AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST AS A SATIRE ON VICTORIAN CONVENTIONS

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CHAPTER I

THE INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem. In this study an attempt will be made to show that the play, The Importance of Being Earnest, by Oscar Wilde, was a travesty on Victorian conventions. It will be further shown that these conventions, which the play satirized, were largely a product of middle class attitudes and morality which had their roots in Puritanism. In order to indicate this, it will be necessary to try to establish the origin of these Victorian conventions and to trace their history down to the 1890's, when these conventions were observed and ridiculed by Mr. Wilde. A study of the critical years of the 1890's will be presented in order to reveal the environment which produced and appreciated the Wildean satire, used in The Importance of Being Earnest. Another problem will be to show that this late Victorian period was a period of evaluation and criticism of Victorian conventions, and that it was a period of transition.

Importance of the Study. The Importance of Being Earnest has too long been considered solely as artifice to charm and to beguile the audience. The play also has value as a commentary and a criticism of Victorian life. If the following definition of comedy is true, the significance of The Importance of Being Earnest may become more apparent: "Comedy is the incense that is offered on the altar of a people's best-judgment-on-the-way-things-should-go-in-society, and public laughter its liturgy."[1] The effect of comedy should be to point out society's weaknesses while making them genially amusing, in order that society will not become angered but will join in generous laughter at its own expense.

That The Importance of Being Earnest has continued to be offered and that the public has continued to laugh is evidenced by an article in the April, 1948 issue of The Quarterly Journal of Speech. In this national magazine there are figures which show that The Importance of Being Earnest was the most frequently presented classic by American colleges and universities in the 1946-47 season; and that the total number of productions were ten, which was two more than the second most frequently produced classic, Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Indeed, The Importance of Being Earnest proved to be more popular among the institutions of higher learning than

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[1] Philo M. Buck, John Gassner, and H. S. Alberson, A Treasury of the Theatre (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1940), I, 31.

were the Broadway hits My Sister Eileen, Arsenic and Old Lace, Winterset, Barrets of Wimpole Street, State of the Union, and I Remember Mama. The only current hits which exceeded the Victorian satire in number of productions were Dear Ruth, Angel Street, and Blithe Spirit.[2]

A partial explanation of the perennial popularity of this Wildean satire may be found in the pertinacity of Puritanism in the English-speaking world; for Puritanism, as will be shown later, was an active and dominant ingredient of the Victorianism ridiculed in The Importance of Being Earnest. Because the culture of the United States is deeply rooted in Puritan New England,[3] the popularity of the play in the United States is understandable. Germany also appreciates the satire on Victorian conventions. Writing in 1930, E. F. Benson stated that Oscar Wilde's plays were given in Germany more frequently than the works of any other foreign dramatist.[4] John Gassner defended the importance of Mr. Wilde's work when he wrote, ". . . the play of repartee and aphorism in his work was supplemented by neat excoriations of shallow society."[5]

All the critics do not agree on the significance of The Importance of Being Earnest. Some call it a play of

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[2] John Dietrich, "Dramatic Activities in American Colleges," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 34:189, April, 1948.

[3] Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1930), I, 3-4.

[4] E. F. Benson, As We Were, A Victorian Peep Show (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1930), p. 197.

[5] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., p. 454.

nonsense that cannot be taken seriously. One early New York critic, for example, made the following comment in a weekly magazine after he had seen the first American production of the play at the Empire Theatre: "The piece is of the lightest possible texture, and never was intended to be subjected to the test of serious consideration or analysis."[6]

George Bernard Shaw felt that he had spent an amusing but wasted evening; after many years, John Mason Brown answered that observation with an observation of his own: "Mr. Shaw seems to have been victimized by his own Puritanism."[7] While the play is grantedly nonsense, it is nonsense with artistry, meaning, and purpose. The whole artificiality of the play and its characters is a travesty; it is having fun at conventional-Victorian expense.

John Mason Brown, in a review of a John Gielgud production of The Importance of Being Earnest, wrote as follows:

> Mr. Gielgud's actors go about their business of being silly with admirable sobriety. Undertakers could not be more solemn than they are. Their demeanor is a cross between a pavane and a ritual. They are people made in the image of their tailors and their dressmakers. They walk the earth as "unnatchel" men and women . . . They come to grips neither with reality nor with those whose hands they shake. When they meet, they deign only to touch each other's fingertips.[8]

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[6] "At the Empire Theatre," The Critic, 26:316, April 27, 1895.

[7] John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," The Saturday Review of Literature, 30:22-4, March 29, 1947.

[8] Loc. cit.

John Mason Brown stated Wilde's position as a critic of his times: "His wit, like his social attitude, is as much the product of his time as Edward VII's frock coat."[9] And in another review, "Wilde was the spokesman for that late Victorian England which was already Edwardian; . . ."[10] In explanation of the Wildean laughter found in The Importance of Being Earnest, Mr. Brown states,

> All comedies of manners are games played against nature in a drawing room or its equivalent. The real point of their joke, as John Palmer once noted, is that man is pretending to be civilized. "The elaborate ritual of society is a mask through which the natural man is comically seen to look."[11]

Life Magazine also upheld Wilde as a valuable critic of his times. The popular magazine maintains that "He was a critic of morals who, in pointing out the social hypocrisies of his day, created a world that was at once lighthearted and satirically absurd."[12]

Recent revivals of The Importance of Being Earnest on the Broadway and London stages portend a future popularity for the comedy on the professional, as well as on the university, stage. Life Magazine observed that, "The Importance of Being Earnest came to Broadway this month and was welcomed more cordially than any new comedy of the season [italics not in the

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[9] Ibid., pp. 22-4.

[10] John Mason Brown, "English Laughter, Past and Present," The Saturday Review of Literature, 29:24-6, November 23, 1946.

[11] Loc. cit.

[12] "The Theatre," Life, 22:123-4, March 31, 1947.

original]."[13] This most recent Broadway revival, which was produced for the spring, 1947 season, was directed by John Gielgud, who also starred in the production as Jack Worthing. Mr. Gielgud is considered by many critics to be the leading English actor of today; and at least his Hamlet, in which he played the title role on Broadway in 1936, will be ranked among the greatest of the present century.[14]

The critics of the 1947 production of The Importance of Being Earnest appear to be singularly in accord. Concerning Mr. Gielgud's interpretation, Time Magazine said, "As of last week, nobody could take exception to his frivolity, for he was giving Wilde's finest play what it sorely needs and seldom gets --a wonderfully high-stylized production."[15] Miss Rosamond Gilder, in speaking of John Gielgud, said,

> He has played Jack Worthing for many years --a pleasant diversion from the exhausting demands of Hamlet, Lear, or Raskolnikoff-- and he plays him with relish and appreciation. . . . As he delivers them, the Wildean epigrams seem simple expressions of sincerity and truth until their two-edged meaning emanates as a sort of afterglow from his unaccented delivery.[16]

"Notice how all the actors," commented Brooks Atkinson, "hold their heads high as though they were elevating themselves above vulgarity."[17] And Time Magazine reiterates after viewing the

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[13] Ibid.

[14] George Freedley and John A Reeves, A History of the Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, 1941), p. 582.

[15] "The Theatre," Time, 49:59, March 17, 1947.

[16] Rosamond Gilder, "Wit and the Prat-full," Theatre Arts, 31:16-17, April 22, 1947.

[17] Brooks Atkinson, The New York Times, 30:2, March 4, 1947.

same production, ". . . the cast plays with very straight faces and very grand airs; and the effect is delightful."[18]

Judging by the warm reception which the play received as late as 1947, it seems unlikely that the classic will cease to be a produced play and become only a piece of literature. While the play lends itself ably to conventional theatre, it is also adaptable to future or experimental theatre. The University of Washington, for example, felt that The Importance of Being Earnest was the only classic which could be comfortably staged in their Penthouse Theatre. This fact was noted by Glenn Hughes in his book written about central staging, or the arena style of acting. Mr. Hughes is considered an experimenter and pioneer in this central staging, or Penthouse, type of theatre.

> Classics we . . . consider a risk. Thus far (with the exception of an early, tentative production of Ibsen's Ghosts) our only venture into pre-1900 drama was with a period costumed presentation of Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest. This was highly successful.[19]

Usually the intimacy and drawing room atmosphere of central staging precludes outdoor scenes; but in the case of the highly stylized production of The Importance of Being Earnest, the garden scene was established in the Penthouse Theatre by the use of a few happily placed potted palms.

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[18] Time, op. cit., p. 59.

[19] Glenn Hughes, The Penthouse Theatre (New York: Samuel French, 1942), p. 47.

Limitations. It is difficult to set time limits on a social convention. No one can say that at such and such a date this attitude or that moral interpretation became a force in a society. In tracing the English middle class conventions which Wilde satirized, it will be necessary to go back to the times when the middle class first became a self-conscious group in English society; that is to say, back to Elizabethan days. A study will be made of the craftsmen, their apprentices, and the merchants, concerning their attitudes, their way of life, and their influence. Many of these men of commerce and of industry were Puritans.

After tracing these threads of Puritanism from the Elizabethan middle class to the Victorian middle class, there will be a concentration upon the Victorian era, and especially upon late nineteenth century tastes and social attitudes of the so-called fashionable or upper class society of England. It will be shown that in the Victorian period the old, English aristocracy based on land was fused with, and lost in, the industrial middle class. The English society which Wilde ridiculed in the 1890's was one which was predominantly puritanical and middle class in its tastes and attitudes.

Briefly, then, the work will be limited to a social history of the English middle class from, roughly, the beginning of Elizabeth's reign to the closing years of Victoria's reign, with the emphasis being placed upon the Victorian period.

Geographically, the Victorian society which will be under scrutiny will be that one which inhabited England; though coetaneous with the English middle class were other middle classes, equally lugubrious, of various nationalities, which struck a similar pose and ordered its life on a pattern very much like the one used by the early English Puritans.

This study will not concern itself with a biography of the author of The Importance of Being Earnest. Mr. Wilde's play, on the other hand, will be examined as a reflection of the critical and transitional period in which Mr. Wilde lived. The play was a product of its environment, and from that standpoint it will be considered.

Definitions of Terms. The Victorian period, for the purposes of this paper, will refer to that period in English history in which Victoria was Queen of England, roughly between 1840 and 1900. Some writers use 1880 as the date of the close of the Victorian Era, and refer to the 1880's and 1890's as Edwardian. This may be true in spirit, for Victoria during the late years of her reign was no longer an important influence in the social world of fashion; and in her place, Edward, as Prince of Wales, was the more significant social leader, who proved to be more in sympathy with the decade known as the "Gay Nineties." In this work, however, the term Victorian will apply to the entire period from 1840 to 1900, while late Victorian will be used to represent the last two

decades of the nineteenth century, the 1880's and 1890's. In a larger sense, the word Victorian also includes the ideals and standards of morality and taste prevalent during the reign of Queen Victoria, which were mostly conventional, prudish, and narrow.

The middle class is a word signifying that English social group composed of merchants, tradesmen, and skilled craftsmen whose thoughts and interests centered in business profits. They developed a distinctive way of life, a code of ethics, and a set of ideals. Their pattern for success was thrift, hard work, and honesty. They felt that money and possessions were proof of that success.

The word Puritan during the Commonwealth and the Victorian Era became synonymous with the middle class. It was under Cromwell and, later, Victoria, that Puritanism and the middle class emerged as the dominant elements in English society. The word Puritan will also be used to represent a religious sect which aimed at a purification of the church according to the New Testament principles and a peculiar purity of personal moral conduct. It was rigidly scrupulous in religious observances and believed in a literal interpretation of the bible.

Statement of Organization. The second chapter of this study is devoted to expansion of the overview, in which the Victorian conventions satirized in The Importance of Being

Earnest are traced from their puritanical beginnings in Elizabethan England. Chapter two is divided into the following sections: Similarities between the Puritan and the Victorian; Identification of the Middle Class with Puritanism; The Theatre Satirizes the Puritan; The Puritan Retaliates and Corrupts the Theatre.

Chapter three is primarily an exclusive social history of Victorian England arranged alphabetically, for convenience, into the following subjects: Amusements; Art; Dandies; Eating, Drinking, and Smoking; Economics, the rising aristocracy; Education; General View; Literature; Marriage and the Home; Manners and Society; Morals; Music; Politics; Religion and Philosophy; Theatrical Conditions; and Women.

In chapter four specific dialogue is quoted from The Importance of Being Earnest which shows the spirit of the 1890's and its satirical view of particular Victorian conventions. These conventions, alluded to in the play, are listed in the chapter under the following headings: Dandies; Education; Food, Drink, and Tobacco; Literature; Manners and Morals; Music; Philosophy; Politics, Property, and Religion; The Rising Aristocracy; and Women and Marriage.

Chapter five contains the summary and conclusions, which reiterates the fact that the 1890's were years of critical evaluation of the pattern of living set down by the early Victorians and by the earlier Puritans. The Importance of Being Earnest was an expression of that criticism of Victorian life and of the desire for new attitudes and new values.

CHAPTER II

THE OVERVIEW

Similarities between the Puritans and the Victorians. In a comparative study of the Puritan of Elizabethan England and the Victorian of nineteenth century England, there appear to be certain attitudes which the two Englishmen have in common. Cursorily, these common attitudes concern the following aspects of social living: dress, food, tobacco, drink, women, sex, amusements, the theatre, literature, Sunday, the Bible, thrift, work, education, politics, marriage, and parental authority.

(1) DRESS. As a protest against the time and money wasted on dress by the ladies and gentlemen of quality, the Puritans dressed, by contrast, in stern austerity.[1] A wife who was extravagant in her taste for clothes --one who aped the fasions of the court ladies-- was considered a morally bad wife by the Puritans. Modesty and economy in clothes were the qualities most sought after by good wives. A book on fashion, written in 1616, was entitled My Ladies Looking Glasse. Wherein May Be Discerned A Wise Man From A Foole, A Good Woman From A Bad. In this book, "the mannish apparel of women and the effeminate clothes of men" were considered

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1 W. E. Lunt, History of England (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938, Revised Edition), p. 498.

improper clothing.[2]

Among the men, the appellation of "Roundhead" came from the Puritan's insistence upon closely cropped hair, "which singularity in that day of elaborate coiffures distinguished him with a vengance."[3] Contrariwise, as a revolt from Victorian Puritanism, aesthetes of the 1890's let their hair grow long.

The Victorian, like the Elizabethan Puritan, dressed with comparative simplicity. Following the Regency with its dandies like Beau Brummell, there was "the sombre wilderness of utilitarian respectablility, and the Victorian top hat, grown into a monstrous extinguisher," which "put out the last lights of Georgian dandyism."[4] The eighteenth century was the heyday of elegance in dress, especially in male dress, such as the heavy wigs, ornate buckles, and fine laces. These did not reappear until Oscar Wilde affected the eighteenth century dress as a revolt against Victorian austerity. He became the subject of satirical fun in Gilbert's Patience, which poked fun at the aesthetes who wore long hair, buckles, and knee pants. The Elizabethan Puritan and the Victorian

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[2] Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 483.

[3] Aaron Mechael Myers, Representation and Misrepresentation of the Puritan in Elizabethan Drama (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1931), p. 84.

[4] Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Victorian Cycle (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1935), I, 27-8.

believed rather in simplicity of dress.

(2) FOOD. The Puritans are appropriately connected with Thanksgiving Day in the United States. They were notoriously fond of feasting. Their contemporaries derisively accused them of gluttony.[5]

Over-eating was also common among the Victorians.[6] Entertainment was done privately in the homes of the wealthy in the form of great banquets, in which prodigious quantities of food were consumed. A typical Victorian dinner is described by Benson on page sixty-three of this study.

(3) TOBACCO. While smoking was regarded by the fops and the gallants of the court as a necessary and fashionable accomplishment, the Puritans were noted for having a real loathing for tobacco.[7]

Under Victorian mores, smoking, if done at all, was done by men as a sort of secret rite, apart from the women.[8] This was the period of the smoking jacket. By the 1890's, after the dandies took up smoking, it became fashionable once again for the upper classes to smoke and it was permitted in the drawing rooms.

(4) DRINK. Under the Stuart dynasty, the Puritan

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5 Myers, op. cit., p. 76.

6 Benson, op. cit., p. 15.

7 Myers, op. cit., p. 82.

8 Benson, op. cit., pp. 15-6.

influence was strong enough in some English counties to cause all the ale-houses to be closed by order of the magistrates; and, under the Commonwealth, brewers, even though they were popular and were considered to be men of high character, could not gain a seat on the magistrates' bench, or be appointed mayor of a borough.[9]

There were many treatises published during this period which emphasized the calamities that overtake drunkards. One of the greatest sins which the Puritans claimed against drinking was its unthriftiness. This sin was emphasized in connection with drinking in a treatise, written in 1618, entitled The Scourge of Drunkenness.[10]

The Victorians regarded drinking in much the same light. Like the Puritans and unlike their eighteenth century ancestors, the Victorians were not heavy drinkers.[11] George Bernard Shaw described his Victorian father as being a furtive drinker in practice but a vehement teetotaler in theory.[12] The mores of society were against drinking; though, as with smoking, drinking became more fashionable toward the end of the nineteenth century.

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[9] John Stephen Flynn, The Influence of Puritanism (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 68.

[10] Wright, op. cit., p. 193.

[11] Benson, op. cit., pp. 15-7.

[12] John W. Cunliffe, English Literature During the Last Half Century (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 120.

(5) WOMEN. Puritan women were "of such piety, chastity, modesty and homeliness as England had never previously known."[13] The ideal Victorian woman was equally as virtuous. ". . .this insistence upon the daughters possessing all of the virtues is the most typical of all the Victorian precepts of moral deportment and general behaviour."[14]

"In social theory and in legal practice, woman throughout the Renaissance was subservient to man."[15] This quotation has reference to the position of woman in Elizabethan England.

The position of women under Queen Victoria was essentially the same. Queen Victoria herself had no truck with the feminist movement, which came later in her reign. She disapproved of women competing with men in the professions and felt that women should be ". . . what God intended; a helpmate for man."[16] In 1870 she wrote to her Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone, and informed him that she opposed the Bill to give women the same position as men with respect to Parliamentary franchise.[17]

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[13] Flynn, op. cit., p. 73.

[14] Robert Harling, Home, A Victorian Vignette (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1939), pp. 86-7.

[15] Wright, op. cit., p. 204.

[16] John W. Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 10.

[17] Loc. cit.

(6) SEX. ". . . sexual immorality, especially conjugal infidelity, is a vice as rare as it is revolting in devout Puritan families."[18]

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert set the example of thorough respectability for Victorian England. Reticences and reserves were practised in the intercourse between men and women. Women, according to a code, only saw what it was fit for them to see; fine breeding demanded that a woman should assume a bland blindness in matters pertaining to sex.[19]

(7) AMUSEMENTS.

> The Bible, sacred songs and psalms, and the harpsichord . . . were deemed almost sufficient, even in many a wealthy Puritan home, to meet the aesthetic and literary tastes of the young. But the needle and the distaff were seldom idle; spinning yarn, working samplers, stiching household garments, brewing and baking, cultivating herbs and flowers, and keeping the home sweet and spotlessly clean, left little time for the pursuit of vanities.[20]

Strict observance of Sunday and the long working hours were also a part of Victorian life, which left little time for games or amusements. Though the country gentlemen was able to fish, hunt, or ride, ". . . it was not until the last two decades of the century that the participation of suburbanites in games and sports became widespread."[21]

(8) THE THEATRE. The strict Puritan and Victorian

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[18] Flynn, op. cit., p. 67.

[19] Benson, op. cit., p. 75.

[20] Flynn, op. cit., p. 74.

[21] Lunt, op. cit., p. 751.

looked upon the theatre as a corrupter of morals, and upon the actors and playwrights as immoral libertines.

Although some Puritans did frequent the Elizabethan theatre, the strict and implaccable members of the Puritan sect were not even seen in the vicinity of playhouses.[22]

The Victorian looked upon the stage as a thing not to be supported in an active manner. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the potential playgoing public was exceedingly small.[23]

(9) LITERATURE. ". . . the deepening shades of Puritanism increased bourgeois interest in godly literature, and the gradual accentuation of utilitarianism sent the tradesman scurrying for useful books, . . ."[24] The first demand that a Puritan made of a book was that it serve some useful end.[25] From the mid-sixteenth century onward, the number of citizens who were buying and reading books steadily increased. A large portion of these books were designed for ordinary readers.[26] A new class of readers grew up in Elizabethan England; women began to read who were from the middle ranks of society and to wield a powerful influence on

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[22] Myers, op. cit., p. 24.

[23] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), I, 8-9.

[24] Wright, op. cit., p. 83.

[25] Ibid., p. 100.

[26] Ibid., p. 81.

English literature.[27] Cookbooks were numerous, a fact which throws light on the literacy of the average housewife.[28] ". . . allusions indicate that romances made the favorite reading of middle-and lower-class women in the early seventeenth century."[29] By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the feminine audience reached such proportions that many authors were making a definite and frank appeal to women.[30]

Besides this, the handbook, "ranging in its infinite variety from the treatise on a gentleman's training to the lowly almanac,"[31] was firmly established in Elizabethan England as a mthod of popular education. The Elizabethan handbooks on family affairs exerted an influence on the later development and popularity of the domestic novel.[32]

The same feminine and moral appeal was made in the literature of the Victorian period. "The novel of the nineteenth century," states G. K. Chesterton, "was female; as fully as the novel of the eighteenth century was male."[33]

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27 Ibid., p. 103.

28 Ibid., p. 109.

29 Ibid., pp. 111-2.

30 Ibid., p. 114.

31 Ibid., p. 169.

32 Ibid., p. 224.

33 G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), p. 104.

As for morality, Victoria "set a high standard of morality; and her people responded by demanding books whose morality was perhaps over-emphasized."[34] Among those of the ordinary educated Englishmen, there lingered a trace of that old Puritan characteristic which distrusted any literature whose main purpose was to interest or to amuse.[35]

(10) SUNDAY. The Puritans were opposed to the theatres playing on Sundays[36] and objected strenuously to any sports on the Sabbath.[37] Sunday was regarded as God's day and reserved for Church and the Bible.

Sunday was regarded by the Victorians as a special day on which there were special principles, not applicable to other days, which determined for them what they might and might not do. "No right-minded Victorian," for example, "thought his Sunday properly spent unless he heard at least one sermon. Many made a practice of hearing two."[38]

(11) THE BIBLE. The possession of a Bible in the vernacular was the prize of every Puritan family in the days of Elizabeth. It was the solemn duty of every Puritan to see that his children learned enough English to enable them to

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[34] Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Readings (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935), p. 13.

[35] Ibid., p. 67.

[36] C. Elvera Blad, The Puritan Attitude Toward the Theatre Prior to the Restoration (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Master Thesis, 1933), p. 36.

[37] Ibid., p. 46.

[38] Cruse, op. cit., p. 107.

read and to understand the Bible.[39] The Puritans baptized their children with Hebrew names from the Old Testament,[40] which also became a common practice among the Victorians. A literal interpretation of the Bible was unquestioned by the Puritans.[41]

In many of their attitudes toward the Bible, the Victorians and the Puritans were in agreement. The Victorians also believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible and in a future life of either eternal bliss or woe.[42] Even after the publication of Darwin's theory of organic evolution, many theologians opposed it because it conflicted with the story of special creation in the book of Genesis, the interpretation of which they took as literal.[43] Indeed, the majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen, the educated as well as the uneducated, believed that everything in the Bible was literally true.[44] Both Puritans and Victorians prayed to a vengeful, wrathful God which would punish all sinners.[45]

(12) THRIFT. The commercial-minded Puritans believed

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[39] Wright, op. cit., p. 48.

[40] Blad, op. cit., p. 22.

[41] Ibid., p. 50.

[42] Lunt, op. cit., pp. 751-2.

[43] Ibid., 761.

[44] Cruse, op. cit., p. 84.

[45] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 68.

in thrift.

> Thrift was another virtue seriously cultivated in Puritan families. . . . The men of the party were equally noted for their industry, and not infrequently for their parsimony. . . . the great prosperity of England, as a trading and commercial nation, must be attributed to the ingrained habits of industry and thrift of the inhabitants of our British homes in those years of Puritan ascendancy.[46]

On the same subject Wright, an authority on Elizabethan England, wrote,

> If there was a single maxim above others which the Elizabethan youth of the commercial classes heard constantly dinned into his ears, it was one which exhorted him to ways of thriftiness.[47]

The nineteenth century Englishmen were also encouraged to save for the purposes of success and of getting ahead commercially and socially. The main idea was to give capitalist enterprise the fullest possible scope. The middle class was coaxed into saving for the purposes of gaining workable and profitable capital, and even penny banks were formed "to attract the coins of the poorest."[48]

(13) WORK. Hand in hand with thrift went the virtues of industry and hard work. An important part of the gospel proclaimed by the Puritans was ". . . the virtue of diligence and persistence, the moral value and the dignity of labor [italics not in the original] . . . "[49] Labor was considered

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[46] Flynn, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

[47] Wright, op. cit., p. 186.

[48] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 312.

[49] Wright, op. cit., p. 170.

to be a moral and religious obligation upon which the very soul's salvation depended. Thus the Puritan felt that the slightest deviation from duty to his vocation involved not only business failure "but the danger of hell-fire in the world to come."[50]

The Victorian Age was also an age of work. "To the middle class, that set the tone of civilization, work was a gospel [italics not in the original] . . ."[51] The Victorian followed the cult and practice of work, whose object was to gather "not honey, but money, all the day." The effect was to engender ". . . that peculiar moral earnestness, common to all the great Victorians of the middle class heyday, . . ."[52]

(14) EDUCATION. Both the Puritans and the Victorians believed in the power of education. This doctrine became one of the most firmly fixed of middle-class beliefs.

> Modern bourgeois civilizations have poured their money into schools, believing that here at last a miracle would be wrought, and every sow's ear, through the magic incantation of the teacher, would be made into a silk purse.[53]

The Elizabethan middle class felt that education would bring all good things in its train.[54]

Under Victoria, universal elementary education was

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50 Ibid., p. 182.

51 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 310.

52 Ibid., I, 145.

53 Wright., op. cit., p. 80.

54 Loc. cit.

enforced by law (1870), and university extension for adult education was established.[55]

(15) POLITICS. Elizabethan Puritans and Victorians were both governed by women whose ideals were largely at one with the middle class. Queen Elizabeth's great-grandfather was a London merchant, and she herself was a firm believer in those Puritan virtues of thrift and industry. "A shrewd intuition for the feelings of the common people was a source of Tudor strength completely lacking in the Stuarts."[56] Puritan influence was especially strong in London, where a lord mayor was elected yearly by a council made up of men prominent in the trade guilds of the city.

In Victorian England, middle class influence was also prevalent. By her example, Victoria "strengthened and concentrated the middle-class ideals and authority, which had deep roots in English history and English character."[57] From 1840 to 1880 the middle class was "the brains of England," and ". . . her policy, her standard of civilization, were the realisation of bourgeois ideals."[58]

(16) MARRIAGE. A chastity of marriage was glorified by the Puritans. They concentrated their attention upon

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55 Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., p. 12.

56 Wright, op. cit., p. 5.

57 Cunliffe, Leaders etc., op. cit., pp. 4-5.

58 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 281.

"preserving the purity of the married state rather than the physiological purity of the individual."[59]

Alfred Tennyson described the ideal in Victorian marriage in a poem of his entitled Princess,

"Till at the end she set herself to man,

Like perfect music unto noble words."[60]

It was the woman who must conform to the man. Domesticity was idealized, and its spirit was expressed in a popular song of the period, "Home Sweet Home."[61] The cult of the double bed was also a part of the temper of the times, when anything except a double bed was considered "immoral."[62]

(17) PARENTAL AUTHORITY. The prosperous Elizabethan tradesman was eager to establish his family and to secure the most profitable marriage alliances for his children. He felt that his parental authority was God-given; and he found his support for the idea in the Bible and in popular bourgeois pamphlets of the day, which stated that "children are not to marie, without the consent of their parentes, in whose power and choise it lieth to provide wiues and husbandes for their sonnes and daughters."[63]

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59 Wright, op. cit., p. 203.

60 Benson, op. cit., pp. 53-4.

61 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 158.

62 Ibid., I, 155.

63 John Stockwood, A Bartholomew Fairing for Parentes, 1589, cited by Louis B. Wright, op. cit., p. 208.

The father dominated Victorian family-life. In the background of most Victorian families, no matter how sweetly and reasonably it may be depicted in the literature of the times, stood the father; ". . . undbending, always right, always to be obeyed, always to be cajoled, outmanoeuvred, and won round."[64] Victorian morality did not come from within, but was regarded as a discipline imposed from without.[65] Thus, the child was reared in fear of God and of the parent; they were both ready to inflict punishment. One of the tenets of the Fabian Society was that the State should compete with parents in providing happy homes for children, in order that the child might have a refuge from the tyranny of the Victorian home.[66] The elder of two daughters of a Victorian home must be married first; anything else was considered irregular.[67]

Victorianism was largely a revival of Puritanism. Though Puritanism died poltically after the Restoration, it lived on in English life and literature with the middle class, which reproved the excesses of society and of literary license in the reign of Charles II. Puritanism emerged in the form of Methodism in the eighteenth century, and later preached

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[64] Mrs. L. B. Walford, Memories of Victorian London (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p. 33.

[65] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 149.

[66] Cunliffe, English Literature etc., op. cit., p. 127.

[67] Benson, op. cit., p. 78.

down immorality and wrong in the days of Queen Victoria.[68] Tennyson embodied the essence of the Victorian Age. His poems were didactic and moral. As Queen Victoria's laureate for more than forty years, he understood the middle-class virtues of his period and took pride in teaching them through the medium of his poems.[69]

> The Victorian Age was, on the whole, a Puritan Age; social conventions were rather clearly marked out, and any overstepping of the lines was promptly condemned and punished by ostracism. Like most periods of social strait-jacketing, it was a self-righteous, smug, almost priggish age. And it was, quite inevitably, a didactic age replete with sermons and lectures dutifully delivered by those called upon to preach and teach and more or less dutifully listened to by those eager to conform.[70]

Identification of the middle class with Puritanism. Originally, the word Puritan referred to the sect of Cathari or Puritani of the third century. This religious group aimed at a peculiar purity of life and doctrine; and thus it became appropriate for Englishmen who endeavored to be particularly circumspect in conversation and morals and who sought further purification of the church according to the "pure" New Testament principles to be called Puritans.[71] Puritanism was neither expedient nor fashionable for the upper classes, while the general trend was toward a rapid growth of Puritanism

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[68] George B. Woods, Homer A. Watt, and George K. Anderson, The Literature of England (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1941), Revised Edition, I, 582.

[69] Ibid., II, 428.

[70] Ibid., II, 427.

[71] Myers, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

among the common people.[72] Skilled craftsmen and artisans, the rising middle class, were attracted to such tenets of Puritanism as thrift and industry.

William the Conqueror brought over a number of weavers from Flanders, and Edward the Third encouraged the coming of skilled Flemish artisans; and wherever these Flemish and Dutch artisans made their homes, strongholds of religious dissension were found. Such cities as London and Norwich and their surrounding districts were hotbeds of English Puritanism. This new middle class brought to England a knowledge of the crafts and mechanical arts, in which England at this time was not proficient. These superior craftsmen made window glass, pins, needles, tapestry, furniture, fine cloth and lace, thread, hats, and gloves. Many of them were tailors, and not a few of them were merchants.[73] As the years passed, after 1600, the Puritans came more and more to represent the middle classes.[74] By 1700, the middle classes, always with the remnants of Puritanism clinging about them,

> . . . were assuming an ever greater part in the life of the age, their wealth conquering the erstwhile supercilious disdain of the aristocracy, and we must plainly see that a new age was being born.[75]

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[72] Ibid., II, 427.

[73] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

[74] Ibid., p. 71.

[75] Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1925), pp. 255-6.

With the industrial developments of the nineteenth century, the middle class came into its own, and Puritanical attitudes and standards became the fashion.

> . . . Puritanism, from the very beginning of its history, had a strong and increasing hold, which was re-inforced by the Methodist revival and the growth of evangelicalism, not only in the new denominations organized after John Wesley's death, but within the Church of England itself. This serious and rather limited view of life, as it happened, was held, not only by Queen Victoria, but by her Lutheran husband, Prince Albert.[76]

This concentrated moral earnestness was the heritage of Puritanism. "It was this quality that had made such a peculiar appeal to the men of trade and business among whom the strength of Puritanism lay."[77]

The Theatre Satirizes the Puritan. The habit of making fun of the Puritans never ceased to be the fashion as long as the Elizabethan theatres remained open. With the accession of King James I, the Puritans attained greater notoriety, and references to them increased proportionately; the greatest variety of allusions as well as the greater number of lengthy satires came within the first fifteen years of the seventeenth century.[78]

The Elizabethan theatre constantly made the Puritan look the fool in order to amuse and to curry favor with the

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[76] Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

[77] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 68.

[78] Myers, op. cit., p. 30.

aristocrat. There were exceptions, as will be pointed out later, but the bulk of Elizabethan playwrights placed the Puritan at a disadvantage alongside the aristocrat and his aristocratic tastes. Because money and favor were bestowed upon the theatre at this time by the aristocrats, it was for the taste of the aristocrat that the Elizabethan playwright wrote. "With the disdain of the commonalty, the greater dramatists sought the favor of the highborn, with little regard for the feelings of the middle class; . . ."[79] It is well to remember, however, that the Elizabethan playwrights saw the rise of the middle class before it became a "social norm;" they had not yet learned to accept a commercial society as the fixed order of things and therefore"". . . observed its rise with unhabituated --marveling or horror-fixed-- eyes."[80]

To make the Puritan appear gross and ignorant alongside the learned aristocrat with his background of classics, one Elizabethan playwright contributed the following: an ambitious fellow comes to London for the purpose of learning to speak Hebrew and Greek and is reproved by a denizen of London. Says the urbanite,

> Why, three-quarters of the city are Roundheads, man, that of all the languages of Babylon think it a heresy to understand any but their native English. The schools of Latin and Greek have a long vacation; if thou wilt please 'em, thou must needs speak English.[81]

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[79] Wright, op. cit., p. 605.

[80] John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 257.

[81] Myers, op. cit., p. 51.

Shakespeare maintained an attitude of unrelenting hostility toward the Puritans, or Protestant Dissenters.[82] In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare's anti-Puritan feelings were found in the character of Malvolio, to whom were given several Puritan eccentricities. Malvolio feigned virtue, and Sir Toby said, "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" And Maria characterized Malvolio as a "kind of Puritan" with his conceit and pomposity.[83] While evil is often punished in Shakespeare's plays, the triumph of moral principle rights no wrong and heals no heart, except in the comedies in which life is not treated seriously.[84]

In Volpone, Ben Jonson satirized the great merchant prince whose sole ambition was gold and his dominating trait, acquisitiveness. Jonson also made fun of the Puritans in Bartholomew Fair through Rabbi Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, who has a priggish sense of piety. Busy was an opportunist, who became an interfering nuisance and ended up in the stocks.[85]

A grocer, his wife, and their young apprentice were ridiculed by Beaumont in his Knight of the Burning Pestle.[86]

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[82] Gassner, op. cit., p. 217.

[83] Myers, op. cit., p. 32.

[84] Gassner, loc. cit.

[85] Ibid., p. 245.

[86] Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 155.

Though the Puritans attempted to silence the theatre in 1642, the theatres re-opened in 1660 and continued to hurl abuse and to laugh at the Puritans. Tatham's The Rump and Howard's The Committee both satirized the Commonwealth. The audience of the Restoration theatre, which was of an entirely different character than the audience of the Elizabethan theatre, was now in complete sympathy with the playwrights' attempts to make the Puritan's position look foolish.

> Noblemen in the pit and boxes, . . . the women of the court, depraved and licentious as the men, the courtesans with whom these women of quality moved and conversed as on equal terms, the fops, beaux, wits who hung on their society made up at least four-fifths of the entire audience. Add a sprinkling of footmen in the upper gallery and a stray country cousin or two . . .[87]

That the Puritans were pretty shabbily depicted on the Elizabethan and Restoration stages is evidenced by the following quotation:

> But London tradesmen grew weary of seeing themselves pictured as grasping usurers, easily tricked by some witty gallant; . . . and they resented the cuckoldry which their stage counterparts invariably suffered from aristocratic dandies, . . . Moreover, plays frequently implied a loose morality displeasing to bourgeois audiences. Spendthrifts and wasters became heroes; witty rogues tricked their masters; sons and daughters resisted their parents; extravagance became a virtue and thrift a weakness to be mocked, and adultery, instead of being damned in awful sentences, was a subject of merriment.[88]

Thus it can be seen how the theatre disdained and defiled everything which the Puritans held to be good and honorable.

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[87] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Restoration Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 8.

[88] Wright, op. cit., p. 605.

The Puritan Retaliates and Corrupts the Theatre.

There was another and more practical objection to the theatre, which irritated the thrifty Puritans. The theatre interfered with work. "Drama," notes Alfred Harbage, "competed with labor in the use of daylight, and opportunity for playgoing was accordingly limited."[89] A continual complaint from the civic fathers was that the theatres drew apprentices and other servants from their ordinary work.[90] By Puritan standards, then, the plays were not only immoral and led to loose and sensual thoughts and behavior, but the theatres themselves were thought to be dens of vice filled with lazy vagabonds, pickpockets, and prostitutes;[91] and the theatre was also judged immoral because the labor supply was continually running off to catch the matinee.

The Puritans also objected to the theatre on the religious grounds that it conflicted with strict observance of the Sabbath, and even competed with Church services. Pressure brought to bear by the Puritans became strong enough to ban public performances on Sunday by order of the Mayor of London; although, greatly in contrast, during the reign of Elizabeth's successors, balls, masques, and plays were enjoyed

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89 Harbage, op. cit., p. 65.

90 Ibid., p. 14.

91 Ibid., p. 93.

by the Court on Sunday evenings.[92]

Plague, the Puritans considered, was the fault of the theatre. ". . . the cause of plagues is sin, if you look to it well: and the cause of sin are plays: therefore the cause of plagues are plays."[93] For aside from the vanity and ungodliness that they found in many plays, they also saw in the theatre a gathering place for the disorderly element of the city and a menace to the public peace and to the public health.[94]

These Puritans of the middle class took themselves seriously, unlike the aristocracy who considered earnestness and sincerity to be boorish. The following is an example of the importance with which the middle class regarded itself:

> No characteristic is more significant of the quality of the Elizabethan middle class than the self-respecting pride of the citizenry in their own accomplishments, and in the dignity of their position . . . Proud of their self-made success, proud of their material accomplishments, proud of their greatest city, London, the Elizabethan middle class developed a self-respect and a self-esteem that at times reached the proportions of smug self-satisfaction.[95]

All of the Elizabethan middle class could not have taken itself too seriously, however, for many of them attended

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[92] Myers, op. cit., p. 24.

[93] Arden, School of Abuse, cited by Aaron M. Myers, op. cit., p. 23.

[94] Blad, op. cit., p. 1.

[95] Wright, op. cit., p. 19.

the theatre where they were ridiculed and satirized. Harbage claims that the majority of the Elizabethan audience were craftsmen.

> Craftsmen, then, with their families, journeymen, and apprentices, must have composed the vast majority of "groundlings." . . . Those at the Globe had chosen play-going in preference to boozing and animal baiting.
>
> After the "Craftsmen" the next largest group in the London area was composed of the "Dealers and retailers." A few of these were merchants, wealthy and powerful, importing great cargoes and manipulating great sums. . .. The greater number were, however, simply shopkeepers.[96]

It seems reasonable to assume that all the middle class were not strict Puritans. The same English middle class which supported the guild productions of the mystery and morality plays of Medieval times would not suddenly turn its back on the theatre. Some, at least, would continue to support it. For ". . . the very tradesman-groups who furnished recruits to the cause of Puritanism had long nourished the production of plays."[97] Further evidence to support the theory that Elizabethan theatre was close to the hearts of the middle class is found in Wright's excellent book on the Elizabethan middle class. Wright opinioned that,

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[96] Harbage, op. cit., p. 61.

[97] Wright, op. cit., p. 603.

> Only with the invention of the motion-picture play has there come a renewal of the interest of the middle class in the theatre that approaches the support given by the citizens of their favorite playhouses in the London of Elizabeth and James, before the fierce controversy and class hatred had divorced the theatre from the amenities of middle-class life.98

The strict Puritan, on the other hand, felt that it was a sin not only to attend the theatre but ". . . to hang garlands on a May-pole, to drink to a friend's health, to fly a hawk, to hunt a stag, to play at chess, to put starch into a ruff . . ."99 By the standards of the strict Puritan, Shakespeare's plays were considered blasphemous, lascivious, obscene; but then any oath or religious figure of speech was "blasphemous," any scene of love-making "lascivous," and any allusion to sex "obscene."100

While not all the members of the middle class were punctilious Puritans, neither were all the Elizabethan playwrights indifferent or antagonistic toward puritannical feelings. ". . . a few dramatists and actors, notably Thomas Heywood, appreciated the sensibilities of the commercial groups and made strenuous efforts to placate public opinion, . . ."101 And according to Harbage, ". . . Heywood wrote for

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98 Ibid., p. 654.

99 Blad, op. cit., p. 22.

100 Harbage, op. cit., p. 9.

101 Wright, op. cit., p. 604.

apprentices and shopkeepers, . . ."[102] Not even the bitterest Puritan could ever say that Heywood made sin seductive or failed to drive home some pragmatic moral.[103] This spokesman for Puritan ideals pointed out the value of industry and upheld the concept of loyalty to the established order. His plays insisted that apprentices were faithful to their masters, that children were subservient to the wishes of their parents, and that subjects were subordinate to their rulers. He was never concerned with problems of absolute morality.[104] Like a true Puritan, Heywood insisted upon truthfulness because it established credit. Drunkenness, gambling, and riotous living, he condemned because they were ruinous to business.[105] One of his best known plays, A Woman Killed With Kindness, is said by Nicoll to be false, artificial, and filled with sentimentalism.[106]

Another Elizabethan playwright who was good to the middle class was Thomas Dekker. He was one of the Elizabethans to celebrate "the middle class that is rising both politically and socially in some proportion to its growing prosperity."[107]

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[102] Harbage, op. cit., p. 139.

[103] Wright, op. cit., p. 651.

[104] Ibid., p. 639.

[105] Ibid., p. 646.

[106] Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., pp. 201-2.

[107] Gassner, op. cit., pp. 253-4.

In The Shoemakers' Holiday, a shoemaker became the Lord Mayor of London. This "success story" must have pleased the groundlings with its general picture of artisan life. They were further flattered in the play when the nephew of an earl received permission from a king to marry a shoemaker's daughter. "It is the best social comedy of the age, and its democratic humor has commended it to our own time," wrote Gassner.[108] Nicoll stated that Dekker wrote sentimental stuff and concerned himself with the lives of the lower and middle classes.[109]

During this same period, however, the bulk of the Elizabethan dramatists continued to write for the tastes of the aristocrats and to use the Puritan as the butt of the gallant's jests. The Puritan ideals continued to be held up to ridicule, and fewer of the middle class patronized the theatre. "It is certain," says Harbage, "that an increasing number of Londoners stayed away from plays on moral and religious grounds and that this number by 1642 had become formidable."[110] When the Puritans gained control of the Parliament, one of the first laws they passed was one which prohibited the presentation of stage plays.

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108 Ibid.

109 Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., p. 167.

110 Harbage, op. cit., p. 68.

This ban on the English theatres existed as long as the Puritans continued to rule England. From 1642 to 1660 players were outlawed and theatres remained dark. When Charles re-opened the theatres, playwrights again began to write for the aristocrats. The Gallic tastes of Charles prevailed, and a highly refined form of satire, the comedy of manners, became popular on London's two patented stages. The comedy of manners concerned itself with the affectations and cultured veneer of aristocratic society. A manner was not considered a trait native to an individual, but a quality acquired by him from social intercourse.[111]

The Restoration playwrights continued the precedent laid down for them by the Elizabethan playwrights and made light of those ideals held sacred by the Puritans: thrift, hard work, sanctity of marriage, loyalty, and sincerity. But the Puritans did not remain silent for long.

In 1698 Jeremy Collier published his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. Soon afterwards the Restoration comedy became corrupted by Puritan sentimentality. Colley Cibber anticipated Collier by two years with his Love's Last Shift, 1696; and other playwrights were to tack on incongruous "moral" endings to an otherwise consistent piece of Restoration comedy of manners, because of

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[111] Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., p. 250.

the publication of Collier's puritannical indignation. There followed a whole series of "moral, immoral" plays, which have come down to the present day [Forever Amber was a beautiful example]. In these types of plays the most salacious and imaginative situations could be enacted as long as the Puritan's "the-wages-of-sin-are-death" concept was upheld. Vice was punished, but there seemed to be no restrictions upon vice until the brief and usually ineffectual ending of the play. Commented Nicoll,

> Nothing shows better the hypocritical veneer which spreads over the age. The reformers were satisfied because virtue triumphed in the end; the pleasure-loving spectators were willing to witness the wholly artificial conversions for the sake of the careless intrigue and loose dialogue of the preceding scenes.[112]

As the middle classes grew in importance and power, the close connection between the Court and theatre weakened.[113] Tears for an ordinary middle-class family were supplied by George Lillo in The London Merchant; or, The History of George Barnwell (1731).[114] In this early domestic tragedy was found the continuation of the sentimentalizing which corrupted the English theatre between the Restoration and the late Victorian period.

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[112] Ibid., p. 281.

[113] Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 8.

[114] Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., pp. 297-8.

> The sad truth is that between Restoration and late nineteenth century English drama there was a tremendous gap. The chasm was only partially bridged in the second half of the eighteenth century when a reaction against sentimental comedy brought John Gay's amusing ballad-drama The Beggar's Opera, Oliver Goldsmith's mild comedies, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan's long-cherished master-pieces The Rivals and The School for Scandal (1779).[115]

The fact that Puritan ideals came to be sentimentalized, instead of satirized by the theatre as was the custom in Elizabethan and Restoration days, was due in no small part to the changing character of the eighteenth century audience. Nicoll gives a sensible explanation for this phenomenon.

> This change was fully established in the reigns of Anne and the Georges. Anne was not interested in the playhouses; the first of the Georges could not have understood a word had he gone to the theatre; and as a consequence the actors, in search of a patron, turned from the King to the public. . . . The public, however, was not the public which had graced Shakespeare's stage; it was still composed largely of society and its servants. Lackeys filled the upper gallery . . . ladies of quality and their gallants flocked to the boxes, and critics and beaux thronged the pit. . . . For all that the audience seemed unchanged [from Restoration times], a great alteration had taken place. Many of the aristocratic families, partly because of excesses in the time of the Merry Monarch, partly because of ill-advised expenditures of money in the troublous days which preceded the succession of Queen Anne, had grown impoverished and no longer hesitated to replenish their coffers by judicious alliances with the wealtheir bourgeoisie. Tradesmen and aristocrats thus gradually came together, . . . the newer elements in audience also delighted in moralizations, in approaches toward sentimentalism, in scenes of pathos . . . by the sixties and seventies of the eighteenth century the battle was won, and victory passed to the side of the sentimental movment. The middle classes, without consciously striving toward it, had gained the mastery.[116]

[115] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 453.

[116] Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., pp. 260-1.

The indifference of the Georges toward the theatre, and the gradual transference of influence from the Court to the middle class, may have been due in part to an ancient antipathy which the German Protestants felt toward the theatre. From the days of Luther, who frowned upon the miracle plays as being idolatrous and irreverent --he forbade the appearance of Christ on the stage,-- the drama lost popularity in Germany. The medieval drama, for example, never altered itself sufficiently to suit the Lutheran faith and consequently died out in the Protestant principalities.[117] Hanover was Protestant.

The differences between the Gallic Charles II and the German George IV are differences in taste and spirit of their two ages. The following may account for the inadequate role played by the king under the Hanovers in relation to the theatre:

> It was unfortunate that George IV and his brothers, who were natural leaders of polite society, and whose influence might have kept alive the tradition of Versailles, were essentially vulgarians, whose German ancestry was displayed in a certain full-blooded grossness, and a heaviness of touch, but who were wholly lacking in German depth and soulfulness. The society of the Pavilion and Carlton House, with its monotony of drinking, drabbing, and damning, might have made Charles II turn in his grave![118]

The civilizing influences of France were lost to the English aristocracy and to the English theatre for many years after the French Revolution. From 1789, the influence of the

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[117] Gassner, op. cit., p. 147.

[118] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 27.

French aristocracy of Versailles was no more. It affected the English upper class.

> For that class was now cut off from its most fruitful source of inspiration and thrown back upon its own insular resources. "La brutalite anglaise" --as its vaunted "manliness" was called South of the Channel-- luxuriated unchecked.[119]

Though the bourgeois or Puritan ideals came to dominate the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century English theatre, the original corruption of the theatre can be traced to the Elizabethan Puritans, whose virtues were extolled by Heywood and Dekker. Except for a brief interlude by Gay, Goldsmith, and Sheridan, the first major attack on Puritan attitudes, since the Elizabethan and Restoration playwrights, was made by such men as Shaw and Wilde. But by then the attitudes satirized were no longer called Puritan attitudes but Victorian conventions.

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[119] Ibid., I, 28.

CHAPTER III

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Amusements. The country gentleman had the advantage over the tradesman because he could fish, hunt, shoot, or ride whenever he wished. Groups of the middle class, however, began to organize rowing and cricket clubs. The poorer urban classes did not begin to participate to any degree in games and sports until the 1880's and 1890's. Lawn tennis was invented in 1874, and golf was imported from Scotland somewhat earlier. These sports, however, did not take popular hold until the latter part of the nineteenth century. In the same period the invention of the bicycle made it possible for townsmen who could not keep horses to reach golf and tennis clubs. By the close of the century sports became the normal part of the social life of the urban middle class.[1]

For the Victorian woman there was archery and a frivolous and unscientific croquet. For those who could afford it, there was riding, and even fox hunts. Skating, cricket, and hare and hounds, a forerunner of the paper-chase, were also popular with both sexes.[2]

The change from the domestic woman to the athletic woman, during the latter part of the century, was a part of

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[1] Lunt, op. cit., p. 751.

[2] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 186.

the major revolt against Victorian convention in the last two decades of the century. Physical exercise tended to make young women more virile and agressive; they began to compete for the first time against men in the field of sports. Thus, they anticipated their later struggle against a male world in the fields of politics, economics, and education. As a contrast to the Victorian ideal of womanhood, there was a new type of horsy women with hard dispositions ". . . who, as girls, had been proud to undergo the initiation of having their cheeks befouled with still warm blood of a fox --a thing that would have made tender-hearted Flora swoon."[3]

The lady champion tennis player began to make her appearance in the late 1880's, though for the majority of women tennis continued to remain merely a party game. Tennis, as was played then, contained that curious and amusing mixture of Victorian conventions and twentieth century attitudes. Ladies, to be sure, were out on the courts wielding raquets and competing against men, but they were forced to hold up their skirts with one hand while they held the racquet with the other. The men played in coats and straw hats, ". . . and as late as the early eighties one had heard of a host restraining gentlemen from the indecency of stripping off their coats at his tennis parties."[4] Highly competitive

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[3] Ibid., II, 227.

[4] Ibid., II, 228.

and expert tennis was a product of the twentieth century.

The invention of the "safety" bicycle was another landmark in the abolition of the sheltered Victorian woman. It was the device by which many Victorian women escaped from the home and domesticity, if only for a few hours. The bicycle built for two was a step toward the equality of the sexes. Male and female left the shelter of the home and braved the elements together. ". . . the great novelty was the woman cyclist," wrote Jackson, "and we immortalised her in our Palaces of Varieties:"

> Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,
> I'm half crazy all for the love of you!
> It won't be a stylish marriage,
> I can't afford a carriage,
> But you'll look neat,
> Upon the seat
> Of a bicycle made for two.[5]

The "Palace of Varieties," which arose in the provinces in the 1890's, was a new type of music hall. It presented two performances a night, "and we began to amuse ourselves."[6]

Just how far women had gone in the field of athletics may be judged by the following note written in 1891:

> Complaint was formerly made that ladies did not take enough exercise. Now it is argued that they take a great deal too much. They have gone from one extreme to another and athletics have been very much overdone. Whether it is in gymnastics, or lawn tennis, or swimming, or golf, they are too enthusiastic and have no idea of moderation.[7]

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[5] Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties (New York: Mitchell Kenerley, 1913, p. 36.

[6] Ibid., p. 35.

[7] J. Ashby Sterry, Graphic, July 18, 1891, cited by Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 350.

Like any group with a new freedom, the women were perhaps inclined to overdo it a bit.

The greatest entertainers in the nineteenth century continued to be the upper classes; they possessed the estates for the fox hunts and the large homes for dinners and balls. The State had not yet taken much of an interest in the recreation of its people, and the mania for professional athletes and spectator sports was only beginning to become evident toward the end of the century.[8]

Art. Because Victoria was the most significant personality in the Victorian age, it may be well to begin any examination of Victorian art with a brief comment on what the Queen considered acceptable. She reflected in matters of art the ordinary educated ideas of her time, as held by those who had no artistic perception. She wanted landscape painters to show her what she herself saw; similarly, the worth of a portrait was in relation to its physical likeness to the sitter. Queen Victoria felt that the spirit within was of no business of the artist and that it must be properly dressed. It was said that she approved the Prince Consort's happy idea of hanging the Rembrandts and the Van Dykes at Windsor higher on the walls, in order to see her own family Winterhalters more advantageously.[9]

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[8] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 348-9.

[9] Benson, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

"Very par'ful" was a common term of praise for Victorian masterpieces; the rest were "Perfectly sweet."[10] The Puritan gospel of work dominated Victorian art. It was the old middle class concept of all value being determined by hours of work, or dollars and cents. The Victorian always looked for work, which he considered value, in his art. Hence, there arose a demand for solidity and elaboration, and a corresponding distrust for any sort of genius that did not have the capacity for taking infinite pains. "The Victorians dearly loved a plodder."[11]

> The gospel of work, or of self-help, was more vital to the Victorians than that of love, and this imparts a noticeable bias to their aesthetic valuations. The Victorian political economy was inclined to determine the value of commodities by the amount of work put into them, rather than their use to the consumer. And in judging of a book or a picture, the Victorian liked to feel that he was getting work for his money.[12]

Wingfield-Stratford described the nineteenth century as a period when England suffered a marked decline in upper class taste and a rise of a new and all-powerful bourgeoisie, ". . . without any traditions of culture, and so busy competing for the means of life, that they had scant leisure to devote to its graces."[13]

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10 Ibid., p. 219.

11 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 217-8.

12 Loc. cit.

13 Ibid., I, 222.

The revolt against the smug conventions of Victorian art began far back in the Victorian Epoch with the pre-Raphaelites. This fellowship of artists was founded in the 1840's by Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. Dante Gabriel Rossetti joined them soon after their inception. These men held that up until the year 1848, Raphael had been the last of the inspired painters. The pre-Raphaelites dedicated themselves to the painting of pictures which were to be inspired by moral as well as artistic beauty and whose subjects were in themselves to be of an elevating character.[14]

Others who joined this movement were Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris. It was Morris' aim to restore beauty to modern domestic life. Chairs, tables, carpets, glass, and wall-papers were to shed their Victorian ugliness under the direction of William Morris. He designed works of honest manufacture made of vegetable dyes and seasoned wood.

> William Morris was also their poet, and for prophet they had Ruskin, who with the full force of his authoritative eloquence proclaimed the splendour of the new dawn now beginning to light the face of the Artless earth.[15]

Burne-Jones became famous for his use of pale and melancholy women. For a time in cultured circles it was considered fashionable to be pensive and willowy. The aesthetic cult of

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[14] Benson, op. cit., pp. 220-1.

[15] Ibid., p. 221.

the eighties was influenced by the pre-Raphaelites.[16]

At their first exhibition appeared the controversial "Nocturne in Black and Gold," by Whistler. There was certainly none of the traces of Victorian convention in the art displayed.

> . . . not a single specimen of the well-groomed Highland cattle, nor a grouse nor a birch tree nor a glimpse of the English Channel was to be seen there, nor a portrait of any chairman of City Companies, . . .[17]

Formerly the Royal Academy had always been the authority in the English art world. To appear on its walls conferred on the aspirant a certificate of artistic soundness and respectability. By the late 1870's, however, the pre-Raphaelite school set up an authority of its own. Its members pledged themselves not to submit their applications to the Lord Chamberlain of Burlington House.[18]

Dandies. The English dandy, who has a long and colorful career, came back into vogue in the 1890's. He was, as has been mentioned, partially a product of the pre-Raphaelite movement. Though he was more popularly referred to by his contemporaries as an aesthete, a better appellation is dandy. He belonged to an old school of thought, deeply rooted in the British soil. He opposed the conventional attitude of the

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[16] Ibid., p. 223.

[17] Ibid., pp. 222-3.

[18] Loc. cit.

Victorians in almost all aspects of life. He felt that bad art was that which photographed or copied life and nature. The dandy, or aesthete, looked upon natural life as only rough material for art; he insisted that nature must be translated in terms of artistic conventions before it could be called art.[19]

Dandyism is related to the attitude toward life which the gallants of the Restoration brought over with them from France. These English noblemen were forced to live in exile in France during the time when England was under the heel of the Puritan. Dandyism was, in fact, "the Pagan's reply to Puritanism."[20] And similarly, the dandies of the 1890's were the Pagan reply to Victorianism.

The fact that men and women were beginning to pay more attention to their dress was an indication of the revolt against the plainness of Puritanism, or Victorianism. "Over-ornamented rooms," wrote Herbert Spencer in late Victorian England, "are even more numerous than over-dressed women."[21] Max Beerbohm, another contemporary of that same period, said in a similar vein,

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[19] Jackson, op. cit., p. 129.

[20] Ibid., p. 133.

[21] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 309.

> For behold! the Victorian era comes to its end and the days of sancta simplicitas is quite ended. The old signs are here and the portents warn the seer of life that we are ripe for a new epoch of artifice. Are not men rattling the dice-box and ladies dipping their fingers in the rouge-pot?[22]

That men shaved their faces clean was also a revolt against Victorianism. Clean-shaven faces were in opposition to the aggressive hairiness and aggressive manliness of the Victorians. Proud of their male sex, men were in the habit of letting their beards grow. "The Dundrearys of the sixties were going out of fashion, only to become joined together into the full-bottomed beards."[23] The dandies of the nineties preferred clean-shaven faces and long hair, in the manner of the Restoration gallants.

The beardless dandies with the long hair much admired the artificial and the stylized. "Style is everything," was a favorite phrase of Oscar Wilde. They were not afraid of the exotic or the foreign; indeed, these hedonists craved new experiences of the senses. There was a strong Oriental influence in the England of the 1890's. Colors, jewels, exotic themes, exotic backgrounds --such as the pagan qualities of The Rubaiyat, The Picture of Dorian Gray-- made a frank appeal to the sensual. Unlike the Greeks, these men did not love beauty with economy; they were more like the Persians who

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[22] Jackson, op. cit., p. 130.

[23] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 77.

loved with lavishness and exaggeration.[24]

The Restoration dandies also loved that which was exotic and foreign; that which appealed to their senses. Descriptions of those lavish heroic drama productions, resplendent with the plumes of Aztec and Incan nobility, can be read in present-day libraries. Students complain, justifiably, about having to read the dull scripts of The Indian Queen and The Indian Emperor stript bare of all that made the plays attractive and sensational to Restoration audiences: namely, the colorful, and often official and authentic, costumes. In doing a popular historical play, the coronation robes were sometimes loaned to the players by the ruler. The heroic dramas were spectacles to please the senses of the Restoration aristocracy; they were not considered literature.

Like the Restoration dandies, the late Victorian dandies were color conscious. Green and yellow were perhaps the two most popular colors, among the rebels; while white, according to Jackson, remained the favorite for the average taste.[25]

Not only sight, but taste and smell were also appealed to in this reaction against the disciplined and ascetic life of the Puritan, whose pattern the somber Victorian had followed. The desire for new sensual experiences led many to take drugs

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[24] Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way to Western Civilization (New York: The New American Library, 1949), p. 95.

[25] Jackson, op. cit., p. 169.

and stimulants.

> Certain drugs seemed to gather about them an atmosphere of romance --it was fashionable to drink absinthe, for example, and to discuss its "cloudy green" suggestiveness-- and all sorts of stimulants and soporifics, from incense and perfumes to opium, hashish, and various forms of alcohol, were used as means to extend sensation beyond the range of ordinary consciousness, along with numerous well-known and half-known physical aids to passionate experience. The age was extroardinarily sensitive, for instance, to the suggestiveness of sex. The subject was discussed with a new interest and a new frankness in essays and novels and plays; . . . Thus sex-inquisitiveness awoke slumbering aberrations in some and suggested them to others, with the result that definite perverse practices became associated with the "advanced" movement.[26]

This physical awakening seemed to be a characteristic of the late Victorians, whether it was on the playing fields in the country or the drawing rooms in the city. A sensual awakening took place in the government as well, and the State took a new interest in the health andasanitation of the nation. "In no respect was progress more marked," stated Wingfield-Stratford, "than in everything connected with health, and the prolongation of life. . . . Hygiene and sanitation were becoming matters of state concern, . . ."[27]

The change of the male from the grim and somber earnestness of an earlier Victorian period to the gayer and more lighthearted demeanor of the late nineteenth century was observed by John Galsworthy, a contemporary of Wilde and Shaw and author of that epic on Victorian England, The Forsyte

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[26] Ibid., pp. 152-4.

[27] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 312-3.

Saga. In that book he wrote,

> Three or four of Francie's lovers now appeared, one after the other; she had made each promise to come early. They were all clean-shaven and sprightly, with that peculiar kind of young-man sprightliness which had recently invaded Kensington; they did not seemeto mind each other's presence in the least, and wore their ties bunching out at the ends, white waistcoats, and socks with clocks. All had handkerchiefs concealed in their cuffs. They moved buoyantly, each armoured in professional gaiety, as though he had come to do great deeds. Their faces when they danced, far from wearing the traditional solemn look of the dancing Englishman, were irresponsible, charming, suave; they bounded, twirling their partners at great pace, without pedantic attention to the rhythm of the music.[28]

Consciously, or unconsciously, the attitudes of the dandies began to affect the attitudes of late Victorian society.

Eating, drinking, smoking. The Victorians, like the Puritans, were fond of great feasts. The chief method of entertainment was the dinner party. Everyone dressed for dinner, whether he was to eat at his own house or at another's. The guests were expected to arrive within half an hour of the time fixed by invitation, and nothing but death or mutilation was permitted to detain them. After the meal, the gentlemen remained over their wines an hour longer, while the women retired to the drawing-room. The men later joined the ladies to take coffee, in the drawing-room.[29]

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[28] John Galsworthy, The Forsyte Saga (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928), pp. 165-6.

[29] Harling, op. cit., pp. 103-4.

A more careful examination of the Victorian dinner is provided by Benson.

> There was thick soup and clear soup (a nimble gourmand had been known to secure both). Clear soup in those days had a good deal of sherry in it. There was a great boiled turbot with his head lolling over one end of the dish and at the four corners of the table were placed four entrees. Two were brown entrees, made of beef, mutton, or venison, two were white entrees made of chicken, brains, rabbit, or sweetbreads, and these were handed round in pairs ("Brown or white, Madam?") Then came a joint made of the brown meat which had not figured in the brown entrees, or if only beef and mutton were in season, the joint might be a boiled ham. My mother always carved this herself, instead of my father: this was rather daring, rather modern, but she carved with swift artistic skill and he did not, and she invariably refused the offer of her neighboring gentlemen to relieve her of the task. Then came a dish of birds, duck, or game, and a choice followed between substantial puddings and more airy confections covered with blobs of cream and jewels of angelica and ornamental Gothic sugarings. A Stilton cheese succeeded and then dessert. My mother collected the ladies' eyes, and the ladies collected their fans and scent-bottles and scarves, and left the gentlemen to their wine.[30]

Sherry was a popular drink at this time. Macaulay was said to have served a half-a-dozen bottles of the best sherry and a dozen of good champagne at one of his dinners at Tunbridge Wells.[31] Drinking, however, except for carefully chosen wines to go with the meal, was not heavily indulged in.

> In these festive evenings of the seventies prolonged drinking of port and claret had gone out, smoking had not yet come in, and so when the decanters of port and claret had gone round twice, and sherry had been offered (it was called a white-wash), the host rang the bell for coffee. The men then joined the ladies, and the ladies who had been

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[30] Benson, op. cit., p. 15.

[31] Harling, op. cit., pp. 108-9.

> chattering together in a bunch, swiftly broke up, . . . so that next each of them should be a vacant chair, into which a man inserted himself, prudently avoiding those who had been his neighbours at dinner.[32]

Apparently, if the Victorian woman wished to drink more than coffee --for every home did not serve wine with the meal-- she was forced to do so in the privacy of her bedroom.

Tea became popular only in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It was this time that the tea-party habit became a prominent feature in the lives of the Victorian matrons. Omnibuses and the growing ease of transportation about the city provided the women with the means of conveyance, for those who did not have a private carriage at her disposal. Tea should be ranked with the bicycle as significant symbols of their liberation. The tea-party gave the feminine world a chance to exchange opinions and formulate ideas of their own. "These afternoon tea-parties of the 'sixties onwards played an important part in women's emancipation and suffrage."[33]

Victorians had a real prejudice against tobacco and smoking. This prejudice extended to both sexes. A story went around that Tennyson wished to indulge his weakness for tobacco while he was a week-end guest at someone's great house. He asked his hostess permission to smoke in the privacy of his bedroom. His hostess refused point blank and

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[32] Benson, op. cit., pp. 16-7.

[33] Harling, op. cit., pp. 118-9.

further pointed out that the habit was not only objectionable but a fire hazard, and that she never relaxed her prohibitive rule.[34]

Economics. The break up of the old English landed aristocracy and the transference of power to the industrial middle class was due in no small part to the falling price of domestic corn(which the United States calls wheat). In the war year, 1855, corn sold for seventy-four shillings; after 1877 it never touched fifty shillings again. In 1884 it dropped below forty shillings, and around 1894 corn sold for as low as nineteen shillings. The grazing counties stood the storm best, but the corn counties were striken beyond recovery. Weather conditons also allied themselves against the aristocracy; 1879 was the wettest year, and 1894, the driest, in memory.[35]

The aristocracy originally meant birth, land, and wealth. In the nineteenth century, aristocracy, as the land grew poorer, meant wealth itself. Some of the landed aristocracy maintained itself by convenient marriages with industrial wealth. G. K. Chesterton called the acceptance of the new wealthy middle class by the older landed aristocracy the "Victorian Compromise." Likewise, the "Victorian Compromise"

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[34] Walford, op. cit., p. 21.

[35] G. M. Young, Victorian England (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 145-7.

implied support by the new wealth of the old aristocratic institutions, such as the House of Lords and the fashionable clubs and schools.

Unlike the middle class in France, which demanded in the French Revolution a destruction of the aristocratic institutions and titles, The English middle class demanded no such radical democratic program. All they wanted was a compromise with the aristocracy. The aristocracy obliged by letting down the barriers and recruiting itself more freely from the middle class. "It was then also that Victorian "prudery" began: the great lords yielded on this as on Free Trade."[36]

Chesterton also believed that the industrial system, run by a small class of capitalists on a theory of competitive contract, was established early in the nineteenth century and was one of the primary beliefs of Victorianism.[37] Because the capitalists' social position was dependent upon money alone, they sought to exploit their wealth to the uttermost. Wealth, which was only a means to the aristocracy of birth, became an end in itself to the aristocracy of money. Love of money meant love of possession. The "sense of property," wrote Galsworthy, was the touchstone of Forsyteism, and the

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[36] Chesterton, op. cit., pp. 30-1.

[37] Ibid., pp. 232-3.

foundation of good morality.[38]

Money did not play such an important part before the agricultural depression because overflowing incomes were assured for the great landowners. It was one of the assumptions of this "Society" that money was plentiful enough and was no object to anyone. But this was only during the earlier part of the Victorian Era.[39] Conditions changed after 1870.

Lunt placed the blame of the agricultural depression on American wheat.

> After 1873 there was a severe agricultural depression which lasted for the remainder of the century. The cause of the depression was American wheat. New railroads which connected the western prairies of the United States with the seaboard made it possible to ship wheat to Great Britain and sell it at a price with which the British growers could not compete. Soon wheat began to come also from Canada and other countries, and grain was followed by meat from the United States, Australia, and Argentina. . . . farmers, who were protected from the competition by no tariff, faced ruin . . . the rents of the landlords and the wages of the agricultural laborers declined.[40]

Thus it was that the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad in the United States played its part in the destruction of the landed aristocracy in England.

Batho and Dobree also believed that America played an important part in the break up of the English social barriers.

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38 Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 200.

39 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 30.

40 Lunt, op. cit., pp. 745-6.

> America, thanks to the railway and the now punctual steamship, overwhelmed the English farmer with wheat from the Middle West. The Australian, with the new refrigerating process, could send his hitherto unexportable mutton to Smithfield. The intensive farming of the old country with its high rent and high labour cost, could not compete with the colonial countries, their free land, their mechanisation, and their unbroken soil.41

As the wealth of the landed aristocracy was decreasing, the wealth of the new industrial middle class was increasing. After steam superseded sails, Great Britain became both the foremost builder of ships in the world and the principal carrier of the world's commerce. Improved transportation meant an expansion of British industry and commerce, which took place after 1850 and made Great Britain for the next quarter of a century the "workshop of the world."42

The changing economy of England from an agricultural nation to an industrial nation and the changing status of an aristocracy based on wealth rather than land accompanied the changes which were taking place in other phases of Victorian life. The old was making way for the new.

Education. George Bernard Shaw wrote of his Victorian school days that they were the most completely wasted and mischievous part of his life. He called the school which he attended a place where they put Caesar and Horace into the

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41 Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobree, The Victorians and After (London: R. M. McBride and Company, 1938), p. 141.

42 Lunt, op. cit., pp. 744-5.

hands of small boys, and expected the result to be an elegant taste of knowledge of the world. He further stated that because his parents allowed him to go his own way, he acquired the habit of freedom, which most Englishmen and Englishwomen of his class and of his time never acquired and were never permitted to acquire.[43]

One of the first Victorian teachers to grasp the fact that boys had minds and that the purpose of public schools was not merely to fill those minds with Greek particles and irrelevant knowledge was Oscar Browning, an Eton master and a modern educator. He opened young minds to new ideas, and forced boys to think. His colleagues of that day looked with suspicion on Oscar Browning's attempt to break from the theories of traditional education.[44]

The public school neglected intellect and despised culture. The emphasis was upon games, discipline, and conformity. It was a type of education that, "while training the will, acted as an almost infallible extinguisher upon the intelligence."[45]

There were, however, a few changes which took place during the latter half of the century. Universal elementary education was enforced by law in 1870, and university extension

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[43] Cunliffe, English Literature During the Last Half Century, op. cit., p. 120.

[44] Benson, op. cit., p. 112.

[45] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 158.

and other organizations for adult education were established. King's College at Cambridge, once exclusively for Etonians, opened its doors to other students and put an end to the life-fellowships. These Life-fellows originally came from Eton and were ensconced permanently at King's College for the rest of their lives, being allowed a small amount for living expenses.[47] Accompanying the breakdown of the social barriers of the upper classes was the breakdown of the exclusiveness of the schools in England.

General View. Victorianism represented the triumph of the middle classes. The first Reform Bill of 1832 gave them political power; the second Reform Bill of 1867 established their control. The dominating ideas throughout the period --and the reactions against them-- were those based on middle class idealism and middle class prosperity. The reaction against these ideas, which took place in the latter half of the century, was a revolution in thought. There was no political principle, no religious dogma, no social tradition, no moral convention that was not called in question.[48]

The views held by those in authority, however, were those which were supported by the full weight of traditional opinion. And if those in authority ever had occasional

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[46] Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., p. 12.

[47] Benson, op. cit., p. 108.

[48] Cunliffe, English Literature etc., op. cit., p. 15.

doubts as to their own material importance they had none about their virtue and righteousness.[49]

Characters from Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga may be said to represent the Victorian England which believed in "trade and individualism at five perccent. and your money back."[50] The respectability of those middle class characters was described by Galsworthy.

> Morals had changed, manners had changed, men had become monkeys twice-removed, God had become Mammon --Mammon so respectable as to deceive himself. Sixty-four years that favoured property, and had made the upper middle class; buttressed, chiselled, polished it, till it was almost indistinguishable in manners, morals, speech, appearance, habit, and soul from the nobility. An epoch which had gilded individual liberty so that if a man had money, he was free in law and fact, and if he had not moneyyhe was free in law and not in fact. An era which had canonised hypocrisy, so that to seem to be respectable was to be.[51]

"The Victorian Age," wrote Inge, "was the culminating point of our prosperity. Our great wealth, indeed, continued to advance till the catastrophe of 1914."[52]

Despite this material prosperity, or perhaps because of it, there were many who were not happy with the ideals of the Philistines. The revolt in art, began by the pre-Raphaelites, was an example of this discontentment. People began to search for new values and new standards. These new ideas and

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49 Jackson, op. cit., pp. 152-4.

50 Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 444.

51 Loc. cit.

52 William Ralph Inge, The Victorian Age (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 35.

concepts began as an expression of the views of a small minority. By word of mouth, but more by the written word, these new attitudes came to be accepted by more and more people. It grew into a movement, sometimes called the aesthetic movement.

The spirit of unrest during the last years of the century was everywhere.

> The spirit of unrest which manifested itself during the last years of the century in legislative reforms, a new status for woman, and the relaxation of parental authority and discipline was clearly reflected in the newspapers, periodicals, novels, and poetry of the time.[53]

Those in authority were outraged. The prosperous and contented middle class felt that to let off steam and then to settle down into a respectable routine of work and thrift was one thing, but to let off steam and refuse to settle down was serious frivolity; and they had the law and the church to support their point of view. It was outrageous and immoral.[54]

The aesthetes, or dandies, challenged Victorian respectability. They were the lawful successors or exponents of Ruskin, Arnold, and Browning. Wrote Young,

> They brought, or brought back, into English life much that we should be poorer without: they recovered for us something of a European standing, and something of a European outlook: refining form and opening new sources of delight. The mischief lay in the addiction to what was less excellent so long as it was less known, to mere

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[53] Cunliffe, Leaders etc., op. cit., p. 264.

[54] Jackson, op. cit., pp. 152-4.

> perversity. But the movement furnished its own corrective in the comedy which it created or provoked [Gilbert's Patience].55

It struck one author that the 1890's were tolerant of novelty in art and ideas to the degree that it would seem as though the declining century wished to make amends for several decades of intellectual and artistic monotony.56

> Anything strange or uncanny, anything which savoured of freak and perversity, was swiftly labeled fin de siecle, and given a certain topical prominence. The term became a fashion, and writers vied one with another as to which should apply it most aptly.57

An example of this fin de siecle, sometimes called "decadent," philosophy toward life is found in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray. The following is an illuminating passage,

> Yes, there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely Puritanism that is having, in our day, its curious revival [italics not in the original]. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment.58

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55 Young, op. cit., p. 163.

56 Jackson, op. cit., p. 18.

57 Ibid., p. 21.

58 Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, cited by Holbrook Jackson, Ibid., pp. 30-1.

The 1890's were rather chaotic years of change and contrast. Never was there a time when the young seemed so young or the old so old, was one author's comment. He stated further,

> . . . and if the bourgeoisie of the Eighteen Eighties were inspired to throw their mahogany into the streets, as we have been assured by Max Beerbohm, their successors of the Eighteen Nineties were barely constrained from doing the same with their most cherished principles.[59]

Jackson wrote of the 1890's,

> People said it was a "period of transition," and they were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or more! But as a matter of fact there was no concerted action. Everybody, mentally and emotionally, was running about in a hundred different directions.[60]

The personality of Aubrey Beardsley typified the spirit of the 1890's. He represented not so much an art as an idea. In his drawings he represented a consistent search after new and more satisfying experiences. Max Beerbohm believed that many of his earlier drawings which seemed morbid and horrible were only the outcome of a boyish desire on the part of Beardsley to shock conventional Victorians. Like the Nineties, he was restless, inquisitive, and impudent. He made illustrations for Lysistrata which were judged as cynical and indecent by his contemporaries.[61]

It was considered quite daring when Mr. Fisher Unwin, a publisher, showed his modernism by advertising his books

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[59] Jackson, op. cit., p. 34.

[60] Ibid., pp. 34-5.

[61] Ibid., p. 123.

by means of posters designed by Aubrey Beardsley.[62] A product of his age, Beardsley was always most content where there was the greatest noise and bustle, the largest number of people, and the most brilliant light: that was the picture of the age as well as of its epitome, Aubrey Beardsley.[63] He was considered another one of the "doomed" figures of the period, dying of consumption at the age of twenty-five, a devout Catholic, and begging his friends at his death bed to destroy his bawdy drawings.[64]

Another young prodigy of late Victorian England was Max Beerbohm, who contributed a great deal of his work while he was under twenty-four years of age. As artist and author, he was an example of the precocity of the period. Sir W. S. Gilbert satirized the prodigies in his day in "Precocious Baby," who was born with

> A pipe in his mouth, and a glass in his eye,
> A hat all awry,
> An octagon tie,
> And a miniature—miniature glass in his eye.[65]

In 1896 Max Beerbohm published his Works and said he was terminating his life as a writer. He was twenty-four years old. At that early age he claimed he was outmoded and belonged to the Aubrey Beardsley period. He stepped aside for

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[62] Ibid., p. 52.

[63] Ibid., p. 115.

[64] Richard Le Gallienne, The Romantic '90's (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1925), pp. 232-3.

[65] W. S. Gilbert, cited by Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., pp. 141-3.

the "younger generation," and succeeded George Bernard Shaw as dramatic critic of The Saturday Review, in 1898.

> He is the spirit of urbanity incarnate; he is town. He is civilisation hugging itself with whimsical appreciation for a conservative end. . . . When he reproves in either prose or pictures, he reproves with a smile.[66]

This extroardinary and modern personality managed to represent the decadence laughing, or rather smiling, at itself. His caricatures indicate his own amused impartiality. These pictures constituted a revival of caricature in England, where personal satire in pictures had almost become a lost art.[67]

Literature. In 1890 Ruskin and Walter Pater were both alive, and their aesthetic-social messages were accepted by an increasing number of people. George Meredith was finding popularity, as was Thomas Hardy. Tennyson was still alive, and Robert Browning had passed away only in the previous year, 1889. William Morris and Algernon Charles Swinburne were recognized as major poets, and had not yet finished some good work. The ardent John Henry Newman died in 1890. In science the great names of Thomas Huxley, John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer, and Francis Galton were honored among living geniuses. Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Pinero, and Henry James were contemporary literary figures, as was Rudyard Kipling.[68]

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66 Jackson, op. cit., p. 146.

67 Ibid., p. 151.

68 Ibid., pp. 43-4.

There was enough controversy and contradiction in the age to cause the gravest suspicions to be aroused over any long established belief. "Whenever people agree with me, I always feel I must be wrong," said Cecil Graham in Lady Windermere's Fan.[69]

There was a prodigious quantity of literature produced at this time. Not only was the quantity of literature extensive, but there was tremendous variety. All kinds of schools and cults and tendencies grew up and each one had its own vociferous adherents and opponents. Le Gallienne, himself a writer of the time, said that when he was a boy, poets were comparatively rare beings and that no one glibly called himself or herself a poet.[70] In the 1890's all that was changed.

> It was immensely invigorating to hear men speaking out in a natural human voice, as it was startling to see actually in print audacities of opinion that gave us some shock . . . One felt, too, that the New Journalism was grimly out for business, and there was an ominous rumbling in the air as of falling towers. . . . There was a vulgar exploitation of minor personalities. . . . one had a feeling that men were getting "famous" too quickly. The bud was already being taken for the flower. Hasty unripe biographies began to be written, and autobiography even was beginning to precede achievement.[71]

Two major influences upon the literature of the period came from modern science and from Continental writers. A

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[69] Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere's Fan, cited by Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., p. 161.

[70] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 2.

[71] Ibid., pp. 12-3.

conflict was brought about between the Victorian fundamentalistic religious beliefs and the findings of a modern scientist like Darwin with his theory of evolution. The scientific method came to be utilized in literature; and there grew up a group of writers who had the same desire for reality but who were much more factual and more profound than the writers of the neo-classical age.[72]

Another force that affected the writing of the time came from the Continent. The English literati were more dependent upon French and "foreign" writers than at any previous time.

> . . . after 1880 one can see in English letters the influence of the realism of the Frenchmen Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and de Maupassant; the naturalism of the Frenchman Zola; the symbolism of the Frenchmen Baudelaire and Verlaine or of the Belgian Maeterlinck; the brilliant Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Turgenev; the German Nietzsche's idea of the superman asserting his will to save mankind; the Frenchman Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution; the Austrian Freud's emphasis upon the subconscious mind; the hedonistic philosophy of the Persian Omar Khayyam; the American Mark Twain's pungent and often savage humor; the Norwegian Ibsen's or the Swedish Strindberg's severe indictments of conventional society. Moreover, in almost all of these influences there lie implicit and explicit revolts --revolts against authority and the established order of things.[73]

With the new fiction, the number of novel readers increased. The frankness of the modern novel descended directly from the French realists. The modern novelist, by contrast to the Victorian novelist, was not only frank, he was frankly

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[72] Woods, Watt, and Anderson, op. cit., II, 909.

[73] Ibid., II, 910.

amoral; his main concern was to get into his book the quality of life, the sense of reality, regardless of the presence or absence of moral ideas.[74]

Arthur Symons wrote in 1893,

> The most representative literature of the day . . . is certainly not classic, nor . . . romantic. After a fashion it is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin decadence; an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilising refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity. . . . this representative literature of today, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.

Of the decadent, or aesthetic, movement Symons wrote further,

> . . . to fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly; to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul; that is the ideal of Decadence.[75]

The Aesthetic movement lost favor following the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895. The general public had not previously been aware of the aesthetes, but with the trial they associated The Yellow Book, an excellent literary magazine to which, incidentally, Oscar Wilde had never contributed, and the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley with that which was ugly and sordid. The suddenness with which the decadent movement in English literature and art ceased, from that time, proved that English thought and morality, rooted in Puritanism, would never

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[74] Jackson, op. cit., p. 267.

[75] Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," Harpers New Monthly Magazine, 87:865-7, November, 1893.

tolerate such an exotic and foreign growth as the aesthetic, or decadent, movement.[76] While urbane London laughed at it through Gilbert's Patience and du Maurier's famous drawings, John Bull killed the movement humorlessly and with a vengance.

The first duty in life was no longer considered to be that of being as artificial as possible, as Oscar Wilde thought, nor was being natural considered to be obvious and inartistic. A reaction to the aesthetic movement and a return to Victorian standards seemed to be the trend.

It is interesting to note that Robert Louis Stevenson anticipated the end of artificiality in a letter written in 1893.

> The little artificial popularity of style in England tends, I think, to die out; the British pig returns to his true love, the love of the styleless, of the slapdash and the disorderly.[77]

For a time, however, the literature ran to epigram, "that poseur of syntax, and to paradox, that dandified juggler of ideas."[78]

Max Beerbohm wrote of these "artificial" writers,

> Delightful among fin de siecle writers were those masters of a new urbanity, which, although in the direct tradition of Addison and Steele, of Dr. Johnson and Charles Lamb, possessed a flair of its own, a whimsical perversity, a "brilliance," quite new to English letters.[79]

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[76] Jackson, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

[77] R. L. Stevenson, cited by Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 108.

[78] Jackson, op. cit., p. 134.

[79] Max Beerbohm, The Works of Max Beerbohm, cited by Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., pp. 47-8.

An example of this pagan impudence in revolt against grim Victorianism was the following poetry taken from Swinburne.

> What ailed us, O gods, to desert you
> For the creeds that refuse and restrain,
> Come down and redeem us from virtue,
> Our Lady of Pain, . . .[80]

It was an attack on Christianity and a plea to return to the old pagan gods; it was an attack on restraint.

With the passing of the pagan decadents also went the two favorite publications of the period, The Yellow Book and The Savoy. They were "the two lamps around which the most bizarre moths of the Nineties clustered. There were few essential writers of the Nineties who did not contribute to one or the other, . . . "[81] Nothing like The Yellow Book had ever been seen before. It was novelty naked and unashamed. People were puzzled, shocked, and delighted.[82] The magazine became the symbol of the period, the symbol of the aesthetes and the "decadents." Wilde appeared on the witness stand with a copy of it under his arm.[83]

It is almost pathetic to read W. Somerset Maugham's post mortem on The Yellow Book, a magazine which was once daringly modern, the center of a storm of protest and contention.

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[80] Algernon Swinburne, cited by Richard Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 223.

[81] Jackson, op. cit., p. 40.

[82] Holbrook Jackson, cited by Richard Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 227.

[83] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 162.

The man who is both contemporary to Victorian and twentieth century England writes,

> If one takes the trouble to look through the volumes of The Yellow Book, which at that time seemed the last thing in sophisticated intelligence, it is startling to discover how thoroughly bad the majority of its contributions were. I shiver a little when I turn these musty pages and ask myself whether in another forty years the bright young things of current letters will appear as jejune as do now their maiden aunts of The Yellow Book.[84]

It was here, however, that a battle was fought between Victorian reticence and twentieth century frankness, between Victorian romance and the realism of the French novel.

Because the Victorian writers wrote for a public, it is evident that those writers must have reflected something of the beliefs and attitudes of that public. It might be useful, therefore, to list a few of the conventional attitudes which were attacked by a few of the literary men of the nineteenth century.

Mathew Arnold (1822-1888). His frontal attack on the utility of the Victorian attitude of the machine age was summed up when he asked his famous question: what was the use of a train taking them quickly from Islington to Camberwell, if it only took them from a dismal and illiberal life in Islington to a dismal and illiberal life in Camberwell?[85]

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84 W. Somerset Maugham, The Summing Up (New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1938), p. 121.

85 Chesterton, op. cit., pp. 75-6.

George Meredith (1828-1909). He was a Pagan, according to Chesterton, who took to Nature as naturally as a Greek.[86] There were no religious difficulties with Meredith's frank acceptance of the theory of evolution. "It became, indeed, his main source of inspiration and the base of his thought."[87] Like Huxley, George Eliot, and other leaders of the new movement, Meredith found no need in his philosophy for a belief in personal immortality and saw no evidence to support such a belief. He took a stand in favor of suffrage for women, and recommended their education. "His women, above all, feel and think and live; and they belong to the modern world he helped to create, . . ."[88] He was the author of such famous books as The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, 1859.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). Chesterton called him a "brooding village atheist."[89] Hardy attacked the Victorian convention of absolute parental control of children in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 1891. He also stormed against the Victorian reticence of sex, in Jude the Obscure, 1895. Hardy's expression of sex in the latter book took a morose and tragic turn, probably because of a reaction against the severe repression of sex in the English novel of the previous

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[86] Ibid., p. 139.

[87] Cunliffe, English Literature During the Last Half Century, op. cit., p. 21.

[88] Ibid., p. 33.

[89] Chesterton, op. cit., p. 143.

generation. He felt that God was without pity, as he was without purpose or plan.[90]

Samuel Butler (1835-1902). Butler began his revolt by going against family tradition and refusing to become a minister. He preferred sheep raising in New Zealand. Butler abhorred the zealot and insisted that God did not intend, nor did he want, his people to be too good.

His stand against the Victorian family was vehement. No one who has read The Way of All Flesh can deny that. He felt that the institutionalized family was a source of the most refined tyranny and cruelty. He attacked not the individual but the institution. It was his opinion that the parents didn't like the idea any better than the children. Butler wrote on the subject,

> I believe that more unhappiness comes from this source [the family] than from any other --I mean from the attempt to make people hang together artificially who would never naturally do so. The mischief among the lower classes is not so great, but among the middle and upper classes it is killing a large number daily.[91]

He stated further that, "I had to steal my own birthright. I stole and was bitterly punished. But I saved my soul alive."[92] His most famous book, The Way of All Flesh, was published in 1903.

W. S. Gilbert (1836-1911). Gilbert laughed at the Victorian's curious union of sentimental thinking and stout

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90 Cunliffe, English Literature, etc., op. cit., pp. 48-56.

91 Ibid., pp. 77-8.

92 Ibid., p. 81.

practical acting. He wrote in the England of the 1880's, ". . . the safest and most comfortable world mankind has ever known."[93] He wrote of sweet, pretty girls, smart young dragoons, match-making mammas; "those genial exponents of the value of a title, a safe income, and a political pull; . . ."[94] Middle class values were satirized by Gilbert, just as they were by Wilde, with a chuckle and a smile.

George Gissing (1857-1903). By Gissing's standards, there was nothing worse in the Victorian novel than its sentimental account of love. He was another of the many late Victorian rebels who opposed the romantic, ideal love concept of the early Victorians. He considered the Victorian novel vulgar. It was his claim that not one married pair in ten thousand ever felt for each other in the same way that two or three couples did in every novel.[95] He also despised the sensational treatment of sex as written by the new "realists." He attacked the Victorian commercialism prevalent in his time, and had no respect for either conventional religion or the new Diety, cold and impersonal Science. He feared that science would restore barbarism under a mask of civilization, and destroy all simplicity, beauty, and gentleness of life.

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93 Hamilton, op. cit., pp. 76-7.

94 Loc. cit.

95 Cunliffe, English Literature etc., op. cit., p. 114.

Gissing was a product of the critical and changing times in which he lived. The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, 1903, was an example of his work.[96]

George Moore (1852-1933). He spent his youth as an art student in Paris and plunged deep into French art, literature, and life. Zola, Moore said, was the beginning of him. His primary interest became the French realists. His early novels, such as Confessions of a Young Man, 1888, were damned by the circulating libraries. His most famous book was Esther Waters, 1894, which proved to be both scientifically exact and artistically satisfying.[97] Mr. Gladstone approved of Esther Waters, and it was said that no other book had sold as well since Tom Brown's Schooldays.[98]

Marriage and The Home. A part of the domesticity of the times was a preoccupation with their gardens. Washington Irving commented upon this love of the English for horitcultural pursuits as being the most widespread of all Victorian hobbies and pastimes.[99]

The home, as has already been described, tended to be over-furnished. This was also described by Galsworthy.

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96 Cunliffe, Leaders of etc., op. cit., p. 276.

97 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 329.

98 Cunliffe, Leaders etc., op. cit., p. 281.

99 Harling, op. cit., pp. 34-6.

> He found the front drawing-room full. It was full enough at the best of times --without visitors--without anyone in it-- for Timothy and his sisters, following the tradition of their generation, considered that a room was not quite "nice" unless it was "properly" furnished. It held, therefore, eleven chairs, a sofa, three tables, two cabinets, innumerable knicknacks, and part of a large grand piano.[100]

In the Victorian ideal of marriage, the man was superior and supreme, and the more thoroughly the woman recognized that fact, the happier the Victorian marriage would be.[101]

The home was the all-pervading insitutuion in the nineteenth century. While the eighteenth century aristocracy had been inclined to see something a little vulgar in domesticity, the middle class of the nineteenth century flaunted its domesticity. Not content with this, the middle class imposed its own standards on the entire country and on all classes.[102]

Manners and Society. Romance was the very breath of the early Victorian culture. It was a social duty to react quickly and appropriately to every possible impression. If one did not have the emotion, he was expected to simulate one. Thus, the Victorian girl assumed an agitated bashfulness if

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100 Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 153.

101 Benson, op. cit., pp. 53-4.

102 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 158.

the occasion demanded, and the harridan looked up with submissive devotion into her victim's face when she posed for the daguerreotype.[103]

It was this romantic element in Victorian life that Wilde and Gilbert enjoyed satirizing [it was the same element in Puritan life that the Restoration comedy, and later Sheridan, enjoyed ridiculing]. For with the triumph of the middle class came the triumph of romance, accompanied by a discipline which was never forgotten from Puritan days.[104] Nothing was as dear to the romantic heart as a refined melancholy, and ladies showed their breeding by an occasional fainting fit or mild hysterical outburst.[105] At the same time, the Victorians believed that passions ought to be under control, and that self-sacrifice was better than self-indulgence.[106]

It was not until the close of Victoria's reign that the view that it was wrong to devote much time to pleasure began to lose favor. During the "Gay Nineties" people began to search for diversions outside the home.[107]

The Victorian social system, according to Wingfield-Stratford, began to break down about the beginning 1860's.

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103 Ibid., I, 95.

104 Ibid., I, 96.

105 Ibid., I, 98.

106 Ibid., I, 161.

107 Lunt, op. cit., p. 750.

The middle class began to lose prestige. A new generation of intellectuals rose in revolt against all the middle class held sacred. Mathew Arnold branded the middle class with the mark of Philistine. Du Maurier taunted the Victorian Society with snobbery. Gilbert, in his songs and operas, was the cause of infectious laughter at little tin bourgeois gods. "By the eighties 'bourgeois' was becoming a term of positive insult among middle class people with any pretensions of being advanced or genteel."[108]

Morals. Victoria herself set the moral standards for the Victorian Age. The Queen conducted her life on broad simple principles, hating anything flamboyant or "extroardinary." She was quite uninterested in problems of human nature and in the dim mysterious yearnings which inspire art and music. She was simple and sincere in her religion, troubled neither by ecstasy nor theological complexities, bringing up her children with affection and firmness in the fear of God and of herself. She set a fashion and conformed to the type which she had been largely instrumental in making. Her private life was rational, respectable, and unimaginative, and she made it public to her subjects when she wrote the Journal of her Life in the Highlands.[109]

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[108] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 328.

[109] Benson, op. cit., p. 32.

Victoria, in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1891, stood by the Victorian moral code which she herself had laid down. This was during a time when the moral tone in England had changed, and England was in a period of transition. The letter was in regards to a recent engagement of her grandson to Princess Victoria Mary of Teck. She wrote, ". . . I have every hope the young people will set an example of a steady, quiet life, which, alas, is not the fashion in these days."[110]

By the 1890's Victoria no longer represented the model in the world of fashion. She was an old woman who lived in retirement. The Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, became the leader of Society; and he was a man who was not afraid to pamper his senses a bit and to enjoy himself. Victoria did not allow her son to take part in governing England; therefore, he ruled in the world of fashion.

Before leaving Victorian morality, let it be said again that Ibsen was of primary importance in the breakdown of Victorian convention in England. His effective method of criticizing conventional morals by means of drama had a profound influence upon thinking people. Nietzsche was known only to the few who read German at the beginning of the decade, but before the end of the century, the first attempt at a complete edition of the works of Nietzsche was made. It was not until 1896 that any general interest in Nietzsche's ideas began in England. In that year Havelock Ellis contributed

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[110] Ibid., p. 191.

a study of the German philosopher to The Savoy.[111]

Music. Toward the latter part of the century the people were more inclined to go out evenings. As Jackson said, there were larger and brighter restaurants, dantier food and orchestras,""and we extended the habit of dining out."[112] Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay! was a popular nonesense chorus, which had its greatest vogue between 1892 and 1896. It was an expression of the time, almost a revolutionary battle cry for the new era.[113]

For serious music during the late Victorian period, there was Wagner. Wagner himself conducted his own work at Albert Hall on his visit to London in 1877.[114] Richter, who had worked under Wagner at Baireuth, conducted Wagner performances in London. He felt that England would set the example, and that Wagnerian music would someday return to Germany sung and not barked and yelled. "The Ring, Tristan, and Meistersinger, . . . were nobly given, . . . here at Covent Garden."[115]

A typical attitude of the English aristocrat of the 1890's was that of Lady Ripon, who was inclined to believe there was no hope for English composers and English singers.

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111 Jackson, op. cit., p. 155.

112 Ibid., p. 35.

113 Loc. cit.

114 Benson, op. cit., p. 261.

115 Ibid., p. 159.

She thought of them vaguely as people who wrote and performed oratorios in Cathedral towns. She was a typical cosmopolitan aristocrat of her day and preferred foreign products to native.[116]

Politics. As in the field of morals, politics were controlled by the middle class. The landed gentry bowed their heads to this rising class. The aristocrat's own Premier Peel, "who had taken office for the specific purpose of supporting the agricultural interest by Protection, sold the pass, and identified himself with the middle class policy of Free Trade in Corn."[117] Even the ruler identified herself with the middle class.

> Lord Beaconsfield . . . once said that if he wanted to forecast the effect of some Parliamentary measure on the minds of the middle-class, and distrusted his own judgment, he always consulted the Queen, and always found he had been right in accepting her opinion. . . . She was identical . . . with the governing class of her subjects, which she saw, long before any of her ministers perceived it, was no longer the aristocracy who then were the landlords of the greater part of English soil, but the middle-class.[118]

The family ties of the Hanovers were predominantly German. Victoria was of German blood, she married a German, she talked German to her family, and she married her eldest

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[116] Ibid., p. 162.

[117] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 105.

[118] Benson, op. cit., p. 24.

daughter to a German.[119]

Edward abolished the old tradition of the House of Hanover of marrying exclusively into German royalty. The Prince married a Danish Princess, the beautiful and popular Alexandra. The new spirit of the times in England welcomed the attractive royal pair. The domestic atmosphere of the Court ceased to be German, and the standards of the earlier Victorians were dying out. The spirit of the 1890's could truly be called Edwardian rather than Victorian.[120]

Wrote Benson,

> To him more than to anyone was due the break up of the mid-Victorian social tradition of frozen pompous dignity, and all its repressions and reticences. He broke down the staid hedges that surrounded society, and beckoned a quantity of lively and gay young persons . . .[121]

Religion and Philosophy Mr. Gladstone once said that the English character owed almost everything to the English Sunday and the English Bible.[122] This was certainly true for the Victorian character. There was nearly universal belief in the literal acceptance of the Bible and in a future life of eternal bliss or woe. Principles of right and wrong were laid down as to what the Victorian might and might not do on Sunday. There was always the danger that a picture or a word

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119 Ibid., p. 27.

120 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 20-5.

121 Benson, op. cit., pp. 86-8.

122 Flynn, op. cit., p. 78.

might produce evil results, might lead to loose and immoral thoughts. As scientific knowledge increased, the educated classes found it more difficult to accept the literal interpretation of every statement in the Bible; and the rise of week-end holidays and parties was but one indication that the strict observance of Sunday was passing.[123]

But for the greater part of the Victorian Age, the educated classes accepted the literal interpretation of the Bible and the strict observance of Sunday. When Benson's father, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, was a theology student at Cambridge, he wrote that his religious principle was not a thing of tender feelings or warm, comforting notions, but that it was full of perfect conviction, absolute belief, and rules to regulate his life.[124] Sunday at public school was rigidly observed. Benson wrote,

> . . . the schedule of devotional activities for the day of rest at Wellington, not forbidden to boys but compulsory on them, was really prodigious. There was chapel at nine in the morning, after which Bible verses were learned by heart and repeated to form-masters at ten. There was Chapel again at a quarter to twelve, and after dinner, at half-past one, there was more Bible-study, followed by a Bible-class in school at half-past three. A third Chapel service was held at half-past six, and there were prayers in the dormitories at nine. No secular books could be taken out of the school library that day, but a special section of it, furnished with devotional and religious volumes, was open for those who wanted them.[125]

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[123] Lunt, op. cit., pp. 751-2.

[124] Benson, op. cit., p. 50.

[125] Ibid., p. 60.

Concerning the literal acceptance of the Bible, Cruse wrote,

> The great majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen, not only the ignorant but also the educated and the devout, believed firmly in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. All that it contained was literally true, . . . The Reverend Theobald Pontifex, of Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, was in this respect typical of both the clergy and the laity of his day.[126]

Some theologians opposed Darwin's theory of organic evolution because it conflicted with the story of special creation as told in the book of Genesis.[127] The author Carlyle put his influence in the scale against Darwin, though he admitted that he had never read Darwin's book. Many of them who clamored the loudest had never read it.[128]

When Darwin's second book, The Descent of Man, appeared in 1871, the clamor against the book was just as loud as that which greeted The Origin of Species, his first book.[129] When Darwin died, in 1882, he was given a place in Westminster Abbey, though one Dr. Laing expressed not a singular opinion when he said that the fact of such a man being buried in the Abbey was a proof that England was no longer a Christian country.[130]

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126 Cruse, op. cit., p. 84.

127 Lunt, op. cit., p. 761.

128 Cruse, op. cit., pp. 95-6.

129 Ibid., p. 106.

130 Ibid., p. 107.

The Victorian still retained the Puritan hatred of any sort of joy or happiness that did not arise directly out of His worship. John Wesley denied play or holidays even for children, and opposed such practices as dancing, theatre-going, and even the drinking of that Chinese decoction of tea. Fear was the most common sentiment associated with the Lord.[131]

> The Paternal wrath and enmity to joy cast a hardening and depressing influence over the Victorian Age. . . . this latest version of the Protestant faith was to revive and intensify the concentrated moral earnestness that was the heritage of Puritanism. It was this quality that had made such a peculiar appeal to the men of trade and business among whom the strength of Puritanism lay.[132]

The Oxford Movement and the challenge of Newman were a revolt against the Victorian spirit, which was considered inconsistent and unnaturally serious.[133]

Others, like Mathew Arnold, tried to loosen the theological bonds of the Church. His enemies said that he was trying to establish agnosticism. G. K. Chesterton said of Mathew,

> It is fairer and truer to say that unconsciously he was trying to restore Paganism: for this State Ritualism without theology and without much belief, actually was the practice of the ancient world.[134]

Toward the end of the century, orthodox religion began

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131 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 64-6.

132 Ibid., I, 68.

133 Chesterton, op. cit., pp. 42-4.

134 Ibid., pp. 76-7.

to break up into a multiplicity of "faiths" or cults, such as Christian Science and Spiritualism; but much of the religious impulse gathered itself in the form of idealistic socialism.[135] George Bernard Shaw, an earnest and essentially religious man, was a product of that new socialistic trend. Shaw wrote, in 1896, that only by intercourse with men and women could man learn humanity. He must give and receive hate, love, and friendship with all sorts of people. Shaw favored the active, experimental life, typical of the 1890's over the contemplative one.[136]

In Man and Superman, Shaw stated his position in regards to realism over idealism. He explained his ideas of heaven and earth.

> Do you suppose heaven is like earth, where people persuade themselves that what is done can be undone by repentance; that what is spoken can be unspoken by withdrawing it; that what is true can be annihilated by a general agreement to give it the lie? No: heaven is the home of the masters of reality: that is why I am going thither.[137]

Another Victorian rebel, W. Somerset Maugham, gave his philosophy of life in a recent book.

> I came to the conclusion that man aimed at nothing but his own pleasure and that when he sacrificed himself for others it was only an illusion that led him to believe that he was seeking anything but his own gratification. And since the future was uncertain it was only common sense to seize every pleasure that the moment offered.

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135 Jackson, op. cit., pp. 247-8.

136 Loc. cit.

137 G. B. Shaw, Man and Superman, cited by Holbrook Jackson, op. cit., p. 241.

> I decided that right and wrong were merely words and that the rules of conduct were no more than conventions that men had set up to serve their own selfish purposes. The free man had no reason to follow them except in so far as they suited his convenience. Having then an epigrammatic turn, and epigrams being the fashion, I put my conviction into a phrase and said to myself: follow your inclinations with due regard to the policeman round the corner.[138]

The first great shock to Victorian complacency was the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species. After reading this book, it became obvious to anybody who chose to think that the seven days' creation, and the Adam and Eve story, were on a par of literal veracity with Jack the Giant Killer. With the Victorian faith, wrote Wingfield-Stratford, went the Victorian morality.[139]

Theatrical Conditions. "No genuine comedy or tragedy could rise out of the level greyness of early Victorian society," wrote Nicoll. The poor were struggling in a period of industrial change, and the rich were duller than they had been in the Augustan days.[140]

Nicoll wrote of early nineteenth century London theatre as the home par excellence of spectacularism and of melo-di dramatic effect. The melo-dramas used music freely, and the hero and heroine were almost always in distress. There was

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[138] Maugham, op. cit., pp. 177-8.

[139] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 324-5.

[140] Allardyce Nicoll, Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), I, 75.

a humorous confidant for the former, and a confidante for the latter. The villain was as black as the hero was white.[141]

When Queen Victoria came to the throne, in 1837, London had only two theatres at which regular drama could be legally performed. The two theatres were Drury Lane and Covent Garden.[142] In 1843 the stage was freed from the monopoly, for the first time since 1660, and new theatres were built.

A new audience was growing from the year 1840, and a definite change in attitude was apparent with the coming of Queen Victoria. Towards the end of the year 1848 Charles Kean was appointed to supervise the "Windsor theatricals." These were performances at court of successful plays taken from the London theatres. Three years later the young Queen engaged a special box at the Princess' Theatre, which she retained annually until her death. She marked her approbation of the theatre by constant personal attendance. Royal visits to the London theatre meant that the aristocracy once again began to attend what, during the early 1800's, had been only considered popular amusement. The Queen and Society managed to bring about a more sober and respectful audience; "but it was not until the seventies and eighties that we find a definite turning of the managers from the type of fare suitable for the

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141 Ibid., I, 101.

142 Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., pp. 312-3.

popular audiences of 1830 to that fit for the more representative audiences which had taken their place.[143]

By the 1890's the theatre was considered an important social organ; it became both school and church to a rapidly growing number. There was little rowdyism, no riots like the earlier part of the century, eight to eleven (theatre hours), and a growing fashionableness of the pit or dress circle.[144]

The prestige of the playwright after 1865 was improved. T. W. Robertson's Society appeared which, despite some sentimentality, heralded a movement toward realism. It also marked a return of social satire to the English stage. W. S. Gilbert soon added other satirical comments of society, and Oscar Wilde followed with his contributions.[145]

Sir Edmund Gosse discovered Ibsen for the British public, and William Archer began his life work of translating Ibsen's plays, in 1879. Henry Arthur Jones, who, by his own confession, came of puritanical background and never saw a play until he was eighteen, wrote plays with honesty and condemned his earlier melodramas.[146] Arthur Wing Pinero wrote one of the early problem type plays, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.[147]

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[143] Nicoll, A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, op. cit., I, 5-6.

[144] Ibid., I, 13-8.

[145] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., p. 453.

[146] Freedley and Reeves, op. cit., pp. 562-3.

[147] Ibid., pp. 563-4.

By the end of the century, the profession of the theatre was more highly esteemed. A half a dozen actors received knighthoods, and Oxford graduates and fashionable ladies began to take to the stage as a profession.[148]

The revolt in the theatre, as in other arts and social institutions, was formed against current social conventions and the prevailing morality of Victorian England. Sex and problems of sex occupied by far the greatest place in the new drama. The new dramatists attacked parental authority, romantic and sentimental love, and capitalism. There was a strong Feminist movement, stimulated by such plays as Ibsen's A Doll's House. The new dramatists came to take a definitely scientific view of life.[149]

Speaking of the drama of the 1880's and 1890's,

> It represented more clearly than any other form the bourgeois revolt against bourgeois conceptions which indicated the break-up of the Victorian view of life. It consistently attacked the basic assumption of society, but it stood for reform rather than revolution.[150]

An important work in bringing about the dramatic renaissance was that accomplished by the critics; chiefly G. B. Shaw, william Archer, and J. T. Grein. These three critics were convinced and ardent Ibsenists. George Bernard Shaw was the

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148 Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., p. 314.

149 Nicoll, British Drama, op. cit., p. 350.

150 Batho and Dobree, op. cit., p. 82.

critic and philosopher; William Archer was the critic and translator of the Master's plays; and J. T. Grein was critic, producer, and founder of the Independent Theatre, the earliest definite home of the Higher Drama.

A Doll's House was produced in London in 1889. Ghosts and Hedda Gabler were produced in 1891. These plays were criticized severely by the older critics. A Doll's House was taken on a three-years' world tour and revived in London in 1892, the same year in which the first stage performance of plays be Wilde and Shaw were seen. In the following year, 1893, no less than six plays by Ibsen were produced in London: The Master Builder, Rosmersholm, Hedda Gabler, Brand, An Enemy of the People, and A Doll's House. Besides these plays, there appeared Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, and Wilde's A Woman of No Importance. A new intelligent interest in the theatre was awakened.

The "new drama" was in the main, however, an occasional affair, highly experimental, and appealing only to a small and seriously minded group of "intellectuals." They very largely belonged to the literary fringe of the Fabian Society and other reform and revolutionary organizations. These people represented practically the sole supporters of the Independent Theatre, the Stage Society, and the New Century Theatre.[151]

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151 Jackson, op. cit., pp. 249-54.

The new drama already existed on the Continent in the plays of Ibsen, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck, Sudermann, Strindberg, and others. On the Continent both theatres and audiences were springing into existence in support of it.

> But here, save for Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde, we possessed no native plays at all comparable with these foreign ones, and until there was a certainty of such plays being produced few authors could be expected to go on writing them.[152]

The actor manager and his demand for plays that were written around himself, and his insistence that these plays enjoy a long run, retarded the full development of the new drama. A return of the repertory system was considered necessary to promote the variety of plays of the new type. Other obstacles were the absence of small and convenient theatres which this intimate type of drama demanded, the high rents for theatres, and the high salaries for principal actors.

It was difficult for Victorian England to look upon the theatre as a place where serious ideas, social and psychological problems, could be presented. The middle class had always looked upon the theatre as a place for idle amusement. These new plays were plays which glorified the will, and showed temperament in conflict with convention and will in conflict with circumstance. Under Shaw and Wilde, plays became realistic only incidentally. The drama was largely a drama of

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[152] Ibid., p. 255.

discussion.[153]

Between 1892 and 1896, Shaw wrote Widowers' Houses, Mrs. Warren's Profession, Arms and the Man, Candida, The Man of Destiny, and You Never Can Tell.[154] During this same period, 1892 to 1896, Wilde wrote Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance, Salome, An Ideal Husband, and The Importance of Being Earnest.[155]

Women. "The legend of the Victorian woman," wrote Wingfield-Stratford, "boils down to the fact that the Victorians had a different ideal of womanhood from that fashionable to-day."[156] Woman tried to live up to that Victorian ideal, for there was a conventional role which was already cut out for her to play in the Victorian social scheme. She knew, too, that her matrimonial chances would very largely depend upon her success in "impersonating [italics not in the original] the prescribed type."[157]

The Victorian woman was trained from childhood to assume her role. There was an insistence that the daughters possess all those virtues which were highly esteemed both in the Victorian and Puritan middle-class families. Book after

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153 Ibid., pp. 259-60.

154 Ibid., pp. 235-6.

155 Woods, Watt, and Anderson, op. cit., II, 928.

156 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 314.

157 Ibid., I, 174.

book appeared, crammed from cover to cover with exacting demands to be placed upon children. The Young Lady's Book may be used as an example. It summed up the demands in a chapter on "Moral Deportment."

> Piety, integrity, fortitude, charity, obedience, consideration, sincerity, prudence, activity, and cheerfulness, with the amiable qualities which arise from them, may, we preseume, nearly define those moral properties called for in the daily conduct and habitual deportment of young ladies.[158]

The Victorians, however, were guilty of having diminished woman to the lowest level she had reached for centuries. Florence Nightingale once spoke out bitterly,

> Women must have no passions . . . the system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery . . . marriage being their only outlet in life, many women spend their lives in asking men to marry them, in a refined way . . . the woman who has sold herself for an establishment, in what way is she superior to those one may not name?[159]

An example of the low estimation of woman's intellectual powers was the reaction to a publication in 1844, Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation. The book was published anonymously, and some suspicioned that a woman was the author of it. A noted geologist, Henry Sedgwick, Dean of Westminster, reviewed the book for the Edinburgh. He declared that the author was a woman, "partly from the fair dress and agreeable exterior of the Vestiges; and partly from the utter ignorance

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158 Henry G. Bohn, The Young Lady's Book, cited by Robert Harling, op. cit., pp. 86-7.

159 Florence Nightingale, cited by Batho and Dobree, op. cit., p. 81.

the book displays of all sound physical logic."[160] The real author was Robert Chambers.

Lack of educational opportunity was one of the causes of the low opinion of women. Women were not permitted to obtain degrees at either Oxford or Cambridge, up to the end of the nineteenth century.[161] A book appeared in 1869 entitled, On the Subjection of Women.

No less person than the Queen herself opposed the Feminist movement. She opposed equality for women in political affairs, as well as in the professions. She felt that woman was only a "helpmate for man." But despite the opposition of the Queen and other Victorian ladies, legislation and new interpretations of existing law gave married women the right to control their own property and their own persons. "Probably the popularity of bicycling," wrote Cunliffe, "lawn tennis and other outdoor games did more to win freedom for women than any legal enactment."[162]

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[160] Henry Sedgwick, cited by Amy Cruse, op. cit., p.85.

[161] Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

[162] Ibid., p. 10.

CHAPTER IV

SPECIFIC DIALOGUE WHICH SATIRIZES VICTORIAN CONVENTIONS, TAKEN FROM THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

Behind all of Oscar Wilde's humorous fopperies there was a serious philosophy. His poses were self-dramatizations, of which he expected others to see the fun, as he invariably saw it himself. There was reality and simplicity underneath his so-called fantastic and artificial work. He could not take seriously the conventions which man conjured up for the sake of his convenience. ". . . he made dying Victorianism laugh at itself, and it may be said to have died of the laughter," wrote Le Gallienne.[1] Wilde employed exaggeration merely as a means of conveying his intellectual sincerity. Paradox with him was merely "truth standing on its head to attract attention."[2]

The following is specific dialogue taken from The Importance of Being Earnest, which satirizes subjects and institutions of Victorian society. For convenience, an arbitrary division was made, and dialogue satirizing Victorian attitudes was placed under the following subject-headings: Dandies; Education; Food, Drink, and Tobacco; Literature; Manners and Morals; Music; Philosophy; Politics, Property,

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1 Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 270.

2 Ibid., pp. 256-7.

and Religion; The Rising Aristocracy; and Women and Marriage.

Dandies. Act I.

ALGERNON: How are you, my dear Earnest? What brings you up to town?

JACK: Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere?

. . . . . .

When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.[3]

The dandy is essentially an urbanite, whose sole occupation is a search for pleasure. The emphasis on pleasure was a late Victorian revolt against the former Puritanical emphasis on work. "Whilst the essential dandyism of the decade lasted it needed an urban background. Town was its natural element, . . ."[4]

JACK: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.[5]

Wilde was laughing at the pretense and snobbery of the age, the newly rich apeing the manners of the aristocrat.

ALGERNON: I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.[6]

The overly-serious and somber Victorians who looked

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[3] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 456.

[4] Jackson, op. cit., p. 135.

[5] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 458.

[6] Ibid., I, 460.

upon life as a grim and dutiful business were laughed at and contrasted with the dandy, who only took the pursuit of the senses with any seriousness.

> ALGERNON: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?
>
> JACK: Oh, no! I loathe listening.
>
> ALGERNON: Well, let us go to the Club?
>
> JACK: Oh, no! I hate talking.
>
> ALGERNON: Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?
>
> JACK: Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.
>
> ALGERNON: Well, what shall we do?
>
> JACK: Nothing!
>
> ALGERNON: It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.[7]

The Puritan's virtues of industry and application toward a goal were ridiculed. It was the dandy's belief that hard work was the refuge of the lazy.

> (Lane presents several letters on a salver to Algernon. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as Algernon, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.)[8]

The dandy was often plagued by bill collectors. The above stage business was to establish the amusing relationship between the indebted aristocracy and the prosperous middle class.

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[7] Ibid., I, 467.

[8] Ibid., I, 468.

Act II.

CECILY: Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, . . .[9]

The dandy held the practical business world of the Victorians and the Puritans up to scorn.

ALGERNON: My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.[10]

Pleasure was given precedence over duty in the 1890's, among the upper classes. The attitudes expressed by Algernon and Earnest are markedly similar to the attitudes expressed by the Restoration gallants. These attitudes make up a sort of code of behavior, which was largely the creation of the courtiers of Charles II. The Restoration gallants borrowed this code from France, where they observed the elegance and charm of life in the Court of Louis XIV. After their exile, they returned to England and endeavored to transplant the life they had seen at Versailles to England. This code served only a small aristocratic minority; the bulk of the Puritan middle class remained aloof. Deviations from this code of manners were the source of much ridicule in the Restoration theatre; the deviations supplied the laughter for the comedy of manners. Many of these attitudes which were ridiculed on

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[9] Ibid., I, 471.

[10] Ibid., I, 475.

the Restoration stage were, interestingly enough, the same attitudes which were ridiculed on the Elizabethan stage. Puritanical and middle class concepts continued to be debunked. The Puritans, in turn, looked upon the code of manners set down by the Court under Charles II as anathema. It is surprising to note how much of the following code of manners was expressed in The Importance of Being Earnest.! The two dandies of that late Victorian comedy of manners have much in common with the Restoration playboys.

The code of manners established the ideal gentleman: he was always well born, well dressed, always poised and witty, and never out of countenance . He was skilled in making love, whether to married women, women high in station, or to young ladies of his own rank. If he so desired, he could carry on several love-affairs simultaneously, as long as he was master of the situation and of his heart. It was considered bad taste to boast of his affairs, however, and he was always discreet. It was unpardonable to betray the confidence of any woman of his own class. If he was weak enough to entertain a serious passion, he was forced to conceal the fact by an affectation of indifference or by over-acted and conventional protestations of devotion. If he was married, he was not able to show any signs of jealousy nor any signs of love toward his wife.[11]

[11] Arthur E. Case and George H. Nettleton, editors, British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), p. 151.

Just as in the days of the Restoration, it became unfashionable in late Victorian society to "take yourself seriously," and the verbal cleverness invented by Oscar Wilde "was adopted cheerfully as a mask for the seriousness of life."[12]

ALGERNON: I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

JACK: Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

ALGERNON: If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.[13]

Here, Wilde was making fun of the dandies. The dandies emphasized clothes and veneer; a clothing of mind and body. By definition, a dandy is one who gives undue attention to dress. This not only includes clothing of the body, but clothing of the mind as well.

> But, whether it expresses itself in the clothing of the body or in the clothing of the mind, it is generally the outcome of similar casues. . . . The revolt against Nature in England was in reality a revolt against the ennui of conventions which in operation acted as checks upon the free movements of personalities and ideas.[14]

CECILY: Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Earnest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life.[15]

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[12] Jackson, op. cit., p. 177.

[13] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 475.

[14] Jackson, op. cit., p. 133.

[15] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 477.

The late Victorian man of fashion wanted to experience all those things which had been denied him because of Victorian convention. It was Pater's philosophy of living for beauty and for the senses. The pagan philosophy was considered morally "bad" by the Victorians and Puritans.

CECILY: I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

ALGERNON: Yes, darling, with a little help from others.[16]

This was the trend of the nineties, away from Victorian austerity to the sensual and artificial.

ALGERNON: I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon.[17]

Bankruptcy was a common end for many aristocrats unable to adjust themselves to a loss of their incomes, particularly due to the agricultural depression in England after the 1870's.

GWENDOLEN: . . . once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive.[18]

Laughter was made at the expense of the dandies and of the "moral" Puritan concept of man's domestic duties to his home and family.

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[16] Ibid., I,

[17] Ibid., I, 478.

[18] Ibid., I, 479.

ALGERNON: When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. . . . I refuse everything except food and drink.[19]

This was in revolt against the romantic and sentimental approach of the Victorians, who were obligated to assume an emotional reaction whether they actually felt one or not.

Act III.

LADY BRACKNELL: He has nothing but he looks everything. What more could one desire?[20]

The laughter was pointed at the Victorian's desire to be something he was not, the pose and artificiality of the period. It was the desire to produce an impression.

Education. Act I.

LADY BRACKNELL: The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.[21]

The apathy and indifference of the masses and the fears of the propertied classes of losing their wealth, upon which their position in society entirely depended, were a source of amusement to Wilde. Education was not a thing to be taken seriously, because there were no evidences of results.

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[19] Ibid., I, 483.

[20] Ibid., I, 488.

[21] Ibid., I, 464.

Act II.

CECILY: I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much.[22]

The Victorian system of education was impractical and unrealistic. The emphasis was upon disciplinary subjects which were not applicable to modern life.

MISS PRISM: Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. . . .

CECILY: But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.[23]

The old Victorian world, beginning with Victoria, was influenced by German culture. The new Edwardian world, on the other hand, looked to Paris, and French became the more fashionable language. Wilde himself prefered the gayer life and Latin culture of France to the heavier Teutonic cultures of Victorian England and Germany.

GWENDOLEN: . . . Mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; . . .[24]

The training young women received was said to have

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[22] Ibid., I, 469.

[23] Loc. cit.

[24] Ibid., I, 479.

been totally unrelated to anything that they may encounter in later life. The life of the young Victorian woman was sheltered and narrow. An example of the traditional education of two young girls of the upper class is found in an account given by Benson. It concerned the rearing of the two daughters of Lord Eastnor.

> The two were brought up by their mother according to the strictest Victorian standards as set up by the Prince Consort for the education of the Royal Children, with this difference that she did not give much personal supervision to it. Backboards and scales on the piano, French exercises and the use of the globes, . . . prohibition to read anything amusing, particularly novels, . . . restricted pocket money and cloistered ignorance of all that was likely to be met with in later life [italics not in the original], . . . and a governess the administrator, while their exquisite mother entranced the fashionable and artistic world of London and made romantic journeys to Italy, constantly writing to her two girls the most affectionate letters, but not really seeing very much of them until they were of ripe years to be shown to men and under her deft guiding hand to make brilliant marriages.[25]

The fault of Victorian education was that it did not keep up with the progressive changes of the times. This was particularly true during the late Victorian period when changes of belief as well as of daily habit were rapidly taking place.[26] The schools continued to overstress the standardized ideals of Victorian England.

Act III.

LADY BRACKNELL: Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.[27]

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[25] Benson, op. cit., pl 77.

[26] Young, op. cit., p. 158.

[27] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 488.

Wilde laughed at the quaint Victorian attitude that the word of an Oxford man was unquestioned.

Food, Drink, and Tobacco. Act I.

LADY BRACKNELL: Do you smoke?

JACK: Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL: I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is.[28]

The indolence of the aristocracy was attacked by the rising and hard working middle class. Wilde made a jest of it. Jack's hesitancy in answering indicates that the old guard still objected to smoking. Smoking in front of ladies was unthinkable. Wrote Benson,

> Smoking was not dreamed of at the after-dinner sittings of this date [1870's] : the smell would assuredly hang about the dining-room, and no gentleman could possibly talk to a lady in the drawing-room after he had thus befouled himself. When he wished to smoke later on in the evening, he always changed his dinner-coat lest it should get infected ever so faintly with the odour so justly abhorred by the other sex, and put on a smoking jacket, very smart, padded and braided, and befrogged, while for fear that his hair should be similarly tainted, he wore a sort of embroidered forage-cap. Thus attired for his secret and masculine orgy, he slippered from his bedroom after the ladies had gone upstairs and with his flat candle in hand, joined his fellow conspirators, as in a charade, in some remote pantry or gun-room, where his padded coat would keep him fairly warm.[29]

When the men of the 1890's took up smoking, it was

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[28] Ibid., I, 464.

[29] Benson, op. cit., pp. 15-6.

as part of the revolt against Victorian convention. One such rebel was recorded to have said,

> I am a fearful smoker. I know it is all wrong, and I should be better if I could keep to half-a-dozen or so a day --but I can't. All we poets smoke, . . .[30]

Act II.

GWENDOLEN: Sugar is not fashionable any more. . . . Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.[31]

This bit of nonesense delighted Wilde. An attitude of what was considered fashionable could be formed over the most trivial things. It was the snobbery of the times.

ALGERNON: I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that.[32]

The cults and fads of the 1890's were ridiculed.

Act III.

MISS PRISM: Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington.[33]

The early Victorians objected to drinking. Temperance stemmed from the Puritans.

Literature. Act I.

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[30] Walford, op. cit., pp. 221-2.

[31] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 481.

[32] Ibid., I, 483-4.

[33] Ibid., I, 491.

ALGERNON: Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.[34]

Wilde made fun of the censorship and of the Victorian prudery toward the new realism. Foreign writers of the avant-garde proved to be men of alarming tendencies, who belonged not to their own time but to the future they were busily shaping. Translations of their strange "new" writings were filling the English atmosphere with portents of change, causing elation among the younger people and misgivings among their elders. Zola was in his prime, and Nana was regarded as the superfluity of naughtiness. His courageous English publisher, Henry Vizetelly, served two prison sentences for publishing Zola: he served six months, with a fine of one hundred pounds, for Le Terre in 1888; and served three months, with a fine of two hundred pounds, in 1889, for Nana.[35]

ALGERNON: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility![36]

Victorian literature rarely depicted truth; but modern literature of the nineties attempted truth through a complicated unraveling of a case history. The naturalist wrote all

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[34] Ibid., I, 457.

[35] Le Gallienne, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

[36] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 459.

the incongruous details of a man's life.

> ALGERNON: Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to the people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers.[37]

Wilde made fun of the critics, who rarely liked his plays.

> Act II.
>
> CECILY: I keep a diary to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down I should probably forget all about them.[38]

The amount of diaries that were published during the nineties was sufficient to cause an amused comment in Wilde's comedy of manners. People would sometimes publish memoirs before they were famous.

> CECILY: . . . memory usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.[39]
>
> MISS PRISM: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.[39]

By the 1890's the Victorian three-volume novel was notorious for its bad taste, its black and white characters.

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[37] Ibid., I, 459.

[38] Ibid., I, 469.

[39] Loc. cit.

Wilde once said that anybody could write a three-volume novel; all it required was a complete ignorance of both life and literature.

The typical Victorian novel was guaranteed to tax no brain by thought and to vex no sense of morality by revolutionary suggestions. The customary size was three volumes; consequently, the unwieldly size and exhorbitant price had the effect of causing the novel to be read from a circulating library copy. Many authors, notably Hall Caine, worked tirelessly for the abolition of the three-volume novel. Publishers finally capitulated in 1913 and introduced the single six-shilling volume. With the passing of the old three-volume novel, there was a loss of popularity for the sentimental lending-library novel of polite romantic atmosphere and crudely happy endings.[40] Kipling wrote of the three-volume novel,

> We asked no social questions --we pumped no hidden shame--
> We never talked obstetrics when the Little Stranger came:
> We left the Lord in Heaven, we left the fiends in Hell.
> We weren't exactly Yussufs, but --Zuleika didn't tell.[41]

Though the large, sentimental novel of shallow romance still serves as an opiate, a battle was fought between reticence and frankness in the 1890's, and the bounds of literary expression have now been extended to satisfy the needs of many more people. The popular novel of the past usually ended

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[40] Jackson, op. cit., p. 265.

[41] Rudyard Kipling, cited by Holbrook Jackson, loc. cit.

happily with the sound of wedding bells; the new novel very often began there. It was realized by the modern school of novelists that married life provided a whole realm of sensations and experiences hitherto neglected by their art. Into this realm they plunged with enthusiasm; and the readers who had been familiar with the experiences in real life were amazed with this revelation of truth to the point that they were forced to conclude that the new fiction was either scandalous or morbid.[42]

Readers turned more and more to stimulating realism. Somerset Maugham wrote a slum novel, Liza of Lambeth, which was published in 1897. Actually, with the new fiction, the number of novel readers increased. The frankness of the modern novel, descended from the French realists, appealed to the younger generation of late Victorian readers.[43]

> CECILY: You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy.[44]

Everyone was writing diaries.

> CECILY: Oh, yes. Mr. Chasuble is most learned. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.[45]

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[42] Jackson, op. cit., pp. 270-1.

[43] Ibid., p. 265.

[44] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 476.

[45] Ibid., I, 478.

Wilde satirized the prodigious quantity of worthless material that was printed by the young and incompetent.

Act III.

LADY BRACKNELL: It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality.[46]

Wilde had no liking for the three-volume novel.

Manners and Morals: Act I

ALGERNON: Lane's views on marriage seems somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.[47]

This was an amusing reversal of the "moral" Victorian question of what "good" was the upper class if it didn't set an example of sterling morality?

JACK: . . . when one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. . . . a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness.[48]

Wilde smiled at the hypocrisy and earnestness of the "moral" Victorian.

LADY BRACKNELL: . . . What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK: 149.

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[46] Ibid., I, 490.

[47] Ibid., I, 456.

[48] Ibid., I, 459.

LADY BRACKNELL: (Shaking her head) The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK: Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

LADY BRACKNELL: (Sternly) Both, if necessary, I presume.[49]

Wilde took a crack at that all-important Victorian convention, the fashionable address, upon which a man's status in society was determined.

A fashionable address was important to Victorian London. Society would often judge a person by his address. For example, in Mrs. Walford's memoirs was found this remark; "Among the people Mary knew there was a lady whose name I forget, --but I recall that she lived at Tunbridge Wells, . . ."[50] In another part of these memoirs she stated, ". . . the bulk of ordinary mortals having any desire to be in the social 'swim' . . . placed themselves within a very narrow and limited area."[51]

Galsworthy, in The Forsyte Saga, spoke of the fashionable side of London.

> All these ladies had shoulder-straps and no tulle --thus showing at once, by a bolder exposure of flesh, that they came from the more fashionable side of the Park.[52]

The rent of a house in a fashionable neighborhood was invariably double that of a house of the same description in

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[49] Ibid., I, 464.

[50] Walford, op. cit., p. 163.

[51] Ibid., pp. 273-4.

[52] Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 167.

a suburban district.[53]

> But a few miles --in some instances, less than a mile-- separated the squalor, confusion and excitement of the working-class districts from the portentous harmony of Berkeley, Grosvenor, Belgrave and Eaton Squares.[54]

Swaggering dinners were mentioned as being served at the houses of the wealthy on the squares of Belgravia and Mayfair.[55]

> GWENDOLEN: The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me.[56]

The artificial age was ridiculed.

> ALGERNON: I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.
>
> LADY BRACKNELL: It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say.[57]

Wilde was laughing at his age, which indulged prevalently in artificial aids to beauty.

> LADY BRACKNELL: . . . Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life.[58]

The accent on health was made fun of. It was a period when everyone was going all-out for sports.

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[53] Harling, op. cit., p. 29.

[54] Peter Quennell, Victorian Panorama (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 34.

[55] Harling, op. cit., pp. 108-9.

[56] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 467.

[57] Ibid., I, 461.

[58] Loc. cit.

LADY BRACKNELL: It is my last reception and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.[59]

The salon and the woman who dominated it were the victims of satire. Wilde frequently enjoyed himself at the expense of elderly, titled women. Lady Bracknell was one of this species.

GWENDOLEN: . . . Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else.[60]

Polite conversation of the Victorian drawing-room was satirized.

JACK: . . . She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL: Ah, now-a-days that is no guarantee of respectability of character.[61]

The Victorians placed great importance upon "respectability."

JACK: I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever now-a-days. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance.[62]

Wilde is probably laughing at himself, and at the other

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59 Ibid., I, 461.

60 Ibid., I, 462.

61 Ibid., I, 464.

62 Ibid., I, 466.

dandies.

JACK: You never talk anything but nonesense.

ALGERNON: Nobody ever does.[63]

It was the late Victorian's response to early Victorian sincerity.

Act II.

MISS PRISM: . . . his gravity of demeanor is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

CECILY: I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.[64]

Wilde was laughing again at the Victorian attitude toward responsibility, a grim, humourless pose.

CECILY: I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGERNON: Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY: I am glad to hear it.[65]

Here the joke was on those late Victorians who were entranced with the idea of "wickedness" and "sin." It was also an attack on those Victorians who pretended to be opposed to hypocrisy, while they masked their own misdeeds with a

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[63] Ibid., I, 468.

[64] Ibid., I, 469.

[65] Ibid., I, 471.

facade of respectability.

Le Gallienne wrote that the dandies of the 1890's enjoyed posing as mysteriously wicked. These "would-be" decadents talked of "purple sins." They drank absinthe with a self-conscious sense of being desperately wicked. Because it was said that Paul Verlaine drank it all the time in Paris, and that Oscar Wilde and Cronies drank it nightly at the Cafe Royal, the "fashionables" felt that the drink suggested diabolism and nameless iniquity.[66] Such was the reaction to Victorian morality.

> MISS PRISM: As a man sows, so shall he reap.
>
> CHASUBLE: (Raising his hand) Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts.[67]

Victorian hypocrisy was a frequent object of satire.

> MISS PRISM: It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.[68]

Wilde laughed at Victorian reticence, and at the fact that the Puritan virtue of thrift did not apply when it came to their prolificness.

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[66] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 193.

[67] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 473.

[68] Loc. cit.

ALERNON: It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stock-brokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties.[69]

This was a reflection on the rising middle class, which was primarily concerned with money and business.

Act III.

GWENDOLEN: In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.[70]

This was the rebel's answer to Victorian sincerity.

LADY BRACKNELL: Pretty child! Your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvelous result in a very brief span of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK: (aside) And after six months nobody knew her.[71]

The attack was on the artificiality of the 1890's.

LADY BRACKNELL: The two weak points in our Age are its want of principle and its want of profile. . . . Style largely depends on where the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present.[72]

Wilde laughed at the arbitrary ways of the world of fashion, and the importance placed upon them.

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[69] Ibid., I, 483.

[70] Ibid., I, 485.

[71] Ibid., I, 487.

[72] Loc. cit.

LADY BRACKNELL: Never speak disrespectfully of society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that.[73]

He was making fun of the "sour grape" attitude of those who secretly admired society from afar.

LADY BRACKNELL: I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.[74]

The fashionable society of the 1890's dislike a zealot.

GWENDOLEN: I never change except in my affections.[75]

This was a universal observation concerning manking. The realists, contrasted to the Victorian idealists, were beginning to face the facts.

The spade that every one had agreed to call an agricultural implement was, in the 1890's, boldly called a bloody shovel.[76] The influence which made for frankness of expression was largely foreign. Emile Zola's books were issued in a well-translated, though somewhat expurgated, edition, for a price which most people could afford. Thousands of copies were sold and read. Zola paved the way for native realists, like George Moore, whose Esther Waters gave Victorians a violent shock.[76]

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[73] Ibid., I, 488.

[74] Ibid., I, 491.

[75] Ibid., I, 492.

[76] Jackson, op. cit., pp. 156-7.

Ibsen was also a stimulus to revolt. His plays were being read in English translation. "Intellectuals" were accepting the idea of the self-centered personality, who conducted his life for the purpose of self-realization. Ibsen wrote, "The great thing is not to allow oneself to be frightened by the venerableness of an institution. . . . Neither the conceptions of morality nor those of art are eternal."[77] The Victorians listened and were moved.

> JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?
>
> GWENDOLEN: I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.[78]

It appears that Wilde made a travesty on the usual Victorian ending of the melodrama, in which the hero clears himself at the end of the play and wins the girl. By reversing the procedure, he asks the girl for forgiveness because he, through no fault of his own, turned out to be truthful. Here, moral preachment was ridiculed.

> Music. Act I.
>
> ALGERNON: I don't play accurately --anyone can play accurately-- but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte.[79]

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[77] Henrik Ibsen, cited by Holbrook Jackson, Ibid., pp. 160-1.

[78] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 493.

[79] Ibid., I, 455.

The amateur piano player of the emotional and sentimental variety was ridiculed. Wilde made fun of the Victorian parlor entertainment. The average conception of music by the Victorian was in the form of a drawing-room amateur contribution following a good meal. Benson described it in his book, As We Were.

> . . . there was certain to be a lady present who sang very sweetly, or had a lovely "touch" on the piano. . . . A brilliant execution was not considered very important, for music was an "elegant" accomplishment: touch and expression were more highly esteemed, a little tremolo in the voice was most affecting, and these were also easier to acquire than execution. Sentimentality was, in these little concerts, the quality most appreciated, and if a lady could induce the female portion of her audience surreptitiously to wipe a slight moisture from its eyes, and the males to clear their throats before, at the end of the performance there rose the murmur of "Oh, thank you, what a treat. Please don't get up yet!" she was stamped as an artist, the music as a masterpiece, and the audience as persons of sensibility. Such songs as "The Lost Chord" . . . were accepted as test-pieces for tears: . . . Men, on these occasions, were not asked to sing, unless they were notable comics: serious playing and singing were purely feminine accomplishments.[80]

LADY BRACKNELL: French songs I cannot possible allow. People always seem to think they are improper, . . . But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, . . .[81]

Wilde was laughing at the stodgy English middle class of the nineteenth century. The Edwardians preferred French; the Victorians preferred German, among the Continental languages.

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[80] Benson, op. cit., pp. 15-7.

[81] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 461-2.

Philosophy. Act I.

> GWENDOLEN: We live, as I hope you know Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits I am told: and my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest.[82]

Ideals and sentiment were made to appear absurd; they belonged to the Victorian world which Wilde was satirizing.

Act III.

> GWENDOLEN: This is not the moment for German skepticism.[83]

Nietzsche's complete works appeared in 1895. German philosophy was made fun of by Wilde: he seemed to enjoy attacking things Teutonic. There were many students of the German philosphers in late Victorian England. George Gissing was an example of a free-thinker who emerged from an extensive study of German philosophy without any philosophy of life of his own, except a vague criticism. An example of "German skepticism" is the following comment by Gissing.

> I can never forget the flower by the wayside and the sun falling in the west. These things have a meaning --but I doubt, I doubt-- whether the mind of man will ever be permitted to know it.[84]

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[82] Ibid., I, 462.

[83] Ibid., I, 485.

[84] George Gissing, cited by John Cunliffe, English Literature During the Last Half Century, op. cit., pp. 104-5.

Politics, Property, and Religion. Act I.

LADY BRACKNELL: What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.[85]

Wilde smiled over the fact that land, once the bulwark of English aristocracy, was a liability. The middle class with investments was better off. The landed proprietor class ceased to dominate the social fabric of the country. The agricultural depression completed the evolution from a rural to an industrial state which the application of steam to machinery had begun. Her vast coal deposits were more important to England than her fields of corn. "Men still spoke of land, but more and more the land was coming to mean house property or industrial sites."[86]

LADY BRACKNELL: What are your politics?

JACK: Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

LADY BRACKNELL: Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate.[87]

There was considerable social snobbery connected with politics; Wilde was amused.

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[85] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 464.

[86] Young, op. cit., pp. 145-7.

[87] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 464.

Act II.

MISS PRISM: I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favor of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap.[88]

With tongue in cheek, Wilde laughed at popular religious movements which went about reclaiming souls. He also laughed at Miss Prism's primitive concept of punishment and damnation. In the great Methodist revival, headed by the Wesley brothers, the worship of the Lord entered upon a new phase. It took on a feminine element that the old Puritans had lacked. The Saviour became feminised, as exemplified in such words in songs as "Let me to Thy bosom fly," and "Let me hide myself in Thee." A marked differentiation was made between the entirely masculine Lord and the partially feminine Saviour. Both the Puritans and the Victorians prayed to a vengeful and wrathful God, which would punish all sinners; while the Victorian evangelists prayed also to Jesus, whom they considered was a friend of sinners.[89]

CECILY: You would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGERNON: Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not particularly encouraging.[90]

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88 Ibid., I, 469.

89 Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 64-6.

90 Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 471.

The intellectuals of the 1890's took immortality lightly. They were only sure of the present. Life, they felt, was brief and uncertain, death was sure, and the future was dark.[91] Swinburne's Hymn to Proserpine expressed the mood of the times.

> A little while and we die; shall life not thrive as it may?
> For no man under the sky lives twice, outliving his day.
> And grief is a grievous thing, and a man hath enough of his tears;
> Why should he labor, and bring fresh grief to blacken his years? . . .
>
> O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods!
> Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all knees bend,
> I kneel not, neither adore you, but standing, look to the end. . . .
>
> Will ye bridle the deep sea with reins, will ye chasten the high sea with rods?
> Will ye take her to chain her with chains, who is older than all ye gods?
> All ye as a wind shall go by, as a fine shall ye pass and be past;
> Ye are gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the wanes be upon you at last.[92]

Swinburne was a brilliant classical scholar. He interpreted Greek legends. He wrote French, too, almost as well as English. Like Shelley, Swinburne was an atheist. He belonged to the aristocratic young rebels like Byron and Shelley, who all had a love of liberty and an aggressive resistance to

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[91] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 224.

[92] Algernon Swinburne, cited by Woods, Watt, and Anderson, op. cit., II, 871-2.

society. He disliked organized religion. Swinburne was considered the most lyrical of the Victorian poets.[93]

JACK: He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

CHASUBLE: In Paris! (shakes his head) I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last.[94]

The suspicious and nationalistic Victorian took a dim view of Paris. Wilde was also satirizing the importance with which these quaint people regarded their burial plot.

The average Victorian never crossed the Channel but was quite sure that anything foreign could not be trusted. The Puritan had felt the same way. One of the marked differences between the Cavalier and the Roundhead was this attitude toward foreigners; the Cavalier traveled in France frequently and was willing to adapt himself to French customs and manners, and, indeed, he even brought some of them to England; while the Roundhead distrusted the foreigner and felt at home only in England.[95] It will be remembered, too, that the Stuarts, enemies of the Puritans, had strong family ties in France.

A new attitude toward foreigners, which harked back to the days of the Cavaliers, was inspired by the late Victorian dandies. Fashionable society, led by the Prince of Wales,

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[93] Ibid., II, 866-8.

[94] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 473.

[95] Lunt, op. cit., p. 437.

looked once more to Paris. The Prince was said to have been the only English Sovereign to have made a conquest of Paris. He was a Parisian in everything but birth.[96] With his Marlborough House Set, the Prince gave sanction to "the pursuit of sin, or at any rate, of pleasure, which, as every good Puritan knew, amounted to the same thing."[97]

GWENDOLEN: The country always bores me to death.[98]

The Edwardians preferred the city. Victorians enjoyed the contact with nature, which was theirs when they left the city for brief periods. "Week-ends," wrote Mrs. Walford in her memoirs, "had not come into fashion in the sixties, but we often ran down to the country for a few days, and came back laden with sweet pure flowers and the songs of nightingale in our ears."[99] The dandies preferred London.

CECILY: Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told.[100]

Wilde even made fun of England's economic crisis, which was especially hard on people with land.

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[96] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., II, 21.

[97] Ibid., II, 24.

[98] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 481.

[99] Walford, op. cit., p. 50.

[100] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 481.

Act III.

LADY BRACKNELL: Exploded! was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.[101]

The position of the greedy and material minded upper classes, which opposed improving the conditions of the working classes, was satirized. A new cognizance of the poor was taking place in Victorian England. The Salvation Army was founded in 1865. Charles Booth's statistical survey of the condition of the London poor was published in the last decade of the century.[102] An awareness of the poor on the part of novelists, such as George Gissing, became prevalent. George Gissing, by showing how the poor lived and worked, enabled the middle class to realize the misery and the squalor of the inhabitants of the slums. In doing this he enlarged the scope of the English novel, whose attitudes formerly had been one of sentimentality or grotesque humor. Gissing absorbed something of the spirit of the French realists.[103]

Others who used their literary skill for the furtherance of social improvements were George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism appeared in 1891; his first play, Widowers' Houses, in 1892; and his

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[101] Ibid., I, 486.

[102] Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution, op. cit., p. 265.

[103] Ibid., p. 275.

earliest collected plays, Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, in 1898. Throughout the 1890's Shaw was a busy journalist, criticizing music, art, drama, life, anything in fact that anybody would print, for he had views to express, and determination to express them, on all phases of Victorian life.

It was in this period, too, that Socialism was written and talked about. Robert Blatchford wrote the popular Merrie England, an essay pleading the Socialist cause which was translated into many languages and which over a million copies were sold. Sidney and Beatrice Webb wrote much of their work on socialism and trade unions during this same period. The monumental work of Charles Booth on the condition of the laboring classes was begun in 1892 and finished in 1903; seventeen volumes entitled The Life and Labour of the London People.[104]

George Bernard Shaw believed in realism as against idealism. Much of Shaw's humor was based upon the incongruity between those people who have the faculty of seeing life as it is and of experiencing life with frank individual conviction, and those who have the habit of seeing and living by the proxies of convention and tradition. Shaw could not see why people should tolerate unimaginative art, brainless drama, low wages, long hours of labor, inconvenient houses,

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104 Jackson, op. cit., pp. 50-2.

dirty cities, illogical morals, and dead religions. Here was the Victorian rebel.[105]

CHASUBLE: They savor of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons.[106]

Victorians were fond of published sermons.

LADY BRACKNELL: Every luxury that money could buy, including Christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.[107]

The implication was that Christianity had become a luxury for the rich.

The Rising Aristocracy. Act I.

LADY BRACKNELL: . . . Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?[108]

Most of the recruits for the House of Lords were coming from the commercial middle class; while the older aristocracy was suffering reverses. The "rising aristocracy" refers to that Victorian middle class which became merged with titled nobility. "The 'Peerage,'" commented Oscar Wilde, "is one book a young man about town should know thoroughly, and it is the

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105 Ibid., p. 241.

106 Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 490.

107 Ibid., I, 492.

108 Ibid., I, 465.

best thing in fiction the English have ever done."[109]

Le Gallienne wrote in The Romantic '90's that most of his early friends seemed to have become knights.

> Knighthoods, too, were already beginning to go cheap. For good or ill, the old order was unmistakably changing. All the more, it was a romantic age to be born in, for most of the great figures of that old order were still alive, in embattled eminence, or had but recently departed.[110]

Act III.

LADY BRACKNELL: Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in a tradesman.[111]

It was an age of social climbers, when appearance meant everything. The snob, thought Wingfield-Stratford, was a by-product of the Industrial Revolution. He was a different species than the dandy. The snob placed himself in society solely because of his money. The enormous wealth of the bourgeoisie increased his importance out of all reason, which gave him a distorted picture of himself and his position in society. Fortunes were made and lost rapidly.[112]

JACK: I have carefully preserved the Court Guide of the period.

LADY BRACKNELL: I have known grave errors in that publication.[113]

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[109] Hesketh Pearson, Oscar Wilde, His Life and Wit (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 151.

[110] Le Gallienne, op. cit., p. 13.

[111] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 487.

[112] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., I, 264.

[113] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 487.

Social climbers placed great importance upon the Court Guide, though in a transitional period such as the Victorian Era, when the middle class joined with the aristocracy, the attitudes of Society was rather strained and foolish.

Women and Marriage. Act I.

ALERNON: My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.[114]

Wilde was joking about the former modest and coy maid of the earlier century, contrasting her with the franker expression of his own age. The Victorian woman was held to a stricter moral code than was the man. During courtship, for example, it was the convention for the woman to be shy and modest, with blushed and downcast eyes. There was one code for the man, another for the woman.

> Little was expected of the man, as compared with the woman, in the way of Moral Deportement. He was supposed to concern himself mainly with learning his lessons and applying himself wholeheartedly to studies and to games.[115]

The Victorian woman was Spartan trained as a child, and she was always taught to maintain an outward form of dignity and politeness.[116]

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[114] Ibid., I, 456.

[115] Harling, op. cit., p. 91.

[116] Benson, op. cit., p. 75.

ALGERNON: . . . The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public.[117]

Wilde was making fun of the hypocrisies connected with the earnestness of the Victorians who showed great affection toward their married partner in public. He laughed at it, by completely reversing the Victorian conception of "bad" form.

ALGERNON: The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.[118]

This was meant to amuse the Victorian audience with its candor. The old Victorian concept of marriage was being made fun of.

ALGERNON: You don't seem to realize that in married life three is company and two is none.

JACK: (sententiously) That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

ALGERNON: Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.[119]

The eternal devotionof the Victorian marriage was questioned. The inviolability of the marriage tie and of the home played a considerable role in Victorian conventions and

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117 Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 459.

118 Ibid., I, 456.

119 Ibid., I, 460.

hypocrisies. Galsworthy gave an excellent description of the sacrosanct regard with which Victorians looked upon marriage, in The Forsyte Saga.

> Most people would consider such a marriage as that of Soames and Irene quite fairly successful; he had money, she had beauty; it was a case for compromise. There was no reason why they should not jog along, even if they hated each other. It would not matter if they went their own ways a little so long as the decencies were observed --the sanctity of the marriage tie, of the common home, respected. Half the marriages of the upper classes were conducted on these lines; Do not offend the susceptibilities of Society; do not offend the susceptibilities of the Church. To avoid offending these is worth the sacrifice of any private feelings. . . . the sanctity of the marriage tie is dependent on the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the family is dependent on the sanctity of property. And yet I imagine all these people are followers of One who never owned anything. It is curious![120]

Many books were published on how to preserve the happy home. Such a book was Happy Homes and How to Make Them or Counsels on Love, Courtship and Marriage, which was popular as late as the 1890's.[121]

> GWENDOLEN: I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative.[122]

The concept of "form" and the opinions of others played an important part. People wanted to show a "front."

> LADY BRACKNELL: Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.[123]

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120 Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 190.

121 Walford, op. cit., p. 33.

122 Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 462.

123 Ibid., I, 463.

The conventional form of the marriage proposal was ridiculed.

LADY BRACKNELL: . . . you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself.[124]

Parental control over children was satirized. A phenomenon of Victorian life was the match-making mother. It was she that took the responsibility upon herself to see that her daughter was "properly" married off. Galsworthy aptly described the convention in his famous novel, The Forsyte Saga.

> Mothers, slowly fanning their faces, watched their daughters, and in their eyes could be read all the story of those daughters' fortunes. As for themselves, to sit hour after hour, dead tired, silent, or talking spasmodically --what did it matter, so long as the girls were having a good time! But to see them neglected and passed by! Ah! they smiled, but their eyes stabbed like the eyes of an offended swan; they longed to pluck young Gathercole by the slack of his dandified breeches, and drag him to their daughters --the Jackanapes![125]

LADY BRACKNELL: (pencil and notebook in hand) I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact.

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[124] Ibid., I, 463.

[125] Galsworthy, op. cit., p. 166.

> However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires.[126]

The cold and material attitude of Victorian parents toward marriage was thought amusing by Wilde. Affection and love were only a convention.

> ALGERNON: The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain.[127]

This was in revolt to the serious demeanor of the Victorian.

> GWENDOLEN: . . . Few parents now-a-days pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out.[128]

This was a travesty on the greater comparative freedom of the young as against the earlier Victorian attitude of absolute submission of the young.

> GWENDOLEN: . . . But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.[129]

The Victorian marriage was often a matter of convenience, an arrangement by the parents.

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[126] Buck, Gassner, and Alberson, op. cit., I, 464.

[127] Ibid., I, 466.

[128] Ibid., I, 467.

[129] Loc. cit.

Act II.

MISS PRISM: No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE: And often, I've been told, not even to her.[130]

Wilde enjoyed ironical understatement.

CHASUBLE: . . . Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK: Oh, yes.

MISS PRISM: (Bitterly) People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.[131]

Wilde was making fun of the grim and serious attitude with which dutiful Victorians approached marriage.

CECILY: I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.[132]

The Victorian attitude of the sheltered woman was satirized.

Act III.

GWENDOLEN: How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.[133]

CECILY: They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.[133]

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130 Ibid., I, 472.

131 Ibid., I, 473.

132 Ibid., I, 478.

133 Ibid., I, 485.

The conventional roles of the sexes were reversed to show their absurdity.

> LADY BRACKNELL: Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of Permanent Income on Thought.[134]

Women were in the habit of going to lectures for the betterment of their minds. The title of this particular lecture was an attack on the irrational and non-thinking upper classes.

> LADY BRACKNELL: . . . No woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating.
> . . . . . .
> London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years.[135]

Victorian hypocrisy and "front" were satirized; everything was for impression and acceptance by society.

> LADY BRACKNELL: He was eccentric, I admit, but only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.[136]

Wilde placed the convention of marriage alongside other common ailments of man.

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[134] Ibid., I, 486.

[135] Ibid., I, 489.

[136] Ibid., I, 492.

LADY BRACKNELL: The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life.[137]

Wilde made fun of the convention which he felt bound two people together in disharmony.

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[137] Ibid., I, 492.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary. An indication of the similarities between the Puritans and the Victorians was shown. They were similar in their attitudes toward (1) dress, (2) food, (3) tobacco, (4) drink, (5) women, (6) sex, (7) amusements, (8) the theatre, (9) literature, (10) Sunday, (11) the Bible, (12) thrift, (13) work, (14) education, (15) politics, (16) marriage, and (17) parental authority.

It was also shown that the middle class identified itself with Puritanism in Elizabethan England and that the theatre, which catered to the aristocracy, satirized the Puritans. Bourgeois, or Puritan, ideals came to dominate England during Cromwell's supremacy and most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The sentimentality of the middle class, which can be traced to the Elizabethan Puritans, pervaded and corrupted the English theatre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By a social history of Victorian England the ideals of the Puritans appeared to dominate Victorian attitudes and conventions. The 1890's were shown to be years of transition between Puritan ideals and other ideals, as yet unformulated. The latter Victorian period was a search for new standards. Women's participation in athletics and their

competition with men in such things as golf and tennis meant their liberation from the home and a growing feeling of equality with men. The invention of the bicycle took both sexes outside of the Victorian home.

A revolt in art took place under the leadership of the pre-Raphaelites and such men as Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, and James Whistler. The English dandy came back into vogue in the 1890's as a reaction to the austerity of Victorian England. The pleasures of drinking and smoking, frowned upon by the strict Puritan and Victorian, became fashionable, in the late nineteenth century. The habit of drinking tea brought women together to exchange ideas and to talk of suffrage for women. Communication was made easier for the late Victorian, and there followed a more rapid circulation of opinions and information.

Instability and change were seen in economics, with the older landed aristocracy giving way before the rising industrial middle class. A few educators, such as Oscar Browning, were beginning to see the inadequacies of the traditional Victorian education with its emphasis upon self-discipline and the development of the will, rather than upon a more dynamic concept which prepared the student for a rapidly-changing world.

The trend in late Victorian literature was toward realism and away from the romantic sentimentalism, which had been popular with the earlier Victorians. To the average

Victorian the newer poets, such as Swinburne and Pater, appeared shockingly pagan and hedonistic. Charles Dickens, Mathew Arnold, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Samuel Butler, W. S. Gilbert, George Gissing, and G. B. Shaw were only a few of the many nineteenth century writers who attacked Victorian conventions.

Patriarchal tyranny in the Victorian home, the supremacy of the husband over the wife, and the absolute parental control over the children were questioned. Ibsen and Shaw wrote vividly of the oppression of the Victorian home and of Victorian marriage.

Darwin's The Origin of the Species was a bombshell which exploded many traditional attitudes. The literal interpretation of the Bible with its creation of earth and man could no longer be accepted. Darwin's book added impetus to an already changing and unstable world. Some of the Victorian rebels became agnostics and atheists. Many renounced organized religion.

The "new drama" of Ibsen and Shaw aided in pulling down established Victorian institutions; freedom and equality for Victorian women were supported in the theatre; and the discussion-type play which concerned itself with social problems became increasingly popular. The satire of Gilbert and Wilde served the same end: the destruction of Victorianism.

Conclusion. The Importance of Being Earnest was essentially an attack upon the trends of modern commercial civilization, which were fixed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was then that the foundations were laid for the later supremacy of the middle class. Just as the Elizabethan theatre laughed at the Puritan tradesmen, the late Victorian theatre of Oscar Wilde laughed at similar virtues of the bourgeoisie of the Victorian period. The gospel of work was ridiculed; spendthrifts and wasters became heroes. Sons and daughters resisted parental control. Extravagance became a virtue, and thrift a weakness to be mocked. Earnestness and sincerity were boorish. Inviolable marriage vows and the sacred, ritualistic conventions which surrounded courtship and married life were taken lightly. Most of the virtues which were accepted by the middle class as being most worthy were abused by Oscar Wilde and the playwrights of the Elizabethan and Restoration theatres.

The virtues which Wilde recommended were similar to those recommended by the Restoration theatre in the comedy of manners. A gentleman dressed well; he was poised and witty and never out of countenance; he was skilled in making love; and his intellect always counquered his emotions. Wilde's ideal coincided with the Restoration ideal: man must always see the fun in his conventions as well as in his natural impulses. Life must not be taken too seriously.

The attitude of the late Victorian audience was far different from the attitude of the earlier Victorian audience.

The people of 1820 came to the theatre to be complimented on their goodness; the people of 1890 were content to have their conventions and virtues ridiculed. A civilized society usually has the ability to laugh at itself. The operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, the plays of Oscar Wilde, and the caricatures by Max Beerbohm supplied the much needed self-laughter for an age that had taken itself too seriously. The Importance of Being Earnest was an expression of a mature and integrated society, the urbane Edwardians of London.

Oscar Wilde was the incarnation of the spirit of the 1890's. At that time there began an application of all the new ideas that had been accumulating from the disintegrating action of scientific and philosophic thought on every kind of spiritual, moral, social, and artistic convention, and on all forms of authority which demanded obedience solely on the basis of it being authority. The 1890's was the spirit of individualism.

> In him [Oscar Wilde] the period might see its own face in a glass. And it is because it did see its own face in him that it first admired, then grew afraid, and then destroyed him. Here, said the moralist, is where your "modern" ideas will lead you, . . .[1]

What serious reformers labored for years to accomplish, Wilde accomplished in a moment with the flash of an epigram.

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[1] Le Gallienne, op. cit., pp. 269-70.

The 1890's were years of critical evaluation and of transition. ". . . the 90's," wrote Le Gallienne, "were generally sowing that wind of which we may be said to be now reaping the whirlwind."[2]

The standards and ideals of the present twentieth century in England and the United States are rooted in those Puritan virtues of Elizabethan days. Modern culture has not changed radically; it is still dominated by the attitudes of the middle class, whose views hark back to those Victorian and Puritan middle class societies. "Scratch any middle-class audience at any time," wrote Gassner in 1949, ". . . and you will find a Victorian heart."[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 225.

[3] John Gassner, "Aspects of the Broadway Theatre," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 35: 192, April, 1949.

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