

In Honour of Robert Raikes

THE eighteenth century was not, as we look back, an elevated period in social behaviour. The men of the period knew it. In 1757 Dr. John Brown wrote *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times*; before long it was in its seventh edition. Horace Walpole described the England of his day as "a gaming, wrangling, railing nation without principles, genius, character or allies."

We should remember that it was the worst of times as well as the best of times, in England as in France. Politics was dominated by rotten boroughs, and rotten itself. The government "did nothing to secure the public safety, provided no schools, made no roads, gave no relief to the poor". A hundred coal-miners might perish without so much as an inquest. The very streets were chartered, said Blake. Women and children were brutally exploited in mine and factory. The countryside which gave to the ordinary people their very means of existence was steadily taken from them through Enclosure Acts. Between 1700 and 1760 we know of two hundred Acts shutting off three hundred thousand acres; the next forty years saw two thousand Acts shutting off two million acres.

The upper classes were their own masters, loose-living amid their intellectual leadership and cultural glories, satirized in Hogarth's *Taste in High Life*, *The Rake's Progress* or *Marriage à la Mode*. As for the poor, their lives were delineated with terrible verisimilitude by Hogarth also in *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*. The former depicts a free but relatively healthy scene; the latter portrays extreme degradation. Sydney in his *England in the Eighteenth Century* gave a sweeping indictment:

The leaders, both in Church and State, careless in their lives and ungodly in their conduct, neglected their duty and became corrupt and altogether abominable; while the public and private life of the aristocracy, of the upper and middle classes, as of the lower orders, was marked by nothing so much as duplicity, conjugal infidelity, dissoluteness, and laxity. (ii 322)

One statistic will be indicative of the change of manners. In 1684 the quantity of spirits distilled in Britain was 527,000 gallons. By 1750 it had risen to 11,000,000 gallons.

It was a harsh age. In 1808 at Carlisle Assizes Joseph Jardine was condemned to death for stealing a web of linen, Arthur Hugh was condemned to death for stealing six £1 notes, George Rowe was condemned to seven years' transportation for a burglary involving goods to the value of five shillings. Women were burnt, not hanged, up till 1780. There were 160 crimes which were "felonies without benefit

of clergy", that is punishable by death; and they included the theft of any sum over a shilling. High treason was punishable by death through slow torture. Eight people were so executed in 1746. Up till 1771 the refusal to plead on a capital charge was punishable by the accused being placed on his back naked in a dark room and weights of stone or iron set on his chest until he died.

But though the critics of the day knew something was wrong, they were by no means agreed as to what it was. Some felt that the corruption began at the top, and what was needed was "improvement", just as the estate-owners of the time "improved" their haphazard gardens into a meticulously ordered symmetry; this theme lies at the root of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Others, like Dr. Johnson, attributed the ills of society to innovation and insubordination.

The Church was moribund. Sydney in his *England in the Eighteenth Century* wrote:

Never has a century risen upon Christian England so void of soul and faith as that which opened with Queen Anne and reached its misty noon beneath the second George—a dewless night succeeded by a sunless dawn. There was no freshness in the past and no promise in the future. The Puritans were buried and the Methodists were not born (ii 328).

Leslie Stephen described the sermons as "dull, duller and dullest". Bishop Secker in 1738 publicly told his clergy that "Christianity is now railed at and ridiculed with very little reserve, and the teachers of it without any at all."

The Church of England was by and large a political institution. Between 1715 and 1722, as Tory bishops died, Whigs were appointed to succeed them. In 1729 George II announced his intention of giving preferment in the Church to gentlemen of quality. From 1736 the Duke of Newcastle obtained absolute powers over patronage in the Church and exercised it with political shrewdness. Dr. Johnson complained: "No man . . . can now be made a Bishop for his learning and piety; his only chance of promotion is his being connected with somebody who has parliamentary interest." The tomb of Mrs Elizabeth Bate, who died in 1751, described proudly and quaintly how she had through her aristocratic connections provided her clerical husband and their children "Twelve separate employments in Church and State". By 1752 Bishop Warburton could write "Our grantees have at last found their way back into the Church. I only wonder they have been so long about it." By 1800 there were twenty bishoprics held by the Duke of Rutland's family. All bishoprics were not of equal worth. Probation in a minor see was the normal precondition of major appointments. Diligence in the House of Lords was more important than diligence in the diocese. A rash word might block a man's future. The outspoken Bishop Watson was kept at Llandaff all his life, and Archbishop Secker took sixteen years to live down a rash speech. The bishops were not idle—that allegation is quite unfounded—but they were worldly.

The parish priests, though part of the Establishment, were for the most part hangers-on of the upper classes; they did not quite "belong". At the beginning of the eighteenth century they included a number of farmers, though this was less common by 1800. Their official duties were light. They were not expected to preach, and if they did it was the common advice of the cleric Bishop Bull and the layman Dr. Johnson that it was advantageous to borrow the work of others. Communion was celebrated three times a year. There was an understandable tendency to absenteeism, to a life of social enjoyment, drinking and hunting. The ablest of them turned their attention elsewhere. The best-known eighteenth-century clerics are remembered for something other than piety and pastoral work—Sterne for his novels, Gilbert White for natural history, Berkeley as a philosopher, Stukeley as a pioneer in archaeology, Stephen Hales as a chemist.

In a sermon preached at Danbury on 11 June 1787, and "Published not by Request", Rev. Dr. William Luke Phillips arraigned the country clergy on four charges: "Immoral Conduct; Professional Ignorance; inattention to Duty; and lastly, attachment to the World". He made no bones about his indictment of the drunkards, "Votaries to Bacchus, bottle companions", and of those who used their position to seduce women ("Tryed one woman", wrote Rev. John Thomlinson in his diary in April 1718, "and did not like her"). He castigated them for neglect of duties: "Thus the dead are left to bury the dead. Parochial Duties, particularly those attended with no immediate Profits, are dismissed: the Sick, in course, are sometimes left to languish, and die, without the Comfort of a Passport into the other World; and Infants expire without having ever received Baptism." In general: "One Day in the Week they are Clergymen, and all the rest of it mere Laymen, Men of the World." The last sentence recalls an anecdote from the same period. A cleric was rebuked for drunkenness by the bishop. "But, my Lord, I never was drunk on duty." "On duty! When is a clergyman not on duty?" Rev. William Jones of Broxbourne, an admirable example of the better cleric of the period, was a poor man and had no time for the wealthy pseudo-clergy:

What a pity that so many of these drones are admitted into the Church, for instead of endeavouring to be useful, pains-taking parish priests, some of them are finical Jimmy-Jessamies, while others are keen sportsmen, sharp shooters, and mighty-hunting Nimrods of the cloth, as it is called by way of eminence. For the accommodation of the latter class of these Reverends daily advertisements appear for the sale of the next presentations of valuable livings, rendered much more valuable, as being 'situated in fine sporting countries', 'plenty of game', 'a pack of staunch fox-hounds kept in the neighbourhood'.

In 1812 nearly three-fifths of the country clergy were absentees. In the eighteenth century this was even worse. It was said of Rev. George White, curate of Colne and Marsden in 1747, that "he read the funeral rite twenty times in one night over the grave of those who

had been buried while he was away". Archbishop Herring's visitation returns at about this period make interesting reading. Of eight hundred and thirty-six parishes, three hundred and ninety-three had no resident parsons: of seven hundred and eleven clergy named, three hundred and thirty-five were pluralists, and nominally responsible for more than one parish. A rich man offered to buy his son a living worth £1,000 a year. "All that will be expected of you is to read prayers and preach a sermon, which will cost you threepence once a week, or by a visit to the metropolis you can lay in a stock of manuscript sermons which will last you for the whole of your life." Cowper describes a parish priest:

loose in morals, and in manners vain,
 In conversation frivolous, in dress
 Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse;
 Frequent at park, with lady at his side,
 Ambling and prattling scandal as he goes;
 But rare at home, and never at his books
 Or with his pen, save when he scrawls a card;
 Constant at routs, familiar with a round
 Of Ladyships—a stranger to the poor.

So also Crabbe's vicar, neither wholly worthy nor wholly unworthy. It is amusing to reflect that Edward Gibbon, the cynical historian of Rome's decline and fall, once expressed a regret that he "had not embraced the lucrative pursuits of the law or of trade, the chances of civil office or India adventure, or even the fat slumbers of the Church".

There were four great movements within the Christian community which promised better things.

The first was Wesleyan Methodism. The history is too familiar to need more than a cursory summary. John Wesley was born in 1703. His grandparents had been Dissenters. His father dissented from the Dissenters and became an Anglican and a High-Churchman with a strongly personal faith. His devout mother was persuaded that her son, rescued from a dangerous fire, was called to high service, and dedicated her Thursdays to him and him alone. He was an earnest lad. "I profess, sweetheart", his father remarked to his mother, "I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he could give a reason for it." He was an earnest undergraduate, and after his ordination returned to Oxford and joined his brother Charles's Sacramentarians, nicknamed the Methodists or Holy Club. He was an earnest young man who with Charles crossed the Atlantic to preach to the Indians of Georgia. It was a formative period; here he showed the first fruits of his genius for organization. It was a period of disillusion. Shortly after his return he wrote in his *Journal* (29.1.1738) "I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? . . . I have a fair summer religion." This same year was to see great changes. First his brother Charles, then he himself had a dramatic conversion to a deep personal trust in Christ. He went to the Continent to learn more of the Moravians who had already played a great part in his conversion. Then on his return, his old

Oxford friend George Whitefield of the organ-voice (a man of Gloucester) invited him to Bristol to preach in the open air to some three thousand people. From that day, April 2nd, 1739, he never looked back. In fifty-two years he journeyed some two hundred and twenty-five thousand miles by horse or chaise and preached forty thousand sermons, organizing his converts into Band-Societies, so that the work went on, and incidentally (this has been challenged but wrongly) laying some of the foundations of the Trades Union Movement. Truly could he say "The world is my parish." His last words were "I'll praise! I'll praise!"

Secondly, there was the Society of Friends. The first and second periods of Quakerism, the age of persecution and the certainty of a universal religion had passed. The glow of fervour had died down. Discipline was less stringent. Samuel Neale (1721-92) lamented the degeneracy. But there was no less zeal, quieter but persistent; there was evangelical dedication, mystical experience, moral probity. We may instance the "powerful and lively" ministry of Samuel Bownes (1676-1753), John Richardson (1666-1753) through whom "Bridlington was become a School of the Prophets" and who had the experience on a cloudless day of being caught up by a cloud into the majesty of God, the purity of John Fothergill (1676-1744) and the valiance-for-truth and disciplinary reforms of his gentle son Samuel (1715-72), Thomas Chalkley (1675-1741) volunteering to be eaten by a starving crew and saved by the catching of a dolphin. The best-known Friend of the period was the American mystic and reformer John Woolman, but he had his counterparts in Britain. The itinerant ministry was faithfully carried on. The worship in quietude gave spiritual strength. In 1745 the London Epistle exhorted Friends to "wait diligently on the Lord", in 1748 to "wait in awful silence for the manifestations of the divine Life", in 1755 to "retire inwardly in great humility of mind and self-abasement," in 1789 to "wait in humble reverence for spiritual ability to worship acceptably the Lord of heaven and earth". At the same time we can trace in Britain as well as America a new social spirit. John Bellers (1654-1725) was actually called by Karl Marx "a veritable phenomenon in the history of political economy." We associate the abolition of the slave-trade with William Wilberforce, but in 1727 the London Yearly Meeting pronounced that "it is the sense of this meeting that the importing of negroes from their native country and relatives by Friends is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting", and in 1758 warned Friends to be "careful to avoid being in any way concerned in reaping the unrighteous profits arising from the iniquitous practice in dealing in slaves".

Thirdly, there was the Evangelical Revival. We cannot dissociate this from the phenomenon of Wesleyanism. But we should note that the Welsh Revival antedated Wesley's conversion experience. Griffith Jones was ordained as early as 1708 and was engaged in an itinerant evangelical ministry by 1714. But the great surge forward took place

with the conversion of Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands in 1735, and the beginning of their itinerant ministry. Furthermore, within England there were many evangelical conversions at much the same time as that of Wesley, and in independence of his. The Cornishman George Thomson had his conversion experience in 1732. William Romaine, a Huguenot by extraction, had known the Wesleys at Oxford, but they had not influenced him, and Wesley insisted that "he was not my son in the Gospel". William Grimshaw went through spiritual agony in 1739-40, and at his conversion in 1742 was "an entire stranger to the people called Methodists", though he later became a close associate of the Wesleys. Even later, when churchmen could hardly fail to know about Methodism, there was such suspicion of "enthusiasm" that it was, if anything, a contrary influence. John Berridge was converted in 1756; he admitted to not knowing Wesley and Whitefield and, in the light of what he had heard about them, not wanting to do so. The Evangelical Revival was in fact, as Gladstone said, the result of a confluence of many tributaries. Further the Evangelical Revival was contained within the Church of England, as the Wesleyan movement was not. We can see that the Revival was firm-rooted in a return to the Bible. We can see it as a reaction to the cool rationalism of many intellectuals. We can see it as a re-emergence of Calvinism from a period of decline. Believers, though not coolly rational historians, will see it as the Spirit's answer to moral and religious moribundity.

Finally there was the Sunday School Movement ushered in by Robert Raikes.

Before we turn to that we must touch briefly on the Charity Schools. This was already a movement some decades old. Effectively it went back to the foundation in 1695 of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. By 1730 there were not far short of fifteen hundred such schools, teaching more than twenty-two thousand pupils. They were of course a provision by the upper classes for the "inferior ranks", patronizing and paternalistic. "I would persuade myself", said Dr. Watts, the hymn-writer "that the masters and mistresses of these schools among us teach the children of the poor which are under their care to know what their station in life is, how mean their circumstances, how necessary 'tis for them to be diligent, laborious, honest and faithful, humble and submissive, what duties they owe the rest of mankind and particularly to their superiors." So too the great Joseph Butler, one of the most admirably tempered church leaders of the age, declared their object "not in any sort to remove poor children out of the rank in which they were born, but, keeping them in it, to give them the assistance which their circumstances plainly called for, by educating them in the principles of religion as well as of civil life". Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 thought that the education they receive would free the lower classes from "the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful

disorders”.

Not every one approved. In 1723 Mandeville wrote his *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*, while they were of comparatively recent growth, and commented “if a horse knew as much as man, I should not like to be his rider”. But in general the upper classes were favourable, and Steele called the movement “one of the greatest instances of public spirit the age had produced”.

The name Raikes is perhaps Danish in origin. The family came from Yorkshire, and it is interesting to note that in the seventeenth century, a daughter of the family married a certain William Wilberforce.

Robert Raikes senior (1689-1757) was born in Gloucester, but seems to have moved to East Anglia while quite young. He learned the printing trade probably in Norwich, moved to Huntingdonshire, and then undertook his first great publishing and journalistic venture in producing the still famous *Northamptonshire Mercury* in association with a partner named John Dicey. This partnership broke up when Raikes returned home to Gloucester in 1722 to found *The Gloucester Journal*. Raikes senior was a remarkable man, a radical and fearless critic of social evil, defying even the censure of the House of Commons. He was a newspaper editor who believed in the power of the media to remedy abuses. His son Robert followed him.

Mary Drew, daughter of a Gloucestershire cleric, was the founding editor's third wife. Robert was born, as has been shown from his baptismal date, on 4th September 1736 (not 1735 as usually is said). One brother, Thomas, became a prominent merchant and director of the Bank of England; another, Richard, after a brilliant period of academic study at Cambridge, was ordained and settled in to a parish near Gloucester.

Robert was only 21 when his father died, and he took over the ownership and editorship of *The Gloucester Journal*. It is therefore clear that he must already have served his apprenticeship to the trade under his father, and become imbued with his father's reformist spirit. His life was externally uneventful. He was thirty-one when he married Anne Trigge. They had ten children. Of four sons, two died young, one became a clergyman, and the youngest a soldier rising to the rank of colonel. Raikes, himself a man of peace, seems to have had prolific military connections, as two of his six daughters married army officers, and three naval officers (two of the husbands becoming admirals). Raikes was a reformist conservative in politics, hostile to the French Revolution, and censorious of opinions which might weaken the constitution.

In religion he was an evangelical, humble and ready to learn from others. Although he was baptized and buried at St. Mary de Crypt, a church which is thus peculiarly associated with him, he attended morning prayers regularly at the cathedral. He was modest about his own achievements, playing them down. None the less he was tireless in good works, and if the works were paternalistic, they arose out of

a genuine concern: better so than indifference or callous exploitation. He took as his model "that trait in our Blessed Redeemer's Character—*He went about.*" So did Raikes go about doing good, in all weathers, calling in homes which might be insalubrious, blessing and guiding grubby, ragged children made in the image of God. "Oh Mr. Raikes was a good man he was!" He has been charged with vanity and foppishness. Certainly he had a passion for cleanliness and neatness of body as well as purity of heart, and incorporated that into his Sunday School regulations. When we think of the filth in the unpaved streets of any city of the eighteenth century, a certain fastidiousness may be excused, and a passion for cleanliness accounted a virtue. Ancient Roman moralists inveighed against the baths—but the provision of pure, accessible water for drinking and opportunities for cleanliness must have led to a great fall in disease and death. "Cleanliness is after all next to godliness" said John Wesley. Fanny Burney found Raikes "flourishing, somewhat too voluble" but admitted him worthy, benevolent, good-natured and good-hearted, "and therefore overflowing of successful spirits and delighted vanity must meet with some allowance". His correspondence with Rev. William Llewellyn or Lewellyn in the 1790s shows him at his best. "I wish my spiritual part was subtilised and refined like yours" wrote Raikes. He speaks frankly of his sense of unworthiness, misery and sinfulness, of his penitence, of the effect of Isaiah 53 on him. There is no self-dramatization here; if we do not understand Raikes as utterly sincere we do not understand the Evangelical Revival. Raikes was simply (in both senses of that word) a good man. He was honoured as such, being made Vice-President of the Gloucestershire Society, and on his retirement from the newspaper in 1803 after nearly 50 years as editor, being given the freedom of the city in the following year. He died in 1811.

Raikes as a Christian editor, aware of the power of the media, was determined to use *The Gloucester Journal* for constructive purposes. We think of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry as the great prison-reformers, but Raikes was campaigning about conditions in Gloucester gaol before Howard became active. He visited the prison frequently himself, and was appalled by what he saw.

The prisoners are locked up at night in a large apartment called the Main, with a chain run through each man's link; during the night they steal from each other, shoes, buckles, bread, or anything which it is possible to conceal. . . . As there is no separation of the sexes in the day time, one of the women sentenced to long confinement is now ready to lie in, and would be destitute of every necessary for such a situation, had not a private beneficence placed a fund, for the relief of occasional distress, in the hands of one individual. In short, the inhabitants of this prison give a more affecting picture of the miseries entailed on mankind by the corruptions of human nature than it is in the power of the imagination to paint.

Gloucester gaol was in fact better than most. The Official Report of the Visiting Committee at the Fleet in 1729 describes the "strongroom":

The place is like a vault, like those in which the dead are interred and wherein the bodies of persons dying in the said prison are usually deposited till the coroner's inquest hath passed upon them; it has no chimney nor fireplace, nor any light but what comes over the door or through a hole of about eight inches square. It is neither paved nor boarded, and the rough bricks appear both on the sides and top neither wainscoted nor plastered.

What adds to the dampness and stench of the place is its being built over the common sewer, and adjoining to the sink, and where all the nastiness of the prison is cast.

It is almost unbelievable, but true, that in 1749 more than sixty people sitting in session in the Old Bailey, including two judges, the Lord Mayor and an alderman, died as a result of noxious fumes emanating from Newgate Gaol.

Raikes campaigned for three objects. The first was the separation of debtors from other prisoners. Debtors were not, in the obvious sense, criminals, but the experience of prison was turning them into criminals. Raikes did not oppose imprisonment for debt but he called for segregation of debtors. Meantime he himself frequently paid off the debts owed in order to secure the release of those so imprisoned.

The second object of his campaign was the condition of the destitute prisoners. A moneyed criminal could in the eighteenth century buy himself privileged treatment. The down-and-outs could not, and so were swept deeper down and further out. Raikes tried to make life bearable for them. To this end there were two means. One was raising the basic standards of hygiene within the prison. The other was to secure a fund by which the cost of improvement might be met. Raikes campaigned on behalf of such a fund and himself gave with unstinted generosity to the needs of the destitute.

So, thirdly, he campaigned, successfully, against the promiscuous and insanitary conditions. Fanny Burney in 1788 gave a picture of the reforms at Gloucester:

Every culprit is to have a separate cell. Every cell is clean, neat, and small, looking towards a wide expanse of country, and, far more fitted to his speculation, a rich expanse of the heavens. Air, cleanliness, and health seem all considered but no other indulgence. The debtors also are considered, as they ought to be, with far more favour than the other offenders; and of course perfectly guarded from all intercourse with them.

The change was Raikes's doing.

But Raikes saw, as many reformers have failed to see, that this was merely treating symptoms. He was doubtful how far the punishments available in his day were effective. *The Gloucester Journal* reported public executions fully and faithfully, and it is fairly clear that he himself was on occasions an eye-witness. But execution was by

definition not reformatory, and Raikes had only to look at the melancholy succession of executions to observe that it was not a deterrent. Prison in the old form was corrupting rather than corrective, and even when it had been reformed recidivism was heavy. Raikes did not oppose imprisonment. Something had to be done, if only to protect society. But he saw that effective action must prevent the crime being committed in the first place. It must tackle the causes of crime.

Raikes's identification of these is astonishing; we have not yet come to terms with his analysis. He found two major causes of crime. One was unemployment.

If the government or the magistrates of the country seek not for the expedient of removing the plea of want of work, the excess of wickedness among the common people will destroy all the comforts to be levied from civil society.

It is of course a class-conscious, paternalistic, even self-protective attitude. Raikes's view was limited. He did not see the enclosures as a primary link in the chain of causation. He did not see the expropriation of the labourers from the land. He did not see the effect of the game-laws in "preserving" the luxury of the haves while the have-nots were starving. But he did see the drift from country to town without the acquisition of new employment skills, and thought that retraining was essential. When we reflect on what is happening in Lagos or Ibadan or Mexico City or Sao Paulo we can see the lessons we have still to learn.

The other cause of crime was ignorance. "Ignorance is generally the principal cause of these enormities." Raikes was a believer in education as enabling people to attain a constructive purpose in life. The Sunday School was an answer to ignorance. It was not in its basic conception "pi"—it took place on Sunday because the children were working six days of the week, and there was nowhen else for it to take place.

But Raikes's concept of ignorance was complex, and it included ignorance of divine truth as well as of human literacy. This is clear from an affecting account he wrote for *The Gloucester Journal* of the execution of James Hawkins in 1785:

Hawkins exhibited a melancholy proof of the truth of that expression, 'having the conscience seared with a hot iron' for tho' little more than twenty-one years of age, he was a shocking instance of the villainy which pervades the human heart, when the mind is destitute of every principle, and ignorance and vice are free from impose. He had never offered up a prayer to his Creator. He said he knew not how to pray. He was totally devoid of all sense of a future state.

Raikes evidently felt that in one sense Hawkins was not blameworthy. He became a burglar because he knew no better. The mind which is an empty room is liable to be inhabited by devils.

Fortunately the Bible could serve both purposes. It was a

convenient tool by which to acquire literacy, and, being in the Authorized Version one of the great masterpieces of English prose, something more. It was also a vehicle for moral and religious instruction. A Nazi, wanting to learn the language of his enemies, decided to read the Bible in English. By the time he had finished, he was no longer a Nazi. So the means of education in a secular sense becomes the means by which lives are changed.

Raikes did not invent the Sunday School. Cardinal Borromeo had developed Sunday Schools at Milan in the sixteenth century. In seventeenth-century England, and indeed in Gloucestershire, we can trace similar movements from Joseph Woodward of Dursley, Joseph Alleine of Bath, and Robert Frampton, formerly Bishop of Gloucester. In the eighteenth century we find such schools scattered over the country. John Wesley was involved in the movement. In Yorkshire there was Rev. Theophilus Lindsey and his disciple Mrs. Cappe. In Lancashire and Cheshire we find James Hey and Rev. David Simpson. Nearer London there were Rev. Thomas Stock of Ashbury and the Methodist Hannah Bell of High Wycombe. In Gloucestershire itself there was Catherine Boevey of Flaxley Abbey, and, more particularly, the Dissenter William King of Dursley. King is important because he was a prison visitor at Gloucester where he met Raikes and became friendly with him. King had held Sunday Schools for children from 1774 and part of his aim was to prevent the fledglings from growing up with gaolbirds. Futhermore, King's concept of the Sunday School as combining training in literacy with moral and religious instruction is close to Raikes's. King's family later claimed that he was the real inventor of the Sunday School and persuaded Raikes of the idea as they walked and talked together. It seems that this is over-simplistic. Raikes has left his own account of walking for business purposes through a Gloucester slum on a weekday and being seared by the condition and behaviour of the children in the street. He made some enquiries, and one of the women told him that he ought to see the noise and riot and hear the cursing and swearing on a Sunday when the factory was not open.

This conversation suggested to me that it would be at least a harmless attempt, if it were productive of no good, should some little plan be formed to check this deplorable profanation of the Sabbath.

Reformation required the remedying of ignorance and the inculcation of active notions of duty and good habits of behaviour at an early stage.

We can then trace the stages by which Raikes came to the idea of the Sunday School. He first tried to reform prison conditions. He found that this took him to endeavour to eradicate the causes of crime. He found that the principal such cause was ignorance, meaning by ignorance both the lack of general education and the lack of moral and religious instruction. He met King and learned about the object and practice of the Dursley Sunday School. He himself had a direct encounter with the street-Arabs and learned about the desecration of

the Lord's Day. All these came together, and he resolved himself to follow King's example.

But though Raikes did not invent the Sunday School, it was his initiative which set off the Sunday School movement. Raikes seized the *kairos*, the opportune moment, the fullness of time, and started a movement which was to spread throughout the country and all over the world.

The first school was established at Sooty Alley in 1780. The day's work lasted from ten in the morning to five in the afternoon, including an hour's lunchbreak and attendance at a church service. From the first there were two enlightened provisions, small classes and the use of student monitors as part of the training in responsibility. The education offered was limited. There was no science, no history, no literature. But then the Bible was to Raikes both history and literature. More surprising, in view of his identification of the causes of crime, there was no attempt at professional or vocational retraining: this would have been regarded as equally, though differently, a profanation of the Sabbath. The emphasis had now become on moral and religious instruction.

Radical critics have tried to debunk the evangelical reformers. They do scant justice to the opposition they encountered. Those who abolished the slave-trade were not comfortably riding on new economic currents as Williams, Walvin and others have suggested. Roger Anstey effectively debunked the debunkers. The abolitionists had to encounter bitterly vituperative opposition for decades before they won the day. Raikes and his associates were not the chosen representatives of the comfortable upper classes getting the people away from revolution with the promise of pie in the sky when they died. On the contrary, education for the poor was associated with Tom Paine and the American and French Revolutions. The farmers thought that education would be the ruin of agriculture, and said so. The upper classes complained that the Sunday Schools were destroying family religion. *The Imperial Magazine* stated "Religion will neither fill our bellies nor clothe our bodies, and as to reading, it only serves to render poor folks proud and idle."

But Raikes knew, in his own words, how to "botanize with human nature". Adam Smith actually said "No plan promised to effect a change of manners with equal ease and simplicity since the days of the Apostles." Raikes did not forget his preoccupation with crime. A catechism in his *Sunday Scholar's Companion* contains the words "Conscience proves that there is a God, as a constable who serves us with a warrant proves there is a magistrate." And it worked. By God, it worked. Raikes found his way to the consciences of the ragamuffins who had been brawling and cursing in the streets among the mud and filth and excrement. There were cleaner bodies and cleaner minds. In 1786 the Gloucester magistrates testified to the higher moral standards. In July 1792 there were, incredibly, no cases at Gloucester assizes.

And the movement spread. By 1787 there were two-hundred and one schools with an enrolment of ten thousand, two-hundred and thirty two. Ten years later there were one thousand and eighty-six schools with an enrolment of sixty-nine thousand. When James Montgomery, whose hymnody was better than his mathematics, celebrated the Jubilee in 1831, the enrolment was one and a quarter million, and there were actually one hundred thousand teachers involved.

In 1810 Raikes took Joseph Lancaster to a back street of Gloucester. He said "Pause here". They paused, and he closed his eyes in prayer, and his friend saw that he was crying. "This is the spot" said the old man "on which I stood when I saw the destitution of the children and the desecration of the Sabbath by the inhabitants of the city. As I asked 'Can nothing be done?' a voice answered 'Try.'"

There is still need to try.

NOTE

I have drawn on some material which I used for The Open University A202 Units 31-2. Biographies of Raikes include William Lloyd *Sketch of the Life of Robert Raikes* (1832) which is slight; Alfred Gregory *Robert Raikes, Journalist and Philanthropist* (1877), clear and readable; J. H. Harris *Robert Raikes, the Man and his Work* (1899), untidy but valuable; Guy Kendall *Robert Raikes, A Critical Study* (1939), a little disappointing. These are all made out of date by Frank Booth's new study. I have been able to draw gratefully on some of the work of Frank Booth, Shirley Elliot and Colin Riches.

For the background to the age see of course N. Sykes *Church and State in England: the XVIIIth Century* (1934); S. C. Carpenter *Eighteenth Century Church and People* (1959); L. E. Elliott-Binns *The Early Evangelicals* (1953); Horton Davies *Worship and Theology in England from Watts and Wesley to Maurice 1690-1850* (1961); R. M. Jones *The Later Periods of Quakerism* vol. 1 (1921); G. E. Harrison *Son to Susanna* (1937); R. Davies and G. Rupp *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* vol. 1 (1955); W. K. Lowther-Clarke *Eighteenth Century Piety* (1944); E. Halévy *The Birth of Methodism in England* (ET 1971); J. S. Simon *The Revival of Religion in England in the Eighteenth Century* (nd); G. R. Cragg *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789* (2nd ed. 1966); J. D. Walsh "Origins of the Evangelical Revival" in G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh *Essays in Modern English Church History* (1966).

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