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Dissent in Urban Yorkshire 1800-1850

NINETEENTH century dissenters held decided opinions on contemporary social and political matters and were not afraid to uphold them publicly. In the large urban areas which were springing up in the Midlands and the North of England they increasingly played an active, and in some instances, dominant role in public life. Several factors made this possible. During the first half of the 19th century the numerical strength of dissenters in urban areas grew appreciably. Many of them belonged to that part of the community which was progressing most rapidly in economic prosperity and social status and their upward movement was assisted by the rapidly changing conditions that were typical of the areas where they were strongest. This was as true in Yorkshire as elsewhere.

The changes in economic conditions which took place in Yorkshire were by no means uniform and were certainly different in character from those which occurred in Lancashire. Whereas the latter became, characteristically, the home of the industrial magnate, Yorkshire, on the whole, maintained smaller industrial concerns.¹ Sheffield remained dominated by small businesses mostly connected with the cutlery industry until the second quarter of the century, when the steel industry became predominant.² Leeds had become by 1830 a typical commercial town, with industries organised on a larger scale than at Sheffield, and a population that was outstripping that of its principal rival.³ According to the census returns of 1801 the population of Sheffield was 31,314, compared with 53,162 at Leeds. By 1831 the inhabitants of Leeds numbered 123,393 whereas Sheffield's population was still only 59,011.⁴ The other West Riding towns were still comparatively small but towns like Bradford, Huddersfield and Halifax were also experiencing growth and change, albeit on a smaller scale than at Leeds and Sheffield. Bradford's population in 1831 was 23,223 and Halifax and Huddersfield did not contain more than 20,000 each.

Population growth was by no means confined to the West Riding industrial areas, and also occurred in some East Riding towns. Hull, the largest community in the area, possessed a population of 30,000 in 1801 which had risen to about 50,000 by 1851, most of the increase taking place after 1831. York, the only other town of any size steadily increased its population from 16,000 in 1801 to 26,000 in 1831.⁵

As the Yorkshire towns grew, especially in the West Riding, their appearance and character changed. Contemporary books, such as Robert Leader's *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield*, contain frequent references to old shops, buildings, and other landmarks being pulled down to make way for new developments, and of open spaces disappearing in the rush to provide housing for the growing numbers of people and accommodation for expanding industries.⁶ Edward Baines, Junior,⁷ admitted that the manufacturing districts presented a repulsive sight caused by "the smoke that hangs over them" and "their noisy, bustling and dirty streets".⁸

Immigrants from the countryside who came to find work were forced to adapt their lives to new ways and inevitably suffered hardship, together with those workers already in the towns. The plight of these groups during periods of unemployment was pitiful. In the middle 'twenties when economic conditions were particularly bad several men at Leeds, including Edward Baines, Senior,⁹ who was an Independent and the editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, set up a committee for the relief of the poor. This in itself was not unusual but in 1826 the committee carried out a survey to discover the number of working men who were out of work. The level of unemployment revealed was very high.¹⁰ At times when work could not be found many of the poor were forced to take to crime and vice in order to survive, but they received little understanding from many of the prosperous middle classes, who often failed to appreciate that inability to obtain work was by no means only due to sloth or personal inadequacy. In 1843 attacks were made in the House of Commons on conditions which existed amongst the poor in the industrial districts and Edward Baines, Junior, defended the towns attacked by maintaining that the "iniquitous" poor were not to be considered part of the community.

"That in a considerable community like Leeds there should be a large number of delinquents must be at once admitted. Most of them are the children of idle and profligate parents who are attracted to a large town by the large resources which it offers to enable them to escape regular labour. They do not belong to the working population of the district."¹¹

He maintained that the bulk of the working people worked hard and were well behaved members of the community. Today his argument does not appeal to us and we are much more likely to point out that the majority of the poor could not have averted, or controlled, their hardships because of the prevailing social and economic circumstances.

In their own way the prosperous and established inhabitants were affected almost as severely by the changing conditions. The

new industrial methods forced entrepreneurs to adapt themselves to new modes of production and the threat of ruin was never far away if they failed. All the established families, which often in the 18th century contributed most to the public life of the industrial towns, became increasingly aware that the social fluidity of the times made it possible for poor men of ability to rise in wealth and power and challenge those who held the chief places in the community.

The majority of influential families at the beginning of the century which professed any formal religious allegiance appear to have been Church of England in outlook.¹² There were a few dissenters who could move as social equals with such families by the 'twenties but the majority could not match such opulence and influence.¹³ Nevertheless, the small group of influential dissenters which existed early in the century grew in size and influence as the years passed. When John Marshall, Senior, became the first man outside the landed interest to represent Yorkshire in Parliament in 1826 he had considerable support from prosperous townsmen, the majority of whom were dissenters. Yet it is quite obvious that dissent was not the only sentiment that bound his supporters together. These people were upwardly mobile townsmen whose prosperity, in many instances, was obtained from industrial and commercial enterprise. They were in many cases men of relatively humble origin whose success was closely linked with the new developments of the times. In the vast majority of cases they were supporters of political reform both locally and nationally. It is clear that religious sentiment was only one factor that was common to such people who in effect constituted an emergent social group. It would be very interesting to try to find out how far religious views were important in structuring the group's characteristics.

It is clear that dissenters were prominent in a number of enterprises which were of great importance in the urban industrial areas. Commerce and industry were, of course, of the most significant, although it must not be imagined that dissenters were the only successful entrepreneurs.¹⁴ A number of leading professional men in the Yorkshire towns were also dissenters, solicitors and doctors being the most noticeable. Dissenting solicitors played an important part in public life and were often closely connected with dissenting activities to secure local political reform.¹⁵ Probably though the most remarkable group were those connected with journalism, and it is of considerable interest that dissenters had available such a large and sympathetic Press. This must surely have been so because of the importance of dissent in these areas. The most famous of Yorkshire's dissenting newspapers was the *Leeds Mercury*, run from 1801 by Edward Baines, Senior, and then from the 'twenties by his son. Edward Baines, Senior, was very sympathetic

to the Independents and his son was one of their most prominent laymen. Under their ownership the *Leeds Mercury* became one of the most successful provincial newspapers of the day. But quite apart from this newspaper most dissenters in Yorkshire's towns had local access to a journal sympathetic to their views. At Hull a Unitarian, the Rev. George Lee, edited the *Hull Rockingham* for a long period from 1811 to 1842. James Montgomery edited the *Sheffield Iris* for a period before 1832 and Robert Leader controlled the *Sheffield Independent* for a considerable period after 1832. Montgomery was a Moravian for a long time and the Leader family was prominent in the Independent community at Sheffield. William Byles, the editor of the *Bradford Observer* was probably a Methodist and another Methodist, William Hargrove, edited the *York Herald*. All the newspapers mentioned were radical or reformist in outlook.

Most of the more prominent dissenters were relatively successful and wealthy men but without connections with established or influential families. What social prestige they succeeded in obtaining was the result of unaided efforts. Because they were dissenters such efforts were doubly difficult since the Test and Corporation Acts, at least in theory, restricted the part they could play in local government or other work which involved holding public office. This obstacle was not insurmountable and some dissenters of considerable resource and character did manage, in the years after the Napoleonic Wars, to press for such things as reform in local government and the abolition of church rates, often with surprising success. Yet it was not until the reforms of 1828 to 1835 that the influence of dissenters became considerable. In 1828 the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed; the Reform Act of 1832 gave the franchise to many dissenters for the first time, and the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 made it possible for the class to which many dissenters belonged to take control of local government, although this was not immediate in many towns as councils were not always set up straight away and some of the old organs of local government continued to function for some time.

Although the influence of dissenters was on the increase during the years under discussion the advance was not uniform and some denominations played a greater part than others. The most influential often belonged to the Presbyterian, Unitarian or Independent Churches, and by far the highest proportion elected to local councils between 1835 and 1850 came from these three denominations. Only a very small number of Hull councillors were Baptists or Methodists before 1850,¹⁶ and this was equally true at Leeds.¹⁷ Further evidence confirming the social predominance of the three churches mentioned can be gleaned from the registers of births, baptisms and deaths which dissenting chapels kept before

the state register began in 1837. These often give information about the father's occupation and while references to commercial and professional backgrounds are quite common in the registers kept by Presbyterian, Unitarian and Independent chapels they are not so frequent in registers belonging to chapels of other denominations. Baptist and Methodist registers usually contain more references to craft and artisan occupations and such an impression is supported if one looks at the composition of the committee chosen to superintend the erection of South Parade Baptist Chapel at Leeds in 1824. Represented on it was a woolstapler, painter, printer, plumber and a paper stainer.

The chapel registers also reveal other interesting aspects of dissenting social life. It is evident that within each chapel, and between dissenting communities which were closely linked, there existed an intimate social community. This was to be expected to a certain extent, but the degree of intermarriage which occurred implies that the chapel was very much one of the centres of social life to an extent quite beyond the importance that it has today. It seems likely that the chapel provided a centre where ideas and political opinions could be discussed. Salem Chapel at Leeds acted as a focal point for prominent Independents and among those who worshipped there were the Baines family, Thomas Plint and George Rawson. Nearly all the Independents who became councillors at Hull worshipped at Fish Street Chapel and yet it was amongst the Unitarians at Leeds and Sheffield that this sort of association is most noticeable. Among the worshippers at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, were members of the Musgrave, Marshall, Oates, Stansfeld and Tottie families¹⁸ whilst at Call Lane Chapel, to which the Unitarians gave considerable support, other important families worshipped; namely the Bischoffs, Luptons, Bywaters and Luccks.¹⁹ At Sheffield the Unitarians worshipped at Upper Chapel to which many prominent local families belonged including the Palfreymans, Shores, Staniforths and Nansons.²⁰

It is unknown how far the more prosperous members of the chapels were representative of the membership as a whole but it is possible that a wider section of the community was connected with the chapels than is often thought. A number of Chartist leaders were connected with the churches at one time and several of the leaders of radical political movements in the West Riding between 1816 and 1820 came from a dissenting environment. James Willan, the Dewsbury printer and intended victim of Oliver the Spy, was a Quaker according to the *Yorkshire Gazette*.²¹ A Yeadon schoolmaster, Joseph Brayshaw, while addressing a radical meeting on Hunslet Moor in June 1819, proclaimed himself as being a preacher of a sect which called itself the "Free Thinking Christians", and it is certainly true that the basis of radical

political organisation at that time, popularised by the "Political Protestants", was similar to the Methodist class meeting.²² Having made these points, however, it must be stated that there was little contact of importance between the churches and the working people, a subject that will be dealt with more fully later on.

One of the more difficult problems which has to be faced in making any assessment of the dissenting interest is that of numerical strength. It is evident that the number of dissenters in the country as a whole was rising during the first half of the century,²³ and it is probable that the growth was in excess of the natural increase likely because of the general rise in population. E. R. Wickham in his book, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, has shown that the dissenting churches in Sheffield experienced considerable growth early in the century, particularly in the 'thirties and 'forties, and an examination of dissenting activities in other Yorkshire towns has revealed comparable growth.²⁴ By 1850 Yorkshire dissenters were certainly as strong, in numerical terms, as practising Anglicans. This statement is based on the only comprehensive and reliable figures available; namely those of the religious census of 1851. This showed that the total number of worshippers, including Roman Catholics, who attended non Anglican churches on Easter Sunday 1851, exceeded those who attended Anglican services in practically all the main Yorkshire towns.²⁵ The impression that these returns give of church attendance is substantiated by other figures showing the numbers of sittings which were provided by dissenting places of worship and the Anglican Church. The dissenters made more seats available in all the towns except York.²⁶

Claims have been made that in the industrial districts dissenters made up half the population.²⁷ It is far from clear that this was so even though the dissenting communities grew appreciably between 1800 and 1850. The only really reliable contemporary figures are those of the religious census and the accuracy of these has been questioned by some people. Moreover they do little to show how growth occurred and only enumerate the position after a long period of growth had taken place. However, the census showed that on Easter Sunday 1851 almost two-thirds of the population in the Yorkshire towns did not attend worship of any kind. If this figure was realistic it makes it rather pointless to argue about whether or not half the population were dissenters since only just over one-third of the population in these areas had the conviction to visit a church of any kind. It is very possible that many of the non-attenders were among the poorer classes. Edward Baines, Junior, remarked on several occasions about the absence of such people from the churches,²⁸ and G. C. Holland wrote that not one family in twenty of the working people was in the habit of attending church or chapel in Sheffield.²⁹ If such a situation existed it follows

that most of those who did attend church belonged to the more prosperous classes or were craftsmen. It was from these sections of the community that many of the men who took part in political and social life were drawn—since, even allowing for the surprising amount of self education which existed, very many of the poor were illiterate and ignorant. As the dissenters in most of the Yorkshire towns outnumbered practising Anglicans at this time, it seems highly probable that dissenters were in an advantageous position to secure influential positions in public life, even allowing for the fact that a proportion of the prosperous classes would have little or no religious allegiance.

The background, social standing, occupations and numerical strength of dissenters have all been considered but what of their actual political and social outlook? Ursula Henriques, in estimating dissenting attitudes towards the state, commented; "the moderate dissenters subscribed to the ideal of the balanced constitution. Its acceptance was the condition of political respectability". She went on to say:

"They knew they were an unpopular minority and despite their appeal to candour and the force of fair argument, they were chary of hazarding their religious liberty or their civil rights in the hands of a church bred sovereign people. They wanted a share of the good things of state, and the status that went with them, and they were inclined to champion constitutional reforms which would secure a House of Commons more favourable to themselves, and less dependent on interests hostile to them. After that, their interest lay in Parliamentary rather than popular sovereignty."³⁰

In 1809, the Rev. Edward Parsons, the Independent minister at Salem Chapel, Leeds, preached a sermon entitled "The True Patriot" in which he said:

"The mixed form of government under which it is our distinguishing happiness to live, is the noblest monument of political wisdom and justice ever exhibited in the world. By the union of the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the democracy, we are equally protected against the tyranny of an individual, and that most and heaviest of scourges, the tyranny of a depraved multitude."

Many dissenters would have concurred with both these statements, yet although practically all dissenters were frightened of too much reform, the amount of change envisaged varied considerably among individuals. There was by no means uniformity of opinion.

The majority certainly did not support universal suffrage. Edward Baines, Senior, although in his younger days a pronounced and zealous reformer, drew back on this point. During the troubled days of 1819 he defined his attitude towards Parliamentary reform

many times. He favoured neither the extremes of the Tories nor those of the ultra-radicals, was in favour of triennial Parliaments in place of septennial ones, but did not accept annual Parliaments or universal suffrage. The latter was ruled out of the question because men under the immediate dominion of others, as he considered many working men to be, could not be expected to exercise their vote freely. In many cases the exclusion was hard, "but as it is impossible to frame laws universally adaptable, the minor evil must be endured to secure the greater good".³¹ Baines for all his apparent intellectual approach to the problem went on to exhibit a more fundamental reason for his opposition—fear.

"Universal suffrage would create an overwhelming democracy ; it would bring soldiers in battalions, paupers by crowds, menial servants, and even vagrants, in hosts to the polls."

Many more examples of such fear and caution could be mentioned. Most dissenters in fact supported the Whigs, both before and after 1832. When Edward Baines, Senior, was approached, as a member of Parliament for Leeds, in 1835, and asked to join a Radical-Irish alliance aimed at ousting the Whigs he replied that he could not. The reason given was that he "considered the Whigs to be the mainstay of the country".³² Dissenters supported the Whigs because they were the only powerful political group likely to consider dissenting claims sympathetically, but also because of reasons of sentiment and tradition.

But there were some who held more radical sympathies : men who were often respected but not strongly supported. Thomas Rawson, who took a leading part in the controversy at Sheffield in 1818 and 1819 over the church rates, was a confirmed radical and chaired the great reform meeting held at Sheffield in 1810 while James Montgomery was imprisoned twice during the reform movement of the 1790s. At Leeds there was a group of vigorous and able dissenting radicals, led by Hamer Stansfeld and supported by J. G. Marshall. In 1840 this group was involved in establishing a Parliamentary Reform Association based on the same principles as the London Radical Association. At one of its meetings in 1840 Joshua Bower revealed that he—

"had been a reformer half a century and had once been as strong a liberal as Mr. Stansfeld, but now he saw things differently. His late brother, John, and the late Mr. Hebblethwaite had gone nearly as far as the Chartists, except physical force".³³

Joshua Bower's outlook was typical of the Association the objects of which, and this shows how much it was dominated by dissenters, were more concerned with protestations to the government about its failure to satisfy dissenting grievances than with efforts to bring about an extension of the franchise. This association and others

like it were only of marginal importance and dissenting radicalism found its greatest outlet in the Complete Suffrage Association which the Birmingham Quaker, Joseph Sturge, launched in 1842. Although many dissenters were opposed to it, an almost equally large number gave it considerable support, and in Yorkshire its most fervent champion was J. G. Miall, an Independent minister who turned journalist and founded the *Nonconformist* to campaign for the Complete Suffrage Association and further the disestablishment of the Church of England. From 1837 he was minister at Salem Chapel at Bradford and helped to found the Bradford Reform Club in 1842 which was designed to publicise the Complete Suffrage Association locally. Many prominent Independents and Baptists in the town joined it and similar clubs sprang up elsewhere but quickly faded away again on the collapse of Sturge's movement.

The attitude which many dissenters held towards political reform inevitably helped to widen the gulf which existed between most dissenting churches and the mass of the people. E. R. Wickham states that,

"hitherto the general alienation of this class from the churches has been a matter of deduction from circumstantial evidence, but in the 'thirties and 'forties there is forthright evidence to support the assertion; it is middle class comment, literate comment, but its objective accuracy need not be questioned . . . And it reveals much more than the fact of general alienation, it also reveals the gulf between the churches and the common people, their respective moods, and their increasing irreconcilability".³⁴

Dissenters were often suspicious and fearful of working people. The reasons why Edward Baines, Senior, opposed universal suffrage were of this kind and his son, in a passage written in 1847, shows how little understanding or connection existed between the classes.

"I have seen a little—a very little—of such places (i.e. slums). I have sometimes (though too seldom) ventured with tracts from house to house talking to the wretched inmates. The impression generally left on me was that the poor wretches seem to live in a world of their own . . . I have felt that if there were a church, a chapel and a school at the entrance of every alley the forlorn and sunk inhabitants would never look at any of them—perhaps hardly know of their existence."³⁵

In 1830 a strong working men's political movement sprang up in Sheffield but Edward Leader, the editor of the *Sheffield Independent*, who was far from being a Whig, did not welcome the development. He admitted that reform was necessary but strongly urged the workers to leave their "natural leaders", the middle class

reformers, to control affairs. He maintained, in effect, that the middle classes would more ably further the ends of the working man than he could himself.³⁶ His fears of working men's political activities were stained with an intolerable arrogance, which unfortunately was not uncommon, even among those who claimed to sympathise with the working people. The Rev. George Lee, the editor of the *Hull Rockingham*, wrote in 1833 that he was entirely sympathetic to the working classes but was concerned that they should realise the humiliations under which they suffered could not be swept aside in a few months, or even years. Although he was sure their lot would be improved he believed they should be patient—above all they should not riot or revolt—since it would be fatal to the successful accomplishment of reform.³⁷

The widespread practice of charging rent for pews may also have helped in dissuading working people from attending church. In 1786 the Rev. George Lambert, the minister at Fish Street Independent Chapel, Hull, dismissed a complaint that there were no free seats as "unreasonable", even though there were 180 unlet seats in the chapel at the time.³⁸ The Old Stone Chapel belonging to the Particular Baptists at Leeds received an annual income of £165 18s. 0d. from pew rents³⁹ and in the new chapel at South Parade the possible income was £333 4s. 0d.⁴⁰ Out of 741 seats in the chapel only 100 were free; the rents ranging from 1s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. a quarter. In the 1851 religious census details were taken of the number of sittings provided by each church and the proportion of appropriated to free seats. They show that, with one or two exceptions, the only denomination which did not appropriate the majority of its seats was the Society of Friends.⁴¹ Such a policy did not prohibit the poorer classes from attending church and free seats were sometimes specially provided for them, yet if they used the free seats they were socially marked off from the rest of the congregation and automatically categorised as "poor", or if they paid pew rents financial sacrifice was involved, particularly when times were hard.

It must be remembered too that the prosperous dissenters were concerned above all to maintain law and order. Thomas Ward wrote in his diary in 1817, "I assisted to create the number of special constables", and he was present at magistrates' hearings at the time.⁴² Quite a large number of dissenters were appointed magistrates in the 'thirties and 'forties and as such were intimately involved in sentencing men caught up in political and social unrest, many of whom came from the poorer classes.

The picture presented of relationships which existed between the prosperous dissenters and the poor is rather a depressing one, but it must not be imagined that such relationships were wilfully created. The more intelligent dissenters realised how important it was that

something should be done to give the poor support, even though the way they went about doing this would today sometimes be considered misplaced, and certainly no reasonably informed people among the prosperous classes had any excuse to deny knowledge of how the poor lived. A reasonable amount of information was collected and published about social conditions in the manufacturing districts, some of which has been mentioned. Clergy felt concerned about such matters and R. S. Bayley, an Independent minister at Sheffield, was sufficiently worried about the distress which existed in the town in the early 'forties to make a survey of conditions among the poor which was published in the *Sheffield Independent*.⁴³ George Lee was acutely aware of the need to emancipate the working people from the physical and mental squalor in which they lived and was convinced that this could only be achieved through general education, which would enable the poor to play a much greater part in the life of the community. In 1837 he commented,

“To us it is a most cheering thing to see the working classes awakening to a proper sense of their own importance, and beginning to see that the legitimate means of attaining it in society are in their own hands, usable at their pleasure, and altogether calculated to improve, by gradual and almost imperceptible changes, the social structure of the community at large”.⁴⁴

It was in order to stimulate education among the poorer classes that dissenters supported the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes in the 'twenties and 'thirties.⁴⁵ Edward Baines and his son took a keen interest in educational movements at Leeds and neighbouring towns and were two of the men most concerned with extending the activities of the Mechanics' Institutes in the West Riding. R. S. Bayley sought to help the working people of Sheffield by founding an institution that was even more distinctively working class in its appeal than the Mechanics' Institutes, and which was known as the People's College.⁴⁶ Yet attitudes about general education for all classes were ambivalent. That wider education was needed was not denied but some objected to any interference by the state in educational development, and were suspicious of financial assistance because they feared direction by the state would accompany it. Some, often the voluntarists, felt that only a portion of the children in the population would profitably gain from full-time education and Edward Baines, Junior, an adamant voluntarist, believed these to amount to not more than one in nine of the total. Those who rejected state aid often laid undue emphasis on the achievements of the Sunday schools which by the 'forties were teaching reading and writing much less than previously. There were some, however, who supported the expansion of state aid for education, often being

Unitarians or the more progressive members of other denominations. Dissenters who opposed state aid were more confident than others of the ability of the voluntary societies to satisfy educational needs, perhaps because they failed to see the immensity of the task and the fact that the resources required could never be found by voluntary effort.

Dissenters were not particularly sympathetic to the more radical movements of the times especially if it appeared that they constituted threats to the established order of things. There was an interesting exchange between dissenters and socialists at Leeds in 1839. J. E. Giles, the Baptist minister at South Parade Chapel, had denounced Socialism in a sermon. The result was that the Leeds socialists invited Giles to attend a course of lectures given by Robert Owen. He refused to do this but offered to examine the socialist "sentiments" and refute them in print if necessary. On reading some Owenite literature he was so shocked that he felt compelled to deliver three lectures against what he considered was a feckless movement. He saw Socialism as a threat to the state, and as something which would undermine all existing institutions. ". . . the Socialist, partly from real, and partly from imaginary abuses in the state, is endeavouring to render you dissatisfied with authority itself".⁴⁷ Giles was incensed by what seemed to him the encouragement which Owen gave to licentiousness. An illuminating side-issue of this affair illustrates the degree of feeling which was raised against the socialists. One of the members of Giles' chapel, a reporter of the *Northern Star* named P. B. Templeton, was expelled. At a church meeting on 8th November, 1839, it was resolved that "Brother Templeton having published a paragraph in the 'papers injurious to the character of Mr. Giles . . . be waited upon . . ." with the inference that if he refused to publicly acknowledge his "sorrow" and retract, he would be expelled. At another church meeting on 26th November the right to take communion was withdrawn from him.⁴⁸

At about the same time as this a series of lectures was held at Hull on the subject of Socialism and the *Hull Rockingham* commented on them from the point of view of the successful middle classes.

"Why should a man devote his nights to study and his days to persevering labour when, after all, those who do nothing, and perhaps worse than nothing are to share his gains equally with himself? And why should not every man reap the fruits of his own deserts? . . . Is it reasonable that the clever and the virtuous should have no more reward than the ignorant, the stupid, and the idle?"⁴⁹

At Sheffield, Commissioner J. C. Symonds regarded Socialism as having a corrupting influence on the youth of the town.

"Attendance at places of worship is by no means a practice with the young of Sheffield . . . Socialism has been rife, and this, added to the prevailing system of independence, has particularly corrupted that most influential class from 13 to 20 years old . . . I regard this as the most debased class in Sheffield."⁵⁰

Dissenters and chartists came into conflict, both direct and indirect, on numerous occasions and chartists broke up, for various reasons, a considerable number of meetings in which dissenters were involved. At Leeds, Edward Baines, Senior, was even replaced as chairman by a chartist at one public meeting,⁵¹ and in 1842 the chartists ejected the dissenters from their controlling position in the churchwardens' vestry at Leeds. Meetings in which dissenters took prominent parts were also broken up at Sheffield,⁵² those most susceptible being connected with the repeal of the Corn Laws and the extension of the franchise. These sort of occurrences could not have helped to promote good relations between dissenters and chartists, although agitation at such times was not directed specifically against dissenters. Nor were all dissenters identifiable with the "factory interest" which was another of the chief objects of chartist attack.

Dissenters were not unalterably opposed to Chartism. In fact, J. E. Faulkner points out that ministers from several of the churches, particularly the Baptist, Independent and Presbyterian, gave the movement active support. He mentions the Baptist minister at Leeds, J. E. Giles, and there were also others in Yorkshire like Joseph Barker and J. R. Stephens.⁵³ What Giles' exact position was in connection with Chartism is not known but he was certainly active in public life at Leeds and on one occasion forthrightly answered charges from the chartists as to his position *vis-à-vis* working men. It is extremely interesting that the man criticising him was named Templeton, possibly the man expelled from Giles' chapel in 1839. To Templeton Giles said,

"the working man's interest is my interest. The working man's food is my food and the working man's welfare I have sought and will seek ; the working man's friendship I value and his friendship I have "⁵⁴

R. S. Bayley was another who showed some sympathy to the chartists and on one occasion expressed his views in the *Sheffield Independent* after there had been considerable unrest in the town.

"I am in political opinions, as many of you know, a Whig and something more. I am in favour of household suffrage, a vote by ballot, of shorter Parliaments, of National Education, and of no monopoly in trade or religion ; but because I conscientiously stop there, and do not approve (after examination)

of the Charter am I, and others who think with me, to be clamoured against as 'base and cowardly' or 'mean and treacherous' Whigs?"⁵⁵

George Lee also felt some sympathy for the chartists and the *Hull Rockingham* commented several times in May and August, 1839, on chartist activities.

"Many of the Chartists, we are bound to say, pursue a more correct course (than the violent minority) but protest against the use, in the attainment of their object, of any weapon but argument. Had the whole body acted throughout on that principle, we for one, should never have objected to their proceedings."⁵⁶

However much dissenters were attracted to the demands put forward by the chartists there was one point beyond which very few of them continued their support. That was when "physical force" was seriously considered. The other source of cleavage was the chartist demand for universal suffrage.

One other, and fundamental, reason why dissenters, chartists and socialists did not make good bedfellows was that dissenters often saw these movements as nothing else than organised efforts to undermine the existing social order, in which many dissenters by the 'thirties and 'forties had some stake. There was much fear that change unchecked would become too rapid and get out of hand, and T. A. Ward, writing in the summer of 1819, expressed perfectly a viewpoint which was equally held at later dates.

"I wish for reform but would have it gradual, that the change might be felt and proved before another made."⁵⁷

To end we must look briefly at the attitude which dissenters held towards the factory reform movement.⁵⁸ Many opposed any regulation of the hours of labour and took what today would be considered a cruel and harsh viewpoint. The reasons for this stand were complex, yet the dissenting character was such that it was held by dissenters that a man justified himself before God and his fellow men by what he was and what he did. Strength of character and personal initiative were thus important virtues. The contemporary economic doctrine of *laissez-faire* compared well with dissenting concepts of virtue, quite apart from the fact that to many factory owners the practice of such a doctrine brought easier and greater profits.

Edward Baines campaigned against the Ten Hours Bill in 1833, and was unsympathetic to the idea from the time when Oastler first mooted the subject in a letter written to the *Leeds Mercury* in 1830. In his reply to Oastler Baines showed that he

was agreeable to limiting the working hours of children under the age of 12 or 14 but would not agree to the regulation of working hours for adults.

“ There are the strongest possible objections to any legislative interference between the master and the workman, to any bill that would constrain the free course of industry, or pretend to adjust either wages or the time of labour. The true policy is to leave the workman to get as much as he can for his labour and the master to purchase labour as cheaply as he can.”⁵⁹

He did not appreciate as important the fact that, except in times of great prosperity, the worker was at a distinct disadvantage in “ getting as much as he could ” for his labour. Such an outlook helped to alienate prosperous dissenters from the working people and Baines himself lost a good deal of the influence he had gained earlier among the poorer inhabitants by the support he gave to the factory owners on this issue.

This article is far from exhaustive but it does illustrate the emergence of a new social elite in the industrial towns which was in the process of achieving parity with those who had possessed social dominance there during the later part of the 18th century. At the height of its powers later in the 19th century the group we have been considering directed the expansion of Yorkshire's industrial towns into communities which are still basically the same today, both in appearance and organisation. It is also clear that many who belonged to this growing elite were dissenters. Whether this was of any significance is not certain ; one does not know the extent that the activity and drive of the people we have considered was connected with their dissenting beliefs or if the connection was only apparent and really coincidental. Current problems connected with the economic and social development of many of the newer countries of the world have led sociologists to study more closely than in the past the forces which cause traditional societies to countenance innovation and change—a vital development if economic growth is to be real and self-sustaining. In a recent book called *On the Theory of Social Change*, E. E. Hagen has argued that creativity often occurs in a group which has, for one reason or another, suffered a depletion in social status. After a time alternative means are found to regain the status which has been lost. Dissenters are discussed in the book as one such group and it is certainly true that the dissenting churches attracted men who were of humble origin and anxious to improve their position. It may well be considered in the future that the social influence of dissent played a greater part than is usually conceded in the growth of industrial society, especially as English historians have, in the past, studied the economic and technological facets of industrial growth in more detail than related social factors.

NOTES

¹ T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830*, (1958), p. 76.

² D. Read, *Press and People, 1790-1850*, (1961), pp. 14-15.

³ Read, p. 32.

⁴ Both towns had "out townships", or villages, within a short distance of the town centres which although not included in the figures given, were, for most practical purposes part of the larger community and added considerably to the population.

⁵ These totals are somewhat larger if those living in the Ainstey of York are included, i.e. 23,600 in 1801 and 33,000 in 1831.

⁶ R. E. Leader, *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield, its Streets and its People*, 2nd edn., (1876).

⁷ Edward Baines, Jun., (1800-1890), joined the staff of the *Leeds Mercury* on leaving school and became editor in 1818. Besides using the paper as a vehicle of opinion he played an important part in many of the activities of the day. He supported Catholic emancipation and political reform and became deeply immersed in the struggle to abolish the Corn Laws. He was M.P. for Leeds from 1859-74 and was knighted in 1881.

⁸ *Leeds Mercury*, 24th June, 1843. Read, *op. cit.*, p.l.

⁹ Edward Baines, Sen., (1774-1848), was one of the most dominant figures in Leeds during the period. He came to Leeds from Preston as a printer apprentice in 1795, and in 1801 managed to purchase the copyright of the *Leeds Mercury* with the aid of a group of political reforming friends. He expanded the newspaper both in scope and in size. From 1807 he took considerable interest in the political affairs of Leeds, taking the leading part in the campaign which began in 1818 to secure greater public control of local government, and he also became increasingly involved in wider facets of public life. From 1835 until 1841 he was M.P. for Leeds.

¹⁰ *Leeds Mercury*, 6th May, 1826. The degrees of unemployment discovered in different areas of the town were: Lower North West, $\frac{1}{2}$; Upper North West, $\frac{1}{5}$; East and South East, $\frac{1}{4}$; Kirkgate, $\frac{1}{3}$; Upper North East, $\frac{1}{4}$; South and Mill Hill, $\frac{1}{5}$.

¹¹ E. Baines, Jun., *Two Letters to Sir Robert Peel on the Social, Educational and Religious state of the Manufacturing Districts*, (1843).

¹² The following families constitute two examples. Sir John Beckett (1743-1826) married a daughter of the Bishop of Bristol and was a banker. He was Mayor of Leeds twice, under the old corporation, and was also a borough and county magistrate. His son (d. 1841) was called to the bar at 21 and in 1806 entered public life as Under Secretary of State for the Home Department in Fox and Grenville's Whig government. Joseph Bailey was the first Sheffield merchant to trade widely with America. His son, Samuel Bailey, was a philosopher and writer who unsuccessfully stood as Parliamentary candidate for Sheffield on several occasions.

¹³ The most outstanding dissenting family early on in the century was almost certainly the Marshall family from Leeds. John Marshall, Sen., was the first mill owner to spin flax in the West Riding and he was a member of Mill Hill Unitarian Chapel, Leeds. In 1826 he was elected as M.P. for Yorkshire and was the first man outside the landed interest to achieve this honour. His three sons were all active in the political and social life of Leeds, although it is not certain how far they remained loyal to the Unitarian Church. The eldest, John, became one of the first two M.P.s for Leeds in 1833; J. G. Marshall was active in local politics at Leeds and became M.P. for the town in 1847. The youngest of the sons was elected to the city council in 1841 and became Mayor a year later. He was made an alderman in 1844. The Shores, of Sheffield, were among the foremost bankers in the town (it was a phenomenal event when their bank failed in 1843) besides being very active in the life of the town. They are par-

ticularly interesting because their connections with dissent go right back to the time of the Great Ejectment. See Lady Stephen, "The Shores of Sheffield and the Olfeys of Norton Hall", *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, v. (1943).

¹⁴ A few of the leading business men at Leeds of dissenting sympathies may be quoted as examples. Joshua Bower (1773-1855) was a crown glass and bottle manufacturer who became one of the largest toll farmers in England, at one time possessing nearly all the tolls between London and Leeds. He developed considerable financial interest in coal mining and died worth about £100,000. See R. V. Taylor, *Biographia Leodiensis*, (1865), pp. 455-63. He was a New Connexion Methodist. See *Leeds Mercury*, 15th April, 1843. George Goodman (1792-1859) was a merchant and a Baptist. He was Mayor of Leeds four times and became M.P. for the town in 1852. T. B. Peace (1782-1846) was a member of the famous Quaker family from Darlington who worked with his brother, William Aldam, in Leeds, as principal member of the firm of Aldam, Peace and Co. See Taylor, pp. 416-7. Thomas Plint (1797-1857) was a cloth manufacturer and later an accountant. He was a member of Salem Independent Chapel and was Whig Registration Agent in the West Riding after 1832, exerting a great deal of influence in maintaining good relations between the town reformers and the county Whig leaders. Hamer Stansfeld worked in the commercial world, was a Unitarian and also one of the ablest radicals in Leeds. William Smith (1776-1850) was one of the leading woollen merchants in Leeds, a local J.P. and Mayor in 1839-40. He was a Wesleyan Methodist. See Taylor, pp. 450-1.

¹⁵ At Sheffield Luke Palfreyman, a Unitarian, was particularly active in local affairs until his premature death in 1846. Another Unitarian, T. W. Tottie, was active at Leeds. He was one of the principal agents for Lord Milton in the 1807 general election and from then until 1832 he was active in maintaining contact between the town reformers and the Whig gentry. He was one of the dominant figures behind John Marshall's candidature for Parliament in 1826. After 1832 he continued to participate in local affairs and was Mayor in 1837-8. At York George Leeman, an Independent, led the attack on Hudson, the railway magnate, in 1849, while at Halifax, James Stansfield, a Presbyterian, was very active in local politics after 1832.

¹⁶ Attempts have been made to obtain the religious viewpoint of the members of the Hull Council in 1836, 1840 and 1845. The number of people identified as dissenters cannot be completely accurate and it is likely that rather more were, in fact, dissenters than is indicated.

1836 (Total membership 56). There were 19 dissenters—1 Methodist.
1840 (Total membership 56). There were 18 dissenters—3 Methodists.
1845 (Total membership 56). There were 19 dissenters—3 Methodists.
All the others were Independents, Presbyterians or Unitarians.

¹⁷ Attempts have been made to obtain the religious viewpoint of the members of the Leeds Council in 1835 and 1841. As at Hull these results are not accurate but do serve to provide a useful guide.

1835 (Total membership 52 app.). There were 19 dissenters—1 Baptist and 2 Methodists.

1841 (Total membership 61). There were 17 dissenters—2 Baptists and 3 Methodists.

All the others were Independents, Presbyterians or Unitarians.

¹⁸ James Musgrave was elected to the Leeds Council in 1835 and appointed an alderman in the same year. His brother William became a councillor at the same time. J. H. Oates was made an alderman in 1842. The other families are mentioned elsewhere.

¹⁹ Thomas Bischoff married Hamer Stansfeld's sister. Although the Bischoffs do not appear to have been active in politics they were certainly

of some importance behind the scenes and were among those who supported Baines' bid to buy the *Leeds Mercury*. J. D. Luccock was appointed an alderman in 1841 and elected Mayor in 1845-6. Darton Lupton was made an alderman in 1841 and was Mayor the year before Luccock.

²⁰ Edward Nanson (b. 1798), was the son of Edward Nanson, Sen., and took an active part in political affairs in Sheffield. He was a prominent member of the Sheffield Reform Association which was set up in 1836. This was really a registration society and the precursor of the constituency associations which were set up in later years.

²¹ *Yorkshire Gazette*, 19th June, 1819.

²² R. F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850*, (1937), pp. 88-95.

²³ Horace Mann, *Religious Worship in England and Wales* (1854), table 17, p. 79. Mann's book was an abridgement of the published findings of the 1851 Religious Census.

| Periods | Wesleyan Methodists (all family) Number of places of worship and sittings at each period | | Rate of Increase % at each period | Independents Number of places of worship and sittings at each period | | Rate of Increase % at each period |
|---------|---|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Number of Places | Number of Sittings | | Number of Places | Number of Sittings | |
| 1801 | 825 | 165,000 | | 914 | 299,742 | |
| 1811 | 1,485 | 296,000 | 80.0 | 1,140 | 373,920 | 24.4 |
| 1821 | 2,748 | 549,600 | 85.0 | 1,478 | 484,714 | 29.2 |
| 1831 | 4,622 | 924,400 | 68.2 | 1,999 | 655,672 | 35.2 |
| 1841 | 7,819 | 1,563,800 | 69.2 | 2,606 | 854,768 | 30.4 |
| 1851 | 11,007 | 2,194,298 | 40.3 | 3,224 | 1,167,760 | 24.9 |

| Periods | Baptists Number of places of worship and sittings at each period | | Rate of Increase % at each period |
|---------|---|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Number of Places | Number of Sittings | |
| 1801 | 652 | 176,692 | |
| 1811 | 858 | 232,518 | 31.6 |
| 1821 | 1,170 | 317,070 | 36.4 |
| 1831 | 1,613 | 437,123 | 37.9 |
| 1841 | 2,174 | 589,154 | 34.7 |
| 1851 | 2,789 | 752,343 | 27.7 |

²⁴ E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (1952), pp. 46 following. It is impossible to point out details connected with the other towns, but a certain amount of the relevant information can be obtained from the following books. John Mayhall, *Annals of Leeds*, 2nd edn., (1864), i. W. Whitaker, *Bowl Alley Lane Chapel Hull* (1910). J. G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire*, (1868). *The Baptists of Yorkshire*, 2nd edn., (1912). John Crabtree, *Concise History of the Parish and Vicarage of Halifax*, (1836). C. B. Knight, *A History of the City of York*, 2nd edn., (1944).

²⁵ Mann, *op. cit.* Compiled from several tables.

| Town | Those in attendance | |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | Anglican | Non-Anglican |
| Bradford | 4,719 | 14,950 |
| Huddersfield | 3,670 | 5,001 |
| Hull | 7,057 | 13,085 |
| Leeds | 13,530 | 23,785 |
| Sheffield | 6,291 | 13,792 |
| Wakefield | 3,875 | 4,025 |
| York | 4,025 | 6,168 |

²⁶ Mann, *op. cit.*, table K, p. 139.

| Town | Proportion % of Sittings to total number of Sittings | |
|--------------|--|-----------|
| | By Anglican Church | By Others |
| Bradford | 31.6 | 68.4 |
| Halifax | 47.2 | 52.8 |
| Huddersfield | 36.8 | 63.2 |
| Hull | 36.2 | 63.8 |
| Leeds | 32.6 | 67.4 |
| Sheffield | 44.2 | 55.8 |
| York | 51.6 | 48.4 |

²⁷ *Leeds Mercury*, 18th August, 1827. See also E. Halevy, *A History of the English People in the 19th Century*, paperback edn., (1961), iii, 134. Halevy notes several contemporary estimates, some of which held that half the population were dissenters. Both Joseph Hume and Daniel O'Connell believed such estimates to be true, but others, including the best dissenting historians of the day thought such claims were exaggerated.

²⁸ There are references from time to time in the *Leeds Mercury*. See also E. Baines, Jun., *Two letters to Sir Robert Peel on the Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts*.

²⁹ G. C. Holland, *The Vital Statistics of Sheffield*, (1843), p. 227.

³⁰ Ursula Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England, 1787-1833*, (1961), pp. 95-6.

³¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 23rd July, 1819.

³² E. Baines, Jun., *Life of Edward Baines*, (1851), p. 221.

³³ *Leeds Mercury*, 5th September, 1840.

³⁴ Wickham, p. 85.

³⁵ E. Baines, Jun., *Letters to Lord John Russell on State Education*, letter iii, "Is there a necessity for State Education?" (1847), p. 20.

³⁶ *Sheffield Independent*, 18th December, 1830.

³⁷ *Hull Rockingham*, 5th January, 1833.

³⁸ Darwent, p. 33.

³⁹ See Ben Goodman's account book, now at South Parade Baptist Church, Headingley.

⁴⁰ See cash book of South Parade Chapel for 1826, now at South Parade Baptist Church, Headingley.

⁴¹ Mann, compiled from various tables. The totals overleaf are those for all dissenting churches in each town. Seats which were free are noted in the first total for each town.

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Bradford | 6,288 out of 14,648 | Leeds | 14,135 out of 39,766 |
| Halifax | 1,078 out of 4,303 | Sheffield | 6,411 out of 17,716 |
| Huddersfield | 2,163 out of 7,484 | Wakefield | 3,825 out of 5,502 |
| Hull | 3,637 out of 11,199 | York | 2,850 out of 6,702 |

⁴² Diary of T. A. Ward, ed., Bell, p. 245.

⁴³ *Sheffield Independent*, 6th May, 1843.

⁴⁴ *Hull Rockingham*, 30th September, 1837.

⁴⁵ G. C. Holland in his *Vital Statistics of Sheffield*, pp. 233-7, complains that neither the Mechanics' Institute nor the Mechanics' Library in Sheffield had received much support from the working people. The membership of the Institute fell from 700 in 1833 to 172 in 1841. The foundation of a separate library for working people in 1841, known as the People's College, boosted the membership of the working men's institutions in the town slightly but did not lead to any revival in the fortunes of the Mechanics' Institute, which never won the support of the working classes to any great extent. The same proved true of the library where the apprenticeship members never reached more than half the total. Holland was of the opinion that such organisations would never get widespread support until the general level of education was much higher.

⁴⁶ Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851*, (1957), p. 74.

⁴⁷ J. E. Giles, *Socialism and its Moral Tendencies, Compared with Christianity*, (1838).

⁴⁸ Minutes of South Parade Chapel now at South Parade Baptist Church, Headingley.

⁴⁹ *Hull Rockingham*, 19th January, 1839.

⁵⁰ J. C. Symonds, *Report on the Trades of Sheffield and the Moral and Physical Conditions of the Young Persons Employed in Them*, (1843); Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁵¹ *Leeds Mercury*, 19th March, 1842.

⁵² *Sheffield Independent*, 28th January, 1839; 23rd February and 31st May, 1841.

⁵³ H. U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches*, (1916), p. 101.

⁵⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 25th April, 1840.

⁵⁵ *Sheffield Independent*, 5th June, 1841.

⁵⁶ *Hull Rockingham*, 11th May, 1839.

⁵⁷ Diary of T. A. Ward, ed., Bell, p. 241.

⁵⁸ For details of this movement in the West Riding see, J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement, 1830-1855*, (1963).

⁵⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 16th October, 1830.

R. W. RAM

Robert Hall. Rev. James Jarvie of Kelso, in *Discourses and Miscellaneous Writings* (A. & C. Black, Edinburgh, 1852, Fourth Ed. 1856) wrote three essays entitled "Ministerial Models", one of which (pp. 308-37) is on Robert Hall. It is virtually a review of the life of Hall by Olinthus Gregory.

Thomas Cooper. Documents connected with the one-time Chartist have been deposited with the Lincolnshire Archives Office by Mr. A. H. Scruton for the Trustees of the Thomas Cooper Memorial Church, Lincoln, the Baptist church with which Cooper was connected towards the end of his life. The documents include papers relating to his trial as a Chartist in 1842, sermons and lectures by him, letters by him and his wife Susanna, letters between him and his wife in 1879. For fuller details see *Archivists' Report* 11 (15th March, 1959-23rd March, 1960), Lincolnshire Archives Committee, Exchequer Gate, Lincoln.