THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARLES DICKENS IN VICTORIAN SOCIAL REFORM

A Thesis By

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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Liberal Studies.

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DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated, in part, to the members of my committee; better mentors, betters friends you cannot find. It is also dedicated to the memory of my mother, Dorothea, who always told me that there was nothing I could not do and that no matter what I did, she would always love me.
ABSTRACT

Of the works of all the great British authors of the 19th century who wrote either consciously, or unconsciously, on the social ills of the time few can reach the same level of eloquence as the novel, *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens. Through a close examination of this work by Dickens; the “Preston Lockout” on which *Hard Times* is based; along with the influence of Thomas Carlyle, this thesis will attempt to show that Dickens was an influential participant in the social reforms of Victorian England. This influence in social reform manifested itself through Dickens’ novels; his magazines *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*; and his many speeches on social injustice. While he advocated social reform, he did not advocate specific social reform legislation. Instead, it was through his enormous popularity as the foremost British author of his day that the influence was wielded for the eventual betterment of the working classes in Victorian England. And finally, by using the works of Carlyle and other contemporary authors and comparing them to *Hard Times*, the reader will see the influence that his peers had in the development of the socio-political philosophy of Dickens.
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INTRODUCTION

It has long been the contention of this author that while the likes of Victorian thinkers such as Marx, Mill, Carlyle and Ruskin to name but a few, formulated the ideas of and laid the groundwork for social reform in the 19th century, it was in reality men like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy* who pointed out through their various novels, the abuses of the Industrial Age in Victorian England. It was both of these men, Dickens writing about the abuses of urban life and Hardy writing about the devastation wrought by the Industrial Age on rural life, who in the opinion of many brought the ideas of the intelligentsia to the “common individual” in a way that the everyday person could not only more easily understand, but also relate to their own circumstances.

Perhaps Dickens’s most famous, and certainly his most influential, novel was *Hard Times* which was published in 1854. *Hard Times* was based on, and took its “tone” from, the great labor dispute within the weaving industry in Victorian England which has come to be known as “The Preston Lockout of 1853-54”.

The question has often been asked that while Dickens at the same time supported the workers themselves through his various novels, other works, lectures and his support of social reform in general, why he did not support the formation of trade unions? Dickens’s surprising portrayal of the union has furthermore become, at least since F.R. Leavis’s important essay on the novel, the major crux of the novel; for as Leavis comments, “Dickens has no glimpse of the part to be played by Trade Unionism in

(*Note: While Hardy fits this argument, to include him would create too long a work for this particular thesis. Therefore, Hardy will not be discussed.)
becting the conditions he deplored.” In essence this is perhaps an argument from history. Unions were later to play a very important role in improving the lot of working people, and were not to be the mere instruments of demagogues for causing civil strife that seems to be Dickens’s version of them. Then why was Dickens against trade unions?

Dickens was a follower of Thomas Carlyle and even dedicated *Hard Times* to Carlyle when it was finally published in book form in 1854. It is not too great a stretch of the imagination to believe that Carlyle, and therefore Dickens, would believe that unions, far from providing a cure for society’s ills, are merely another symptom of the disease. Unions, in Dickens’s view, augmented the evil in the industrial world by following the agenda set by the Masters. If the Masters do not acknowledge the workers as fellow men, but only as “hands”, the union encourages the workers to regard the Masters as enemies, “the oppressors” that the workers are to “crumble into dust”.

Although Dickens’ novels contain a radical vision of Victorian society, Dickens himself remains a politically enigmatic figure. His novels, like *Hard Times*, have been condemned for their “sullen Socialism” (Orwell, citing Macaulay, *Dickens*, p. 6) and their “idealized Toryism” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 362, reprint of G.B. Shaw’s article on *Hard Times*, Norton Critical Ed.) and Dickens himself has been “stolen by Marxists, by Catholics, and … by Conservatives.” (Orwell, *Charles Dickens*, p. 157). Most often he is viewed as an unsystematic thinker who “ought to have been a Comtist, but was not”, and a writer for whom the ideas of Marx and Darwin “came too late” (Shaw, Preface to *Great Expectations*, p. xiv.); the attempts to describe his political position remind one irresistibly of Polonius’ efforts in the field of dramatic criticism.
On Dickens, the breadth of opinion is extensive; social critic, T.A. Jackson, claimed him as a Marxist manqué while to George Orwell he was a radical and a rebel, but not in the accepted sense of the phrase “revolutionary writer.” George Bernard Shaw declared that “he was a revolutionist without knowing it” (Shaw, Preface to Great Expectations, p. vii.). But whatever one’s viewpoint, Dickens is generally considered to have been a radical, yet he was not one of Disraeli’s “low rads” nor was he radical in the same way that Bamford, Hunt, the Chartists, or the writers of the Westminster Review were radicals. In spite of this elusiveness and even if, as George Ford suggests, it is impossible to pin party labels on him, (Ford, His Readers, p. 83) some pattern in his political and social thinking does, however, emerge.

This thesis will attempt, by looking at the historical and literary records, to answer certain questions that arise when looking at Dickens’s response to the Preston Lockout in Hard Times. After briefly discussing life during the pre-Industrial era, the author examines what happened during the Preston Lockout and then discusses Dickens’s relationship to the philosophy of Thomas Carlyle and to a lesser extent, to Ruskin as well. In his A Note on Hard Times, Ruskin says that Dickens “…is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written, and all of them, but especially Hard Times, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions”.

After discussing this aspect of Dickens’s philosophical and socio-economic thought the author then describes and discusses the efforts Dickens took in supporting the workers; i.e. his visits to Preston during the strike, his publications in Household Words, etc., and finally, the aspects of the Preston Lockout which he did not support.
THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE

“On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster….. Coal and iron, so long unregardful neighbors, are wedded together; Birmingham and Wolverhampton, and the hundred Stygian forges, with their fire-throats and never-resting sledge-hammers, rose into day.” – Carlyle.

No discussion of *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens can be attempted without a discussion of the social philosophy of Carlyle and Dickens. Nor can the philosophy of both of these men be understood without at first discussing to some extent, however briefly and incompletely, the transformation in modern life known as the industrial revolution or without giving an account of the labor dispute within the cotton industry at Preston, which Dickens used as the catalyst for the novel that some have called his greatest work.

The message of these great Victorians to their contemporaries, their denunciations of present evils as well as their prophetic vision of a better order, were set against a background of social change that took shape before their eyes. They were not only witnesses of this mighty drama of contending industrial forces; but they could also well remember times, in their youth or early manhood, when the English landscape was as yet unsullied by factory-smoke, and when many an English cottager lived amidst beauty, peace, and contentment, and had not yet been infected by the fever of a modern manufacturing town.

The individual of today cannot easily picture that older world in which their ancestors lived a little over two centuries ago. Measured as history measures them, changes have been so recent and so revolutionary that the England of the first Georges
(1714-1760) seems less removed from the times of the Pharaohs than from the England of the present, at least in nearly everything that is concerned with the daily activities of contemporary citizens. Commerce, manufacture, agriculture, travel, domestic economy, one and all, were carried on very much as they had been carried on for centuries.

The business of the home, the field, and the market-place was not essentially different from what it had been when the legions of Rome garrisoned the English countryside or when William, Duke of Normandy crossed the English Channel in 1066; most everything done within commerce and agriculture was still accomplished by hand. In 1760 – to pick a convenient date – the old communal system of agriculture in England was in full swing. Land around a manor or lord’s house, was broken up into innumerable small strips, cultivated, fallow, and waste. The yeoman farmers of those days, some of them tenants, some of them freeholders tilled their scattered allotments, pastured their cattle, sheep, and swine on a common pasture, and lived in small clustered cottages. Most of their implements were wooden and, therefore, inadequate, and their methods of farming were almost hopelessly antiquated; for they did not rotate their crops nor fertilize, and they systematically allowed one-third of the arable land which were “postage stamp” parcels to begin with, to lie fallow each year. Thus in these rural centers, lapped in a surrounding stillness of which we today can scarcely dream, these sturdy peasant proprietors lived from generation to generation.

England in their time was an agricultural nation. Her lawmakers were her landlords and much of her physical and moral strength was in her yeomen. But the fields were not the only source of livelihood. Otherwise these agricultural communities
could not have been self-sufficient. Every farmer’s cottage was his factory, where the family, old and young, not only made their own candles and leather, but spun and wove their own cloth from the wool of their own sheep. At least this was the custom in the beginning and for most peasants; although in some parts of England from Tudor times onward it was expanded into what has since been known as the “domestic system” of manufacture. “Every family spun from its own flock the wool with which it was clothed,” wrote Wordsworth, speaking of the dalesmen of Westmoreland; “a weaver was here and there found among them; and the rest of their wants was supplied by the produce of the yarn, which they carded and spun in their own houses and carried to market, either under their arms, or more frequently on packhorses, a small train taking their way weekly down the valley or over the mountains to the most commodious towns” (Wordsworth, Guide, p. 60).

It was the existence of these “commodious” towns, which were not self-sufficient, as were the earlier rural communities that had brought about a development in “domestic” manufacture, only suggested in the passage just quoted from Wordsworth. Since the townspeople did not make their own cloth, they purchased it from the farmers, who, therefore, found it more and more to their profit to devote a larger share of their time to spinning and weaving than to farming, at least so long as farming went on in the old way. Spinning and weaving, moreover, might go on at any season and would furnish employment for the entire family instead of for a part only.

Thus there grew up entire communities of rural cloth-makers, some of them, like those of Yorkshire, where woolens were made, dating back to the days of the Tudors;
others, like those of Lancashire, the home of cotton manufacture, probably not extending back much before the 18th century. In the prosperous expansion of this industry, we can trace the beginning of capitalistic enterprise and division of labor. A hand-loom weaver would become the owner of four or five looms, which he worked with the assistance of journeymen and apprentices. His yarn would be spun in the neighboring cottages, whose families would thus be dependent upon him for their employment. If the master weaver were a maker of cotton cloth, he would take the product of his looms perhaps three times a week to the market at Manchester, offering his goods for sale, soliciting orders, and returning with a quantity of raw material for his spinners.

Defoe, in his *Tour of Great Britain* (1727), has left us a vivid picture of these now vanished communities of workers, in his description of the woolen industry in the parish of Halifax, Yorkshire, and of the great cloth market at Leeds, where the weavers marketed their goods:

The nearer we came to Halifax we found the houses thicker, and the villages greater, in every bottom; and not only so, but the sides of the hill, which were very steep every way, were spread with houses; for the land being divided into small enclosures, from two acres to six or seven each, seldom more, every three or four pieces of land had a house belonging to them. In short, after we had mounted the third hill, we found the country one continued village, though every way mountainous, hardly an house standing out of the speaking distance from another; and as the day cleared up, we could see at every house a tenter, and on almost every tenter a piece of cloth, Kersey, or shalloon; which are the three articles of this country’s labor. … Then, as every clothier must necessarily keep one horse, at least, to fetch home his wool and his provisions from the market, to carry his yarn to the spinners, his manufacture to the fulling-mill, and, when finished, to the market to be sold, and the like; so every one generally keeps a cow or two for his family…. Those we met few people without doors, yet within we saw the houses full of lusty fellow, some at the dye-vat, some at the loom, others dressing the cloths; the women and children carding, or spinning; all employed from the youngest to the
oldest; scarce anything above four years old, but its hands were sufficient for its own support. Not a beggar to be seen, nor an idle person, except here and there in an almshouse, built for those that are antient, and past working. The people in general live long; they enjoy a good air; and under such circumstances hard labour is naturally attended with the blessing of health, if not riches. (Defoe, *Tour*, pp.155-6).

One of Ruskin’s correspondents in the days of *Fors Clavigera* (1873) pictures the idyllic past that he knew at Wakefield before the advent of machinery and the factory-system; and his picture sharply contrasts the brightness of the old times with the blackness of the new:

There was no railway then, only the Doncaster coach careering over the Bridge with a brave sound of horn; fields and farmsteads stood where the Kirkgate station is’ where the twenty black throats of the foundry belch out flame and soot, there were only strawberry grounds and blossoming pear-orchards, among which the throstles and blackbirds were shouting for gladness. … On the chapel side there was the soft green English landscape, with woods and spires and halls, and the brown sails of boats silently moving among the flowery banks; on the town side there were picturesque traffic and life; the thundering weir, the wild still water beyond, the big dark-red granaries, with balconies and archways to the water, and the lofty white mills grinding out their cheering music. But there were no worse shapes than honest, dusty millers’ men, and browned boatmen, decent people. I can remember how clean the pavement used to look there, and at Doncaster. Both towns are incredibly dirt now. … Market day used to be a great event for us all. I wish that you could have seen the handsome farmers’ wives ranged round the church walls, with their baskets of apricots and cream cheese, before reform came. … You might have seen, too, the pretty cottagers’ daughters, with their bunches of lavender and baskets of fruit, or heaps of cowslips and primroses for the wine and vinegar Wakefield housewives prided themselves upon. On certain days they stood to be hired as maid-servants, and were prized in the country round as neat, clean, modest-spoken girls. I do not know where they are gone now, - I suppose to the factories. …Tradespeople were different, too, in old Wakefield. They expected to live with us all their lives; they had high notions of honor as tradesmen, and they and their customers respected each other. They prided themselves on the “wear” of their goods. If they had passed upon the house wives a piece of sized calico or shoddy flannel, they would have heard of it for years after. Now the richer ladies go to Leeds or Manchester to make purchases; the town
tradesmen are soured and jealous. They put up big plate-glass fronts, and send out flaming bills; but one does not know where to get a piece of sound calico or stout linen, well spun and well woven. (Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, pp. 380-2).

The characteristic aspects of this attractive picture were no doubt reproduced in hundreds of towns all over the country. England had a foreign trade then, as she had had in the days of Chaucer, but commerce and manufacture in the modern sense were relatively unknown. Her people lived and worked under the old, old theory that each community was to be self-sustaining. Relations, therefore, were far less international than national, and even more parochial than national. Villages and towns lived largely unto themselves, shut out from the rest of the world, most of their inhabitants never seeing beyond the horizon that circled their ancestral homes.

As we have seen, there were the beginnings of capitalistic enterprise at this period, but the captain of industry who systematically exploited his labor, purchasing it in the cheapest market, and who developed his industry in the British spirit of individualism had not yet come; nor had the wage-earner, nor the factory-system. It was not an ideal world, far from it; and there were communities, such as the weavers of coarse cloth at Oldham, Lancashire, among whom conditions were wretched. But taken all in all, the world of those days was a world of contented toilers, for the most part independent and prosperous, owning their own wheels and looms, and on Sundays regularly attending the village church, because like Job “they feared God, and eschewed evil;” – a world, be it said, which furnished the quiet back ground in so much of Wordsworth’s poetry and to which Carlyle and Ruskin reverted so often a half century and more afterward as an Edenic countryside (Roe, *Philosophy*, p. 11).
Then, around 1733, as if by magic, came the flying shuttle and on its heels, the spinning-jenny, along with the power-loom which was followed rapidly by the application of steam to all the uses of industry through new and marvelous machinery; then came also a revolution in travel and transportation by means of canals, Macadam’s turnpikes, railroads, and steamships. By a kind of simultaneous collaboration of wonder-working forces, a new world sprang into being, and the old world vanished like morning fog. The spinning-wheel and the hand-loom were silenced, and manufacturing was transferred from scattered villages and quiet homesteads to factories and cities filled with noise. Villages became towns, towns became cities, and factories started up on barren heath and deserted wasteland. Within fifty years English industry changed from medieval or semi-medieval to modern. A new order of population was created. Commerce and manufacturing went forward by leaps and bounds. And by the middle of the nineteenth century England became the wealthiest nation in the world, and her people found themselves in the midst of a gigantic industrial system, with its myriad interests and its multitudinous problems (Roe, *Philosophy*, p. 12).

Without weighting the reader with “facts” that would be befitting of Dickens’s Thomas Gradgrind, a few figures may be of help in order to grasp the magnitude of these changes and to put what has been previously stated into perspective. The population of England and Wales in 1750 is estimated to have been 6,517,035; by 1821 it had nearly doubled. The increase in the population of England and Wales from 1770 to 1801 was 27.5%; from 1801 to 1831 it was 56.35% (Porter, *Nation*, p. 13). The manufacturing towns expanded enormously. From 1801 to 1831, the population of Glasgow increased
Manchester, 151%; Liverpool, 138%; Birmingham, 90% (P. Gaskell, *England*, p. 220). “The population of Lancashire, which is the great center of the cotton trade,” writes Dr. Peter Gaskell (1833), “in 1700, was 166,200; in 1750, 297,400, in 1801, 672,731; in 1811, 828,309; in 1821, 1,052,859; in 1831, 1,335,800” (P. Gaskell, *England*, p. 220). In 1700 the agricultural population was double that of the manufacturing population, by 1830 the ratio was reversed. In 1813 there were 2,400 power looms in use in Great Britain, in 1835 there were 116,801 (Chapman, *Lancashire*, p. 28). In 1760 in the cotton trade 3,000,000 pounds of cotton were manufactured; in 1833, 303,656,837 pounds were produced (P. Gaskell, *Artisans*, p. 329). “One spinner,” says Dr. Gaskell, writing in 1836, “produces as much in one day now as would have required a year’s time to produce a century ago” (P. Gaskell, *Artisans*, p. 329). In 1787 there were 41 cotton mills in Lancashire alone; a half century later, there were 157, with operatives estimated at 137,000 (Podmore, *Owen*, I, p. 40).

Perhaps nothing shows more impressively the effect of the new order of things than the growth in the importation of raw cotton: in 1815 it amounted to 82 million pounds; in 1835 it was 318 million pounds and in 1851, 659 million pounds (Slater, *Modern England*, p. 128).

The transformations wrought upon society were more revolutionary, both actually and potentially, than any which had been seen before. The new distributions of property, the rapid accumulations of private fortunes, the widespread application of machinery and the consequent enormous multiplication of the conveniences and luxuries of life, the disappearance of some classes and the emergence of others, together with the deeper
changes in the habits and thoughts of a whole people -- all these were circumstances
sufficient to awaken the attention of thoughtful men to the fact that a new order of life
had come into being, bringing with it new conditions and new problems such as were
destined to make rough sailing for the ship of state in the years ahead.

For the source of England’s wealth was likewise the source of her most
troublesome problems and her darkest conditions, the factory system. In the early days of
machinery, before the application of steam to manufacturing and when the power-loom
was operated by the force of water, factories sprang up in the country districts wherever a
stream afforded sufficient power to turn the wheels. A little later, as soon as it was
demonstrated that the power-loom could be profitably run by steam, factories were
transferred to towns, where more workers lived or could live and where goods could be
marketed more readily and more cheaply. It was not long before these factory towns
presented an appearance with which the world of today is only too familiar, -- myriads of
rickety tenement buildings, housing a vast and crowded population of operatives with
their families, -- acres of factories, most of them hastily constructed and badly ventilated,
and thrusting into the sky a forest of chimneys from which there poured a never-ceasing
cloud of smoke that blackened the country for miles around. The population in these
industrial centers grew rapidly on its own account, but it was augmented from two classes
outside, the rural cloth-workers of the old order who were being thrown out of
employment because of the introduction of new machinery, and the small farmers who
were forced to leave their farms in consequence of the movement in agriculture known as
“enclosures”.

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The old system of farming was found to be wasteful and backward in the extreme. In the 18th century a few progressive landlords, like the Marquis of Rockingham, the Duke of Bedford, Lord Townshend, and even George III himself, began experimenting in new crops, new methods of rotation, drainage, etc. They soon demonstrated the great value of these improvements. But it was found that the new farming could not proceed without the overthrow of the old, and therefore, by Act of Parliament or by coercive act of landlord, there went on from 1760 to 1843 a readjustment know as “enclosures”. The small parcels of disconnected open land and the “commons” were re-apportioned into larger groups of enclosed lands, held by fewer farmers under longer leases, or independently. The movement which, considered in its broad aspects, is accurately described by Arthur Young in his, A Six Months Tour through the North of England, volume I (1771), as “not merely beneficial to the individual” but “of the most extensive national advantage,” was accompanied with great distress to hundreds of the small, unprogressive farmers, who were now compelled to become either dependent farm-laborers or to join the rising army of the proletariat in the factory towns.

Instead of an independent people, living mostly in the country, owning their own cottages and tools, and tilling their own small farms or gardens, there grew up a vast aggregation of dependent city toilers, -- men, women, and children, -- tenanting rented houses, working in factories not their own, and operating machinery that required less and less skill and more and more monotonous “tending”. The day of the wage-earner had come. The day of the exploiting captain of industry had come also. Sprung in most cases from the ranks of operatives, knowing little or nothing of what went on beyond the four
walls of his factory, frequently illiterate, usually brutal and debased, the typical factory-owner of the first quarter or so of the 19th century was industrious and shrewd enough to accumulate a fortune rapidly, where by he could live in newly built mansions, furnished with all the tawdry accessories that money could buy. His position and his wealth gave him vast power, often exercised under the grossest forms of tyranny over the hordes of workers dependent upon him; so that he amply deserved the contemptuous nickname with which Carlyle dubbed him, “Plugson of Undershot, the modern buccaneer”.

The factories themselves were equipped with unprotected machinery and enclosed a damp over-heated atmosphere, which in the majority of cases were wholly unfit for their swarming populations. They were of course unsanitary and un-inspected, and the air in them was filled with floating particles of cotton “fluff”. A far greater number of operatives were women and children, since adult male labor was not needed to tend the machines. Child-labor was not only better adapted to the needs of the work; it was cheaper. In the earlier period before the apprentice system was abandoned, pauper children were recruited from the workhouses and foundling hospitals of London and other large cities, and were literally sold into slavery to the mill-owners, whose brutal overseers often treated them in ways too shocking to describe (Heilbroner, *Worldly Philosophers*, pp. 105-6). Matters were scarcely improved when apprentice-children were withheld, or when conditions under which they were allowed by the magistrates to work were restricted, and “free” children were employed; for the reason that parents, in their ignorance and poverty, seemed glad enough to have the meager wages of the household augmented by the pittance which their children might earn.
Probably the most vivid – one might say, lurid – account of these early factory “hands” ever written is that by Frederick Engels, life-long friend and co-worker of Karl Marx, in his book called *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844.*

Describing child-labor, he refers to the parliamentary Factories’ Inquiry Commission of 1833 in these words: “The report of the Central Commission relates that the manufacturers began to employ children rarely of five years, often of six, very often of seven, usually of eight to nine years; that the working-day often lasted fourteen to sixteen hours, exclusive of meals and intervals; that the manufacturers permitted overlookers to flog and maltreat children, and often took an active part in so doing themselves.” As proof of his assertion that the active work of the mills was done by women and children, Engels quotes figures from a speech of Lord Ashley made in support of the Ten Hours’ Bill which Lord Ashley introduced into the House of Commons in 1844: “Of 419,560 factory operatives of the British Empire in 1839, 192,887, or nearly half, were under eighteen years of age, and 242,296 of the female sex, of whom 112,192 were less than eighteen years old. …In the cotton factories, 56.25%; in the woolen mills, 69.5%; in the flax-spinning mills, 70.5% of all operatives are of the female sex (Engels, *Condition*, p. 151).

If factory conditions were bad, the home conditions of these operatives were inexpressibly worse. Where all accounts agree, one should no doubt dismiss his skepticism; and yet the often-told tale of human wretchedness and human degradation in the tenement districts of the manufacturing towns almost passes belief, even for the sophisticated student of slum conditions. “From some recent inquiries on the subject,”
says Gaskell, “it would appear that upward of 20,000 individuals live in cellars in Manchester alone.” (P. Gaskell, England p. 138). “A full fifth of the population, more than 45,000 human beings, of Liverpool,” says Engels, “live in cellar dwellings.” (Engels, Condition, p. 36). He found the situation as bad or worse in other cities.

Even at this distance of time one can scarcely read without a shudder the descriptions of endless ranges of houses along the “unpaved and unsewered” back streets of the industrial centers, into which the tired throngs of toilers poured at the end of one day, and from which they emerged at the dawn of the next. These rickety hovels were not only filthy and over-crowded; they were centers where the common decencies of life were hardly known, or if they were known were not practiced. Here vice and drunkenness, crime and poverty, flourished in their natural habitat and thrived as weeds thrive in a neglected barnyard.

The culmination of these two opposing worlds, workers and owners, met in Preston, England in 1853.

THE PRESTON LOCKOUT, 1853-1854

The causes of the Preston Lockout can be understood by examining the changing conditions within mid-Victorian England and can be further explained by the growth of the cotton industry. This expansion coincided with several significant changes within the industry: the emergence of factory production; the relocation of production from rural to urban areas; further technological change; and an increasingly large proportion of the labor force divorced from owning the means of production. But perhaps the most
important aspect of this change was the organization of the labor force by unionization.

The trade unions were part of a broader working-class movement concerned with asserting the worth of the common people in a society that worshipped status and money. They acted not only as bargaining agents, engaged in power struggles with employers, but also as spokesmen for the working-class against the middle-class. The trade unions’ emphasis on the virtues of their members was not so much a bargaining ploy, intended to convey an impression of conciliation, but rather part of the long-standing defense of working men against obloquy from above. Along with the pursuit of better wages and working conditions, trade unions were asserting the radical desire for self-respect, independence and, to a degree, equality.

The changing nature of the cotton industry was reflected in the growth of Preston, which by 1851 was essentially a single-industry town. The introduction of power loom weaving and the steady, but slow, diffusion of the new self-acting spinning technology in the 1830s changed the structure of the cotton industry. Before the 1820s, spinning factories and weaving sheds were generally quite separate, but once spinning masters began investing in the power loom, firms increasingly combined both processes on the same site. Between 1825 and 1840 integrated firms grew rapidly and were only checked by the inability of power looms to work fine yarn and by the increased export of yarn after 1832 (Jewkes, *Localization*, pp. 91-106). By 1841 approximately one-third of Lancashire cotton factories were of the combined type. Of the 975 firms operating in 1841, 321 combined spinning and weaving; 170 spun coarse yarn; 80 spun fine yarn; and 104 manufactured cloth on the power loom (Gatrell, *Labour*, p.122). By 1850, the zenith of the integrated firm, 38% of Lancashire firms were combined and these utilized 81.8%
of the total number of looms, 55.7% of the total number of spindles and 62.6% of the industry’s labor force (Farnie, *Industry*, on line).

The early 1830s was the period of the most significant growth when measured in terms of the number of mills built and combined firms also emerged in this period as profits were relatively higher in the manufacturing sector of the industry. While demand and profits increased, power supplies such as steam, water, etc. were fully utilized and new investment took place. In the three years between 1835 and 1838 the cotton industry experienced a 50% increase in horsepower. This subsequently increased capacity and in the period up to the 1841-2 depression, prices and profits came under pressure while marginal firms left the industry (Matthews, *Trade*, pp. 127-51). In Preston the number of mills appears to have remained the same, although it is quite possible that new entrants forced out the unprofitable ones. When Leonard Horner surveyed Lancashire textile firms in 1841, he estimated that Preston had 42 mills (*Parliamentary Papers*, 1842, vl.XXI, on line). Employment statistics exist for only 30 of the 42 mills, but these were probably the largest. In 1841 20% of Preston’s population were employed in these 30 mills; 707 spinners, 1,725 piececers, 7,495 power loom weavers, cardroom hands and reelers, and 523 were overseers, packers and engineers (Gatrell, *Labour*, p. 118).

In the next few years the industry experienced a remarkable boom, induced both by domestic demand and by demand from industrialized and primary product countries (Hughes, *Fluctuations*, p.76). Low rates of interest added to the urge for investment, and technological change minimized the problems created by relatively inelastic supplies of raw cotton (Church, *Victorian*, p. 30). By the end of 1851, 73 new factories were built in
Lancashire, many of them in and around the Preston area (Parliamentary Papers, 1852, vl. XL, on line). This expansion continued into the following year when a further 84 mills were erected. Over this period, the amount of machinery was increased by 9,875 horsepower and it is little wonder that Horner, the northern factory inspector, was forced to conclude that “at no period during the last 17 years that I have been officially acquainted with the manufacturing districts of Lancashire have I known such general prosperity, the activity in every branch is extraordinary…[and] new mills are going up everywhere” (Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3, vl. XL). Preston more than shared in this boom and by 1852 the number of firms there had increased to 64 and horsepower to 3,500 (Church, Victorian, p. 35). In all, 1,100,000 spindles were in operation and capable of producing 800,000 pounds of Number 32 yarn weekly, while the 2,000 power looms could weave up to 90,000 pieces of Indian shirtings weekly. Estimates of the number of workers varied between 21,000 and 25,000, approximately 30% of the total population (Parliamentary Papers, 1854, vl. XIX). Even with the periodic depressions, it is clear by these statistics that the industry sustained a continuous growth pattern and that money was being made by the mill owners.

This expansion in Preston’s productive capacity can largely be explained by the growth of two overseas markets: India and China (Gayer, Growth, p. 325). Since the 1830s there had been a steady shift in the distribution of cotton cloth exports throughout the world. As Europe and the United States began to develop import-substituting industries, British exports of cotton piece goods – by value 75% of total cotton exports – switched to India and China. Both markets developed rapidly, and by the early 1850s India was the world’s main importer of cotton goods. In 1830 India imported 52 million
yards, in 1840 145 million and by 1850 314 million yards, amounting to 23% of British cotton exports (Ellison, *Cotton*, p. 64). Trade with China, though less important in terms of volume, grew rapidly after the boost given by the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. In 1840 China imported 13 million yards of cotton cloth; by 1850 this had increased to 73 million yards, and represented 5% of British cotton exports (Sandberg, *Lancashire*, p. 168).

The origins of the Preston Lockout of 1853 were due to the commercial crisis of 1846-8 which came at the end of this long period of growth within the industry (Evans, *Commercial*, pp. 75-94). The first signs that trade was languishing came in August 1846, when the Blackburn mill owners’ or, masters’ association gave notice of the introduction of a four-day week and the Preston association of mill owners met to consider a similar proposal, two months later (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 250). Having heard reports from manufacturers in other towns, the Manchester mill owners decided to implement a shortened work schedule as well (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 251).

By early 1847, conditions in Preston had deteriorated drastically. In the first quarter of the year the local Poor Law Union relieved twice as many paupers as in the first three months of 1846 (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 252). By May, soup kitchens had been opened and 1,000 of the town’s 14,000 cotton workers had been laid off (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 253). A further 5,000 were working four days a week instead of six, with earnings reduced accordingly (Joyce, *Work*, pp.57-8). Trade conditions improved slightly in the summer months but, by the autumn, trade was as depressed as ever. At the end of October 1847, one in six of the population was receiving relief from charitable organizations which were quite apart from those who had entered the state run workhouses (Engels, *Condition*, p. 165). As the editor of the Preston Guardian
confirmed, the situation was becoming desperate:

> We have consulted those who call at hundreds of the poor peoples houses every week, such as collectors for burial societies and collectors of rent, and they affirm that the people were never so reduced to poverty and utter destitution as at present. They are leaving their separate dwellings, and two or three families are squeezing into a single cottage or becoming lodgers. Their all is gone; furniture sold to subsist upon; clothing and bedding all worn out. (Dutton & King, *Ten Percent*, p. 23)

That same autumn, 1847, two local manufacturers, Joseph Gillow and Robert Gardner, suspended payments to workers altogether (Turner, *Growth*, pp. 119-20). In Blackburn 200 workers marched to the nearby village of Feniscowles to plead for three days’ work a week, but were refused: “as the men returned home, the pangs of hunger urged them to pluck turnips from the fields by the wayside, which the poor creatures ate with relish, strewing the tops on the highway.” (Turner, *Growth*, pp. 120-21).

The workers saw shortened work schedules as painful but necessary, and above all temporary. Reductions in wages, which bitter experience had taught them to expect in depressed times, were neither necessary as it turned out due to the fact that even in this time of depression the industry in the area was actually expanding nor, for all the mill owners promises, were they temporary. The anticipation of wage cuts led the weavers in Lancashire to revive their union organization. By the end of 1846 there were energetic unions of power loom weavers in Blackburn and Darwen, and also a country-wide federation based in Oldham (Turner, *Growth*, pp. 121-22). The Preston union, which had been recruiting actively for some months, issued its manifesto in December under the signature of its secretary, Richard Marsden, a former handloom weaver and a prominent Chartist. Calling upon all weavers to take up membership, the manifesto appealed also to the mill owners “to prevent the English workman from sinking to the level of the Irish
serf” (Turner, *Growth*, pp. 122-25). Stockport manufacturers paid higher wages than those in Preston, Marsden wrote later (Evans, *Commercial*, pp. 75-94). But competitive wage reduction between the two centers would prove self-defeating, for it would destroy the manufacturers’ own home market: “we only sink labour lower still, till at length the power of the operatives to purchase clothing, or food sufficient is at an end, and we come to rely solely upon foreign trade” (Engels, *Condition*, p. 166).

Such arguments had no appeal for the mill owners whose financial straits demanded immediate solutions. In May, 1847, a strike at one Preston mill, against a 5% wage reduction, ended when the employer, William Ainsworth, promised to restore the cut when trade improved. The Blackburn weavers’ union was locked in a protracted dispute with Hopwood & Co., which ended (after £2,261 had been spent in strike pay – or approximately £138,371.00 in 2002 monetary values – see [http://eh.net/hmit/ online value converter]) only when five of his fellow manufacturers agreed to serve as arbitrators. Further strikes soon broke out in Blackburn and Darwen, and in August the Spinners’ Federation called for a Lancashire-wide strike of fixed duration to clear the market of the accumulated stocks of unsold cotton goods. William Ainsworth announced in September a further 5% reduction, and other Preston masters were expected to follow suit. The cuts, as a spinners’ deputation told the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, were “likely to become general”. In October the Preston weavers called a meeting to protest against reductions proposed by John Paley Jr., the current mayor of Preston. After delegates from Darwen had addressed them, in a Temperance Hall “crowded almost to suffocation,” the weavers resolved to build up a fund which would provide six shillings a week for those forced to strike in defense of their wage rates. But Edward Swinglehurst,
chairman of the meeting, expressed the general mood when he declared that “everything that can be done should be adopted before a strike is resorted to, which indeed is the last thing that ought to be thought about” (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 24).

Little came of the resolution, and wage reductions continued to spread. A major obstacle in the way of the unions was the hostility of the mill owners to the organization of their workers. Introducing a resolution at a meeting in support of the National Association of United Trades, Richard Marsden regretted the necessity for him to do so. He would have called upon someone else, he said to cheers, “had he not been aware that they were for the most part so bound down by their employers, that very few dare take part in that meeting” (Wood, *Cotton Trade*, pp. 139-46). In January, 1848, Marsden organized an eventful meeting of weavers in the course of which one speaker accused an unnamed employer of threatening to send spies to the hall and to reduce the wages of any of his hands observed to be there. Marsden attacked another manufacturer, John Hawkins, for promising to dismiss any of his workers similarly detected. Jack Moss, said to be a spy, was ejected from the hall, and a harrowing tale was told of the late William Crankshaw, who had been dismissed by his employer for attending a previous meeting and had died soon afterwards (Wood, *Cotton Trade*, pp. 139-46). Clearly intimidation, real or imagined, was rife.

Despite the fear of “victimization”, or “blacklisting” by employers, a number of strikes broke out in Preston. At Thomas Naylor’s mill the turnout resulted in the halving of the proposed reductions: instead of 11s (shillings) 8d (pence), or approximately £36.00 in 2002 values for an eleven hour day, Naylor’s weavers now earned 9s and 6d (about £29.00 in 2002) or 10s (about £31.00 in 2002) for ten hours (Wood, *Cotton Trade*, pp.
The weavers – principally girls – at Richard Threlfall’s mill also struck, organizing processions through the streets and begging for “loans”. Their handbills claimed that “Threlfall himself acknowledged to us that it was a robbery, but he must follow others”, a statement which Threlfall indignantly denied. Unable to fill the Temperance Hall, the strikers appealed for support at meetings in the Craven Heifer Inn. Little was forthcoming; they were soon forced to submit, several dozen strikers being victimized (Wood, Cotton Trade, pp. 139-46). Their defeat marked the end of the strikes in Preston. Even in militant Blackburn, where strikes continued as late as August, failure was inevitable because of either a lack of organization on the part of leaders of the workers, or because of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the workers themselves. All over Lancashire, wages were being forced down – probably by an average of 10% (Wood, Cotton Trade, pp. 139-46).

Preston had not been in the vanguard of the resistance to the reductions. “Imitate the spirit of the operatives of Blackburn and Darwen”, urged John Bowman an organizer appealing for funds for Threlfall’s strikers. “I was in Blackburn a week last Sunday, and called on the weavers’ committee, to see if they were willing to assist us, but I found them rather backward, for they look upon Preston as about one of the rottenest places, as regards standing up against a reduction in our wages.”(Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, pp. 25-6). John Nottingham, another organizer, complained that “it has been a pretext with the masters in Ashton, in order to reduce wages, to say that they cannot sell their cloth with the Preston manufacturers, because they pay less wages than them” (Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, pp. 25-6).

The willingness of the Preston workers to accept low wages, complained of in
1847, played an important part in their mobilization in 1853. In 1848 Bowman could do little more than declare, unhappily, “I have been a factory operative fourteen years, and every year I have found myself in the receipt of less wages.” (Wood, Cotton Trade, 139-46). A month later the defeated weavers met in the Craven Heifer to hear a number of speakers, including Richard Marsden, call for the formation of a permanent union to resist further wage cuts. The degree of militancy among the audience – themselves presumably less passive than the majority who were absent from the meeting – was unwittingly revealed by one speaker. He urged affiliation to the National Association of United Trades, “who would, if strikes were necessary, send an agent down to conduct them so that the workpeople would not need to take any part, but only to attend at the weekend for the purpose of receiving their remuneration” (Wood, Cotton Trade, pp. 115-16).

The workers believed that the employers had promised to restore the reductions as soon as trade improved (Wood, Cotton Trade, p. 24). For their part the masters denied that any firm commitment had been made. Early in 1849, when the worst of the depression was over, the Stockport masters’ association refused their workers request for an advance in wages (Wood, Cotton Trade, p. 24). There were several local strikes in Preston at this time, with wages apparently involved in most of them (Wood, Cotton Trade, pp. 139-46). At the end of February a public meeting of weavers agreed to petition the masters for the restoration of the 10%, but the spinners, acting on the advice of their federation decided in March to defer their wage demands until the legality of the relay system, or the 10 hours question, had been determined (Bloy, Victorian Legislation, on line). The “relay system” was an attempt by the mill-owners to circumvent legislation
designed to limit the amount of hours that owners could require workers to be on the job during a work day.

The Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847 were attempts by the Whig government to limit the hours of work for children between the ages of 8 - 13 to six and a half hours a day. Children over thirteen and all women were to work for no more than twelve hours a day, nine on Saturday. Unfortunately, mill owners evaded the provisions of this legislation by resorting to the "relay system", which broke up the twelve hours into smaller shifts and spread them over the traditional sixteen-hour workday (5 a.m. - 9 p.m.). In 1847, the Ten Hour Bill limited the hours of all workers to fifty-eight per week. However, lack of adequate enforcement, shortage of inspectors, and the failure of the legislation to apply across all trades severely limited its impact. It was not until further factory legislation in 1867 and 1874 that child labor was finally brought under control and the ten-hour day was firmly secured for all workers. This so-called '10-Hour Act' said that women and children between the ages of 13 and 18 could work a maximum of ten hours a day or 58 hours a week (Bloy, *Victorian Legislation*, on line).

It was not until August, 1849, that the spinners returned to the wages question, when they petitioned the masters for a 10% advance in pay (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 26).

Neither weavers nor spinners succeeded and organizer George Cowell later reported the failure of repeated applications to individual employers for the return of the 10% in the next three years (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp.26-7). The years 1850 and 1851 were quiet in the Preston cotton industry. With the exception of a few isolated disputes the workers’ unions seem to have lain dormant until the spring of 1852 (Dutton
It was then that a drawn-out dispute affecting winders at Radcliffe coincided with a strike of weavers at Threlfall’s mill in Preston occurred. The weavers were able to attract 350 people to a meeting in support of the two strikes, but it was still necessary for a delegate from the iron trades to suggest “that committees should be formed of hands from each factory in the town, for the purpose of checking encroachments upon their labour” (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp. 27-8). Evidently the weavers’ union of 1846-8 had faded from the scene, but the stage was set for the largest of all the strikes to affect the cotton industry; a strike that is still remembered in Great Britain today.

By the end of 1852 the return of general prosperity could no longer be doubted. It was increasingly embodied in bricks and mortar, as new mills rose up around Preston and plans for more were announced (prompting the town’s bricklayers to strike for higher winter wages) (Ashworth, *Preston*, Columbia University Microfilm). The Bolton mill owner Henry Ashworth noted an “increasing scarcity of labour” (Ashworth, *Preston*, Columbia University Microfilm), and an anonymous observer in Preston grew concerned: “While so many new factories in the town and neighbourhood are near completion, and so many looms in the present ones are resting for want of hands, it seems a natural inquiry – where are we to go for a supply?” (Boyson, *Ashworth*, p. 191). He suggested a return to the Poor Law Board’s discredited policy of recruiting workers from the low-wage agricultural areas of the south (Boyson, *Ashworth*, p. 191). The workers had other ideas. They began to see the boom as an ideal opportunity to restore their lost wages.

In the spring of 1853, a movement spread throughout the country for higher wages, which brought increased wages to a variety of trades outside of the cotton
industry. The Manchester brickmakers struck in January, followed in February by masons and joiners at Ashton, and by farm laborers near Salisbury. March saw strikes in several Liverpool crafts, in the Tatley and Dewsbury woolen mills, and on the land in Oxfordshire. In April boys struck at a Liverpool engine works and a shipyard at Birkenhead, and strikes broke out among waggonwrights and bricklayers at South Shields, seamen at Ipswich, Liverpool shoemakers, brickmakers and joiners at Wigan, and the joiners of Sunderland and Hartlepool (Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, p. 27).

Generally, though, strikes in these trades appear to have not been needed for as the Burnley Mentor wrote:

> We are happy to be informed that in our town the carpenters and joiners have demanded, and to the honour of the masters, be it known, have obtained an advance of two shillings per week in their wages. The plasterers and painters are also in negotiation with their employers for a like increase in pay; and they are, we believe, in a position to ensure their own success. This is cheering, and shows that the beneficial effects of prosperity in trade are not confined to one class. We trust that labour in every department will soon enjoy a higher remuneration, from the voluntary and generous concessions of employers themselves (Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, p. 27).

To stimulate the generosity of the cotton manufacturers, the workers began to organize their own agitation for higher wages. Late in January the spinners of Bolton, Leigh and Chorley petitioned the employers for an increase of 10%, citing two years of prosperity as proof of their ability to pay. One mill owner did so, the rest delaying their reply until the next meeting of the local owner’s association, whose offer of a 5% advance was accepted by the spinners on February 3 (Gillespie, Labor, p. 3). A week later spinners employed by Richard Bashall at the village of Walton, near Preston, accepted his offer of a 5% increase, in response to their claim for 10% (Gillespie, Labor, p. 4). In the same week weavers at a mill in Manchester turned out in pursuit of higher
wages. For the moment, this would remain an isolated incident. “The cotton districts
have been remarkably free from strikes for some considerable time past, until this arose”,
commented the *Preston Guardian* (Gillespie, *Labor*, pp. 5-6). Conflict on a large scale
was not to begin for almost four months.

When the storm did finally break, it was in Stockport. Here, on March 11, 1853,
the weavers gathered in the Lyceum to support a petition to the mill owners calling for an
advance. The respected Stockport radical shopkeeper and one-time weaver, George
Cooper, expressed his amazement that the wages question had been dormant for so long.
While the manufacturers had been making enormous profits the workers “had been too
much asleep to their own interest, and had also neglected the interests of that trade by
which they gained their bread.” (Kirk, *Reformism*, pp. 54-9). J.B. Horsfall, a victimized
weaver from Royton, now a bookseller and publisher, insisted that an increase was fully
justified. “The newspapers tell us that trade is most abundant, profits large, and the
operatives [workers] fully employed and content. If this really be so, I contend that this
prosperity and this abundance ought to be diffused through every grade of society, and
that the power loom weavers ought to enjoy a portion of it.” Stockport, he alleged, was
among the lowest-paid towns in the area, earnings there being 10, 15, or even 20% below
such towns as Heywood, Bury and Blackburn. “At present, the position of Stockport
retarded the advance in other towns.” said Horsfall. Mortimer Grimshaw of Great
Harwood, one of the leading speakers and organizers during the Preston Strike, accused
throughout the districts that, “Stockport was pointed out as having stained itself amongst
the list of manufacturing towns because it was paying the lowest rate of wages”. Duly
admonished, the Stockport weavers agreed to “throw off the stain of reproach” by
pressing their claims for higher wages, and to appoint a committee to raise funds for the organization of the struggle. There was, as yet, no thought of striking; “respectful deputations” and “courteous appeals” to the owners would suffice (Kirk, Reformism, pp. 54-9).

The Preston mill owners now became alarmed and hastily revived their own organization. Meeting in secret at the Bull Inn on March 18, the Preston Master Spinners Association established a committee whose directions were to be binding upon the members and agreed in principle to a levy. A fortnight later the Association approved an initial levy of five shillings per horse-power (which would raise several hundred pounds), and resolved that each member should demand a “discharge note” from all spinners seeking employment, to aid the identification and possible blacklisting of activists (Kirk, Reformism, p. 251). That the masters’ concern was warranted became clear in the first week in April, when the Preston spinners issued a circular to the employers asserting the propriety of trade as grounds for increased wages (Kirk, Reformism, p. 251).

If the Preston mill owners looked set to resist the campaign, the response of the Stockport employers was only a little more encouraging for the workers. They offered, “when trade mended”, to pay the average of the wages given in thirty-five cotton districts in Lancashire and Cheshire, but warned that this, far from justifying an increase, would probably require a reduction for the weavers of Stockport. When the workers met in the Lyceum on April 1, this contention was greeted with incredulity. The weavers decided to meet the owners on their own ground and set up a committee of six men to collect information on the wages actually paid in other towns (Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, pp. 29-30). Three weeks later they reported that wages in Stockport lagged 8% behind the
average paid in 30 other centers, and no less than 12.5% behind towns within a ten-mile radius of Manchester (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp. 29-30). This appears to have embarrassed the employers who, early in May, refused to recognize the workers’ committee: in future they would deal only with representatives of their own hands, mill by mill (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp. 29-30).

Unrest was now spreading. While the Bolton spinners had settled for 5%, the agitation continued in nearby towns. Several thousand spinners struck in Ashton late in April on a different issue, the violation by the owners of the Ten Hours Act. A turn out of spinners at a small mill in Blackburn was soon settled, but the evidence which this provided of a more general discontent was no doubt one factor behind the decision of the Blackburn owners’ association to grant a 5% increase to all spinners at the end of the month (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp. 29-30). On May 4, a meeting of weavers’ delegates from the Blackburn mills agreed to petition the owners for the restoration of the 10% which they had lost in 1847. After two weeks of reflection the mill owners refused. A further delegate meeting was called, and a strike began to appear likely (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, pp. 29-30).

In Stockport four thousand workers packed the cattle market on May 27, their patience all but exhausted. This time activist George Cooper’s tone was distinctly menacing: “I warn the employers to remember the approach of the schoolmaster from Ashton in 1842. That holy week was the labourer’s holiday. By that holiday, I think the schoolmaster administered a lesson to the manufacturers in this district, which would never be forgotten.” (This was a reference to the 1842 strike, which had provided a lesson of a particularly violent kind) (Mather, *Strike*, pp. 115-40). There were three
options open to the Stockport masters, Cooper continued. They could pay wages equal to the average of those prevailing within a ten-mile radius of Manchester; they could agree to a simple 10% increase; or they could go to arbitration. They had six days to reply, but no reply came (Mather, Strike, pp. 115-40). On June 5, a meeting of weavers’ delegates from all the major cotton towns approved the demand for an unconditional increase of 10%. Four days later the striking workers paraded through the streets of Stockport, waiting to be joined by those whose notice was expiring hour by hour (Mather, Strike, pp. 115-40). Battle had been joined in the first great dispute of the 10% campaign.

In Preston the weavers finally followed the example of the town’s spinners, holding their first mass meeting on June 9 in the Temperance Hall. The recent delegate meeting at Bolton, they were told, had firmly rejected any notion of a 5% increase. From now on, their motto was “Ten percent, and no surrender”. As yet, feeling was less intense in Preston than in other areas. The secretary of the impromptu weavers’ committee declared that he would rather see twelve months of agitation than a one-month strike, and the chairman, George Ainsworth, disavowed all ideas of striking for the 10% (Kirk, Reformism, pp. 252-3). These pacific sentiments were reinforced by the principal speaker, George Cowell. A local weaver, Cowell was to become the leader of the Preston strike and for the next year would spend almost every waking hour in that capacity. For the moment, he was confident of a peaceful settlement. “I and one or two friends,” he said “having read a circular sent out from Blackburn upon the subject, have resolved to see if we cannot arouse the operatives of Preston to bestir themselves with a view to obtaining an advance of wages in common with the other towns and districts.” (Kirk, Reformism, p. 282). That an increase was due, he argued, could not be denied. Wages in
Preston were 20% lower than in Oldham, where the weavers had a permanent union. The cost of living was rising and the manufacturers, who had pledged universal prosperity as a result of Free Trade, had failed to carry out their promises.

In Preston itself life continued much as before. Yet there was no doubt that tension was mounting. Henry Wilkinson, who had chaired the weavers’ meeting on July 14, was dismissed as a result, as was a young woman collector. One employer, Miles Rodgett, provoked a strike by threatening to cut wages unless productivity increased. Still anxious to avoid trouble, Cowell urged the strikers to return to work and to sue Rodgett for breach of contract if the proposed reductions were implemented (Dutton & King, *Preston Strike*, RSA). Both the spinners and the cardroom hands were actively campaigning for the 10%. The weavers now met every Thursday in Preston’s orchard, marching there through the streets with bands. Edward Swinglehurst, the veteran of the 1847 agitation, began to take an active part in the movement. The immediate energies of the weavers were devoted to the collection of subscriptions for Stockport. On August 5, collectors of strike donations at Horrockses & Miller were seize by the police (acting on instructions from Thomas Miller), charged with begging, and locked up for the night. The magistrates, evidently embarrassed by the case, freed the workers the next day and reprimanded the policemen concerned (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 37).

These posturing maneuvers continued throughout the rest of the summer and early autumn. In September, it was even suggested that the construction of “co-operative mills, like those operating successfully in the town of Padiham might serve as a long term answer to the mill owner’s challenge. The idea soon caught on, though at first with a more limited perspective. At the next delegate meeting a committee of five was set up,
with the task of drafting a prospectus of a co-operative mill to provide work for those who, it was expected, would be victimized in the course of the dispute. From now on “co-operative self-employment” was to figure prominently (if in the end abortively) in the workers’ thinking (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 42).

As the prospect of a peaceful settlement receded, the weavers pressed on with their plans for co-operative mills. Their delegate meeting on October 9 approved the prospectus drawn up by Swinglehurst and the other members of the sub-committee appointed for that purpose (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 45). The Oldham delegate, John Cheetham, waxed lyrical on the possibilities of co-operation. If, he calculated, four million of the six million adult males in the country contributed 1 pence per week, this would amount after 60 years at compound interest to no less than £3,471,129,995, 18s, 4d, “which sum would buy up all the property in the kingdom!” On a more practical note, Cowell announced that the committee would provide financial assistance for weavers who wished to move to Blackburn (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 45). William Walton repeated his claim that the workers had the full support of the mill owners in his town. When the Preston owners went to Blackburn to appeal for assistance, he reported, “some of the masters in that town had threatened to kick their a-s out of the mills if they came there again” (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 45).

On Friday October 14 more than 10,000 workers, many of whom must have left work early, thronged Preston Marsh to hear speeches by Cowell, Swinglehurst and the Blackburn delegate William Brown. At the conclusion of the proceedings Cowell proposed three cheers for Queen Victoria and the Royal Family. Next morning the lock-out officially began (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 45).
In Preston alone, the lock-out involved a large majority of the mills, but it was by no means universal. Of the 35 signatories to the Masters’ Association’s original proclamation, eight were already shut through strikes, 23 closed on October 15th, and the remaining four were under notice to follow suit within the next week or so. A further six concerns, which had not been parties to the original decision, joined the lock-out, while more than a dozen firms remained aloof (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 94).

At least 80% of the town’s productive capacity had closed and estimates of the number of workers involved varied widely from as low as 14,000 who were *known* to be receiving strike relief, to as high as 25,000 according to some press reports. At the end of the dispute mill owner Henry Ashworth of Bolton put the numbers locked out at about 17,000, but he was taken to task by the Reverend John Clay, chaplain of the Preston House of Correction. The chaplain supplied his own estimates of the numbers involved, and these are probably the more accurate due to his association with the prison and charitable organizations. Totaling 18,000, there were 6,200 males and 11,800 females. Of the males, according to Clay, two-thirds were adults, and most of the remainder were youths aged between 13 and 17. More than half of the females were adult women, teenage girls accounting for nearly all the rest. Very few children, of either sex, were involved in the dispute (Clay, *Prison Chaplin*, reprint). If these figures are true for the town of Preston alone, the total number of those workers locked out across Lancashire could easily have been twice the 18,000 estimated by Clay.

The lockout lasted, more than eight months. In the end, the workers finally had to admit defeat and that they had gained nothing. A number of circumstances had come together to defeat the workers of Preston and Lancashire; first, was the out-break of the
Crimean War; second, with the war came a shift in the cotton market; while the third and probably most important reason, the mill owners were simply able to outlast the strikers both in time and in finances.

The manufacturer’s obduracy was no doubt encouraged by the first real sign of weakness on the part of the turnouts. Surprisingly, it came from the spinners. On March 26, 1854 a meeting of spinners at Blackburn urged their Preston colleagues “to surrender the ten per cent” in exchange for a district or country average. It is not clear whether this call came from the Blackburn spinners alone, or whether it was the recommendation of the Lancashire spinners’ union as a whole (Church, *Victorian*, pp. 45-50). It was certainly a major retreat, for “ten per cent and no surrender” had been the workers rallying cry since the start of the dispute. The Preston spinners now revealed a growing anxiety as to the outcome of the strike. On April 8, they issued a circular “to the manufacturers of Lancashire and the surrounding districts” formally abandoning the 10%, and asking instead for a district average (Church, *Victorian*, pp. 45-50).

While not associating themselves with the spinners’ initiative, the weavers gave no sign that they resented it. They too, were becoming nervous. As early as April 1, Cowell was asserting that a thousand of the weavers’ being relieved would never find employment in the mills, and hinted that they might have to be struck from the union lists (Church, *Victorian*, pp.45-50).

It soon became evident that the turnouts’ enthusiasm was less than in 1853, and that divisions were more obvious. Ironically, it was now the spinners, who initially had wanted no part of the strike, who were the most adamant, while the weavers began to hesitate. When the mill owners association reopened the mills on April 20, they at once
attracted more than 200 weavers who were prepared to forsake the 10%. Four days later the strikers were recommended by their delegates to accept an offer by three firms to pay the going rates in neighboring Hyde. The cardroom hands, for whom this would have meant a substantial reduction, immediately refused, but the offer involved only a 3% cut in weavers’ rates and there was considerable dissension before they, too, rejected the offer. The trickle of weavers back into the mills soon became a flood, and by the beginning of May their resistance had crumbled. Only the spinners persisted in the strike, and by May 9, they had been forced to abandon what was by now a hopeless struggle (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 187).

THE PRESTON STRIKE IN *HARD TIMES*

Caricatures of the mill owners, workers and Preston itself, can be found in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (1854), and, to a much lesser extent, in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 198). Both books were, in different ways, based on the strike, and perhaps Preston was unique in this respect, since no other strike has ever attracted the pens of two such powerful and popular writers. Each novel was first serialized in *Household Words*, to revive its falling circulations, *Hard Times* between April and August 1854 and *North and South* between September 1854 and January 1855 (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 198). Unlike Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens actually visited Preston in search of copy. He arrived on the evening of Saturday, January 28, 1854 and attended a delegate meeting on the following day. None of the workers was aware of his presence and he left after a short time rather
disappointed, so it seems, that the town was not in an excited state of disorder (House, *Dickens World*, p. 207). Dickens wrote in his journal, “I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here.” (Butt, *Dickens*, p. 209). His account of the delegates’ meeting was published two weeks later in *Household Words* (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 198).

Dickens had formed his views on strikes before he visited Preston and, although his article “On Strike” showed that he was impressed by the workers’ peaceful conduct and by the efficient management of their affairs, he continued to believe that strikes were wasteful and a “deplorable calamity” (Leavis, *Tradition*, p. 245). Yet in the novel, which is concerned with the tyranny of fact over imagination and experience, no strike is discussed (Butt, *Dickens*, pp. 209-10). Dickens instead attempts to show that the workers were too easily influenced by their delegates and the mill owners by their extreme “stuttering”, to use Sissy Jupe’s word for statistics, versions of political economy.

Slackbridge, whom Dickens depicts as the union leader, is almost certainly based on Mortimer Grimshaw. The “Thunderer of Lancashire,” or Gruffshaw as Dickens calls him in “On Strike,” is characterized in the novel as a brash, insensitive mob orator inspired by animal cunning; a gnashing and tearing demagogue. This picture is, in effect, drawn from the incidents Dickens witnessed at the delegates’ meeting on Sunday. There, Grimshaw savagely attacked the Warrington committee for denying him the right to speak; two Burnley delegates fell into dispute as one accused the other of being a tool of the Burnley mill owners; and three Manchester men, who had come to rally support for the Labor Parliament, were refused a platform (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, 198). Out of this unusually charged meeting Slackbridge was conceived, a man “above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood.” This image, however, and the divisive
contrast with the men is very misleading, both as a description of Grimshaw and because Dickens failed to recognize the importance of Cowell who, as everyone acknowledged, typified the moderate yet determined aspirations of the union and the men. Slackbridge is at best a snapshot of the past and at worst a symbolic confirmation of middle-class prejudice.

The Preston labor dispute had become internationally famous – Karl Marx thought that revolution might begin here and said “our St. Petersburg is at Preston” (Dutton & King, Ten Per Cent, p. 122). In April, 1854 Cowell made a speech in which he claimed that the Preston strike would be remembered by posterity; the future, as things turned out, was almost as cruel as the present (McLellan, Karl Marx, pp. 260-1). No matter how much the mill owners and workers saw the dispute in terms of class war, it has rarely been celebrated as such. In the end it has been seen as little more than a wage dispute where the monolithic appeal of “ten per cent and no surrender” eclipsed the alternative visions promised by Chartism and Co-operation.

In Parliament, where the general sentiment was that both classes are dependent upon each other, little was said about the strike. Whenever strikes were introduced into debate, Members of Parliament (MPs) predictably sought easy refuge in their laissez-faire creed and in their belief in the morally elevating effects of education. On Preston Hansard, the official report on the proceedings of the British Parliament is almost silent. There are a few vague references to the troubles in the distant “northern districts”; but if MPs had any thought about the affair, most kept it to themselves. Sir George Strickland, Preston’s MP, spoke only once through out the whole period, and then without mention of the strike. In the debate on the Payment of Wages (Hosiery) Bill to outlaw the Truck
system, he urged a typically Benthamite line in suggesting that the government ought to intervene on behalf of helpless women and children unable to make “a contract upon equal terms with their masters”, but not for adults who “perfectly understood their own interests…and were quite capable of protecting themselves against the master” (Dutton & King, *Ten Per Cent*, p. 201).

The significance of the struggles of 1853 and 1854, was that they belied hopes for industrial harmony and marked a revival of general class conflict. Throughout 1853 and 1854 the overwhelming majority of cotton (and other) employers were extremely reluctant either to concede wage advances or to recognize trade unions. The latter were generally viewed by employers as coercive bodies which sought to challenge the capitalists’ control and authority in the workplace. And, faced by employer hostility, workers and trade unionists became increasingly antagonistic towards and more wide-ranging in their criticisms of employers as a class (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 251).

Heightened worker militancy and awareness reflected themselves in a hardening of language and attitudes towards capital, and in the growth of support for the notion of cooperative production and the idea of a Labor Parliament. During the course of the 10% campaigns workers became progressively less conciliatory in their attitudes and language. In refusing to abide by the conventions of “reason” and “commonsense,” capitalists were thought to be acting in a “greedy”, “unscrupulous” and “tyrannical” manner. In such circumstances, not only individual capitalists, but the capitalist class as a whole, and the society they represented, were more widely criticized (Kirk, *Reformism*, p. 252).
The intensity and scale of the unrest of 1853 and 1854 were not to be repeated. Nevertheless, industrial relations were by no means harmonious during the remainder of the decade and the cotton unions achieved limited acceptance only after the bitter conflicts of the 1850s and the cotton famine of the early 1860s. In 1853 the cotton industry was a long way from the truce that finally prevailed in 1867. The Preston lock-out, which lasted from September 1853 to April 1854, was still fresh in the mind of the secretary of the Preston branch of the Power-Loom Weavers’ Association when he reported to the Royal Commission in 1867 on the “causes” that had led to the formation of the union: “The tyranny to which the men were forced to submit from the defenseless position of the trade after the “great” lock-out of 1853-54” (Tholfsen, *Working Class*, p. 273). Although, the occasion of the lock-out was a dispute over wages, the basic issue in Preston was *trade unionism*. Another attempt by employers to resist trade unions produced an extremely long strike in 1859. The masters took exception to the fact that the paid secretary of the union was to be “the only medium of communication between employer and employed”, and “indignantly refused to submit to such humiliating conditions”. They received a great deal of support from other manufacturers “on the express ground that the dispute was not a mere question of wages, but one of dictation” (Tholfsen, *Working Class*, p. 273).

Clashes between trade unions and employers continued even after the passage of the Trade Union Act of 1871 which recognized unions as legal bodies, with the right to own property, accumulate funds, and conduct strikes. These clashes were an important factor in maintaining the radicalism and class consciousness of the labor aristocracy and countering divisive forces that tended to separate it from other working individuals. A
A noteworthy aspect of the mid-Victorian situation was the fact that trade unions were composed of skilled individuals who were most vulnerable to “embourgeoisement” and the cult of respectability (Tholfsen, Working Class, p. 273).

By virtue of their trade union involvement, however, these individuals were brought into direct contact with the coercive force that lay behind middle-class liberal ideology. While their socio-economic characteristics dictated a preoccupation with narrow craft interests and a sense of superiority to the less skilled, their continuing battles with the employer class fostered a broader class consciousness and strengthened their political radicalism. Trade disputes were perceived in terms of ideological categories – capital and labor, employers and workmen, masters and servants – that strengthened the class consciousness of the labor aristocracy. Attacks on middle-class behavior and ideology reinforced the radical values of the working-class subculture. Indirectly, such ideological conflict was also conducive to the notion, usually only tacit, that eventually a society free from class domination might be the utopian hope for a transformation of the social order, they nevertheless preserved to some small degree the vision of a somewhat different society. Both in theory and in practice the trade unions resisted middle-class hegemony - but within the framework of the culture of which they were very much a part.

CARLYLE AND DICKENS

No Dickens novel has been subjected to more extreme critical vicissitude than Hard Times. Lauded as his most coherent social novel and denounced as his feeblest imaginative production, both its detractors and its admirers agree that Hard Times is a
Dickensian oddity. To some this means simply that *Hard Times* represents a falling off from the great imaginative splendors of *Bleak House* or *Our Mutual Friend*; to others that it exhibits a new degree of control and precision (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 78).

Monroe Engel views *Hard Times* and *A Tale of Two Cities* as Dickens’ “sports of plenty,” to be distinguished from the main body of his “mature fiction” by their relative “thinness of texture” and their “excessive purposefulness,” (Engel, *Dickens*, p. 169) though “purposefulness” is hardly new to Dickens or to Victorian fiction in general. It may be to the point, he suggests, that “Dickens’ indeterminate debt, or sense of affinity at least, to Carlyle is more evident in these two books than anywhere else.” (Engel, *Dickens*, p. 131). This is surely an understatement about a novel dedicated to Carlyle and of which Dickens said to Carlyle “I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me.” (Dickens, *Letters*, 2:567). If, as Douglas Bush has wittily suggested, Wordsworth was Coleridge’s finest poem, *Hard Times* must rank as Carlyle’s finest novel (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 78). There is nothing indeterminate about his influence on it. Dickens himself thought the book a Carlylean novel, and almost every aspect of its satire has a counterpart somewhere in Carlyle’s writings.

*Hard Times* is an unusual novel, but its uniqueness is one of degree not of kind. *Hard Times* is not *sui generis* (of its own gender or genus) because it represents nothing else Dickens wrote, but because it expresses his widespread use of Carlyle’s thinking. In this it merely brings to a point of sharp focus a widespread tendency of all the later novels. Even the peculiarities of its form, which have excited much critical dissension, may be attributed to Dickens’ desire to appease Carlyle. Dickens’ unusually stark presentation of his material is surely determined by an awareness of the serious and
philosophical nature of his subject (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 78).

In content *Hard Times* bears the unmistakable imprint of Carlyle’s influence. It makes its attack on statistical methods even less temperately than Carlyle had done in “Chartism” and it endorses his unflattering view of the “dismal scientists”. In addition to his satire of Utilitarians, Dickens follows Carlyle in his scorn of “sham and cant” and his anger at the apparent absence of leadership from the “unworking aristocracy”. Like Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, he castigates the influence of ultra-rationalist methods in education and enters a romantically inspired plea for the sense of wonder and imagination.

Even the novel’s characters might be considered personifications of Carlylean criticism in that Dickens used satirical names, much like Ruskin did, or Carlyle’s “Plugson of Undershot”. Gradgrind embodies all that Carlyle denounces in the “mechanists”, and his relationship with Bounderby, a Victorian “captain of industry”, reveals how easily Utilitarian ideas consort in practice with Philistinism. Bitzer exemplifies the moral results of “getting-on” in the world, which is reminiscent of Carlyle’s attacks on the self-interest principle of the *laissez-faire* economists, while Harthouse strolls out of the pages of Carlyle’s “gospel of dilettantism” (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 79). Two of these characters, Stephen Blackpool, mill-worker, and Thomas Gradgrind, schoolmaster, exemplify the clash of Carlylean philosophy (with which Dickens agrees) on the one hand, and Utilitarianism and Industrialization on the other.

*Stephen Blackpool*

“I entertain a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play.”

(Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 51)
The utterances of the character, Stephen Blackpool, contain beneath their rude expression, some of the thoughts on Industrialism which were uppermost in Dickens’s mind when he was writing *Hard Times*. At the same time, they express these thoughts in the form of the most comprehensively and consistently Carlylean analysis of society to be found anywhere in his writings. This is worth emphasizing; instead, as so often, of sensing an unelaborated Carlylean theme or overtone, we are here, for once, dealing with a concrete and reasonably complex intellectual formulation, covering a fairly wide area (Oddie, *Dickens*, p. 47).

Each notion enunciated by Blackpool is either essentially or peripherally part of the Carlylean “system”. His inarticulateness, though it is apparently like Othello’s, contradicted by the printed evidence, is an essential part of his persona. His inability to speak in his own interests goes with his inability to give an answer to Bounderby’s request that Blackpool should say “how you would set this muddle to rights”. His answer, like Carlyle’, is “give me a leader”. Like Carlyle, he suggests the doctrine of *laissez-faire* as a root cause of the gulf between employer and employed; like Carlyle he points to the responsibility of employers for the human needs of their employees and suggest that the relations between them should be based on spiritual rather than on material, formulistic considerations and self-interest. Blackpool echoes Carlyle’s concern about the monotony and the spiritual debility of Industrial society and his insight that the problem is a deep-rooted one, not to be cured by coercion of the working classes; without a just understanding of their needs, nothing will be achieved. Like Carlyle, too, Stephen emphasizes that this problem is not one which can be solved by Parliamentary
methods, by “deputations to Secretaries of State” (Oddie, *Dickens*, p. 51). It has on the contrary, grown “from generation to generation” and the root of the problem as Carlyle puts it in *Chartism* is “weighty, deep-rooted, far-extending; did not begin yesterday, will by no means end this day or tomorrow” (Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 37).

In a way, this is the most Carlylean point of all, and it is elaborated in Blackpool’s remarks on Slackbridge. Perhaps Blackpool indicates here an important general point of contact between Carlyle and Dickens, in pointing to the fatuousness of dealing with symptoms rather than with causes. Although this is obviously a fundamental Dickensian perception, Dickens’s expression of it in *Hard Times* is plainly influenced by Carlyle as can be seen when compared with the writings of Carlyle:

**Hard Times**

“We’ll indict the blackguards for felony, and get ‘em shipped off to penal settlements.” … “Sir,” returned Stephen… “If yo was t’tak a hundred Slackbridges..an’was t’ sew ‘em up in separate sacks … yo’d leave the muddle just wheer’ tis…” tis hopeless and useless to dream o’ takin them fro their trade, ‘stead o’ takin their trade from them!….Put that clock aboard a ship … an’ the time will go on just the same. (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 115).

**Chartism**

What will execration; nay at bottom, what will condemnation and banishment to Botany Bay do for it? Glasgow Thuggery, Chartist torch-meetings, Birmingham riots, Swing conflagrations, are so many symptoms on the surface; you abolish the symptom to no purpose, if the disease is left untouched (Carlyle, *Chartism*, p.37).

Is the condition of the English working people wrong….? A most grave case, complex beyond all others in the world; a case wherein Botany Bay, constabulary rural police, and such like, will avail but little (Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 38).

That we should judge by the root causes of phenomena rather than by their symptoms is, clearly enough, a belief held by both Carlyle and Dickens (though it is not a central theme of *Hard Times* itself) and is a vital source of the creative energy of both writers. Equally clearly this idea, seen by turn in a Carlylean and a Dickensian context,
undergoes a distinct change in meaning. For Dickens, it is part of a general fund of passionate decent-mindedness, part of the impulse to expose hypocrisy and cant. For Carlyle, it is this and something besides; associated with the idea of causes and symptoms is Carlyle’s whole philosophy of truth and falsehood: the truth is a kind of volcanic force, which can be kept down by a crust of falsehood only for so long (Oddie, Dickens, p. 52). Eventually, the truth will blast a way through; physical force, for instance, unless justly applied, is useless in the long run:

Conquest, along with power of compulsion, an essential universally in human society, must bring benefit along with it, or men, of the ordinary strength of men, will fling it out (Carlyle, Chartism, p. 63).

And:

Injustice, infidelity to truth and fact and Nature’s order, being properly the one evil under the sun…our grand question as to the condition of these working men would be: Is it just? (Carlyle, Chartism, p. 64).

Injustice is a kind of “falsehood” that cannot last.

_Thomas Gradgrind_

_Murdering The Innocents*

“_Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over…. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplications table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature…. “_” (Dickens, Hard Times, p. 6)

(*Note: From Matthew 2.16 -18: King Herod, believing his position was threatened by the birth of Jesus, ordered the slaughter in Bethlehem of all children under the age of two. One of the feast days in the Church Calendar is Innocents’ Day on December 28th. It was formerly the custom on Holy Innocents’ Day to whip children and adults as a reminder of Herod’s massacre. (Simpson, Hard Times, p. 33))
Gradgrind represents Victorian Utilitarianism and its allied science, political economy, as derived from the 17th and 18th century materialist and empirical traditions. By the time Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) came to formulate what became the ethical foundation of many areas of 19th century life, he had at his disposal an established theory of morals based on the assumption that all human action is based upon self-interest. His objective was to measure, value, and compare “lots” of pleasure and pain – the “greatest happiness” principle – and, through an elaborate enumeration, draw scientific conclusions about human springs of action. Thus, by quantifying sensibilities and creating a rational calculus, Bentham could safely dispense with such nebulous abstractions as love, kindness or sympathy (Simpson, *Hard Times*, p. 33).

As the main representative of this intellectual tradition in the novel, Gradgrind, is a “man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 3). There are innumerable similarities between Dickens’ treatment of Gradgrind and Carlyle’s mocking shorthand notes of the intellectual Euphuist whose powers of logic lead him to discover the principles of “cause and effect,” who “accounts” for the dynamic process of history by means of circumstantial theories, and who flatters himself that he dwells “in the daylight of truth,” while in fact working in the “rush-light of closet logic” (Carlyle, *CME*, 2:75).

An uncompromising no-nonsense Utilitarian and economist of the Manchester school, Gradgrind has grown up so to speak in the shadow of Bentham. His mind is dominated by the mere power, as Carlyle describes it, of “arranging and communicating” and not only lacks imagination but causes him to distrust it in others. An “eminently
practical” father, Grandgrind lives in a “calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house” called Stone Lodge. He has recently retired from the wholesale “hardware trade” and is looking about for a suitable opportunity of making “an arithmetical figure” in Parliament (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 10). He controls a model school whose teachers are engaged in “taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 9). Gradgrind, who “with a rule and a pair of scales” was “ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 3), illustrates Carlyle’s conclusion that wise men now appear as political philosophers, “who deal exclusively with the Mechanical province; and occupying themselves in counting-up and estimating men’s motives, strive by curious checking and balancing, and other adjustments of Profit and Loss, to guide them to their true advantage” (Carlyle, *CME*, 2:69).

The analytical instrument of the understanding faculty is by definition limited. We murder to dissect or, as Carlyle expresses the idea, “we see nothing by direct vision; but only by reflection and in anatomical dismemberment. Like Sir Hudibras, for every “Why” we must have “Wherefore.” We have our little theory on all human and divine things” (Carlyle, *CME*, 2:76). In a passage that is even closer to the specific caricature of Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, Carlyle asks, “What is Jeremy Bentham’s significance: Altogether intellectual, logical. I name him as the representative of a class important only for their numbers, intrinsically wearisome…Logic is their sole foundation, no other even recognized as possible; wherefore their system is a machine and cannot grow or endure” (Carlyle, *FFY*, 2:90).

The worst defect of the system, however, is its divorce from experience and its
exaggerated reliance on abstract theory. To Gradgrind “the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled – “… As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink, and paper, so Mr. Gradgrind, in his Observatory…had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 96). For Gradgrind the cipher and the numeral replace the human individual and, therefore, all social and moral questions are resolved merely by correct arithmetic.

Carlyle and Dickens both satirize the methods and are skeptical of the results of “Statistic Inquiry, with its limited means” and “short vision.” Their main criticism is that statistics are an abstraction remote from the actual complexity of human affairs, and that their value is determined only by the quality of mind that employs them. “Hitherto, after many tables and statements, one is still left mainly to what he can ascertain by his own eyes, looking at the concrete phenomenon for himself” (Carlyle, *CME*, 4:126). Louisa Gradgrind discovers the truth of Carlyle’s assertion when she visits Stephen Blackpool’s lodgings and for the first time in her life becomes aware of individuality in connection with the Coketown workers. Previously, in conformity with her father’s precepts, she had thought of the factory hands only in the mass as

…something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; something that increased at such a rate of percentage, and yielded such another percentage of crime, and such another percentage of pauperism; something wholesale, of which vast fortunes were made; something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again; this she knew the Coketown Hands to be. But, she had scarcely thought more of separating
them into units, than of separating the sea itself into its component drops (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp. 157-158).

The distinction between abstract reasoning about life and concrete experience of it is consistently maintained throughout the novel. It is the main point of the famous schoolroom scene where Sissy Jupe, the circus child, has to be told that a horse is a “graminivorous quadruped” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 4), and it underlies Gradgrind’s gradual conversion in which his Utilitarian theories are systematically confuted by life (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 87).

The extent to which the mechanical cast of Gradgrind’s mind debars him from insights into the reality of human experience is revealed in a number of important confrontations and perhaps the key one is the confrontation with his daughter Louisa over Bounderby’s proposal of marriage. It takes place significantly in the observatory with its telescopes trained on abstract theories about human nature. Upon advising Louisa of Bounderby’s proposal, Gradgrind finds himself “extremely discomfited” by her “unexpected question” whether she is thought to be in love with Bounderby. “‘The reply depends so materially, Louisa, on the sense in which we use the expression’” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 98), and Gradgrind makes it clear that to himself as to all reasonable people the term is synonymous with fantastic. As he edges away from the embarrassing realm of emotion into the haven of statistics on the subject of marriage, Gradgrind’s rationalizations are painfully revealing. He is not in the least deterred by Louisa’s query as to what word she ought to use in place of love. Gradgrind cannot see his daughter’s dilemma, for to see it, as Dickens observes, he would have had to overleap at a bound the “artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting between himself and all those
subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 99).

The main movement of the novel is the process by which Gradgrind is converted to recognition of the values of imagination and of sentiments which lie outside the Utilitarian prospectus. Sissy Jupe, “a subtle essence of humanity” who quietly defies the system’s attempt to reduce her to a numerical unit, is the main agent of this change. Though she is “extremely deficient of facts,” as Gradgrind tells her, her lack of aptness for this kind of education is “manifested to us…as part and parcel of her…indefeasible humanity: it is the virtue that makes it impossible for her to understand, or acquiesce in, an ethos for which she is ‘girl number twenty’, or to think of any other human being as a unit of arithmetic (Leavis, *Tradition*, p. 230).

An aspect of Dickens’ method here is his use of the converting *Seelenspiegel*, or soul mirror, in which, as Barbara Hardy points out, the hero sees “his defect enlarged, isolated, unmistakably his own, but detached for inspection.” Thus in *Hard Times* Gradgrind is converted by two images, his double and his opposite. “Gradgrind’s redeeming opposite is Sissy, the pupil who teaches the master that the truth of the heart can be stronger than the truth of reason” (Hardy, *Charles Dickens*, p.42, 49). But he can only profit from her lesson after Louisa, Tom, and later his prize pupil Bitzer have shown him in various ways the grotesque form of his own sterile catechisms (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 88).

Sissy Jupe is presented by the criteria of two kinds of judgment. By Utilitarian standards she is an incompetent child susceptible to idle imaginings. From the opposing point of view she is the center of right feeling and moral health. The dunce of the
Coketown school in Gradgrind’s eyes, she would have fared far better with Carlyle (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 89). A frustrated M’Choakumchild reports on Sissy’s density: “after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler three feet high, for returning to the question, ‘What is the first principle of this science?’ the “absurd” answer, ‘To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me’” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 55).

In innocently advocating the politics of the New Testament, Sissy is Dickens’ spokesman, for these are the terms he used to confound the bluff gentleman in the railway carriage to Preston: “Political economy was a great and useful science in its own way and its own place; but…I did not transplant my definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods” (Dickens, *MP*, p. 424). Or again Sissy is asked the Condition-of-England question: “‘this schoolroom is a nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money. Isn’t this a prosperous nation?’ … ‘I thought I couldn’t know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine!’” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 57). Her reply would not have struck Carlyle as foolish at all, for of her tormentors he said: “Their whole philosophy is an arithmetical computation performed in words….Could they tell us how wealth is and should be distributed, it were something; but they do not attempt it.” (Froude, *Carlyle: FFY*, 2:78).

These incidents are a dramatic preparation for Gradgrind’s final humiliation when Louisa, the child whose marriage no less than her mind he has formed according to the system, returns home to confront him with its failure. “‘All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to
this. Save me by some other means!” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 219). Gradgrind has no other means but the belated recognition that there is a “wisdom of the Heart” as well as a wisdom of the head. It is, as Gradgrind concedes, Sissy’s benevolent influence over Stone Lodge that has helped to bring about this change. “Some change may have been slowly working about me in this house, by mere love and gratitude: that what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 223).

Gradgrind’s conversion and the crisis through which Louisa passes are substantially in accord with the experiences John Stuart Mill later recorded in the *Autobiography*. Both experiences are the outcome of a Spartan training which starves the imagination and ultimately erodes the feelings and debilitates the intellect. Mill’s deliberate cultivation of those feelings that lie outside the Utilitarian scheme of things is paralleled in *Hard Times* by Louisa’s determination that her own children “should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 298). This is the positive note on which the novel ends (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, p. 90).

Here, certainly is part of the meaning of *Hard Times*; but, just as the values of Coketown persist, so Dickens’s quasi-Carlylean vision remains overpoweringly the book’s strongest shaping force. That Stephen Blackpool’s story and meaning were – and probably consciously so – conceived in a Carlylean mould and to illustrate as Carlylean perception, is beyond any doubt; that Louisa’s education, consequent indifference to life, and ultimate spiritual crisis owe much to Dickens’s reading of Carlyle seems hardly less clear. Together, these two narratives determine the vision and total structure of *Hard Times*, and the limiting boundaries inside which the novel’s special character as a
powerfully ordered work of art establishes itself. ‘The book contains nothing in which you do not think with me’? Perhaps not; but in no other major novel is Dickens’s reverence for the Prophet of Chelsea so pervasively and deliberately proclaimed.

While no one can dispute the complexity and richness of Dickens’ imagination or the psychological ambivalences which often lie beneath its operation, it is surely symptomatic of the new climate of Dickens criticism that we need reminding that he thought of himself as an author with a message or that the contents of that message were derived in large measure from his understanding of Carlyle. Much of what he wrote, particularly in the late novels which are so admired by modern critics, was written under the impress of Carlyle’s teaching and in consequence an important thread of his artistic development can be followed by tracing his response over a quarter of a century to that influence. As Jack Lindsay indicates, Dickens

…responded wholeheartedly to the attacks Carlyle made on the classes who monopolized suffrage, land, machinery, Press, religion, communications, travel, paper money, and who had imposed the Poor Law. For the first time he saw the social system in something like a coherent perspective, and discovered that it wasn’t an accident that various things he disliked could all be grouped as expressions of class-power. He still continued to think in politico-moral terms rather than socio-economic, and indeed continued to do so till the end of his days, but order was being brought into his thinking, his emotional attitudes. His impulses of revolt, coalescing as they had round the heads of Religion, Law, Parliament, and State power, were now provided with a philosophic justification. (Linday, Charles Dickens, p. 202).

The nature of that response was manifold and intricate and its value may be in pointing to affinities in two major Victorians who appear on the surface to be radically dissimilar. Indeed accretions of popular mythology about both writers tend to emphasize these imagined differences – Carlyle appearing as the authoritarian strong man, unrestrained in his worship of force and his idealization of the superman, Dickens as the
progressive liberal and author whose propagandist novels set in motion many of the Victorian reforms. Neither of these views, however, is true, though it is true that Carlyle thought Dickens too “soft” and that his charitable philosophy was basically wrong, while Dickens drew back from some of Carlyle’s belief in the nature of heroic power and from his fundamental Puritanism. The reality is more complex than the clichés suggest and indicated that there were, for all the differences that lie between them, startling areas of accord (Goldberg, *Carlyle*, pp. 226-7).

**DICKENS AND TRADE UNIONISM**

The contradictions in Victorian responses, including those of Dickens, to trade unions must be set in their historical context to be fully understandable. English common law regarded combining with the aim of controlling conditions of work, wages, and hours as illegal in being a conspiracy to restrain trade. Theoretically, this prohibition applied equally to masters and workers, but in practice it was more severely applied in the case of the latter. The traditional legal position was reinforced by an Act of Parliament of 1800 partly stimulated by the agitation generated by the French Revolution and the fear of its spreading to the United Kingdom. Partial recognition of unions was implied in the Act of 1859, which accepted the validity of peaceful persuasion in the field of hours and wages, although the formation of unions still remained an unlawful, if not necessarily a criminal, activity. Agitation against these prohibitions led to a series of what were regarded as “outrages” in Sheffield and Manchester in 1865-6. This in turn resulted in the setting up
of a Royal Commission which sat from 1867 to 1869 to review the whole matter. These deliberations led to the Trade Union Acts of 1871 and 1876 which set the pattern for the legal development of union activity which remained dominant in the United Kingdom until the 1980s and the actions of the Thatcher government (Schlicke, Dickens, p. 566).

The core texts for an understanding of Dickens’s attitude towards unions are *Hard Times* and his *Household Words* article of February 1854, ‘On Strike’. However, it is also useful to consider another *Household Words* article of December 1853, ‘The Preston Lock-Out’ which concludes with these words, “…Ignorance of the most deplorable kind is at the root of all this sort of strife and demoralizing misery. Every employer of labour should write up over his mill door, that Brains in the Operative’s Head is Money in the Master’s Pocket.” (Ford, *Hard Times*, p. 286). Although this article was actually written by James Lowe, it is well known that nothing appeared in Dickens’s periodical without his approval and so its critical sentiments towards trade unions must be seen as part of the total picture of responses in this field.

Although, while some argue that perhaps they were not the direct inspiration for *Hard Times*, the Preston difficulties were sufficiently well known to encourage Dickens to visit the town as part of the preparation for his novel. The fact of some 20,000 to 30,000 cotton spinners being unemployed and so entirely dependent on support from fellow unionists and charitable contributions, for seven to eight months in 1853-54 was a cause of national concern and interest. The tone of Lowe’s article can be felt in his reference to the ‘mob-orators [who] appear in time of trouble and contention, to excite, with their highly spiced eloquence, the thoughtless crowd; over whom they exercise such pernicious sway.’ (Ford, *Hard Times*, p. 284).
The tone, as well as the content, of ‘On Strike’ is markedly more balanced, but it has to be assumed that Lowe’s stereotypical view of glib outsiders holding sway over honest, but rather dim, workers was not unacceptable to large sections of the Victorian middle class. A representative of the class, ‘Mr. Snapper’, is the object of Dickens’s attack in the course of the train journey he takes to see the Preston situation for himself. Dickens is clear that the ‘hands’ have a ‘perfect right to combine in any lawful manner’ (Ford, Hard Times, pp. 288-9) and that this is ‘a protection to them’. And he accepts also that the ‘blame of this business is not all on one side. I think the associated Lock-out was a grave error.’ (Ford, Hard Times, p. 289). However, Dickens cannot bring himself to accept that the workers are in the right, as he fears that ‘they are at present engaged in an unreasonable struggle’ (Ford, Hard Times, p. 289), and this unwillingness to take sides is rooted in his belief that ‘into the relations between employers and employed…there must enter something of feeling and sentiment’ something of mutual explanation, forbearance, and consideration’ (Ford, Hard Times, p. 288).

This attempt to see both sides of the question motivates the treatment of trade unionism in Hard Times, and can seem cowardly to modern readers, especially those of a left-wing tendency; and to some extent it runs counter to the expressions of support for union, and other forms of working-class activity contained in, for example, Dickens’s letters. However, in addition to being a deeply held conviction, Dickens’s tone and attitude can be understood as the best means of combating, without alienating, the no-doubt vulgar prejudices that existed in much of his audience. The presentation of the union ‘agitator’ Slackbridge, very much in the terms of Lowe’s article, as a manipulator might be seen as a sacrifice to this viewpoint. But a high artistic purpose is also at work
in the novel, one in which union pressures can be seen as threatening the individuality that it is part of the novel’s essential purpose to defend against the forces that menace it (Schlicke, *Dickens*, p. 567).

Criticism, says Leavis, has its points to make against *Hard Times*. It can be said of Stephen Blackpool, not only that he is too good and qualifies too consistently for the martyr’s halo, but that he invites an adaptation of the objection brought, from the Negro point of view, against Uncle Tom, which was to the effect that he was “a white man’s good nigger” (Leavis, *Tradition*, pp. 244-5). Leavis continues by saying that certainly it does not need a working class bias to produce the comment that when Dickens comes to the Trade Unions, in dealing with them his understanding of the world offers a marked limitation. There were undoubtedly professional agitators, and Trade Union solidarity was undoubtedly often asserted at the expense of the individual’s rights; but it is a score against a work so insistently typical in intention that it should give the representative role to the agitator, Slackbridge, and make Trade Unionism nothing better than the pardonable error of the misguided and oppressed, and, as such, an agent in the martyrdom of the good working man (Leavis, *Tradition*, p. 245). But, Leavis continues, to be fair we must remember the conversation between Bitzer and Mrs. Sparist:

“It is much to be regretted,” said Mrs. Sparsit, making her nose more Roman and her eyebrows more Coriolanian in the strength of her severity, “that the united masters allow of any such class combination.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Bitzer.

“Being united themselves, they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man,” said Mrs. Sparsit.

“They have done that, ma’am,” returned Bitzer “but it rather fell through, ma’am.”
“I do not pretend to understand these things,” said Mrs. Sparsit with dignity. “...I only know that those people must be conquered, and that it’s high time it was done, once and for all.” (Dickens, *Hard Times*, p. 89).

CONCLUSION

Hard Times deals with issues which were a matter of concern for Dickens throughout his career: industrial relations, education, class; the right of common people to amusement, and attitudes antithetical to that right. It also draws on contemporary concerns with reforming divorce laws, colored by his personal discontent at the time with his marriage, which broke down irretrievably in 1858.

The negative experiences in Dickens’s childhood produced a trauma from which he suffered all his life. On February 20, 1824, when Charles was twelve, John Dickens, his father, was arrested for debt and taken to the Marshalsea Prison. At home the food began to run low; and they had to pawn the household belongings until all but two rooms were bare. Young Dickens even had to carry his books, one by one, to the pawnshop. During this period, Dickens was removed from school and forced to spend six months working in a cousin’s “blacking shop” pasting labels on the blacking bottles for 6s (shillings) a week. He worked in a rickety old house by the river Thames that was full of dirt and infested with rats. Every evening after work he would go to the Marshalsea Prison to spend the night with his family, who in the meantime, had also moved to the prison so they could be closer to his father. Even as a young child, Dickens was so ashamed of this situation that he never forgot the experience and it became the fertile seeds from which his novels grew (Wilson, *Bow*, p. 5).
What is perhaps most interesting is that some of Dickens’s critics have charged that he indulged himself too much in self-pity in connection with these hardships of his childhood. After all, they argue, he was only there for “six months.” Dickens’s critics, however, do not take into account that during those months he was in a state of complete despair. For an adult in similar desperate straits, it is always possible to imagine some way out. But for a child, from whom love and freedom have suddenly and inexplicably been taken away, no relief or release can be projected (Wilson, *Bow*, p. 6); for a child, six months might as well be six years!

Therefore, as early as 1838 he declared his outrage over advocates of the factory system – “the enemy’s camp” – and the oppressive conditions under which cotton-mill workers suffered. “I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures”, he declared to E. M. Fitzgerald on 29 December 1838 (Schlicke, *Dickens*, p. 263). Although *Nickleby*, the novel he was writing at that time, located the Cheerybles’ business in Lancashire, and although Leech’s illustration of Ignorance and Want in *A Christmas Carol* included factories in the background, it was not until *Hard Times* that the blow was struck. By then a number of industrial novels had addressed what Carlyle defined as the “Condition of England”, most notably Disraeli’s *Sybil* (1845), Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), and Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850) (Schlicke, *Dickens*, p. 263).

But like his contemporaries, Dickens was no advocate of working-class revolution. As ever, Dickens maintains the Carlylean view that an enlightened moral outlook is necessary to heal social divisions. Dickens blames these divisions on Mr. Gradgrind’s philosophy of “Fact”, which conflates two prominent social theories of the
age, *utilitarianism* and *political economy*. Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian doctrines proposed bringing about the greatest happiness for the greatest number through government intervention, whereas Adam Smith’s followers held that national prosperity, being governed by immutable economic laws, required a *laissez-faire* approach from the state. Dickens brushed aside the differences, finding in both views a fallacious conception of humanity; ‘…into the relations between employers and employed, as into all the relations of this life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance, and consideration; something which is not to be found in Mr. McCulloch’s dictionary, and is not exactly stateable in figures; otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit.’ (Dickens, *On Strike*).

Dickens’s views about industrial society are in part romanticized, probably impractical, and – considered as documentary evidence – under researched. They are, however, both positive and heartfelt. Industry is not something to be feared for itself, but only for what narrow-minded, profit-dominated folk make it. In a speech at the Birmingham and Midland Institute on 30 December, 1853 he urged his large audience to heed the principles of the Mechanics’ Institution: ‘the fusion of different classes, without confusion’ and ‘the creating of a better common understanding among those whose interests are identical, who depend upon each other…In this world a great deal of the bitterness among us arises from an imperfect understanding of one another’ (Fielding, *Speeches*, p. 167).

The assertion that Dickens was influenced by Carlyle depends for its credibility on what is claimed for the word ‘influence’, and on how we establish it. To compare
either the whole ‘social theory’, or the attitude to specific issues, of the two men, to produce the biographical evidence of Dickens’s admiration for the Sage of Chelsea, and then to arrive at the looked-for conclusion, is not a productive procedure. As much as the existence of the phenomenon, we need to know its character. What, precisely, are we claiming, when we say that in certain of his works, and during a certain period of his life, Dickens was influenced by the works of Thomas Carlyle?

One thesis can be dismissed, despite what might be considered as evidence to the contrary: the notion that Dickens was a humble disciple of Carlyle, who sat at his master’s feet, and carefully evolved his own view of society from a study of the Sage’s social theory. Curiously enough, this is a view that Dickens himself can be seen to foster, and his own professions of faith to the master – ‘No man knows your books better than I’ (1854); ‘I am always reading you and trying to go your way’ (1863) – certainly seem to confirm it. But we should treat these professions with caution. Dickens certainly admired Carlyle, and was anxious for his approval. But reverence for the Sage of Chelsea did not always, for Dickens as for his age, imply the adoption, or even the approval of his views. Few people admired, and many disliked, the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*; but public respect for Carlyle, nevertheless, remained remarkably unshaken after their publication.

If we can rule out the more or less direct transference of ideas from one mind to another that is implied by the notion of a master-disciple relationship, how, then, can we identify the operation of Carlyle’s influence over Dickens? The answer to this question is difficult to give in an organized way. Though we can produce a list of Carlylean headings that seem to contain much of Dickens’s response to this world (the fear of
Mechanism, mistrust of Parliamentary Government, impatience with administrative inefficiency, concern with the Condition of England Question, awareness of the potential destructiveness of the mob, etc.), the primary sources in Dicken’s topical reactions and emotional life of all these notions are, nevertheless, scattered and various; we form them into a coherent body of opinion at our peril.

It is also important to note that, in establishing the various primary reasons why Dickens should respond to different areas of Carlyle’s ideology, it has frequently been possible, even necessary, to do so without actually referring to Carlyle’s works. What we can say, therefore, is that Carlyle offered an imprecise but consistent structure of ideas and opinions that happened to overlap (given a little unconscious adaptation) with many of Dickens’s disparate and disorganized feelings about particular issues and about life in general. Backed by a personality that Dickens found worthy of admiration and respect and by Carlyle’s massive reputation, this structure of ideas presented him with a nucleus around which his own ideas could form and also, perhaps, with a mirror by which he could recognize their shape.

It is, therefore, safe to write that Carlyle did not present new ideas; he articulated what many contemporaries, including Dickens himself, already felt in a living form. Dickens, on the other hand, can be considered highly influential through his novels and his magazines, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* due to his vast readership. By popularizing the ideas of Carlyle, Ruskin and himself he was able to bring the desire for social reform to the common individual in a way that everyday people could not only understand, but also relate to their own circumstances.
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