Dedication To The Working Classes

Men and women of the working class, I dedicate my book to all of you; I wrote it so that you might understand your plight, therefore it belongs to you.

The horrifying oppression which the English aristocracy inflicts on the people of the British Isles — the labourers and workers who create all the wealth — offers a lesson of the greatest importance which the workers of the world should keep constantly in mind. Do you know how it is that a handful of lords, barons, bishops, landowners and squirels have the power to oppress, torture and starve a nation of twenty-six million people, beat them like animals, crowd them into workhouses, transport them to live among savages, and deny them clothes, even bread? Do you know the reason for these atrocities? It is because these twenty-six million human beings are brought up like slaves in ignorance and fear. It is because the Church, the Schools and the Press are in league with the oppressors. Do you think that if the English had been reared in accordance with the principles of freedom and equality, if they had learned that resistance to oppression is not only the natural right of Man but his sacred duty, they would have suffered the proprietors of feudal estates and the aristocracy — legislators by right of birth — to enact the Corn Laws, enabling them to exact a higher price for the workers' daily bread? No, of course not, for then the English people would have a sense of dignity and too proud a spirit to submit to a slow and painful death by starvation.

In 1831, when poverty and unemployment struck the workers of Lyons, those energetic and determined men chose to die fighting for their rights rather than see their numbers dwindle as they and their families died of hunger.
They took a black flag on which they wrote with a firm hand these memorable words: *Live working or die fighting*! Would God that the workers in England would follow the splendid example of their brothers in Lyons! But, alas, for many years English workers have been on the brink of starvation; hunger, that implacable Fury, has so undermined their forces that today the unhappy people, spent and weary, hang down their heads and die in silence, for they no longer have the strength to protest. But their deaths will lie at the door of their cowardly assassins.

You would think that if a country were moderately well-governed, its citizens need only be diligent, thrifty and competent at their work to live in modest comfort. But in England you see a multitude of skilled men unable to find work and dying of hunger. This is because workers have to submit to exorbitant taxes which they cannot pay; because the fruits of their labours can no longer find markets abroad; because the aristocrats who govern England refuse to import grain, wine and livestock. This means that the worker has to pay more for the indispensable commodities of life—bread, meat and beer.

In England the people are free only in name; twenty-four million workers still labour under the yoke of the aristocracy. As yet they have not even begun the struggle for liberty and equality which you and your fathers won in glorious revolutions.

Never forget that if the reign of justice—government for the benefit of all men and women—is won by the courage of the masses, it is preserved only by their most active vigilance. The privileged classes believe they are a law unto themselves, entitled to live a life of luxury at the expense of the rest of society. This means that in England the great landlords who dominate the elections have the power to starve the workers. When the members of legislative assemblies are elected by only a small number, it is for the benefit of this minority that the whole nation is governed.

So do not lose sight of your political rights, for if the law refuses to grant them to men of all abilities as they acquire that true, professional knowledge which enriches life and guarantees independence for everybody, if the law does not call upon an increasing number of citizens—increasing, that is, in proportion to their intellectual development—to exercise their political rights, you will fall beneath the yoke of a new aristocracy, the aristocracy of money—parasitical, grasping, and a thousand times more tyrannical than the aristocracy from which your fathers were delivered.

However, take care that you look upon political rights as only the means which will enable you to strike, through the law, at the evil roots of society and at the abuses which dominate the social order today: abuses in the organisation of government and politics, commerce and agriculture, the family and religion. It is the social system, the base of the structure, which must concern you, not political power, which is but an illusion, supreme one day and overturned the next, restored in a new form only to be overturned once more. For politics, properly speaking, affects only special interests which differ from state to state, and concerns none but the privileged classes. Up to now the exercise of political power has been an egotistical science which governments have used with varying skill to exploit their peoples, whereas social science embraces the whole human race. The truly benevolent ruler acts for the common good and keeps the welfare of both the individual and the community constantly in mind.

But as in society today political power is still the keystone of the state, so you must continue to fight to extend your political rights. The able farmer and craftsman, the inventor of new products or methods, the skilled worker, artist, scholar, teacher, doctor, engineer, military or naval officer—all have a better claim to be electors or deputies than freeholders and petty landlards, who, in a word, produce nothing, and live at the expense of the real producers of wealth.

Fellow-workers, my book describes the great social drama
which England unfolds before the eyes of the world. It will acquaint you with the callous egotism, revolting hypocrisy and monstrous excesses of the powerful English oligarchy and its unpardonable crimes against the people. It will prepare you for the inevitable and terrible struggle between the proletariat and the aristocracy, and help you to judge whether the English people are destined to throw off the yoke and rise again, or whether this great nation must remain forever divided between a cruel and corrupt aristocracy on the one hand and a wretched and degraded people on the other.

Through the English example you will see how precarious is the existence of a people whose civil liberties are not guaranteed by political rights and social institutions, established in the equal interests of all. You will see how important it is for you to obtain these two guarantees and fit yourselves through education to make proper use of them.

Be sure of this, that your freedom and progress depend entirely on spreading throughout your ranks a thorough knowledge of every law and institution which either harms or benefits the workers' interests.

History shows us that urban and rural workers have been slaves for thousands of years. Their servitude might have endured for ever had not the advent of printing brought books within their reach. Reading has spread slowly among the working classes, but greater freedom has always followed in its wake. When people could read the Bible and the Gospels, they rejected the domination of Rome and the priests; when they had newspapers to instruct them in the rights of man, they demanded that their rulers should be accountable for their actions, that public office should be open to all, and that all (or at least all males) should have equal civil and political rights.

My brothers, we do not live in ordinary times: the people are no longer satisfied with partial emancipation; they understand at last that every man is a citizen of the world, all are part of the great human family, naturally dependent

one upon the other. It follows that they wish all who dwell upon this earth to be emancipated, free and happy.

Today the privileged classes are in the grip of a terrible fear: they threaten, the earth trembles. We must leave the songs of the bard to happier days, for now is not the time to amuse ourselves reading romances, poetry or drama. Usefulness first, usefulness. It is imperative for workers to learn the causes of their sufferings and the means to remedy them; they must understand the march of history and what lies behind the actions of the privileged classes. That is why they must make it a duty, an act of conscience even, to read and reflect on the works of their devoted champions. Let them study the books of Eugène Buret, Gustave de Beaumont, the Abbé Constant, Cormenin, Fourier — in short, the works of every human being to whom God has revealed the source of the evils which plague society and violate the laws of harmony.

Workers, if you would persevere in the study and investigation of these evils and reflect on them calmly, you will need to steel your hearts and summon up all your courage, for you will uncover wounds too deep to heal.

I clasp your hands in mine, all you men and women who up to this day have counted for nothing in the world. I join with you in the common task, I live in you through love.

I am your sister in humanity.  
Flora Tristan, 1842

NOTES

1(TN). The Corn Laws were enacted at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815, at the instigation of the predominantly agricultural interest in Parliament. They were intended to keep the price of corn (as well as agricultural profits and rents) high by pro-
A Visit to the Houses of Parliament

Members are extremely careless in their appearance: they present themselves in frock-coat, riding-boots, hat on head, umbrella under their arm. They pay little attention to most of the speeches.
Baron d’Haussez. *Great Britain in 1833*

In France our liberties are established by custom long before they are confirmed by law. In vain did Napoleon and the Restoration repeal the laws which marked the beginning of woman’s emancipation; this tyranny merely served to awaken universal resistance. Women are proving daily that they are men’s equal in intelligence, and public opinion is growing correspondingly more enlightened. But in England intellectual ideas have no power to extend the bounds of freedom; there, freedom has never advanced a step without the aid of insurrection. While women authors illuminate the entire British horizon with their brilliancy, not only do laws and prejudices combine to keep women in the most atrocious bondage, but even the House of Commons, that body which claims to represent the whole nation, if not in reality, at least on paper, and which goes down upon its knees to receive the orders of a queen, carries inconsistency to such lengths that it refuses women the right of admission to its sittings!

In this country, which claims to be free — if we are to attach any value to the rhetoric of journalists and politicians — one half of the nation is not only deprived of its civil and political rights, it is also in many ways virtually enslaved; women can be sold in the market-place, and the legislative
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assembly 

assembly **denies them a place** in its bosom. Oh shame! Shame on a society that persists in such barbarous customs! What ridiculous arrogance that England should insist on the right to impose her principles of liberty throughout the world! Yet where is there a country more oppressed than England? Even the Russian serf is happier than the English factory-worker or the Irish peasant. Is there any place on earth where women do not enjoy more freedom than in the British Isles?

Being forbidden to attend a sitting of the honourable gentlemen made me want to gain admittance all the more. I was quite well acquainted with a member of the House, a Tory, not an unreasonable sort of man; he had travelled a good deal and prided himself on being free from prejudice. I was innocent enough to believe that his deeds would match his words; I asked him — thinking it the most natural thing in the world — to lend me some men's clothes and take me with him to the sitting. My proposal had the same effect on him as had, in days gone by, sprinkling holy water on the devil! What! Lend men's clothes to a woman and insinuate her into the sanctuary of male power? What an abominable scandal, what depravity, what fearful blasphemy! My friend the Tory turned white with fear; red with indignation, snatched up his hat and stick, rose without a glance in my direction, and declared that he could have nothing more to do with me. His parting words were from the Gospel: 'Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!' to which I added the verse: 'And woe to that man by whom offence is taken!'

This incident showed me the omnipotence of prejudice in England, but I could also see that the ruling classes are not taken in by it; they accept its demands out of hypocrisy, because this enables them to exploit the dogmas of religion to keep the masses in their place.

The will of woman is the will of God; this proverb is so often borne out that I feel it augurs well for woman's future emancipation. My resolution was not shaken in the least. To

A VISIT TO THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

me all obstacles are a challenge which only make me persevere the more. I saw very well that I could have no further recourse to any member of Parliament, whatever his political colour, nor to any other Englishman. I therefore approached in succession several gentlemen attached to the French, Spanish and German embassies, but met with refusals everywhere, not for the reason that the Tory had given, but because they feared to compromise themselves by offending against accepted custom. At last, strangely enough, I found an eminent Turkish gentleman, sent to London by his government, who not only approved my plan, but helped me carry it out by offering me a complete set of clothes, his admission card, his carriage, and his own amiable company as escort. How gratefully I accepted his offer!

We settled on a day. I repaired to his lodging with a French gentleman we had taken into our confidence. Here I changed into an elaborate Turkish costume; it was much too big and I felt very uncomfortable in it — but he who desires the end must accept the means!

London and its buildings are so well lit that one sees better by night than by day. We get out of our carriage at the door of the House of Commons. Our costume attracts attention: everybody stares at us, follows us, and I hear murmurs all around me: 'The young Turk appears to be a woman.' Since in England all is scrupulous formality, the usher asks the real Turk for his admission card, takes it to show I don't know who, then makes us wait for more than ten minutes. There we stayed, surrounded by row upon row of inquisitive onlookers, both men and women, assembled in this lobby to enjoy the interesting sight of watching their representatives pass by. Two or three ladies fixed their gaze upon me and repeated out loud, 'There's a woman in Turkish clothes!'

My heart was beating violently and I blushed despite myself; I was in agonies during that long wait for fear that people would complain and prevent me from being admitted. However, my appearance inspired respect.
overcame my agitation and preserved a calm demeanour, for such is the influence of costume that, in donning the Turkish turban, I had acquired the serious gravity habitual to the Moslem.

At last the usher returned and told us we could go in. Quickly we made for the little staircase on the left and took our places in the back row so that we would have nobody behind us; but here too our costumes excited attention, and soon the rumour spread throughout the gallery that I was a woman in disguise. In that one evening, I learned more about Englishmen in high society than ten years of ordinary residence in London would have taught me: no words could express their extreme discourtesy, coarseness — brutality, even — towards me.

Although the Turk and I outwardly maintained the calm bearing of the true Ottoman, they must have guessed how distressed and embarrassed we were feeling. Yet without the slightest respect for my status as a woman and a foreigner, or for the fact that I was there in disguise, all these so-called gentlemen passed in front of me, staring at me boldly through their lorgnettes and exchanging remarks about me in loud voices; then they stopped behind us in the stairway, and — speaking loud enough for us to hear — exclaimed in French:

'What is that woman doing in the House?'
'What reason can she have for attending the session?'
'She must be French; they have no respect for anything.'
'Such conduct is most improper.'
'The usher should make her leave.'

Then off they went to speak to the ushers, and they came to stare at me as well; others hastened to inform members of the House, who left their seats to come and stare in their turn. I was on thorns; what a gross breach of good manners and hospitality! But I shall pass over these painful memories and speak about the House itself.

In appearance nothing could be meaner or more commonplace; it puts one in mind of a shop. It is rectangular-
any attention to what they say — indeed, they do not seem to be very interested in it themselves! Certainly a far deeper silence reigns there than in our Chamber of Deputies, as most of the members are either asleep or reading their newspapers.

We had spent more than an hour in the chamber; a second speaker had succeeded the first without attracting the slightest attention, and I was beginning to feel extremely fatigued; my understanding of English was insufficient for me to follow the debate, but I am sure I would have understood it better had not the monotonous voices of these wax-works grated so intolerably on my nerves. We were preparing to leave for the House of Lords when O'Connell rose to his feet. Immediately everyone awoke from his parliamentary torpor; the recumbent members sat up, rubbing their eyes; newspapers were set aside, whispering ceased, and on every pale impassive face there appeared an expression of the keenest attention.

O'Connell is a bull-necked, commonplace sort of man; his face is ugly, red, blotchy and wrinkled; his gestures brusque and unrefined. His dress matches his person — he wears a wig and a wide-brimmed hat. To see him in the street, you would take him for a cabman in Sunday best — but I would swiftly add that beneath this gross exterior God has concealed a being full of fire and poetry, and there is a world of difference between the two.

The spokesman for the people looks no different from any ordinary citizen, and this may be one reason for the power he exerts, for in this corrupt society, elegant manners make one suspect the truth of a man's words and the purity of his heart. When O'Connell speaks in defence of his people or in the name of his religion, he is inspiring, sublime — how he makes the oppressor tremble! His ugliness vanishes, his face becomes as impressive as his words. His little eyes flash fire, his voice rings out, resonant and clear; he speaks with such emphasis that his words go straight to his listeners' hearts, where they kindle every emotion from pity to rage. At meet-

ings he provokes his audience to tears, anger, enthusiasm — and revolt! I truly believe that this man could work miracles.

If Queen Victoria were to rely on so powerful an adviser, if she could set aside religious differences and unite in fraternal embrace the people of her three kingdoms, she could achieve in a few years what Louis XI failed to accomplish in his entire reign, and her liberated people would bless her name. But to succeed in this great task, it would need a follower of Machiavelli to sit upon the throne.

We proceeded to the House of Lords. There, too, they guessed my sex, but the manners of these gentlemen were very different from those I had been exposed to by the representatives of shopkeepers and financiers. They kept their distance; there were some smiles and whispers, but I heard no unseemly or discourteous remarks. I saw that I was in the presence of true gentlemen, tolerant of a lady's whims and even making it a point of honour to respect them. The English nobility, despite its aloofness, possesses an urbanity of manner, a politeness one seeks in vain amongst the overlords of finance — or in any other class.

As we entered, the Duke of Wellington was addressing the House; he spoke in a cold expressionless drawl, and what he said, though received with deference, made little impression. Then Lord Brougham delivered two or three facetious pleasantries which provoked uproarious laughter from their lordships.

Their chamber is hardly any better than the Commons; it is built on the same plan, with the same rough unfinished masonry devoid of any decoration.

The noble lords conduct themselves no differently from their fellows in the lower chamber; they too keep their hats upon their heads, but this is from pride in their rank rather than lack of manners, and they require spectators in the public galleries and witnesses summoned to appear at their Bar to bare their heads, even if they are members of the Commons.

When Lord Wellington had finished speaking, he
spread across his bench with his legs on the back of the
bench above and his head lower than his feet - a most
grotesque posture, just like a horse with its legs in the air, as
we French would say.

I left these two chambers hardly edified by what I had
seen, and certainly more scandalised by the behaviour of the
gentlemen of the House of Commons than they had been
by my clothes!

NOTES

1(TN): The Houses of Parliament, as described by Flora, were
almost completely destroyed by fire in October 1834, and from
that date until the opening of Barry’s new buildings in the 1850s,
both Houses were in temporary accommodation.

Parliament voted to admit ladies to its sittings in 1835, four
years before Flora published her Promenades dans Londres.

It therefore seems reasonable to infer that the events described
in this chapter took place during Flora’s second visit to London, in
1831. All three speakers she mentions by name could have spoken
on the same evening; Daniel O’Connell took his seat in the
Commons in 1829, Lord Brougham moved from the Commons to
the Lords in 1830, and the Duke of Wellington had been entitled
to a seat in the Lords since 1808.

2(TN): Daniel O’CONNELL (1775–1847) was known as ‘the
Liberator’ for his lifelong efforts on behalf of the Irish people. A
lawyer by training, he exploited every legal loophole to outwit
repressive landlords and administrators as he laboured to build up
the Catholic Association in his native land. In 1828 he was elected
an MP but was unable to take his seat until 1829 when the Catho-
lic Emancipation Act was passed. O’Connell used his remarkable
powers of oratory to advance the Irish cause by constitutional
means; throughout his life he remained opposed to subversion
and violence. He worked to free the predominant Catholic
majority in Ireland from the burden of the tithes they were com-
pelled to pay towards the upkeep of the Church of Ireland, and to
improve the lot of the impoverished tenants of Anglo-Irish land-
lords. In these two causes he had some support from his colleagues
in the House, but in his agitation for the repeal of the Union with
England, he was alone.

3(TN): The Duke of WELLINGTON was leader of the Tory
Opposition in the House of Lords in 1831, and again in 1835–
1841. Henry BROUCHAR (1778–1868) became a Baron in
1830. He was renowned in both Houses for his wit and eccen-
tricity. Flora took a dislike to him because he adopted some of the
ideas of Malthus and the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham; she
distrusted the liberal doctrines of free trade, as propounded by
the Whigs. She probably did not know that he also voted against
the admission of ladies to parliamentary debates.
Factory Workers

Children of our glorious land,
Up! To arms! and watching stand!
Militants of industry,
Constant must your vigil be.

Vainly the parasite
Mocks at your labours;
You are the masters now,
Rouse yourselves, neighbours!

Producers all, impose your will,
Show the hicks who scribble still!
What the peaceful future plans
For deserving artisans!

Up! To arms! etc.

A Call to Arms (song by Vincard,
a worker and a disciple of Saint-Simon)

The workers are now the pariahs of society: not a voice
is ever raised in the legislature for their good, except it be
for some restraint upon their liberty, or curtailment of their pleasures.

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In the beginning all societies go through a period of slavery,
but the evils it produces make it essentially transitory, and its duration is in inverse ratio to its harshness. If our fathers
had not treated their serfs with more humanity than English
industrialists treat their workers, servitude would never have
lasted all through the Middle Ages. The existence of the

English worker, whatever his occupation, is so appalling
that the negroes who left the sugar plantations of Guadeloupe and Martinique to "enjoy English freedom" in Dominica and St. Lucia are glad to return, when they can, to their former masters. But do not think for a moment that I should want to commit the sacrilege of condoning any form of slavery! I only want to show that English law treats the workers more harshly than the autocratic French master treats his negroes, and that the slave of English capitalism has a far heavier task to earn his daily bread and pay his taxes.

The negro is exposed only to the caprice of his master, whereas the English worker and his family are at the mercy of the manufacturer for their very existence. If calico, or any other product, suddenly falls in price, all employers affected by it, whatever their business — spinning, cutlery, pottery, etc. — immediately agree among themselves to reduce wages, without troubling to consider whether the new rates are sufficient to feed their workers or not; at the same time they increase working hours. When the worker is on piece-work they demand better quality work, yet pay less for it, and if they are not satisfied with the standard of work, they refuse to pay for it. Cruelly exploited by his employer, the worker is also squeezed dry by taxation and starved by the landlords, so he invariably dies young, his life shortened through overwork or through the nature of the work itself.

His wife and children do not long survive him: harnessed to the same machines, they succumb to the same causes; or if winter comes and they have no work, they die of hunger by the wayside.

When the division of labour is carried to extremes, industry makes enormous progress, but it dispenses with Man's intelligence and reduces him to the function of a mere cog in the machine. If the worker were still capable of performing more than one stage in the manufacturing process, he would enjoy more independence and his greedy employer would have fewer opportunities to torment him; if he spent no
more than a few hours at the same task, his constitution would be able to withstand the harmful effects of his work. In no English factory will you ever see a grinder over the age of thirty-five; yet the use of the grinding-machine has no ill-effects on our workers at Châtellerault, because grinding is only one part of their work and takes up only a little of their time, whereas in the English factories grinders do nothing else. If the worker were engaged in various stages of production, he would not feel crushed by a sense of his utter insignificance, nor would his intelligence become dulled through constant repetition of the same actions; he would not feel the need for strong liquor to rouse him from the torpor induced by the monotony of his work, nor would drunkenness add the final touch to his misery.

Unless you have visited the manufacturing towns and seen the workers of Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Sheffield, Staffordshire etc., you cannot appreciate the physical suffering and moral degradation of this class of the population. It is impossible to judge the plight of the English worker by French standards. In England the cost of living is half as much again as it is in France, and since 1823 wages have fallen so low that the worker is nearly always forced to claim parish relief to keep his family alive. As the parish authorities are overwhelmed by the increased demands on their resources, they regulate the amount of relief according to the worker's wage and the number of children he has, in relation to the price of potatoes, not bread, for to the English worker bread is a luxury! Skilled workers fare little better, as their higher wages make them ineligible for relief. The average wage they earn, I am told, does not exceed three or four shillings a day, and they have, on average, four children, so if you relate these figures to the price of necessities in England, you can easily imagine their distress.

Most workers lack clothing, bed, furniture, fuel, wholesome food — even potatoes! They spend from twelve to fourteen hours each day shut up in low-ceilinged rooms where with every breath of foul air they absorb fibres of cotton, wool or flax, or particles of copper, lead or iron. They live suspended between an insufficiency of food and an excess of strong drink; they are all wizened, sickly and emaciated; their bodies are thin and frail, their limbs feeble, their complexions pale, their eyes dead. They look as if they all suffer from consumption. It is painful to see the expression on their faces, which is common to all workers, and I do not know whether it comes from the stress of permanent fatigue or the black despair that corrodes their hearts. It is difficult to get them to look at you for they all keep their eyes lowered and only occasionally steal a sidelong glance at you; then their normally impassive faces, wrapped in profound gloom, assume a stupid, brutish, thoroughly evil expression.

In English factories, unlike ours, you never hear snatches of song, conversation and laughter. The master does not like his workers to be distracted from their toil for one moment by any reminder that they are living human beings; he insists on silence, and a deathly silence reigns, so much does the worker's hunger reinforce the employer's command! Between master and man there exists none of those bonds of familiarity, courtesy and concern one finds in France: bonds which soften the feelings of hatred and envy that the rich, with their disdain and harshness, their excessive demands and their love of luxury, always arouse in the hearts of the poor.

In an English factory you would never hear the master say to a worker, 'Good day, Baptiste, how is your wife and the little one? Good, that's splendid! Let's hope she'll soon be quite well again; tell her to come and see me as soon as she's up and about.' An English employer would think it demeaning to speak to his workers in this way. In every factory owner the worker sees the man with the power to dismiss him from his job; that is why he touches his cap so humbly every time they meet, but the employer would think it beneath his dignity to return the greeting.
In my eyes slavery is no longer the greatest human misfortune since I have become acquainted with the English proletariat. For the slave knows he will get his daily bread all his life and be cared for when he falls ill: but there is no bond between the English worker and his master. If the employer has no work to offer, the worker dies of hunger; if he falls ill, he dies on his wretched straw pallet, unless when he is on the point of death, he has the good fortune to be taken into hospital — for it is a special favour even to be admitted. If he is old, or crippled in an accident, he is dismissed and has to resort to begging, but then he has to be careful not to be arrested for vagrancy. All in all, his position is so appalling that you feel he must be possessed of either superhuman courage or total apathy to be able to endure it.

Cramped conditions are a commonplace in English factories; the space allowed each worker is calculated with a careful eye. The yards are small, the staircases narrow; the worker is obliged to move around his machine or loom sidewardly. If you visit a factory it is easy to see that the comfort and welfare, even the health, of the men destined to spend their lives within its walls, have never entered the builder's head. Cleanliness, one of the surest roads to health, is sadly neglected; the more meticulously the machines are painted, varnished, cleaned and polished, the dirtier are the floors, the dustier the windows, the more squalid the yards with their pools of stagnant water. It is a sad truth that if the buildings and workshops were clean, trim and well maintained, like our factories in Alsace, the rags of the English worker would appear even more hideous in contrast. But no matter what the reason for the lack of cleanliness, whether it is due to accident or design, it is none the less an extra burden for the worker to bear.

England has no greatness left; save in her industry, but this is truly colossal, in terms of the mechanical inventions she owes to the mathematical genius of modern times. These magical machines seem to turn everything around them to stone! The docks, the railways, the immense size of the factories, all testify to the importance of British commerce and industry.

The sheer power of the machines and their universal application amaze the mind and stupefy the imagination. Human science in a million different guises has usurped the functions of the intellect; with machines and the division of labour, motors are all we need; reasoning and reflection are no longer necessary.

I have seen a steam-engine with the power of 500 horses! Nothing could be more impressive and awe-inspiring than the sight of these iron masses in motion; their gigantic dimensions strike terror into the imagination and dwarf the capacities of Man. This mighty engine is housed in an enormous shed where it controls a considerable number of machines working on iron and wood. The huge bars of glowing iron, raised and lowered forty or fifty times a minute to set the monster's tongue darting in and out as if to devour everything in sight; the dreadful groans it emits; the rapid revolutions of the immense wheel that issues from its entrails only to return before it has revealed more than half its vast circumference; all this fills the soul with terror. In the presence of the monster, you have eyes and ears for nothing else.

Recovering from your fear and stupor, you look about you for Man, but you hardly see him, reduced to the size of an ant by the giant proportions of everything around him. He is busy feeding enormous iron bars between two great blades curved like the jaws of a shark, which cut through them as cleanly as a Damascus steel slicing through a turnip.

If at first I felt humiliated to see Man brought so low, his functions reduced to those of a machine, I was quick to realise the immense advances which all these scientific discoveries would bring: brute force banished, less time expended on physical labour, more leisure for Man to cultivate his intelligence. But if these great benefits are to be realised, there must be a social revolution; and that revolution will come, for God has not revealed such admirable
inventions to men only to have them remain the slaves of a handful of manufacturers and landed proprietors.

Beer and gas are the two main products consumed in London. I went to see the superb brewery of Barclay and Perkins, which is certainly well worth a visit. This establishment is very spacious; no expense has been spared in its equipment. Nobody would tell me how many hogs of beer it produces each year, but to judge from the size of the vats, it must amount to an extraordinary quantity. It was in one of these vats — the largest, it is true — that Messrs Barclay and Perkins once invited a member of the English royal family to a dinner at which more than fifty guests were present. This particular vat is 30 metres high! Everywhere that steam can be used, manpower is excluded, and what strikes one most about this brewery, is how few workers are employed in such a vast enterprise.

One of the largest gas-works is in Horseferry Road, Westminster; I have forgotten the name of the company. You cannot visit it without a ticket of admission.

In this palace of industry the abundance of machinery and iron is quite overwhelming; everything is made of iron — platforms, railings, staircases, floors, roofing etc.; plainly no expense has been spared to ensure that buildings and equipment alike are made of the most durable materials. I saw cast-iron vats with the dimensions of a four-storey house. I wanted to know how many thousand tons they hold, but the foreman with me was just as uncommunicative as the foreman at the brewery, and preserved an absolute silence.

We went into the big boiler-house; the row of furnaces on either side were burning brightly; the scene was not unlike the descriptions the poets of Antiquity have left us of Vulcan's forges, save that the Cyclops were animated with divine activity and intelligence, whereas the black slaves of the English furnaces are sullen, silent and impassive. There were about twenty men present, going about their work in a slow, deliberate fashion. Those with nothing to do stood motionless, lacking the energy even to wipe away the sweat streaming down their bodies. Two or three turned their blank gaze towards me; the rest did not even raise their heads. The foreman told me that only the strongest men were selected as stokers; even so, they all developed chest diseases after seven or eight years of the work, and invariably died of consumption. That accounted for the misery and apathy depicted on every countenance and apparent in every movement the poor wretches made.

The work demanded of them is more than human strength can endure. They wear nothing but cotton drawers; when they leave the boiler-house they merely throw a coat over their shoulders.

Although the space between the two rows of furnaces must have been fifty or sixty feet, the floor was so hot that the heat penetrated my shoes immediately and made me lift up my feet as if I had stepped on live coals. I stood upon a large stone slab, but even this was hot, although it was well off the ground. I could not stay in this terrible hell; the heat was suffocating, the smell of gas was making me dizzy, and my chest felt as if it would burst. The foreman took me to a gallery at the end of the boiler-house where I could see everything in relative comfort.

We made a complete tour of the establishment; I was lost in admiration for all the machines, for the meticulous care that marks every stage of the work; but in spite of all precautions there are frequent disasters in which men are injured and even killed. O God! Can progress be bought only at the cost of men's lives?

The gas produced at this factory is taken by pipes to light the Oxford Street area as far as Regent Street.

The air is horribly tainted; at every instant you are assailed by poisonous fumes. I emerged from one building, hoping to find the air purer in the yard outside, but everywhere I went, the foul exhalations of gas and the stench of coal and tar pursued me.

What is more, the entire premises are very dirty. The yard
time to make a hasty descent.

I awaited the end of the business, anxious to see what would become of the poor stokers. I was surprised that not one woman appeared. Dear God! I thought, have these men no mother, sister, wife, or daughter waiting at the door as they emerge from this hell, to wash them in warm water, to wrap them in shirts of flannel; to give them something nourishing to drink; to greet them with friendly words that would give them heart and help them to endure their cruel lot? I was in a fever of anxiety, not one woman appeared. I demanded of the foreman where these men, soaked in sweat, would go to take their rest. 'They'll lie down in this shed,' he replied, quite unconcerned, 'and in a couple of hours they'll go back to their stoking.'

This shed, open on all sides to the wind, was really no more than a shelter from the rain, and inside it was as cold as ice. A sort of mattress lay in one corner, almost indistinguishable from the coal around it. I saw the stokers stretch out on their stony bed, with no covering but a greatcoat so stained with sweat and coal-dust that it was impossible to tell its original colour. 'There,' said the foreman, 'that's how these men get consumption; they don't look after themselves, going straight from the heat into the cold like that.'

This last observation by the foreman was all I needed to send me out of the factory in a state of exasperation.

So this is how men's lives are bought and sold; and when the work required of them kills them, at least the capitalist is spared the expense of increasing their wages! But this is even worse than the slave trade; I cannot think of a crime more monstrous, except cannibalism! There is no law to prevent factory-owners from disposing of the youth and strength of their workers exactly as they please, purchasing their existence, sacrificing their very lives, just for the sake of making money—and all the workers get is seven or eight shillings a day!

I do not know whether any owners of similar factories have had the humanity to provide a warm room equipped
with tubs of warm water, mattresses and woollen blankets, where stokers could go after their work to wash, wrap themselves up and rest in a temperature more in keeping with the one they had just left. It is a sham and a scandal for a country that the things I have described should ever happen.

In England, when the coach arrives at a post, ostlers come running to throw cloths over the horses' backs, rub them down, wash their feet and lead them to a warm stable strewn with dry straw.

Several years ago a number of extra staging-posts were introduced, because people realised that excessively long relays shortened the lives of the horses. Yes, but a horse costs the capitalist £40 or £50 sterling, whereas the state provides him with men for nothing!

NOTES

1(TN). Jules VINÇARD (1796 – 1879) was a skilled worker who became a follower of the social reformer Saint-Simon and founded the journal La ruche populaire (The People’s Beehive) which reviewed Flora’s Promenades dans Londres favourably, but declined to serialise her Union ouvrière on the grounds that it was too Utopian. In his day, Vincard was probably best known for his popular songs.

2(TN). Châtelherault is a town in the west of France, not far from Poitiers and situated on the river Vienne; it is famous as the home of the national small arms factory, established in 1819.

3(FT). “It is on record that many workers in the manufacturing towns of England do not attend church because they have no clothes.

On 31 May 1840 I visited the district of Bethnal Green in the company of the parish officers responsible for distributing relief in this part of the city of London.

Among the wooden hovels scattered all over the "gardens" we noticed one which stood out from the rest by reason of its even more wretched appearance. It might have been taken for a pile of rotting timber thrown upon a dunghill; the fence separating it from the other hovels consisted of broken planks interspersed with scraps of iron and metal all in an indescribable state of filth and dilapidation. In one room on the ground floor — the only room in the house — with its floor a few inches lower than the pile of rubbish in the yard outside, lived a family of ten. This hovel which measures less than ten feet square by seven feet high has a rent of 15s. 6d. a week. It is even more difficult to convey an idea of the state of the family than to describe their dwelling. The man, the head of the family, was shakings with fever; illness and hunger had reduced him to extreme emaciation, and nothing about him seemed alive except his gaze, transparent and animated by the heat of his fever; it was impossible to endure his anguish expression. This man, thirty-seven years of age, English by birth and a silk-dyer by trade, told us that he could earn up to £5 a week when employed, but that he had been unable to find work for five months. The relief officer confirmed that he had always been of good character, and that neither laziness or vice had brought him to this state. His wife, crouching by the broken hearth, held an infant to her breast, and three more barefoot young children were outside. Their father confessed to us that the other children had gone out "in the hope of finding something, either by begging or otherwise". For five months he had had no other means of existence than what the parish allowed him and what the children brought home. Despite the extreme destitution of this family, they refused to take refuge in the workhouse.

In another yard of this abominable quarter we found a family which seemed to us even more wretched than the first, if that is possible. They were living in one upstairs room, quite spacious and light, but approached by a dark and dirty staircase where every stair shook beneath our feet. This family consisted of eight people, all present at the time of our visit. The head of the family was a weaver of velvet, still young, and English by birth. He earned 7s. 6d. per week, but he was not continuously employed. His lodging cost him 2s. 6d. per week, and for nearly two months he had been unable to pay his rent. The only article of furniture in the room was his loom; there were no chairs, no table, no bed. In one corner was a big heap of straw, half hidden by a scrap of cloth,
and in it were buried three children, stark naked like animals, with not a single rag between them. The woman had her back turned to us and was vainly trying to fasten about her what remained of her clothing so that she would be fit to be seen. The man was wearing a blue coat with two or three shining engraved buttons still on it; he had no shirt. He received us with courtesy, and sadly yet calmly told us the full horror of his plight. When we entered he was holding a Bible, and when the parish officer asked him why he did not go to church, he pointed to his bare chest, to his wife standing motionless with shame in the corner, and his children hiding one behind the other to avoid our gaze, and replied that soon he would not even be able to go out looking for work. This family was accounted honest, and the officer had already distributed clothes to them several times, but lack of work had forced the father to trade these gifts of charity for bread. And this is not the only part of London privileged to suffer such wretchedness. Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Shadwell, St Giles and St Olave would provide us at every step with scenes similar to those we have just described.


4(FN). This expression, which I have also noticed in slaves in America, is not confined in the British Isles to factory workers alone. It is found wherever people are dependent or subordinate; it is one of the most characteristic features of a working-class twenty million strong. There are some exceptions, nevertheless, and it is nearly always among women that they are to be found.

5(FN). I saw it in Birmingham. The proprietor of the factory assured me that the power of the machine equals that of 500 horses; it turns more than 200 driving-wheels and sets in motion wood-saws, shears for cutting iron, rollers of every size and an assortment of machines for various purposes such as making zinc spoons etc. While I was there, a sixpenny piece was placed under a press to give me some idea of the power exerted — and out came a ribbon of silver paper forty-two yards long and as thin as an onion-skin.

6(TN). Barclay Perkins' brewery in Southwark was one of the

7(TN). This was the Gas, Light and Coke Company, founded in 1812 and first in the field for the commercial exploitation of gas. It established its works in Horseferry Road in 1813 and one of its first achievements was to light the approaches to the Houses of Parliament. By the time of Flora's visits to London in the 1830s there were nearly a dozen other companies, all in fierce competition.
Infant Schools

Very few mothers are sufficiently enlightened to raise their children in accordance with the best principles of education.

Even fewer have the freedom to devote themselves to the study and application of these principles.

The most affluent and populous cities are the very ones which present the greatest number of obstacles and disadvantages in this respect.

Nowhere in the infant school should the pedagogue and scholar be found; everywhere, on the contrary, there should be a sound and philosophical system of instruction inspired by the devotion and heroism characteristic of maternal love.

As for small children, their physical development alone deserves prolonged and intelligent study. At this age it is essential not only to maintain healthy organs but to create them: an abundance of fresh air and almost constant activity are necessary for the cultivation of a constitution which would otherwise perish through inactivity or constraint.

The intelligence should develop gradually through play and not through sustained effort, until pupils reach the age when they are capable of concentration.

Jean-Denis-Marie Cochin, *Manual for Infant Schools* (1833)

If the working classes had the means to arouse the interest and respect of our legislators, would not the legislature and that Church which costs so much to maintain occupy themselves with improving the religious, moral and political education of the people, which so far only a few isolated individuals have attempted to do?

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Great discoveries are always in accordance with the needs of the times: this is a universal historical truth. The hand of God is behind the establishment of Infant Schools and I am convinced that of all recent institutions these are the most promising and best answer the needs of Europe and the whole world. Education may be said to begin with life itself, and the system of instruction followed in the infant school is so superior to any that the child, whatever his class, can obtain at home, and has so great an influence on all who receive it, that a worker's child sent to such a school from the age of two will undoubtedly make better progress than a child from the wealthier classes who continues to be educated at home.

Infant schools inculcate the principle of mutual aid and respect for communal property in the heart of the child. In his eyes all social distinctions are obliterated and he defers only to the monitors who instruct him. He is required to account for what he knows and to teach what he has learned, and this gives him a great facility for expressing his thoughts; he learns to understand the relation between cause and effect, between men and what they know; and in this way he acquires a thoroughly sound judgment. If when he proceeds to primary school his education continues along the same lines, by the time he is sixteen he will be proficient at reading, writing, arithmetic, drawing and geometry, as well as the practice of most of the processes used in the mechanical arts and in agriculture, so that he need not be condemned, as his father was, to continue in the same work for the rest of his life in order to earn a living. The same method may be applied with equal success to every branch of knowledge, for we learn nothing so well as when we are required to teach it to others. If they were brought up in this way, men would work in large associations because they would find it easier and more pleasurable to work together.

If children were sent to public institutions from the age of two, the needs of the household would be less pressing, the education the wife had received would enable her to earn her living as well as the husband, and this would bring us a little nearer to organising society on Phalansterean principles. In 1440 when the first attempts at printing were being made at Strasbourg, any prediction of the power this new invention was to exercise four hundred years later would have been greeted with nothing but incredulity.

When we observe the fate of children in every class of society we can only marvel that infant schools were not invented long ago, and that they are not being set up faster and in greater numbers to meet the needs of the population. People are forced to work hard every day to feed their families, so they cannot look after their children; when they are young, they are locked up inside the house, or somebody has to be paid to look after them, and when they are older they are allowed to run about the streets. Shut up alone in damp, poky rooms with no fresh air or warmth, even if they survive sickness and accidents these children are weak, undersized and sometimes crippled for the rest of their lives. In the streets the dangers threatening their existence are even greater, and they are almost certain to be perverted in the jungle of vice common to all big cities, so they drift into crime before they have been trained to work.

Then again, if we consider the innumerable hazards which threaten the livelihood of the worker: the reduction of wages, the lack of employment, the excessive increase in the cost of living, to say nothing of the possibility of illness and additions to the family, we can only feel that it must take a rare love of work and an uncommon degree of sobriety and thrift, as well as a great deal of luck and considerable strength of character, if a man is never to fall victim to destitution. However, what becomes of the children in the frightful tribulations that beset the working class?

In the evenings the father and mother, weary and bitter, return from their daily toil, their minds tormented with worry. Ah! The scenes of family life that now unfold are of a kind to brutalise even the child with the happiest disposition: often beaten because he has fallen down and torn his
clothes or let the dog steal his dinner, the unfortunate child, constantly reviled and abused, becomes lying and deceitful and nurses a sullen hatred for his father and mother. On their side, dire poverty and addiction to various means of deadening their minds to the sufferings they endure extinguish any feelings of affection in their hearts, so that they come to hate the children who add to their privations, and finally abandon the older ones to vagrancy and leave the new-born baby at the foundling hospital.

Only set up infant schools, and as if by magic you transform the child and his home. First of all, the burden of poverty and worry is lightened; the child leaves the family home in the morning to be welcomed into a place where he will be under the guidance of a friendly person genuinely interested in his welfare; he spends his day with companions of his own age in an uninterrupted round of pleasurable activities: first his attention is captured by a variety of interesting things to look at, then he joins in singing and marching in procession, receives instruction from the more advanced pupils, and passes it on to the others less advanced than himself, thus enjoying all the importance of being a member of the school. Every day he learns how to live in a community, exercises his faculties in preparation for a higher role, learns to know himself and to appreciate others, learns to respect others in order to be respected himself. He enjoys good health, for his strength and skill are improved by gymnastics; he becomes clean and modest and can give a reason for everything he does.

When he returns home at the end of the day, his parents are delighted to see him: he has given them no cause for worry, nor has he taken up a moment of their time. They approve of his behaviour, ply him with questions all through supper, and every day they marvel at the progress he has made in judgment and understanding; then, observing his conduct, they are led to examine their own, and not wishing to be despised by their own child or to see him held in greater esteem than themselves, they too seek diligently to change their ways. They come to appreciate the benefits of education and often go to school to share the children's lessons, so the charming spectacle of moral development in the infant school will improve the morals of the parents.

If we now turn our attention to the affluent professional class of society, which is probably more able and better educated than the opulent leisure classes, we shall see that the children of this class have no less need of infant schools than the children of the proletariat.

Most of our moralists have declared themselves in favour of public education because it has been proved that teaching is more effective in action than in precept, that practical lessons which pupils give one another have more influence on their moral and intellectual development than instruction by even the most skilful teachers. If we consider the irresistible and unfailing enthusiasm which mutual instruction generates whenever children are gathered together, and the intense competition which is stimulated by their awareness of their daily progress, and if on the other hand we consider how profound first impressions are and how many corrupting influences surround children in the paternal home, we cannot understand why the middle classes regard infant schools with such marked repugnance that they will not accept this system of instruction for their children, but prefer to cut them off from the social advantages which come from a common education.

Of all the educational systems in vogue in modern times, the only truth to be almost universally accepted is the advantage of public education over private. There is such a wealth of precise observation in Xenophon, Plutarch and Montaigne that it seems inconceivable that it has taken us so long to arrive at the only complete, effective and true method, which takes Nature as its guide and leads man from the cradle to the age of puberty. Rousseau owes his influence solely to the ideas he borrowed from these three thinkers; unfortunately he did not know how to make use of them, for he did nothing to advance the most important of the social
they do not know what truth is? As everybody around them expresses different opinions about the same things, they see nothing but the clash of wills, and absorb self-interest through every pore.

It cannot be hoped that a child raised in this fashion can ever be a good citizen; he will be the slave of his passions, of prejudice, of all things and all men. Either he will never rise above mediocrity or he will sink to the depths of villainy because of his uncontrollable vices; for things to turn out otherwise he would have to possess quite extraordinary qualities to surmount all the obstacles to the rational development of his intelligence.

If we now turn our attention to that part of the population which fortune permits to live in luxury, we perceive that there is no child who suffers more and whose mind and body deteriorate faster because of his family life than the child of wealthy parents. Providence may save the child of poor parents from the perils of vagrancy, and sometimes we see men rise from the depths of poverty to be an honour to the human race; middle-class children are nearly always in the company of their parents and receive constant signs of their affection, so that the qualities of the heart may develop in them in spite of the defects of their mind or the vices of their character; but it is quite otherwise in wealthy families. Their children are certain to be corrupted and they have no chance to acquire any good qualities. They are brought up by nurses, tutors and servants: all these slaves strive to humour the little ones whose tears frequently have the power to bring about their instant dismissal; they anticipate all their desires, they yield to them in everything, they even rouse their brains to create artificial needs for their charges, and the unfortunate little creatures, cradled in idleness, spoiled by adulation and puffed up with pride, develop the vices of tyrants and the habits of despots. They are imperious, bad-tempered and unable to resist the slightest whim. Their parents rarely see them, and scold them, punish them unreasonably or reward them undeservedly, according to
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their mood. The servants, fearing the children will tell tales, teach them to lie, and when the little despots are displeased they invent lies of their own and accuse the servants who have offended them of the very misdeeds they fear to be accused of themselves. The very air the rich child breathes is corrupt! Hypocrisy is constantly before his eyes; now it is the mask the servants wear in the presence of his parents, now it is the two different faces his parents assume inside or outside the home. He hears two different languages as well: one of servility, the other of arrogance. To hold his attention his nurse fills his head with fantastic tales. At home the whole world is at his feet: if he is angry or tearful they all beset themselves immediately in their anxiety to soothe him; outside, everybody greets him with deference, fawns upon him and seems flattered to receive him, so how can he fail to believe himself a person of consequence and to affect the hard, proud manners of his parents? Tender affections are unable to grow in his heart, only vanity has a place there; pride makes him touchy and every day he grows more demanding until finally the imprint of Nature is quite effaced and there is no child left, only a puppet in rich clothes. He is the son of a lord, a man who lives in a palace with an army of servants, never goes out save in a coach, and is greeted very humbly by all the tradesmen in the neighbourhood.

Excess of food and excessive precautions against cold, heat, rain, fresh air and any kind of fatigue, form a régime which makes no demands on the child's constitution, so that when he is old enough to go to college, he has no physical or moral resources. Transported into this new world, he finds it hard to adapt himself to its rules and the spirit of equality among his companions; he complains to his parents who redouble their admonitions to his teachers, and their efforts are not without fruit, for henceforth their child is treated with every indulgence, always excused and never constrained; some poor, intelligent classmate writes his essays and is paid in cakes. Every Sunday he takes home to

INFANT SCHOOLS

his parents a good report; sometimes he is at the top of his class and at the end of the year he is sure to gain a prize. After seven or eight years he leaves school as stupid as when he entered it, having acquired nothing but fresh vices.

I have no hesitation in affirming that the rich child needs to be rescued from the characters and the influences around him just as much as the poor child does from the brutality of his parents and the influence of the streets.

In the infant school the education is the same for all. The most intractable and fretful child absorbs the information imparted to him; lack of intelligence is no drawback as everybody starts at the same level and lessons are always based on the progress made by each member of the class. The child receives none but sound ideas and learns to live in a community, to perform happily his share of the common tasks, and to acknowledge as the true aristocracy only the intelligent and gifted; he willingly accepts the poorer child as his leader if the latter happens to be a monitor and stands above him in the intellectual hierarchy.

In the age of tyranny the high valleys of the Vosges sheltered in their inaccessible retreats intrepid Protestants who had chosen to abandon their fields to be plundered rather than give up their freedom of conscience. Their new home could sustain only goats and deer, so they and their descendants led a harsh existence. In 1767, Oberlin, a pastor of the Protestant church, arrived in their midst: he was a man possessed of that powerful energy which begets a heart full of love for his fellow men. Through his labours he overcame the barrenness of the soil, set up schools and established apprenticeships in various trades, so that prosperity took the place of poverty. As the parents were busy in their fields or at their trades, and were unable to care for their little children, Oberlin had the inspired thought of gathering them all together under one roof and selecting suitable young women to be trained by himself and his wife as teachers; this was the origin of the infant school. Later Oberlin's methods were imitated and perfected in Switzerland.

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Robert Owen, convinced that in order to be effective education must start in the cradle and aim to fit children for the society to which they are destined to belong, founded his own infant school in New Lanark, Scotland, in 1816, but it was not until 1827 and 1828, when the system had already taken root in Germany, that France and England thought of adopting it.

What could be more admirable than the accurate observation and sound judgment of the practical philosopher Owen when he founded the infant school? The principles he discovered for the education of children contain a truth plain for all to see. By his study of nature alone, Owen bequeathed to the world a system for the moral development of young children far superior to any previously known—because it contains nothing that cannot be verified by simple observation.

The energy and curiosity which a child displays at every stage of his development are the two forces which Owen controls with benevolence and forbearance, for the infant intelligence recoils from suffering and cruelty just as quickly as the body recoils from physical pain. Owen attributes a good share of the evils of this world to the system of rewards and punishments; he banishes both from his school to prevent the growth of envy, jealousy, vanity and false standards, and to avoid provoking lies and deceit. In his school the natural consequences of good and evil actions are their own reward: the child who behaves well is happy to see the joy his conduct gives to others, while the child who behaves badly finds no allies, and the abuse of force is put down by the intervention of all. Owen has learned from experience what unlimited power love and kindness exert over children: mutual acts of benevolence and generosity are the foundations of his educational system. The gentleness and goodwill of teacher and pupils blend in harmony with the natural energy and curiosity of childhood to form the simple and powerful instrument which Owen discovered as the means of shaping the social character of human beings. He controls their will through the constant exercise of kindly feelings, overcomes their antisocial tendencies through the influence of training in good habits, and wins their unlimited trust through the authority which truth exerts upon us all, for he himself says nothing that is not true, and in all his teachings his disciples recognize the light of truth.

The fundamental law of the Owenist school responds to the need of love, the desire for knowledge and that thirst for truth which reveals the soul. Owen discovered this law through a series of experiments and through careful study of the social behaviour of his workers and children. He found that the influence of custom, affection and truth produced such favourable results that it is hardly surprising that he vented his indignation against the absurdity of persisting in the use of antisocial educational methods which have for centuries been vainly piling 'precept upon precept and line upon line'. The results of conventional education demonstrate only too well the poverty of educational theory, and provide ample proof that the principles of truth and morality can have a lasting influence on us only when they are practised in life. When they are constantly applied to our actions, these principles cannot help but exercise our judgment, motivate our conduct and shape our habits.

This is how Owen puts it: 'Reading and writing are merely instruments by which knowledge, either true or false, may be imparted; and, when given to children, are of little comparative value, unless they are also taught how to make a proper use of them.

When a child receives a full and fair explanation of the objects and characters around him, and when he is also taught to reason correctly, so that he may learn to distinguish general truths from falsehood, he will be much better instructed, although without the knowledge of one letter or figure, than those who have been compelled to believe, and whose reasoning faculties have been confounded or destroyed by what is most erroneously termed learning.

It is readily acknowledged that the manner of instructing
children is of importance and deserves all the attention it has lately received; that those who discover or introduce improvements which facilitate the acquirement of knowledge are important benefactors of their fellow-creatures. Yet the manner of giving instruction is one thing, the instruction itself another, and no two objects can be more distinct. The worst manner may be applied to give the best instruction, and the best manner to give the worst instruction. Were the real importance of both to be estimated by numbers, the manner of instruction may be compared to one, and the matter of instruction to millions: the first is the means only; the last, the end to be accomplished by those means.

'If, therefore, in a national system of education for the poor, it be desirable to adopt the best manner, it is surely so much the more desirable to adopt also the best matter of instruction.'

Owen has observed the development of human intelligence; he does not speak to children of abstractions or the revelations of the soul, for the simple reason that such ideas are beyond their comprehension. The first things that man learns, as well as all the means of self-preservation, come from the exercise of instinct and the power of intuition on objects submitted to the perception of his senses. Education must therefore begin with learning about the material world; furthermore, the child should take a pencil in his hand before a pen. He should be able to draw objects before he learns the combinations of conventional signs which represent their names, for once he understands the intellectual fiction which connects a collection of different signs with the means of remembering sounds and speech, words and songs, as well as the concepts of size and number, his intelligence has taken a giant step and henceforth the world of ideas is wide open to him.

In the Owenist system children are admitted to school from the age of two; they stay until they are ten, and not until they reach the age of seven or eight do they learn to read. One general rule dominates the entire system: the child is taught nothing that does not follow directly from what he already knows. Owen has too much common sense to want to tell his little pupils about God before God has revealed Himself to their hearts; he trains them to practise charity, shows them that true self-interest consists in not being selfish, and relies on their personal satisfactions and regrets to teach them the meaning of conscience.

In his infant school Owen follows where Nature leads; he adapts his material to the intelligence of his pupils and uses the methods of Lancaster. Step-by-step explanation, exercises in judgment, physical training and an introduction to the methods used in various trades, simultaneously develop the intellectual faculties; a rational love of one's neighbour, manual skills and physical strength. Owen does not permit any formal religious instruction, preferring to base his moral code on the principle of reciprocity: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' In that sense he was right when he informed me that there was no infant school in London run according to the principles he had followed when he set up his own.

In England when the question arose of following the example of Germany and setting up infant schools, Owen was consulted by Lord Brougham and informed him that in his own school he permitted only such abstract ideas as the child could understand, that is, ideas capable of being explained through material objects; that he did not know of any religious beliefs appropriate to the infant intelligence; that children, like all other living beings, are affected by pleasure and pain and are just as capable as adults of understanding that self-interest obliges them to observe the rules that reciprocity dictates; and that in his view the dogmas of original sin, paradise, hell etc., were of a nature to create false notions of justice and injustice, to make the mind dispassionate and to foster hatred against anyone of any other religious persuasion. Lord Brougham objected to Owen's system on the grounds that religious beliefs still exert a
considerable influence. The institutions known by the name of National Schools and British and Foreign Schools (which the learned Lord has favoured with his patronage) admit children of all persuasions and do not seek to convert them to any particular creed; yet all the same, fanatics have prevailed upon them to prescribe the study of the Bible—and this is for children between the ages of eighteen months and seven years! The converts in Tahiti and New Zealand could not do better than that!

In Switzerland and several of the German kingdoms schools and infant schools had already been flourishing for some years before public opinion in England showed any signs of interest, for in intellectual matters, Germany is far ahead of England. Religious controversy ceased to excite any interest there long ago, and intellectual inquiry has abandoned the countless different interpretations of the Bible to explore the higher realms of thought. The establishment of infant schools and the methods of teaching children have excited neither controversy nor theological objections.

In the Austrian states parents are obliged to send their children to school; this government measure is no more than the fulfillment of its most pressing duty, for it is in society's interest that each one of its members should receive an education in keeping with the way that society is organised.

As I was strongly convinced of the importance of infant schools I was very eager to visit the places where the children of the poor find shelter and instruction. There are still so few real infant schools in London that I asked fifteen or twenty people if they could direct me to one, but nobody knew what I meant. In the end I approached the founder of the infant schools himself, the estimable Mr. Owen, whom I had the pleasure of meeting during his stay in Paris in 1837. 'Alas!' Owen said to me, 'I do not know of a single infant school in London which is a genuine school for children. There are many establishments supported by public charity, but not one founded on my principles.' In the mouth of Owen such words could not help but carry weight, and they frightened me. If there were no infant schools in the monster city, where did children go when their parents worked all day long; where did those poor half-naked, barefoot little children take shelter during a whole long day of cold, rain or fog? Who would teach them reading, arithmetic and drawing; who would inculcate in them habits of cleanliness, order and co-operation? Who would teach them all those things that children learn through play? Nobody. London still does not possess genuine infant schools, and what few schools exist are far from being a substitute. That is why between five and eight o'clock on summer evenings one sees so many children in the streets, especially in densely populated districts. At that hour, when the day's work is over and the streets are thronged with traffic, the poor little creatures are allowed to emerge from their holes and take the air. In London the poor inhabit either the attic or the cellar; often one single room houses father, mother, and seven or eight children whose faces bear witness to the rank foulness of the air inside. Nothing could be more cadaverous and stunted than these little ones; their extreme emaciation and pallor, their vacant eyes, their excessive dirtiness and hideous rags are a sight worthy of the deepest compassion. I have always preferred to live in populous districts, so every evening I found myself in the very midst of all these children swarming from their homes like ants from an ant-hill, and if the streets were narrow I was all too often aware of the foul stench rising from this mass of bodies. In winter there is no hour at which they may be let out, so I cannot imagine where they can go for a breath of fresh air. Oh! all you poor people of no account, the way you are treated is inhuman! The aristocracy can take the air in their magnificent parks, on their vast estates, or anywhere on the continent, where they go to spend the money the people earn for them; the aristocracy have splendid palaces and mansions in the finest parts of London and use them for only a few months in the year, yet they still reserve for their sole use all the squares which
enhance the city, while the child of poor parents, lacking the space even to breathe, dies like a dog swollen with dropsy, in a damp cellar or miserable attic!

I was on the point of leaving London without having discovered a single infant school when one day as I was loudly complaining of the futility of my search, a Tony who chanced to be present said to me, 'You are mistaken, madam; London possesses several infant schools just like your own, and if you like I will give you the address of one or two.' I accepted with alacrity and set out at once.

One of the addresses was in Palmer's Village, that is, on the very edge of Westminster, more than seven miles from the centre of the city. This school was so little known that we had to provide ourselves with a guide, and although he lived in the neighbourhood, it was only after asking the way twenty times or more that he succeeded in getting us to the house; but we arrived at last. We had to cross a yard of sorts, then we entered a little room with a low ceiling and uneven floor, furnished with an old table and two or three benches; the children there were all very young, about a dozen little waifs so dirty and ragged that it was painful to behold them. From this room we passed into a somewhat larger one containing fifty-two children between the ages of three and six, just as dirty and ragged as the others; the smell pervading the room was so intolerable that we were forced to go outside, but the door was left open so we could observe the class from the yard. It was similar to our infant schools; they were being taught a variety of things, particularly to count. The old woman in charge of the school was most obliging and gave us all the information she could. The place was not maintained by the parish, but a member of the House of Commons, Mr William Smith, bore all the cost himself: he had built the house and set aside an annual sum of thirty pounds plus coal and candles for those responsible for running it — that is to say, the old woman, her husband and their daughter. In addition to what is given by the founder, each child must pay a penny a week; this sum, small though

INFANT SCHOOLS

it is, is often beyond the means of parents with several children to send to school, and if admission is not absolutely free, these schools can hardly be said to fulfill the purpose for which they were set up; however, what would be a niggardly half-measure on the part of an official body appears in a different light when it is the work of an ordinary citizen; then it becomes a fine act of charity more likely than anything else to revive the zeal of parish authorities and rekindle the spirit of charity, if indeed the last spark is not already extinct in the Church of England, the richest church in Europe. Unfortunately in England the parishes are independent and do not have to fear the censure or supervision of a central administration. In London, as elsewhere, the parish council or vestry is composed of wealthy people who have at their disposal a garden or square where they can send their children for fresh air and exercise. They show little concern for the fate of the children of the poor.

The aged superintendent of the infant school told us of another school which was also the result of private charity, the benefaction of a much respected lady, Miss Mary Doyle.

With the same guide to lead us we boldly plunged into a labyrinth of unpaved lanes where at every instant our cab was in danger of being shaken to pieces; and this was in London, very near the fashionable districts and elegant squares! We passed through streets so mean and squalid that it would be hard to find their equal in any country of Europe; most of the houses (or rather hovels) have no windows or doors and outside each one there is a pit where rubbish, slops and every kind of filth lie rotting, poisoning the air with their smell.

The faces, dress and language of the inhabitants go very well with the names of the streets (Hog Lane, Dung Street, etc.) but they are not all thieves and prostitutes, for most of them are weavers with large families to keep who come here because the rents are low. What utter destitution! The sewer is not more disgusting. How the poor suffer on the very doorstep of the rich!

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At last after many wrong turnings and vain inquiries our
guide made us stop at the mouth of an alley even dirrier
than the rest. There we had to leave our cab as it could never
have got through the way we had to follow; the school was in
an interminable lane with several sharp turnings, and every
so often we came upon ponds in which rain-water was care-
fully saved for washing clothes. This lane, a positive sewer, is
dangerous enough for a fully grown person and must be
even worse for children as they make their way to school. It
was only after great care and many tribulations that we
reached the house. It had rained that morning and what
with the sticky mud and the soapy water we nearly fell into
the pond twenty times over.

A young woman of between twenty and twenty-five was
in charge of the school; she was of decent appearance, had a
soft voice and courteous manner, and seemed well-bred.
She was somewhat embarrassed at our visit and no sooner
had we entered than she began to tell us how badly the
house was situated; the spot was marshy and the laundries
all around made it a very unhealthy place to live in. 'The
kind lady who founded the school,' she went on, 'is a good
friend of the poor, but she is far from wealthy; this house
is all she has, and however shabby and inconvenient it may be,
her charity is no less admirable for that! What is more, she
goes without the barest necessities of life in order to pay me
twenty pounds a year to look after the girls, and the same to
my father to look after the boys.' I agreed that such gener-
osity was indeed very noble, and I wondered if anywhere in
the three kingdoms there was a rich man capable of such an
action.

The school consisted of two rooms, each far too small for
the number of children (there were eighty in all) and so low-
pitched that the windows had to be kept open in all weather
to let in some air. The boys were on the ground floor and the
girls above; there was access from one room to the other by
means of a wooden ladder, and children of two were climb-
ing up and down holding on to a rope.
the training establishments, which he claimed turned out none but teachers of blasphemy and insurrection.

Mr. J S Reynolds, the secretary of the Society, was next to speak; he described the efforts of the Committee to promote scriptural education among the children and said it was their fear that if the government intervened, education would not contain sufficient religion. He therefore besought the noble company, on behalf of the Committee, to exert all its influence to ensure that Parliament confined its activities to the industrial regions, seeing that the Society could not hope that the Chartists in those parts would ever adopt scriptural education for their children. The secretary rounded off his report with the tidings that the Committee had despatched teachers to Smyrna, Syria and Egypt to spread scriptural education among the Ottomans and the Arabs.

Captain Vernon Harcourt, in an oration worthy of a zealot of the sixteenth century, called the attention of the assembly to the considerable number of children roaming about the metropolis with nobody to make them read the Bible. He warned that the Catholics were taking advantage of all these abandoned Protestant children by bringing them up free of charge in their own schools; they were even going so far as to provide them with clothes in the hope of making converts, and he knew of entire families who had been converted to Catholicism by these means.

The Reverend James Cumming proposed that the assembly should affirm that the present and eternal well-being of all individuals, the good order of every class in society and the stability of the most precious institutions of the Empire all depended for their existence on scriptural education. It amazed him to hear certain persons maintain that the Holy Scriptures were beyond the understanding of children. He stated that the baptism of new-born infants imposed the obligation to initiate them into the doctrines of religion, so that their very first halting words were taught them from the Bible. He rejected the contention of Rousseau that a child’s religious instruction should not begin before the age of nine or ten. He said that more than 600,000 people in London had no regular place of worship, and more than 900,000 had no knowledge at all of God or of the Holy Scriptures. 'The question,' he cried, 'is not whether children should be brought up in school or at home, but whether they are to receive an education for Heaven or for Hell. If the children of the poor are not given a scriptural education they will be raised in obedience to one of the two great principles which struggle against us: they will fall into the hands of atheists or the priests of Rome!' And the Reverend Cumming, transported by the fanaticism of a Luther or a Calvin, gave free rein to his hatred of Catholicism. 'The children of England,' he cried, 'are exposed to the greatest dangers; they are rushing headlong to their ruin, for popery is invading us on all sides. Catholic priests are roaming the country setting up schools and enticing Protestant children inside them so that they may corrupt and seduce them and make them abandon the Church of England, the sole guardian of established truth! And so our unfortunate children will be turned from the path of righteousness by these idolatrous priests; they will be brought up in idolatry, absurdity and all the stupid rituals of Catholicism: they will worship statues and pictures and be taught the blasphemous words, Hail Mary. The risks the Protestant churches run are so great that infant schools should be set up everywhere so that every child that is born will receive a scriptural education. If Ireland had such schools she would be a very different place today. The effect of scriptural education may be seen in Scotland, where they teach the Bible from the earliest hours of infancy, whereas in Ireland the Bible, if not totally rejected, is certainly excluded from all instruction.'

The Reverend Cumming spoke for more than two hours, and all through his long discourse his voice was charged with a holy indignation against popery, as he called it. He concluded with these words: 'For my part, I have no desire that men should say I extended the domain of science, instructed my fellow-citizens, shone in literature or electrified the
masses with my eloquence; I would consider I had worthily fulfilled my task if a simple epitaph engraved on my tomb proclaimed that I had taught a single child to pronounce the name of Jesus!

This speech was frequently interrupted by bursts of applause.

Mr. Labouchere, the current President of the Board of Trade, a man one would have thought either too enlightened to have any dealings with a Society whose avowed aim is to teach the Bible to infants between the ages of two and seven, or too independent to betray his convictions and toady to the aristocracy, was present at the meeting and spoke in much the same strain as the Reverend Cumming. The Reverend J. Stratton showed more tolerance and said that he applauded the establishment of every kind of school for the education of children, but this laudable spirit of philanthropy did not meet with the support of the noble gathering, and after several further speeches all in favour of scriptural education, the meeting rose.

Surely nowhere but in England can there still be people simple enough to try to make religious propaganda with Bibles and religion out of argumentation. It must be admitted that to propose stopping the advance of Catholicism by distributing the Bible and teaching it to babes and sucklings is quite absurd, a ridiculous idea for such a solemn assembly to entertain!

Apart from the Society I have just described, there are several others supported by the subscriptions of the aristocracy; but despite all these efforts the Church of England has a rough struggle ahead against the Catholic priests, for they are men who understand the need for toleration and are gaining the acceptance of all parties because they are prepared to come to terms with the ideas of the times, something which the stiff-necked puritans cannot bring themselves to do.
English Women

Is there a shadow of justice in the fate that has befallen women? Is not the young girl a piece of merchandise displayed for sale to any man willing to bargain for her possession and sole proprietary rights? Is not her consent to the marriage bond a mockery, forced upon her by the tyranny of the prejudices which beset her from her earliest childhood? Men would have her believe that the chains she wears are forged out of flowers; but she can have no illusions about her degradation, even in countries with an excessive fondness for philosophising, like England, where a man enjoys the right to lead his wife to market with a rope about her neck and deliver her like a beast of burden to anyone willing to pay the price. In this respect, is our public opinion any more advanced today than in those uncouth times when a certain Council of Mâcon, a real Council of Vandals, deliberated whether women had a soul and decided in the affirmative by a majority of only three votes? English law, which moralists praise so highly, grants men other rights no less degrading to women, such as the enticement of a husband to be awarded damages at the expense of his wife's avowed lover. In France procedures are more civilised, but in essence slavery is always the same.

Charles Fourier, 
*Theory of the Four Movements* (1808)

What a revolting contrast there is in England between the extreme servitude of women and the intellectual superiority of women authors! There is no evil, suffering, disorder, injustice or misery arising from the prejudices of society.
English gentleman, or the bigotry and pretensions of the bourgeois, the tyranny of the husband and father, the offensive pride of superiors and the servility of inferiors, then the further they are from reality when they portray a picture of domestic happiness. Happiness without freedom! How can there ever be happiness in a society of masters and slaves?

This is what happens in wealthy families: the children are confined to the third floor with their nurse, maid or governess; the mother asks for them when she wishes to see them, and only then do the children come to pay her a short visit, during which she addresses them in a formal manner. As the poor little girl is starved of affection, her capacity for loving is never awakened and she does not know the sweet feelings of intimacy, trust and frankness that come naturally to every little girl who has a loving mother, while for the father she hardly knows, she has a respect mingled with fear, and for her brother she keeps the consideration and deference she has been obliged to show him from her earliest childhood.

The system followed for the education of young girls seems to me fit to turn the most intelligent child into a blockhead. M Jacotot says, 'In everything there is everything'; but English education on the contrary seems to demonstrate that in everything there is nothing! It is concerned solely to imprint on these young minds the words of all the European languages without the slightest thought for the ideas. This extravagant folly is as cruel as it is stupid: a little girl is given a German nurse, a French governess and a Spanish maid, so that from the age of four to five she may learn as many languages. I have seen some of these poor little things whose plight was truly pitiful; they could not make themselves understood by anyone around them; all the pretty tricks of speech were denied them, and as they were unable to communicate in words, they were obliged to have recourse to signs, which led to either frustration or apathy according to the nature of the child: some became fractious and noisy, others moody and silent. Forced to overload her memory with the vocabulary of three or four languages, the child acquires only a confused notion of the meaning these words express; she retains the oral signal but the idea it represents escapes her; she develops an abnormal memory, but the intelligence required to understand concepts is destroyed. No doubt a knowledge of languages is necessary for a people whose greed invades the entire earth, but it is essential first to subordinate every kind of instruction to the development of the child, and only then to consider the usefulness of the language that the child is to be taught. It is rare, if not impossible, to be able to express oneself with facility and elegance in three or four languages. As incorrect and outlandish forms of speech combined with a foreign accent give offence in any country, and as women are rarely if ever called upon to conduct business with foreign powers, I think that on the whole there are more useful things for them to learn.

But whatever is taught, the system followed is the same as for languages. The young girl must learn music whether she has any aptitude or not; she must also be able to dance, draw, and so on. The result is that young ladies know a little of everything but have no talent which is of any use to them even for their amusement. Of course one meets with exceptions, but these are rare.

As for their moral education – it all comes from the Bible. Nobody will dispute that this book is full of good things, but what a number of obscenities, indecent stories and improper descriptions would have to be removed before placing it in the hands of young girls if their imagination were not to be sullied and they were not to think that all the actions society condemns are justified: theft, murder, prostitution etc.; for whatever the reverend gentlemen may say, scriptural education is the most antisocial system of all. There are countless paradoxes in English society, but this is among the most shocking. To insist that a young girl should be pure, chaste and innocent, and then to prescribe for her
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reading a book containing the stories of Lot, David, Absalom, Ruth and the Song of Songs; to allow her to read St. Paul's sermons on fornicators and regale her mind with scenes of rape, orgy, adultery and prostitution expressed in the picturesque language of the Bible; and then to tell her that the words breeches, shift, drawers, thigh, bitch etc., must never pass her lips! In this way young girls are instructed in the appearance of chastity and innocence and the reality of vice, just as, through being exhorted to observe the Sabbath, the people are instructed in the appearance of religion and the reality of idleness and its consequent disorders. It is a curious fact, but nowhere is there any morality; nobody believes in chastity, probity, or any accepted sense of the word virtue any more; nobody is taken in by appearances, yet they still serve to mask the morals of the nation.

Young ladies have very few amusements: as family life is formal, arid, and intolerably boring, they plunge headlong into the world of the novel. Unfortunately these romances revolve around lovers such as England has never known, and their influence gives birth to hopes that can never be fulfilled. The imagination of our young readers takes a romantic turn and they dream of nothing but abductions, but as this is the century of luxury and comfort, every abductor is the son of a nabob or lord and heir to an immense fortune, and every abduction is accomplished in a superb carriage drawn by four horses. Far from fulfilling the desires of which they are the object, wealthy young men have hard hearts and jaded senses; they submit everything to cool unsentimental calculation. The bitter disappointments young ladies suffer would be avoided had they been brought up to live simply, to enjoy the pleasures of the intellect and to disdain the gratifications of vanity. If they had learned the lessons of the Gospels, they would know that great wealth invariably corrupts the heart, and they would not have the least desire to be loved by young men who spend their lives in gambling and getting drunk with prostitutes. But these young ladies, after waiting in vain for the carriage and four

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horses, reach the age of twenty-eight or thirty and then marry some small merchant, obscure clerk or someone of even less account; many never marry at all.

Of course the fate of the married woman is very much sadder than that of the spinster; at least the unmarried woman enjoys a certain freedom, she can enter society and travel with her family or with friends, whereas once a woman is married, she cannot stir from the house without the permission of her husband. The English husband is like the lord and master of feudal times; he is sincerely convinced that he has the right to demand of his wife submission, respect and the passive obedience of a slave. He cloisters her in the house, not because he loves her madly or is jealous like the Turk, but because he considers her to be his property, his chattel, an object for his sole use which must always be within his reach; it never enters his head that he should be bound in fidelity to his wife. This manner of looking at things, which leaves his passions a free rein, is attributed by many people to the influence of the Bible.

The English husband sleeps with his servant, casts her out when she is pregnant or after she has given birth, and thinks himself no more guilty than Abraham when he sent Hagar and her son Ishmael forth into the desert.

In England the wife is not mistress of the household as she would be in France. In fact she is almost a stranger in her own home: the husband holds the money and the keys; it is he who controls expenditure, hires or dismisses servants, orders dinner every morning and invites the guests; he alone decides the fate of the children; in short, he has sole charge of everything. Many women do not know the nature of their husband's business or what is to be the profession of their children; and they are generally ignorant of the state of their fortune. The English wife never asks her husband what he does, what company he keeps, how much he spends or how he passes the time. Not one of them would dare to ask such questions. From the extreme dependence of English wives and the respect they show for the wishes of their lord and
master, to the easy familiarity and active interest French wives display towards their husbands, is as far as the distance between French civilization today and in the age of St Louis. The English wife has no guarantee that her fortune will be safe; she is robbed of everything without her knowledge. It is quite common for her to remain in ignorance of her husband’s bankruptcy, ruin and even suicide, until she reads in the newspaper that he has blown his brains out.

I have already said that it is customary for children to live with their nurse or governess in a room apart. Their mother never sets foot in it; it is not from her that they learn to speak and gradually develop their heart and mind. When the nurse or governess takes them down to her in the drawing-room she looks to see that they are clean and have fresh clothes on; once she has finished her inspection she kisses them, and that is all until the morrow. When they are older the children are sent away to school so their mother rarely sees them, and once they are married, relations between them are almost at an end; they write to each other and that is all. The coldness and indifference of the wife and mother is not only the result of the soul-destroying education she has undergone, it is also the natural consequence of the position she occupies in the conjugal home. What interest can she take in an association which is one-sided and in which her wishes or opinions are of no account? How can a slave be anything but indifferent to the good or bad fortune of her master?

I think I can guess what gives these English ladies the title of housewives: it is their sedentary existence. It is almost inconceivable that anybody who stays at home all the time should do absolutely nothing; however, this is exactly what happens. Not only do they do nothing, but they would consider themselves little better than servants if they so much as picked up a needle; so time is an intolerable burden to them. They rise very late, dawdle over breakfast, read the newspapers and dress; at two o’clock there is another meal, then they read novels, and write letters often fifteen pages long. Before dinner they make a fresh toilet, and after dinner, towards seven or eight o’clock, they sit a long while over tea. At ten o’clock they take supper, and then they sit alone by the fire.

Nothing reveals the materialism of English society so well as the state of nullity to which men reduce their wives. Are not social duties the responsibility of women as well as men? Yet these gentlemen think they can banish their wives from society and condemn them to live the life of a vegetable! It must be confessed that scriptural education produces the most extraordinary results! These English households must constitute the most bitter satire on the indissoluble bond of marriage; it would be impossible to invent a more convincing example of the absurdity of marriage as an institution. To account for so large a number of talented women in England one can only assume that the Almighty must have granted them more moral strength and intelligence than He gave their masters; otherwise, living under such conditions, they would inevitably have become completely stupid.

The reasons behind all marriages in England are, on the woman’s side, the desire to escape from a father’s tyranny, to lighten the burden of prejudice which weighs so heavily on unmarried girls, and the hope of enjoying a more important place in the world, for noble souls feel the need to play an active part in society; on the man’s side, solely the desire to appropriate his wife’s dowry and use it to pay his debts and dabble in speculation, or if the money happens to be a fortune, to fritter away the revenues from it in clubs and finishes or in the company of his mistresses.

It is the woman who gets the worst of the bargain. Prejudice leads her to the altar where greed awaits her to strip her of all she possesses; whereas men lead exactly the same lives as before. The marriage bond, so irksome for the woman, imposes no obligations on them, and there is nothing to stop them from living with prostitutes, maidservants or actresses if they so desire. The majority will maintain a mistress in luxurious style in some pretty little house in the
display such talent with impunity, and society, unable to deny her gifts, has raised an outcry against the scandal of her revelations. Poor women! They are permitted only to suffer and forbidden even to complain!

But in England women are also concerned with the most serious matters. Miss Martineau has written some very remarkable works on political economy, Mrs Trollope has published a very successful account of her travels in America, Mrs Gore has written a volume of attractive stories based on the history and customs of Poland and Mrs Shilly writes verses full of melody and feeling; many of these ladies contribute to the reviews and journals, but it grieves me deeply to observe that as yet not one of them has dared to embrace the cause of women's liberty, that liberty without which all other freedoms are short-lived and for which it is so peculiarly fitting that women authors should fight. In this respect French women are far ahead of the English. However, one woman's voice was heard in England half a century ago: a voice which found its irresistible strength and boundless energy in the truth which God implanted in our souls; a voice which was not afraid to attack every prejudice and expose the lies and iniquities of which they are made. Mary Wollstonecraft entitled her book A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: it appeared in 1792.

The book was suppressed the moment it appeared, but this did not save its author from calumny. Only the first volume was published and now it is extremely rare. I could not buy a copy, and had not a friend been good enough to lend it to me, it would have been impossible for me to procure it. The reputation of this book inspires such fear that if you so much as mention its name, even to so-called 'progressive' women, they will recoil in horror and exclaim, 'Oh, but that is an evil book!' Thus calumny often proves too strong for even the best deserved reputation and transmits its hatred from generation to generation without respect for death or glory.

Mary Wollstonecraft dedicated her book to M de Talley-
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rand-Périgord. Listen to this Englishwoman who was the first to dare proclaim that civil and political rights belong in equal measure to both sexes, and who refers to opinions expressed by M de Talleyrand before the Assembly in order to prove to him that it is his duty as a statesman to act in accordance with his convictions and ensure their victory by establishing the complete emancipation of women.

Here are some passages from that dedication:

Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on the simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to be the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be ineffectual with respect to its influence on general practice. ... If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations ...

Consider - I address you as a legislator - whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to subjugate women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness? Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him the gift of reason?

In this style argue tyrants of every denomination, from the weak king to the weak father of a family; they are all eager to crush reason, yet always assert that they usurp its throne only to be useful. Do you not act a similar part, when you force all women, by denying them civil and political rights, to remain immured in their families groping in the dark ...

But if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason - else this flaw in your NEW CON-

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STITUTION will ever show that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant; and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality ... if women are not permitted to enjoy legitimate rights, they will render both men and themselves vicious, to obtain illicit privileges.

And now, this is how she addresses women:

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists - I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Discarding then, those pretty feminine phrases, which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence, and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to show that elegance is inferior to virtue, that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex; and that secondary views should be brought to this simple touchstone.

Mary Wollstonecraft claims freedom for women as a right, in the name of the principle on which human justice and injustice are founded; she claims it because without freedom no kind of moral obligation can exist, because without equality between the sexes morality has no foundation and ceases to be real.

Mary Wollstonecraft says she has an exalted view of women as creatures who, like men, are placed on this earth in order to develop their intellectual faculties. Woman is neither inferior nor superior to man; the two differ in mind

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and body only to complement one another, and since the moral faculties of one are destined through union to complete those of the other, both must receive the same degree of development. She fiercely criticises writers who regard woman as a subordinate being created for man's pleasure. On this subject she has some sharp words for Rousseau, who insisted that woman must be weak and passive, man strong and active; that woman was made to be subject to man; finally that she must make herself agreeable and obey her master, for this is the aim of her existence. Mary Wollstonecraft points out that if such principles are followed, women are brought up to be deceitful, perfidious and coquettish, while as their minds are left uncultivated and the excessive stimulation of their emotions leaves them defenceless, they fall victim to every form of oppression. She shows that the inevitable consequence of all this is to turn morality upside down. The pernicious influence of books in which authors insidiously debase women even as they worship their charms cannot be too often exposed or too severely censured.

Mary Wollstonecraft speaks out bravely and vigorously against abuses of every kind. From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene to the contemplative mind... for all are aiming to procure respect on account of their property; and property, once gained, will procure the respect due only to talents and virtue. Men neglect the duties incumbent on man, yet are treated like demi-gods; religion is also separated from morality by a ceremonial veil, yet men wonder that the world is almost, literally speaking, a den of sharpers or oppressors.

Mary Wollstonecraft was already publishing in 1792 the self-same principles that Saint-Simon was to disseminate later, and which spread so rapidly after the Revolution of 1830. Her criticism is admirable; she reveals in their true colours all the evils arising from the organisation of the family, and her powerful logic is irrefutable. She boldly undermines the mass of prejudices which envelope our society; she demands equal civil and political rights for both sexes, equal admission to employment, professional education for all, and divorce by mutual consent. Without these fundamental principles, she says, any social system which promises universal happiness will only betray its promises.

Mary Wollstonecraft's book is an imperishable work: imperishable because the happiness of the human race is bound up with the cause which A Vindication of the Rights of Woman defends. Yet this book has been in existence for half a century and nobody has ever heard of it...

NOTES

1(FT). In the upper classes, young ladies remain with their governess until they marry; when their mother wishes to see them, she sends them a note by her footman inviting them to come and take tea with her, and the young ladies make a special toilet to visit their mother's apartment, just as if they were going to visit a stranger.

2(TN). Jean-Joseph Jacotot (1770–1840) was a French polymath and educationist: Professor of Latin at nineteen, subsequently Professor of Mathematics and of Roman Law, he evolved a system of education which he put into practice when he was appointed to teach the French language at the University of Louvain in Belgium. Jacotot's system was based on three principles:

1. All men have equal intelligence.
2. God has given to all the ability to teach themselves.
3. Everything is in everything.

3(TN). Louis IX (1214–1270) was the ideal of the medieval king, excelling in all the skills of a knight, yet devout and ascetic. At home he treated the nobles and consolidated his kingdom; abroad he went on two Crusades, in the course of which he