THE Captain of Industry IN ENGLISH FICTION 1821-1871

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ONE
Homines Novi

> Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand, ever rising. Even manufacture [lit. the hand-powered process] no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry, the place of the industrial middle-class, by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.
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> Marx and Engels,
> *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

One of the consequences of the invention of the steam engine in 1769 and of spinning and weaving machinery between 1764 and 1785 was a social revolution, which as Friedrich Engels observed, "changed the entire structure of middle-class society."[1] Karl Marx, enlarging upon this social transformation, noted that "entire classes of the population disappear and new ones with new conditions of existence, and new requirements take their place."[2]

Although the primary concern of this study is to examine the attitudes of Victorian novelists toward the new class of industrialists as they adapted themselves to an existing social structure that itself had to change in order to accommodate them, the purpose of this first chapter is to analyze the social phenomenon of their newness, while providing an historical account of their initial emergence in the late eighteenth century. In order to accomplish this aim, I have established four criteria by which the newness of the class might be judged. In this analysis I shall discuss (1) the social origins of the early industrialists, (2) the uniqueness of their economic and social position as a new class, (3) the qualities needed for success in

industrial enterprise, and (4) the degree of social recognition bestowed upon such representative industrialists as James Watt and Richard Arkwright by the old ruling class, the supremacy of which was challenged by men whose wealth stemmed from the economic basis of factory production instead of land. This historical introduction will seek to differentiate the industrialists from other affluent classes, and thereby assess their distinction as *homines novi*.

Our first consideration, the social origins of the early industrialists, has drawn attention to itself by virtue of the persistence of the economic historian Paul Mantoux in establishing a connection between the new class of manufacturers and that "darling of poets and social theorists," the English yeoman.[3] According to Mantoux's theory, the yeoman class, which rapidly decayed in the eighteenth century, supplied the raw material for the emergent manufacturing class.[4]

Arnold Toynbee, attempting to account for the decay of the yeomanry, records that at the end of the seventeenth century Gregory King estimated the number of freeholders in England at 180,000. Less than one hundred years later (1787), Arthur Young spoke of the class as nearly gone. The cause of this rapid disappearance following the era of parliamentary supremacy after 1688 is chiefly political, but economic reasons figure as well. He who possessed the soil possessed political power, under conditions which gave power in parliament to owners of land. The Englishman's land hunger can thus be ascribed to what Disraeli called a territorial constitution.[5] Since such was the case, both the greater gentry and the wealthy merchant class strove to invest in land the immense fortunes made in foreign trade and colonial enterprise. Pressure from this quarter together with the decline of domestic industry led to the extinction of the yeomanry.[6]

The Peel family, notes Mantoux (p. 370), affords a striking example of the process by which the moribund yeomanry transformed itself into the new manufacturing class. The father of Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, was a cotton spinner and maker of printed calicoes who died in 1830, leaving a personal estate of £1,400,000. The grandfather of Sir Robert, born in 1723, was one of Arkwright's imitators and competitors. Before entering into cotton spinning he sold woolens and cottons made by himself at home. While engaged in domestic weaving, he also farmed land that had been in the possession of his family who had been peasant proprietors of the yeoman class since the fifteenth century. Thus the family had begun as farmers, become farmer-weavers, and then entered industry.

Two lesser known figures, William Radcliffe and Joshua Fielden, were not as favored by fortune as the Peels, but their histories exhibit a similar

pattern. The fall of the Radcliffe family, who had been landed proprietors, had begun during the civil wars of 1642-49. The Enclosure Acts and the subsequent growth of large estates forced them from the land, and they turned to weaving. A product of several generations of weavers, Radcliffe set up for himself in 1789 and by 1801 employed one thousand workers. Joshua Fielden, on the other hand, was still a yeoman farmer in 1780; but after having set up looms in his house, he owned a five story factory by the end of the century.[7]

If it were feasible, argues Mantoux, to lay out the genealogies of late eighteenth-century manufacturers, one significant fact would emerge: "Many of them, particularly in the cotton industry, were of country stock and came of that semi-agricultural, semi-industrial class which up to that time [the late 18th century] had formed a large part, perhaps more than one-half, of the population of England. And, if we go further back still, we often arrive at the peasant stock, at the old race of yeomen, now hidden though not extinct."[8]

In his attempt to account for what became of this class, Mantoux has presupposed that the yeomen were ambitious, energetic, enterprising, and prepared to meet the challenge posed by the loss of their small holdings and the decline of home industry, by entering into the main current of the Industrial Revolution "in a spirit of adventure and conquest" (p. 373). On the other hand, Peter Gaskell, whose beau ideal of the Englishman was the country squire, presents quite another stereotype of the yeoman. Writing in 1833, Gaskell holds that the yeoman class was apathetic and utterly incapable of adapting to change:

> The yeoman had lived for generation after generation upon his patrimonial acres—rarely increasing their extent and quite as rarely lessening them. He had, however, failed to keep pace with the onward march of events—had confined himself to cultivating his land precisely in the same way in which it had been cultivated by his forefathers—viewed all innovations as rank heresy, vegetated upon his natal soil, profiting either it or the world but little; but having, notwithstanding many points about him of real value. He was strictly honest in all his dealings—though almost universally improvident, more, however, from want of mental energy and forethought than from actual extravagance—contented with his lot and a kind and hearty neighbour—but utterly unable to cope with the crisis [consolidation of small holdings and decline of domestic industry] which was opening for him.[9]

Gaskell, moreover, viewed the yeoman class as unfit to compete with those to whom the intermittent changes occurring in business were not disquieting. The yeomanry's "long course of inactivity and the little diffusion of intelligence amongst them, rendered them incapable of main-

taining the struggle with men who had been accustomed to the variations of trade; and whose forethought enabled them to apply remedies, and to take such precautionary and anticipative measures as screened them from loss" (p. 44).

According to Gaskell, then, the successful manufacturer was a man already experienced in business. He was most likely either a petty manufacturer, who in addition to being a producer of goods engaged also in marketing, or a merchant who had acquired control over the means of production. In either case, the members of this class would have been the merchant manufacturers, who provided the transition between the master craftsman and the modern industrialist.

Mantoux's estimation of the yeoman class—the bold, independent peasantry of England, losing their small holdings, making their fortune in manufacturing, buying land once more from a gentry that had looked down upon them, and building stately homes as "monuments to their new wealth and their ancient pride" (p. 373)—is not without appeal by virtue of its simplicity and the suggestion of myth-making that accompanies it. The account, moreover, argues for a vitalism in the history of society in which no element becomes extinct but merely suffers a sea change and reappears prepared to respond to the changes that had made its former being obsolescent. Considering, however, the lack of clearly defined classes in such a period of social and economic flux as the Industrial Revolution, such an uncomplicated point of view regarding the social origins of the new class of industrialists would seem to belong more appropriately to the folklore of capitalism, along with the myth of the self-made man.[10]

Despite the attractiveness of the yeoman-turned-manufacturer theory, it seems more likely that inventors, industrialists, and entrepreneurs came from every social class.[11] The Duke of Bridgewater, best known for his improvements in transportation, began building canals in order to get his coal from Worsley to Manchester. The clergyman Edmund Cartwright, a classical scholar and imitator of Pope, invented the power loom and set up a factory in 1787, thereby incurring the accusation of "having deserted his caste."[12] John Roebuck was a doctor who turned to industrial chemistry and later founded the famous Carron ironworks. Richard Arkwright, the wealthiest spinner in the cotton industry, had been a barber. Peter Stubs, an innkeeper, built up an extensive file-making concern. Samuel Walker, a prominent figure in the iron industry of the North, had begun as a schoolmaster. The myth of the self-made man, it would seem, came nearest to reality in the second half of the eighteenth century, for during these years, "vertical mobility had reached a degree higher than that of any earlier, or perhaps any succeeding age."[13]

The foregoing discussion has revealed the difficulty of differentiating industrialists from other classes on the basis of social origins. But by turning to our second criterion for assessing newness, a consideration of the industrialists' economic basis, we are able to view their unique position in relation to the merchant, the laboring, and the landed classes.

The rise of the large-scale industrialist was accompanied by a change in the traditional relationship between merchant and manufacturer. At the beginning of George III's reign in 1760, merchants and landlords controlled British productive resources. As a basis for economic power, the merchants had a monopoly of trade. The merchant controlled the production of the small pre-Industrial Revolution manufacturer by regulating the supply of raw material and the output of finished goods. The accumulation of capital by manufacturers, however, together with the failure of many commercial houses during the American Revolution, led to the involvement of the new class of capitalists in banking and credit. By the 1780s and 1790s manufacturers began to extend their operations so that, in addition to production, they secured raw materials and marketed finished products on their own. Having become independent of mercantile control, the new class of captains of industry took their place by the side of land and commerce as an entirely new source of moneyed power.[14]

If, at the end of the century, the manufacturer stood in a new relation to the wealthy and powerful classes, his connection with his employees had also undergone change. Before the Industrial Revolution, in the era of the small manufacturer, it was difficult to distinguish between master and man. As the factory system developed with greater numbers of workers in large mills a gulf arose separating employer and employee.[15] This altered relationship is evident in the change in meaning of the word, "manufacture." Andrew Ure, in his *Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835), noted that "manufacture" had in the course of time lost its original meaning, "to make by hand." With the establishment of the factory system, the machines "manufactured" and by "manufacturer" was meant the owner of machinery and the employer of its operators, instead of a master craftsman who worked along with his apprentices and journeymen.[16] Marx and Engels commented upon the change from the patriarchal workshop to the factory by extending the martial metaphor, captains of industry, in order to dramatize the unenviable position of the rank and file:

> Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they the slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly

enslaved by the machine, the overlooker, and above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself.[17]

The gulf between the employers and employed, which was the natural consequence of the disciplined organization of industrial production on a large scale, was further widened, one observer states, by virtue of the rise of many employers from the working class:

> Many of the manufacturers had in fact come from what the "Great" were often disposed to look upon as "the refuse of mankind," and their very emergence from the ranks of common labor tended to raise higher the barriers already existing between employers and employees in manufacturing enterprises. The further separation of these two groups is another manifestation of the early differentiation of the new manufacturers from other groups.[18]

It is this last connection, the relation of the employer to his dependents, that distinguishes the early industrialist from the aristocrat. The two classes were similar in the respect that both possessed moneyed power and—unlike the wealthy merchant or later the captain of finance—the one had an army of factory workers and the other, a host of agricultural laborers as dependents. Traditionally, the landowners professed a social responsibility for their farm workers, while on the other hand, industrialists were accused of espousing a cash-nexus relationship between master and man.

Carlyle's concept of society as a group of individuals tied together by bonds of mutual obligation instead of an aggregate of atoms appealed to those of his generation who were inclined to look for this kind of society as existing before the Industrial Revolution. To such a writer as Peter Gaskell, looking back in 1833, the relationship of the landed gentleman to his dependents was that of a patriarch. Gaskell's idealized portrait of the country squire in pre-industrial rural England reflects his Tory nostalgia:

> The distinctions of rank, which are the safest guarantees for the performance of the relative duties of all classes were at this time in full force; and the "Squire," as the chief landed proprietor was generally termed, obtained and deserved his importance from his large possessions, low rents, and a simplicity and homeliness of bearing which, when joined to acknowledged family honours, made him loved and reverenced by his tenants and neighbours. He mingled freely with their sports—was the general and undisputed arbitrator in all questions of law and equity —was a considerate and generous landlord—a kind and indulgent master—and looking at him in all his bearings, a worthy and amiable man; tinged, it is true, with some vices, but all so coated over with widespreading charity, that the historian willingly draws the veil of forgetfulness over them.[19]

Only a few of the squirearchy are left in the industrial North, continues Gaskell, implying at the same time that manufacturers are lacking in the social attitudes of the country squire: "This race of men is now nearly extinct from the manufacturing districts. Their possessions are passed into new hands—their descendants 'pushed from their stools' by an order of men having few or no traits in common with them. . . ."[20]

If Gaskell suggests only indirectly that the relationship between the manufacturer and his employees differed from that of the squire and his dependents, a modern interpreter of the early nineteenth century or late Georgian period emphasizes the distance at which the employer held his workers in contradistinction to the squire's sense of social obligation to his inferiors:

> But they [the squirearchy] had a tradition of social responsibility that was almost entirely lacking in those hard-headed and self-made individualists [the industrialists]. No doubt in long-established family businesses an almost patriarchal relation between the head of the firm and his hands was capable of establishing itself. . . . But these cases were at the best, exceptional, and the drift of the time was towards the segregation of industrial employers and employed into separate class entities that might, or might not, be able to adjust their mutual relations on a peaceful basis to their common advantage, but were no more inclined to enter into social relations with each other than Jews and Samaritans. So that research may possibly be able to unearth some isolated instance of an employer skippering his factory's cricket team, or his wife functioning as Lady Bountiful, these things would have been viewed, even at the time, as exceptional. Whereas they were, on country estates, not only normal, but ranked among customs more honoured in the observance than the breach.[21]

Perhaps the most strongly worded statement emphasizing the distinction between the new class and the aristocracy with respect to the relationship between the wealthy and their dependents was made by Marx and Engels:

> The bourgeoisie, whenever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of Philistine sentimentalism in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It

has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and, in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—free trade.[22]

As a result of the changeover from small manufacturers to large-scale industrialists, it is evident that the new class stood in a new and unique relation to the merchants, the working population, and the aristocracy. But what individual characteristics set the industrialist apart as a *homo novus*? To answer this question, it is necessary to turn to a discussion of the third criterion of newness: the combination of prerequisites for success in industrial enterprise.

The men who survived in the process of changing over from small to large-scale industry had one distinguishing characteristic—an ability to put other men's inventions to work. Richard Arkwright, for example, was a master at obtaining results from others' inventions where the originators had failed.[23] Given this ability, the distinctive task of the manufacturer was that of an organizer of industrial production. As such, his energies were divided among the exigencies of accumulation of capital, management of labor, and accurate knowledge of markets.

The first problem of the manufacturer was to secure capital since, except for second-generation manufacturers (the father of Sir Robert Peel, for example), most early industrialists were not wealthy. Men who had neither capital nor patents had to begin very modestly, working with their hands and saving to accumulate capital. Their hopes to rise very often lay in forming a partnership with other men like themselves or, as in the case of Robert Owen, becoming managers and subsequent partners of a large concern.[24]

After obtaining the capital necessary to set up a factory, the manufacturer had to recruit and train workers who were not accustomed to the discipline required to make a factory productive. According to Andrew Ure, writing in 1835, the task of subjecting the new class of factory workers to this discipline was formidable, and it posed the major problem of the factory system:

> The main difficulty did not, to my apprehension, lie so much in the invention of a proper self-acting mechanism for drawing out and twisting cotton into a continuous thread, as in the distribution of the different members of the apparatus into one cooperative body, in impelling each organ with its appropriate delicacy and speed, and above all, in training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton. To devise and administer a successful code of factory discipline suited to the necessities of factory diligence, was the Herculean enterprise, the noble achievement of Arkwright."[25]

In addition to accustoming his workmen to the new discipline of the factory, the early industrialist also had to deal with markets, since, unlike the small manufacturer, he produced too large a quantity for local, and in many cases even national consumption. As Mantoux has observed, if the large-scale manufacturer "was not a born trader, he had to become one, and learn how to extend his connections over the whole country and beyond" (p. 377).

In summing up the qualities needed for success in industrial enterprise, it may be said that the manufacturer had to perform successfully the functions of capitalist, factory manager, and merchant, thereby setting "a new pattern of the complete businessman."[26] If the factory system visited the division of labor upon the work force, the opposite seems to have been true with regard to the early millowner. Perhaps the best contemporary evidence of this new type of businessman is the testimony of Robert Owen, midway in his career which began with a clerkship in the retail trade and ended with the ownership of the New Lanark Mills. In 1791 at the age of twenty, Owen became the manager of a cotton mill employing five hundred people. Mr. Drinkwater, the proprietor, knew nothing about the mill, nor did the outgoing manager leave any instructions. In addition to the qualities discussed above, the following account illustrates the adaptability and attention to detail with which Owen distinguished himself as a successful manufacturer:

> thus uninstructed I had to take the management of the concern. I had to purchase the raw material,—to make the machines, for the mill was not nearly filled with machinery,—to manufacture the cotton into yarn,—to sell it,—and to keep the accounts,—pay the wages,—and, in fact, to take the whole responsibility of the first fine cotton spinning establishment by machinery that had ever been erected. . . . I at once determined to do the best I could, and began to examine the outline and detail of what was in progress. I looked grave,—inspected everything minutely,—examined the drawings and calculations of the machinery. . . . I continued this silent inspection and superintendence day by day for six weeks, saying merely yes and no to the questions of what was to be done or otherwise, and during that period I did not give one direct order about anything. But at the end of that time, I felt myself so much the master of my position as to be ready to give directions in every department.[27]

Robert Owen, as proprietor of the New Lanark Mills, gained social recognition in his lifetime. Through his model establishment came visitors of all degrees and countries. At one point in the 1820s Owen even fancied that he had influence among such heads of state as Castlereagh who listened patiently to his schemes for the regeneration of society. But

Owen's career was exceptional; his fame does not rest entirely upon his work as a manufacturer. For other early manufacturers, social recognition was not so readily achieved.

The great manufacturers, employing "several thousand" workmen and able to raise "single capitals of two or three hundred thousand pounds" and obtain credit at home and abroad for a year to eighteen months, excited envy indeed in the hearts of titled wealth because of the potential power inherent in such affluence. And with envy of the source of power came disdain for the means by which it was acquired.[28] Broadly speaking, the English aristocracy, to its credit, was not characterized by that class rigidity typical of its Continental counterpart which would lead it to shun industrial wealth as a means of broadening its economic base. Assuredly, in earlier times the aristocracy was not unwilling to make connections with the commercial classes. Nevertheless, the upper classes in the time of Arkwright and Watt expressed an antagonism toward those two representatives of industrial talent and wealth.

Carlyle, writing in *Chartism* (1839), eulogized Arkwright and Watt as men who, though of unheroic origin, were capable of heroic doings. Arkwright, wrote Carlyle, was no hero of romance with god-like looks and gestures but "a plain, almost gross, bag-cheeked, potbellied Lancashire man" who was appointed by society to the calling of a barber. He had several difficulties to overcome: his wife burned his model of a spinning wheel and when he perfected the spinning jenny, his townspeople mobbed him for putting spinners out of work. But Arkwright was no ordinary man, continues Carlyle: "O reader, what a Historical Phenomenon is that bag-cheeked, potbellied, much-enduring, much inventing barber! French Revolutions were a-brewing: to resist the same in any measure, imperial Kaisers were impotent without the cotton and cloth of England; and it was this man that had to give England the power of cotton."[29]

But Arkwright's class-conscious contemporaries were not inclined to cover the entrepreneur with glory. The upper classes were reluctant to grant him social recognition because he lacked a pedigree: "a great *mill-monger*," writes one disdainful contemporary, "is newly created a knight, though he was not born a gentleman."[30] Upon his death Arkwright received scant praise, attention being centered upon his crude manner; his detractor conceded his practical usefulness but would not acknowledge his greatness.[31]

Carlyle was as warm in his praise for James Watt as he was for Arkwright. While the gods were at play, Prometheus-Vulcan was at work:

> Neither had Watt of the Steamengine a heroic origin, any kindred with the princes of this world . . . [who] were shooting their partridges; noisily, in Parliament or elsewhere, solving the question, Head or tail? while this man with blackened fingers, with grim brow, was searching out, in his workshop, the Fire-secret; or having found it, was painfully wending to and fro in quest of a "moneyed man," as indispensable man-midwife of the same.[32]

Arrogance, however, rather than praise or sympathy, was the attitude of the gentry encountered by the inventor of the steam engine. Writing as a manufacturer in 1787 to a correspondent in France, Watt notes the hostility of the upper orders toward his class: "Our landed gentlemen . . . reckon us poor mechanics no better than the slaves who cultivate their vineyards."[33] Another manufacturer echoed Watt when he wrote of the "gentlemen of landed property" as "the proud and bigoted landowners [who] look down with contempt on the merchant or manufacturer."[34] T. Gisborne, author of *Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (1794), a popular work on morality, deplored the "aristocratic prejudices and the envious contempt of neighboring peers and country gentlemen, proud of their rank and ancient family, who even in these days occasionally disgrace themselves by looking down on the man raised by merit and industry from obscurity to eminence."[35]

In Manchester, the scorn with which the aristocracy met the aspirations of the manufacturing class was returned in equal measure in the poem-epistles of the Manchester clergyman, Thomas Bancroft, writing to a friend at Cambridge in 1777. In praise of Manchester manufacturers who were looked upon as "servants" Bancroft wrote:

> Such are England's true patriots, her prop and her pride;
> They draw wealth from each state while its wants are supply'd;
> To mankind all at large they are factors and friends,
> And their praise with their wares reach the world's farthest ends. . . .
> Is it then, ye vain lordlings! ye treat us with scorn,
> Because titles and birth your own fortunes adorn?
>
> What worth to yourselves from high birth can accrue?
> Are your ancestors' glories entailed upon you?
> And is your lazy pomp of much use to a nation?
> Are not parks and wide lawns a refined devastation?
> But peace—'tis presumption,—too much would demean 'em
> To hold converse with upstarts, a *vulgus profanem*.
> Their blood in pure currents thro' ages conveyed
> It were impious to taint with the contact of trade.[36]

The antagonism between hereditary wealth and the new industrial

affluence cannot be dismissed on the superficial grounds that the new class was composed of rough, coarse upstarts who would not pass as gentlemen in an old aristocratic society. The issue involved more than an absence of pedigree. The resentment underlying the attitude of the aristocracy toward the new class of industrialists is perhaps partly explained by Emerson in his discussion of Napoleon as symbol of the spirit of commerce and industrial enterprise:

> I call Napoleon the agent or attorney of the middle class of modern society; of the throng who fill the markets, shops, countinghouses, manufactories, ships, of the modern world, aiming to be rich. He was the agitator, the destroyer of prescription, the internal improver, the liberal, the radical, the inventor of means, the opener of doors and markets, the subverter of monopoly and abuse. Of course, the rich and the aristocratic did not like him.[37]

If the old order did not consider industrial achievement as meriting notice, the manufacturing classes might have been moved to seek social prestige by working for a seat on the as yet unreformed Parliament. Many an Englishman thought of such service as highly praiseworthy. Yet the early industrialists were largely indifferent to politics even if the opportunity were open to them. "It was not by the arts of lobbying or propaganda," observes T. S. Ashton, "but by unremitting attention to their own concerns and their specialized trade organizations, that, after the end of our period [1830], they became a power—perhaps the greatest power—in the State."[38]

"The discovery of the steam-engine," wrote J. A. Froude in his biography of Disraeli, "had revolutionized the relations of mankind. . . ."[39] With the coming of the factory system a new class of potential leaders of English society came into existence. In this chapter which was intended to assess the newness of this class, we have attempted to demonstrate that, whether or not they were the old yeomanry transformed, the captains of industry stood in a new relation to both the upper and lower orders of English society after the successful application of mechanical invention to machine production had changed their workshops into factories. Despite their affluence, the old order was reluctant to extend social recognition to the "great yeomen of the Yarn," "the lords of the Loom," as Cobbett derisively addressed them, and the "iron gentlemen."[40] With this historical background in mind, we shall, in the next chapter, examine the characterization of the early industrialist in fiction.