

With fingers weary and worn
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags
Plying her needle and thread
Stitch , stitch, stitch
In poverty hunger and dirt,.....

Thomas Hood ' The Song of the Shirt ' .

Nothing says more about the abject conditions of the lower classes of Victorian society than that there were numbers of poverty stricken people who were willing to literally scrape a living by collecting dogs' excretia and selling it so that it could be used by another equally dreadfully desperate group who spent their days rubbing this nauseous material into leather to soften it.

Reading Strutt's ' Gazette ' today the seamiest side of Victorian life obtrudes very little , indicating that those who turned its tiny pages , although aware of such horrors, had come to accept them as a way of life where God rather than man had decided the 'stations ' to which men and women were appointed.

Dickens' Hard Times ' gives a vivid picture of life in the industrial cities, such as his imaginary Coketown , with its population of workers ' people equally like one another as the streets of the town, large and small, are alike, who all went in and out at the same hours with the same sound on the same pavements to the same works and where every day was the counterpart of the last and the next In the same Coke town the factory owners had been ' ruined ' so often that it was amazing how they had borne so many shocks ' they were ruined when they had been required to send the labouring children to school and when the inspectors were appointed to look into their works, and when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machines and utterly undone when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke....'

By the mid 19th century conditions may still have been bad but they were less horrific than they had been even decades earlier and much of this progress in attitudes, towards child labour in particular, were inspired by reformers such as Lord Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper . An Evangelical and a Tory, his childhood had been so unhappy that he likened its conditions to those of the miserable pupils at Dotheboy Hall in ' Nicholas Nickleby ' but this experience had not made him bitter nor unmoved by the hardship of others .

cont.

It was largely through his efforts that in 1833 children under the age of thirteen in the mills were forbidden from working more than 48 hours a week or a nine hour day and were to receive two hours schooling a day , although the latter was dependent on their being a place where lessons could be given in a factory, in attic, cellar or out building and a teacher to take them The Mines Act of 1842 prohibited women and girls from working underground and put the age limit for boys at ten .

Before the efforts of such more enlightened politicians , children had worked in coal mines from the age of seven or eight ,or even earlier, pushing or drawing the coal trolleys, those too young or too weak were given the job of trappers, opening and shutting the doors which controlled the air flow into the narrow passages , sitting alone in the blackness waiting to operate the traps .

Not regarded as actual physical labour it could therefore be given to comparative babies to perform. Those who dragged the trucks were harnessed to them like the pathetic pit ponies , others worked on the pumps, often in passages little more than 19 inches high, standing in water , climbing up steep slopes half naked and on all fours . Shaftesbury's heart-rending descriptions of the conditions opened the eyes of Parliamentarians many of whom had no idea (nor wanted to have) of what was going on in the underworld of the the country's growing prosperity.

Slavery was being abolished in the Colonies but conditions every bit as bad were commonplace in their own cities , The mills were often staffed by pauper children housed in communal houses who before the new laws had worked a fifteen hour day including Saturday and Sunday when they probably had to spend at least half the day cleaning the machines . Sir Robert Peel the elder was one of the earliest more enlightened mill owners for many of those in government has never been near an industrial town let alone inside a mill or a factory .

Child labour horrifies us but it was usually only the children of the rich had been allowed to enjoy their youth in leisure apart from lessons. For centuries children had always worked, either helping in cottage industries or on the land, although the latter labour was more congenial and at least in more pleasant conditions consisting possibly of tending herds or gathering produce. The earliest reforms applied only to the employment of the pauper children in the textile mills where in 1819 the employment of children under nine was forbidden although little effort was made to enforce the law.

Peel extended this rule to all children working in mills . When the socialist pioneer Robert Owen said there was no need for children to work at all the pious threw up their hands in horror questioning what they would do instead, the Devil surely finding mischief for their idle hands ! .

The reforms in working hours were not only extremely complicated but only applied to textile mills and factories, and coal mines, and although some restrictions were applied to the work of women and children in other trades of various kinds the hours men worked were completely uncontrolled . Shortage of labour encouraged employers to invite workers from a sister kingdom said J. Kay Shuttleworth , a practice which could then prove a severe embarrassment when the demand fell owing to fluctuations in prosperity, and quoting the colonisation of the Irish ' which was first encouraged and has proved one of the chief sources of demoralisation and consequent physical deprivation of the people.'

In his Paper on 'The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester' in 1832 Dr Kay (later Sir James) Shuttleworth had warned that if the higher classes ' do not endeavour to promote domestic comfort virtue and knowledge among the lower, their misery , vice and prejudice will prove volcanic elements by whose explosive violence the structure of society may be destroyed. '

However Ebenezer Elliott, a poet who directed much of his artistic talent towards the support of the Anti Corn Law campaign , saw a beauty as well as material advantage in the new industrial towns and cities . In his poem ' Steam at Sheffield ' in 1840 he decried those who despised their noise and dirt and those who worked in the mills and factories

' He who loathes the crew
To whose dark hands the toiling ear is bound ,
Is dark of spirit, bilious as his hue
And bread tax-dyed in Tory lust's true blue '

Saluting ' steam miracles of semi deity ' Elliott continued ' There is a glorious harmony in this tempestuous music of the giant steam ' comparing the advantages afforded in employment by the manufacturers compared to the poverty of country dwellers, with land owners doubling the rent on every farm and the poor rustics living beastlike and dying blind to the priceless mysteries of "att and his million feeding enginery.'.

When a bill made further cuts in working hours for children there was opposition on economic grounds that it would spell ruin for the manufacturers. Children who were considered lazy or stupid or merely dog-tired, were beaten, contemporary drawings show heart rending scenes of mothers dragging their exhausted offspring from bed to the mill in the dawn light. Some children hardly knew their mothers, being given to a wet nurse at birth so that their mother could return to work and soon as they were old enough being sent to work themselves, returning home at night to a hovel where they fell into an exhausted sleep, too tired to eat, even if there was food for them. No wonder they were short-lived, sickly and stunted in growth but with an endless supply of human souls, the wastage went unmourned. If those in England ran out there were thousands more always available from Ireland!

The end had also come for the hand craftsmen, the men who had made objects of beauty such as Chippendale's chairs, the blacksmiths who wrought the iron for the gates of the squires' mansions, the tapestry weavers, the embroiderers, the craft shoemakers. Now all was mass produced as cheaply and speedily as possible in what became known as the 'slop shops'. Tailors, boot-makers and fine dressmakers still existed in large numbers but their work by hand had to compete with the speed of the machine or it became uneconomic.

The reduction of the working hours of children was unavoidably linked with that of adults, many of the children were actually employed by the weavers rather than the mill owners and Sir John Hobhouse (Baron Brougham) the radical politician, who had been a friend of Byron and was prominent in the work for this reform, thought the easiest way to stop evasion of the new law was to stop the machines at the appointed hour and rules governing all classes of workers were finally approved in 1847.

In his 'Past and Present' and 'After Day' Pamphlets between 1842 and 1850, Thomas Carlyle saw legislature as the culprit 'as it has the power to order the dingy manufacturing towns to cease from their soot and darkness'. There should be baths, he said, 'and fresh air and a wholesome temperature, ceilings at least twenty feet high and every toiling city should have a hundred acres or so of free green field with trees on it for its little children to desport themselves in....' Eight years later he was despairing. 'What a world we have made of it with our fierce Mamon worship!'

(cont.)

All British industrial existence seems fast becoming one huge hideous poisonous swamp of reeking pestilence, physical and moral, a hideous living Golgotha of souls and bodies buried alive . Thirty thousand outcast needlewomen working themselves swiftly to death, three million paupers rotting in idleness Carlyle saw no hope, for even with vast charity efforts to help such people the cesspool, once baled clean out, would begin before nightfall to fill up anew '.

Old habits die hard and there could still be evasions of the new laws, even in 1856 a Bill was defeated in Parliament which attempted to regulate the hours of labour in bleaching factories where girls had to work in temperatures up to 130 degrees F. opposition speakers taking the view that without these conditions the product would be unprofitable and government should not interfere with manufacturing.'

Various areas of London had their specialised trades, brewing at Spitalfields Southwark and Pimlico, matches at Bow and Hackney silkweaving at Spitalfields, Gas at Beckton (although there were numerous small gas companies at various places, mostly on the riverside owing to the need to transport the coal by barge ,) tar at Silvertown and tailoring at Bethnal Green

It is not surprising that even if work were available at factories and other organised industries that thousands of people preferred to seek a living in the obnoxious but more entrepreneurial occupations even, if their freedom included the liberty to starve.

Henry Mayhew left the most intimate and comprehensive account of the lives of the lowest dregs of society in his time in his 'London Labour and the London Poor,' the street finders searching for bones and rags, the mudlarks who scoured the river shores for any usable or saleable object and the sewer hunters who carried the search right into the stinking labyrinths of tunnels under the streets. Mayhew found them the most intelligent finders, adventurous, working in gangs, who were familiar with the tides sweeping up the outlets from the river, as they well had to be as to be caught would mean a ghastly death, and knowing their way about the passages like moles marking their progress by the type of sewage that descended around them from the districts above .

cont.

The street finders at least worked in the open air . Mayhew reckoned there were about a thousand of them in the 1850s , sleeping in refuges or straw yards , they got up early, at about 2 a.m. in the Summer , and worked for about seven to nine hours turning over any heap of rubbish they could find in the streets , ything good enough they would eat the rest went into a greasy bag for sorting out later for disposal in various ways. If lucky he or she might make about tenpence a day . The filthiest and cheapest part of London in those days was St Katherine's Dock where 'the narrow lanes and courts ran between houses of the poorest type' Mayhew described them as appearing to have tumbled into their places at random Huge dust heaps occupied every open space divided by foul drainage channels in which dabbled crowds of ragged dirty children. 'None resides in these places, he said ' but the poorest and most wretched. '.

Among the most salubrious work of finders was that of collecting cigar ends . They received between sixpence and tenpence a pound for their salvage which they sold to the manufacturers of what were described (before the Trade Descriptions Act !) as the ' best Havannahs ' . With this sum they could buy stale bread which they mixed with oatmeal and boiled into a sort of porridge to feed their large families.

The rag and bone men with their barrows, or sometimes with a donkey cart, would buy anything and dealt mostly with servants . A 'Gazette' advertisement directed at this class wooed them in verse

' Yes Cook, I wish a word with you
For me your dripping save
I weigh like gold and as for price
Most liberally behave,
Weigh it yourselves if you prefer ,
I only court a trial,
My honesty , which you will find
Is quite beyond denial. !

To "adies "aids : When Ladies turn their wardrobes out
With such as is your share
Just haste to me and you will find
That I will treat you fair. '

c out.

Housemaids were invited to 'treasure up their rags, I white and coloured buy, while the 'sprightly footmen' could be careful of little odds and ends and the kitchen maids make pennies from bones ' if cook did not get them first !)

Other advertisements bore catchy headings, 'War with Russia ! Amity with 'rease ! We are giving 2½d to 3d a pound for kitchen stu . High prices for metals 16/- a cwt for old lead, 6/7d . pound for brass Also wanted old lace and livery buttons 1/6d a dozen for old wine bottles Emmanuel 13 Church Street one door from Holland Street. '

' Kensington Savings 'ank ! : High prices ! A halfpenny a pound for bones, good dr pping 4d a pound ,waste paper 1½d to 2d a pound , good shaped wine bottles 1s 4d a dozen, old coal sacks a halfpenny a pound . '

Rope, stair rods old locks and keys there was scarcely anything that was not saleable . The rag and bone shops were recognised by their sickening stench as well as their shambles appearance from the bones and 'kitchen stuff ' being boiled down within and the donkey's stable was more/likely to be wholesome than the living quarters. The marine stores did not buy dripping and grease and were more like the present day ' junk' shops selling the articles as they were rather than as scrap . 'rease was also collected by women with baskets calling on the cooks in the big houses, some of it going to candlemaking the better drippin being bought by the poor to eat. 'are and rabbit skins were bought either for the fur or to boil down with the bones to make glue.

(cont)

But of all the finders and scavengers there can surely be none more likely to arouse nausea in modern minds than the collectors of dogs' dung . The substance was used in the processing of leather (pigeon droppings being more suitable for the finer hides such as calf skins . The trade had once been solely pursued by women who were called bunters and were likely to combine it with finding of other types . The material was sold by stable bucketfuls at between eightpence to tenpence a load , according to quality the ' dry limey sort ' fetching the highest price as this was considered more alkaline and therefore possessing better purifying properties . To this end the wily and more unscrupulous collectors would add mortar to their findings . Those with good connections made contracts with kennels , sometimes middlemen were involved , particularly dealing with starving Irish families , who having no outlet for their stock , had to sell it to an established pure finder at a cut down price .

Many of those engaged in this revolting occupation made a good living and there was often intense rivalry to the ownership of the area where the 'pure' was to be collected . Sales mostly took place in the tanneries at places such as Bermondsey where the workers carried out the equally obnoxious task of rubbing the pure in by hand , although meant to wear glo they said it was easier to do without . Mayhew reckoned that there were about two or three hundred people regularly engaged in the collection^{of} ' pure ' selling to well known tanneries . Some of them were almost too feeble to stoop , they carried a covered basket and a glove , though like the tanners most said it was easier to wash their hands than the glove . Some leather tanning was done at home as cottage industry with families collecting their own ' pure ' ,

Mayhew found one of his pure collectors in a wretched locality ' redolent with filth and pregnant with pestilential diseases .' ' The old woman lives in a room at the top of the house the lower rooms being filled with little ragged children . She was a superior sort of woman and could read and write . She told how she had been the daughter of a milkman who had fallen on hard times . She had a sailor husband who had been taken by the press gang and she had never seen him again , and was told he was dead . She married again but her husband was taken ill with paralysis and there was nothing else she could do to earn a living but to collect pure . At first she said , she could not endure it and was unable to eat for nausea but in the end she got more used to it . cont .

When Mayhew met her her second husband was also dead and she too was ill ' with dizziness in her head ' and she had had nothing to eat but a piece of bread dipped in water, nevertheless, she said, she could not bear the thought of going into the ' great house ' (the workhouse) and would sooner die in the street. She also told Mayhew that when people applied to one of the Poor Law guardians for relief he told them to go out and collect ' pure ' which he then bought at cut price and resold himself.

This may have been the most spectacularly awful of menial employment but there were plenty of other ways to scratch a living which were little better, from the sewer scavengers and mudlarks to the dustmen and nightmen who cleared the cesspits and thousands whose status varied according to their employment, from the affluent footmen, with a strict snob code of precedence, to the meanest little skivvy or maid of all work.

There was an enormous clothing industry spawned by the new methods of mass production employing regiments of workers both in the cotton and woollen mills to seamstresses. Cotton, which began its life among the black slaves in America, was processed by white slaves, the overworked and pitifully paid women and children who worked in the north of England and the Midlands in conditions no better, as well as being less paternal and personal, than those on the plantations.

In July 1855 the ' Gazette ' carried an item announcing the printing of an Act of Parliament which ' intended to limit the hours of work of persons employed and resident in the establishment of dressmaking and milliners in the metropolis. The prohibited hours, exclusive of Sunday, are from March 1 to August 1 in every year between 9.30 in the evening and 8 in the morning, and from August 1 to March 1 from 8 in the evening and 8 in the morning. (This would still mean a twelve hour day although it was proposed to allow an hour and a half for meals daily) Employers who broke the rule would be brought before the magistrates without power of appeal.

But much worse even than work in the slop shops (cheap clothing workrooms) were the conditions of the outworkers employed on piece work and immortalised by Thomas Hood in his ' Song of the Shirt. '.

cont.

Work work work
Till the brain begins to swim
Work-work -work
Till the eyes are heavy and dim,
Seam and gusset and band,
Band and gusset and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep
And sew them on in a dream....

Mayhew writes of one such 'slop worker' who made moleskin trousers at 7d or 8d a pair 'I can do a pair in a day and twelve when there is full employment, in a week . My expenses out of that are about ls 6d for twist and thread and candles but I have coals to pay for at about sixpence a week, so 5s 6d is the very outside of what I earn in full work ! This girl paid a shilling a week rent . Another girl () said she could earn no more than three shillings a week and had to work until nine or ten o'clock every night to achieve that and a third , a shirtmaker as in Hood's sad song, was the worst off of all, she received only twopence farthing for every shirt she made and worked from 5 a.m to midnight.

Some dressmakers and milliners, in common with assistants in drapers shops 'lived in' and were supplied with meals as part of their meagre wages. Such meals often left much to be desired as witnessed by this complaint about 'poor food for milliners' in the 'Gazette' on June 13 1855

'It would seem that the best way to abolish a nuisance is to denounce it in your columns . The particular incidence of cruelty to which I wish to call your attention is the practice in a large millinery establishment of placing upon the table joints of meat in a state so nearly raw . The appetites of the slaves of the needle are not at any time of remarkable voracity owing to their eternally sedentary occupation and exclusion from the air ...the sight of a mass of flesh from which the unwashed blood reeks might be delightful to a cannibal or a tigress but the sempstress wants more civilised fare The reason is obvious..... the heads of the firm know well that the appetites of the poor creatures under them will revolt at the appearance and not want to taste of the raw joint ...I hope these matters will mend but if this first warning is not heeded and this disgusting practice continues, we will call attention to it in a way as little to be relished as the uncooked state of the flesh.

What is meant by this threat is not made clear.

(cont)

Apart from dressmaking women were mainly employed in domestic service (in 1851 the census numbered at about a million). Lady Harrington at 13 Palace Gardens (the house that is now the central portion of the Soviet Embassy) employed a staff of twenty to look after herself and her daughter . The role of men in domestic service was usually less menial than that of women with chances of employment as grooms, butlers and footmen . A man who had just left the Army (2nd Regiment Lifeguards) advertised in the ' Gazette ' for a job as a time keeper or watchman ' He can write and is well skilled in accounts and understands the care of horses ... '.

Conditions below stairs were usually very different from the ' feudal servants system in country houses where, although hard-worked, and subject to strict hierarchy, the servants could enjoy much of the affluence of their master , even if it were only the pickings from the rich mans table and his cast off clothing and that of his family ,

In middle class urban life , such as that predominant in the households which would be receiving Strutt's ' Gazette ' , the 'servants' probably consisted of a maid of all work who would be housed in the attic or a basement room , unheated and unlit except for a candle and given poor food and low wages in exchange for a life of drudgery . Duties would include step cleaning, using lumps of ' hearthstone ' and carrying water and coals up endless flights of stairs in the tall narrow houses where every fire had to be tended and the ' slops ' from all the bedrooms emptied and jugs and basins filled.

Advertisements for ' Want Places ' in the ' Gazette ' seldom mention wages but one for a ' thorough servant of all work in a private family ' offers £10 per annum ' with usual tea and sugar allowances ' Family of two, gentleman dining at home only on Sunday, Drawing room apartment occasionally let,....must be good plain cook and early riser,

Washing put out . Mr Young baker 3 Pitt Street Campden Hill. ' Washing would be ' put out ' to the numerous laundresses who also advertised for work adding to their prowess the possession of ' good drying grounds ' . Other advertisements offer to care for children ' Nursechild , wet or dry ' .

A homily addressed to maidservants by a correspondent reminded them ' the whole of your time belongs to your employer excepting such as is necessary for rest and occasional recreation ' . A popular way to engage servants was by use of the ' Domestic Bazaar ' where servants sat on benches waiting inspection and interview by prospective employers .

cont.

As an advertisement for such a ' bazaar ' at 252 Oxford Street states ' servants will no longer be required to walk about enquiring ' Do you know of any situations today ? ' Servants are waiting to be hired from 10 to 5 o'clock ' . Few other trades were open to women , although those of modest education might join the legions of illpaid illhoused governesses . However in August 1855 it was reported that the recent Queen's Speech to Parliament had been transmitted by lady telegraphers who ' nearly equalled the speed and correctness of their more experienced co adjutors . The Electric Telegraph Company has a large number of females at present learning and the experiment promises to be highly successful ' .

The thought of coal at little more than a pound a ton may sound Utopian to twentieth century ears where heating takes up so much of a family's income John Woodward's Northern Coal Office at Knightsbridge advertised such cheap coals but before it could be tipped into the cellars of the more affluent houses in ' azette ' territory in Phillimore Gardens or Kensington "quare its journey to London had been achieved through the back-breaking toil of another group of the labouring poor , the coal porters and heavers . When a Collier arrived at Gravesend from a northern port the Captain informed the Factor at the Coal Exchange and after ascertaining the quality and quantity of the cargo the ship would be supplied with a coal meter and gang from the Coal Whippers office . There were usually far more gangs than meters and until the 1840s men were employed and paid by the riverside publicans who were usually relatives of the ship owners . In about seventy of these taverns the men crowded round the bars calling for drink and the bigger their orders the more chance they had of being given work when a ship came in . The work was incredibly hard and heavy and even the strongest man could only last a few years dragging sacks of coal on his back from the ship's hold and eventually , good for nothing , those who had followed it could end up among the bands of crossing sweepers , the last resort for those broken and injured by accident or war , or disabled by sickness . At least this trade was in the open air and gave those who followed it a certain entrepreneurial freedom as they were also able to perform any other little tasks that those in the neighbourhood might require . All the investment needed was a broom and those who secured a ' pitch ' might receive a few regular ' pensions ' from the inhabitants . Their crossings would also be protected by the police .

if they gained favour, preventing the usurping of their trade by pirate sweepers. Some bankers and affluent tradesmen hired their own special sweeper to keep the path to their doors clean.

Many of the sweepers had taken the job on after an accident which deprived them of earning another living and these included those who had lost an arm or a leg or suffered from rheumatism which would prevent them from undertaking a labouring job. A few were casual workers who moved from street to street but these were usually little more than children who worked under an older boy known as a ' king ' or ' captain ' and earning about a shilling a day.

Henry Mayhew describes the many great characters to be found among the London sweepers, such as Billy at Cavendish Square, near the mansion of the Duke of Portland, who was well versed in society gossip, another was an old woman of over eighty who was so feeble she could hardly stand, let alone sweep. Some of the younger sweepers would combine their trade with amusement, performing acrobatics for halfpennies to amuse passers by.

Sickness or injury at work spelt penury and disaster for the bread winner and his family, in the case of death even the funeral expenses could be beyond the means of many people. In March 1854 the 'Gazette' appealed 'To the Benevolent: On February 21st last a serious accident befell a sober and industrious working man named James Webb who fell from the roof of a large barn he was engaged in pulling down at Holland Farm, Kensington. After lingering a week in St George's Hospital the poor fellow died from concussion of the brain. A few persons who know the straightforward character of the deceased and who feel anxious to show their sympathy towards his widow and family have resolved to assist to some extent by raising a subscription towards his funeral expenses, thus testifying also that true moral worth, when found in a station where it is rarely seen, does not pass entirely disregarded. Your assistance is respectfully asked and donations you think fit to bestow will be acknowledged by Mr E Tisdall jnr. Holland Farm, Kensington.'

In subsequent issues acknowledgement was made of gifts of £ 1 each from Mr Tisdall himself, and another member of his family, as well as some of half a crown and two shillings (in stamps) from a reader of the 'Gazette.'

Despite the apparently over-supplied labour market, dustmen seem to have enjoyed something of the entrepreneurial independence that they do today - or at least their masters did, as witness this Gazette item under the heading of ' Paucity of Dustmen. '

cont

- Let us look into the state of our dustbins. Why are they so often full to overflowing, sending off pestiferous odours ? Because dustmen are scarce . Why ? Because the carts can be much more profitably employed carrying bricks , earth and other materials for the numerous buildings going up in all directions . Also as regards the bins of the more humble housekeepers, the dustman, when he is found - after much watching for and screaming after - exacts so high a rate for the removal of the contents that it becomes quite an object of consideration to empty them.
- When I was young I remember the office was performed gratis for the value of the dust and any gratuity was quite optional but now (and the value of manure cannot be less than before) the men regularly make a bargain before they begin their work and the householder is lucky to get off by paying twopence for beer. Things are very different in "aris" (they always are !) said this Kensington Householder,
- Every house is cleared of the sweepings of the previous day by men and carts provided by the police, nothing being required but that the domestics place the rubbish at ^{an} early hour at the street door, without any beer money.
- Apart from actual household refuse the cinders had to be removed and Henry Mayhew 's estimation was that these amounted to nearly as much as the $3\frac{1}{2}$ million tons of coal burned annually in London. He also gives an account of the system which gradually reversed from the refuse collectors buying the rubbish to their being paid to remove it.
- The persons with whom the agreement is made by the parish officers are known as Dust Contractors and are generally men of considerable wealth. Formerly the custom was otherwise when the residuum of London fuel was more valuable, then master dustmen would pay the parish for the privilege, as much as £500 a year. The Court of Sewers of the City of London in 1846 were able to obtain £5000 from the contractors for the liberty of carrying away the dirt from the street and the dust from the bins . Then the contractors entered into a combination and resolved not to bid so high and got the contract for £2,200, then no premium was paid , but the City Commissioners had to pay them £ 300. Now the City is paying £4,900 divided among four contractors . Each master employs about six carts manned by two dustmen bringing in five loads a day. In the yards about fourteen people work, mainly women, sifting the loads into soil used for manure , and breeze for brick making . Among the 'treasures ' to be found were broken bricks used for road making or the foundations of houses , old tin for japanned corners of trunks , old shoes which could be pulled apart and used for stuffing and lining new shoes , or to make Russian blue dye. cont.

The dust was piled in high cones in the yards amongst which cocks and hens pecked and pigs routed for anything edible. The women worked with their sifting pans wearing loose cotton gowns with black bonnets and leather aprons, and round their feet little children grubbed for bones. Dustmen wore breeches and smocks and fantail hats and were only distinguishable from coal men by being grey instead of black.

Whereas factory hours had become the subject of legislation, those of workers in less organised trades remained matters for argument, as shown by a dispute reported in the 'Gazette' in October 1854 over time for sharpening of tools. Heard in the Brompton County Court the case was between a joiner called Humphrey and Messrs Grey and Ormson of Chelsea, horticultural builders, in which he claimed he was entitled to 1s 4d as a quarter of a day's wages due according to custom for sharpening his tools, before being discharged for irregularity in the morning. The plaintiff maintained that it was the custom, not only in the trade generally, but also in this particular firm, for such an allowance to be made on the event of discharge, unless the workman had discharged himself. The workman had brought witnesses with him but they were objected to because they had remained in the court during the earlier part of the hearing and therefore were not allowed to give evidence.

The employers said it was only when their workmen were engaged in country jobs that such an allowance was made as while on their own premises the men could sharpen tools at all times as they became blunted and the plaintiff had not been engaged in a country job when he was discharged. The judge said there was no evidence to support Humphrey's demand for his 1s 4d and therefore decided in favour of his employers with costs.

Mayhew considered that the public were deplorably misinformed on the character and nature of trade societies. The common impression was that they were a combination of working men instituted and maintained solely with the view of exacting an exorbitant rate of wages from their employers and they were necessarily connected with strikes and with other savage and silly means of attaining this object. It is my duty to make known that the rate of wages which such societies are instituted to uphold has, with but few exceptions, been agreed upon at a conference of both masters and men and that in almost every case I find the members as strongly opposed to strikes as the public themselves. The majority of them are being organised as much for the support of the sick and the aged as for the regulation of the price of labour and a considerable sum is devoted annually for the subsistence of their members when out of work.

cont.

' It is not generally known how largely the community is indebted to the trade and friendly societies of the working classes dispersed throughout the United Kingdom or how much expense the public is saved by such means in the matter of poor rates alone. It is the slop workers of the different trades, the cheap men or non-society hands who constitute the mass of paupers.'

Nevertheless strikes did occur, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had been engaged in a long dispute only a couple of years earlier which ended in a lock-out with a technical victory for the employers, and the builders were also becoming aware of their strength in united protest against low wages and poor conditions.

' Punch' foretold that soon not only the cab men, dock labourers and police (who struck in 1853) would be going on strike but the lawyers, the doctors, apothecaries, even the clergy ...' which some poor curates might reasonably do '.

The Inspector's Notebook in the 'Gazette' recommended that 'the working classes should get up a Benefit Club for themselves in Kensington and Notting Hill, in some private house, for the provision to be made for sickness and death' while the local Work Society announced that its committee had 'taken pains to induce the work women to practice habits of cleanliness, neatness and activity, thus ensuring neat and strong work in the garments offered for sale' (a few pennies for making a long-sleeved, high-necked, tucked nightdress, sewn by hand!) The object being to afford the poor the means of aiding themselves during the winter months by labour rather than by pleading for and accepting alms from richer neighbours.'

Although the various Factory Acts had succeeded in obtaining a Saturday half holiday for their workers, shops and offices were unrestricted and many shops opened until midnight to catch every morsel of the Saturday trade the unfortunate clerks and book keepers still having to 'tally up' after closing time.

The 'Gazette' reports a crowded meeting at the Guildhall with 'Sir J. Duke in the Chair when Mr Hubbard late Governor of the Bank of England warmly urged the importance of a half holiday, socially, mentally and physically to large classes of society.' It had, he said, been successfully carried out in the chief towns of Scotland, also in "anchester and Leeds and Liverpool. The proper hour of closing on Saturday should be two o'clock when it was thought all offices, public and private might close without any injury to public business. In order to facilitate the closing of retail houses

at an earlier hour on Saturday it was proposed that employers should pay their staffs on Friday or early on Saturday.

On August 18 1854 it was reported that 'the Holiday Movement for diminishing the hours of toil is certainly making progress'. In respect of the efforts of the Early Closing Association and the successful attempt to procure a half holiday on Saturdays, the 'Times' has opened its influential columns to the discussion of the subject'. One of those who was said to figure prominently as a correspondent was the Rev. D Cummings who was campaigning for fixed holidays, thirteen in number which would not be 'holy days' but 'genuine English holidays'. Suggested dates were New Years Day, Easter Monday, the Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, Whit Monday, the Queen's Birthday, St Andrews and St Patrick's Days. In addition, during June, July and August, all shops warehouses and houses of business should either close entirely at 4 p.m in the afternoon to allow half the employees to go at that hour.

This, he said, would be taking a few days from Mamm instead of taking the sacred day from its great 'proprietor.' On the continent endless saints days were practically and sensibly turned into days of pleasure and rest. We had justly banished such days from the religious calendar and we could not do better than transfer them to the British Museum, the Zoological Gardens or the Crystal Place.

The Rev Cummings told how visiting Field Lane and Parker Street (in Holborn) he had spoken to a young Scotsman who had been slaving from early morning until ten o'clock at night and on Saturdays until midnight and was so exhausted and prostrate that on Sunday morning he had to lie in bed, and he had no heart to utter one word of rebuke to him. 'I can only sympathise and sorrow', Although a Saturday half holiday might be carried out in banks and factories and other large establishments, he thought it might be difficult to enforce it for thousands whose work was conducted in more casual and less organised manner. The legislative prohibition of Sunday trading was most wanted. Pressure was about to be applied for the opening of the British Museum and the Crystal Palace on Sundays. The feelings of the upper and middle classes with reference to Sunday observances were unpalatable to the working man, he said, who the church failed to attract as a habitual attendant.

An advertisement in the 'Gazette' for a meeting on Early Closing called the Reader to 'answer the call of the Young Men and Women of Loddon engaged as assistants in Houses of Business who entreat you to avoid evening shopping hours. Heads of families are also earnestly solicited to afford their servants opportunity for shopping in the daytime. You will thus greatly assist in abolishing that great enemy of the trading classes, the late hour system.

cont.

Never shop after 7 p.m. '

The announcement also reminded readers that ' in addition to the hundreds in this assembly who are engaged in commercial establishments there are perhaps thousands who have children whom they hope to see engaged in them. Let such persons remember that in abolishing the late hour system they are conferring a boon upon those children and leaving a legacy to society at large more valuable than all the money that can be given ten times told.

No wonder, ~~(C)~~ in the light of such miserable conditions of work and harsh employers, that so many had to endure that emigration appeared to be the only hope for hundreds of people , apart from the lure of gold prospecting in Australia and Canada. A 'Gazette' item in 1854 announced that ' although the labour market in Australia was still rather dull, wages still compared very favourably with those in England some settlers being paid as much as £70 to £80 a year plus rations of 10lbs of flour, 10 to 13 lbs of meat and two pounds of sugar for those in living-in employment.

In the other direction, the SS Redjacket was reported to have just arrived in Liverpool from Australia carrying £545,000 worth of gold nuggets discovered by prospectors , including two weighing 43 pounds and 47 pounds respectively,

The Canadian Universal Investment and Emigrant Land Society offered shares at five shillings each, paid in instalments every quarter, these were advertised with attractive stories of success such as a farmer who ' came with no more than an axe and cleared eight to ten acres. He put up a house, bought a cow or two, married and had twelve sons and six daughters and brought them all up comfortably. He built another house, which cost £600, gave each of his children 200 acres when they were twenty one as well as an outfit of horses, oxen, cows sheep and furniture ' . No wonder ' Punch ' published a joke about the shortage of servants such as footmen, with two elegant society ladies lamenting that all the tall men had gone to Australia and it was therefore very difficult to get two ' matching ' men to wait upon them !

But a touching commentary on what emigration could mean to families in terms of heartbreak and the parting from all that was loved and familiar is provided by Ford Maddox Brown's picture ' The Last of England '. A grim faced man and a wistful woman at his side hold hands as they stand at the ship's rail watching the last of their homeland slip away.....

x x x x

cont

Emigration may have offered a solution to the able-bodied and adventurous; but to others, old and infirm and ill-educated, the workhouse may have been the only refuge, but even that was closed to those who lived in the wrong place and did not belong to the relevant parish, as the ' Pictorial Times ' depicted in 1847 with a harrowing illustration of a dying pauper

' He was sickly and feeble and famished and old
And his thin tattered garments flapped loose in the cold
And timidly knocking, he asked with a sigh
For a pallet of straw to lie down and die .

' We are full ' said a voice . ' We have room for no more.
' Thou art not from our parish, be gone from the door,'
And the pauper, scarce able to crawl from the gate
Lay down with a groan and prepared for his fate. '

A sad tale of destitution is told by a ' Gazette ' correspondent Alfred Howard , who writing in September 1855 describes how he 'was accosted by two women , one aged about 70 years old, the other about 25 with a child in her arms about 12 months old . The old woman it transpired had two sons, one of whom had had his leg amputated in the Crimea and the other who was under orders to proceed thither and she had come to London to see him before his departure .

They enquired of me for Kensington Workhouse as they wanted refuge for the night , both appeared in extreme poverty and the child had a severe infection of the chest arising from the cold and wet. They said they had come from Hounslow and being come to Knightsbridge they strayed across by Brompton. I accompanied them to "estminster Workhouse by a short route through the green lanes . I rang the bell but the porter answered that no stranger or traveller of any description could be admitted ,even if the applicant was a resident of Westminster, without an order. I asked where any one of the Guardians resided that I might apply for an order as the women and child could not be without shelter for the night, but the man could give no information. I then accompanied them to "ensington workhouse and the porter, after asking their names and where they came from , opened the gate and let them in. ' Relating this story Mr Howard said it was a shame that such women should be refused shelter anywhere.

In nearby Fulham a new Union Workhouse had been completed only a few years earlier , its opening being 'celebrated with a sumptuous dinner for the more respectable inmates '. The new

institution had cost £20,000 to build and included ' spacious yards in which the inmates could exercise ' The year before its opening it had been used to shelter victims of the cholera epidemic which were so numerous that some of them had had to be accommodated in tents. Even a new and 'improved' workhouse was an uninviting place so that hundreds of destitute people would prefer to keep their freedom and live rough or beg. Begging had in fact become an industry playing on sympathy through deformity or misfortune, (notices saying 'I am starving' , or borrowing babies to carry about.) ['The number of dead bodies of newly born infants which have been picked up in the streets of the metropolis is frightful to contemplate ' said the 'Gazette ' They amount to between eleven to twelve hundred a year and the parks furnish no small part (the bodies of two newly-born children, apparently twins, had just been discovered in an empty house in one the streets adjoining Westbourne Terrace, Bayswater).

The 19th century workhouse might seem terrible to us today, but they had vastly improved in the previous sixty or seventy years to the time of the 'Gazette'. A century earlier no differentiation was made between the old and sick, the handicapped, unemployed, vagrants, drunkards or lunatics, all being thrown in together, including children.

in 1832

The Chairman of the Commission to the Poor Law was Charles Blomfield, Bishop of London and this recommended the end of outdoor relief (a dole given to poor families) and the establishment of ' well regulated workhouses ' (though not too well regulated for fear they became attractive .) Outdoor relief would continue to be given to the old and sick but those who could not be relieved at home and orphan children would be taken to the workhouse. Classified according to their ability to work, the able bodied men and women / the aged and children in special homes, a few indulgencies would be given to the old and the children would be educated by qualified teachers . The work also had not to be repellent.

Parishes were grouped together into ' unions ' so that one workhouse for the various classes could serve several districts . The organisers of this system had not taken into consideration the first signs of the modern disease of unemployment / that a man could be able-bodied and willing to work but still not able to obtain it, as was the case when times were bad and the factories laid off their employees. The intention of making the able-bodied pauper's life worse than that of the labourer was practically impossible as the wages of the poorest workers were so low that their condition could hardly be worsened and the better run work houses fed their inmates to a far higher standard than many a poor working family could afford.

Conditions varied according to the master or matron of the house . Guardians too were instructed by the Commissioners for the Poor that they must separate the sick , especially the infectiously sick from the other inmates and vagrants were also kept apart. Lunatics were to be sent to special asylums . Loose women were to be kept away from women and girls of good character . These apparently sensible and humane rules were marred by the unnecessarily harsh and unfeeling regulation which separated couples of child bearing age . Although they could not be forcibly detained , paupers who left the workhouse would not be re-admitted , Inmates were allowed to attend church and children could attend outside schools but until 1842 meals had to be taken in silence , no smoking was allowed and visitors only allowed in the presence of the matron .

Work included oakum picking (shredding old tarry ropes into small pieoes to be used for caulking timbers of ships) stone breaking, corn grinding and bone grinding (which caused disease - probably anthrax)

' Christmas Day in the Workhouse ' is not a comic monologue as some seem to think but a harrowing indictment of hypocritical and self righteous charity as a man metaphorically throws their Christmas fare in the faces of the poor law Guardians who allowed his wife to starve to death because they refused her outdoor relief and she would not be separated from him to enter the workhouse.

The old crossing sweeper told Henry Mayhew that if she ~~wanted~~ to go into ' the House ' she would not live three days... ' Its not that I eat much its the air I should miss, to be shut up like a thief... I couldn't live long I know....'

It must have been like rubbing salt into their wounds for the hapless souls lying in their truckle stretchers in the ward for the casual poor in Marylebone Workhouse to gaze up to the engraved motto on the walls ' God is Justice, Truth and Goodness.....'

.....O.....