleak House</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9. Alton Locke</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10. Latter-Day Pamphlets</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>All the world going to see the Great Exhibition of 1851</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The gathering of the nations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>General view of the Exhibition building under construction during November, 1850</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Paxton's ingenious methods and devices</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Southern entrance to the transept</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Interior of the transept, as seen from the South Entrance</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The Eastern, or Foreign Nave, looking West</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Moving machinery</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The transept of the Crystal Palace on the 1st of May</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Great Protectionist Demonstration in Drury Lane Theatre</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Her Majesty, as she appeared on the First of May, surrounded by &quot;Horrible Conspirators and Assassins.&quot;</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The Pound and the Shilling. &quot;Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?&quot;</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>St. James and St. Giles meet as men</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Manchester in 1851</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>London in 1851</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Prince Albert's Model Lodging House</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>The Cellar and the Model Lodging House</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Specimens from Mr. Punch's Industrial Exhibition of 1850 (to be improved in 1851)</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The Happy Family in Hyde Park</td>
<td>120</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. &quot;Peace&quot;—Painted by Armitage</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The &quot;St. Lawrence&quot; and the departure of the &quot;Singapore,&quot; with troops for the Cape</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Peace!—A Sketch from the Crystal Palace</td>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Bush-fighting in Kaffraria</td>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The Pilgrims to Rome (After Chaucer)</td>
<td>155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Chancery Reform</td>
<td>177</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. A Court for King Cholera</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Reform Removing the Bandage from the Eyes of Justice</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The Needlewomen at Home and Abroad</td>
<td>197</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. A Drop of London Water</td>
<td>199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. The Shipwrecked Ministers Saved by the Great Exhibition Steamer</td>
<td>218</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

On May 1, 1851 The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations opened in London amid shouts of jubilation and confident predictions that it heralded a new era of peace and prosperity for the nations of the earth. This first world's fair, displaying exhibits from all over the world in a fairy-like glass-walled pavilion in Hyde Park, roused the enthusiasm of Englishmen to unprecedented levels. From the opening ceremony in May until the closing on October 11, London was perceived as the hub of the world. Crowds thronged to the Crystal Palace, as the exhibition building was popularly called, to see the best that man could produce, to compare the goods of different nations, and to wonder at the vastness of it all.

At the time, the press claimed that the Exhibition was not just another industrial fair, but that it was the event of the opening years of the second half of the nineteenth century. It was visited by 6,039,195 people, Englishmen and foreigners alike; talked about wherever people gathered; discussed voluminously in the newspapers and magazines of the year, in rollicking broadside ballads, in books cataloguing its wonders, in the personal letters of almost everyone who spent time in London that summer; and acclaimed as a symbol of the society which produced it. The most sanguine even expected it to be the single event by which the Victorian age would be remembered.
PLEASE NOTE:

Illustrations are light and indistinct. Best copies available. Filmed as received.

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS INTERNATIONAL
Figure 1. All the world going to see the Great Exhibition of 1851.
(From Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank, 1851, or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys.)
It was, said the Athenaeum, "the great historical centre of the
nineteenth century....Like one of those lights which Rembrandt threw
into the centre of his grand and sombre pictures, the tale of Hyde
Park in 1851 will fall on the page of history....In the records of
the event...the historian will find nearly all that is of perennial
and universal interest in this age."^1

Although time has tempered such hyperbole, the claim still has
elements of truth. Most retrospective surveys of the Victorian scene
regard this exhibition as a central phenomenon of the mid-Victorian
period, not only for its internationalism, its architectural innova-
tions, and its comprehensiveness, but also because it produced a
great deal of soul-searching and self-consciousness in Englishmen.
Overwhelmed, and not a little elated at this summation of what they
had accomplished at mid-century, they asked themselves: how does
this compare with fifty years ago? to what does all of this tend?
where might we be fifty years hence? how will history view us? Even
those less prone to philosophical speculation had a heightened sense
of historical continuity as they measured man's current capabilities
against their memories of the past. Because it inspired so much
self-examination among its contemporaries, the Exhibition provides
an obvious center of interest for us of the twentieth century as we
look back to try to understand the Victorian mind.

The Great Exhibition confronts students of literature with an
interesting paradox. The summer of 1851 produced hundreds of

^1 October 18, 1851, p. 1094.
written accounts of the Exhibition. Some were earnest attempts to
immortalize the event for the expected scrutiny of future ages.
Others were intentionally ephemeral, produced to attract the money of
souvenir-buyers. Some aimed to instruct. Still others were personal
expressions of rapture or partisan displeasure. Tone and style matched
purpose, from lofty cadence to breathless excitement, from utilitarian
prose to doggerel verse. And yet, despite all of the writings
attesting to the significance of the Exhibition, the major Victorian
writers were remarkably silent on the subject. Their awareness of the
event is documented by brief impressions recorded in letters, speeches,
and magazine articles; yet a twentieth-century reader can read through
the novels, non-fiction, and poetry which the classic Victorian
writers produced in 1650-51 and the years immediately following, and
find surprisingly few references to this alleged symbol of what it
meant to be an Englishman at the midpoint of the nineteenth century.
The list of direct literary references to the Exhibition by such
authors is impressive mainly by its brevity: Thackeray's "May Day
Ode" and his unsigned verses and articles in Punch, brief paren-
thetical hints in Ruskin's Stones of Venice, a few lines in
Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "Casa Guidi Windows," the seventh
stanza of Tennyson's dedicatory poem, "To the Queen," which preface
his Laureate Edition of 1851 (the stanza has been omitted in all
subsequent editions). The most respected and enduring authors of the
era witnessed the glut of Exhibition novels, plays, verses, and prose,
but for the most part did not add to it, although they did plenty of
other writing while all of this was taking place.
A student of Victorian literature and society is naturally intrigued by this apparent paradox, and sets out to discover what this tells us about the relationship of the Victorian authors to their society and about the writers' acceptance of the popular values of the day as symbolized by the Great Exhibition; and more importantly, what all of this might mean in helping twentieth-century readers to understand and appreciate the works of writers like Dickens, Carlyle, and Kingsley which were produced in this era. None of these three, after all, shared the general jubilation over the Exhibition, and Dickens and Carlyle in particular were quite critical. The student might question: does this mean that they were totally out of step with their society? does it mean that they were non-participants in the general belief in progress? Does it mean that the works which they produced at this time were totally uninfluenced by so pervasive a phenomenon as the Exhibition?

The purpose of this study is to pursue these questions—-to examine, first of all, the Great Exhibition as a symbol of English society at mid-century, a claim made by innumerable journalists; to assess the completeness and accuracy of this claim, based on the evidence of the wider journalistic record; to consider the responses of Dickens, Carlyle, and Kingsley to this symbol of their society; and finally, by exploring the relationship which their literary works bear to the society and the times in which they were written, to determine the extent to which the impact of the Great Exhibition is felt in the works of these authors.
It seems appropriate to treat the mid-century years (1850-52) as a unit, and to recognize the continuity of these years with the preceding decades, despite the intense self-consciousness of the Exhibition summer which gives it the appearance of a mini-era of no more than six months set apart from the years preceding and following. These three years marked the conscious completion of a half-century during which English life had been incredibly transformed; men were now assessing the effects of that transformation and speculating about England's future direction. Although the Exhibition was in the forefront of this consciousness, and although it greatly intensified the tendency, the Exhibition was but the chief manifestation of a wider mood of self-awareness. These three years witnessed as well a continuing discussion of problems which had been scrutinized in earlier decades—the changes in class relationships, the condition of the working class, the quality of English life—as thinkers sought to redefine the old issues in the light of mid-century achievements; the same topics appeared in discussions of the Exhibition. Finally, the self-assessment of these years echoed the growing emphasis on the practical and the immediate that was typical of the new industrial towns, where men earned respect by their pragmatic ability. This tendency, too, reached an apex within the Exhibition. For these reasons I treat the mid-century years as a unit.2

2 This concept is substantiated by T.S.R. Boase, who says that the fervor of the Exhibition was "the climax of a mood rather than the beginning of a millennium" (English Art 1800-1870 [Oxford, 1959], p. 256).
None of the major writers active in these years, as I have said, wrote anything of consequence about the Exhibition. The books they did write, however, were deeply rooted in the concerns of those years and were written with an audience of mid-century readers in mind. In subject matter they were current and immediate; in purpose they were practical; in mood they shared the mid-century obsession of national self-analysis; and in philosophy they shared the mid-century faith in progress. They probed the same long-standing issues of which the Exhibition was claimed to symbolize triumphant resolution. To this extent these works seem to have been shaped by forces similar to those which culminated in the Exhibition. Insofar as they comment on the values symbolized by the Exhibition they might be viewed as indirect Exhibition works. And to the extent that the Exhibition popularized the shared tendencies, it might be said that the Exhibition exerted a subtle indirect impact on the literature of the period.

My thesis is that there exists a greater connection between the Great Exhibition and the classics of mid-Victorian literature than has hitherto been supposed, and that an understanding of the significance of the Exhibition in English life can help us to understand both the literature and the readers' acceptance of it. I have divided the study into three stages. The first gives a background account of the Exhibition, to establish exactly what it was, how it began, and why the press proclaimed it to be the central symbol of English life at mid-century. I have tried to provide a picture of the Exhibition as a contemporary might have been aware of it, rather than an
exhaustive history of the event. The second part demonstrates by means of attitudes recorded in the periodical press and other contemporary sources, that the mid-Victorians were by no means as smug and complacent as printed accounts of the Exhibition might lead us to suspect. The third part considers Dickens' *Bleak House*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, and Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* in terms of their concerns with the values of the Exhibition as discussed in Part II. The indirect impact of the Exhibition on literature will thus become more clear.

Although much interesting information is available on the responses of other authors, and the attitudes reflected in their works, such information is only included when it relates to the thesis at hand.
PART I
Chapter 1
The Great Exhibition

On the morning of May 1, 1851 all London was astir. Visitors had been pouring into town in record numbers by boat, train, and carriage, from the English countryside, from America, Europe, and the colonial empire, and on this May morning they thronged towards the Crystal Palace for the long-awaited inauguration of the Great Exhibition. An envied 35,000 were to share in the official opening ceremony. Thousands more, of all classes, filled the nearby parks and lined the streets, eager to share in the excitement and perhaps to catch a glimpse of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Says one historian, "It was probably...the first time in England, that so many people had gathered together for a festive occasion."\(^1\) If the crowds were impressive, the Palace itself was even more so. After weeks of unpacking, displays of goods from all over the world were neatly classified and gorgeously arranged. Admirers marveled at what they called the "fairy-like vista," as sunlight poured through the clear glass walls and roof, playing on the crystal fountain and on majestic elms which stood in early leafage beneath the arched glass transept. Choirs sang; bands played; royalty processed; fervent prayers called

Figure 2. The gathering of the nations.
(Illustrated London News, May 3, 1851, p. 359.)
for God's continued blessing on the English nation; and speeches
heaped praises on the organizers of the Exhibition, paid tribute to
this wonderful display of human ingenuity, and welcomed representa-
tives from all nations of the world to this grand festival of the
Brotherhood of Man.

The Great Exhibition, reported the press, was a unique event in
the annals of human history. For the first time, all nations were
gathered together in peace, to display their manufactured goods, raw
materials, and decorative arts, and to compete with one another for
medals of excellence. The novel building of glass and iron which had
been erected in London's Hyde Park to shelter the Exhibition was in
itself an admirable feat, covering eighteen acres, with aisles
providing ten miles of display frontage, its novel design inspiring
the spirit of celebration as no conventional building could have done.
During the five and one half months that the Exhibition was open, it
was visited by more than six million people (as many as 109,915 on a
single day), in part because the sliding admission scale allowed for
shilling days, affordable by the working classes. Special excursion
trains brought farmers and operatives to London at reduced fares.
People shook their heads in wonder that all of this, so impossible a
few years ago, had actually come to pass.

This exhibition was different in conception, scale, and execu-
tion from the smaller industrial fairs which had served as inspiration.
Britain had held local industrial fairs since early in the century,
and France had a long history of national exhibitions, but England's
Exhibition of 1851 was international in scope. Half of its floor space was allocated to foreign countries, introducing a greater diversity of goods than ever before. Prize medals were to recognize excellence on a world-wide plane, and the displays were to measure the progress and attainments of the whole human race. This was partly a result of changes arising from the industrial revolution. As nations depended more on industrial production, and therefore on wider markets for their goods, they needed one another as customers. It thus seemed in everyone's best interest to be friends in commerce. It was expected that by sharing their ideas and getting to know more about one another on the personal level, nations of the world might erase traditional enmity and distrust. Never had men felt the possibility of world unity as they did at this glorious mid-century, when the railroad, steamship, and telegraph (which was to link England and France by the end of 1851) had combined to shrink the distance between nations, and men were curious to learn more about the mysterious inhabitants of other parts of the globe.

Along with its larger scale, the Exhibition had a larger purpose than any previous fair. When such an exhibition was first projected in 1849, it was intended to meet a definite need for English industry. It was expected to benefit industry by providing 1) a wider familiarity with raw materials and their potential, 2) a familiarity with processes and advancements discovered by others, and 3) an opportunity to educate taste in designers by comparing a multitude of designs, some better than others. In her rapid
industrialization, England had achieved the capacity to produce goods more rapidly and cheaply than before, but in design she had lagged behind countries like France. Enterprising men realized that Englishmen need not buy on the continent if tasteful goods were available at home; that tasteful design would add only negligible cost to something like mass-produced crockery, yet would enjoy a ready and expanding market; and that design-conscious artisans might devise better methods of production.

Some of these goals had been shared by earlier exhibitions, including successful ones sponsored by the Society of Arts in 1848 and 1849. But as this exhibition developed its limits were expanded to include the consumer as well as the producer. It was envisioned not merely as a trade fair, primarily of interest to mechanics, artisans, and merchants, but as a festival of design involving those who would buy as well as those who would produce. An educated market, it was hoped, would stimulate superior production. Further, displays were not limited to manufacturers and artisans, but were solicited from anyone who had done a superior job in any endeavor, from hobby-craft to intricate craftsmanship, from fancy needlework to steam boilers. In this way the general public was encouraged to involve itself in the concepts of craftsmanship, whether at a professional or amateur level. The broad base determined a broader technical level of displays as well—not simply machinery and decorative arts, but also educational displays such as steps in the production of tea, or scale models of the Liverpool docks. An audience of millions rather
than thousands, of laymen as well as experts, had to be provided for.

The ultimate purpose, involving all of these considerations, was shaped by the calendar. Poised as it was on the threshold of a new half-century, the Great Exhibition would measure the progress attained within the last fifty years and sight the direction for the future. It would be a stock-taking of all but cosmic proportions. According to the plans of Prince Albert, the foremost originator,

\[\text{The Exhibition of 1851 is to give us a true test and a living picture of the point of development at which the whole of mankind has arrived in this great task, and a new starting point from which all nations will be able to direct their future exertions.}\]

Preparations

On June 29, 1849, after long consideration of the possibilities by the Society of Arts, Prince Albert announced to Henry Cole his intention that the exhibition planned for 1851 should be international.\(^3\) Then began long months of hard work during which first one difficulty and then another threatened to upset the entire endeavor. Although leaders in industry and government generally approved the idea, a broad base of solid support was slow in forming. Such an exhibition seemed a startlingly new and risky venture with improbable chances of success. It involved untried concepts carried

\[\text{\footnotesize\(^2\)Speech delivered on March 21, 1850, at a dinner hosted by the Lord Mayor of London to encourage support for the Exhibition.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\(^3\)Along with Prince Albert, Henry Cole deserves credit for the initiation and success of the Exhibition. He was on the Council of the Society of Arts, had been a leader in organizing the Society's exhibitions in 1848 and 1849, and was among the first to urge Prince Albert to enlarge the 1851 Exhibition to international scale.}\]
out on such a massive scale that a failure, if it came, would be monumental. It was as yet a tenuous plan, but it required the investment of vast capital and personal reputation. Practically, people did not believe that such a scheme could be carried off.

There were too many problems. How could the necessary preparation be completed within the allotted time of less than two years? Where could a large enough building be erected without destroying a treasured park area? How were so many exhibitors to be found? How could a new building be erected in time? Would not foreign goods flood English markets and depress English employment? Would not foreigners steal English trade secrets? How could nations be induced to cooperate when Europe seethed with nationalistic feuds? What would be the horrible consequences of inviting foreign revolutionaries to foment mischief in London? The problems seemed unsurmountable.

Practical caution and shortness of time were the biggest difficulties; and for every problem untangled, another seemed to appear.\(^4\) Despite the Society of Arts' earnest canvassing to gain the financial support necessary before a Royal Charter could be granted, response was slow. The vexing question of finances was not resolved until November 1849, when the firm of Messrs. James and George Munday, contractors for public works, pledged itself as sole guarantor (in

exchange for a generous slice of the eventual profits), so that a Royal Commission might be appointed; the Mundays expressed willingness, however, to step aside if and when such a commission could attract sufficient public backing for self-support. Thus a Royal Charter was granted on January 3, 1850, and the twenty-four-man Commission was established, composed of leaders from science, industry, agriculture, commerce, arts, and government. The Munday sponsorship, so crucial in earlier days, was now suspended. But additional problems remained. The voluntary subscriptions necessary to achieve self-support slackened to a trickle by late February. Although foreigners were eager to pledge exhibits, home enthusiasm lagged: conservatives found the novelty unsettling; some industrialists feared inroads on English markets; and landowners, smarting from the repeal of the Corn Laws, were interested neither in encouraging foreigners nor in supporting an exhibition which seemed to be more to the advantage of manufacturing and commercial interests.

With less than a year remaining before opening, the whole project was nearly defeated in late June and early July of 1850, when the question of building design and a passionate attempt to ban the Exhibition from the chosen site entangled the Commission in a complicated fight to preserve the very life of their project. Long ago approved by the Crown, Hyde Park was an ideal site, since it was centrally located and close enough to railroad terminuses to make it accessible to large numbers of people, was large enough to provide ample space, and possessed a certain fashionable charm worthy
of distinguished visitors. But just as work began in the park, opponents began agitation to force a change in location. Local residents did not fancy having their tranquil neighborhood inundated by hordes of fair-followers, or giving up their spacious park (one of the "lungs of London") in exchange for a huge building. Opposed to the Exhibition from the very first, Colonel Waldo Sibthorp (MP for Lincoln) led a determined fight against its intrusion into the park, and especially against the destruction of several young elms which it would supposedly necessitate. Opposition increased when the building committee published a sketch of the proposed building in the Illustrated London News (June 22, 1850, p. 445)—a brick and mortar monstrosity surmounted by an iron dome—which, in addition to being tasteless, impossible to complete within a year, and distressingly permanent, would require the sacrifice of Sibthorp's elms. Opponents proposed moving the Exhibition to Regents Park, the newly laid-out Battersea Park, Wormwood Scrubs, Primrose Hill, or the Isle of Dogs, or anywhere except their park. A heated Parliamentary debate ensued. The besieged Commission, with plans set and foreigners already invited to Hyde Park, feared that an Exhibition at any lesser site would be impossible. Sibthorp's blocking effort was finally defeated on July 4, however, and the way lay open.

The solution to the building problem, evolved during these same darkest days, was the plan for the famous Crystal Palace, submitted at the last minute by Joseph Paxton. Based on the principle of the glass lily house which Paxton, as head gardener, had built for the
Duke of Devonshire, the proposed building could be quickly constructed of prefabricated iron girders and panes of glass, and just as easily disassembled after the Exhibition, the large salvage value of its fabric reducing significantly the total cost of the building. When the sketch of Paxton's building appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on July 6, the public reacted favorably, and the Exhibition was given much-needed impetus. Meanwhile, during this same week, the remaining problem of finance was quickly settled. The railway building magnate Samuel Morton Peto, a member of the Finance Committee, offered his guarantee for £50,000; on the basis of the substantial private pledges which followed Peto's action, the Bank of England agreed to advance all necessary funds. The Exhibition could now be a public rather than a private-profit venture. Moreover, this bold show of faith by pragmatic men helped to convert the hesitant. Caution about the Exhibition was no longer a practical virtue, since success seemed more and more likely.

Within days of the approval of the Paxton plan and the settling of the money issue, the contracts were signed for the glass (Chance Brothers) and iron girders (John Henderson). The contractors took possession of the site along the southern border of Hyde Park on July 30, 1850, and the three-tiered building rose with almost magical swiftness. Since all of the measurements were in multiples of twenty-four, and all of its parts were designed to be interchangeable, parts could be mass-produced by special machinery invented by Paxton, transported to the site by rail and wagon, and easily assembled. This
novel method of construction even made it possible to preserve the much-defended elms, by topping the building with the huge arched glass transept which became its most admired feature. Long before the building was completed, the site was the center of national attention, with visitors willing to pay 5s to watch the bustling workmen create the improbable fabric of glass and iron with the help of Paxton's ingenious new glazing wagon, whose wheels rode smoothly along in the very gutters which would receive the glass. By December the framework was in place, and by February 12, 1851 the palace was glazed and ready for the reception of goods. The completed building with its main entrance facing Prince's Gate, extended lengthwise 1848 feet by 450 feet in width, its overall size four times that of St. Peter's in Rome.

The days of criticism and predicted disaster were not over once construction had begun, but now they offered little obstacle. A vocal few still insisted that this novelty would simply not be safe—that the fragile-looking structure would collapse under the weight of the contents or under the vibration induced by thousands of footsteps; that the first hailstorm would smash the glass; that leaking and dampness would damage the goods. But Paxton's sound design and program of careful testing for strength had made such fears unnecessary. Each girder, according to its intended use, had been tested to withstand nine, fifteen, or twenty-two tons; corps of sappers and miners had marched through the building, finding it perfectly stable; storms had left it intact; and Paxton's specially-designed gutters
Figure 3. General view of the Exhibition building under construction during November, 1851.
(C.H. Gibbs-Smith, The Great Exhibition of 1851, p. 46.)
prevented any drips. However, similar convincing assurances could not be given to other worriers who expected that London would be overrun by the same foreign revolutionaries who had been toppling the thrones of Europe, or by the same Chartist mobs who had given Englishmen such a scare in 1848—in short, by the most unscrupulous and unsavory characters of all nations. Pessimists predicted the theft of valuable exhibits from the glass house, pickpockets in the crowd, mob mischief, and attacks on the Queen. Only the Exhibition itself could test the validity of such fears.

Meanwhile, the Commissioners busied themselves with hundreds of prosaic details. They had to allocate space and decide upon the placement of goods. Now that the Exhibition had become popular, requests for space had to be turned away or granted with reduced footage. Contracts were let for refreshment stalls and for the printing of catalogues. Admission prices, both for season tickets (men, 3 guineas; women, 2 guineas) and for individual tickets were set, providing expensive, and thus exclusive, entry for the first few weeks (6l on May 2 and 3; 5s from May 5 through 24); but after May 26 entry could be gained Monday through Thursday at 1s; Fridays, 2s 6d; and Saturdays, 5s. From August 9, the Saturday fee was reduced to 2s 6d. Policies for judging and prizes were set. Plans were laid for the opening ceremony.

Preparations were also being made in the towns and villages of England. Savings clubs were formed among working people, allowing them to systematically put by their shillings for a trip to the
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In addition, building saw the use and introduction of many ingenious methods and devices. Fig. 6 shows a section of a standard roof and column. Fig. 7 is a section of a well-known Paxton gutter; it will be seen that there is a main passage for rain water at the top and two smaller channels below on the sides which collected the rainwater from inside the roof. Both channels were then led down the centre of the gutter. Fig. 8 shows a part of the standard roof and glass roofing. Fig. 9 is Paxton’s method of glass placing, which could be done over in wet weather and which ran on tracks, carrying the glass in a carriage. Fig. 10 is a workman Welshing the joints of the main drainage pipes near the base of one of the Reflection domes which led off the rain and collected moisture.

Figure 4. Paxton’s ingenious methods and devices.
(As presented in C.H. Gibbs-Smith, The Great Exhibition of 1851, p. 45.)
Exhibition. Railroads instituted special fares for excursions to London.\(^5\) Exhibitors prepared their wares. In London, householders prepared rooms to let, streets were more clearly marked, shops sported placards announcing, "On parle français ici," and private citizens organized petitions for the installation of public comfort facilities.

The skepticism which had dismissed the original plans as impossible was replaced by a groundswell of enthusiasm as the theoretical was translated into successful reality. It was as if the very impossibility of the scheme made its completion all the more wondrous, and all the more reason for self-congratulation. Newspapers kept the public up-to-date with all that was happening. Interest grew, too, as goods began arriving from all over the world—in crates labeled in French, German, and Greek (among others), and accompanied by the story-book range of nationals who would unpack and arrange them. A steady stream of carts and vans headed for the Crystal Palace to be unloaded, a tangible forecast of the wonders to be expected, and, again, fully reported in the press. By opening day the wonder had intensifies—in a country which could produce such an Exhibition, anything might be possible. Just months ago the site had been bare, and now it was occupied by the largest single building in the world. Short years ago the technology for producing sheet glass in quantity was undeveloped, yet here were 293,655 panes, produced and installed

\(^5\)Half price or less for a journey of more than 100 miles, reported the Morning Chronicle, November 20, 1850.
in little over six months. Recent papers had reported quarrels and nationalistic rivalry among the nations of the world, but here at England's invitation, nations were actually cooperating as brothers. The whole complex plan had successfully matured in two years, against huge odds, and was ready for opening on schedule—a triumphant demonstration to the world of English inventiveness, efficiency, and productivity. Englishmen were increasingly proud of this miracle which had happened almost unexpectedly in their midst. They could not help but see in this crystal surface a reflection of themselves. Like Narcissus at the pool,

John Bull to quite as deep a pass,
Has with John Bull been smitten,
Beholding, in his pile of Glass,
The Glory of Great Britain.  

Enthusiasm was to reach even greater heights as each day added thousands to those who had seen the wonders displayed within.

A Visit to the Exhibition

In order to understand the excitement over the Great Exhibition, it will be helpful to put ourselves in the position of a ticket-holder. On entering the Crystal Palace by the main entrance, under the transept on the south side, the visitor found himself in the midst of a vast and airy vista. High above, sunlight streamed in through an endless expanse of glass. Underfoot, the wide floorboards, fitted so that dirt could be easily swept through the cracks to the ground beneath, were clean and uncluttered. Ahead under the high

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6Punch, 20(May 31, 1851), 225.
Figure 5. Southern entrance to the transept.
arch of the transept which stretched the entire breadth of the building, he could glimpse the huge crystal fountain, the Coalbrookdale iron gates, and the now-famous elms. Along the transept and to the right in the east nave extended the foreign exhibits in seemingly infinite succession, identified by red and white banners and national flags and punctuated by statuary. Nearest to the transept were Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Persia, and Arabia, with Switzerland, Brazil, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, the Zollverein, North Germany, Russia, Norway, Sweden, and the United States ranging beyond view towards the extremity.

To the left, in the west nave, were exhibits representing the British empire, with the bays closest to the transept devoted to the colonies, and the remaining expanse occupied by British home products. The eye could barely begin to scan the variety, but a leisurely stroll would discover machinery along the northern wall and raw materials along the southern, with agricultural implements immediately adjacent. In the central aisles one would encounter bays devoted to paper, printing, bookbinding, furniture, upholstery, decorations, paperhangings and papier-mâché, manufactures in mineral substances for building or decorating (marble, slate, etc.), manufactures in leather, skins, furs, and hair; textiles, including cotton, dyed, woven, and felted fabrics, woolen and worsted, flax, hemp, and linen. There was hardware, including cutlery, edge tools, locks, and grates. There were displays of military goods, carpets, fancywork, jewelry, precious metals, chemical and pharmaceutical products, scientific
Figure 6. Interior of the transept, as seen from the South Entrance.
instruments, and articles of clothing. Galleries running the length of the nave, both west and east, provided additional space for lightweight goods such as musical and surgical instruments, silks and laces, glass and porcelain. So much there was that to see it all would require weeks. Equipped with a catalogue, the visitor would be able to pinpoint the location of any particular exhibit, note its numbered location within the building, and walk directly to it, since a preassigned grid of letters and numbers identified every twenty-four-foot space in the building (A to S moving north to south, 1 to 77 moving west to east), in the same manner that longitude and latitude markings helped one to read a map. When tired, the visitor could rest and refresh himself at one of three special refreshment courts (franchised to Schweppes), where he might buy food and non-alcoholic beverages, or obtain, gratis, a cup of filtered water.

Once the visitor had recovered from the breathtaking wonder of the overview, he could settle down to examine individual exhibits. If he were a textile worker, he might head directly for the machinery court and textile displays, and there spend his entire day. But if he were a man of leisure possessed of a season ticket, he might devote weeks to serious perusal of all exhibits in turn. By doing so, he would be amazed at how much mankind had learned in the past fifty years, and he could dream about the future. Within the Exhibition the visitor could trace the raw materials, the machinery by which they were transformed, and the techniques of design whereby, transcending crude utility, goods might help to mold a higher civilization.
Figure 7. The Eastern, or Foreign Nave, looking West.
(Contemporary photograph in the Victoria and Albert Museum, reproduced in Gibbs-Smith, p. 62.)
This was an unprecedented collection of raw materials from all over the globe, whereby man might learn geography and classification as well as the potential of each material and its best source. There were huge displays of mineral resources—coal, representing different qualities and sources, and dominated by a monster block of anthracite from the Swansea collieries weighing four tons; building stones of limestone and slate; granites and marbles for statuary. There were dyestuffs and raw fibers. There were ores and chemicals and samples of the recently-exploited gutta percha.

The machinery courts, whirring with examples of the ingenious inventions by which man had transformed his whole way of life in the past half-century, were the source of the greatest awe. There were man's new genii: steam, drive belts, gearing. There were power looms and hydraulic presses and Applegath's amazing highspeed printing press producing pages of the current *Illustrated London News* there within the Exhibition. There were power clod breakers, steam locomotives, and McCormick's new reaper. There were spinning machines and a patent envelope folder. There were machines for laying underwater telegraph cable.

But it was in the courts of manufactured goods that the theoretical potential of material, machine, and design was practically demonstrated. Here were the improved buggies, the farming implements, the telescopes, the consumer goods of glass and metal and fiber, the furniture for man's comfort, the clothing for his warmth and adornment. Displays demonstrated man's skill in improving
Figure 8. Moving machinery. Power was provided from a specially-built boiler-house outside the main building.
(C.H. Gibbs-Smith, p.81.)
the utility of common items, whether by efficiency of operation or by
greater adaptability. There was an improved firegrate from Sheffield,
designed to send more heat into the room and less up the chimney;
there were easy chairs from the American Chair Company, featuring a
new type of spring to allow free side-to-side movement; and Canada
was showing an exceedingly lightweight canoe. Visitors especially
admired goods in which art was wedded to basic utility. Just as
civilization succeeded barbarism after basic physical needs had been
met, so too, they believed, could civilization be furthered in turn by
adding beauty to a basic tool. Decorated fireplaces could both heat
efficiently and provide beauty. Pianos, gas lamps, chairs, and fire-
irons could all serve a double role, being decorative as well as
functional. This tendency toward the decorative was normal for a
growing middle class with time and money to spend in the cultivation
of taste. But it extended also to goods produced for the lower
classes. In this spirit, one Staffordshire pottery firm showed a
collection of ornamented teapots and water jugs "constructed only for
the cheapest market"—beautiful, but without prejudice to economy. 7
For the middle market, chimney pieces like those usually carved in
marble by individual craftsmen were shown reproduced in cast iron;
iron bedsteads, sturdy and easily cast in fanciful patterns,
replaced wood; Britannia metal mimicked the silver trays of the
wealthy. New materials could be used in old ways, and experimentation

7 The Crystal Palace Exhibition, Illustrated Catalogue, London
1851 (An Unabridged Republication of the Art-Journal Special
went wild: iron fountains, vases, bracelets, and goblets; rubber shoes; paper chairs. New scientific techniques also contributed to wider availability of beautiful things. Electroplating, for example, provided a cheaper way of producing metal items which looked much dearer, and steam machinery made lovely textiles much more affordable.

Everywhere in the courts of manufactured goods the visitor would encounter art applied in practical ways. He could admire the Kenilworth buffet (carved of solid English oak in deep relief with scenes suggested by Scott's novel) and fine lace and jewelry. He could marvel at the special show-pieces in which the wedding of art and utility reached its highest extreme. Among these were a length of Spitalfields brocaded silk in fifteen colors, requiring 30,000 cards in its production, and the Sheffield Town Razor, with its elaborately inlaid handle and fine blade engraved with a view of the Crystal Palace. While "pure" art might be an admirable thing, the Exhibition celebrated its practical application and its diffusion among the many.  

The goods displayed were endless. There were fine telescopes and watches and lighthouse mechanisms. There were tinned food-stuffs. There were curiosities of individual endeavor, such as models of buildings carved in cork, an expanding model of a man, and a miniature silver teakettle fashioned from a four-penny piece.

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8See the Illustrated London News, 18 (January–June 1851) and 19 (July–December 1851) for engravings of many of the articles displayed and for evaluations of their artistic merits.
Figure 9. The transept of the Crystal Palace on the 1st of May. (Illustrated London News, May 24, 1851, p. 455.)
There were sleighs and shawls, and chairs carved from coal. There were models demonstrating the working of a mine. Above all, there was the great Koh-i-noor diamond, recently presented to the Queen, behind its protective grillwork.

It would not be surprising then, that the Englishman of 1851 was almost overcome by the physical grandeur and symbolic overtones of this amazing Exhibition. Superlative passed superlative; and at last even an expert wordsmith like Thackeray admitted that because it was the "vastest and sublimest popular festival that the world has ever witnessed," it defied description. "What can one say about it but commonplaces?" The impossible, the unthinkable, had been accomplished. In less than two years the visionary idea had come to fruition. Parkland had not been permanently sacrificed. Practical genius had introduced a new concept of architecture, whereby a building grander than a fairy palace could be erected at less cost per square foot than an agricultural barn, and with the swiftness of lightning. Nationwide cooperation had solved all problems of funding. Goods had arrived from the far-flung corners of the world. Frenchman rubbed shoulders with Hindu, and English worker with English peer, all with the greatest good will. Uncountable wonders of human accomplishment were on display. No trace was to be seen of the continental revolutionary or the Chartist mob. It was all a

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10Household Words, January 18, 1851, p. 389.
source of great astonishment to the society which had listened with mingled skepticism and inertia to the original idea. The press went wild with claims even more unrestrained than the *Morning Chronicle*'s report on May 2 that "the greatest trophy ever erected of human progress, industry, and skill, has been triumphantly piled." The Exhibition was proclaimed as a symbol of national Progress, Prosperity, and Class Unity; it was said to mark new dignity for English workmen, a new era of peace for the nations of the world, and the arrival of the millennium.

Why, then, did the major Victorian writers not join in the general acclaim? Our search for an answer must begin with the role played by the press in the Exhibition mania.

**The Role of the Press**

At this point in history, with newly-developed rapid printing techniques, rapid and cheap distribution, and a growing and diversified reading public, the press found itself in an ideal position to both mold and reflect the public consciousness. The more the Exhibition was publicized, the greater the interest; and the greater the popular interest, the more coverage given.

The Commission had included the press in their early plans, but they could hardly have guessed how valuable it would eventually prove to be to their success. The Exhibition was the first event in English life which required so great a harnessing of public cooperation. The public, ordinary citizens as well as entrepreneurs, had to be won over, and the press was enlisted as an
important ally. To stimulate public contributions to the subscription funds, names of influential contributors were prominently publicized in the paper. The overseas recruiting missions of the commissioners were reported, as well as the exhibits projected by manufacturers who subscribed their early support. Impetus was added by the national reportage of the carefully-staged Lord Mayor's banquet on March 21, 1850, to which all mayors were invited and by means of which leaders in all communities became personally drawn into the plans. The influence of the press was felt in the building controversy, in which it provided what almost amounted to a national plebiscite. When both of the proposed building plans were submitted to the public in the Illustrated London News, the first aroused opposition, while the second, the Crystal Palace, kindled national acceptance.

The press had served mainly as an agent of publicity in the early months, but by 1851 its role had shifted. As the public became more fascinated by the embodiment of this impossible dream, reporters scurried to provide people with the coverage they wanted. The press carried detailed accounts of the opening ceremony. In the columns of the Times and the Athenaeum, in the cartoons of Punch and the pictorial coverage of the Illustrated London News, hundreds of thousands of readers across the kingdom were enabled to share the drama of the opening day with the fortunates who had been there in person. Throughout the entire summer the daily and weekly press printed detailed descriptions of the exhibits, serving as surrogate tours for those who had not yet gone, and as educational background
for all, helping them to understand the significance of the displays. Said the *Athenaeum*, "On every hand the records of the marvel which it has been the privilege of this generation to see are multiplying for the use and information of the generations to come....Every fragment of the matchless collection and the casket which contains it seems to have its separate reporter."¹¹ People planned to keep their copies of the *Illustrated London News* as a permanent record and reminder of what they had seen.

Beyond the mere cataloguing of the exhibits, the press on all levels—from daily to quarterly, from penny periodical to literary review—reported the public feeling that surely the Exhibition was more than a display of goods. From all levels came extravagant claims: the Crystal Palace was a symbol of its age; it was a tangible embodiment of the progress of the English people in conquering nature to useful ends. Steam engines, reporters averred, were not simply machinery—they were evidence of man's harnessing of Nature's laws. Attendance figures were not mere statistics—each fez or beard to come through the gates was evidence of International Brotherhood; each crowded shilling day was significant of Prosperity and Intelligence among the lower classes. The more the press eulogized the Exhibition, the more susceptible the public became; and the more eager the public was to find symbolic significance in the event,

¹¹ *Athenaeum*, September 27, 1851, p. 1026. The allusion is not merely to journalistic coverage, but to the innumerable guide books, printed souvenirs, and descriptions in story and verse. Both the Victoria and Albert and the British Library have extensive holdings of these materials (see Bibliography, p. 227).
the more copiously flowed the hyperbole. Exhibition sentiment sold. This is not to say that it was not in earnest, for much of it was, but only that it was intensified by the willingness of the public to believe it.\textsuperscript{12}

The key questions for us are: How thoroughly did the people at the time share the buoyant belief that the Exhibition symbolized vast moral attainments? Did the grandeur of the Exhibition really overshadow all other concerns during this time? Were writers like Carlyle and Dickens alone in resisting it?

The printed evidence

In trying to gauge public opinion about the significance of the Exhibition we must bear certain cautions in mind. First, even contemporary conclusions arrived at in the glow of the Exhibition were not necessarily widely shared. Our evidence of public attitudes is limited to newspaper and periodical claims about the significance of the Exhibition which the writers may not wholly have believed, but which they judged would sell; to popular literature (broadsides, etc.) which although it shows that the market for Exhibition hyperbole covered a broader range of people than the readers of newspapers and weekly journals, does not demonstrate that the readers really believed in deep philosophical implications of the Exhibition; and

\textsuperscript{12}Fraser's repeatedly discussed the puffery of the press. For example, it deplored "the habit, growing on the nation, of boasting of its greatness and wealth,—a habit fostered by insidious journalists and by politicians pandering to the weaknesses of the people." (43 [April 1851], 474.) Later in the year Fraser's said, "almost any desired 'public opinion' might be made to order." (44 [Sept. 1851], 332.)
to the diaries, letters, and other private reports of those who had
visited the show, which tell us more about individual than general
attitudes, and which tend to deal more with the physical phenomenon
of the Exhibition itself than with extravagant philosophical claims.
In general it seems safe to conclude that most people were aware of
assertions that the Exhibition signaled the arrival of the millennium
and that many were thrilled with the grounds for pride which the
Exhibition gave them. Of the widespread self-satisfaction allegedly
felt by society at large about society at large we have little firm
evidence.

Secondly, we can learn as much about public opinion from the
prosaic concerns of the era as we can from its self-appraisals. By
examining the events which made the news, the issues which were
discussed in journals, and the subject matter of articles, stories,
and poems in a wide variety of periodicals, we can learn some of the
ideas which dominated the minds of each group of readers. While this
still may not provide a satisfactory answer to the question of public
opinion, it shows us, at least, a range and variety in opinion, and
gives some basis for evaluating the validity of reported beliefs.13

The press provides us with additional insight into the Exhibi-
tion era by commenting on public attitudes only indirectly connected
with the Exhibition. The periodicals published articles about trends

13Writers for Bentley's (29 [1851], 107-109), Fraser's (43
[March 1851], 286), and the Morning Chronicle (May 6, 1851) each
claimed that a pretty clear idea of contemporary attitudes could
be gained by examining the output of the press.
in taste, behavior, and belief, many of which seem to have been written thoughtfully and without any obvious motive which might render the observations questionable. In such sources, for example, we discover that notwithstanding the received idea of the public mood in 1851 the mid-century years did not seem especially complacent to a writer in the Athenaeum (January 25, 1841, p. 103) who commented:

To say that the age is indifferent to its evils is simply not true....The refinements in the art of government, and the extension of the means of observation, have laid bare the rotten parts of our system with greater minuteness than has been ever attained in any other country or time; and like a deformed child, who sees its own distorted figure for the first time in a faithful mirror, we have been filled with terror by the contemplation not of a new, but of a newly-reflected image.

What emerges from a careful study of the periodical and popular press of 1850-52 (see chapters 2 through 6), is the variety of public opinion at the time. Although vast numbers did share the pride and optimism inspired by the Exhibition, many of them seem to have retained the ability to distinguish between the novel emotions peculiar to the Exhibition and the on-going realities of daily life. They were not absorbed in the Exhibition to the exclusion of all other concerns. And they did not assume that the momentary triumphs of the Exhibition (in the relationships between classes, for example) signaled the solution of wider problems. In this regard, at least, our dissident major writers had plenty of company, as we shall see in the chapters which follow.
The historical view

We encounter a repeated theme in the press of 1851. We find a preoccupation with historical time, both in reports about the Crystal Palace and in non-Exhibition articles; we hear it both from those infected by the Exhibition fever and from their cooler-headed compatriots. Writers seemed keenly aware of the position of the present moment within the ongoing sweep of time: "We...now stand upon the neutral ground between the irrevocable past and the unknown future." This historical consciousness seems an essential feature of the age, and as such, I believe provides the next step in understanding the silence of the major writers on the subject of the Exhibition.

The progressive view of history was not new in 1851, but rather part of a normal tendency increasingly common in the nineteenth century. In earlier times, when change had come more slowly, it had been less a source of preoccupation. But now change was coming fast. New sources of power led to changes in methods of production, trade, and the role of the worker. Some thinkers were bothered by the rapidity of change. To what ends was it tending? Was it desirable or dangerous? Were things getting better or worse? Could man's increasing power over his environment harness these changes to good ends if he remained both vigilant and ready to adjust? At mid-century men were caught up in this race with change. Perhaps even without consciously trying, thinking men took soundings of their present location, and pondered over the questions of where they had come

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14 Fraser's, 43 (January 1851), 1.
from, by what path, and where they were headed.

In the years leading up to the Exhibition, several characteristic attempts had been made to diagnose the direction of change. Among them three are worth mentioning as representative of the frame of mind even before the impact of the Exhibition. The first volume of Macaulay's *History of England* (1849), written in the belief that correct information about the past was essential in determining a proper view of the present, had in the famous third chapter traced essential changes in English life between the seventeenth century and the present. In similar spirit, William Porter's *Progress of the Nation* (2nd ed. in 1847; reissued in 1851) had undertaken to evaluate the tangible qualities important to commerce and industry. With mountains of statistics he attempted to trace either progress or regression in production, shipping, living standards, morals, and other important areas of modern life. This same mood of national evaluation produced William Johnston's *England As It Is: Political, Social, and Industrial, in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century* (1851) with its chapters examining the present in terms of economics, the condition of the people, food, habits, crime, and the theory of progress.

By 1850-51 this self-analytical tendency was thriving, since the half-century was the logical end-point of an era—a natural time to evaluate the changes of the past fifty years and to strike a new base line for the half-century about to begin. The customary New Year's tendency to reminisce about the events of the past year and to frame
resolutions for the future was magnified at New Year's 1851 as people summed up the events and advancements of a fifty-year epoch.\(^{15}\)

Magazines featured summations of what appeared to them to be the essential characteristics of 1851, flourishing statistics to demonstrate the current trends in manufacturing, agriculture, and quality of life.\(^{16}\)

The only thing shared by all of these analysts was disagreement. Some, like Macaulay, were highly content with present tendencies; others, like Johnston, were sure that England had taken a wrong turn and needed to redirect her course. A goodly number reflected the writer's partisan political views, tending to be optimistic if the writer felt that Free Trade was a good way to face the economic shifts of the nineteenth century (articles in the Economist, for example), and pessimistic if the writer felt that Free Trade could only lead to disaster (articles in Blackwood's). Some were pleased that conditions seemed so much brighter than they had in the mid-forties; others called attention to remaining social inequities and felt that society was distressingly slow to recognize that rapid change demanded reevaluation of the adequacy of old ways. Whether an individual praised or criticized the accomplishments of his society depended greatly on his historical perspective—on whether, from the vantage point of the present he looked towards the past to measure how far man

\(^{15}\) For such a measuring, see Fraser's, 43 (January 1851), 1; also January 1852, p. 17f.

\(^{16}\) See, for example, a two-part article in the Economist, January 18, 1851, pp. 57-58; and January 25, pp. 81-83.
had progressed; or, by contrast, towards the future, to measure man's current achievement against his potential. Social analysis in 1851 was marked by both euphoria and disappointment.

With its stated purpose of measuring the level of human attainment, the Exhibition was in part a product of this pattern of thought, and in part the basis for more. It provided a microcosm of man's achievement in virtually every area of invention and production, reminding even the average citizen of the contrasts between life in 1851 and life as it had been perhaps ten, fifty, or a hundred years previously. The press bolstered this awareness. Time after time, readers encountered references to the "Juxtaposition" of two very different eras. The Exhibition was said to have provided a "precipice in time," whereby, as in a shift of geological strata, the remains of one era are revealed in close contrast with those of another. Another writer imagined the astonishment which would be felt by an Englishman who had emigrated to the colonies years ago, if he could suddenly be transported back to discover what had occurred in his homeland since he had left her shores. Another visualized the pride with which Prince Albert and the executive committee might conduct all the reincarnated savans of past ages on a tour of the Crystal Palace, showing Pliny, Aristotle, Bacon, and Newton this microcosm of "the

17 A word used by contemporary observers. See Athenaeum, January 25, 1851, p. 103.

18 Thomas Hardy, Fiddler of the Reels, quoted in C. R. Fay, Palace of Industry, 1851, p. 96.

19 Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, February 15, 1851, p. 98.
wonderful things that have been done in the world since their time." Another urged his readers "to fancy ourselves suddenly transported back to the year 1800, with all our habits, expectations, requirements, and standard of living formed upon the luxuries and appliances collected round us in the year 1850." Another envisioned a still wider contrast in time—an islander being instantly conveyed from Pitcairn to the doors of the Crystal Palace—illustrating thereby "the two extremes of civilization in its lowest and highest development," hands with little more than Stone Age cunning, and hands of 1851 capable of putting girdles around the earth. In comparing the goods which they saw in the Exhibition with those which might have characterized a similar gathering in, say, 1800, visitors found ample justification for pride.

Progress

At the same time, the press reflected trust in man's continued capacity for improvement. Just as by discovering the laws of physics man had harnessed the genie, steam, and by discovering laws of immunization he had learned to prevent smallpox, man might hope to gain control over other "powers of nature"; the age which had produced the Exhibition, stated the Athenaeum, "need not despair of any good cause coming to fruition in due time" (July 19, 1871, p. 773). Writers in

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20 Fraser's, 45 (January 1852), 19-20.
21 The Economist, January 18, 1851, p. 57.
22 Fraser's, 44 (August 1851), 119-120.
1851 frequently characterized their society by an image of organic growth: some described society as a tender seedling in the process of growing into a towering tree; others as a stream swelling into a mighty river as it advances towards the ocean; others as a child inevitably developing into responsible manhood. They spoke of each generation standing on the shoulders of the one before, with the consequent ability to reach higher than previously possible. There seemed every reason to believe that the process would continue.

Such an optimistic view of society did not necessarily mean complete contentment with things as they were, even when the Exhibition provided obvious grounds for self-congratulation. For some writers social weaknesses could be squarely faced since the present, with all its imperfections, was only an intermediate stage in the forward sweep; shortcomings were remediable and thus no real cause for concern. In this view, contemporary society was like "a thoughtful and laborious youth succeeding a restless and heedless infancy."

Although its infancy had been characterized by "base war, lying policy, thoughtless cruelty, senseless improvidence," the human race was now "just emergent from childhood" and beginning to explore and control the universe. Although still showing some infantile behavior, it was now giving evidence of "a definite state of progress" and hope for future development.23

Others were bothered by the contrast between man's present achievement and his potential, echoing William Johnston's disappointment:

We regard with admiring wonder the inventions of science, and our respect for human ingenuity is vastly increased; but when we inquire how far the use of them has benefited the great mass of the people, we are compelled to dismiss all sense of triumph in their achievements.  

Such writers could be outspokenly critical of society, in the belief that man was showing himself to be a poor steward of the talents given to him. In this spirit, E. B. Browning's poem, "Casa Guidi Windows" praised the wonders of the Exhibition—"O magi of the east and of the west, Your incense, gold, and myrrh are excellent"—but challenged the exhibitors, "Is your courage spent on handwork only?" The poem lamented the remaining problems of an imperfect civilization (untaught children, women driven to prostitution, continuing warfare), asking, "No remedy, my England, for such woes?" The stanza concluded:

0 gracious nations, give some ear to me!  
You all go to your Fair, and I am one  
Who at the roadside of humanity  
Beseech your alms—and God’s justice to be done.  
So, prosper! 

We see, then, that despite the Narcissism which understandably surrounded the Exhibition, the mid-century years were marked by a tendency toward self-analysis on a broader scale as well, and diversity of judgment was not uncommon. If the major writers with whom

24Johnston, England As It Is, I, 68.

we are concerned disregarded Exhibition rhetoric and chose to write about society itself rather than about its microcosm, if they kept a cautionary eye on the drift of change, and if they seemed to be negative while others immortalized the Exhibition, they would not be at odds with the spirit of the age.
"Trade is everywhere good. The necessaries and luxuries of life are, many of them, half the price they were ten years ago."

(Economist, March 1, 1851, p. 222.)

"Where our prosperity? It is not sure
Where some grow rich by many growing poor.
But cheap bread is a mighty pretty cry,
Though useless when we've not wherewith to buy..."

("The Crystal Palace; A Satire For the Times," by E.M.G., p. 11)

The self-analysis of the Exhibition year resulted in disagreement over the issue of prosperity. Some witnesses celebrated prosperity's reign with satisfaction. Others insisted that it was by no means fully achieved, and dismissed national pride on that count as badly misplaced. Each side had strong reasons for its impressions.

Prosperous Conditions

"Prosperity" was the official verdict of the government, the unofficial theme of the Great Exhibition, and, without doubt, the dominant feeling of 1851. It was amply supported by comparison of the present with the past. A reader browsing through newspapers

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1The government felt that Free Trade, instituted in 1846, was responsible for current commercial prosperity; the Exhibition was seen as a monument to the results of Free Trade.
and magazines would have encountered pages of statistics demonstrating that these were good times. Writers pointed out that money bought more in 1851 than it had in past years. Bread was cheap and plentiful, with a quartern loaf costing between 5d and 6d (the lowest price since 1793). They reported, moreover, that through the cheapness of machine manufacture, quality clothing of cotton, linen, silk, and wool had become a commonplace rather than a luxury, linen shirts costing only half what they had in 1800, and flannel petticoats only one-third.²

The press heralded the Exhibition as a symbol of this new well-being. Only industry which was already thriving, it pointed out, could have produced on such short notice sufficient materials to erect the glass palace. The iron works of John Henderson had supplied the 4,500 tons of iron as fast as it could be used, and Chance of Birmingham had produced with ease the almost 300,000 panes of glass within the few months allotted. "There is no one circumstance in the history of the manufacturing enterprise of the English nation," observed Household Words, "which places in so strong a light as this its boundless resources in materials, to say nothing of the arithmetical skill in computing at what cost, and in how short a time, those materials could be converted to a special purpose."³ Only a nation with money to spare, reporters noted, could have financed the expensive venture—some £ 335,742, all from private pockets—and could

²Economist, January 18, 1851, p. 58.
³January 18, 1851, p. 388.
have produced so many citizens able to pay the admission. Crews of efficient workers, often more than 2,000 men at one time, had been engaged in erecting, testing, glazing, and painting. Not scrawny, discontented laborers, these. They were comfortably paid for their work, it was noted, most of them earning between 3s and 5s per day, or better than a pound per week for many of them.

The displays within provided a "precipice in time" by means of which current prosperity could be compared with the past, and reporters encouraged this point of view. Goods were now in wide use which fifty or a hundred years ago would have been reserved only for the rich. Moreover, by the creative application of scientific principles, inventions had contributed to the health and quality of human life. Food could be produced more abundantly and cheaply by the displayed machinery for cutting, turning up, and pulverising farm soil at one operation. It could be processed with less waste by such devices as Westrup's economical corn mill. Miners could hope for safer working conditions when the model ventilating apparatuses were installed in their mines. Printed newspapers and magazines could be made more readily available for the betterment of English minds thanks to Applegath's great vertical printing press. Science and technology seemed to guarantee continued prosperity.

The greatest evidence of prosperity in the Crystal Palace, though, was the crowd, which flocked from cottage and tenement as well as from mansion and palace to see the Exhibition. Observers were pleased—and surprised—by the large number of tidy, well-fed working
people, whose very presence in the Exhibition indicated some degree of well-being in society at large. If not rich, these people had at least the admission shilling; a secure subsistence which would allow a brief vacation without inviting starvation; and perhaps the price of transportation, if they had a distance to come, or a bottle of ginger beer to wash down a basket lunch. Here was a populace no longer gathered in masses crying for bread, but one, with basic needs now satisfied, which could devote itself to a day or two of pleasure and self-improvement. Here was a nation which had emerged from the dark years of rick-burning into better times.

Thus did the evidence within the Crystal Palace seem to reinforce the mid-century conclusions of men like Macaulay and Porter. Never before had so many people, unlettered as well as lettered, been able to sift their own evidence and draw their own conclusion about the condition of England. And by the most natural process—comparison of the present with the past—the condition of England looked very good indeed.

Where Our Prosperity?

Despite the attractiveness of this tangible symbol, however, significant numbers of Englishmen in 1851 doubted that the Crystal Palace provided the full story. In Parliament, in popular literature, in quarterly journals, in books and newspapers, they questioned the allegedly prosperous condition of the nation. They pointed to pockets of impoverished workers, to cases of industrial stagnation, and to evidence of economic decline in the society which was so busy admiring
itself inside the Crystal Palace that it seemed to have forgotten the world outside. These critics charged that the economic advancement of some segments of society had been achieved at the expense of others, and thus did not constitute real prosperity. They reminded the nation that what might look like progress compared with the past was not yet advanced enough to merit complacency.

**Suffering Farmers**

English farmers and Tories whose interest was in the land comprised the chief group which questioned the existence of prosperity. Unlike the commercial interests, for whom a precipice in time showed immense improvement, the farmers saw no cause for celebration in their own case. The very Free Trade which had boosted commerce and inspired the Exhibition had served to lower grain prices to levels below those of fifty years ago. (Hence the low price of bread.) Sympathizers claimed that the prosperity enjoyed by manufacturers had been purchased at the price of farm destitution.

There was little doubt that rural hardship was real. Part of the Queen's address to the opening of Parliament, as reported by the *Times*, acknowledged the farmer's plight. "I have to lament," she said, "the difficulties which are still felt by that important body among my people who are owners and occupiers of land." The price of wheat in 1851 was said to be so low as to be barely remunerative, having gone from a high of 124s per quarter in June 1847 to as low as 37s
per quarter in 1851. Farmers blamed the fall on foreign competition following the repeal of the Corn Laws. It had become cheaper, they said, for coastal cities to import wheat from France than to depend on home-grown grain. Petitions to Parliament in February 1851 claimed that some farmers were already ruined and few would remain at the end of two years if wheat were to remain at present prices. Owners complained that they could not lease out their land when contracts came due, and that tenants had difficulty paying rent.

The Tory Blackwood's, of course, was their most constant mouth-piece, proclaiming that repealing the Corn Laws had been a mistake which might doom English agriculture if something were not done. But aside from specifically Protectionist rhetoric there was plenty of recognition of rural difficulties in the press. The open forum of the Times and Parliament helped to air the grievances. Articles reported wage cuts by farmers and the consequent near-starvation of their laborers. Some farmers, like those in Essex, lowered the wage rates to six or seven shillings per week. Some, as in the north of Yorkshire, put their laborers on part-time work, employing them only three, four, or five days of the week, with consequent loss of pay. The situation seemed to get worse as the year progressed. Laborers in Wiltshire were doubly hit, since in addition to wage cuts to five

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4Edinburgh Review, 93 (April 1851), 312.
5Blackwood's, 69 (April 1851), 505.
6Times, February 14, 1851, p. 3.
or six shillings per week, their allowance of skim milk was discontinued:

Six shillings a week, and no more milk,
And that's the way poor folks they bilk,...
And 'twill be a happy New Year for we.7

Verses described the hollow eyes and thin cheeks of the poor folk, concluding that it would be considered cruelty if livestock had as little to eat as the poor laborers who tended them. If they had no money to buy it, the cheapness of bread was no boon.

In February Benjamin Disraeli introduced his Agricultural Distress Bill to Parliament. It sought relief for suffering landowners, not by returning to Protection, but by reducing the heavy burden of taxation (county rate, highway rate, church rate, and poor rate) borne by the land. So wide was the bi-partisan acknowledgment of farm suffering that the ministry barely maintained its majority against the motion. According to the Times (February 14) several members who were otherwise Free-Traders admitted the inequity suffered by the poor farmers. The dissolution of Lord John Russell's government little more than a week later was partially due to the weakness of its support in this prosperity debate.8 The Times commented on the "bathos" of a ministry falling when facing not war or deficit, but alleged "universal peace and unexampled prosperity."9 Many ministers, it appeared, felt that the sympathies of their constituents were growing

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7Punch, 22 (January 10, 1852), 14.

8Times, February 25, 1851, p. 4.

9Times, February 24, 1851, p. 4.
in favor of the destitute farmer, and in the event of dissolution they wanted to be on the right side of the political fence.

Looking wistfully back towards the days of Protection, landowners blamed the government free trade measures which seemed particularly designed to profit commercial interests at the direct expense of those of the land. Although many rural folk attended the Exhibition as a holiday, unburdened by political thoughts, and giving city people reason to doubt the talk of farm unrest, landowners were bitter towards the Exhibition which they viewed as a monument to Free Trade. Unlike the men of commerce, most farmers saw no developing stake for themselves in the present or the future. Agricultural technology shown in the Exhibition did not bring the same kind of optimism to them that a steam engine brought to a manufacturer. Without the cash to improve the land, without the technical knowhow to do it, and, too often, without the realization that more efficiency might compensate for Free Trade losses, many did not consider this Exhibition a bright harbinger of their future.

While prosperity reigned in Hyde Park, Protectionists were attracting support from hard-pressed farmers. "Teeming hoards" of protectionist pamphlets emerged (cited by the *North British Review*, 14 [November 1850], 85-121) to proclaim the entire collapse of agricultural prosperity. *Household Words* reported, "In Worcester, Nottinghamshire, Edenbridge, Ross, Devonshire, York, Kent, Waltham, and Northampton; in Bucks, Leicester, Horsham, Ely, and Stafford; [Protectionists] have daily, within the past month, exhibited the
activity and energy of a more than mortal despair." They charged that the general prosperity was illusory as well. Against the official pronouncements of thriving industry, writers for Blackwood's raised their own sets of statistics which demonstrated decreased revenues, depression in textiles and iron, reduction of shipping, increase in pauperism, and inequity in the sharing of the national wealth. Blackwood's asserted that the announcement of good times was a ploy of the Russell government to justify its own policies.

Believing as they did that the economy was stagnant and that Free Trade policies were responsible, Protectionist sympathizers sought to discredit the Exhibition. In an attempt to replace the Crystal Palace with a symbol which would more accurately reflect the reality of English life as they saw it, they held what the Times called "another Exhibition" at the Drury Lane Theatre on the day before the opening of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. The planners hoped, said the Times, to "cast a sort of slur beforehand on the Exhibition"; to impress on the crowds pouring into London that despite the professed prosperity in Hyde Park there "had been another gathering in London of not quite so cheerful a character." In numbers and representation, at least, the demonstration was impressive. The Drury Lane Theatre was filled to overflowing, and a supplemental meeting was held at St. Martin's Hall, Longacre, to

10 January 1850, p. 1.

11 Times, May 8, p. 4; also Punch, 20 (April 26, 1851), 173.

12 Times, May 8, p. 4.
Figure 10. Great Protectionist Demonstration in Drury-Lane Theatre.  
(Illustrated London News, May 10, 1851, p. 375.)
accommodate those unable to find room at the theater. Delegates from almost every county in England were present, including two dozen peers, more than fifty members of Parliament, and an impressive list of gentlemen. Colonel Sibthorp, of course, was among them. Participants at both meetings represented a vast amount of wealth, rank, and influence, and displayed, according to the Illustrated London News, a level of earnestness and enthusiasm seldom if ever exceeded at any similar demonstration.\textsuperscript{13} No concrete action was taken; no revolution plotted. The meeting drew attention chiefly because of the size of the turnout, the solidarity of the viewpoint, the respectability of the participants, and the vigor of their speeches. On the very eve of the Great Exhibition their resolutions deplored the distress of the agricultural interest, the reduction of wages of labor, and the diminution of employment in many parts of the United Kingdom, but also stressed commercial depression and the deterioration of the life of the nation in general, proclaiming that

\begin{quote}
derangements exist in the social system of the country, which are sapping the foundations of its prosperity, and, if not speedily remedied, must end in widespread disaster, discontent, and ruin.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Urban Poverty}

A similar conclusion was shared by those who observed the abysmal conditions of London's urban poor, huddled into hovels and maintaining a precarious existence in the very shadow of the Crystal

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Illustrated London News}, May 3, 1851, p. 356.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}
Although many writers were too enthralled with the Exhibition itself to notice the edges of the crowd, some were saddened by the sight of paupers gazing vacantly at the vast structure which housed a "banquet" not spread for them. A number of writers expressed regret at the contrast between Regent Street and the adjacent slums, and at the irony of holding a festival of Prosperity when some were starving. 

*Eliza Cook's Journal* reported

> Every picture has its dark side, every medal its obverse. London is not all grandeur, wealth, and gaiety. God knows it has its dens of misery, too, its regions of squalid poverty and perennial suffering. The roll of the chariot that bears some proud beauty on to the Queen's drawing room, falls upon the ear of dying poverty in some wretched hovel....Notwithstanding our opera, our west end, our Crystal Palace, our miles of shops full of wealth, our streets full of splendour and gaiety, there exists alongside it all, a barbarian population, huddled together into the backsettlements of the metropolis, more full of the elements of danger and woe to society than is to be found in any other city in Europe or the world.16

London's poverty was on display to Exhibition visitors. An American reported observing near Westminster Abbey, in the area of Pye Street and Duck Lane,

> wretchedness the most bitter, destitution the most utter, and vice the most terrible, that ever you saw....Truly London has one side which is too painfully dark and horrible to gaze at with complacent nerves....Your impressions, first and last, are, that in London there is...enormous wealth and terrible poverty...beautiful churches and

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15Among the works which mentioned paupers in connection with the Exhibition were Samuel Warren's *The Lily and the Bee, an Apologue of the Crystal Palace* (New York, 1851), p. 21; and Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank's *1851: or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family, Who Came Up to London to "Enjoy Themselves," and to See the Great Exhibition*, p. 128.

16October 25, 1851, pp. 403-5.
thousands who can never enter them for want of decent
ralment;---in fact that London is the wealthiest and most
wretched city in the world—the city of extremes!17

While poverty might be no worse than in past generations, it seemed
more distressing in a society which professed such progress.

Recognition of urban poverty was reflected in the subject matter
of magazine poetry, such as this in the Athenaeum,

In rich men's halls the fire is piled,
And ermine robes keep out the weather—
In poor man's hut the fire is low,
Through broken panes the keen winds blow,
and old and young are cold together.18

and this from Fraser's,

Shall we feast high while their children cry,
   In their rags and cold abode...?
   
Our joyous song in a winter's day
   Will only mock their grief.19

Blackwood's, of course, did not miss the chance to add its note,

...from the metropolis and larger cities, we have accounts
of misery and destitution which, did they reach us from
missionaries in a heathen land, would fill our souls with
horror, and our hearts with righteous indignation.20

Just as the Exhibition symbolized man's ability to harness the
laws of nature to any scientific or technical task, some contempor-
aries believed that it should be possible for man to spread

17David Bartlett, What I Saw in London; or, Men and Things in
the Great Metropolis (Auburn, Connecticut, 1852), pp. 18-20.

18December 27, 1851, p. 1376.

19A4 (January 1851), 15. See yet another in Household Words,
October 11, p. 60.

2069 (January 1851), 112.
prosperity more equitably, if he applied himself to the task. So far he had not. The first step was to admit the problem and to bring it to the public attention. In scrutinizing the progress of society at mid-century, a number of journalists, noblemen, and churchmen had found plenty of evidence to verify the claim made by a reviewer in the Athenaeum that "in the cities of rapid growth nearly all the material progress had been at the cost of the poor." It became their mission to educate the public about the urban poor and to urge the changes necessary to improve their condition.

Henry Mayhew, whose Morning Chronicle series (1849-50) on the London poor had stirred up so much interest, was now independently continuing his earlier work in parts publication, and on July 28, 1851 he brought out a collected volume (the first of several) London Labour and the London Poor, detailing the precarious existence of London's street people. Rev. Thomas Beames' The Rookeries of London (published in 1850 and reissued in 1852) revealed the awful realities of London tenements and low lodging houses, the desperate resort of the struggling poor. Having worked as a clergyman among the poor for twelve years, he was now resolved to "tell the naked truth" about the conditions under which human life dragged along in the styes of St. Giles, Saffron Hill, Jacob's Island, Ratcliffe Highway, and even in some sections of St. James' and Westminster. Viscount Ingestre

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21 January 25, 1851, p. 103.

22 At a circulation of 18,000, according to the Economist, February 8, 1851, p. 143.
published his *Meliora: or, Better Times to Come. Being the Contributions of Many Men Touching the Present State and Prospects of Society.*\(^{23}\) Through this volume of essays depicting the lives of the non-prospering, Ingestre challenged his readers to recognize the world of the poor:

> By degrees the full truth has burst upon us; we cannot now, at the close of the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and fifty-one, plead ignorance, on any one point, of the real moral and social condition of the million, whose toil creates our national wealth, and on whose loyalty and welfare depends the very life of the nation. (p. viii)

The novel *St. Giles and St. James* by journalist/satirist Douglas Jerrold, dramatized the tragic disregard of the rich for the necessities of the poor.\(^{24}\)

> How widespread was this recognition of prosperity's antithesis?

We have no basis for supposing that guilt feelings haunted the majority. The evidence does tell us, however, that some people regarded urban poverty as an important factor in determining the condition of England; that they felt it was unfair to dismiss poverty as inevitable or as a minority condition insignificant compared to the rising levels

\(^{23}\)The volume was a collection of essays on social themes. The editor's full name was Charles John Chetwynde Talbot, 19th Earl of Shrewsbury, Viscount Ingestre. His volume went through a second edition in 1852 and was followed by a second series of essays similar to the first, in 1853. Contributors to the 1851 edition included Rev. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, Rev. C. Girdlestone, Montague Gore, Dr. Guy, Rev. T. Beames, W. Beckett Denison, Henry Mayhew, and Martin Tupper.

\(^{24}\)A review in the *Athenaeum*, July 19, 1851, says that although the elements of the story may seem bitter, "the true humanities underlie a bitterness like this. Mr. Jerrold has no worse motive in such writing than to improve the tone of the society in which he lives." (p. 769)
of middleclass comfort; and that they were actively trying to arouse public awareness.

No one would deny the existence of rural or urban suffering. The debate concerned its significance. One could either dismiss the existing pockets of poverty as an inevitable transition stage on the way to rising prosperity for all; or one could insist that the concentration of poverty in certain patterns (on farms or in urban industrial areas) was indicative that a wrong step had been taken somewhere, or at best that progress had only just begun. The opposing points of view provoked vigorous debate in 1851 as each side flourished both statistics and individual cases to support its own interpretation. Statistics might say that industrial production was booming (Fraser's, 43 [January 1851], 5); but that could be countered by figures showing purported decline in the cotton trade (Blackwood's, 69 [June 1851], 706). Wages might be shown to be rising relative to prices (Economist, May 31, 1851, p. 590); yet whole classes were reported to be existing on incomes so low that even low-priced goods were beyond them (Blackwood's, 70 [December 1851], 644).

What does all of this mean to us? For one thing, although some characterized 1851 as a "singularly happy year, of peace, plenty, and good feeling,"25 there was a vocal undercurrent which, looking at its own evidence, characterized this boasted civilization as "in reality only a piece of diversified patchwork--refinement and rags, grandeur

and starvation." Further, the very heat of the debate and the
defensiveness of the heralds of prosperity show us that the allega-
tions of stagnation seemed to carry enough validity that they had to
be answered rather than ignored. And, importantly, the question would
have been highly visible to readers, who would find intellectual
sparring in the reviews and in newspaper reports of Parliamentary
debates, and more visceral appeals in cheaper magazines and in the
work of journalists like Mayhew. Contemporaries were not unaware that
despite the overwhelming appeal of the Crystal Palace, the national
fair could also be a reminder of darker realities:

It is with a feeling nearly akin to loathing that we peruse
accounts of Brobdignag [sic] glass houses, and sham exhibi-
tions of the industry of nations, reared at an enormous
cost, when we know that the men who ought to be the pro-
ducers of our national wealth—and who might be so, were
they not made the victims of a heartless and senseless
system—are being driven in hundreds from their hearths
and homes, and cast upon the wide world, without a roof to
shelter them, or a rag to give them covering.  

For our purposes it is not essential to reach a conclusion about
which assessment of the condition of England was the more accurate.
That task belongs to historians and economists who must add data from
less biased sources than the opinions, however valuable, of contem-
poraries.  

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26*Chambers' Journal*, October 4, 1851, p. 209.

27*Blackwood's*, 69 [January 1851], 126.

28Scholars themselves are not unanimous, some favoring the theory
of high prosperity more than others, yet most recognizing that hard-
ship for some underlay a gradually expanding economic improvement.
See detailed discussion in Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-
1875* (London, 1971); George Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian
Revolutions in Great Britain During the Nineteenth Century* (New York,
1968); and Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-
the fact that people in 1851 looked at differing evidence and came to differing conclusions. It is important to remember that the citizens of 1851 did not know that history would classify them with the prosperous fifties rather than with the "hungry forties." Each knew only what life looked like and felt like to him. For most, perhaps, the preeminent symbol was the prosperity of the Great Exhibition. But for others, the realities of society formed a darker exhibition which could not be denied.
Chapter 3

Class Unity

And royal blood, and lordly rank, and noble lineage proud,
Relaxed their ancient dignity, and went among the crowd.
They mingled with the multitude that thronged the busy place,
And met with troops of working-men, and looked them in the face.
Henceforth may one eschew mistrust, the other cease to scorn,
And learn how much in common binds the high and lowly born.
("The Exhibition Lay," p. 24.)

...for, of old, the separation between the noble and the poor
was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, a precipice between upper and lower grounds in the field of humanity, and there is pestilential air at the bottom of it.

(John Ruskin, Stones of Venice, II, in Works, X, 194.
The passage was written in 1851)

In their Exhibition-year self-analysis, the Victorians disagreed also about the extent of their progress towards social unity. Variations on the "Two Nations" theme, popularized by Disraeli's Sybil in 1845, surfaced repeatedly in 1851, both in popular literature and in more weighty essays. There was no more unanimity here than on the question of prosperity. Some observers extolled the arrival of a new era of class cooperation as England entered the new half-century; others deplored what seemed to them a continuing rift between the Two Nations, made even more threatening by the obvious gains of the wealthier classes. Despite widespread acclaim of the Great Exhibition as a symbol of social unity, a notable undercurrent urged the continuing potential for social revolution.

68
One Nation

Following as it did, close upon the social ferment of the Chartist years, the Exhibition was praised in the press as a monumental symbol of progress in the relations between the upper and lower classes of England. As the Exhibition was being planned, vivid memories remained of the rick-burning of the mid-forties and marching angry throngs of 1848 and there were fears of possible mob violence when fifty or sixty thousand citizens would be gathered in Hyde Park. To the pleased astonishment of the nation, however, no insurrection materialized. Instead of attracting conspirators plotting class war, the Exhibition witnessed a contented mingling of workers with the upper classes. The extra troops which waited in readiness nearby to maintain order were not needed; the one thousand extra-duty policemen found their main activities to be directing traffic and restoring lost children to their parents.

The mixing of classes became a central theme of the Exhibition. This was the first major social fête attended on relatively equal terms by common laborers as well as the elite. The panorama, the vaulted transept, the wonders on display, and the crystal fountain were "magic," "impressive," "bewildering," and "enchanting"¹ to servant girl as well as queen. Both farmer's wife and baron's daughter could dip their handkerchiefs in the fountain of eau de cologne. Observers noted that the working classes examined the

displays with just as much intelligence as their social superiors; and all classes seemed to be joined in the identity of a single pursuit.

Whether or not it was actually true, the press interpreted the Exhibition as evidence that widening prosperity and more general availability of goods were lessening the distance separating the levels of society. Living standards, writers claimed, were growing more similar. The daughters of the workers visiting the Exhibition looked almost as bright in their crisp cotton prints as their richer sisters did in silks. In making the trip to London, worker and gentry alike could ride the railroad, than which even the Queen had no faster means of transportation. Optimists even speculated that elegant crystal houses, in the style of the Crystal Palace, might be available to the poor as well as to the rich, since technology had made such construction cheaper per square foot than a rude Irish hovel. Much of this was journalistic hyperbole, of course, but it was common enough in 1851.

The press also found the Exhibition to be symbolic of changes in class prejudices. England's citizens, it was claimed, were beginning to perceive themselves as mutually related and mutually dependent, with no one group able to prosper alone. Factory owner and consumer alike were beginning to recognize the value of the skilled hand in producing the wealth of the country. Farmer and merchant might be

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2Illustrated London News, July 19, 1851, p. 102.

3Illustrated London News, June 28, 1851, p. 608.
Figure 11. HER MAJESTY, as She Appeared on the FIRST of MAY, Surrounded by "Horrible Conspirators and Assassins."
(Punch, 20 (May 10, 1851), p. 193.)
at odds over national economic policy, but popular songs like "Trade and Spade" printed in the *Illustrated London News* (May 10, 1851, p. 376) recognized the mutual dependence of one upon the other, and the unity of "both the rich and poor" as they relied upon this cooperation. Englishmen were reportedly beginning to realize that while the lower classes might need to be polished by exposure to the culture of the higher, the "used up" nobles in turn could take a lesson from the eager curiosity of the common people as both classes frequented the Exhibition.

Throughout the season, newspapers stressed the theme of social unity in the Crystal Palace. On opening day, they reported, the crowds of eager spectators streamed from Spitalfields as well as from Mayfair to watch. After May 26 they described the crowds of respectable poor flocking "to see the Exhibition, While it is a bob a head." They recorded the surprise among the upper classes in discovering that the workers behaved with dignity and decorum. It appeared that not only could they be expected to learn from the example of the superior classes, but ordinary people could be trusted to mingle in better society without giving offense. Even nobility relaxed its exclusiveness to attend on shilling days, when the Exhibition was crowded with farmers and laborers and serving girls. Adventurous ladies who tried this novel mixing were reportedly amazed that they could stroll without inconvenience among the commoner crowds. *Punch* printed a cartoon depicting the genial smiles

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4 "Come Let Us Go and See the Exhibition for a Shilling" (London, 1851).
exchanged by the Duke of Wellington and a workingclass family as they met face-to-face and marveled at the novelty of the situation: "Whoever would have thought of meeting you here?" Reports proclaimed that the Exhibition was so universal a topic that employers conversed with their employees about the wonders they both had seen, and ladies even discussed it with their maids.

Royalty, too, seemed drawn into a closer unity with the people. Everyone was invited to exhibit in the Crystal Palace regardless of his class if he had something outstanding to show. Prince Albert showed his model lodging house and a jewel cabinet of his own design; but the display of a patent envelope-folding machine (by Thomas De la Rue, a printer/inventor successful in the card and ornamental paper trade) or the tiny tacks made by a provincial tinker was given equal entrance. Not far from the Queen's magnificent Koh-i-noor diamond and the carved ivory throne presented to her by an Indian rajah, was displayed a carpet made by 150 working women and dedicated to the Queen; and in the ladies' work department there was a wilderness of home-made tea-urn mats, antimacassars, and Berlin wool-work. Prince Albert had finally won popular acceptance for his central role in promoting the Exhibition, and even the Queen seemed "somewhat nearer to the people" than hitherto. In jolly good sport, popular broadside verses pictured the Queen as a friendly chum to the good-natured clown, Harry (of course in clean collar and dicky and

5Punch, 20 (June 14, 1851), 247.
Figure 12. THE POUND AND THE SHILLING. "Whoever Thought of Meeting You Here?"
(Punch, 20 (June 14, 1851), 247.)
shining boots!) as they met in the Exhibition; Harry relates the story:

She [the Queen] hoped that I was quite sublime,
She'd stand a pot but she'd not got time,
She hoped I would not think her mean;
Oh no, says I, it's all serene.7

The _Athenaeum_ claimed that the Crystal Palace was evidence of significant social changes in England, as rich and poor drew closer together.

Long and truly it has been the reproach of England that its various classes lived apart—had no interests, no habits, no sympathies in common. The fashionable, the official, the literary, and the operative worlds have seldom approached each other before, and never mixed together. Exclusion has been written hitherto on every door,—especially in higher circles; and a dead and pompous formalism, growing out of narrow views and selfish vanities, has prevented the cordial and healthy intercourse of different sections of society. The Crystal Palace is a blow struck at this exclusive system.8

The mood of England seemed to have changed drastically in the six years since Disraeli's *Sybil* had portrayed the impassable gulf between the Two Nations ruled over by the Queen:

...two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, and fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.9

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7"All Serene," a song by H. Wood of Birmingham, to the tune of "Steam Arm." Printed by T. King of Birmingham in broadside form; it is among the Exhibition materials preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

8_Athenaeum_, May 3, 1851, p. 477.

Now the emphasis seemed to be on the similarities rather than the differences. The low seemed to be approaching the level of the high, transforming the "order of society" to "equality and fraternity."\textsuperscript{10} Just three short years after the threatened class revolution of 1848, Thomas Macaulay could confidently state that the idea of class revolution was as preposterous at the present day as the chance of the moon falling out of the sky.\textsuperscript{11} "One Nation"—rather than Two—seemed to be the theme of the day.

\textbf{Two Nations}

At the same time that the Crystal Palace stood as a bright beacon of a nation reunified, however, much printer's ink recorded the continued belief that two very different nations coexisted on English soil, each ignorant of the details of the other's existence. Earnest voices testified to the continued gap between the rich and the poor. Key words, often repeated, were "contrast," "gap," "gulf," and "two worlds." In number, at least, these allegations might suggest the mood of the forties; but in tone, for the most part, they were gentler, with less volatility and more trust that conditions could be improved once the problem had been admitted.

Evidence of the Two Nations abounded in contemporary life, especially when one looked outside the walls of the Exhibition. Certainly the economic gap had not been erased. Prosperity was not

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Economist}, May 17, 1851, p. 532.

universal and the advances in comfort enjoyed by the top and middle segments of society stood in even sharper contrast to the continuing hardships of those at the bottom. We can best appreciate the contemporary consciousness of the situation by considering the avowals of observers. We read in Eliza Cook's Journal:

Look at the jeweled gorgeousness which rolls along to St. James' or to the Opera, and then at the bleared and filthy population of Saffron Hill, and you find it difficult to believe that these two classes, forming the upper and under strata of city life, are moulded of the same mortal clay.\(^2\)

in W. Beckett Denison's essay in Meliora:

We see, on every hand, stately palaces to which no country in the world offers any parallel. The houses of our rich are more gorgeous and luxurious than those of any other land....But look beneath all this display and luxury, and what do we see there? A pauperized and suffering people. To maintain a show we have degraded the masses until we have created an evil so vast that we now despair of ever find a remedy\(^3\);

and in Thomas Beames' The Rookeries of London:

We wonder not that luxury should increase with wealth; such has ever been the rule...yet, when a particular class remains stationary, and in broad contrast with the advancement of all else but itself, then there is danger—then there is a sore in the nation's body which, would she live, must be healed.\(^4\)

An American spending a year in London in 1850-51 witnessed both the elegant carriages of the rich and the "destitution and horrible

\(^2^{October 25, 1851, p. 403.}

\(^3^{On Model Lodging Houses," in Meliora, p. 197. He quotes from Kay's Social Condition and Education of the People.}

\(^4^{Beames, p. 144.}
"wretchedness" of the styes "where the poorer classes herd together."

His conclusion:

there yawns between the rich and poor of London a great gulf almost like that between heaven and hell. Not merely in reference to deeds, but in everything—aspirations, thoughts, and principles, as well as mere actions.\(^{15}\)

No practical man, of course, would have expected economic diversity to vanish. Those who deplored the gap between the two nations hoped merely to reduce the shameful extremes which bred social estrangement. Knowledge could help in bridging the gap, since the upper levels, once educated to the realities of the back streets, might be enlisted to the task of "melioration." The impulse was two-fold: 1) towards urging the rich to alter habits through which they had been unwittingly injuring the lower classes, and 2) towards fostering independence of, rather than dependence on, charity.

The goal of a number of writers was to open the communication between these separate worlds. Henry Mayhew's researches for his Morning Chronicle series had brought him "into contact with a means of living utterly unknown among the well-fed portion of society,"\(^{16}\) convincing him that many evils existed because of this ignorance, and confirming his resolve to take the rich on a vicarious tour of the neighborhoods where they had never been. One of his aims was to give the rich a more intimate knowledge of the sufferings, and the frequent heroism under those sufferings, of


the poor...and cause those who are in 'high places,' and those of whom much is expected, to bestir themselves to improve the condition of a class of people whose misery, ignorance and vice, amidst all the immense wealth and knowledge of 'the first city in the world,' is, to say the very least, a national disgrace to us.17

In exploring the problem of London's rookeries, Thomas Beames blamed the overcrowded, uncomfortable, excessively dear housing available to the poor on landlords who, though not especially bad fellows, were simply unaware of the misery to which they contributed. John Garwood hoped that as a result of his volume, The Million-Peopled City, one class would not "live separate from, unmindful of, and without effort for the benefit of the other"; that "the middle and higher classes may be incited to contemplate and seek to elevate and bless the other classes of London's population."18 Viscount Ingestre proclaimed to his readers that his object was "to create a curiosity in your mind on these subjects. The rest will work itself."

Regretting that in England a young heir usually remained ignorant of the status of his laborers until he succeeded to his father's property, Ingestre urged his upper-class readers to "come and see for yourself" by means of his volume.19 The tone of these writers was not bitter Chartist denunciation of the upper classes. They felt shame for their own recent ignorance and for that of their fellows,

17"Preface" to London Labour and the London Poor.

18 John Garwood, The Million-Peopled City; or, One-half of the People of London Made Known to the Other Half (London, 1853), pp. ix–x. Although not published until later, this book draws heavily on materials from the 1849-51 period.

especially when the result of that ignorance formed an ugly contrast to the progressiveness symbolized by the Crystal Palace. They regretted that a nation which could build the Britannia Bridge and connect its cities with the telegraph had done so little to improve the lot of its own citizens. They regretted that there were

but few subjects of human knowledge with which 'the intelligent classes' in this inquiring age are less conversant than the actual condition of the English Peasantry. Something is known of the interior of Africa, and shrewd surmises exist as to the geological structure of the moon; the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt are read and interpreted; and the learned begin to be acquainted with the mysteries of Hindu polity, and the details of Assyrian civilization; but of English peasant life the notions which exist are in the last degree dim and obscure, save among those who seldom approach what is called 'Society.'

They trusted, however, that with the task once recognized, betterment would follow.

There were other more practical stimuli to reform. Those whose mission took them into the squalor of the other London reminded their readers that the powder keg of possible revolution still remained, and that it was but luck that it had not yet been ignited. Moreover, self-preservation demanded that the disease-producing rookeries not be ignored. England might still be two nations, but typhoid and cholera respected no class boundaries. Fevers bred in the slums, warned J. Mutt in his essay in Meliora.

20Johnston, England As It Is, II, 177.

are ripened into maturity, whence they spread in full-grown power amongst the better-housed and better-fed portions of the community. It is therefore, upon grounds of interest, as well as those of humanity, that proper regard should be paid to the condition of the very humblest abodes among them.22

Judging by written evidence, a significant number of people at mid-century recognized that the gulf between classes had not disappeared with the forties, and these attempts to reintroduce one nation to the other were not without impact. Bentley's Miscellany reported that Mayhew's Morning Chronicle articles "have aroused the public mind, which will not rest satisfied until the social condition of the lower classes is considerably ameliorated."23 Even Charlotte Brontë, in the seclusion of a Yorkshire parsonage and confessedly disinclined to social crusading, reported that the vicarious explorations of London's slums provided by Mayhew had opened a new perspective for her:

Those papers on the London poor are singularly interesting; to me they open a new and strange world, very dark, very dreary, very noisome in some of its recesses, a world that is fostering such a future as I scarcely dare imagine.24

Recognition of continued social estrangement in the Exhibition year was not limited to the exhortations of clergymen or to conscious campaigns to sensitize the rich. There was much satire, especially in Punch, concerning social snobbery at the Exhibition. When


23Bentley's Miscellany, 29 (1851), 670.

householders in Belgravia feared the influx of rabble into their neighborhood, Punch ran a cartoon deriding St. James' exclusion of St. Giles from his parks. When some aristocrats and middleclass families still chose the exclusiveness of attendance on the more expensive Fridays and Saturdays, a piece of light fiction in The New Monthly Magazine spoofed the shock of a gentleman at discovering that an idolized aristocratic lady might attend on a shilling day. And when, despite the groundswell of support for the retention of the glass house in Hyde Park as a winter garden for all, some aristocrats expressed relief that it was indeed to go, Punch seized the opportunity to mock the lingering prejudice:

The People! I really am sick of the wawd:
The People is ugly, unpleasant, absawd;
Wha-evaw they go, it is always the case,
They are shaw to destwoy all the chawm of the place.

They are all vewy well in their own pwaap spheewaw,
A long distance off; but I don't like them neeaw;
The slams is the place faw a popula show;
Don't encouwage the People to spoil Wotton Wow.

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25Punch, 19 (October 19, 1850), 167. These personas were frequently used in Victorian parlance—"St. James's," the name both of the Royal Court and of a fashionable neighborhood, represented the rich and aristocratic; "St. Giles," name of a wretched London slum, represented the poor.

26"All the World and his Wife; or, What Brought Everybody to London in 1851," The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist, 92 (July 1851), 363.

27Punch, 22 (May 8, 1852), 198. Although it had been stipulated from the beginning that the building must be removed from Hyde Park after the Exhibition, the people were reluctant to part with their glass house. The solution: it was moved to Sydenham, where it remained until destroyed by fire in 1936.
Magazine poetry and popular fiction picked up the theme, providing a contrast to the shoulder-rubbing in Hyde Park. At the same time that writers in the *Illustrated London News* used the persona of St. Giles to describe the sturdy and frugal laborer come up from the country for the shilling day, 28 people were buying and reading the 1851 reissue of Douglas Jerrold's novel, *St. Giles and St. James*, in which the impoverished St. Giles was portrayed as "the victim of an ignorant disregard of the social claims of the poor upon the rich." 29 At the same time that the papers recorded the pride with which the shilling visitors examined the marvelous silks and laces they themselves had made, the subscribers to the *Illustrated London News* were reading a serialized "Story of the Present Day," detailing the miseries suffered by the once-prosperous silk-weavers of Spitalfields—degradation the more painful since it was thrust upon the workers most sensitive to beauty. Periodicals ranging from the lower-class Eliza Cook's *Journal* to the *New Monthly* read by higher-born ladies, printed verse and prose focusing on the rich man's ignorance of the Other World and his insensitivity towards its inhabitants. With its purpose as an organ for the working classes, a magazine like Cooper's *Journal* might be expected to emphasize the lack of responsible brotherhood between these two realms of humanity:

28 July 19, 1851, pp. 100-102.

They died!—died of hunger—
By bitter want blasted,—
While wealth for the Wronger
Ran over untasted!—...
they died while men hoarded,
The free gifts of God! 30

But even family magazines like Household Words printed poetry based on this familiar theme:

Thou dwellest in a warm and cheerful home,
    Thy roof in vain the winter tempest lashes;
While houseless wretches round thy mansion roam,
    On whose unsheltered heads the torrent plashes.

Thy board is loaded with the richest meats,
   O'er which thine eyes in sated languor wander,
Many might live on what thy mastiff eats,
    Or feast on fragments which thy servants squander.... 31

Much of the middleclass interest in the theme of the poor in 1851 seems to have been a fashionable dilettantism—a somewhat titillating change from reading about high life. Just as it was fashionable to attend the Crystal Palace among the operatives, so it was fashionable to be aware of the "way the other half lives." The contrast between grinding poverty and well-fed comfort lent itself as a theme for pleasing sentimentalism. One could be moved by the tragedy, as at a theater, and wallow in tears, yet emerge from the theater not greatly changed, declaring that "a good cry sometimes does us good; it makes us remember we are human creturs (sic)." 32

30 June 1, 1850, p. 344.

See additional examples: "Human Brotherhood," Nov. 30, 1850, p. 229;

32 Jerrold, St. Giles and St. James, p. 41.
Figure 13. St. James and St. Giles meet as men.
(Douglas Jerrold, *St. Giles and St. James.*)
Nevertheless, the widespread appearance of the theme of class contrast at midcentury, even when not for an earnest purpose, reminds us that the two nation theme of the forties had not been wholly replaced.

Old social hierarchies—the lingering remnants of the feudal relationship between master and man, the social unit of the small village—were being superseded, and new relations had not yet been fully defined. It was partially this struggle for definition which underlay the two nation theme. One could look at the Exhibition, where the interaction between higher and lower classes was based not on vestigial feudal ties but on the self-reliance, thrift, and intelligence of each individual, and conclude that significant progress in social unity had been achieved, with more to be expected. Or one could consider the very different results of the new freedom from vassalage evident in industrial towns, where employers knew only the contract of cash payment and workers found few mechanisms to protect them, as a class, from the hardships over which individuals had little personal control—rent gouging, bad housing, food adulteration, water contamination, uncertain employment, the workhouse. In such a case one might agree that the classes were linked, but by a self-forged chain which threatened to pull down the rich rather than elevate the poor. One might share S.G. Osborne's disappointment that a society which could produce the Exhibition could remain ignorant of the miseries of its poor. Shortly before opening day, in a letter to the editor of the *Illustrated London News*, he documented the overcrowding and insufficient food in the Kilkenny Union Workhouse, and pleaded,
...am I wrong, Sir, in saying, that such a state of things, within a twenty hours' journey from London, is in a sad and shameful contrast to the expected doings of the 'World's Fair' on English ground? When, the other day, I looked on the Crystal Palace, and thought of Kilrush Workhouse...I confess I felt, as a Christian and the subject of a Christian Government, utter disgust...\[33\]

\[33\]Illustrated London News, April 12, 1851, p. 285.
Chapter 4
The Dignity of Labor

"The triumph of the Artizan has come about at length,
And Kings and Princes flock to praise his comeliness and strength."
(Martin Tupper, "The Great Exhibition of 1851, A Ballad for the Workman," The Complete Poetical Works of Martin Farquhar Tupper [New York, 1875], p. 30.)

"But what to me are these inspiring changes,
That gorgeous show, that spectacle sublime?
My labour, leagued with poverty, estranges
Me from this mental marvel of our time.
I cannot share the triumph and the pageant,
I, a poor toiler at the whirling wheel,
The slave, not servant, of a ponderous agent,
With bounding steam-pulse, and with arms of steel."
("A Voice from the Factory," Household Words, April 5, 1851, p. 36.)

Unlike the concepts of Prosperity and Unity, which had been almost accidentally symbolized by the Exhibition, the idea of the Dignity of Labor had been a central theme from the beginning. Unlike Prosperity and Unity, which were proclaimed after the Exhibition materialized, much of the talk about Dignity of Labor had been intention or theory, uttered before the fact. The Exhibition did, of course, provide much evidence of an increasing admiration for the products of industry and for the hands which made them. But despite the prestige lent to workers by the Exhibition, substantial improvement in their status was still more hoped for than attained.
The Jubilee of Toil

From the earliest days of planning, the Exhibition was envisioned as a "Jubilee of Toil,"1 a "Festival of the Workingman,"2 and a "new epoch in the history of the working classes of this country."3 The working classes had in recent years been a source of national unease; now, however, Prince Albert and the Society of Arts were championing the laboring man as the very foundation of the English way of life. Previous exhibitions, stressing products and prize competitions, had been of interest chiefly to competing manufacturers and higher artisans. This exhibition, however, with its wider goal of providing a living picture of mankind's recent development, was planned to recognize the role of the worker, without whom Science and Art could not have progressed so far.

An early goal of the Exhibition was to expand artisans' creativity. In October 1849 Henry Cole expressed his hope that the proposed Exhibition would provide a forum for communicating information about manufactures and art between the workers of many countries, providing mutual stimulation and inspiration as workers shared ideas. Some months later the Belgian minister suggested that modern workers could


3Thomas Briggs, "Advantages to be derived by the working men from a visit to the Exhibition of 1851," (Prize Essay), Morning Chronicle, December 18, 1850.
be inspired by this Exhibition even as Galileo's genius had been 
inspired by a swinging lamp at Pisa.\(^4\) The best productions of which 
man was capable might be the result.

As plans moved on, the expected benefits for the worker himself 
seemed as great as the improvements in manufacture. "What can be 
obler than industry and work?"\(^5\) queried the Bishop of Oxford. He 
proposed that the Exhibition would confer on English workers the 
respect which they rightfully deserved. The exhibition would bring 
them credit for their skill. It would stimulate scientific advances 
making work less dangerous and wearisome. It would underscore the 
mutual dependence of the operative and the capitalist, softening 
their struggles. And it would finally mend the broken spirit of the 
worker by letting him discover that the little pin or button over 
which he drudged was an essential part of a larger work, and that he 
himself was a contributor "to the great wealth and the great name of 
the great land in which he lives."\(^6\)

At the Lord Mayor's banquet in March 1850, powerful men from all 
over the kingdom joined in toasting the health of "The Workmen of the 
United Kingdom,"\(^7\) thus giving a measure of practical support to 
idealistic hopes such as those held by the Bishop of Oxford. Planners 

\(^4\)Audrey Short, "The Great Exhibition of 1851," p. 34.

\(^5\)Bishop of Oxford, public speech at Westminster, quoted in 
A Short Statement of the Nature..., p. 7.

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Earl of Carlisle, speech at the Mansion House, March 21, 1850.
at this banquet agreed that although the Exhibition of 1851 was for all classes as well as for all nations, it was "preeminently intended to be the festival of the working man and of the working woman," whose sweat, sinew, skill, and intelligence "constitute the wonder-working industry of Britain." To this end, its committees should include men distinguished by talent and successful work as well as those marked by nobility, stars and ribbons, or wealth.

The implication was not as revolutionary as might at first appear. The world of work was generously represented in planning and managing the Exhibition, but by the leaders of commerce and industry rather than by any Marxian proletariat. The word "worker" as used by initiators of the Exhibition had a broad meaning. It meant all who were not idle, and therefore included—in addition to the operatives who traded a day's work for a day's wage—owners of factories and designers of buildings. Among the Royal Commissioners were William Cubbitt (of the Institute of Civil Engineers), John Gott (the Leeds wool magnate), Thomas Field Gibson (silk merchant of Spitalfields), Thomas Bazley (Chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and Alderman William Thompson (shipowner).

Early attempts had indeed been made to include workers in the planning, especially in making arrangements for members of their own class to visit London, but they had foundered. Prince Albert had

8Ibid.

championed working-class participation from the first. At his suggestion, a Working Classes Committee meeting was held in March 1850, with invitations issued to men who were in frequent close connection with leaders of the working classes: Lord Ashley, Charles Dickens, Dr. Southwood Smith, William Thackeray, John Stuart Mill, John Forster, Sidney Godolphin Osborne, several clergymen, two Members of Parliament, and even the Chartists William Lovett, Francis Place, and Henry Vincent.\(^\text{10}\) Despite his sympathy, Prince Albert's royal position prevented him from accepting the presidency of this committee. He had to be chary of close alliance to such an untried scheme, since if it should fail, the working classes might feel that their interests had been betrayed by the monarchy. The Committee had to proceed without the backing of royal prestige.

It ran against yet another barrier when requesting affiliation with the Royal Commission. Here the problem was the personalities and democratic ideas of some of the members. Lord Stanley objected to the composition of the committee and to S.G. Osborne in particular. The Commission in general objected to the presence of Chartist members; it hardly seem prudent, after the Chartist disturbances had finally been quieted, to give glory to the Chartist members by implicitly sanctioning their opinions. Thus denied any real power, the committee was disappointed and bitter. After a life of only three months, it met for the fifth and last time at the Society of Arts headquarters on June 5. Some members favored continuing despite the

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\(^{10}\)Short, "The Great Exhibition of 1851," p. 80.
official rebuff; others felt that an unrecognized committee could neither rally the confidence of the working classes nor do its job effectively. When Dickens proposed immediate dissolution, the majority agreed, and the Working Classes Committee was no more. 11

The Prince was disappointed. Both he and the Royal Commission recognized that working class arrangements would need to be made in some way. As Lord Grey wrote to Henry Cole, "the labouring classes must not be allowed to think, what is indeed completely contrary to fact, that there is any indifference on the part of HRH to their interests—on the contrary there is no point on which he is more sincerely anxious." 12 To this end, the Commission appointed Alexander Redgrave of the Home Office to make arrangements to facilitate working class attendance.

The 330 local committees did much more to promote the active involvement of the working man. Through them, manufacturers and workers alike learned about the scope of the coming Exhibition. Savings clubs were formed, in which workers could set aside a small sum each week towards the cost of their trip. Special trains were chartered for excursions to London after the shilling admission was in effect.

As preparations moved ahead, however, the practical was increasingly admired, and the workman—in approbation if not in power—became the hero of the year. Cole's original intent to foster

11 Ibid., pp. 80-88.
12 Ibid., p. 82. Letter from Grey to Cole, June 7, 1850.
more creative artisans was eclipsed in the popular mind by the idea of according honor to the lazy hand. Prizes were offered for the best essays on the expected effect of the Exhibition on the workingman. Popular poems and songs celebrated the worker, extolling "The dignity of labour/ The brotherhood of man," and welcoming the world to "the Workshop of the Earth":

Hurrah! for honest Industry, hurrah! for handy skill
Hurrah! for all the wondrous works achieved by Wit and Will!

With horns hand and glowing heart may greet his brother Wealth.

Newspapers and magazines reported changes in the popular mood, reflecting new respect for an ancient phenomenon. One commented, "How impressive the moral! For the first time since the world began an ovation has been accorded to Labour!" Said another,

To know...that the dignity of labour [was] considered worthy of the highest honor and respect from the highest and most illustrious persons in our nation, will be a subject of pride to everyone...and to the humblest Englishman who earns his bread by the sweat of his brow.

Said yet another,

The proposed Exhibition marks the great fact, that useful industry...is raised to a post of honor.... Not a man has been employed in getting things ready for the Exhibition, or in preparing the building, but must have felt additional dignity, from a conviction that the work of his hands

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16 Illustrated London News, April 26, 1851, p. 333.
was to be seen and admired by great multitudes of his fellow creatures.17

London and the provinces were filled with oratorical compliments to labor and with songs associating the character of the worker with the awe and wonder inspired by industrial progress.

Honest toil was praised not only as the key to personal independence, but also as the worker's contribution to the advancement of society at large. It was seen as the essential partner of Science and Art. While credit was still given to the painter in oils or to the designer of bridges, the press now accorded equal praise to the weaver of the canvas on which the oils were spread, and to the calloused hand of the miner and smelter whose toil had provided the iron.18 Working men were publicly credited with many of the discoveries which had brought England to preeminence. James Watt, inventor of the steam engine, had been a scientific instrument maker, as Eliza Cook's Journal reminded its readers. Richard Arkwright, contriver of the spinning machine, was once a barber. The inventor of the locomotive, George Stephenson, had been a Newcastle pitman. Even Joseph Paxton, designer of the Crystal Palace, was originally a poor gardener whose first job had paid but twelve shillings a week. These facts were presented to illustrate for Eliza Cook's readers the axiom that "Laborious industry, earnest perseverance, diligent self-culture, enabled these men to do what they have done; to fight

17The Economist, January 4, 1851, p. 5.

battles and overcome difficulties; bequeathing their great works and their noble examples as a legacy to their race."\(^{19}\)

**The Evidence in Hyde Park**

The glass palace, springing up as if by magic in Hyde Park, focused national attention on British workmen; for, in fact, there was no super-human genie at work—only common English workers, using marvelous new machines invented by an English worker (Paxton), in a new form of architecture conceived by the same worker. Their handiwork was a source of pride to their class, to themselves, and to the nation as a whole.

*The Morning Chronicle* recorded hearty interest during construction. Sunday afternoons found throngs of eager on-lookers at the site—about 100,000 on one Sunday in mid-October.\(^{20}\) Thousands of artisans and workers came out to admire the contributions of their own class. *The Morning Chronicle* reported on November 18.

Among those toiling thousands who, leaving the workshop and scenes of their daily labour, and forsaking the haunts of vice and intemperance in which they have too frequently passed the greater portion of their day of rest, visit and admire the rising building, there exists but one feeling of ardent and earnest desire for the complete success of the undertaking, the support of the honour and credit of their country, and of loyalty and gratitude to the illustrious Prince who originated [it].

The workers' comfortable pay scale of 3s to 5s per day was well-publicized in the press, and the two to three thousand "decently-clad,


\(^{20}\)Morning Chronicle, October 20, 1850, p. 5.
honest-looking men, many of them with much intelligence in their faces" 21 who were busily at work, reassured the nation that the workers were enjoying better times as well as new respectability. "What an amount of good must thereby be distributed among their class!" commented one visitor about the salaries of the workers. "There will be no tenth of April Chartism here—our Exhibition of '51 is better than a revolution." 22 The press had high praise for the workmen, to whose credit it was attributable "that the work was done, well-done, and done within the stipulated time." 23

If working class interest had been strong during the months of preparation, it increased during the Exhibition itself. After May 26, when admission could be gained for a shilling, the multitudes came to study and admire. As had been expected, it was a source of pride to workers to see on display goods which they and their fellows had had a hand in producing, and it was a source of amazement to the upper classes that there were so many lofty brows and keen eyes among the workers. The press repeatedly called attention to earnest laborers bent on self-improvement, as in this report on the agricultural department which appeared in the Illustrated London News (August 2, 1851, p. 168):

Perhaps the most gratifying sight in visiting this class is to watch the interest taken by the large numbers of agricultural labourers in the immense variety of things

21Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, March 1, 1851, p. 129.

22Ibid.

23Edinburgh Review, 94 (October 1851), 575.
here exhibited, and upon which they are well able to form opinions. To these men an exhibition of their own everyday working gear, of such variety, beauty, and ingenious design, must be a great treat. Their masters have been in the habit of seeing similar collections at the annual agricultural shows, but the labourer, who seldom leaves the land on which he works, can have but few opportunities of seeing more than the old-fashioned implements of his own locality.

The laborer and his skillful work were the subjects of many newspaper and magazine articles both before and during the Exhibition, and he could see engravings in the Illustrated London News of members of his class doing their honored tasks.

Many employers were generous in allowing their employees time off to see the Exhibition, some even as a paid holiday. Messrs. Truman, Hanbury, Buxton, and Co., the brewers, granted their 300 workers two days' holiday and half-a-crown per day. The Iron and Citizen Steamboat Companies gave one day's leave and expenses to their 500 workers. The Admiralty gave leave to dockyard men to come to London from six to ten days to see the Exhibition, but it did not pay expenses. Workers coming to London could stay, if they chose, in special dormitories which had been fitted up to provide decent low-cost accommodation—separate beds, washing facilities, proper ventilation, and moderately-priced food. Thus might visitors avoid the London evils of low lodging houses and dishonest companions.

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24 Illustrated London News, June 7, 1851, p. 513.
26 Illustrated London News, August 2, 1851, p. 148.
clergyman. If we are to credit the popular jokes and cartoons of the
time, we might believe that most commercial life in provincial towns
came to a halt, as all establishments closed so that masters and men
might journey to see the Exhibition.

The Less-Perfect Reality

If scenes within the Exhibition and press reports of new regard
for labor fostered a general sense that a new epoch was beginning, a
glance at the realities of the workplace reminded many contemporaries
that the Millennium had not yet arrived. The songs of praise and
lofty sentiments which heralded the upward mobility of some workers
seemed an insensitive mockery of the daily condition of others; fair
wages, better working conditions, and decent housing would demon­
strate, far more creditably than philosophical effusions, society's
new-found regard for the honest working man.

The poor housing conditions which existed in the back streets of
London at mid-century are a matter of record. The interested reader
can consult the details in these sources—the overcrowding of scores
of humans into the dilapidated wreckage of a house originally built

Studies, 11 (September 1967), 2-40 for a bibliographic discussion of
the subject. For contemporary reports of housing conditions, see
Beames, Mayhew, and Inestre. For the situation as it continued into
the 1880s, see Andrew Mearns, The Bitter Cry of Outcast London (first
tions by twentieth-century scholars, see Francis Sheppard, London
1808-1870. The Infernal Wen (Berkeley, California, 1971); Geoffrey
Best, Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-1875 (London, 1971); and Gareth
S. Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between
Figure 14. MANCHESTER in 1851. (Mayhew and Cruikshank, 1851, or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys.)
Figure 15. LONDON in 1851. (Mayhew and Cruikshank, 1851, or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys.)
to shelter a single family; the lack of clean water for either drinking or washing; the lack of adequate ventilation; the lack of facilities for the disposal of human and household wastes; and the high cost at which such miserable quarters were rented. Some contemporaries were uncomfortably aware that such miserable squalor was the necessary home, not just of beggars and thieves, but of some of the very workers whose dignity was lauded in the Exhibition. This awareness was widespread and expressed in very direct language. The pages of Household Narrative (2 [May 1851], 115), for example, carried an account of the May 10 meeting of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, in the course of which the chairman had underscored the contrast:

They had [he said] close to where they sat, that remarkable building which was in itself a shrine to labour; but while they gazed on the long array of its radiant offerings, or the results of its harmonious combinations, let them not refrain from tracing them back in thought to the crowded workshops, to the damp cellars, and to the stifling garrets in which so much of that collected mass of ingenuity and splendour had been elaborated. And they should derive, perhaps, not the least precious lesson which the Crystal Palace could teach, if, transferring their care from the work to the workman, they studied, as best they could to surround the abode of his daily health with some portion of the decency, the comfort, and the enjoyment with which he so plentifully enriched their own.

If, at this exhortation, listeners and readers did trace the contents of the Crystal Palace back to the homes of the workmen, they would have found little of this decency, comfort, and enjoyment.

Let us sample some descriptions of working class neighborhoods. Eliza Cook's Journal (October 25, 1851, pp. 404-405) reported that "frightful overcrowding" was practised "even in favoured localities":
working men and their families huddled into a single apartment,—by day a sitting-room, by night a sleeping-room; the streets without foul, water scarce and dear,—a cleanly life next to impossible.

Throughout London, continued the same report, workers lived in similar conditions:

In the parish of St. Pancras, you find streets inhabited by the working classes fast becoming rookeries. Agar's Town is full of a squalid population.... Go eastward, to the Minories, to Shoreditch, to Whitechapel, to Wapping, to Mile End, it is the same; or to Paddington, Bermondsey, or Lambeth, and you will find the working population environed with nuisances, living in dwellings which barely supply the most elementary wants of our being, and where the moral as well as the physical atmosphere is full of poison.

Although Englishmen might have been little surprised to discover such conditions among the laboring poor, it was sobering to be reminded that even "the best paid of the working classes...porters, policemen, and such like," who lived in the respectable environs of Regent Street were "kept pauperized by the almost constant presence of sickness in their dwellings," and suffered mortality of one in thirty-six of their whole population yearly.28 Dr. Guy, physician to Kings College Hospital, contended that workmen at mid-century suffered living conditions as miserable as those in the jails of the past:

Twins are not more alike than the prisons of Howard's time and the low lodging houses of our own day. Honest working men by the thousand, in town and country, in every part of England, are compelled to live in as complete destitution of all the appliances of comfort and decency and of all the physical aids to morality and religion, as the most degraded tenants of the worst gaols of the last century. They breathe

28Eliza Cook's Journal, October 25, 1851, pp. 404-405.
the same foul atmosphere, they are pressed into the same narrow space, they are compelled to the same unseemly companionship, they languish under the same loathsome diseases, they are doomed to the same premature decay. Howard's gaol fever was but the prototype and progenitor of the typhus fever, which, one year with another, brings from fifteen to twenty thousand of the most valuable part of our population to untimely graves, and stretches at least ten times as many, for weeks together, in muttering delirium, on beds of sickness.  

In discussing the ravages of typhus, which took the lives of thousands of workers every year, Edwin Chadwick declared

What a contrast between the fairy delight of the Crystal Palace and the squalor and premature deaths of the artisans who have fabricated its wonders! There perfect machinery and costly fabrics, the result of wonderful skill and vast labour exhibit prodigious evidences of manufacturing industry and wealth—here foul and poisonous cellars, hovels, and workshops, artisans living painfully and dying off early—there the beautiful pearl, here the deadly disease out of which it has been generated.

The contrast was not reassuring.

Steps were already being taken to remedy this situation, however, by designing and constructing model lodging houses in which workers could live in decent comfort at moderate rents. Prince Albert had such a unit (still to be seen, on Kennington Common) constructed on the grounds of the Exhibition, hoping to win over men of capital to this new concept of housing. His purpose was to demonstrate that the working classes paid a higher rental for wretched hovels than they would be called upon to pay for such comfortable houses as these, and to prove to capitalists that such buildings would yield a fair return


30Eliza Cook's Journal, July 26, 1851, p. 203.
Figure 16. Prince Albert's Model Lodging-House.
(Illustrated London News, June 14, 1851, p. 559.)
for the money invested in them. Three bedrooms in each apartment, in addition to living room and scullery, provided the privacy and space necessary to family morality. Sanitary needs were provided by cistern-supplied water, watercloset, sink, and built-in dustbin. Built-in closets and scullery furniture meant less additional outlay for furnishings. Hollow brick construction rendered it fireproof, soundproof, decay-resistant, and relatively inexpensive.

Similar blocks, some sponsored by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes, were already in service in Streatham St., Bloomsbury (48 units renting at from 4s to 7s per week), New Street, Golden Square (renting at from 4s 6d to 6s 6d per week), and another was planned for the parish of St. George, Hanover Square. For ordinary housing in similar locations, lacking privacy, sanitation, and comfort, a family might pay 5s for a single upper room.\(^{31}\) For the very poor, model buildings, with attached bath house, to house 200-300 people, had been erected in Gray's Inn Lane, which included space for 128 needlewomen at rent of 1s per week.\(^{32}\) Otherwise the very poor might gain crowded flop space in a low lodging house for 1s 6d per week per individual,\(^{33}\) or might pay 1s 6d per week for a very bad cellar.\(^{34}\) Overall, the Society for Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes felt that the laboring poor were

\(^{31}\) Eliza Cook's Journal, October 25, 1851, p. 405.

\(^{32}\) Household Narrative, 1 (June 1850), 136.


\(^{34}\) Eliza Cook's Journal, October 25, 1851, p. 405.
Figure 17. The Cellar and the Model Lodging-House.
(Punch, Punch's Almanack for 1850.)
paying two to three times the sum which they should pay for better accommodations. There were, however, only a few of these model dwellings available. While praising these improvements, the Athenaeum (June 21, 1851, p. 658) cautioned readers not to forget that "comparative elevation above so low a scale, is not enough to satisfy the demands of prudence or to complete the duties of humanity."

Observers called attention as well to the precarious income of many workers. Ordinary incomes did not all measure up to those of the skilled workmen erecting the Crystal Palace. In some trades, notably tailoring and needlework, excessive numbers of workers drove the prevailing rate so low that a woman employed by a slop house could not commonly earn more than 2s 6d per week. If a tailor worked 18 hours per day, he could not make more than 10s per week after expenses. To make a coat, which occupied him 26 hours, a man earned 2s, less than 1d per hour.35 In the operative trades in Bradford, Leeds, and Manchester, workers who earned good incomes while work continued (men, 15-20s; women 8-10s), were rendered destitute at the inevitable times of slack employment.36 At agricultural labor a man might earn 9s to 19s per week (or only 6s in depressed areas), and a woman 4s to 5s per week, again limited to seasons when work was available.37 During the Exhibition year, at the same time

35Times, March 5, 1850, p. 6.


that the worker was highly touted, some observers felt that England's supply of labor had grown beyond her capacity to keep them in useful employment, and, especially in the case of needleworkers and farmers, that emigration was the only hope for sorely-used workers. They found it shameful that the English worker had to flee his home like a rat abandoning a sinking ship.

One proposed solution to the problem was cooperation, especially in the clothing trades in London, but also considered for factory and farm laborers. Rather than competing for the available jobs, and thus cheapening their own wages while an owner reaped profits at their expense, it was proposed that workers pool their capital to become their own masters. By working together, rather than against one another, and by reducing the capitalist's slice of their profits, workers could attain regular work, remunerative wages, and healthier working conditions. The Christian Socialists, led by Charles Kingsley, John Ludlow, and F.D. Maurice, were the chief spokesmen for cooperation among the London tailors and needlewomen. The cooperative idea spread among engineers in the iron trade,38 and proponents of collectivism watched with interest the experiments in collective farming.

Conditions in the workplace, too, raised questions about the dignity of labor. The periodical record shows us that some citizens at least perceived that goods like those on display in the Crystal Palace had been produced in very different surroundings: the

38 Thomas Hughes, "Prefatory Memoir" to Alton Locke, p. xli.
prize-winning Spitalfields silks amid the impoverishment described in Augustus Mayhew's "Story of the Present Day," serialized in the Illustrated London News (beginning Feb. 1, 1851) and in an article in Fraser's noting the fall of weavers' wages from 14s 6d in 1824 to 5s 6d in 1849: "weavers are found living twenty-three persons in a house tasting sometimes animal food once a month, while they produce maroon-coloured velvets 'for ladies to wear and adorn them, and make themselves handsome'";\(^\text{39}\) the gay clothing of Exhibition visitors in sweat shops described by Kingsley in "Cheap Clothes and Nasty" and Alton Locke; and manufactured goods by mere "muscular machines" whose human needs rendered them inferior as producers to the machines of belts and iron.\(^\text{40}\) Punch proposed that this exhibition of industry would be incomplete without a display of the "industrious" as well as their productions: "In a glass hive we ought to know how the bees work. However, as needlewomen cannot be starved, nor tailors 'sweated,' nor miners blown up, amongst a multitude of people, with any degree of safety," Punch suggested, paintings of laborers might be appropriate. The writer continued,

Shall we ostentatiously show off all manner of articles of comfort and luxury, and be ashamed to disclose the condition of those we have to thank for them?\(^\text{41}\)

The Illustrated London News also reflected this awareness. In reply

\(^\text{39}\)Fraser's, 41 (January 1850), 4.

\(^\text{40}\)Henry Mayhew, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys..., p. 129.

\(^\text{41}\)Punch, 20 (Feb. 1, 1851), 42.
Figure 18. SPECIMENS FROM MR. PUNCH'S INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION OF 1850. (TO BE IMPROVED IN 1851).
(Punch, 18 (April 13, 1850), 145.)
to a previously-printed verse,

Come forth, ye toiling millions! God's universe is fair
Come forth from crowded street,
And cool your feverish feet
With a trample on the turf in the pleasant open air,42

the paper printed an answer from the point of view of the toilers:

Ah, would that we could!
Pent in darkness and gloom, bending over the loom,
In the workshop and office, dark alley and lane.43

As we have seen, the prevailing mood of the Exhibition summer encouraged people to hunt for symbols; the ones they seized on were not always flattering. One writer was inspired by a display of iodine crystals which had been purified from kelp. He recognized that the chemist had achieved the resulting iodine crystals only by making a liberal outlay for the necessary equipment and by handling the raw material—algae—with care. By tackling the task in this responsible way, the chemist was able to "extract from the algae valuable products." This presented sharp contrast, he mused, with the way workmen—the algae of society—were treated. What might not be accomplished if society were willing to invest in the refinement of the algae of society the equipment and care necessary "to render all their qualities subservient to the public good"!44 Other observers found the machinery of the Exhibition symbolic. Care was lavished on

42Illustrated London News, May 17, 1851, p. 408.
44Art and Faith, In Fragments from the Great Exhibition (London, 1851), pp. 96-107. According to Charles Dilke, the author of this anonymous work was George Troup.
the upkeep of machinery, which would not produce if moving parts were not oiled and belts were allowed to break; yet human workers were suffered to toil until they dropped, with no maintenance necessary, since a broken human could be so easily replaced. Anticipation of the "gathered trophies" in the Exhibition prompted the thoughts of a writer for Punch to pass "from the labour to the labourer pale":

From out of gorgeous hues and fabrics rare
Let the gaunt weaver's face its lesson look,
And all that's forged, or wove, or carven there,
    Becomes a leaf of a portentous book--

Too often blurred with blood, blotted with tears,
    With sin and sorrow writ, from rim to rim;
While they that ought to read, with selfish fears
    Avert their eyes from off the record grim.45

45Punch, 18 (April 13, 1850), 141.
Chapter 5

Peace

"The Exhibition of 1851 will fulfill the prophecy of the Sacred Volume, and hasten the period 'when men shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.' It is a stage forward in that millennium which announces 'peace and goodwill towards men!'

(A Short Statement of the Nature and Objects of the Proposed Great Exhibition, p. 7.)

"In short, war surrounds us on all sides; its passions are raging throughout the world; an era of such hostile prognostications is scarcely to be found in the annals of mankind."

(Blackwood's, 69 [February 1851], 204.)

"The same [continental] public journals that contained some moving homily addressed to the friends of brotherly unity on the blessings of peace, generally contained a no less exciting summons from half a dozen commanders to arms. The Commission invited the governments of the continent to mingle in idyllic brotherhood, at a time when both the governed and the governors were engaged in a more rancorous contest from purely national motives than perhaps at any previous period."

(Edinburgh Review, 94 [October 1851], 566.)

As the first international industrial fair, the Exhibition seemed to herald a new era of international peace. For the first time since the world began, noted the Times (May 1, 1851, p. 4), men were gathered from all parts of the world under a banner of cooperation rather than on a field of battle. It appeared that mankind had drawn nearer to ideal brotherhood than ever before; war had never seemed nearer to extinction. Yet, as contemporaries had drawn divergent conclusions regarding Prosperity, Class Unity, and Dignity
of Labour, they also held differing views on the subject of peace. While it was easy to be enthusiastic about the unprecedented friendship evidenced in the Crystal Palace, even among nations who had traditionally been bitter enemies, few appear to have really believed that it signaled a permanent change in international relationships. The press recorded the promises of peace which the Exhibition offered to a hopeful public; but it also reflected the continued concern over national defense, and recent military actions on the continent and in the colonies. While they might sympathize with the Manchester School's economic hopes for peace and with the philosophical idealism of the Peace Society, few men in 1851 appear to have really believed that armies were obsolete. While they might think world peace more nearly achievable than it had been fifty years ago, most were also aware of the current world circumstances which called for traditional preparedness. We find in the press much talk of peace, but also much awareness of the inevitability of human conflict.

The World at Peace

The romantic view of the perfectibility of man underlay the peace hopes of 1851. In the mid-Victorian view, man's war-torn past was as natural a stage in the development of the human race as was combative-ness in a child who had not yet arrived at the rationality of adulthood. It was understandable that nations, like children, would "use the fist until they are of age to use the brain,"¹ and that during

¹E.B. Browning, "Casa Guidi Windows," The Poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, II, 360. The poem was completed and published in 1851.
that span of immaturity, Caesars and Napoleons would necessarily play important roles. But man now seemed to be showing signs of greater rationality. He could analyze past history for insights into human behavior; structure his economics to make warfare less likely; and recognize that he had more to gain through peace than through war. Beyond this, man had demonstrated by other advancements that he was not limited by the difficult or the seemingly impossible. The dreams of a few years back had already become realities. Railroads, gas lights, and the telegraph had once seemed mere fancies, yet here they stood as tangible proof that the unattainable might yet be attained. Why, asked the press, should the abolition of warfare be regarded as any less possible?  

The press in 1851 was full of hopes for peace based on the belief that even the natural selfishness and aggression of nations could be harnessed for peaceful ends by arranging that their separate selfish interests coincided with the good of all. Modern manufacturing processes were dependent upon raw materials which nature had scattered among the nations. Nature, it was thought, had done this purposely so that nations would have to cooperate in order that each might achieve its potential. Each could profit most by producing only the goods which it was best suited to produce, and by trading these for goods which could be produced more skillfully and cheaply by someone else.

\[\text{Athenaeum, August 2, 1851, p. 832.}\]
\[\text{New Monthly Magazine and Humorist, 92 (July, 1851), 387.}\]
This mutual dependency would mean greater prosperity for all (or at least for countries like England, whose industry was already well-established); but it would also mean that peace, with its undisturbed flow of trade, would be more profitable than war. If prosperity depended upon peace, considerations of the pocketbook would help men to get along. England had already taken the first steps into this new world of practical brotherhood by abolishing the Corn Law tariffs (1846) and repealing the remaining Navigation Acts (1849). She hoped that other nations would recognize the material advantages of peaceful cooperation as they, too, became more enlightened. A peace based on the facts of economics seemed more attainable than one based—in the unsuccessful tradition of centuries—on simple goodwill.

The Exhibition

The Exhibition presented practical evidence that this system worked, and that peace was achievable at last. For the first time in history a gathering of this size and diversity was met in a hall of peace to honor skill of hand and ingenuity of mind rather than strength of arm. To be sure, some small points of friction did arise during the allotment of space, chiefly disagreements over official names (should it be "Holland" or "The Netherlands"?) and over domination (was Algiers an integral part of France, or merely an adjunct?). If all men had not quite left contentious ways behind, however, they seemed at least poised upon the brink. On May 4, when the Bishop of London preached his sermon from the text of Isaiah 2:4—"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they war anymore"—
the Biblical goal seemed closer to fulfillment than ever before in history.

"Peace" was reflected in every aspect of the Exhibition, and the press outdid itself in discovering new angles from which to view this symbolism. By contrast with the military pageantry of the last big national gathering, the anniversary of the French Republic two years before, this celebration of world brotherhood, it was pointed out, was led by a gentle and delicate female sovereign, accompanied by husband and children. No uniforms or bayonets or armies of one hundred thousand men were needed to swell the pageantry of this festival; merely the respectful loyalty of thousands of subjects, and the cooperation of welcome visitors from every quarter of the globe.

Whereas the diplomatic functions of men had traditionally been held in thick-walled mediaeval castles and renaissance palaces, typical of the less-enlightened past when neighbors were enemies, this gathering was held in a vulnerable building of glass, signifying unprecedented trust in the nobler instincts of man. In 1851 foreigners were welcomed, at first with lingering distrust, but then with growing warmth, as their behavior seemed to prove that people reared under other flags and customs could be trusted as well as one's own countrymen. For years the street-corner exhibitions in which natural enemies

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4 Chambers' Journal, May 31, 1851, p. 337.

5 The Palace of Glass and the Gathering of the People. A Book for the Exhibition (London, 1851), chapter 2. This is a book of 162 pages, dealing with the symbolism of the Exhibition. It is sanguine in mood, with strong religious overtones.
of the animal kingdom coexisted amicably in the same cage had been an
English phenomenon. Now, claimed the press, the Great Exhibition
seemed to be just such a "Happy Family" on a larger and nobler scale,
in which human enemies had learned to live together without fear of
being molested. The Illustrated London News suggested that the
Exhibition marked new levels of maturity in mankind, demonstrating to
the people of Europe "that if they had known as much of each other
fifty or sixty years ago as they do now, there would, in all likeli-
hood, have been no battle of the Nile, the Baltic, or Trafalgar, and
no carnage of Aboukir, Marengo, Jena, Leipsic, Moscow, Saragossa, or
Waterloo." Reporters called attention to a specially-designed
emblem, symbolic of this peace festival, which hung in the fine-art-
court—an allegorical portrait of the goddess of Peace, seated on a
lion, crowned with plenty, blessed by divinity, with the instruments
of war piled powerless at her feet. By such reportage the press
urged the idea of the Peace Palace on a willing public.

6 See Punch, 21 (July 19, 1851), 38 for a cartoon of the Happy
Family.

7 May 3, 1851, p. 343. "Who shall say," continued the writer
with increasing smugness, "if we had had a railroad system pervading
Europe in 1780, and steam-ships plying between New York and Liver-
pool at the same period, whether Napoleon Buonaparte might not have
become a great sculptor or a great cotton-spinner in 1810? whether
Wellington, the mighty captain, might not thirty years ago have been
a philosopher greater and more genial than Bentham, or a Lord Chan-
cellor more potent and profound than Eldon? whether a thousand
battles would not have remained unfought? and whether the millions
of men that perished in them might not have helped to adorn and
improve a world which they were solely engaged in ravaging?"
Figure 19. *THE HAPPY FAMILY IN HYDE PARK.*

(*Punch, 21 (July 19, 1851), 37.*)

"PEACE." PAINTED BY ARMITAGE.—IN THE FINE ARTS, COURT OF THE GREAT EXHIBITION.
Figure 20. "Peace" — Painted by Armitage.
(Illustrated London News, May 31, 1851, p. 478)
"Peace."—Painted by Armitage. In the Fine Arts Court of the Great Exhibition.
The Exhibition gave substance to hopes for future peace as well. Even observers who had been skeptical of the Manchester theory that commerce could replace war admitted that the Exhibition demonstrated that very principle. National contests, it appeared, need no longer be fought on the battlefield, but in such international exhibitions as this, where the prizes would go to skillful work and inventiveness rather than to brute force. Victory and world esteem would be earned by means of rational minds and practical science. Nations would no longer fear armed invasion, because arms would be an inferior and inefficient means of competition. Face-to-face meetings would destroy many old national prejudices and teach men to accept genuine differences in customs with mutual good humor. Household Words hoped that it would thus "in future be no longer a matter of course, that because fifty thousand Frenchmen in blue coats and red trousers meet fifty thousand Englishmen in blue trousers and red coats, they must all fall to, and cut or blow each other to atoms."\(^8\) "Peace" was on every lip.\(^9\) Englishmen wanted to believe in it; they liked their image as world peace-maker. By willing peace so strenuously some succeeded in persuading themselves that it had already arrived, at least within the Exhibition, which seemed to be a peace conference as much as an industrial fair.

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\(^8\)October 11, 1851, p. 64.

\(^9\)Athenaeum, May 17, 1851, p. 525.
Another, completely independent, peace conference was meeting in London during the Exhibition summer. On July 22, 23, and 24, London was host to the fourth annual Peace Conference of an international society founded in 1848 by an American, Elihu Burritt, for the purpose of establishing alternatives to war as the means of settling differences between nations. The first Congress had met in Brussels in 1848, the second in Paris, and the third in Frankfurt. Among the proposals discussed in London in 1851 were arbitration, mediation, disarmament, non-intervention by one state in the affairs of another, and the establishment of an authoritative code of international law.10

The Peace Society enjoyed a great deal of publicity and spin-off support because peace was popular that summer. Its doctrine, idealistic almost to a fault, would quite probably have been dismissed as moonshine by more people, had not the practical peace celebration in Hyde Park lent it credibility; for the Society advocated total renunciation of arms, without provision for defense in this less-than-perfect world. But it was difficult in 1851 to be critical of such a doctrine, however impractical it might be. The press reported that this fourth Congress was met by a "more wide and unanimous testimony against the bad and illogical argument of war" than before.11

10 North British Review, 16 (November 1851), 29-30.
11 Athenaeum, August 2, 1851, p. 832.
lived down the cry of "Utopian!" just as the Exhibition had overcome similar accusations:

The cry of "Utopian!" has become a vain echo before the things that we have seen.... The prodigy of yesterday will be the fact of tomorrow:—the dreamer of one generation is the lawgiver of the following. At no season since the peace agitation commenced have its principles stood before the world in so imposing an attitude as they now occupy. Practically, the Crystal Palace has been the [peace] congress of the year. The Society has merely had to give it articulate voice,—to register progress.

Although the Peace Society did not draw the support of powerful men, as did the more practical Exhibition, Thomas Carlyle was sympathetic to the cause, and a letter of support from him was among those read at the beginning of the proceedings.

Preparedness

The euphoria of peace was both real and earnest, but it could not completely supplant all past experience of human conflict. While prophets of peace felt that the world could ultimately live without soldiers, quite the opposite stance was taken by British officialdom and, apparently, by the general populace when they turned from Exhibition dreams to the concerns of ordinary life. Even while they aspired to peace, an unarmed innocence was not part of that goal. Talk of beating swords into ploughshares was mainly limited to the jubilant articles inspired by the Great Exhibition; more traditional attitudes characterized the remainder of the press.
Weapons for Peace

Britons in general, we find, were still proud of their world power and unmatched capacity for warfare if it should be necessary. "Peace" was not absence of weaponry, but a keen-edged sword, safely sheathed, yet ready to quell any aggressor. England characterized itself as a powerful lion napping calmly in the sun with one eye open—with strength, genial enough, but not to be provoked. Although denouncing warfare, John Bull would clearly not hesitate to use his power if threatened. Even as he advocated rational settlement, he could still ripple his muscles and declare, "Were we pitched into—just wouldn't we fight?"12

Most Englishmen felt that the maintenance of a well-equipped and well-trained army was not inconsistent with England's position as "peacemaker" of the world. If called upon to defend the principles of a free nation against foreign despotism, England would be ready; if there was trouble with disobedient natives in a colony, England would use her military strength as a policeman to make sure that the peace was kept. But even more important than armed intervention, power could guarantee that foreigners would not trifle with the English crown or with the rights of her citizens, and the presence of a strong army in Britain would preserve the peace by discouraging aggression abroad. Sending troops if the occasion demanded was well within the concept of peace. Even while Englishmen rejoiced to see warships

12 *Fraser's*, 43 (February 15, 1851), 137.
13 *Punch*, 22 (February 14, 1852), 69.
from Turkey and the United States pressed into peacetime service to
carry goods to the Exhibition—"Symbol of peace, their vessel
rides!"—they were not overly disturbed to see their own steamer
Singapore, laden with troops bound for South Africa, departing from
the same harbor.

While approving the high-sounding theory that trade and closer
ties could lead to peace, most Englishmen put their ultimate trust
in defensive war. It had been the soldier, Wellington, after all, who had put an end to the most devastating war in recent history. For
this prowess as a bringer of peace, Wellington was still considered
"the most m-able man in Christendom." It seemed only appropriate
that the aged warrior was close beside the Queen as she opened the
Exhibition; as in the allegorical portrait, Wellington was the lion's
strength upon which the Queen of Peace rested. The Illustrated
London News tells us that the true soldier, perhaps even more than
the true philanthropist, was considered a man of peace.

Believing that weapons of war were inconsistent with the
brotherhood of man, members of the Peace Society requested that the
Commissioners ban guns and armaments from display, but the Commissioners

14 W. M. Thackeray, "May Day Ode," Times, April 30, 1851, p. 5.
15 Illustrated London News, March 29, 1851, pp. 251-252.
16 I draw conclusions from periodical articles which discussed
current attitudes, and also from the subject matter of articles
during these years.
Figure 21. The "St. Lawrence" and the "Singapore."

(Illustrated London News, March 29, 1851, p. 250.)
denied the request. Weapons were a legitimate branch of productive industry, they maintained, and as such could not be excluded if the Exhibition was to provide a complete picture of man's progress. The Exhibition opened, therefore, with its collection of armaments as well as ploughshares. From the crude stone clubs and stone-tipped spears and arrows sent as the contributions of less "civilized" peoples, to the new Colt revolver capable of firing six deadly shots without a pause to reload, a considerable progress in destructive power was evident. France had sent its rifles and pistols; Prussia sent brass guns, rapiers, and muskets; Turkey sent sabres; China sent matchlocks; England proudly displayed heavy calibre guns, carbines, matchlocks, swords, and bowie knives. There were formidable cannon and monstrous shells.

Powerless to change this situation, the peace prophets made the best of it. It occurred to them that the presence of weapons might further their cause more effectively than the requested ban, by reminding observers of war's destruction. Visitors might cringe at the horrible potential of monster shells and sophisticated guns, and vow to renounce them. Armaments might preach eloquent sermons to the passing visitors:

Much platform oratory may be heard and forgotten, but the sight of a small round piece of iron, which, falling on the dome of St. Paul's would break through and tear the great edifice into fragments, is a thing to live in the memory for many a day.19

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19 *Athenaeum*, October 25, 1851, pp. 1121-2.
Figure 22. PEACE! — A SKETCH FROM THE CRYSTAL PALACE.
(Punch, 21 (July 5, 1851), 22.)
Such a peace lesson would be more effective than higher arguments.

To make certain that even the thickest-witted visitor read the intended lesson aright, the peace advocates placarded the guns (or so we are led to believe by a volume held by the British Library) with homiletic verses pointing the moral. Some guns were thus made to confess their sins and renounce their past:

Tho' bright and fair my face you see,  
War's murderous work was meant for me,  
But I the hateful task resign,  
'Mid Labour's peaceful stores to shine.  

Other sought to elicit similar resolutions on the part of the beholder:

Here harmless we lie,  
But let each passer by  
Reflect with a sigh  
On the course we have run,  
The foul deeds we have done,  
And crave that forever  
The like may be never.  

The advocates of a more realistic "defensive" peace, however, were not yet ready to forswear the engines of war. If weapons in the Crystal Palace gave them hope for peace, credit was due to scientific advances in warfare--deadlier weapons would scare off their enemies. Looking at the six-shot Colt revolver on display, men dreamed of an

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20 Placards Exhibited in Conspicuous Places Within the Crystal Palace, Designed to Forward one of the Grand Objects of the Royal Commission (London, 1851). These are eleven unsigned homiletic poems bound into a volume entitled Society of Friends Tracts in the British Library. The Catalogue attributes them to John Harris. They are presented so as to suggest that they really were used, although they were not mentioned by reporters describing the Exhibition.

21 Ibid.
even more fearsome weapon, "a machine that will throw a constant shower of balls." More sophisticated weaponry would make warring man less barbaric, they expected, by exercising his "ingenuity of mind" rather than the "morbid malignity of disposition" which had marked hand-to-hand combat. Brute passions would no longer be fanned by slaying a fellow creature face-to-face; stone clubs were for barbarians. Civilized war, when called for, would depend upon superior scientific skill; as the Edinburgh Review commented, "war is becoming a mere problem for the laboratory—a question of the relative expansive powers of certain gases" (94 [October 1851], 593).

The Peace Society may have enjoyed a reception more cordial than usual, but it nevertheless was belittled by some of the magazines and popular literature of the year. Elihu Burritt was dismissed as harmless enough, but without any great influence on world affairs. Members of the Peace Society were portrayed as totally unaware of the warfare which would be a probable consequence if nations should relax their defences. "France disarm!", exclaimed a reincarnation of Voltaire imagined by a writer in Blackwood's. "Better ask her to walk at once out of the map of Europe." Attempting to demonstrate the nationalistic animosity lurking under the facade of peace, one satirical tale published in Blackwood's portrayed the nations as

22 Westminster Review, 55 (July 1851), 386-387.

23 Chambers's Journal, March 29, 1851, pp. 193-195.

24 "Voltaire in the Crystal Palace," 70 (August 1851), 151.
brawling even within their formal peace meeting.25

**Embattled Europe**

With the tensions existing between and within the countries of Europe, it was no wonder that some Englishmen were reluctant to trust in brotherly love alone to protect their homes, factories, and institutions. Weapons and barricades had been well-used on the continent in the last three years, and Englishmen could not be completely comfortable as they watched the shifting power alliances on the continent. Although the wars of Italian nationalism ended in 1849 when the Austrian, Radetsky, put down Mazzini's uprising in Milan, when the French occupied Rome, and Grand Duke Leopold resumed the Tuscan throne,26 Englishmen at mid-century could not coolly regard this struggle as past history. For them it seemed very recent, even current, threatening another eruption.

Journal articles in 1851 stressed that despite the apparent calm symbolized by cooperation in the Exhibition, the continental hostilities were not over and might spread. In February 1851 readers of Blackwood's were warned that Austria and Prussia had been on the verge of a dreadful contest for the previous six months. They read a menacing outline of the recent embroilments--Piedmont invading Lombardy; Russia invading Holstein; France besieging Rome; the

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26See William Langer, Political and Social Upheaval, 1832-1852 (New York, 1969) for a discussion of European tensions during these years.
Magyar rising against the Slav, the Bohemian against the Austrian, and the Lombard against both; and the Germans leaving their ploughs for their arms. "Flames and passions of war," the readers were told, surrounded Europe on all sides. She was "slumbering on the edge of a volcano" (p. 205). Similar reports, in tones not quite so fevered, were staples of most journals of the year. The October issue of the Edinburgh Review described the European situation as it had been during the planning stages of the Exhibition:

On the whole the period of its first promulgation was one of general political convulsion, to which the annals of history offer but few parallels. From the Weser to the Danube, from the Belt to the Caspian, preparations for war were everywhere making. Denmark, Holstein, Germany, Prussia, Austria, Hungary, and Italy, bristled with armed men.

The writer continued with a summary of the smoke, flame, and struggle, and a reminder that it was not yet completely over: "Austria, still reeling beneath the weight of repeated shocks, seemed to have permanently taken to its tents; its capital and provincial cities appeared no longer safe; and, indeed, to this day are in a state of siege" (pp. 566-567). It is not surprising then, to read W. E. Aytoun's warning in Blackwood's at the height of the Exhibition festivities, "We cannot, I am very much afraid, expect that the clarion of war will be silenced forever by the braying of Elihu Burritt. Look at it in what light you please, there is not security for the maintenance of tranquility on the content. One other convulsion, and, from no fault of our own, we may be inextricably
The moral of these discussions: England was to keep herself armed.

Such a resolve was not really out of keeping with the talk of peace emanating from the Exhibition. Although the mid-century years were full enough of armed conflict, both threatened and real, these conflicts weren't included in the prevailing definition of "war." If the Exhibition heralded an end to large-scale European wars like the Napoleonic and to wars caused by simple ignorance between nations, it took no account of those fought for ideological reasons or those fired by nationalist aspirations—the types which were the constant threat to peace at mid-century. Neither the economists nor the Peace Society seemed to have an answer to the plight of a people who were oppressed by another. Yet the spread of the democratic ideal brought increasing conflict between long-standing empires and their subject peoples, who sought to throw off foreign domination and to regroup as independent sovereign states.

Moreover, English armed might still seemed the best way both to deter European war and to preserve liberty. On a visit to England in October 1851 Louis Kossuth (leader of Hungary's revolt against the Hapsburg dynasty) urged that England's strong deterrent force not be weakened by Peace Societies. Aggressors must know that England would not hesitate to use force when necessary. Kossuth's trust in arms did not seem impractical in this year of peace. Wherever he

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2770 (July, 1851), 118. Emphasis added.
went—Southampton, London, Birmingham, Manchester; among workers and
in council chambers—he was cheered and his speeches eagerly listened
to. Elizabeth Barrett Browning urged that it was no virtue to
enjoy Peace by a protected fireside, acquiescing to continental
tyanny:

'Tis treason, stiff with doom,—
'Tis gagged despair, and inarticulate wrong,
Annihilated Poland, stifled Rome
Dazed Naples, Hungary fainting 'neath the thong,
And Austria wearing a smooth olive-leaf
On her brute forehead, while her hoofs outpress
The life from these Italian souls...29

In such situations, peaceloving Englishmen could sympathize with
bloodshed even in 1851—since with all the talk of peaceful settle-
ment and arbitration, arms were the only force which they really
trusted for the defense of important beliefs.

Considering the world situation, it is not surprising that the
calm of the Exhibition year was short-lived. Before the year was
over, yet another military coup had put an end to republican France,
and Englishmen had fresh reason to worry about their defenses against
the unpredictable French. Popular literature began to picture 1851
in retrospect as an island of calm to be gazed at somewhat wistfully
as the world reverted to its fretful ways. In the light of Napoleon
III's coup, the accomplishments of the Peace Congress in educating
the world seemed negligible. "Judging from recent occurrences,"

28 See the Illustrated London News in October for frequent and
full reportage of Kossuth's acceptance.

proclaimed one popular verse, "rare is/ The wish for a Peace-making Congress in Paris." punch gloomily contrasted the dark and stormy prospects of 1852—"cannonshot, and wail, and war-cry loud"—with the just-elapsed year of brotherhood, hope, and peace. The Englishman's latent trust in might was resurrected; the economic arguments for peace were superseded by red-blooded patriotism; and Tennyson echoed the public sentiment:

Though niggard throats of Manchester might bawl [the Peace doctrine based on economics]
What England was, shall her true sons forget?
We are not cotton-spinners all.

The call to honor replaced for a time the belief that profitable trade was the highest goal among men. And by 1854, troopships were to head for the Crimea.

Troubled Colonies

The thirty years of peace, when measured from the English fireside, failed to take into account another aspect of the world situation—the rumblings within England's own colonial empire. By

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30 Alphabetical Epitome of the Great Exhibition, 1851 (London, 1861). Among the artifacts of the Exhibition year are several of these "alphabetical epitomes," or popular verses structured on the familiar alphabetical pattern of "A is for Apple...B is for...," in which each initial stands for an important idea or event of the year. They provide interesting insight into which issues of the year achieved popular prominence. A note accompanying this one stated that having been written but not published in 1851, it was being published due to lively interest preceding the Exhibition of 1862.

31 Punch, 22 (January 17, 1852), 30.

defining "war" as a major engagement like the Napoleonic wars, England could easily overlook the significance of her extensive military activities, dismissing these "wars" as the supervision necessary for the guidance and discipline of barbarian colonies. In the last week of 1850, the Seventh Kaffir War broke out in South Africa, with hostilities escalating as the Exhibition year progressed. Newspapers and magazines kept abreast of the events of the war (battles, casualties, expenses), often in an issue which elsewhere in its pages proclaimed the arrival of the millennium of peace and brotherhood.

Although the phrase "Kaffir War" was used in the headlines and news articles, people seemed to prefer to think of it as a "native rebellion." Having expanded inland deep into native territory, colonial farmers now had increasing trouble with the natives over land and cattle theft. English patience growing thin at native non-cooperation in concluding a treaty, the ranking British officer declared his intention to capture the most powerful offending chief. As the British soldiers set out on this disciplinary mission on December 24, 1850, they were ambushed and 38 of them slain. The next day more than 70 colonists were brutally murdered as they sat at their Christmas dinners, and thereafter the Kaffirs frequently appeared from the bush to maraud and to skirmish with the troops posted to protect Her Majesty's subjects. At first the leaders at

33Illustrated London News, March 15, 1851, p. 222.
Figure 23. Bush-fighting in Kaffraria.

(Illustrated London News, April 12, 1851, p. 290.)
the Cape expected victory within two or three months, but by mid-April the opinion from the Cape was that the "war will be a very protracted and expensive one."\textsuperscript{34}

The war worsened for lack of ready communication, despite the Exhibition effusions about a shrinking world. It was already March before news of the December attack appeared in London papers; news took at best six or seven weeks to filter back to London, and official responses took as long to return. Reluctant to face up to the embarrassment or expense of a war, especially during the Exhibition year, leaders did not adequately assess the depth of the situation from the available information, but rather hoped that things could be handled locally. Some troops had been sent out in early March, but it was June before additional men were deployed, and the situation had grown more explosive with the delay. Some reporters, not entirely in jest, blamed the duration of the war directly on the Great Exhibition, since were it not for the festival in London, the troops kept in readiness there, and the general unpopularity of force, the Duke of Wellington would surely have sent off some six or seven thousand troops to the colony immediately, and thus settled the natives once and for all.\textsuperscript{35}

While the riches of the colonies were proudly displayed in the western nave of the Crystal Palace and songs proclaimed the fraternal

\textsuperscript{34}Illustrated London News, April 26, 1851, p. 334.

\textsuperscript{35}Punch, 21 (November 1, 1851), 192.
ties which should make war as odious as fratricide, the press recorded
the common attitude that the best way to deal with the Kaffirs was to
exterminate them.\textsuperscript{36} The reputed closer bonds of brotherhood between
the peoples of the world had clearly not extended to the naked
"savages." War was called for, most often in muted terms, but occa-
sionally with the shrillness of Bentley's:

"War should be carried on to the very knife" against these
"treacherous and blood-thirsty barbarians"...these "murdering
robbers"...these "incorrigible ruffians."\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Interest in the Military}

This active battle-zeal was, of course, an undercurrent. The
Kaffir War was not an issue of great enough magnitude to compete with
the Exhibition for the nation's attention. Yet the general reader in
1851 was not without interest in war and military adventure, both
recent and in times gone by. Most of the current periodicals carried
what information they could obtain about the Kaffirs in general
(history, language, tribes, and past wars) and about this war in
particular. The major reviewing organs—the Edinburgh, the Quarterly,
the Westminster, Blackwood's, and the Athenaeum—as well as the more
popular magazines, reflected in their review articles the tone of many

\textsuperscript{36}The idea of extermination as a solution was recorded in the
Illustrated London News, April 19, pp. 308–309; The Economist, May
17, p. 532; Bentley's Miscellany, 29 (1851), 415; Bentley's
Miscellany, 30 (1851), 590; and a speech by Roebuck in Commons.
A Master/servant relationship was discussed in Edinburgh Review, 93
(April 1851), 488–497.

\textsuperscript{37}Bentley's Miscellany, 29 (1851), 415.
publications coming off the presses, and the interest of the readership. There were countless pages pertinent to the bloody European conflicts of the recent past and the uneasy present, detailing the ideological as well as the physical struggles of Austria, Hungary, Italy, France, Russia, Turkey, and the Danubian provinces. Books on current military discipline were reviewed in the Westminster, the Athenaeum, and the Economist. There were histories of past wars; the conquest of Spain by the Moors in the 8th century AD; the mutiny of 1797; the Napoleonic wars; the war in Afghanistan; and Creasy's Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World. Some of these newly-published historical volumes were widely noticed, providing the basis for long disquisitions on the general topic in several magazines in the course of the year. On all levels there was an interest in personal reminiscences of soldiers' wartime experiences, as for example, "The Campaigns of an Austrian Aide de Camp" in the recent wars (Blackwood's); the recollections of the "The 42nd Regiment Before and After Waterloo" (Chambers's); or the military memoirs of Lieutenant Col. James Skinner (Westminster and the Athenaeum).

Certainly these books of military interest were just a small fraction of the total literary production of 1851, and represented but a fraction of those reviewed. But we find as well, in those magazines whose contents included short fiction and poetry, 38

38Chiefly Athenaeum, Bentley's, and New Monthly.
a taste for original stories about the military life, and for fictional reminiscences not unlike the factual memoirs formally treated on the review pages. Blackwood's printed tales set in barracks or mess, emphasizing the romance of a soldier's life. Fraser's served up pseudo-autobiographies of military characters, and a lighthearted tale of the escapades of a young officer in France. Poems looked back on glorious days of old, when Britons were filled with strength and heroism, and when men took pride in victory rather than words. Verses gave glory to "the race of the hero and bard,/ Who the foes of their country defied."39

By 1852 serious invasion fears would spring up as patriots suddenly realized that Peace had lulled them into vulnerability. The military interest in 1851 represented no such panic; it was merely evidence of the British tradition continuing despite the optimism inspired by the world's fair. Brotherhood might be proclaimed and cannon denounced, but behind it all the soldier was a mainstay of the social fabric. Soldiery remained one of the honorable professions alongside law, medicine, and the church, available to the younger sons of nobility. It provided a chance for a young man, backed by purchase fees, to achieve officership and make a name for himself. Dashing young men in colorful uniforms remained attractive to the ladies of the kingdom. In short, deep-down belief in the army, unshaken by changes in the popular whim, is just what one might expect. That

39"Ode to the Ancient Britons," Bentley's Miscellany, 30 (1851), 455.
essential trust underlay the paradox of 1851. While it hailed peace as eagerly as any, Fraser's could also declare with a note of pride, "the genius of our people is essentially warlike." And in noting England's displays in the Exhibition, Punch could suggest the inclusion of a recruit (specimen of the raw material) and a soldier on duty (specimen of the manufactured article) as products for which England was preeminent.

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40 Fraser's, 38 (January 1851), 2-3.
41 Punch, 20 (February 15, 1851), 64.
Chapter 6

Religious Strength

"Glorious God! on Thee we call....
Homage to thy throne we bring!
In the wonders all around
Ever is Thy Spirit found."
(Martin Tupper, "A Hymn For All Nations)

"And this civilization rests on Christianity; could be raised on Christianity only; can be maintained by Christianity alone...."
(Prince Albert, June 17, 1851)

"It is a terror-stricken age.... The Bible is a dead letter.
Men worship the air and call it God."
(Henry Atkinson, letter to Harriet Martineau, dated Good Friday, 1851, in Martineau's Autobiography, II, 268-9.

"Therefore, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name, be all Praise." To this prayer the crowd on opening day murmured assent. For most celebrants it was a traditional sentiment, an expression of general thanksgiving. For others it marked this festival as a Religious Jubilee, a respite for a faith embattled by schism, skepticism, popery, and indifference. For some it was but rhetoric; for some it seemed a matter of course; for yet others it was a challenge to evangelistic zeal.

Self-analysis in Exhibition year extended to religion, and here, too, there was a lack of unanimity. What was the condition of Christianity in England? By contrast to the pressures that had been buffeting the church, the Exhibition might seem to portend wider
acceptance of religion. However, others who looked thoughtfully at
the evidence both in the Exhibition and out of it, were reminded that
the pressures on religious tradition continued unabated. The boldest
assertions that the Exhibition marked a religious millennium\textsuperscript{1} appear
to have issued mainly from a zealous minority. The idea spread
rapidly both because it was promoted by the press and because it was
acceptable to the national self-image.

\textbf{Religious Jubilee}

The Exhibition was not originally conceived as a religious
festival. It began, as we have seen, as a show of industrial and
artistic advancements. But its amazing scope and success soon
inspired awe and thanksgiving, which found their natural outlet in
religious feeling. By the time of the Mansion House dinner in March
of 1850, Prince Albert was already predicting that the vast collec-
tion in the Exhibition would produce upon spectators an impression of
"deep thankfulness to the Almighty for the blessings which he has
bestowed upon us...here below"; and Sir Robert Peel was expressing
similar hopes: "We propose to teach them [the people] gratitude to
their Almighty Creator by the exhibition of the wonderful contriv-
ances of nature for the happiness of mankind."\textsuperscript{2} As the building
materialized and the displays poured in, the Exhibition seemed to
represent much more than industrial preeminence. It symbolized the

\textsuperscript{1}The Palace of Glass and the Gathering of the People, A Book
for the Exhibition (London, 1851), Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{2}Times, March 22, 1850, p. 5.
rich bestowal of blessings by the Christian God on His people—
blessings far in excess of those enjoyed by non-Christians, or even
the less-enlightened non-Protestant nations. The building, with its
spaciousness, its plan of nave and transept, and its high vaulting,
reminded them of a cathedral; it had organs and choirs, and on opening
day, archbishops and dedicatory prayers. In several ways, too, it
suggested a parish church, bringing together people in their Sunday
best for inspiration, instruction, and sociability. It was not
uncommon for the pastor of a country parish to make arrangements for a
special tour, and pastors were seen guiding and protecting their
flocks as they threaded through the long aisles.

While a few of the displays were of religious interest—Bibles
printed in 148 languages; chalices, altar screens, baptismal fonts,
and alms basins; statues and crucifixes; stained glass windows; and
even the model of a floating church for seamen—it was not these
scattered displays of religious artifacts which gave the Exhibition
its religious overtone. This came, rather, in the response of the
reverent mind to the overall effect. Everything here, from steam
engines to ornate sauce-boats, seemed to reflect the glory of God.
In his "A Hymn for All Nations," which was translated into thirty
languages as a universal expression of the meaning of the Exhibition,
Martin Tupper observed:

In the wonders all around
Ever is Thy Spirit found,
And of each good thing we see
All the good is born of Thee!
All things had been crafted by men, of course, but such achievements seemed almost beyond the unaided power of man. The inspiration seemed to be godlike, a reaffirmation that man's skill was due to his having been created in the image of God:

\[\text{Thine the beauteous skill that lurks} \\
\text{Everywhere in Nature's works;}\]

\[\text{.....} \]

\[\text{Yea, and foremost in the van} \\
\text{Springs from Thee the mind of Man.}\]

(Tupper, "A Hymn for All Nations")

One did not need to be particularly devout to feel this kind of reverence. But in some observers piety reached higher peaks. God, rather than man, they believed, was ultimately responsible for this wondrous show, and all the material wealth served to raise the mind beyond the earthly to contemplation of the spiritual. The press was full of such lofty sentiments, especially when describing the emotions inspired by the opening festivities.

Official statements meanwhile linked England's preeminence in technology and civilization with her Christianity. In his address to the June 17 meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, Prince Albert said,

We are met at an auspicious moment, when we are celebrating a festival of the civilization of mankind.... And this civilization rests on Christianity; could be raised on Christianity only; can be maintained by Christianity alone.... I feel persuaded that the same earnest zeal and practical wisdom which has made our political constitution an object of admiration to the nations, will, under God's blessing, make her Church likewise a model to the world.

He was speaking of the Protestant Church, of course. At mid-century there was a strong feeling that protestantism fostered progress,
while the superstition and repression of Catholicism blocked it. The Exhibition would put the results of protestantism on display for the world to see.

The Exhibition provided a focus for religious activity, and a temporary cessation of sectarian battles. Prize contests elicited a flood of essays predicting the moral and religious gains to be expected from the Exhibition. Anticipating an unprecedented opportunity for proclaiming God's word to the nations, churchmen and dissenters alike prepared for the challenge. Plans were made to provide worship opportunities during the Exhibition season for visitors, both English and foreign. With the opening of the Exhibition, services were available every week in German, French, and Italian at designated churches, and it was announced that the facilities of the Free Church in Burton-place were available to foreigners of any nation upon application.

English souls were not forgotten. Religious sects welcomed the opportunity to distribute tracts and to make a religious impression on visitors. Evangelists looked eagerly to the working classes,

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3Macaulay explains this feeling in his History of England:
"During the last three centuries, to stunt the growth of the human mind has been her [the Church of Rome's] chief object. Throughout Christendom, whatever advance has been made in knowledge, in freedom, in wealth, and in the arts of life, has been made in spite of her, and has everywhere been in inverse proportion to her power. The loveliest and most fertile provinces of Europe have, under her rule, been sunk in poverty, in political servitude, and in intellectual torpor, while Protestant countries...have been turned by skill and industry into gardens, and can boast of a long list of heroes and statesmen, philosophers and poets."

(The History of England from the Accession of James II [New York, 1849], I, 53-54.)
notoriously lax in church attendance. Sermons were preached and religious lectures planned especially for their benefit. Church organizations arranged for lodging houses in which workers could stay during their visit to the Exhibition without being polluted by the big city.

All sects were busy, the time seemed ripe, and the field was large enough for all harvesters. The mood which infused the Exhibition year with new religious life was one of inclusive, non-doctrinaire Christianity, rather than the zeal of any individual sect. Martin Tupper's "Hymn for All Nations," conceived as a universal psalm for the Exhibition, exemplified the mood. It was, in his words, "a simple psalm so constructed as scarcely to exclude a truth or to offend a prejudice." The psalm was a general offering of praise to the God who had bestowed skill, peace, and brotherhood—all of these gifts being obvious in the Exhibition, and the God to whom they were attributed being just distinct enough to gain the acquiescence of all, but indistinct enough to prevent any doctrinal disputes, even among the diverse peoples into whose languages it was translated. Even visitors who were more interested in the contents of the Exhibition than in its parables could join in such hymns. For the Crystal Palace functioned, as well, almost as a secular church, with a faith based on practicality and common sense rather than on mysticism or fine points of theology.

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Festival of Mammon

That the excitement of the Exhibition sparked visions of the millennium is understandable when we review the mood of that summer. But in their calmer moments even those who most desired a resurgence of faith recognized that the Exhibition was in reality little more than it had been from the first—an industrial arts show of vast scope and proportion. The realization brought disappointment to those whose earnest hope had begotten the fragile belief that a new era of faith was dawning. They had hoped to see the present time outstrip the past; but now they found the hope unfulfilled and the potential unmet.

Charles Kingsley was perhaps the most articulate of these observers. He had been moved to tears on entering the Exhibition building, recorded his wife: "to him it was like going into a sacred place, not a mere show as so many felt it, and still less a mere gigantic shop, in which wares were displayed for selfish purposes, and from mere motives of trade competition." Yet Kingsley grieved at the materialistic and irreligious state of the country, and the tendency of the Exhibition to remain at the level of a palace of Mammon. Having been inspired by Prince Albert's aspirations as expressed in the Mansion House speech, Kingsley was disappointed by the reality:

Great words; but in the hearts of how few, alas! to judge from our modern creed on such matters, must the really

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important and distinctive points of them find an echo. To how few does the whole Exhibition seem to have been any thing but a matter of personal gain or curiosity, for national aggrandisement, insular self-glorification and selfish—I had almost said, treacherous—rivalry with the very foreigners whom we invited as our guests.  

Kingsley accused Englishmen of nominally praising God for His blessings, while really trusting in the works of man:

There may be some official and perfunctory talk of God's blessing on our endeavours: but there seems to be no real belief in us that God, the inspiration of God, is the very fount and root of the endeavours themselves; that He teaches us these great discoveries; that He gives us wisdom to get this wondrous wealth; that He works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. True, we keep up something of the form and tradition of the old talk about such things; we join in prayer to God to bless our Great Exhibition; but we do not believe—we do not believe, my friends—that it was God who taught us to conceive, build, and arrange that Great Exhibition; and our notion of God's blessing it, seems to be God's absence from it; a hope and trust that God will leave it and us alone, and not "visit" it or us in it, or "inter fere" by any "special providences," by storms, or lightning, or sickness, or panic, or conspiracy; a sort of dim feeling that we could manage it all perfectly well without God, but that as He exists, and has some power over natural phenomena, which is not very exactly defined, we must notice His existence over and above our work, lest He should become angry, and "visit" us.  

Presumably his congregation accepted his insight as accurate.

Kingsley was not alone in noticing the dominance of Mammon in the Crystal Palace. Such sentiments were also recorded in the popular literature inspired by the Exhibition. Some contemporaries urged that the Exhibition be regarded as merely the fair that it was, rather than


7 Ibid., pp. 144-145.
as a contrived lesson in piety. A writer calling himself "A Spiritual Watchman of the Church of England" circulated a pamphlet entitled The Theology and Morality of the Great Exhibition, in which he maintained that the press erred in bathing the Crystal Palace in religious glory. While he intended no discredit to either the Exhibition or its planners, he insisted that the Crystal Palace should be described as no more than it really was: "simply a splendid piece of human art dedicated to Mammon." God and Mammon, he maintained, were distinct and contradictory concepts. Even Martin Tupper, whose "Hymn for All Nations" had popularized the God-centered view of the Exhibition, ultimately had second thoughts about its nature. In a poem also published in 1851 he wrote,

Yet was it an unsatisfying meal,
   A poor dry pittance to the Souls of men
   That long for Spiritual food, and then
Only are feasted, when they love and feel!
No more than so; a this-world's commonweal,
   Triumphant Matter ranged from pole to pole;
   And our Valhalla, to high wisdom's ken,
Had not one drop of balm the heart to heal,
   One ray of peace the conscience to console!  

Perhaps Charlotte Brontë was thinking the same thing when she commented that the Exhibition's wonders "appeal too exclusively to the eye and rarely touch the heart or head."  

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8He also found the Prince's doctrine in the Mansion House speech to be "exceedingly erroneous in a scriptural point of view."

9Quoted in Hudson, p. 105.

Religion in a Changing Society

When observers compared the mood of thanksgiving and unity within the Crystal Palace with the turmoil of the religious world in the previous few decades, they saw progress. But when they looked to the evidence in the real world and considered the probable future trends, the role of the church seemed none too secure. The challenge to the religious community was to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing world. In the Exhibition years four main threats stood out: Roman Catholicism, sectarianism, skepticism, and the Church's own inability to meet changing social responsibilities.

Roman Catholicism

England's strong wave of Protestant pride at mid-century was in part an attempt to counteract the threat of Catholicism which had been most recently manifested by the establishment of a Papal diocese on English soil. The Ecclesiastical Titles Bill designed to limit further Papal encroachment had been introduced in Parliament; English reaction was in full swing. The public equated the Pope with the devil, and outspokenly damned him. A writer in Bentley's observed that hatred for the Pope

is written up at every corner, on dead walls, and deserted houses, in shop windows, and stalls and gateways, in pictures, books, and journals; the streets are everywhere chalked over with staggering letters announcing as articulately as that mural calligraphy can articulate any

intelligible purpose the one outburst of protest that at this moment engrosses the heart, brain, lungs, and hands of England, "No Pope!" "No Popery!" 12

The literary output of late 1850 was marked by "an extraordinary influx of tracts on the question of the Papal Aggression," according to Household Narrative (2 [January 1851], 23); "Their number makes it hopeless to even print their titles." Articles in journals and reviews reflected society's concern. After discussing the number of Roman Catholic churches, colleges, convents, monasteries, and schools flourishing in England for the past ten years, for example, a writer in Cooper's Journal expostulated, "who can sit down in indifference as to the spread of Popery?" 13 Short fiction in popular magazines dealt with priests interfering in the confidences of marriage; ladies being incarcerated in convents against their wills; and fake priests assisting rogues in luring women into non-binding marriages. Punch printed a parody of the Canterbury Tales, with the pilgrims heading for Rome. 14 Anti-Papal feelings even precipitated some embarrassing situations at the Exhibition, with visitors objecting to a crucifix prominently displayed in Pugin's Mediaeval Court. Some people worried that anti-Papal zeal might cause England to be less than hospitable to her non-Protestant foreign guests.

Over the past few decades, Romanism had been gaining an increased foothold in England through Irish immigration and as an

12 Bentley's Miscellany, 29 (January 1851), 12:

13 October 26, 1850, p. 473.

14 20 (May 31, 1851), 230.
Figure 24. The Pilgrims to Rome (After Chaucer).
(Punch, 20 (May 31, 1851), 230.)
unlooked for result of the Oxford movement. Tractarians were regarded as wolves within the flock of the Church, likely to entrap new innocents with their doctrines and set them on the path to Rome. By 1851, however, thinkers were suggesting that secessions to Rome were as much due to weakness and schism within the church as to priestly plotting. According to the *Edinburgh Review*, the furor against Papal Aggression was the outburst "of a sense of danger within our own lines"; and the Pope had been emboldened by "disorganization of the garrison he was attacking."¹⁵

**Sectarian Strife**

Mid-century English Protestantism varied widely in doctrine and practice, with the Romish Puseyites at the one extreme and the numerous dissenting sects at the other. Their differences, as observers in 1851 pointed out, meant increased conflict within the family of Christians, and a weakened front against the threats of Roman superstition on the one hand and German rationalism on the other.

There were many divisive issues. The broadening of doctrine had become a political problem within the church. The filling of a bishopric or even of a minor living became a delicate business. Not only the suitability of the man for the job had to be considered, but also his party; the acceptability of his doctrine to the local bishop and clergy; and the holding of doctrine similar enough to that of his

¹⁵⁴ (October 1851), 527.
immediate predecessor to be easily accepted by the congregation (some low church parishes had been known to actually reject a Tory newcomer who tried to introduce surplices and papistical liturgies into their traditional service). In the event of friction on these points, the hearing procedures, civil rather than internal, were apt to intensify the passions. Another issue concerned the Church power structure. Traditionally, decisions on Church appointments and policy had been made by the lay Parliament rather than by the Convocation of churchmen, which retained little more than a symbolic function; but this seemed inadequate in an age of rapid change when government policies were affected by other conditions besides Holy Writ. In January 1851 a group of clerics challenged tradition by sending a petition not to Parliament but to Convocation. By July the issue of Convocation had raised a tempest not only within the Church, but between Church and Dissent as well. Dissenters fought Convocation, fearing that it would strengthen the established Church at their expense. Another point of discord was the proposed expansion of state aid to education, with both Church and Dissent jealous of any support which might be given by the government to the other. Under the resulting crossfire neither side was strengthened; the Church itself was split along Whig/Tory lines; and poor illiterates like Dickens' Joe continued to know "nothink" about religion.

16 In 1851 such a doctrinal dispute rocked the church and came near to splitting it irrevocably when Bishop Philpotts of Exeter rejected the appointment of a Rev. Gorham to a living in his diocese because of his "heretical" doctrine on baptism. For detailed discussion of the sectarian struggles at mid-century, see Owen Chadwick The Victorian Church, Part I.
Contemporary observers were well aware of the conflicts. Grimy satirical verses warned of the dangers "When churchmen and church be grown so frail/ They know not their earthly head from tail," and bemoaned the contrast between the peace of the heavens and the strife of priests and parsons here below:

priests and parsons rave and broil
Their bigot slaves in hot turmoil

But wrangling, jangling, damning zeal
Never did good to commonweal.17

Review articles admitted the problems within the church and examined the elements of the controversies (see Edinburgh Review, October 1851, pp. 527-557). Concerned critics asserted that religious bickering was partially responsible for many of England's problems. Viscount Ingestre blamed "religious dissents, the squabbles, namely, between High Church and Low Church" for slowing the solution of social problems, and the Illustrated London News (February 1, 1851, p. 65) blamed England's shameful illiteracy rate—England allegedly had a greater number of uninstructed than any other country—on the religious bickering which effectively blocked the spread of education.

Even the problem of papal pretensions seemed related to splintering

17 Ye Prophecie of Pierre Reiller, An Heretique Friere of Ye Abbey of Holie Crosse by Waltham. In Ye Whiche is Dimlie Fore-shadowedde Ye Create Exhibitionne of Eighteene Hundrede and Fiftie-One. (London, 1851), pp. 6, 12. This is an eight-page satirical poem on the ideas and events of the Exhibition year, structured around an imaginary situation. Supposedly the coffin of a long-buried friar had been unearthed. A manuscript clutched in the skeleton's hands prophesied the religious wrangling and the exhibition to take place in 1851. The friar had apparently been buried alive for having thoughts which were too advanced for his time.
within the established church. Both Queen Victoria and Lord John Russell agreed that the Puseyites, within the Church, were a greater enemy than the Pope himself.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Skepticism}

It was clear that their positivist philosophy was widely interpreted as skepticism, atheism, and worse, Harriet Martineau and Henry Atkinson had expected that their new book, \textit{Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development} (published January 1851), would evoke both social condemnation for its authors and righteous counterstatements by churchmen. But public response to her "heretical" doctrine surprised Martineau, demonstrating to her both how insecure and vulnerable faith was in 1851, and how ready many people were to accept rationalistic ideas. Her experience supports Fraser's charge that a "clutching despair of unbelief"\textsuperscript{19} lay beneath mid-century faith.

The authors had anticipated a slack market for the book, a boycott of the publisher, and damage to their friendships and writing careers. To their amazement, these effects never materialized. Although "the entire periodical press" condemned the book, Martineau reported, it was "excellently received and widely sympathized with. ... The open avowal of heretical opinion made all the relations of

\textsuperscript{18}Chadwick, p. 296.

\textsuperscript{19}Fraser's, 44 (September 1851), 334.
life sounder than they had ever been."

Martineau had expected that faith would stand firm against her, yet she discovered otherwise. "If I had known," she wrote in her autobiography, "what I could not know till the reception of our volume revealed it to me,—how small is the proportion of believers to the disbelievers in theology to what I had imagined,—I might have proposed a different method; or we might have done our work in a different way. In regard to disbelief in theology, much more had already taken place than I, at least, was aware of." The Church, of course, blamed "sceptics" like Martineau for fostering this doubt, but Martineau interpreted such accusations as yet another evidence of the crumbling of theological belief. If Christian faith was too weak and unsure to withstand conflicting ideas, Martineau reasoned, then the blame should rightfully fall on its untenable position rather than on her philosophy. She and Atkinson insisted, also, that the Church, not they, bore responsibility for lost beliefs:

It is all very fine, talking about people's religious convictions; but what is to become of those who have no such convictions,—that increasing crowd filling up the spaces between the schisms of the churches? The Church is rotting away daily. Convictions are losing their stability. Men are being scattered in the wilderness. Shall we not hold up a light in the distance, and prepare them a shelter from the storm?22

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21Ibid., II, 329-330.

22Ibid., pp. 360-61. Emphasis added.
If the weak were tossed about, how did the central rock of the Church withstand the threat? Poorly, in Martineau's judgment: "I certainly had no idea how little faith Christians have in their own faith till I saw how ill their courage and temper can stand any attack upon it." Atkinson wrote to Martineau:

They fear that...there is substance in the midst of it; there is danger to the state of things; and they dare not honestly face the facts, and meet the argument which they declare to be too superficial to deceive anyone.... Shame upon the land! With that skulking phantom of a dressed-up faith that dares not face the light, in broad day: with God upon their lips, and preaching Christ crucified, they fear to encounter God's truth by the wayside!....

There is no faith in change, in progress, in truth, in virtue, in holiness. It is a terror-stricken age.... The bible is a dead letter. Men worship the air and call it God. God is truth, law, morals, noble deeds of heroism, conscience, self-sacrifice, love, freedom, and cheerfulness. Men have no God. It is yet to be given to them. They have but a log, and are croaking and unsatisfied, and tomorrow they try King Hudson or the devil.

Meanwhile, the Crystal Palace echoed with prayers. Other than its obvious trust in science, the Exhibition had little to remind people of rationalist threats to religion. One could be a non-theist and still join in the songs of praise in the Exhibition. One could have felt the pangs of doubt, and welcomed the pageantry of the Exhibition the more because of it. And one could feel extremely Good in the Exhibition without involving the sticky problem of theology at all.

\[23\text{Ibid., p. 354.}\]
\[24\text{Letter from Atkinson to Martineau, in Autobiography, II, 367-369.}\]
Indifference

A glance at the religious habits of the general population of London convinced some churchmen that Christianity faced a challenge. Infidelity was uncomfortably common—if Christianity had any real message for the world, Christians would have to spread it in a meaningful way.

The new cities, evidence showed, harbored substantial numbers of unbelievers. The nation's first religious census, taken in connection with the civil census of 1851, revealed the indifference of masses of lower-class city dwellers. It discovered vast concentrations in the cotton and coal towns to whom ideas of religion were as foreign as they were to the people of a heathen country. In one of the poorest sections of London, it revealed, only about 6,000 out of a population of 90,000 attended church. The situation was substantiated by observers. One of Mayhew's informants, a trusty costermonger, estimated that not three in one hundred costermongers had ever been in the interior of a church, or any place of worship, or knew what was meant by Christianity. Although exposed to tracts by the City Mission, and aided by occasional priests, the costers, he said, "have no religion at all, and very little notion, or none at all, of what religion or a future state is."


David Bartlett, described the population in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey—"worse infidels than the sun shines upon in Turkey, and darker souls than any that exist in Afghanistan!" The problem was not limited to the costermongers or to the marginally employed. John Garwood, Clerical Secretary of the London City Mission, reported that the baking, shoemaking, and milk trades in London had high concentrations of infidelity; country people frequently lost their religious habits when they moved to London. Contemporaries considered the reasons for this infidelity: some was due to lack of teaching; and some due to teaching which seemed irrelevant to real life.

A handful of churchmen in London took on the challenge of making Christianity relevant, and the emergence of the Christian Socialist movement in 1850-1851 testifies to recognition of the infidelity problem. The solution? The Church should become a social and political force, forging an alliance with the gentlemen and workmen and against the shopkeepers and the Manchester school, whose practices seemed to make English life both unchristian and unhuman for many. In this alliance, the Kingdom of Christ and its authority over industry and trade would be vindicated. The "heathens" of the cities, once they lived in a civilized manner, might no longer be indifferent to Christianity; the infidel bakers could espouse a living religion rather than rejecting the traditional trappings of one.

At the height of the Exhibition, one arm of the Church thus waged war against the threat of indifference. By doing so, it fostered yet more disagreement within the church, which was not yet ready to meddle with the laws of economics.
"But in the vast museum of art and nature now about us, romance almost grows tame and commonplace by the side of realities. ... Fiction in her wildest flights has never dared to imagine such a scene."

(Athenaeum, May 3, 1851, p. 470.)

When we turn to the literary notices in the periodicals of the Exhibition year, we find that some critics sensed that certain changes in literary taste had been developing in the same climate of science and practicality which eventually culminated in the Exhibition.¹ The Exhibition had emerged from a period characterized by growing respect for facts, precision, and close observation of the world, and by an expanding conviction that the useful arts were as valuable as the ornamental. During this period, they claimed, literature showed a tendency in the same direction, becoming more attentive to facts and close observation, and more attuned to social purpose.²

¹As used by these critics, the terms "literature" and "literary" included historical, technical, and journalistic writings as well as literary art; but the critics clearly considered their insights to be as applicable to belles lettres as to other concerns.

²This perception was not new in 1851. A similar idea had been expressed ten years previously by a reviewer in the Athenaeum (Sept. 25, 1841, p. 740) who observed that the age of romance was almost over because it was "at variance with the spirit of the present age. The nineteenth century is distinguished by a craving for the positive
In a leading article entitled "The Literature of the Exhibition" (Sept. 6, 1851, pp. 289-90), a writer for the Illustrated London News discussed the link he perceived between the Exhibition and literary taste. "For many years," he maintained, "it has been observed, particularly in the manufacturing districts, and in the minds connected with them, that the tendency of literature has been toward realities," including careful observation of the condition of society. This concern with the "domain of the real and the true" he pointed out, was not a sudden development at the time of the Exhibition, but had obviously been progressing for some time, and was not to be mistaken for a passing fad like love for sentimental novels, or fashions in dress, or even like running to the World's Fair itself. It was, rather, "part of the general intellect--a permanent step forward, the necessary consequence of the past, and indicating the more advanced future to which society is hastening" (p. 290).

The tendency was heightened, he claimed, by the Exhibition, where literary men learned increased habits of precision and a spirit of close and minute observation: "It is for them, in fact, a new education; and, banishing the poetry of fictions and dreams, will inspire them with the poetry of reality" (p. 290). Moreover, he felt that the taste of readers would be altered—"The mind will be drilled by many charming novelties into a love of facts, and will not willingly go back to vagueness uncertainty, and fiction." Thus and the real—it is essentially an age of analysis and criticism... and these faculties are...the natural antagonists to the imagination."
educated, the public would require a similar spirit in writings not connected with the Exhibition. He anticipated that close consideration of the "realities of his condition" would help man to discover and apply the laws of the universe for the betterment of society. For it was by attention to "the real and the true" that men could expect to maintain and improve themselves—"we cannot live by fictions and unrealities."

Another critic, David Masson in the North British Review, had also noticed this propensity. One of the most remarkable signs of the time, asserted Masson in February 1851, was the appearance and flourishing of a "Literature of Social Reference"—a species of literature devoted to illustrating and improving the condition of the people. Although this type of literature had been growing in dimension for some years, said Masson, it was only recently that literary men had so fully adopted the cause and added this crusading literature to the traditional genres—"It is only of late that literary men have looked abroad on contemporary human life, as overspreading the rural earth, or pent up in masses within the walls of cities, and said to themselves deliberately and consciously, 'Here is a field for us'" (p. 209).

Not a minor development, this trend even threatened to supersede "pure literature," claimed Masson. "All literature seems to be flowing towards this channel, so that there seems a likelihood that we shall soon have no literature at all but a literature of social

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3 He spoke of it both as a separate genre and as an influence on traditional genres, such as fiction.
reference" (p. 209). Although he realized the disturbing consequences of such an eventuality—chiefly the crudities that would be passed off as literature and the noisy clamor over ephemeral matters—Masson found the possibility not without its merits. For after all, he reasoned, the literary effort of Europe from the fifth to the tenth centuries had been "thoroughly practical and stimulative to action... aimed solely at guiding the conduct of men"; literary men in all ages had really been the organs of the sapienza volgare; and the poets of old had known that even the highest artistic work was rooted in the human condition. Besides, he concluded, there was much to be gained, even if pure literature were temporarily overshadowed—by focusing their powers of analysis and observation on social problems, literary men could help to uncover natural laws and keep England on a progressive course. The best of the new literature, he hoped, "would reconcile a habit of energetic activity in human affairs, with all possible devotion to the poetical, the abstract, or the transcendental."

The trends identified by the Illustrated London News and the North British Review describe the taste of a wide public including, but not limited to, the readers of novels. Readers at the time of the Exhibition, it seems, were increasingly interested in reading about things in the everyday world; esteemed literature which was practical rather than ornamental; believed that reading was a good way to learn about things outside one's immediate sphere; and
willingly relied on the analytical "eyes" of the man of letters as a source of insight.

Charles Kingsley, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Carlyle each produced a major work in the period between the establishment of the Royal Commission (January 1850) and the dismantling of the Exhibition building (summer 1852). We can see in these works some indication of the way in which tastes developing during the preceding decades were expressed at mid-century. Each of them—Bleak House, Alton Locke, and Latter-Day Pamphlets—carried a strong flavor of journalism, as I will demonstrate in the chapters which follow. In each, the subject was the society in which the author lived. In each, the author assumed the role of educator, bringing both information and insight to readers who might otherwise be without access to either. Insofar, then, as they reflect the emphasis on "realities" which culminated in the show in Hyde Park, these works share in the spirit of the Exhibition.

But here arises the paradox noted in my introduction. We of the twentieth-century may well ask: What about the authors' failure to mention the Great Exhibition (in these works as well as others) at a time when the Athenaeum was equating its significance with the "lights which Rembrandt threw into the centre of his grand and sombre pictures" (see above, p. 3)? We know from their letters and speeches, after all, that all three were keenly aware of the Exhibition euphoria. And what about the dark portrayal of society in Bleak House, Alton Locke, and Latter-Day Pamphlets, at a time when England felt ample justification for pride? Were these writers willfully
resisting the optimism which the Exhibition had inspired in countless journalists and versifiers?

The situation becomes less puzzling when we, like the reading public of 1851, look beyond the Exhibition reportage to the other concerns of the day. We gain new perspective by recalling that the mid-century years were a time not only of celebration but of general self-analysis; that even those who testified to England’s progress were concerned to keep her on a progressive course; that opinions about the condition of England were certainly not unanimous, despite the evidence of the Crystal Palace; and that it was not uncommon for the Crystal Palace to symbolize, even for journalists, what England ought to be, but had not yet become. In this light we can appreciate the indirect impact of the Great Exhibition on the works of these three authors. Like many of the anonymous writers quoted in chapters 2 - 6 above, Dickens, Kingsley, and Carlyle each viewed the Exhibition as a reminder that much work lay ahead for England and that complacence was deadly. Even if they shared the general wonder at the amazing feat which England had accomplished in Hyde Park, therefore, their mid-century works dealt not with the celebration of progress, but rather with the task ahead; they wrote about the macrocosm of society rather than about its microcosm in the Crystal Palace. Part of each author’s purpose was to foster continued progress by making readers aware of pressing social issues and by suggesting solutions. In this way, even though they were critical of English society, Bleak House, Alton Locke, and Latter-Day Pamphlets projected but another side of the social optimism symbolized by the Exhibition.
Chapter 8

*Bleak House*

"a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together."

*(Bleak House, p. 115)*

Perhaps more than any other major author, Charles Dickens was directly involved with activities associated with the Exhibition. He served on the short-lived working-class committee, as noted above (p. 92); he signed the petition urging installation of public rest-rooms for the convenience of Exhibition visitors (p. 23); and in January 1851, according to a letter from Lord Granville (of the Finance Committee) to General Grey (Private Secretary to Prince Albert), Dickens criticized the policy of delaying shilling admissions until after the opening weeks.\(^1\) He suggested to Bulwer Lytton that they schedule the opening of Bulwer's play, "Not So Bad As We Seem," in which Dickens was acting, to take best advantage of the Exhibition crowds\(^2\); his close association with Joseph Paxton, who helped design the set for the play, kept him well informed of Exhibition plans (Paxton personally showed Dickens and W. P. Frith through the icy

\(^1\)The letter is in the *Royal Archives: Exhibition of 1851*, as quoted in Fay, p. 138.

unfinished Exhibition hall in February); he toured the Exhibition's Model Lodging House with Edwin Chadwick on May 28th; and as editor of *Household Words* read manuscripts dealing with the Exhibition and consciously edited out excessive references to it.

We may conclude, therefore, that Dickens was peripherally involved with the Exhibition in several different ways; but the evidence also tells us that he thought that too much was made of it. On May 11 he reported to Mrs. Watson that he was "used up" by the Exhibition:

> I don't say that 'there is nothing in it"—there's too much. I have only been twice; so many things bewildered me. I have a natural horror of sights, and the fusion of so many sights in one has not decreased it. I am not sure that I have seen anything but the fountain and perhaps the Amazon.

Later, in a July 27 letter to Wills, he wrote:

> I have always had an instinctive feeling against the Exhibition, of a faint, inexplicable sort. I have a great confidence in its being a correct one somehow or other—perhaps it was a foreshadowing of its bewilderment of the public. My apprehension—and prediction—is, that they will come out of it at last, with that feeling of boredom and lassitude (to say nothing of having spent their money) that the reaction will not be as wholesome and vigorous and quick, as folks expect.

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6 Quoted in Fay, p. 20.
As mentioned earlier, the Dickens novel which appeared soon after did not refer directly to the Exhibition, but, as I shall show, it was not uninfluenced by this major event.

**Dickens' New Novel**

Although Part I of *Bleak House* did not appear until March 1852 and the novel was not completed until September 1853, Dickens was actively planning it while the excitement of the Exhibition gripped London. He mentioned in a letter to Forster in August 1851 his restlessness while planning his new story; letters show that as early as September 7 his "new book was waiting to be born"; he began the actual writing in November 1851; and he had completed two numbers by March 1852.

Meanwhile, several of his speeches and articles in *Household Words* show that Dickens, like other mid-century writers (see above, pp. 42-46), was evaluating the condition of society. Although there was much to see at the Exhibition, its wonders did not impress him very much with England's progress. Instead, he seems to have been more concerned with aspects of English life which had not yet been transformed by the application of human genius. He was concerned with what remained to be done outside the Crystal Palace. An article in *Household Words* referred to the need:

A Tunnel under the Thames is called for—and it is accomplished. A stupendous iron Tubular Bridge is called for—and it is accomplished. An enormous Exhibition Palace for the Industry of all Nations is called for—and it is accomplished. But there, lie our over-crowded burial-grounds, generating a poisonous atmosphere in the thick
of the living and loathing people! There, runs the polluted Thames, of which we are compelled to drink! There, stands Smithfield and other nuisances! And there, sit the Corporation of London, and the Metropolitan Commissioners of Sewers! Why are none of these evils removed? Why do these great and universally-demanded national works stick fast in the mud of obstinacy and imbecility, and leave us all in the 'Slough of Despond'?

Dickens' speech to the May 10 meeting of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association conveyed the same frustration. Even after it had been demonstrated that a centralized Board of Health was a powerful weapon in containing the ravages of cholera, he complained, people would not accept the idea. The "mischief" done by dirt continued, and it remained as certain as ever that "if you once have a vigorous pestilence raging furiously in St. Giles, no mortal list of Lady Patronesses can keep it out of Almack's." Dickens seemed to take hope, however, from the fact that the Crystal Palace, like the Board of Health, had once met resistance and yet had triumphed:

We have a transparent instance very near at hand of the mysterious arrangement that no great thing can possibly be done without a certain amount of nonsense being talked about it in the way of objections.

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7Household Words, March 22, 1851, p. 617. He went on to answer his own rhetorical question: "so long as the people of England will endure all this, no one of these most desirable and universally demanded works will ever be accomplished."

8The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford, 1960), p. 128. St. Giles, as explained above, was a notorious London slum; Almack's was a fashionable assembly room in King St., St. James's (also known as Willis' Rooms) where such functions as dramatic readings and elegant balls were held.

9Ibid., p. 130.
From early in 1851 the idea of the Great Exhibition seemed to be linked in Dickens' mind not with the arrival of the millennium but with the enormity of what yet needed to be done and with the problem of motivating people towards tasks which he believed lay within their powers. The Crystal Palace rising in Hyde Park inspired his dream of a very different kind of Exhibition—not of England's triumphs, but of her weaknesses; not to be admired, but to be energetically pitched into. Dickens seemed to share the New Year's sentiments expressed in *Household Words* (January 1851) by the aged personification of the Year 1850 as he drew his final breaths:

I have seen... a project carried into execution for a great assemblage of the peaceful glories of the world. I have seen a wonderful structure, reared in glass, by the energy and skill of a great natural genius, self-improved.... Which of my children shall behold the Princes, Prelates, Nobles, Merchants, of England, equally united for another Exhibition—for a great display of England's sins and negligences, to be, by steady contemplation of all eyes, and steady union of all hearts and hands, set right?\(^{10}\)

The old man imagined such a display set up for study in the Exhibition building. "Come hither my Right Reverend Brother... come hither, from a life of Latin Verses and Quantities, and study the Humanities through these transparent windows! Wake, Colleges of Oxford, from day-dreams of ecclesiastical melodrama, and look in on these realities in the day-light.... Listen, my Lords and Gentlemen, to the roar within, so deep, so real, so low down, so incessant and accumulative!" Unlike the planned Exhibition in Hyde Park, it would not run its course in six months' time, but would remain until the "sins and

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\(^{10}\) *Household Words*, January 4, 1851, p. 338. Emphasis added.
negligences" were redressed. "Nothing but work in the right spirit, will quiet it for a second, or clear an inch of space in this dark Exhibition of the bad results of our doings! Where shall we hold it? When shall we open it?"

The novel which Dickens began later that year was, in some limited ways, just such a "dark exhibition," anatomizing the remissness of society so that readers could "come hither, and study." While it would be stretching probability to suggest that Dickens consciously designed his novel on the pattern of a reverse image of the Great Exhibition, it seems reasonable to suppose that the continued jubilation which Dickens found so tiresome during the summer of 1851 had something to do with his decision to write a social novel very different from David Copperfield, the serialization of which had concluded the preceding November. Dickens used his novel to open readers' eyes to needed reform. The intertwining themes of the novel provided "exhibits" not only of the curse of Chancery, but of other shameful situations whose existence was inevitable as long as Englishmen remained unconscious of, or indifferent to, the evils which their society had generated.

Another Exhibition

The first number revealed that Bleak House would not present an amiable picture of mid-Victorian England. Its opening paragraphs pilloried Chancery procedure as an abomination inconsistent with

11Ibid.
CHANCERY REFORM.

John Russell. "Quilt 'em, Tommy! Quilt 'em! They'll Go when They're Warm! We'll Keep Up with 'em!"

Figure 25. Chancery Reform
(Punch, 20 (April 12, 1851), 154.)
England's advanced civilization. "Never can there come fog too thick," asserted the narrator on page 1, "never can there come mud and mire too deep to assort with the groping and floundering conditions which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth."12 After a paragraph heavy with images of darkness and incompetence the narrator summed up the significance of Chancery in mid-century England:

This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every mad-house, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!" (p. 2)

Having recently encountered Exhibition symbolism everywhere they looked, readers might have sensed in Bleak House variations on familiar themes. Exhibition rhetoric had delighted in a society proudly basking in the light of crystal windows, attended by all the world, and with very little of which to be ashamed. Dickens' image throughout the entire novel, however, was dark and airless, dealing in mist, decay, death, dim windows which admitted no light, bleak houses, and a dilapidated neighborhood whose name bore witness to stagnation—Tom-All-Alone's. In contrast to recent journalistic proclamations of a new era of human felicity, Bleak House traced the

12 Citations to the novel are from Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (Riverside Edition; Boston, 1956).
deadly impression of Chancery's Great Seal—the Jarndyce property reduced to a street of "perishing blind houses" where "every door might be Death's door" (p. 74), and the miserable population haunting its wreckage:

As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than...all the fine gentlemen in office...shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it. (p. 167)

Its impress on those like the man from Shropshire, Miss Flite, and Richard Carstone, who depended on Chancery for justice, was little better—despair, poverty, broken spirit, and (eventually) death.

Exhibition journalism had boasted of progress and change; Dickens' image was one of deadlock and stoppage. The men and women of Sir Leicester's circle (the governing class of England) contrasted unfavorably with the liberal and enlightened aristocrats who had reportedly mixed on an equal basis with the workers in the Exhibition. Unlike the visitors to the Exhibition, members of the fashionable circle in Bleak House were bound by "precedent and usage," both in legal institutions and in social attitudes. They were "oversleeping Rip Van Winkles who have played at strange games through a great deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties, whom the knight will wake one day" (p. 6). Their world was isolated from the moving age—"the evil of it is," commented the narrator, "that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweler's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle
around the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air" (p. 6). Elegant ladies and gentlemen in it "have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world, and to keep down all its realities." The images which Dickens used in describing England's officials stood in unmistakable contrast with images recently spread in the popular press, reminding Dickens' readers that despite the progress celebrated in the previous year, strong elements in society still had not faced up to the pace of transition, and evils unacknowledged by those in real power still ravaged the country.

**Bleak House** echoed several of the Exhibition themes discussed in chapters 2 through 6 above, again from a negative point of view. Individuals from all levels of society were linked not by a new social equality, but rather by their entanglement in "the web of very different lives" (p. 491) and by the "retribution" worked by disease (p. 475). The narrator stressed the unexpectedness of connections between a poor law writer and Chesney Wold (p. 126), between Esther and the World of Fashion (p. 485), and between Jo and the "house in town" (p. 167):

What connection can there have been between many people... who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, neverthe-\*\-less, been very curiously brought together! (p. 167)

(The image of the "gulf" as we saw above in chapter 3, had been commonly enough raised in contrast with the Great Exhibition claims of brotherhood.) The ruling class in the world of **Bleak House** had acquired no new respect for the dignity of labor. Sir Leicester viewed any mechanical talent as incipient Wat Tylerism, had only
vague notions of the industrial cities of the north, and refused to believe that any action should be taken to meet the changing needs of a society no longer based on the land. The religious millennium was nowhere in sight. Although ostensibly pious, Mrs. Pardiggle and Mr. Chadband had no message for brickmakers and crossingsweepers, and Dickens made it clear that Jo's moral ignorance was chargeable to competition between religious factions. Said Jo, "Different times, there was other genlmen come down Tom-All-Alone's a-prayin', but they all mostly sed as the t'other wuns prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-talking to theirselves, or a-passing blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin' to us. We never knowd nothink. I never knowd what it was all about" (p. 491).

Bleak House "exhibited" many of the other "sins and negligences" of mid-century England which demanded "steady contemplation of all eyes and steady union of all hearts and hands" if they were to be set right. One was the problem of public health, both in regard to the strain put upon water supply, sewerage, and housing by an increasingly concentrated population, and to the spread of disease from overcrowded intramural burying-grounds. Observers, Dickens among them, were frustrated by the ineffectuality of England's leaders in resolving remediable evils, since it was an established fact, according to the Times, that

in English towns generally half the attainable period of life is lost to all who are born...and that the destroying agent is typhus fever, generated by localized filth and excessive moisture. Bad drainage and immoderate dampness,—
that is to say, too little water where it is needed, and
too much where it is out of place, are the generating
elements of typhus.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite this knowledge, London remained filthy and pest-ridden, a
serious concern for reformers in the Exhibition year when excessive
and preventible mortality undercut England's pride in her progress,
and whole districts presented "a picture more like some foul and
fantastic nightmare, than an account of the metropolis of the greatest
nation in Europe."\textsuperscript{14} The problem was discussed in the Reviews (the
Quarterly Review, Sept. 1850 and March 1851 and the North British
Review, May 1851, among others); was evidenced by the weekly report
of mortality figures in the Economist; and was highlighted by Dr.
Collier's pamphlet \textit{The Health of the Metropolis During the Year of the
Great Exhibition}, whose object was to "arouse and instruct authority;
to enlist the philanthropist and the statistician; to withdraw the
film from the eyes of the blind, and the veil which has been thrown
over a subject second in importance to none."\textsuperscript{15}

Dickens did his part to withdraw the veil. In addition to his
involvement with the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, his stated
concern with sanitary improvements (Preface to \textit{Martin Chuzzlewit},

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Times}, Sept. 4, 1851. Quoted in John Butt, "Bleak House in

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{North British Review}, May 1851, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{15}Dr. Collier, \textit{The Health of the Metropolis During the Year of
the Great Exhibition} (London, 1851), p. 3. Collier was especially
concerned that officials tried to gloss over the problem during the
Great Exhibition, so as to avoid national embarrassment.
Figure 26. A COURT FOR KING CHOLERA.
(Punch, 23 (Sept. 25, 1852), 139.)
written November 1849), his articles in Household Words, and his association with the slum-clearance projects of Miss Burdett-Coutts, 16 Bleak House introduced thousands of readers to situations similar to those documented by the press. The hovels near St. Albans, where Esther first met the brickmakers' families, were ill-drained, damp, and offensive, "with pigsties close to the broken windows," and surrounded by "stagnant pools." "Look at that water," growled the surly brickmaker. "Smell it! That's what we drink. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin, instead! Ain't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty—it's naturally dirty, and it's naturally wholesome; and we've had five dirty and wholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides" (p. 82).

London's Tom-All-Alone's was even worse, packed with foul lodgings "offensive to every sense"—crowded, filthy, unventilated. In Tom's stinking fever houses, Inspector Bucket was informed, "the people 'have been down by dozens,' and have been carried out dead and dying 'like sheep with the rot'" for months and months (p. 236).

Like the writer in Chambers's who had described the boasted civilization in the Exhibition year as a "diversified patchwork [of] refinement and rags" (above, p. 65), Dickens was aware of London's shameful contrast. Like Bartlett and Ingestre (above, pp. 78, 79) he was concerned that one half did not know how the other half lived.

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16See details on all of these activities of Dickens in Butt, pp. 11-13; and in Trevor Blount, "Dickens' Slum Satire in Bleak House," Modern Language Review, 60 (1965), 341. Blount calls attention to reports in the press of the time which attest to the authenticity of Dickens' portrait.
As Mayhew had done in the Exhibition year, Bleak House urged Englishmen to "bestir themselves" (above, p. 79). Snagsby's mission into the "villainous" streets of Tom-All-Alone's, which left him scarcely believing his senses and feeling "as if he were going, every moment, deeper down, into the infernal gulf" (p. 236), might almost be the dramatic expression of Household Words' earlier invitation to complacent readers to "study the Humanities through these transparent windows....and look in on these realities in the daylight."

Bleak House carried revelations, too, of the pest-generating urban graveyards, another evil requiring melioration. By means of the novel, Dickens' readers followed the remains of Nemo ("our dear brother here departed") to a ghastly resting-place:

to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed; while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official back-stairs—would to Heaven they had departed!—are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial.

With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate—with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life—here, they lower our dear brother down a foot or two: here, sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside: a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilisation and barbarism walked this boastful island together (p. 115).

They heard Jo attest to the shallowness of the grave, a common abomination since sextons and ministers received payment for each
"dear departed" who could be crammed into the overcrowded churchyard.\(^{17}\)

In this regard the graveyard horrors could be considered as one example of a widely diffused pattern of "doings" productive of "bad results." As portrayed in *Bleak House*, Englishmen on many levels had grown so self-centered and acquisitive that their interrelationships were warped, pulling the entire social fabric askew. Individuals were blind to needs larger than their own. Chancery lawyers regarded prolonged suits as valuable commodities, regardless of their toll in human tragedy; attorneys on the pattern of Wholes sucked souls from clients like Richard, with the glib excuse of needing to provide for their own daughters; clergymen like Chadband could not see beyond the broad expanses of their own bellies. Some men, like Harold Skimpole and "Deportment" Turveydrop, seemed merely childlike in their abdication of adult responsibility; but as the novel developed they were shown to be not essentially different from Grandfather Smallweed whose selfishness was only thinly disguised by blaming it on his imaginary friend in the city. Outcasts like Jo and Guster the workhouse girl were more used than succored by their better-off brothers.\(^{18}\) Even the frenzied pseudo-philanthropic activities of Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mr. Quale, and Mr. Gusher were revealed as

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\(^{18}\)For a detailed exploration of the relationship of Dickens' "outcasts" theme to the contemporary situation, see P.A.W. Collins, "*Bleak House* and Dickens's Household Narrative," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 14 (1960), 345-349.
doing more service to the philanthropists' egos than to a society
desperately needful of "work in the right spirit." It was the self
less characters like John Jarndyce, Esther Summerson, and Allan
Woodcourt who provided a "steady union of...hearts and hands" to set
the negligences right.

The structure of the novel, with the author himself sometimes
speaking through the "omniscient narrator," allowed Dickens to empha­
size the significance of his "exhibition" by frequent capping of
descriptive passages with exclamations of insight. The opening chap­
ter, for example, ended on such a note:

> If all the injustice [Chancery] has committed, and all
> the misery it has caused, could only be locked up with
> it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre,—
> why so much the better for other parties than the parties
> in Jarndyce and Jarndyce! (p. 5)

So, too, did many of the sections describing poor Jo, such as that in
Chapter 16 where his existence was judged inferior to that of the
lower animals. A dog, suggested Dickens, was better educated than
Jo; on market day

> the blinded oxen, over-goaded, over-driven, never guided,
> run into wrong places and are beaten out; and plunge, red-
> eyed and foaming, at stone walls; and often sorely hurt
> the innocent, and often sorely hurt themselves. Very like
> Jo and his order; very, very like! (p. 169)

After describing Jo's death, Dickens pointed the moral homeward
towards those same people who had been invited, in Household Words,
to view the "dark Exhibition"—

> Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead,
> Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead,
> men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts.
> And dying thus around us every day. (p. 492)
Although English life as presented in Bleak House seems almost a conscious denial of the progress symbolized by the Great Exhibition, we can best understand Dickens' position by recalling the larger concerns of the mid-century years as reflected in the newspapers and periodicals. Writers were eager to trace the relationship of the present time to the past and to the future; they were attentive to the direction of change, desiring to keep an upward course; and they believed that social problems, like technical ones, could be resolved (see above, pp. 42-49). Identification and close analysis of a problem were considered essential steps toward solution. Seen in this context, challenging readers to melioration, Dickens' novel seems less at variance with the spirit of the Exhibition.

Literature of Reality

In creating his dark image, Dickens made little attempt to portray society as a sociologist might have seen it, with all of its members objectively represented. He was of course exaggerating when, for example, he used the Dedlock circle to represent the entire aristocracy in order to make his point. But if some of his situations were fictional, much of his material was not. In its subject matter and purpose, Bleak House seems to reflect the interest in realities which critics tell us had been gradually expanding in the decades before the Exhibition, and which underlay the Exhibition itself. Bleak House was fiction, but not of the far-away, other-world sort which we are told was increasingly ill-suited to the interests of a practical age (see above, chapter 7). Bleak House was a novel of the
here and now, rich with the sense of contemporary London and the pulse of middleclass life. In the opening chapters of the novel especially, London seemed almost to emerge as a chief character, with its thousands of foot-passengers, mire-covered horses and dogs, and haggard gas lights, all struggling through the fog, and with even its extremes closely enveloped in one unifying "London particular." The reader would have been constantly aware of the local environs of the story and of the daily pursuits of London people. The novel found as much of its plot interest in the lives of shopkeepers and wage earners as in its expose of Chancery abuses and in the solution of its central high-life mystery. Bleak House seems in this regard to support the assertion of the Illustrated London News (see above, p. 166) that having been "drilled by many charming novelties [in the Exhibition] into a love of facts," readers would "not willingly go back to vagueness, uncertainty, and fiction."

Bleak House thus embodied the Exhibition spirit in a number of ways. It touched Exhibition themes, but from a different viewpoint. It echoed Exhibition symbols, if only indirectly. Although a pleasing story intended for the popular market, it was also a social novel which reminded readers that all was not well in England. It focused on social "realities," although it was primarily fiction in which the journalistic note was often forgotten. It provided a compromise between fact and fiction well-suited to changing tastes, purposely dwelling, as Dickens himself announced, "upon the romantic side of familiar things."
Figure 27. REFORM REMOVING THE BANDAGE FROM THE EYES OF JUSTICE.
(Punch, 21 (August 16, 1851), 84.)
Chapter 9

Alton Locke—Tailor and Poet

"...the eye only sees what it brings with it the power of seeing."

(Alton Locke, p. 28)

"Is no the verra idea of the classic tragedy defined to be, man conquered by circumstance? Canna ye see it there? And the verra idea of the modern tragedy, man conquering circumstance?--and I'll show you that, too—in mony a garret where no eye but the gude God's enters... Is there na poetry there?.... Ay, Shelley's gran'; always gran'; but Fact is grander—God and Satan are grander. All around ye, in every gin shop and costermonger's cellar, are God and Satan at death grips; every garret is a haill Paradise Lost or Paradise Regained."

(Alton Locke, pp. 96-7, 101)

We know from his sermons and from the biography written by his wife that although Charles Kingsley was enthusiastic about the Exhibition, he, like Dickens, was keenly aware that English life at mid-century did not measure up to the effusive claims made about it by Exhibition journalists. "The opening of the Great Exhibition was a matter of great interest to him," wrote his wife, "not only for its own sake, but for that of the Great Prince who was the prime mover in the undertaking. On entering the building he was moved to tears; to him it was like going into a sacred place, not a mere show as so many felt it, and still less a gigantic shop, in which wares were displayed
for selfish purposes, and from mere motives of trade competition.\footnote{Fanny Kingsley, ed., Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of his Life (London, 1877), I, 280.}

But, she continued, his response was not entirely joyful:

The science, the art, the noble ideas of universal peace, universal brotherhood it was meant to shadow forth and encourage, excited him intensely, while the feeling that the realization of these great and noble ideas was as yet so far off, and that these achievements of physical science were mere forecastings of a great but distant future, saddened him as profoundly.\footnote{Ibid., emphasis added.}

Kingsley's sermons that summer repeatedly reminded his congregations of the contrast between the "great words" spoken about the Exhibition and the actual materialistic and irreligious state of the country (see above, pp. 150-1).

Kingsley wrote no book specifically about the Exhibition, but during the winter of 1849-50 when early preparations for the Exhibition were taking place, he wrote Alton Locke, a novel about the society which the Exhibition was to come to symbolize; it was published in August 1850, shortly after the contractors had begun construction on the glass palace in Hyde Park. While Alton Locke did not refer directly to the coming Exhibition, it reflected the Exhibition spirit in both of the ways discussed at the end of Chapter 7—it focused on the "realities" of the present day; and in the spirit of perfectibility it undertook the practical task of arousing the public to correct injustices suffered by the laboring poor. Arising from the Christian Socialist movement, Kingsley's book went beyond the
usual pamphleteering using a fictional form which would entertain as it instructed. According to a reviewer in the *Athenaeum* (September 7, 1850), the novel form allowed Kingsley "to arouse the attention of a wider class than that which refers to blue books and official reports, and force them to look at the social evils that are lying at their doors." And according to David Masson in the *North British Review*, it was a specimen "of the kind of works that men of genius would still be able to produce" even if "pure literature" gave way before the wave of social writing.³

Alton Locke was structured as an autobiography in which the narrator, a London tailor of that name, told of the chain of experiences which had led him both into the excesses of Chartism and into the eventual realization that a better solution might be achieved by means of Christian Socialism. Through Locke's experiences, the reader would learn that the predicament of the working poor was a compound of many resolvable problems: economic practices which led to the misery of slop work; economic and social barriers which effectively shut off intelligent artisans from the education necessary if they were to provide responsible leadership for their own class; the separation of the upper and lower classes by gulfs of mutual ignorance; and the failure of the church to adequately serve the working classes.

It was Kingsley's aim, through the persona of Alton Locke, to convince the public of the existence and urgency of a problem with

which they might never have had direct contact, even though it
existed close about them, and to warn of its pressing significance.
Like Dickens, he assumed the dual role of journalist (recording the
facts of the present day) and social prophet (interpreting the
materials and drawing conclusions for the instruction of the readers).
As other writers were to do during the Exhibition season, Kingsley
tried to expand his readers' vision and stimulate their desire for
improvement. "Go, scented Belgravian!", exhorted the narrator in
Alton Locke, "and see what London is! and then go to the library
which God has given thee—one often fears in vain—and see what
science says this London might be!" Readers in 1851 might well have
substituted the noun "Exhibition" for "library" without substantially
altering his meaning.
Kingsley's story was designed to open his readers' eyes, just as
the essays in Meliora were to bring the "full truth" to Ingestre's
readers in 1851 (see p. 64, above). Kingsley showed his readers,
first of all, that by buying their clothes cheaply at new "show
shops" they were directly responsible for the starvation consuming
whole classes of journeymen tailors. Conditions in the "honorable
trade" had been bad enough, with its crowded and ill-ventilated
workrooms where respiratory diseases flourished. Yet the spread of
"slop work" made earlier conditions seem almost elysian. Tailors

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4 Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke—Tailor and Poet, Everyman's
Library edition (London, J.M. Dent and Sons), p. 95. Citations are
from this edition.

5 Masters saved money by closing their own workrooms and letting
out their work at the cheapest figure in the open market.
were forced to submit themselves to middleman contractors or "sweaters" who retained a percentage of the payment for each garment passing through their hands, and who kept their workmen in virtual slavery. Kingsley showed his readers the horrors of the sweater's den from which Locke was able to free Billy Porter. It was "a fetid, choking den, with just room enough in it for the seven or eight sallow, starved beings, who, coatless, shoeless, and ragged, sat stitching, each on his truckle bed" (p. 198); obliged to buy their meals from the sweater at inflated prices, the men soon were deeply in debt, subsisting for days on nothing more than tea and crusts, and unable to leave because even their clothing had been pawned. When discovered after five months' imprisonment, Porter was a skeleton:

his hands and feet were all chapped and bleeding. Neither shoe nor stocking did he possess; his only garments were a ragged shirt and trousers; and—and, in horrible mockery of his own misery, a grand new flowered satin vest, which to-morrow was to figure in some gorgeous shop-window! (p. 198)

Kingsley wanted readers to be aware that the fancy "slop" vest represented vast economic injustice. His tone was not unlike that of the speaker at the Metropolitan Sanitary Association meeting in May 1851 who (as reported in Household Words) reminded those who would visit the Exhibition of "the crowded workshops...damp cellars, and... stifling garrets in which so much of that collected mass of ingenuity and splendour had been elaborated" (see above, p.102).

The reader was taken as well to see the "modern tragedy" of hardworking needlewomen, forced by meagre wages to chose between prostitution and starvation. Locke described the bare and comfortless
garret room inhabited by four poor women: by the cold fireplace a
miserable old woman muttered her fear of the workhouse,

while upon a few rags on the floor lay a girl, ugly, small-
pox marked, hollow-eyed, emaciated, her only bedclothes the
skirt of a large handsome new riding-habit, at which two
other girls, wan and tawdry, were stitching busily, as
they sat right and left of her on the floor. (p. 97)

Emigration—leaving England—seemed their only hope, Lizzy, one of
the busy stitchers, mused:

Oh! if that fine lady, as we're making that riding-habit
for, would just spare only half the money that goes to
dressing her up to ride in the park, to send us out to
the colonies, wouldn't I be an honest girl there?—maybe
an honest man's wife! Oh, my God, wouldn't I slave my
fingers to the bone to work for him! Wouldn't I mend my
life then! I couldn't help it—it would be like getting
into heaven out of hell. But now—we must—we must, I
tell you. I shall go mad soon, I think, or take to drink.
When I passed the gin shop down there just now, I had to
run like mad for fear I should go in; and if I once took
to that— (p. 100)

The existence of such circumstances in actual life was documented by
Mayhew and by Kingsley himself in "Cheap Clothes and Nasty." And as
the Exhibition approached, the problem was noticed as a contra-
indication for celebration; a writer in Blackwood's (as noted above,
p. 66) experienced "a feeling akin to loathing" when he contrasted
the "accounts of Brobdignag [sic] glass houses" with workers who "are
driven in hundreds from their hearth and homes and cast upon the wide
world."

Kingsley's novel introduced readers to the "ghastly" and "sick-
ening" living conditions in the slums of London, and emphasized
their effect on inhabitants. Readers saw, through Alton's eyes, the
streets of St. Giles—"brawling torrents of filth, and poverty, and
Figure 28. THE NEEDLEWOMAN at HOME and ABROAD.
(Punch, 18 (Jan.12,1850), 15.)
sins (p. 95); and the "wilderness" of Bermondsey, where, in one of the crazy houses lay three naked corpses, the family of the sweater, Jemmy Downes, dead of the pestilence which rose through the floor-boards of the house:

What a room! A low lean-to with wooden walls, without a single article of furniture; and through the broad chinks of the floor shown up as it were ugly glaring eyes, staring at us. They were the reflections of the rushlight in the sewer below. The stench was frightful—the air heavy with pestilence. The first breath I drew made my heart sink, and my stomach turn. (p. 317) .... [The house hung] on rotting piles over the black waters, with phosphorescent scraps of rotten fish gleaming and twinkling out of the dark hollows, like devilish grave-lights—over bubbles of poisonous gas, and bloated carcasses of dogs, and lumps of offal, floating on the stagnant olive-green hell-broth—over the slow sullen rows of oily ripple which were dying away into the darkness far beyond, sending up, as they stirred, hot breaths of miasma.... (p. 318)

The residents here emptied their slops into the stream with one hand and filled their kettles with the other. It was no wonder, Kingsley implied, that they preferred to drink gin rather than the water which, according to Punch, contained "myriads and myriads of worlds, whole universes instinct with life, or life in death!"

It was important to Kingsley that his readers recognize these realities. Their own health, of course, was at stake, since fevers generated in Bermondsey spread readily to other neighborhoods, and since new slop-made coats could carry the disease of the maker to

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6 Punch, 18 (1850), 188.
Figure 29. A DROP OF LONDON WATER.

(Punch, 18 (May 11, 1850), 188.)
the relatively comfortable home of the buyer. But such knowledge would also help them to understand the compelling reasons behind the Chartist unrest and help them to forestall desperate actions in the future. In Kingsley's novel the reader was given the opportunity to observe the daily life of a London artisan who, although he grew up in a Christian home (maintained on a mere £ 25 per year) and worked diligently, was nevertheless sucked by the prevailing economic conditions—as any of his class might be—into insurrectionary activity. To understand the allure of Chartist, Alton pleaded,

you must have lain, like us, for years in darkness and the pit. You must have struggled for bread, for lodging, for cleanliness, for water, for education—all that makes life worth living for—and found them becoming, year by year, more hopelessly impossible, if not to yourself, yet still to the millions less gifted than yourself. (p. 292)

Or, as Kingsley implied, you must have experienced it indirectly under the guidance of a knowing teacher, who could also show you the reasons why Chartist had appeal among the non-urban masses. Readers learned through Kingsley's novel that the workers' hovels went unrepaired in order to save the farmers money; that owners had abdicated their responsibilities to the labourers; that workers were

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7In the novel such retribution was carried by the coat which, half-finished, had covered the corpse of Jemmy Downes' wife; and in the pages of Punch it figured in a modern version of a classical myth

The vest that poison'd Hercules
Was bought from a slop-seller;
It was the virus of disease
That rack'd the monster-queller.

'Twas Typhus, which the garment caught
Of Misery and Famine,
Hands that for some cheap tailor wrought;
The Hydra-story's gammon. (Punch, 18 (1850), 38.
not allowed to maintain garden patches to produce their own food; and that complainers lost both their work and their shelter (p. 248). Readers saw the pinched and wan laborers, and sympathized with Alton's impression that the sheep, "highly-bred, over-fed, fat, thick-wooled animals, with their troughs of t.1nisps and malt-dust, and their racks of rich clover-hay," were better off than the boys, "little half-starved shivering animals," who tended them (p. 250). Men condemned to these conditions might understandably "welcome any ray of light, even though it should be the glare of a volcano" (p. 292). And self-preservation might motivate reform, even if altruism had not.

Like the anonymous writers of 1851 who deplored the celebration of man's limitless potential in the Exhibition while remediable miseries persisted without, Kingsley's Alton Locke reproved his readers' complacency. In a direct appeal to the "respectable gentlemen and ladies" among his readers, Locke lamented the high death rate among working-class families from diseases which the good time can and will prevent; which, as science has proved, and you the rich confess, might be prevented at once, if you dared to bring in one bold and comprehensive measure, and not sacrifice yearly the lives of thousands to the idol of vested interests, and a majority in the House.

(p. 63. Emphasis added)

The structure of the novel supported Kingsley's role as a teacher. Just as Mackaye, the old Scotsman, had taken care that Locke's political opinions would be the result of personal grappling with the world rather than the adoption of second-hand opinions,
Kingsley guided his readers through a likeness of real events so that they would trust the validity of his conclusions. His characters, both low and high, labored under true-to-life misconceptions and had lessons to learn. On the one hand, Kingsley showed, the upper classes were quite right to oppose the Charter; but on the other he showed that the impulse towards Chartism could arise in the most honest men under certain conditions. He showed both that the working man had good reason to distrust the clergy and aristocracy for contributing to the present situation; but also that much of the ranting of the working classes against the upper classes was unfair—that the Church had historically been the ally of the common man, and that among the aristocracy were reformers doing a great deal on behalf of the workers. Just as Mackaye admitted, after he had set up Locke's employment by the fiery editor O'Flynn, "I sent you to schule, lad, I sent you to schule" (p. 216), so Kingsley sent his readers to school, to be convinced by the evidence around them.

**Exhibition themes**

Although it was written more than a year before the Exhibition, Alton Locke touched many of the same themes which dominated the Exhibition year, and in the same spirit—to measure man's progress at mid-century and to search out paths for future improvement.

**Prosperity**

The historical time of the novel was the early and mid 1840s, with a different set of economic circumstances than prevailed in
1850-51, yet many readers at mid-century responded to Alton Locke as a novel of the present time. It dealt with the general economic principle of competition, revealing the hardships which the accepted laws of supply and demand could impose on whole portions of society even while other portions prospered. Alton Locke reflected both of the conclusions about national prosperity which were common in the Exhibition year—on the one hand (as expressed by the well-intentioned Dean Winstay) that "the poor are not by any means as ill-used as they are taught, in these days, to believe" (p. 154); and, on the other, the opinion arrived at by leaders (like Locke) immersed in another kind of evidence, that the present system in the clothes trade meant inevitable "penury, slavery, misery" (p. 110) for an entire class of hard-working artisans, and that the present system in agricultural labor meant a vicious "cannibalism" practiced by society against whole counties of farm workers (p. 250). The intention of the novel was to resist the dismissal of these as natural and minor pockets of suffering, and to urge that society's expectations be revalued.

**Social unity**

A recurring theme in the novel is the false notion held by gentlefolk about artisans and by artisans about gentlefolk, arising from their virtually complete separation. Distrust was lessened by personal contact: Locke demonstrated to Dean Winstay's circle that natural genius and a fair degree of literacy could arise among the artisans; and he learned from his association with these aristocrats
that much of the artisans' bitterness against them was unfounded. But despite Winstay's recognition of intelligent brows among the tailors, and despite Locke's acknowledgment of the reforming landlords and the good clergy, class ignorance remained a major barrier.

The gulf was not simply between the nobility and the vulgar, but rather, as the novel showed, between gentlemen and the skilled journeymen who made their clothes. They could be joined, as Alton and George were, by cousinship, and yet inhabit very different worlds. The deep differences extended to activity, dress, occupation, and education, forcing bitter awareness of inequality on even the most intelligent and educated of the workers. The gulf could be bridged most easily by death, when pestilence was conveyed from poor to rich by a slop-made coat.

Alton Locke recognized the progress being made towards reducing the gulf. But Kingsley's purpose was not to celebrate these small gains; it was to urge the necessity for more.

**Dignity of Labor**

When Kingsley wrote his novel in 1849-50 he was documenting the feelings among the working classes about the unfairness of their exploited position. The existence of the problem was verified by Mayhew's work, and the message of the novel was generally accepted as true in 1851, despite the tributes to the newly-emerged dignity of labor inspired by the Exhibition.  

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8 A review in Blackwood's (69 [March 1851] 266) pronounced that Alton Locke was "too well founded in fact."
suggestion that starving tailors and farmworkers themselves should be on display in the Exhibition as a lesson that dignity for some did not mean dignity for all (see Figure 18, above).

The novel dealt with two aspects of the tailors' lives—the concern for self-betterment (intellectual, moral, and artistic) among the best of the artisans, and the economic slavery which made even bare existence difficult. The novel acknowledged levels of reason and intelligence among the tailors which ought to qualify them to hold up their heads as valued citizens; yet it revealed the economic exploitation which starved their intelligence and artistic nature as well as their bodies, by not rewarding hard work with fair wages.

Religion

The challenge to organized religion explored by Kingsley in Alton Locke was essentially the same as that noted in the Exhibition year. Kingsley demonstrated to his readers the reasons why Christianity was under attack at mid-century.

Both the Anglican and Dissenting clergy were to be blamed for the skepticism among the working classes. Locke's own skepticism had arisen from his taste of Dissent in his youth. Dissenting clergy, he reported, taught doctrine which was difficult for a workman to reconcile with his own experience. They held that children were "incarnate fiends" (p. 66) until conversion, but Alton could see no evil in his innocent young sister; they taught that keeping the Sabbath meant forsaking all amusement, but Alton could not
understand why God's creation was considered too evil for man's attention on Sunday. They taught that 999 of every 1000 souls was damned from birth, but this he could not reconcile with the love of God which shone out in every tree and flower and bird. Additionally, the Dissenting clergy's lack both of sensitivity and intellectual development inspired natural revulsion in such as Alton. According to the novel, their prayers were aimed more towards earthly considerations than towards God. Their canting piety, flimsy enough for a child to see through, repulsed the working man. They devoted their energies to fighting extinct Satans while ignoring the "real, modern, man-devouring Satan" of the workers' world. It was no wonder, reasoned Locke, that the workmen had no time for such religion.

The Anglicans presented no better case for Christianity to Alton's inquiring mind. Hundreds of thousands of workmen, reported Locke, had never been spoken to by the clergy, and too many of the clergy were ignorant of "the doubts, the feelings, the very language of the masses" (p. 192). Services were more suited to bonnets and babies than to adult men who were more worried about keeping alive in this world than about the next. Worn out bodies and empty bellies made poor audiences for sermons. Besides, artisans noted the Church's record with distrust—its opposition to reform and its institutionalization of inequality through pew rents.

Society presented little evidence that Christianity had any practical effect on men's lives. "Religion?", retorted Locke to his mother's respect for vital religion. "Nobody believes in it. The
rich don't; or they wouldn't fill their churches up with pews, and shut the poor out, all the time they are calling them brothers. They believe the gospel? Then why do they leave the men who make their clothes to starve in such hells on earth as our workroom? No more do the tradespeople believe in it, or they wouldn't go home from sermon to sand the sugar, and put sloe-leaves in the tea, and send out lying puffs of their vamped-up goods, and grind the last farthing out of the poor creatures who rent their stinking houses. And as for the workmen—they laugh at it all, I can tell you. Much good religion is doing for them!" (p. 67).

The church was unable to meet the needs of intelligent workers. As Alton explained to the Dean, "a very large portion of thoughtful workingmen...complain that they cannot identify the God of the Bible with the God of the world around them; and one of their great complaints about Christianity is, that it demands assent to mysteries which are independent of, and even contrary to, the laws of Nature" (p. 170). The Church had a monopoly on education as well—or so one of Alton's Chartist friends charged—and handled it as a valuable commodity available to the rich at a handsome price, but unavailable to poor scholars despite the existence of fellowships established years before for the poor.

Kingsley believed that all of these derangements—extreme poverty, social barriers, enslaved workers, heathenism—could be resolved if the Church were to become the ally of the workman as he forged his new role in society. It was first necessary, however, for
people to understand the problem—a challenge in itself for, as Locke pointed out, "there is nothing more difficult than to make people see...the facts which lie under their own nose" (p. 248).

Kingsley's novel underscored these facts for his readers, not in a pessimistic spirit, but ever following the vision of progress:

Oh, England! stern motherland, when wilt thou renew thy youth?—Thou wilderness of man's making, not God's!... Is it not written that the days shall come when the forest shall break forth into singing, and the wilderness shall blossom like the rose? (p. 368)

In his novel, as in his later response to the Exhibition, Kingsley seemed to be "excited...intensely" by the aspirations for the future at the same time that he was "saddened profoundly by the realization that these achievements...were mere forecastings of a great but distant future." His novel, with its promotion of Christian Socialism, was an attempt to help society toward more lofty goals. It is this which links Alton Locke, despite its portrait of a society very far from the millennium, with the social optimism of the Great Exhibition.
Chapter 10

Latter-Day Pamphlets

"The deranged condition of our affairs is a universal topic among men at present; and the heavy miseries pressing, in their rudest shape, on the great dumb inarticulate class, and from this, by a sure law, spreading upwards, in a less palpable but not less certain and perhaps still more fatal shape on all classes to the very highest, are admitted everywhere to be great, increasing and now almost unendurable. How to diminish them,—this is every man's question. For in fact they do imperatively need diminution; and unless they can be diminished, there are many other things that cannot very long continue to exist beside them."
(Model Prisons, "Latter-Day Pamphlets, p. 48)

"Bull, my friend, you must strip that...poisoned Nessus' shirt...off your poor body...and...come forth into contact with your world, under true professions again, and not false."
("The New Downing Street," Latter-Day Pamphlets, p. 162)

During the seven months immediately following the establishment of the Royal Commission, while it was strenuously working to bring the Exhibition into being, Thomas Carlyle was writing a series of essays which, like Alton Locke, presented a far less agreeable picture of mid-century England than did the coming glass palace: a society marked by "chaos," "shams," "falsity," "pruriency," and "Stygian quagmires." Such charges hurled by Thomas Carlyle were nothing new, but when presented in his Latter-Day Pamphlets they were especially disturbing. They contained, according to one reviewer, "matter more irritating and blistering than any of the author's previous writings"; and as plans for the Exhibition moved ahead,
they seemed to come "more directly into conflict with prevailing sentiments, parties, and interests."\(^1\) Like others at mid-century, Carlyle felt the need to reevaluate the progress of society. "In the days that are now passing-over us, even fools are arrested to ask the meaning of them," wrote Carlyle in his opening page. "It is a time to make the dullest man consider; and ask himself, Whence he came? Whither he is bound?\(^2\) At a time when many of his countrymen were pleased with the image of themselves emerging in the approaching Exhibition, Carlyle was a leader among those who were more concerned with what England ought to become. His criticism was harsh, but offered in the name of progress.

In his \textit{Latter-Day Pamphlets} Carlyle assumed once again his role of preacher/teacher, isolating what he saw as the major problems of the day, urging readers to open their eyes, challenging them with knotty questions, and warning them of the impending doom if no answers were to be found. He pleaded to each reader ("Awake, arise, before you sink to death eternal" p. 141), confided ("The truth is, dear reader...." p. 255), prescribed and threatened ("this is what you need; and if you cannot get it, you must die, my poor friend" p. 163). He took his stance expecting his message to be alarming and offensive (p. 295) and anticipating that only one out of a thousand would heed it (p. 296). According to David Masson,

\(^1\)\textit{North British Review}, 14 (November 1850), 4.
who reviewed Carlyle's new work for the *North British Review*, the *Pamphlets* marked a new development in Carlyle's writings—they were "a more explicit assertion than the author had before made, that he detaches himself from the devotees of pure and pleasurable literature, and regards himself as a social agent or recognized force in the country, charged with a special commission and special responsibilities." Considered in this light, the *Pamphlets* were another manifestation of the tendency which Masson had noticed towards a literature of social reference.

Whereas Dickens and Kingsley absorbed this approach in their fiction, Carlyle chose the directness of preaching. Rather than immersing his readers in detailed descriptions of actual poverty or human behavior (as Dickens and Kingsley did), Carlyle warned them that although their future depended on an accurate assessment of those details, they must undertake it on their own. He wrote of the "parent phenomenon" (p. 295) in which all social problems were rooted, rather than about individual manifestations of the problem. He produced a picture of Stygian quagmires and rotting corpses which no one would mistake for an objective description of society. Yet his exaggerations conveyed general truths, and his goal was to be "veridical," or to produce works grounded on the interpreting of facts (p. 323).

Although Carlyle wrote about problems threatening England's very existence, he had no practical solutions to propose. He offered, 

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3 *North British Review*, 14 (November 1850), 4.
rather, awareness of the parent phenomenon, the assurance that certain practices would not be acceptable solutions, and the challenge that readers must somehow find out the practical solutions for themselves. They must find a way to enable the most capable to rise to positions of leadership; they must find ways to admit talent from all levels of society without the institutionalized anarchy of democracy; they must bring institutions and beliefs into consonance with reality and the eternal laws.

**Carlyle and the Exhibition**

Carlyle recorded his impressions of the meaning of the Exhibition more fully in his journals and letters than did other major writers of the time. He expressed admiration for the "gigantic bird's cage" as he watched it rise in Hyde Park⁴; he approved of Paxton's ingenuity in designing a building which could be so quickly raised and so easily dismantled, removed, and rebuilt elsewhere⁵; he declared that it "surpassed in beauty and effect of arrangement all the edifices I have ever seen or read of, except in the Arabian Tales."⁶ But there, he said, "the merits of the business ended."

The Exhibition itself was only a well-got-up "piece of nonsense,

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⁵D. A. Wilson, p. 332.

⁶Ibid.
marked by "ostentatious frothery," "windy fools," and "bedlam."

Improvements in industry were unlikely to emerge from such a gathering, he insisted:

> The grandest specific set of improvements ever made in manufactures was effected, not in a big Glass Soap-bubble, presided over by Prince Albert and the General Assembly of Prurient Windbags out of all countries, but under the torn hat once of a Lancashire Pedlar and Barber [like Richard Arkwright], who chanced to have a head that he could employ in thinking under said hat.¹

And regarding the wares, Jane Carlyle commented that when you came to look at them in detail "there was nothing really worth looking at—at least that one could not have seen samples of in the shops."² As those who knew him might have expected, Carlyle grew irritable at the hordes crowding into London for the Exhibition, and at their noisy celebration of the arrival of a new era of human felicity. The Exhibition might indeed be symbolic of English life, but for Carlyle the meanings were very different than the interpretations made in the public press.

> He expressed his judgments in harsh epithets. "The World, with its...Crystal Palaces and such like," he wrote to Varnhagen von Ense, "is and remains a great ass. Enchanted Ass, for there is always a man imprisoned there, poor devil!"³

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²D. A. Wilson, p. 344.


⁴D. A. Wilson, p. 331.
stupidity of mankind—a servum pecus," he wrote in another letter. "I had no idea til late times what a bottomless fund of darkness there is in the human animal, especially when congregated in masses, and set to build Crystal Palaces, etc., under King Cole, Prince Albert, and Company. The profoundest Orcus or belly of Chaos itself, this is the emblem of them." In a letter to Emerson he wrote of the "Win-dust-ry of all Nations," the "sanhedrin of windy fools from all countries of the globe," and "this Universal Children's Ball which the British Nation in these extraordinary circumstances is giving itself." To Thomas Spedding he wrote, "I seriously meditate flying beyond seas till the vile banquet of the children of the wind, with all its tumults and eloquent eructations, be fairly over. One dead dog is bad; but fifty of them stranded at Blackfriars Bridge on a hot day, what can you do with these? The nostril and the soul alike turn away with abhorrence from such an Ecumenic Council." The meaning of these images can best be understood in relation to Carlyle's mid-century philosophy as expressed in his Latter-Day Pamphlets. Carlyle viewed the Exhibition as one manifestation of England's general malady—the consecration of shams and the inability to raise up effective leaders.

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11 Ibid., p. 355.
12 The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1834-1872, ed. C. E. Norton (Boston, 1883), II, 197.
13 D. A. Wilson, p. 352.
This was an age when men wore "long ears," Carlyle had charged in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. Real manhood would wish for the overturning of all unveracities, he said; yet "many a solid Englishman" clung to comfortable outmoded forms in conflict with Eternal Law, thus becoming an "enchanged human ass"; like Bottom, the Weaver, he "feels his cheek hairy to the scratch" (pp. 236-37). In what way was the Crystal Palace connected with such a transformation? Carlyle would probably have said that the Exhibition reinforced the reign of shams by encouraging contentment with things as they stood rather than the heavy task of reform. Soothed by the prosperity apparent within the Exhibition, Englishmen too easily dismissed the need for reform, possibly with the retort: "Did not cotton spin itself, beef grow, and groceries and spiceries come in from the East and West, quite comfortably by the side of shams?" Just as the universal foolish human throat had celebrated the arrival of the millennium amid the chaos of 1848, Carlyle might say that it was now just as foolish about the Exhibition, and just as oblivious to the necessity of self-amendment.

The front wall of your wretched old crazy dwelling, long denounced by you to no purpose, having at last fairly folded itself over, and fallen prostrate into the street, the floors, as may happen, will still hang-on by the mere beam-ends, and coherency of old carpentry, though in a sloping direction, and depend there till certain poor rusty nails and worm-eaten dovetailings give way:—but is it cheering, in such circumstances, that the whole household burst-forth into celebrating the new joys of light and

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15 Ibid., p. 10.
ventilation, liberty and picturesqueness of position, and thank God that now they have got a house to their mind? My dear household, cease singing and psalmodying; lay aside your fiddles, take out your work-implements, if you have any, for I can say with confidence the laws of gravitation are still active, and rusty nails, wormeaten dovetailings, and secret coherency of old carpentry, are not the best basis for a household. (pp. 10-11)

It was an age, too, proclaimed the Pamphlets, when good leadership was desperately needed. According to the quality of its leadership a nation was either filled with "Heavenly light," or mired in a "Stygian dusk" (p. 121) or "Devil's Darkness." Rare was the leader with real rather than sham intellect—loyal to the laws of the universe, the "Missioned of Heaven,"—who could bring the nation back to Eternal Truth. More common was the leader without light, falsely presumed by a stupid and dark-minded population to be the Missioned of Heaven (pp. 98, 107), and followed by them on a path growing ever darker. Why should Carlyle choose the image of "profoundest Orcus" (or place of death) as his emblem for the supporters of the Exhibition? While such an undertaking as the Exhibition (requiring more "beaver intellect" than "heroic" leadership) was ably led through a tangle of difficulties, the work of Parliament (which required "heroism, faith, devout insight to discern what is needful, noble courage to do it" [p. 109]) foundered hopelessly for lack of decisive leadership. The only heroic politician of the time, Robert Peel, was now dead, leaving Whig, Tory, and Peelite unable to reach agreement on a series of issues including agricultural distress, fiscal and financial reform, and Papal aggression. Lord John Russell's government fell on February 21 after
less than three weeks in power; repeated attempts to put together a new government failed; and finally Lord John and his same Ministers returned by default to finish the session as best they could. Meanwhile, delighted with the show in Hyde Park, the English public seemed indifferent to the leadership crisis. A "servum pecus," it followed "sham" leaders towards false complacency; it showed itself mired in "Devil's Darkness," for as Carlyle had said in Latter-Day Pamphlets, "Show me the man you honour; I know by that symptom, better than by any other, what kind of man you yourself are" (p. 255). A Punch cartoon of the "Shipwrecked Ministers Saved by the Great Exhibition Steamer" satirized the quality of leadership and the interests of the nation.

When Carlyle described the atmosphere of London during the Exhibition as being perfumed by the carcasses of fifty dead dogs stranded at Blackfriars Bridge on a hot day, he was drawing on an image frequently used in Latter-Day Pamphlets to illustrate "sham"—the outer core of an idea remaining in circulation (the carcass floating on the water) after all life had died out of it, with unpleasant consequences for those in proximity. The sham in 1851 must have seemed monumental to him, some fifty times worse than usual. Carlyle was much offended by the circulation in London of forms and philosophies long since deprived of veracity and overdue for consignment to the Stygian deeps where they more properly belonged. What may have been among those "dead dogs"? Certainly the clamor about the arrival of the millennium when it seemed clear to him that the
Figure 30. THE SHIPWRECKED MINISTERS SAVED BY THE GREAT EXHIBITION STEAMER.
(Punch, 20 (June 7, 1851), 237.)
millennium was yet far off. And quite probably the elements of "Constituted Anarchy" which Carlyle had blasted in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* were among them: "No-rule" in government; "the consecration of cupidity, and braying folly, and dim stupidity and baseness, in most of the affairs of men"; "a Government tumbling and drifting on the whirlpools and mud-deluges, floating atop in a conspicuous manner, no-whither—like the carcass of a drowned ass" (p. 29).

"Wind" was Carlyle's most frequent image in describing the Exhibition, as well as a dominant theme in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, where it was presented as a major obstacle to real reform. Wind was the empty semblance of something which should have had substance. It encouraged sham. Ineffectual Parliament was full of it, charged Carlyle—"Is Society become wholly a bag of wind, ballasted by guineas?" (p. 192). Carlyle thought that although great triumphs were claimed for the Exhibition—such as vast improvements in manufactures—the claims were more semblance than reality.

**Exhibition themes**

Carlyle's judgments in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* grated on the sensibilities of those who viewed the Exhibition as a demonstration of human progress, since the Pamphlets gave England a negative score in each area for which the Exhibition was to symbolize advancement. Yet his stern diagnosis was not wholly out of character with the time. Many other people were reminded at mid-century of the challenging tasks yet remaining before a new era could be hoped for. Moreover, Carlyle's expectations were as high as his frustrations.
Despite her problems, he felt, England was in better spiritual health than most of her neighbors—"in England heroic wisdom is not yet dead" (p. 134)—and he trusted to youth to carry out the necessary changes to achieve "the best possible condition of human affairs" (p. 250). The hopefulness of his philosophy seems but a variant form of the dominant optimism of the Crystal Palace year. Carlyle, too, expected the future to outstrip the present—"...may future generations, acquainted again with the silences, and once more cognisant of what is noble and faithful and divine, look back on us with pity and incredulous astonishment" (p. 213). The major difference was that in Carlyle's view the present was not something of which to be proud.

**Prosperity**

Carlyle pointed to extreme pauperism among both British and Irish—to "the Irish Giant, named of Despair"; to thirty thousand wretched needlewomen; to three million paupers in forced idleness. These, he intimated, were divine missionaries sent by the just heavens to force England into recognition of her real problem—that pauperism was "the general leakage through every joint of the ship that is rotten"; that it was "our social sin grown manifest"; that it was "the poisonous dripping from all the sins, and putrid unveracities and god-forgetting greedinesses and devil-serving cants and jesuitisms that exist among us" (p. 158). He made no effort to weigh relative economic prosperity or to convince society of its lack. He felt rather that the existence of pauperism provided reason
enough for society to reform itself, since it demonstrated a
degeneracy which needed to be stemmed.

Class Unity

The issue of class relations he regarded similarly, starting
from the premise that the obvious problems were evidence of a larger
malaise which demanded attention. The aristocracy no longer provided
responsible leadership; traditional ties between master and man had
been severed but not replaced. "We are not properly a society at
all," said Carlyle, "We are a lost gregarious horde, with Kings of
Scip on this hand, and Famishing Connaughts and Distressed
Needlewomen on that—presided over by Anarch Old" (p. 283). The
loss of social "hierarchy" was choking England. "Emancipation," or
the cutting asunder of human relations in the name of liberty, had
created more problems than it solved. No substitute had been found
for the vast ventilating shaft which the church had provided in
feudal times, allowing true talent to rise through the ranks (p. 132);
intellect among the English masses had no way to be heard, and
English life was dying for want of air. Further, miseries were
pressing upward through the classes and England knew not how to
diminish them. The articulate classes either ignored them or tried
to check them with ineffectual philanthropies, when what was needed
was a general admission of the foulness of the world's ways, and a
serious effort to realign them with "the Laws of wind and water, and
of Earth and of Heaven" (p. 50).
Dignity of Labor

England's divorce from Truth affected her laboring population. In adopting the policy of emancipation, or cutting asunder all the ties between employer and employee except cash payment, thereby leaving the workers at the mercy of the system of supply and demand, England had transformed her industrial life into a "Stygian quagmire"—"Supply-and-demand, Leave-it-alone, Voluntary Principle, Time will mend it:—till British industrial existence seems fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral: a hideous living Golgotha of souls and bodies buried alive, such a Curtius' gulf, communicating with the Nether Deeps, as the Sun never saw till now" (p. 27). To drain this "quagmire" it would be necessary somehow to restore the few wise to command over the innumerable Foolish. Responsible hierarchy was essential both to protect the worker from an anarchic industrial economy and to keep him busy at productive work. Organization of labor, said Carlyle, was the vital problem of the world, demanding to be boldly faced if England was to learn how to live.

Peace

The major threat to peace at mid-century, Carlyle maintained, was no longer war between the nations, less likely now that Europe was becoming one parish with interlocked economic interests, but Anarchy, which could be every bit as disruptive. It was already responsible for the open convulsions in Europe—the toppling of rulers, the rise of street barricades and insurrectionary pikes. At
home, while anarchy was already quietly apparent in no-government and lack of leadership, it "was not yet convulsed, but only heaving towards convulsion, and to judge by the Mosaic sweating establish-
ments, cannibal Connaughts and other symptoms, not far from convul-
sion now" (pp. 140-41). He was referring to the social threat posed by starving slop-work tailors (p. 29) and by the 3 million Irish paupers advancing on English towns, "wide-mouthed, seeking whom [they] may devour" (p. 94). Carlyle hoped that street barricades of the European sort could be avoided in England, their goals achieved by dedicated reform in the right direction so that the transition into the New Era could be made on firmer ground (p. 157). Failing that, the foul universal boil would go on ripening until it burst out into undeniable anarchy, with all of its impact on human affairs.

Religious Strength

Carlyle's judgments about English religious faith were no more gentle. Although Englishmen gave lip-service to God and to the Thirty-nine Articles, Carlyle charged, their real gods resembled George Hudson, the railroad magnate; their real Bible was the Peerage book; and their real religion was found mainly in the region of the stomach:

Hudson,—though I mumble about my thirty-nine articles, and the services of other divinities,—Hudson is my god, and to him I will sacrifice this twenty-pound note: if perhaps he will be propitious to me. (p. 257)

In spiritual and moral provinces the English mind had become mired in hypocrisy, professing to believe in values quite different from
those apparent in actual practice. No matter how respectable the doctrine which England professed, an observer might detect the belief in pounds sterling and practical worship of the scrip dealer, since that was where Englishmen placed their greatest trust.

Of these three writers, Carlyle was clearly the most negative about the Exhibition and the least gentle in his social criticism. Yet his hard words belied his ultimate belief in human potential. A critic in Hogg's Instructor appreciated his larger purpose:

The surgeon, who shuts himself up with the plague-smitten corpse, to unfold, for his brethren, the hidden workings of the disease, would not, we suppose, be accused of morbid rancor or the philosophy of dissatisfaction.16

Carlyle studied the human condition and diagnosed the disease which he found there; but his purpose was to prescribe a cure, not to fester in bitterness. Like numerous anonymous writers at the time of the Exhibition, Carlyle believed that man had not yet achieved his best, but that he might, if he aspired to the challenge.

16Quoted in Eclectic Magazine, December 1852, p. 521.
"...and the pint I reach'd was this—that the house [the Crystal Palace] is nothin' short...of a pictur of human progress; that there's a meaning in every joist of it, and in every inch of windowpane; that from the basement to the roof on it, from the doorway to the crown, it shines out as the embodiment of an everlastin' truth."

("Letters from London on the Great Exhibition and Other Matters, by Feleg E. Wheeler," Illustrated London News, July 26, 1851, p. 135.)

"We do not despair either of the human race or of the fortunes and social conditions of this country. We are confident we are within bounds when we say that four-fifths, perhaps nine-tenths, of the social and private evils which now afflict humanity, are the direct consequence of selfishness and folly in this or some recently preceding generation."

(Blackwood's, March, 1851, p. 259)

Early in 1851 the Economist had posed a key question: "Is it not true...that at all points our national position in 1850 is almost as much in advance of that which we occupied in 1800, as it is behind that which we hope to occupy when the opening of a new century shall shine upon our quiet graves, and gladden the hearts of our children and our children's children, with the promise of yet richer harvests and the hope of a more unchequered civilization?" (February 8, 1851, p. 139). The Exhibition gave Englishmen an impressive measure of their progress to date; it also gave them every reason to believe that today's impossibility would be tomorrow's reality. This seemed just as true of social improvements as of tangibles like plate glass and underwater telegraphs. If undertaken with the proper
understanding and insight, man-initiated changes in government, in economics, and in social structures could, it was hoped, bring about a better world.

It is this spirit which links Bleak House, Alton Locke, and Latter-Day Pamphlets with the dominant mood of satisfaction in the Exhibition year. On first consideration their social criticism might seem to be incongruous with the general celebration. They did, after all, reject claims that the "Crystal House" signified the arrival of the millennium, portraying instead in their writings the "ruined shelters" of Tom-All-Alone's (Bleak House, p. 167), the "mouth of Hell" where Alton Locke caught his fever (Alton Locke, p. 319), and the "wretched old crazy dwelling" held together by worm-eaten dove-tailings (Latter-Day Pamphlets, p. 10). All three authors ignored the imagery of human advancement, focusing readers' attention on the "cannibal" aspects of society and on the plight of humans who were worse off than animals. But a deeper examination reveals subtle ties with the exhibition spirit. Like a number of journalists in the Exhibition year, they looked at evidence of man's achievements only to feel disappointment at the lingering of resolvable evils. They devoted their pens, therefore, to the campaign for betterment. They believed that theirs was an age of progress. But in terms of the question posed by the Economist, they were more concerned with achieving the "more unchequered civilization" of the future than celebrating "the national position in 1850."
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An eight-page printed listing of historical and official
documents; catalogues and guides; pictorial illustrations;
collections of illustrations; and miscellaneous publica-
tions.

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Reference to the Exhibition of 1851, in the Possession of C.
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for Private Circulation. V+A
Valuable 116 page catalogue of most of the Crystal Palace
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Gives full publishing information and frequent annotations
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London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851. BL
A 12-page tract which urges foreigners visiting the
Exhibition to keep the Sabbath; avoid traveling or arriv-
ing on Sunday; schedule meals so as not to prevent waiters
from attending services; avoid doing errands on Sunday.

227
"All the World and His Wife; or, What Brought Everybody to London in 1851." The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist, n.s. Serial beginning March, 1851, p. 267. OSU

Alphabetical Epitome of the Great Exhibition, 1851. London, 1861. BL

Introductory note states "The following Alphabetical Epitome of the principal events of the first Great Exhibition year, 1851, was written soon after their occurrence, and was not intended for publication, but it is not without interest now that another Exhibition is in the course of formation after the interval of a Decade."

Art and Faith, In Fragments From the Great Exhibition. London: Partridge and Oakley, 1851. BL


Planned for the author's farm at Oaklands, near Lewes, Sussex, to create a more efficient, healthful, and comfortable farm for both man and beast.

Burnet, Richard. To Her Majesty's Commissioners For the Exhibition, 1851. (Letters published in the Devonport Telegraph, 1841). London, 1850. V+A

To establish that the Devonport Mechanics Institute had conceived of such an exhibition 3 or 4 years before Mr. Scott Russell or Mr. Whishaw.


A "niggar-hating" Yankee rents a room in London, only to discover that he is to share the room with Gumbo Jumbo, a black missionary fled from the South to the happy climate of Exeter Hall.


A twenty-page poem on the opening, giving an especially good account of the fears preceding the opening.
Satirical poems (13pp. and 7pp.) using the formulas of eighteenth-century satire to cut through the hypocrisies of the time. Makes fun of the cranks who opposed the Exhibition.

A separately-printed child's story, which has been subsequently bound with three other stories, with one title page.

The Crystal Palace and Its Contents; Being An Illustrated Cyclopaedia of the Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, 1851. Embellished with Upwards of Five Hundred Engravings with a Copious Analytical Index. London: W.M. Clark, 1852. BL

Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, From the Originals Painted for H.R.H. Prince Albert, by Messrs. Nash, Haghe, and Roberts, R.A. Published under the Express Sanction of His Royal Highness Prince Albert, President of the Royal Commission, To Whom the Work is, by Permission, Dedicated. London: Dickinson Brothers, 1854. BL

An Elegy for the Crystal Palace, Adapted from Gray. Supposed to be written in Hyde Park, 31st May, 1852. London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1852. V+A
A nine-page poem. According to the Preface: "The only apology for attempting to parody Gray's beautiful Elegy, must be the anxious desire of the Author to assist in preserving that useful and splendid building—The Crystal Palace, for the benefit of the public."

A religious pamphlet in 26 pages, whose main argument is summed up in the sentence: "The Inexhibitible, then, must never be forgotten, amidst all the attractions and wonders of the Exhibited or Exhibitable."

The Exhibition Lay. London: Groombridge and Sons, 1852. BL
Poem of 32 pages in a small bound volume.
The Exhibition of 1851. The Palace of Industry: A Brief History of Its Origins and Progress; with a Descriptive Account of the Most Interesting Portions of the Machinery Employed in its Construction. London: John Ollivier, 1851. V+A

Under the title, in ink, is written: "Written by Mr. Ollivier himself."


The Introduction mentions that the same author wrote "Little Henry's Holiday," also about the Exhibition. Page 16 mentions "Pleasant Pages" by the same author. The book takes the form of a conversation between Papa and children in which he explains displays in the Exhibition, asking them to figure out more facts and explanations by reasoning from what he tells them and from what they already know. Together they classify (for example) the types of food by climate (tropical, temperate, arctic) and by family (corn plants, spices, leguminous plants, meats, etc.). After each discussion a child summarizes all facts into an "Object lesson" to be memorized. This work demonstrates popular attitudes towards the educational role of the Exhibition.

First Report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851, to the Right Hon. Spencer Horatio Walpole, etc. etc., One of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State. London: Spicer Brothers, 1852. BL


A poem of 24 pages by an author from Barton-on-Humber, Lincolnshire. In preface, the author claims to be a "very humble working man" and craves the public's indulgence for his "present effusions" which have been "written from the best and purest motives."

O Ful, Tru, ur Pertikler Okeawnt o Bwoth Wat Aw Seed un Wat Aw Yerd, We Gooin too Th' Greyt Eggshibishun, e Lundun, Un o greyt deyle o Hinfurmashum besoide, wele kalkilated fur to giv thooze foeke o Gradely Hinseet Hinto things, us Hassent ad Nothur Toime Nur Brass Fur to Goo un see fur theirsels. be O Felley fro Rachde. Thurd Edishun. Rachde: Wrigley un Son, 1856. (1st ed. 1851) V+A

A story in 82pp., entirely in phonetic spelling. As much about the trip to London as about the Exhibition.
A 79-page poem in high-style heroic couplet. Mostly about Belgravian life: the rise of the rich neighborhood; comparison of the gracious old gentry with the gras, nouveau riche; satire about girls setting their fashionable caps for dukes and earls; a long panegyric against Popery as the priests invade the secure English fold; the money-hungry renting out of rooms during the Exhibition year.


"The Great Exhibition Pictorial Alphabet." London: H. Beal, 1851. BL
A 9x12 fold-up sheet, with the individual letters in separate squares. Bound in a volume entitled Useful Arts, 1861.

Great Exhibition 1851—Tickets, Songs, etc. V+A
A scrapbook volume devoted to Exhibition materials. A note on the first page, signed by Sir C. Wentworth Dilke, reads "A few more papers connected with the Exhibition of 1851." 55 pages. Includes views of the Exhibition printed on transparent blue and red plastic cards; views printed on heavy paper cards; 9 different styles of stationery embossed with Crystal Palace designs; woven silk-like mementoes of the Exhibition; and twenty different street ballads (some in 3 or 4 editions from different cities).


Industrial Exhibition Remembrancer. London, 1851. BL
A card, 2 7/8 x 4 inches, issued as a memento. Has a map of the ground plan of the Crystal Palace, noting stairs, entrances, and exits. On the reverse, it has space for noting Lodging, traveling expenses; month and date of attendance; and articles which attracted the holder's particular attention. The same card is also represented in German and in French.

Saccharine poem in 18 pages.
Love and Loyalty. (No publishing information given). V+A
A strong pro-British poem in 32 pages. Cautions Britain against the wiles of Popery. Claims that Britain is indebted to the Protestant Religion for the prosperity evident in the Exhibition.

Martin. The Exhibition Poem (published by the author at his residence, Rose Cottage, Grove St., Hackney) V+A
A grandiose poem in twenty pages, in praise of the Exhibition.

Mayhew, Henry, and George Cruikshank. 1851: or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family, Who Came up to London to "Enjoy Themselves," and to See the Great Exhibition. London: David Bogue Co., 1851. OSU
A lively novel in 242 pages, with 9 engravings by George Cruikshank. A yeoman sheepfarmer from Cumberland reluctantly takes his wife and two children to London to see the Exhibition after discovering the difficulty of village life without any shopkeepers (all had gone off to London). He has every misadventure imaginable—catching wrong trains, losing tickets, falling victim to con men, losing money, lodging among shocking Frenchmen. This is the best and most complete account of the Exhibition in fiction.

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A poem of about 10 pages, in praise of the Exhibition.

Napier, Mrs. The Lay of the Palace. London: John Ollivier, 1852. Fourteen-page poem in magnificent style, praising the Crystal Palace. Cloying. V+A


Well-written, especially in the first 3 chapters. The last chapters become increasingly didactic.
Placards Exhibited in Conspicuous Places Within the Crystal Palace, Designed to Forward one of the Grand Objects of the Royal Commission—Warmlly Responded to by the Queen, and Suitably Dwelt Upon by the Archbishop, viz:—"The Strengthening the Bonds of Peace and Friendship Among All Nations of the Earth."

[London, 1851.] BL

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Ten pages of text, with added diagrams of seven different styles of cottages designed for different needs, including the one for four families on display in Hyde Park.


A comic take-off on history, filled with puns and with gibes at English ways. The book includes a guide to things to see in the city, along with satirical comment.

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A pamphlet of 7 pages.

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A bound pamphlet of 18 pages, carrying as headnote the description of "Vanity Fair" from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. It describes the goods in the Crystal Palace as vanities, and complains that the "ware of Rome" is greatly promoted in this fair (particularly in the Medieval court).
The Trip to the Great Exhibition. (no publishing information). V+A
A story in 28 pages of the trip to the Exhibition made by Barnabas Blandydash, his wife, and daughter Leonora, in their pony cart—a journey of 70 miles. It is a satirical view of the proud country bumpkin/gentleman who came to the Exhibition, revealing his plans, his primping, his pride at taking his own cart rather than the railroad. It contains self-righteous ranting about Popery, and foreigners.

A Visit to the Great Exhibition. By One of the Exhibitors. London: Cundall and Addey, 1851. V+A
A brief guide to things to see in the Exhibition.

Warren, Samuel, F.R.S. The Lily and the Bee; An Apologue of the Crystal Palace. New York, 1851. CSU
A free-verse prose-poem in 192 pages. Highly emotional, with liberal use of exclamation points; full of visions and greatly over-wrought moral analogies. Rich in social context minutiae, with references to popular science, Lyell's geology, fundamentalist religion, etc.

A poem in 84 pages, the last four of which give a good poetic summary of the unbounded pride and faith in the Exhibition.

C. Street Ballads (preserved in boxes and scrapbooks in the Victoria and Albert Museum Library and the British Library)

"All Serene!" (Tune—"Steam Arm"). Written and Sung by H. Wood. Printed by T. King, Birmingham. V+A
Begins: "One Morning, a freak popped into my head,
As I lay by the side of my Wife in bed..."

"The Big Show Coming" (Tune—"The Good Time Coming"). Written by H. Wood, Sung by Morgan, Ryland, etc. Printed by T. King, Birmingham. V+A
Begins: "There's a big show coming boys, a big show coming,
When every man will do his best
And for the prizes will contest, at the big show coming..."

"Come Let Us Go and See the Exhibition For a Shilling." Printed by E. Hodges. London, 1851. BL, V+A
Begins: "Let all the world say what they will I do not care a fig..."
Other versions were printed by William Pratt in Birmingham and Disley in London.

"Crystal Palace." Printed by E. Hodges. London, 1851. BL, V+A
Begins: "Britannia's sons..."
"Crystal Palace." Printed by E. Hodges. London, 1851. BL, V+A
Begins: "In Great Hyde Park..."
The same song was printed by Birt, in Seven Dials, with
the title "Have You Been to the Crystal Palace." V+A

"Downfall of the Exhibition." Printed by Disley. London. V+A
Begins: "Just listen awhile to my fate,
And pity my awful condition..."

"The Downfall of the Exhibition." Printed by Paul, London. V+A
Begins: "I have been free from storms and wars, and
I have been a gazer for tens of thousands..."

"The Exhibition and Foreigners." Printed by E. Hodges. London. V+A
Begins: "Look out, look out, mind what you're about
And how you do go on sirs..."
Also by William Pratt in Birmingham, under the title
"The New Exhibition Sights and Wonders! This is the
March of Intellect."

"Exhibition Fashions." London, 1851. BL, V+A
Begins: "Come listen with attention
All ranks and all conditions
Since everything in London
Is called the Exhibition..."

"Exhibition of All Nations." Printed by William Pratt, Birmingham. V+A
Begins: "Good people all of each degree.
Attend and listen unto me;
From far and near they come to see
The splendid Exhibition..."

"The Exhibition Wonders." Printed by W. M'Call, Liverpool. V+A
Begins: "Good people all both great and small, come
listen for a while,
I'll sing to you a verse or two, will cause you for to
smile..."

"The Great National Exhibition of 1851." London, 1851. BL

"John Bull and the Exhibition." Printed by William Pratt, Birmingham. V+A
Begins: "Come listen to these curious lines,
They're strange, but they are true..."

"Lamentations of the Exhibition." Printed by E. Hodges. London. BL, V+A
Begins: "Well! here I am as you may see,
Stuck in among a lot of trees..."
"The National Exhibition" (Tune: "The Literary Dustman"). (No publishing information). V+A
Begins: "The folks are all like going mad,
Both low and upper classes..."

"Queen Victoria's Welcome to the City Banquet." Printed by H. Disley. London. V+A
Begins: "You heroes of England a while just attend
To the lines I am going to sing..."

"The Queen's Visit to the City Banquet." Printed by C. Paul. London. V+A
Begins: "Oh thousands how they roam along
All class low and high..."

"Uncle Ned's Visit to the Exhibition." Printed by W. Pratt, Birmingham; also by J. Cadman, Manchester. V+A
Begins: "Come each buxom swell who in England does dwell,
And you ladies so frolicsome and gay..."

"Wonders of the World." Printed by E. Hodges, London. V+A
Begins: "Come all you bold heroes so gay,
Who is in a right good condition..."

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A bi-weekly journal dedicated to the Crystal Palace, put out by the publishers of The Critic and London Literary Journal. It was designed as a central organ, to condense, arrange, and gather the widespread data of the Exhibition into one easily stored and consulted paper.

The Morning Chronicle, November 9, 1850 – November 18, 1851.

Preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum Library is a fairly complete collection of articles pertaining to the Exhibition which appeared in the Morning Chronicle. They are pasted up in 5 volumes spanning the indicated dates.

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The North British Review, 14 (Nov. 1850, Feb. 1851); 15 (May, Aug. 1851); 16 (Nov. 1851, Feb., 1852).

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