

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Isolation of the Poor

The upper classes, to whom the fact that the labourers were more wretched in 1830 than they had, been in 1795 was a reason for making punishment more severe, were not deliberately callous and cruel in their neglect of all this growing misery and hunger. Most of those who thought seriously about it had learnt a reasoned insensibility from the stern Sibyl of the political economy in fashion, that strange and partial interpretation of Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricardo which was then in full power. This political economy had robbed poverty of its sting for the rich by representing it as Nature's medicine, bitter indeed, but less bitter than any medicine that man could prescribe. If poverty was sharper at one time than another, this only meant that society was more than ever in need of this medicine. But the governing class as a whole did not think out any such scheme or order of society, or master the new science of misery and vice. They thought of the poor not in relation to the mysterious forces of Nature, but in relation to the privileges of their own class in which they saw no mystery at all. Their state of mind is presented in a passage in Bolingbroke's *Idea of a Patriot King*. 'As men are apt to make themselves the measure of all being, so they make themselves the final cause of all creation. Thus the reputed orthodox philosophers in all ages have taught that the world was made for man, the earth for him to inhabit, and all the luminous bodies in the immense expanse around us for him to gaze at. Kings do no more, nay not so much, when they imagine themselves the final cause for which societies were formed and governments instituted.' If we read 'the aristocracy' for 'kings' we shall have a complete analysis of the social philosophy of the ruling class. It was from this centre that they looked out upon the world. When the misery of the poor reacted on their own comfort, as in the case of poaching or crime or the pressure on the rates, they were aware of it and took measures to protect their property, but of any social problem outside these relations they were entirely unconscious. Their philosophy and their religion taught them that it was the duty of the rich to be benevolent, and of the poor to be patient and industrious. The rich were ready to do their part, and all they asked of the poor was that they should learn to bear their lot with resignation. Burke had laid down the true and full philosophy of social life once and for all. 'Good order is the foundation of all good things. To be enabled to acquire, the people, without being servile, must be tractable and obedient. The magistrate must have his reverence, the laws their authority. The body of the people must not find the principles of natural subordination by art rooted out of their minds. They must respect that property of which they cannot partake. They must labour to obtain what by labour can be obtained; and when they find, as they commonly do, the success disproportioned to the endeavour, they must be taught their consolation in the final proportions of eternal justice.'^(1*)

The upper classes, looking upon the world in this way, considered that it was the duty of the poor man to adapt himself, his tastes, his habits, and his ambitions, to the arrangements of a

society which it had pleased Providence to organise on this interesting plan. We have in the pages of Eden the portrait of the ideal poor woman, whose life showed what could be done if poverty were faced in the proper spirit. 'Anne Hurst was born at Witley in Surrey: there she lived the whole period of a long life, and there she died. As soon as she was thought able to work, she went to service: there, before she was twenty, she married James Strudwick, who, like her own father, was a day labourer. With this husband she lived, a prolific, hardworking, contented wife, somewhat more than fifty years. He worked more than threescore years on one farm, and his wages, summer and winter, were regularly a shilling a day. He never asked more nor was never offered less. They had between them seven children: and lived to see six daughters married and three the mothers of sixteen children: all of whom were brought up, or are bringing up, to be day labourers. Strudwick continued to work till within seven weeks of the day of his death, and at the age of four score, in 1787, he closed, in peace, a not inglorious life; for, to the day of his death, he never received a farthing in the way of parochial aid. His wife saved him about seven years, and though bent with age and infirmities, and little able to work, excepting as a weeder in a gentleman's garden, she also was too proud to ask or receive any relief from the parish. For six or seven of the last years of her life, she received twenty shillings a year from the person who favoured me with this account, which he drew up from her own mouth. With all her virtue, and all her merit, she yet was not much liked in her neighbourhood; people in affluence thought her haughty, and the Paupers of the parish, seeing, as they could not help seeing, that her life was a reproach to theirs, aggravated all her little failings. Yet, the worst thing they had to say of her was, that she was proud; which, they said, was manifested by the way in which she buried her husband. Resolute, as she owned she was, to have the funeral, and everything that related to it, what she called decent, nothing could dissuade her from having handles to his coffin and a plate on it, mentioning his age. She was also charged with having behaved herself crossly and peevishly towards one of her sons-in-law, who was a mason and went regularly every Saturday evening to the ale house as he said just to drink a pot of beer. James Strudwick in all his life, as she often told this ungracious son-in-law, never spent five shillings in any idleness: luckily (as she was sure to add) he had it not to spend. A more serious charge against her was that, living to a great age, and but little able to work, she grew to be seriously afraid, that, at last, she might become chargeable to the parish (the heaviest, in her estimation, of all human calamities), and that thus alarmed she did suffer herself more than once, during the exacerbations of a fit of distempered despondency, peevishly (and perhaps petulantly) to exclaim that God Almighty, by suffering her to remain so long upon earth, seemed actually to have forgotten her.' 'Such,' concludes Eden, 'are the simple annals of Dame Strudwick: and her historian, partial to his subject, closes it with lamenting that such village memoirs have not oftener been sought for and recorded.' (2*) This was the ideal character for the cottage. How Eden or anybody else would have hated this poor woman in whom every kindly feeling had been starved to death if she had been in his own class! We know from Creevey what his friends thought of 'the stingy kip' Lambton when they found themselves under his roof, where 'a round of beef at a side table was run at with as much keenness as a banker's shop before a stoppage.' A little peevishness or even petulance with God Almighty would not have seemed the most serious charge that could be brought against such a neighbour. But if every villager had had Dame Strudwick's hard and narrow virtues, and had crushed all other tastes and interests in the passion for living on a shilling a day in a cold and bitter independence, the problem of preserving the monopolies of the few without disorder or trouble would have been greatly simplified. There would have been little danger, as Burke would have said, that the fruits of successful industry and the accumulations of fortune would be exposed to 'the plunder of the negligent, the disappointed, and the unprosperous.'

The way in which the ruling class regarded the poor is illustrated in the tone of the discussions when the problem of poverty had become acute at the end of the eighteenth century. When Pitt, who had been pestered by Eden to read his book, handed a volume to Canning, then his secretary, that brilliant young politician spent his time writing a parody on the grotesque

names to be found in the Appendix, and it will be recollected that Pitt excused himself for abandoning his scheme for reforming the Poor Law, on the ground that he was inexperienced in the condition of the poor. It was no shame to a politician to be ignorant of such subjects. The poor were happy or unhappy in the view of the ruling class according to the sympathy the rich bestowed on them. If there were occasional misgivings they were easily dispelled. Thus one philosopher pointed out that though the position of the poor man might seem wanting in dignity or independence, it should be remembered by way of consolation that he could play the tyrant over his wife and children as much as he liked.(3*) Another train of soothing reflections was started by such papers as that published in the *Annals of Agriculture* in 1797, under the title 'On the Comforts enjoyed by the Cottagers compared to those of the ancient Barons.' In such a society a sentiment like that expressed by Fox when supporting Whitbread's Bill in 1795, that 'it was not fitting in a free country that the great body of the people should depend on the charity of the rich,' seemed a challenging paradox. Eden thought this an extraordinary way of looking at the problem, and retorted that it was gratifying to see how ready the rich were to bestow their benevolent attentions. This was the point of view of Pitt and of almost all the speakers in the debate that followed Fox's outburst, Buxton going so far as to say that owing to those attentions the condition of the poor had never been 'so eligible.' Just as the boisterous captain in *Evelina* thought it was an honour to a wretched Frenchwoman to be rolled in British mud, so the English House of Commons thought that poverty was turned into a positive blessing by the kindness of the rich.

Writing towards the end of the ancient régime, Cobbett maintained that in his own lifetime the tone and language of society about the poor had changed very greatly for the worse, that the old name of 'the commons of England' had given way to such names as 'the lower orders,' 'the peasantry,' and 'the population,' and that when the poor met together to demand their rights they were invariably spoken of by such contumelious terms as 'the populace' or 'the mob.' 'In short, by degrees beginning about fifty years ago the industrious Part of the community, particularly those who create every useful thing by their labour, have been spoken of by everyone possessing the power to oppress them in any degree in just the same manner in which we speak of the animals which compose the stock upon a farm. This is not the manner in which the forefathers of us, the common people, were treated.'(4*) Such language, Cobbett said, was to be heard not only from 'tax-devourers, bankers, brewers, monopolists of every sort, but also from their clerks, from the very shopkeepers and waiters, and from the fribbles stuck up behind the counter to do the business that ought to be done by a girl.' This is perhaps only another way of saying that the isolation of the poor was becoming a more and more conspicuous feature of English society.

Many causes combined to destroy the companionship of classes, and most of all the break-up of the old village which followed on the enclosures and the consolidation of farms. In the old village, labourers and cottagers and small farmers were neighbours. They knew each other and lived much the same kind of life. The small farmer was a farmer one day of the week and a labourer another; he married, according to Cobbett, the domestic servant of the gentry, a fact that explains the remark of Sophia Western's maid to the landlady of the inn, 'and let me have the bacon cut very nice and thin, for I can't endure anything that's gross. Prythee try if you can't do a little tolerably for once; and don't think you have a farmer's wife or some of those creatures in the house.' The new farmer lived in a different latitude. He married a young lady from the boarding school. He often occupied the old manor house.(5*) He was divided from the labourer by his tastes, his interests, his ambitions, his display and whole manner of life. The change that came over the English village in consequence was apparent to all observers with social insight. When Goldsmith wanted to describe a happy village he was careful to choose a village of the old kind, with the farmers 'strangers alike to opulence and to poverty,' and Crabbe, to whose sincere and realist pen we owe much of our knowledge of the social life of the

time, gives a particularly poignant impression of the cold and friendless atmosphere that surrounded the poor:

'Where Plenty smiles, alas! she smiles for few,
And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore,
The wealth around them makes them doubly poor.'(6*)

Perhaps the most vivid account of the change is given in a letter from Cobbett in the *Political Register* for 17th March 1821,(7*) addressed to Mr. Gooch: --

'I hold a return to small farms to be absolutely necessary to a restoration to anything like an English community; and I am quite sure, that the ruin of the present race of farmers, generally, is a necessary preliminary to this.... The life of the husbandman cannot be that of a gentleman without injury to society at large. When farmers become gentlemen their labourers become slaves. A Virginian farmer, as he is called, very much resembles a great farmer in England; but then, the Virginian's work is done by slaves. It is in those States of America, where the farmer is only the first labourer that all the domestic virtues are to be found, and all that public-spirit and that valour, which are the safeguards of American independence, freedom, and happiness. You, Sir, with others, complain of the increase of the poor-rates. But, you seem to forget, that, in the destruction of the small farms, as separate farms, small-farmers have become mere hired labourers.... Take England throughout three farms have been turned into one within fifty years, and the far greater part of the change has taken place within the last thirty years; that is to say, since the commencement of the deadly system of Pitt. Instead of families of small farmers with all their exertions, all their decency of dress and of manners, and all their scrupulousness as to character, we have families of paupers, with all the improvidence and wrecklessness belonging to an irrevocable sentence of poverty for life. Mr. Curwen in his Hints on Agriculture, observes that he saw some where in Norfolk, I believe it was, two hundred farmers worth from five to ten thousand pounds each; and exclaims "What a glorious sight!" In commenting on this passage in the Register, in the year 1810, I observed " Mr. Curwen only saw the outside of the sepulchre; if he had seen the two or three thousand half-starved labourers of these two hundred farmers, and the five or six thousand ragged wives and children of those labourers; if the farmers had brought those with them, the sight would not have been so glorious."

A practice referred to in the same letter of Cobbett's that tended to widen the gulf between the farmer and the labourer was the introduction of bailiffs: 'Along with enormous prices for corn came in the employment of Bailiffs by farmers, a natural consequence of large farms; and to what a degree of insolent folly the system was leading, may be guessed from an observation of Mr. Arthur Young, who recommended, that the Bailiff should have a good horse to ride, and a bottle of port wine every day at his dinner: while in the same work, Mr. Young gives great numbers of rules for saving labour upon a farm. A pretty sort of farm where the bailiff was to have a bottle of port wine at his dinner! The custom was, too, to bring bailiffs from some distant part, in order to prevent them from having any feeling of compassion for the labourers. Scotch bailiffs above all, were preferred, as being thought harder than any others that could be obtained; and thus (with shame I write the words!) the farms of England, like those of Jamaica, were supplied with drivers from Scotland!... Never was a truer saying, than that of the common people, that a Scotchman makes a "good sole, but a d---d bad upper leather.'"(8*) Bamford, speaking of 1745, says: 'Gentlemen then lived as they ought to live: as real gentlemen will ever be found living: in kindness with their neighbours; in openhanded charity towards the poor, and in hospitality towards all friendly comers. There were no grinding bailiffs and land

stewards in those days to stand betwixt the gentleman and his labourer or his tenant: to screw up rents and screw down livings, and to invent and transact all little meannesses for so much per annum.'(9*) Cobbett's prejudice against Scotsmen, the race of 'feelosofers,' blinded him to virtues which were notoriously theirs, as in his round declaration that all the hard work of agriculture was done by Englishmen and Irishmen, and that the Scotsmen chose such tasks as 'peeping into melon frames.' But that his remarks upon the subject of the introduction of Scottish bailiffs reflected a general feeling may be seen from a passage in Miss Austen's *Emma*, 'Mr. Graham intends to have a Scotch bailiff for his new estate. Will it answer? Will not the old prejudice be too strong?'

The change in the status of the farmer came at a time of a general growth of luxury. All classes above the poor adopted a more extravagant and ostentatious style and scale of living. This was true, for example, of sporting England. Fox-hunting dates from this century. Before the eighteenth century the amusement of the aristocracy was hunting the stag, and that of the country squire was hunting the hare. It was because Walpole kept beagles at Richmond and used to hunt once a week that the House of Commons has always made Saturday a holiday. In the Peninsular War, Wellington kept a pack of hounds at headquarters, but they were fox-hounds. In its early days fox-hunting had continued the simpler traditions of hare-hunting, and each small squire kept a few couple of hounds and brought them to the meet. Gray has described his uncle's establishment at Burnham, where every chair in the house was taken up by a dog. But as the century advanced the sport was organised on a grander scale: the old buck-hounds and slow horses were superseded by more expensive breeds, and far greater distances were covered. Foxhunting became the amusement both of the aristocracy and of the squires, and it resembled rather the pomp and state of stag-hunting than the modest pleasures of Walpole and his friends. In all other directions there was a general increase of magnificence in life. The eighteenth century was the century of great mansions, and some of the most splendid palaces of the aristocracy were built during the distress and famine of the French war. The ambitions of the aristocracy became the ambitions of the classes that admired them, as we know from Smollett, and Sir William Scott in 1802, speaking in favour of the non-residence of the clergy, 'expressly said that they and their families ought to appear at watering-places, and that this was amongst the means of making them respected by their flocks!'(10*)

The rich and the poor were thus growing further and further apart, and there was nobody in the English village to interpret these two worlds to each other. M. Babeau has pointed out that in France, under the ancient régime, the lawyers represented and defended in some degree the rights of the peasants. This was one consequence of the constant litigation between peasants and seigneurs over communal property. The lawyers who took the side of the peasants lived at their expense it is true, but they rendered public services, they presented the peasants' case before public opinion, and they understood their ideas and difficulties. This explains a striking feature of the French Revolution, the large number of local lawyers who became prominent as champions of revolutionary ideas. One of Burke's chief complaints of the Constituent Assembly was that it contained so many country attorneys and notaries, 'the fomenters and conductors of the petty war of village vexation.'(11*) In England the lawyers never occupied this position, and it is impossible to imagine such a development taking place there. The lawyers who interested themselves in the poor were enlisted not in the defence of the rights of the commoners but in the defence of the purses of the parishes. For them the all-important question was not what rights the peasant had against his lord, but on which parish he had a claim for maintenance.

The causes of litigation were endless: if a man rented a tenement of the annual value of £10 he acquired a settlement. But his rental might not have represented the annual value, and so the further question would come up, Was the annual value actually £10? 'If it may be really not far from that sum, and the family of the pauper be numerous, the interests of the contending

parishes, supported by the conflicting opinions of their respective surveyors, leads to the utmost expense and extremity of litigation.'(12*) If the annual value were not in dispute there might be nice and intricate questions about the kind of tenement and the nature of the tenure: if the settlement was claimed in virtue of a contract of hiring, was the contract 'general, special, customary, retrospective, conditional, personal' or what not?(13*) If the settlement was claimed in virtue of apprenticeship,(14*) what was the nature of the indentures and so on. If claimed for an estate of £30, was the estate really worth £30, and how was it acquired? These are a few of the questions in dispute, and to add to the confusion 'on no branch of the law have the judgments of the superior court been so contradictory.'(15*)

Thus the principal occupation of those lawyers whose business brought them into the world of the poor was of a nature to draw their sympathies and interests to the side of the possessing classes, and whereas peasants' ideas were acclimatised outside their own class in France as a consequence of the character of rural litigation and of rural lawyers, the English villager came before the lawyer, not as a client, but as a danger; not as a person whose rights and interests had to be explored and studied, but as a person whose claims on the parish had to be parried or evaded. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that both Fielding and Smollett lay great stress on the reputation of lawyers for harshness and extortion in their treatment of the poor, regarding them, like Carlyle, as 'attorneys and law beagles who hunt ravenous on the earth.' Readers of the adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves will remember Tom Clarke 'whose goodness of heart even the exercise of his profession had not been able to corrupt. Before strangers he never owned himself an attorney without blushing, though he had no reason to blush for his own practice, for he constantly refused to engage in the cause of any client whose character was equivocal, and was never known to act with such industry as when concerned for the widow and orphan or any other object that sued in forma pauperis.' Fielding speaks in a footnote to Tom Jones of the oppression of the poor by attorneys, as a scandal to the law, the nation, Christianity, and even human nature itself.

There was another class that might, under different circumstances, have helped to soothe and soften the isolation of the poor, but the position and the sympathies of the English Church made this impossible. This was seen very clearly by Adam Smith, who was troubled by the fear that 'enthusiasm,' the religious force so dreaded by the men of science and reason, would spread among the poor, because the clergy who should have controlled and counteracted it were so little in touch with the mass of the people. Under the government of the Anglican Church, as set up by the Reformation, he pointed out, 'the clergy naturally endeavour to recommend themselves to the sovereign, to the court, and to the nobility and gentry of the country, by whose influence they chiefly expect to obtain preferment.'(16*) He added that such a clergy are very apt to neglect altogether the means of maintaining their influence and authority with the lower ranks of life. The association of the Anglican Church with the governing class has never been more intimate and binding than it was during the eighteenth century. This was true alike of bishops and of clergy. The English bishop was not a gay Voltairean like the French, but he was just as zealous a member of the privileged orders, and the system over which he presided and which he defended was a faint copy of the gloriously coloured scandals of the French Church. The prelates who lived upon those scandals were described by Robespierre, with a humour that he did not often indulge, as treating the deity in the same way as the mayor of the palace used to treat the French kings. 'Ils l'ont traité comme iadis les maires du palais traitèrent les descendants de Clovis pour, régner sous son nom et se mettre à sa place. Ils l'ont relégué dans le ciel comme dans un palais, et ne l'ont appelé sur la terre que pour demander à leur profit des dîmes, des richesses, des honneurs, des plaisirs et de la puissance.' When Archbishop Dillon declared against the civil constitution he said that he and his colleagues acted as gentlemen and not as theologians. The Archbishop of Aix spoke of tithes as a voluntary offering from the piety of the faithful. 'As to that,' said the Duke de la Rochefoucault, 'there are now forty thousand cases in the Courts.' Both these archbishops

would have found themselves quite at home among the spiritual peers in the House of Lords, where the same decorous hypocrisies mingled with the same class atmosphere. For the English bishops, though they were not libertines like the French, never learnt so to be Christians as to forget to be aristocrats, and their religious duties were never allowed to interfere with the demands of scholarship or of pleasure. Perhaps the most distinguished product of this régime was Bishop Watson of Llandaff, who invented an improved gunpowder and defended Christianity against Paine and Gibbon. These were his diversions; his main business was carried on at his magnificent country scat on the banks of Windermere. He was bishop for thirty-four years, and during the whole of that time he never lived within his diocese, preferring to play the part of the grand seigneur planting trees in Westmorland. He has left a sympathetic and charming account of what he modestly calls his retirement from public life, an event not to be confused with abdication of his see, and of how he built the palace where he spent the emoluments of Llandaff and the long autumn of his life.

It was natural to men who lived in this atmosphere to see politics through the spectacles of the aristocracy. To understand how strongly the view that the Church existed to serve the aristocracy, and the rest of the State through the aristocracy, was fixed in the minds of the higher clergy, we have only to look at the case of a reformer like Bishop Horsley. The bishop is chiefly known as a preacher, a controversialist, and the author of the celebrated dictum that the poor had nothing to do with the laws except to obey them. His battle with Priestley has been compared to the encounter of Bentley and Collins, a comparison that may not give Horsley more, but certainly gives Priestley less than his due. When he preached before the House of Lords on the death of Louis XVI his audience rose and stood in silent reverence during his peroration. The cynical may feel that it was not difficult to inspire emotion and awe in such a congregation on such a subject at such a time, but we know from De Quincey that Horsley's reputation as a preacher stood remarkably high. He was one of the leaders of the Church in politics; for our purposes it is more important to note that he was one of the reforming bishops. Among other scandals he attacked the scandal of non-residence, and he may be taken as setting in this regard the strictest standard of his time; yet he did not scruple to go and live in Oxford for some years as tutor to Lord Guernsey, during the time that he was Rector of Newington, as plain a confession as we could want that in the estimation of the most public-spirited of the clergy the nobility had the first claims on the Church. These social sympathies were confirmed by common political interests. The privileges of the aristocracy and of the bishops were in fact bound up together, and both bishops and aristocracy had good reason to shrink from breaking a thread anywhere. Perhaps the malicious would find the most complete and piquant illustration of the relations of the Church and the governing class in the letter written by Dr. Goodenough to Addington, who had just made him dean of Rochester, when the clerkship of the Pells, worth £3000 a year, was about to become vacant. 'I understand that Colonel Barré is in a very precarious state. I hope you will have the fortitude to nominate Harry to be his successor.' Harry, Addington's son, was a boy at Winchester. The father's fortitude rose to the emergency: the dean blossomed a little later into a bishop.

But if the French and the English bishops both belonged to the aristocracy in feelings and in habits, a great difference distinguishes the rank and file of the clergy in the two countries. The French priest belonged by circumstances and by sympathy to the peasant class. The bishop regarded the country curé as un vilain sentant le fumier, and treated him with about as much consideration as the seigneur showed to his dependants. The priest's quarrel with the bishop was like the peasant's quarrel with the seigneur: for both priest and peasant smarted under the arrogant airs of their respective superiors, and the bishop swallowed up the tithes as the seigneur swallowed up the feudal dues. Sometimes the curé put himself at the head of a local rebellion. In the reign of Louis XV the priests round Saint-Germain led out their flocks to destroy the game which devoured their crops, the campaign being announced and sanctified from the pulpit. In the Revolution the common clergy were largely on the side of the peasants.

Such a development was inconceivable in England. As the curé's windows looked to the village, the parson's windows looked to the hall. When the parson's circumstances enabled him to live like the squire, he rode to hounds, for though, as Blackstone tells us, Roman Canon Law, under the influence of the tradition that St. Jerome had once observed that the saints had eschewed such diversions, had interdicted *venationes et sylvaticas vagationes cum canibus et accipitribus* to all clergymen, this early severity of life had vanished long before the eighteenth century. He treated the calls of his profession as trifling accidents interrupting his normal life of vigorous pleasure. On becoming Bishop of Chester, Dr. Blomfield astonished the diocese by refusing to license a curate until he had promised to abstain from hunting, and by the pain and surprise with which he saw one of his clergy carried away drunk from a visitation dinner. One rector, whom he rebuked for drunkenness, replied with an injured manner that he was never drunk on duty.

There were, it is true, clergymen of great public spirit and devoted lives, and such men figure in these pages, but the Church, as a whole, was an easy-going society, careful of its pleasures and comforts, living with the moral ideas and as far as possible in the manner of the rich. The rivalry of the Methodist movement had given a certain stimulus to zeal, and the Vicar of Corsley in Wilts. (17*) for example, added a second service to the duties of the Sunday, though guarding himself expressly against the admission of any obligation to make it permanent. But it was found impossible to eradicate from the system certain of the vices that belong to a society which is primarily a class. Some of the bishops set themselves to reduce the practice of non-residence. Porteus, Bishop of London, devoted a great part of his charge to his clergy in 1790 to this subject, and though he pleaded passionately for reform he cannot be said to have shut his eyes to the difficulties of the clergy. 'There are, indeed, two impediments to constant residence which cannot easily be surmounted; the first is (what fortunately prevails in some parts of this diocese) unwholesomeness of situation; the other is the possession of a second benefice. Yet even these will not justify a total and perpetual absence from your cures. The unhealthiness of many places is of late years by various improvements greatly abated, and there are now few so circumstanced as not to admit of residence there in some part of the year without any danger to the constitution.' Thus even Bishop Porteus, who in this very charge reminded the clergy that they were called by the titles of stewards, watchmen, shepherds, and labourers, never went the length of thinking that the Church was to be expected to minister to the poor in all weathers and in all climates.

The exertions of the reforming bishops did not achieve a conspicuous success, for the second of the difficulties touched on by Porteus was insurmountable. In his *Legacy to Parsons*, Cobbett, quoting from the *Clerical Guide*, showed that 332 parsons shared the revenues of 1496 parishes, and 500 more shared those of 1524. Among the pluralists were Lord Walsingham, who besides enjoying a pension of £700 a year, was Archdeacon of Surrey, Prebendary of Winchester, Rector of Calbourne, Rector of Fawley, perpetual Curate of Exbury, and Rector of Merton; the Earl of Guildford, Rector of Old Alresford, Rector of New Alresford, perpetual Curate of Medsted, Rector of St. Mary, Southampton, including the great parish of South Stoneham, Master of St. Cross Hospital, with the revenue of the parish of St. Faith along with it. There were three Pretymans dividing fifteen benefices, and Wellington's brother was Prebendary of Durham, Rector of Bishopwearmouth, Rector of Chelsea, and Rector of Therfield. This method of treating the parson's profession as a comfortable career was so closely entangled in the system of aristocracy, that no Government which represented those interests would ever dream of touching it. Parliament intervened indeed, but intervened to protect those who lived on these abuses. For before 1801 there were Acts of Parliament on the Statute Book (21 Henry VIII. c. 13, and 13 Elizabeth c. 20), which provided certain penalties for non-residence. In 1799 a certain Mr. Williams laid informations against hundreds of the clergy for offences against these Acts. Parliament replied by passing a series of Acts to stay proceedings, and finally in 1803 Sir William Scott, member for the University of Oxford, passed an Act which

allowed the bishops to authorise parsons to reside out of their parishes. It is not surprising to find that in 1812, out of ten thousand incumbents, nearly six thousand were non-resident.

In the parishes where the incumbent was non-resident, if there was a clergyman at all in the place, it was generally a curate on a miserable pittance. Bishop Porteus, in the charge already mentioned, gives some interesting information about the salaries of curates: 'It is also highly to the honour of this diocese that in general the stipends allowed to the curates are more liberal than in many other parts of the kingdom. In several instances I find that the stipend for one church only is £50 a year; for two £60 and the use of a parsonage; and in the unwholesome parts of the diocese £70 and even £80 (that is £40 for each church), with the same indulgence of a house to reside in.' Many of the parishes did not see much of the curate assigned to them. 'A man must have travelled very little in the kingdom,' said Arthur Young in 1798, 'who does not know that country towns abound with curates who never see the parishes they serve, but when they are absolutely forced to it by duty.'(18*) But the ill-paid curate, even when he was resident and conscientious, as he often was, moved like the pluralist rector in the orbit of the rich. He was in that world though not of it. All his hopes hung on the squire. To have taken the side of the poor against him would have meant ruin, and the English Church was not a nursery of this kind of heroism. It is significant that almost every eighteenth-century novelist puts at least one sycophantic parson in his or her gallery of portraits.(19*)

In addition to the social ties that drew the clergy to the aristocracy, there was a powerful economic hindrance to their friendship with the poor. De Tocqueville thought that the tithe system brought the French priest into interesting and touching relations with the peasant: a view that has seemed fanciful to later historians, who are more impressed by the quarrels that resulted. But de Tocqueville himself could scarcely argue that the tithe system helped to warm the heart of the labourer to the Church of England in cases such as those recorded in the Parliamentary Paper issued in 1833, in which parson magistrates sent working men to prison for refusing to pay tithes to their rector. Day labouring men had originally been exempted from liability to pay tithes, but just as the French Church brought more and more of the property and industry of the State within her confiscating grasp, so the English Parliament, from the reign of William III, had been drawing the parson's net more closely round the labourer. Moreover, as we shall see in a later chapter, the question of tithes was in the very centre of the social agitations that ended in the rising of 1830 and its terrible punishment. In this particular quarrel the farmers and labourers were on the same side, and the parsons as a body stood out for their own property with as much determination as the landlords.

In one respect the Church took an active part in oppressing the village poor, for Wilberforce and his friends started, just before the French Revolution, a Society for the Reformation of Manners, which aimed at enforcing the observance of Sunday, forbidding any kind of social dissipation, and repressing freedom of speech and of thought whenever they refused to conform to the superstitions of the morose religion that was then in fashion. This campaign was directed against the license of the poor alone. There were no stocks for the Sabbath-breakers of Brooks's: a Gibbon might take what liberties he pleased with religion: the wildest Methodist never tried to shackle the loose tongues or the loose lives of the gay rich. The attitude of the Church to the excesses of this class is well depicted in Fielding's account of Parson Supple, who never remonstrated with Squire Western for swearing, but preached so vigorously in the pulpit against the habit that the authorities put the laws very severely in execution against others, 'and the magistrate was the only person in the parish who could swear with impunity.' This description might seem to border on burlesque, but there is an entry in Wilberforce's diary that reveals a state of mind which even Fielding would have found it impossible to caricature. Wilberforce was staying at Brighton, and this is his description of an evening he spent at the Pavilion with the first gentleman of Europe: 'The Prince and Duke of Clarence too very civil. Prince showed he had read Cobbett. Spoke strongly of the blasphemy of

his late papers and most justly. '(20*) We can only hope that Sheridan was there to enjoy the scene, and that the Prince was able for once to do justice to his strong feelings in language that would not shock Wilberforce's ears.

Men like Wilberforce and the magistrates whom he inspired did not punish the rich for their dissolute behaviour; they only found in that behaviour another argument for coercing the poor. As they watched the dishevelled lives of men like George Selwyn their one idea of action was to punish a village labourer, for neglecting church on Sunday morning. We have seen how the cottagers paid in Enclosure Bills for their lords' adventures at play. They paid also for their lords' dissipations in the loss of innocent pleasures that might have brought some colour into their grey lives. The more boisterous the fun at Almack's, the deeper the gloom thrown over the village. The Select Committee on Allotments that reported in 1843 found one of the chief causes of crime in the lack of recreations. Sheridan at one time and Cobbett at another tried to revive village sports, but social circumstances were too strong for them. In this respect the French peasant had the advantage. Babeau's picture of his gay and sociable Sunday may be overdrawn, but a comparison of Crabbe's description of the English Sunday with contemporary descriptions of Sunday as it was spent in a French village, shows that the spirit of common gaiety, killed in England by Puritanism and by the destruction of the natural and easy-going relations of the village community, survived in France through all the tribulations of poverty and famine. The eighteenth-century French village still bore a resemblance in fact to the medieval English village, and Goldsmith has recorded in *The Traveller* his impressions of 'mirth and social ease.' Babeau gives an account of a great variety of village games, from the violent contests in Brittany for the 'choule,' in one of which fourteen players were drowned, to the gentler dances and the children's romps that were general in other parts of France, and Arthur Young was very much struck by the agility and the grace that the heavy peasants displayed in dancing on the village green. Windham, speaking in a bad cause, the defence of bull-baiting in 1800, laid stress on the contrast: 'In the south of France and in Spain, at the end of the day's labour, and in the cool of the evening's shade, the poor dance in mirthful festivity on the green, to the sound of the guitar. But in this country no such source of amusement presents itself. If they dance, it must be often in a marsh, or in the rain, for the pleasure of catching cold. But there is a substitute in this country well known by the name of Hops. We all know the alarm which the very word inspires, and the sound of the fiddle calls forth the magistrate to dissolve the meeting. Men bred in ignorance of the world, and having no opportunity of mixing in its scenes or observing its manners, may be much worse employed than in learning something of its customs from theatrical representations; but if a company of strolling players make their appearance in a village, they are hunted immediately from it as a nuisance, except, perhaps, there be a few people of greater wealth in the neighbourhood, whose wives and daughters patronize them.' (21*) Thus all the influences of the time conspired to isolate the poor, and the changes, destructive of their freedom and happiness, that were taking place in their social and economic surroundings, were aggravated by a revival of Puritanism which helped to rob village life of all its natural melody and colour.

NOTES:

1. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (fourth edition), p. 359.
2. *Eden*, vol. i, p. 579.
3. *Reports on Poor*, vol. ii, p. 325.
4. *Political Register*, vol. lxxviii, p. 710.
5. *Hasbach*, p. 131.

6. 'Village,' Book i.
7. Vol. xxxviii, p. 750 ff.
8. Cobbet's *Political Register*, March 17, 1821, p. 779.
9. Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, p. 38.
10. *Rural Rides*, p. 460.
11. *Reflections*, p. 61.
12. *Poor Law Report*, 1817.
13. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1834, p. 161.
14. Cf. case of apprentice, *Annual Register*, 1819, p. 195.
15. *Poor Law Report*, 1817; in some cases there were amicable arrangements to keep down legal expenses; e.g., at Halifax (Eden), the overseer formed a society of the officers of adjoining parishes. Cases were referred to them, and the decision of the majority was accepted.
16. *Wealth of Nations*, vol. iii, p. 234.
17. *Life in an English Village*, by Maude F. Davies, p. 58.
18. *Inquiry into the State of the Public Mind among the Lower Classes*, p. 27.
19. The parsons under Squire Allworthy's roof, the parson to whom Pamela appealed in vain, and, most striking of all, Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*.
20. *Life*, vol. iv, p. 277.
21. *Parliamentary Register*, April 18, 1800.