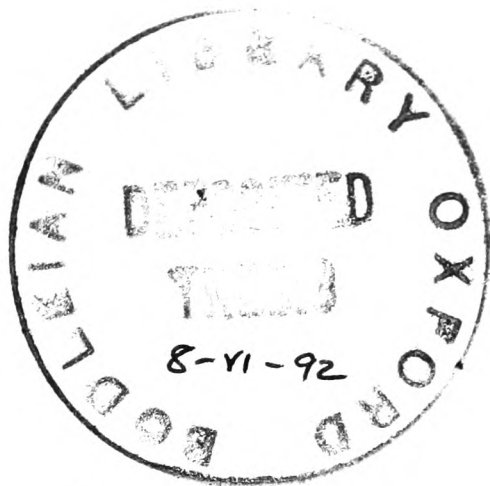




**THE MAKING OF A MIDDLE CLASS LIBERALISM IN MANCHESTER,
c.1815-32: A STUDY IN POLITICS AND THE PRESS**

- by -

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THE MAKING OF A MIDDLE-CLASS LIBERALISM IN MANCHESTER
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by Michael J. Turner

SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to make a useful contribution to our picture of the development of early nineteenth-century provincial liberalism. It investigates various political, social and economic aspects of liberalism in Manchester and draws attention to the ideas and activities of a small and identifiable group of respectable reformers who were active in the town in the first half of the nineteenth century and who had a significant impact on local affairs. Much has been written about Victorian Manchester and about Manchester politics in the era of Chartism, the Anti-Corn Law League and the so-called 'Manchester School'. This thesis seeks to elucidate and explain some of the less explored developments which were antecedent to and shaped these later events and movements. The main avenue of inquiry is provided by the public careers of a 'small but determined band' of reformers (as they were called by one of their number, Richard Potter), men who involved themselves in numerous political campaigns and who also pioneered a new kind of political journalism in the provinces. Archibald Prentice and John Edward Taylor in particular made the newspaper a vital organ in the formation and direction of liberal opinion. These men represented prominent features of Mancunian liberalism in the years before parliamentary reform and incorporation, and the main concern of the thesis is to illustrate these features by investigating the principles and campaigns of this reformist vanguard. Attention is paid to the band's political and theological precepts and motivations, to the examples and encouragement provided by earlier Manchester reformers, to the key role of the local reformist press in the work of enlightenment and mobilisation, to the liberals' battles with Manchester's mainly Tory-Anglican ruling party on certain local government issues, to the band's involvement in campaigns and discussions relating to important social questions such as education, health and welfare, poverty and labour relations, to the band's participation in commercial campaigns and the movement against the corn laws, and to their views and activities on the central question of parliamentary reform.

The most important primary sources for this study are to be found in Manchester. The newspapers are invaluable; there are also substantial collections of contemporary pamphlets and miscellaneous ephemera which provide essential information as well as the material necessary for an appreciation of the wider Manchester setting. Members of the band have left certain materials - correspondence, scrapbooks, lectures, books and pamphlets, reminiscences and personal records - which are of importance when used alongside their letters, articles and editorials in the local newspapers.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of the development of early nineteenth-century provincial liberalism. It focusses on the political, social and economic concerns of an identifiable group of respectable reformers - a 'small but determined band', as one of their number Richard Potter called them - who were active in Manchester in the first half of the nineteenth century and who had a significant impact on local affairs. They were predominantly newcomers to Manchester, Unitarian in religion (though their most active member, Archibald Prentice, was a Scottish Presbyterian), young (mostly aged under 32 in 1815), and engaged in the manufacturing and trading of cotton goods. They were active in local politics from about 1815 and especially after Peterloo in 1819, and they led the attempt of Manchester's "outs" to break the hold on local affairs that had been enjoyed by a select circle of mainly Tory-Anglicans for many decades (and particularly since 1789). As well as engaging in this contest for political power and in movements to reform local government, the members of the band also interested themselves in a wide range of economic and social matters: free trade and the protection of local commerce, the promotion of education and 'improvement', health and welfare reforms, poverty and labour issues. Members of the band also pioneered a new kind of political journalism in the provinces, rendering the newspaper a vital organ for the formation and direction of liberal opinion and for the

organisation of reform campaigns. The band helped to found the Manchester Guardian in 1821 and then, when this proved lukewarm on too many important questions under its editor John Edward Taylor, the more radical members decided to turn the Manchester Gazette into both a party political weapon and in a wider sense the tireless promoter of the public good. Prentice was its editor and was later owner-editor of the new Manchester Times 1828-47. A self-styled 'rational radical', his leading articles were truly tracts for the times, challenging, insistent and imbued with honesty and conviction. His colleagues, notably John Shuttleworth, also engaged in newspaper writing, and most of them were also prominent platform speakers during these years. A rising level of influence during the 1820s led to a victorious election campaign in newly-enfranchised Manchester in 1832 and then to the incorporation of Manchester in 1838. The band led the incorporators, provided Manchester with its first mayor in Thomas Potter, and were prominent among the founders of the Anti-Corn Law League. The band represented important aspects of Manchester liberalism in this era. This was a creed that was reformist, humanitarian, public-spirited and based on a belief in progress. There was internal friction, however, both within the band and within Manchester liberalism. The band was not an entirely cohesive body. Some members wanted greater and quicker reforms than others. Some were more enthusiastic about fashionable social and economic doctrines than others: the acceptability and applicability of laissez-faire doctrine were particularly important causes of disagreement. Differences of opinion relating to the salient public issues of the period were perhaps most apparent in the arguments over the Guardian's policy after

about 1824.

This thesis is arranged thematically rather than chronologically. Chapter I introduces the eleven individuals who made up the 'small but determined band', outlines their family backgrounds, their interests and aspects of their public careers, and deals in particular with the theological, social, political and other motives behind their participation in campaigns for reform. The aim here is to explain why these men were reformers and to describe how their personal precepts and predilections were manifested in what they said, wrote and did. The first chapter also deals with another important influence on the band: the examples and encouragement given by earlier Manchester reformers. The latter were of abiding significance because of their courage in the face of persecution and disapproval in the war years, their use of political debate and propaganda through newspaper and pamphlet, and their success (albeit rather limited) in helping to raise awareness about injustices and abuses and in providing a foundation on which the later respectable reformers could build.

Chapter II considers the band's involvement in the development of political journalism. At an early stage they recognised that access to or control of a newspaper was an essential requirement for the success of the reform cause. Mancunians had to be informed, convinced and stimulated by effective and reasonable appeals to their good sense and public spirit. The press had the potential to be the most valuable weapon at the reformers' disposal; the habit of newspaper reading was on the increase, journalism was becoming more respectable and established,

and the band included men of intelligence and considerable literary talent who could take advantage of the opportunities that appeared to be available. They proved extremely eager to exercise influence. This chapter begins with a brief investigation of the development of the provincial newspaper press and then deals with the establishment of the Manchester Guardian. There is a discussion of the role and opinions of Taylor, the editor, and an account of the Guardian's impressive progress as a newspaper and a commercial venture. As it progressed, however, the Guardian moderated its political stance. Taylor's attitude displeased some of his friends and political allies, especially Prentice, and most of the band decided that the cause of reform required a more uncompromisingly reformist press organ. The purchase of the Manchester Gazette in 1824 and the establishment of the Manchester Times in 1828 are described, and the crucial contribution of Prentice as editor of these two predominantly political newspapers is investigated. There is an assessment of Prentice's talents and achievements, and the suggestion is made that his role has not been credited with the importance it deserves. The chapter concludes with an account of newspaper warfare in Manchester, dealing mainly with non-political subjects since the political affiliations of the local newspapers are made clear in other sections of the thesis.

Chapter III deals with the important local government disputes of this period. Excluded from local power structures and lacking influence over the administration of police, manorial and parish affairs, the band and other assertive liberal-Dissenting leaders sought to challenge the

ruling party on all manner of issues. Some of the band were particularly keen to cultivate alliances with reformers from humbler social strata. Shopkeepers, publicans, clerks, artisans, petty traders and other men of small means often looked to the band for leadership, and cooperation in this period was to provide the basis for the successful incorporation movement of the later 1830s. Chapter III, while it looks forward to this campaign, deals mainly with the calls for greater economy and efficiency in the years 1815 to 1832, and with the band's attempt to open up the local government system and secure more influence for themselves and some of their supporters. After demonstrating the reality of 'oligarchy' and exclusiveness in Manchester local government the chapter investigates those disputes and campaigns in which the band figured most prominently. Argument over new churches, church rates and tithes were particularly bitter because of the infusion of sectarian rivalry, but such matters as local rates, the salaries and conduct of local officials, street improvements and local expenditure were also productive of much controversy. The chapter ends with an account of the most important arguments of this period; these related to the control of the gas establishment and the use of its profits, and the reconstitution of the Police Commission. Attention is also paid to the disagreements on local questions between Taylor and some of the others in the band.

Chapter IV discusses the band's approach to and consideration of important social questions. Conscious of the need and duty to be active in 'good works' and 'improving' ventures, the band advocated and participated in a range of charitable, philanthropic and mainly voluntary

movements in the fields of education, health, social welfare and poverty relief. They gave generously of their time, attention and money, and engaged wholeheartedly in the social debates of the period. Their concern for the lower ranks was genuine. There was clearly some self-interest and some concern for social control and conditioning, but moral and humanitarian impulses were also evident: most of the band regarded the intended recipients of aid and instruction not only (or mainly) as economic commodities - 'workers' - but as individuals who, once 'improved', would certainly be worthy of the proper status and dignity of citizens. Consideration of important social questions led on to an interest in the presence, habits and influence of the Manchester Irish. The size and character of the town's Irish population gave cause for concern and the band keenly participated in the discussion of suggested reforms for Ireland which might encourage and enable more Irish to stay at home. The band also involved themselves in the discussion of labour issues. Controversies surrounding strikes, combinations, wages, truck and factory regulation were among the most enduring and divisive of the period. On these and the other issues mentioned above there were sometimes disagreements within the band (especially between Prentice and Taylor); humanitarian sentiments could conflict with approaches that were strongly doctrine-based. This further demonstrates the interruption of and obstacles to total cohesion within the band and the lack of homogeneity in Manchester liberalism as a whole.

Chapter V investigates the band's economic ideas and its members' involvement in debates and agitation related to prominent commercial

questions. It includes an account of the establishment and activities of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (the representative body of Manchester's business community and dominated by cotton merchants and manufacturers), and of the protests against certain duties, taxes and government policies regarded by Manchester businessmen as unjust and burdensome. The band's involvement in these matters is highlighted, as are the band's views on Huskissonian reforms, currency regulations, taxation and the corn laws. What emerges is that commercial opinion in Manchester was broadly on the side of caution and was characterised by a self-interested and inconsistent desire for liberalisation. All of the band were free traders but the majority of Mancunian businessmen lacked their ideological commitment and were interested mainly in short-term concerns, in profits and in the security and extension of Manchester's trade. Such things were of concern to the band too, but they also looked beyond them and to the wider issues at stake - local and national prosperity and the reformation and improvement of Britain's (and perhaps the world's) economic organisation. Throughout the period from 1815 to 1832 members of the band helped to inform local opinion about commercial issues and to mobilise commercial campaigns. The Guardian was to be renowned, indeed, for its commercial news and advice, even if its advice did not go unchallenged. On certain issues, particularly the corn laws, it was the members of the band who kept up the pressure for debate and activity and tried to educate and prompt the more moderate majority into some kind of response. Once again, though, there could be disagreements within the band on the propriety of certain demands, the direction taken by commercial campaigns, or the soundness and applicability of theories

relating to taxation, the currency or trade.

Chapter VI deals with the band and parliamentary reform. It begins with an account of the immediate postwar years when the band's ambivalence towards strident plebeian radicalism led them to criticise and oppose its more reckless and inexpedient forms even while offering sympathy, encouragement and guidance. Peterloo provided the band with a golden opportunity: the sense of grievance and outrage enlarged the number of people prepared to support those respectable reformers who led the protest campaign, and the decline of plebeian radicalism after Peterloo and the Queen Caroline controversy opened the door for the rise of spokesmen and leaders who advanced radical nostrums in a more sensible and rational manner than had Hunt and his Mancunian followers. The band took full advantage of the opportunity which Peterloo provided, energetically disseminating the 'radical version' of that event and using it to demonstrate that the local and central authorities - and the rotten system which supported them and which they supported - were justly liable to question and censure. The band kept the issue of parliamentary reform before Mancunians throughout the early 1820s and then in 1827-8 played an important role in the town's attempt to secure the parliamentary seats of the corrupt Cornish borough of Penryn. The campaign was directed by moderates and conservatives, though, and members of the band were unable to make it more advanced in aims or avowed ideology. The situation in 1830-32 was different; members of the band led Manchester's agitation in favour of the Reform Bill (if not something more) - and they managed to retain some degree of control despite the strength of party and especially social (or 'class') divisions among politically-active

townsmen. Throughout the 1815 to 1832 period the band acted as a reasonably cohesive unit on the matter of parliamentary reform, although Prentice was more advanced in his views and more impatient than some of his allies. He was also more prepared to invite sections of the lower classes into active political participation in readiness for political rights (though only on his own terms). Most of the band regarded parliamentary reform in the same way: as the central remedy for the nation's political, social and economic ills, as the prerequisite for other necessary reforms, as the means of giving local interests better representation, defence and promotion, and as an important result of and stimulus for continuing the challenge to entrenched authority locally and nationally.

Chapter VII, the conclusion, attempts to summarise and assess the findings of the study while elucidating the main characteristics of that middle-class liberalism evinced by members of the 'small but determined band'. It is clear that those accounts which have regarded postwar Manchester as a 'liberal' town are simplistic if not inaccurate. Politically and commercially 'liberalism' had to struggle to gain acceptance - let alone a measure of ascendancy - and even then it was only one of several systems of thought and action that influenced local affairs. Still, the fact that the liberals did have influence says much about the efforts, commitment and achievements of their vanguard - the 'small but determined band'. The band ensured the return of two liberal, free trade candidates at the first Manchester parliamentary election in December 1832, and also secured parliamentary seats for two of their own number - Joseph Brotherton for Salford and Richard Potter for Wigan.

These victories represent a fitting reward for nearly twenty years of ceaseless campaigning and debate. The band laid the foundations for the incorporation movement and the Anti-Corn Law League, and helped to create the environment which was necessary for these two important manifestations of reformist sentiment to flourish and be effective. This is why a study of the band's ideas and activities is both necessary and worthwhile. For all that has been written on Victorian Manchester, northern Chartism, the League and the 'Manchester School', relatively little has been said about the period before the late 1830s during which these well-known movements and ideologies were being formed. This thesis aims to contribute to the filling of a gap, to describe and elucidate the principles, methods and objectives of a group of important Manchester reformers, to preserve their efforts against undue neglect and in doing so to explain the progressive, assertive, insistent and at times partly fragmented phenomenon that was 'liberalism' in the leading provincial town of England before the passing of the Great Reform Act.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.H.R.	American Historical Review
Biogr.Refs.	Biographical References: obituaries, newspaper cuttings, microfilms, pamphlets, letters etc., card-indexed, Local History Dept., MCL.
B.J.E.S.	British Journal of Educational Studies
B.J.R.L.	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
Chetham's	Chetham's Library, Manchester
C.H.J.	Cambridge Historical Journal
D.N.B.	Dictionary of National Biography
E.H.R.	English Historical Review
Ec.H.R.	Economic History Review
H.J.	Historical Journal
H.S.A.N.Z.	Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand
H.T.	History Today
I.R.S.H.	International Review of Social History
J.B.S.	Journal of British Studies
J.E.H.	Journal of Economic History
J.Eccl.H.	Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JRL	University of Manchester John Rylands Library
MCL	Manchester Central Library
M.R.	Manchester Review
M.R.H.R.	Manchester Region History Review
N.H.	Northern History
P.&P.	Past and Present
P.L.P.L.S.	Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (Literary and Historical Section)
Q.J.E.	Quarterly Journal of Economics
R.E.S.	Review of English Studies
S.C.H.	Studies in Church History
S.H.	Social History
T.H.S.L.C.	Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
T.L.C.A.S.	Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society
T.M.S.S.	Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society
T.R.H.S.	Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
T.U.H.S.	Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society
U.B.H.J.	University of Birmingham Historical Journal

Chapter I

THE 'SMALL BUT DETERMINED BAND' AND THEIR PREDECESSORS

1. The 'small but determined band'

The 'small but determined band' (a phrase coined by Richard Potter) provided a more or less permanent nucleus for the activities of Manchester's respectable reformers from the 1810s to the 1840s. The band could be quite a loose and informal arrangement, with members drifting in and out, and working with other political allies from the business community or shopocracy and menu people according to the issues and exigencies of the time. But there were ten or eleven individuals in these years who, although not always in complete agreement with each other, normally worked as an identifiable team and shared a similar approach to the public questions of the day.

Among the most active and radical members of the band was Archibald Prentice (1792-1857), propagandist-in-chief in his newspapers the Manchester Gazette 1824-8 and Manchester Times 1828-47.¹

1. On Prentice's life and career, see his Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester (1851) and History of the Anti-Corn Law League (2 vols., 1853); D. Read's introduction to 3rd edn. (1970) of Sketches; P. Ziegler, 'Archibald Prentice', in Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals, ed. J. O. Baylen and N. J. Gossman, ii (1984); J. Evans, Lancashire Authors and Orators (1850), 204-8; R. Dunlop, 'Archibald Prentice - A Page in the History of Journalism', MacMillan's Magazine (1889); A. Somerville, 'Archibald Prentice of Manchester', in Free Trade and the League (1853) ii; D.N.B.

Most of the band were Unitarians but Prentice was a Presbyterian originally from Covington Mains in Lanarkshire. His father had been a well-respected tenant farmer, and Prentice could proudly trace his ancestry back to prominent local Covenanters who had fought and died in the cause of religious liberty - one of the many causes he himself was to advocate ceaselessly in his newspapers. Among the combatants at Bothwell Brig in June 1674 had been his forebears the Laird of Staine (also named Archibald Prentice) and Alexander Reid, the Linlithgow farmer whose autobiography was first edited by Prentice in 1822. The theme running through Prentice's historical and biographical notes in the volume is not surprisingly the rank injustice of persecuting individuals for their opinions.¹ He never lost his love for Scotland or his pride in his ancestry, and both sentiments were gratified by his membership of the Manchester St. Andrew's Society. This body brought together Scotsmen living in the local area and Prentice was a prominent member, participating in the Society's educational, political and recreational activities and presiding over such functions as the St. Andrew's Day dinner of 1830.²

Born in November 1792 Prentice moved to Glasgow in 1809 as apprentice to the manufacturer Thomas Grahame. He was an avid reader of literature and politics and began to receive a political education in the liberal circles of the town. Future friend and political associate Alexander Somerville recorded that Prentice 'had the privilege of being a listener

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1. The Life of Alexander Reid, a Scottish Covenanter, written by himself and edited by Archibald Prentice, his great grandson (1822).
 2. E.g. Times, 13 Nov., 4 Dec. 1830, 28 May, 25 June, 19 Nov. 1831.

to the conversation of well-informed and liberal men at the tables of his cousin (David Prentice) of the 'Glasgow Chronicle', and of Mr. Charles Tennant, the great manufacturing chemist who had procured him his station'.¹ Prentice's cousin David founded the reformist Glasgow Chronicle in 1811 and was its part-owner and editor until his death in 1837.² Some of Prentice's earliest political writings appeared in his cousin's paper. The character of the milieu in which he moved in Glasgow was greatly to influence his future endeavours in Manchester. His employer Thomas Grahame was the son of a member of an old family of Glasgow solicitors; the Grahames were closely tied to the eighteenth century mercantile elite of the town. Thomas's elder brother Robert was active in the local Whig cause from the 1790s and was one of the 'Clique' which achieved ascendancy in local politics in the 1830s. The leading proprietor of the Glasgow Chronicle was John Douglas, a veteran Whig who stood as a candidate in the 1832 Glasgow parliamentary election. In 1833 Robert Grahame was the first Lord Provost of the reformed Glasgow Town Council. Another brother of Thomas was the poet James Grahame, and the connection with literary men is further established by the fact that David Prentice was a godson of the poet James Thomson. The Glasgow Chronicle and the Manchester Gazette and Times all reflected in some degree their editors' interest in literature.³ Archibald Prentice married into the Thomson family in June 1819. His brother-in-law Philip

1. Somerville, 383.

2. A. Andrews, The History of British Journalism (1859), ii. 291-2.

3. Details of the Glasgow background were very kindly supplied by Dr. John McCaffrey of Glasgow University.

Thomson was to help out with the Gazette in the 1820s.¹

In 1811 Prentice became the travelling agent or 'bagman' of Thomas Grahame's firm, with a salary of £100 a year. He enjoyed his job immensely: 'Our house has a good name, and its friends are hospitable to its representative'. In 1815 Grahame took him into partnership. That year also saw the movement of the firm from Glasgow to Manchester. Prentice had visited Manchester on his commercial travels and convinced Grahame that the business opportunities in the capital of the cotton trade were too good to ignore. The two men established a fustian warehouse in Peel Street.² It was not long before Prentice had associated with other members of the band, and his skill and persistence as an agitator made him increasingly prominent. Eventually the Manchester Tories tried to chastise him with a libel accusation after he had ridiculed the men behind a petition against the Reform Bill; the matter came to trial in summer 1831 and the prosecution failed.³ Prentice began writing articles for Cowdroy's Gazette, the organ of Manchester liberals, soon after he settled in the town. He purchased the paper in 1824 with the backing of his wealthier friends. Under him the Gazette, and from 1828 the Times, became persistent exponents of advanced opinions. Prentice was a

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1. L. H. Grindon, Manchester Banks and Bankers (1877), 202, 259, 261-4; Prentice referred to Thomson as his sub-editor in a letter of 5 May 1828: see Rd. Potter Collection (London School of Economics) xii f.195-6.
 2. Prentice, Letters from Scotland, by an English Commercial Traveller (1817), 43; Sketches, 66.
 3. Times, 16 April 2, 16, 23, 30 July 1831; Prentice (ed.), Report of the Trial of Archibald Prentice for an alleged libel on Capt. Grimshaw, at the Salford Quarter Sessions, 14 July 1831 (1831).

talented writer and speaker, clear, forceful and persistent.¹ Norman McCord has called his history of the League, written in 1853, neither well-planned nor well-written, but this may be balanced by Donald Read's view that - in his day - Prentice's editorials contained probably the best writing which appeared in all the newspapers of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.² It is also true to say that in his own day Prentice's writings were often well-received, and highly recommended in several contemporary journals.³ Some commentators, notably N. C. Edsall,⁴ have been dismissive of Prentice's role and contribution but it is clear that in Manchester Prentice did play a central role in the formation and rise of the reformist caucus. The success of the caucus, and then of the League, owed much to men like Prentice who did most of the groundwork and preparation. He wholeheartedly devoted his newspapers to political debate (and suffered financially because of this), and was always ready to stand up and make his opinions heard.

Like others in the band Prentice involved himself in a wide variety of activities. He donated money to various institutions and causes, but his main assistance was given in his newspapers and on the platform. He was not as wealthy as his friends and so his pecuniary contributions were normally on a more modest scale. He gave constant attention and

1. See account in Evans, 204-5.

2. McCord's review in Ec.H.R. (1969), 146; Read, Press and People (1961), 89.

3. E.g. New Methodist Magazine, World, New Monthly Magazine, Edinburgh Theological Magazine; see advertisements in Times, 3 Dec. 1831.

4. Edsall, Richard Cobden. Independent Radical (1986), 34.

publicity to educational, moral, charitable, political and social issues, was interested in working-class needs and concerns, believed in the need for fundamental reforms to improve the workings of state and society, and constantly attempted to produce 'right opinion' and to prompt others into useful public endeavours. He gave lectures on matters such as infants schools, temperance, emigration and wages, as well as political subjects.¹ In much of what he wrote and said Prentice displayed great admiration for Bentham. It was one of the high points of his life when he met and dined with the aging philosopher in April 1831. He called Bentham's writings 'my political text books' and was glad that he had opportunities to disseminate Benthamite ideas during his own public career.² Prentice was the first of four members of the band to be elected to the famous Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, the keystone of local culture and enlightenment, which he joined on 22 January 1819.³ Although a sober and serious-minded individual Prentice was sociable and a great raconteur and conversationalist. He was well-read, humorous and cultured. His days as a commercial traveller provided him with many of his favourite stories, and his Letters from Scotland (written in 1815, published 1817) and Tour in the United States (1849) display his wit, his enjoyment of the camaraderie and experiences of

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1. E.g. his Remarks on Instruction in Schools for Infants (1830); A Tour in the United States, with two lectures on Emigration (1849); Sanitary and Political Improvement promoted by Temperance (1849); Lecture on the Wages of Labour as affected by Temperance (1851); One Day's Rest in Seven. The Right of the Working Classes (1855).
 2. Prentice, Sketches ch. XXIV, and Some Recollections of Jeremy Bentham (1837).
 3. Complete List of the Members and Officers of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society (1896).

travel, and his penchant for observation and description of people and places. Like his friends he enjoyed social occasions. In September 1828 a fancy dress ball was one of the features of the Manchester Music Festival in aid of charity; Prentice attended in highland dress, predictably, William Harvey as Robin Hood, Shuttleworth a German baron, J. E. Taylor a barrister and Atkinson a courtier.¹ Prentice loved poetry and music, especially that from his native land which he found impressive and moving. He also enjoyed art exhibitions.²

Prentice had great personal courage, displayed not only in his public career but also by such things as his beating-off of three highwaymen who attacked him late one night as he was travelling home from the Times office. A strong-willed and fiery individual, he also had a hot temper. He almost came to blows with local Tories at an electoral meeting in August 1832, and in 1836 he challenged one of them to a duel during a ball when he overheard some insulting remarks about his highland costume. Prentice was remembered as 'a hard-headed Scotchman', 'a Saul in stature', of 'heroic and commanding presence', and a very earnest politician: 'the advocacy of political justice rose to the rank of a religion'. His life was not without personal tragedies, as when he had to give up the Gazette in 1828 because of financial problems and when he lost his children. His seven-month old son died in 1821 and his fifteen

1. See Evans and Dunlop for portraits of Prentice as the socially-accomplished provincial gentleman, the welcome dinner guest and relater of witty anecdotes. On the ball, Hay Scrapbooks, vol. xVA (unpaginated).

2. E.g. Letters from Scotland, 80, 115-16.

year-old daughter in 1835.¹ Still, he was proud of his journalistic achievements and Grahame, Prentice & Co. did well before he entered journalism full-time. The firm had moved by 1821 from Peel Street to a more desirable location in Cannon Street, the centre of the warehouse district. Prentice originally resided in Salford but by 1832 lived in the comfortable surroundings of All Saints' Place, Chorlton Row. He later moved out to Higher Broughton and then to Plymouth Grove, away from the business centre towards the suburb of Ardwick. He attended the Presbyterian church in Greenhays.² Prentice was a Police Commissioner before 1828 and a Town Councillor after 1838. He never made much money from his newspapers and when he left journalism he worked in the gas office and also benefited from an annuity purchased for him by his friends. Considering his long and active public career it is a fitting end to Derek Fraser's study of Victorian urban politics that there should be a brief account of Prentice's activity.³ Prentice is a symbolic figure, representative of the active, assertive and public-spirited local politician of the age. Politics gave identity, dignity, meaning and opportunity to the lives of men like Prentice and others in the band.

It was in the warehouse of Thomas and Richard Potter that meetings of the band first took place. The Potters were originally from Tadcaster in Yorkshire, where their father John had been a shopkeeper and then a

1. 'Some Epitaphs of Editors' and anon. pieces in Biogr. Refs; J. T. Slugg, Reminiscences of Manchester Fifty Years Ago (1881), 288-9; Times, 4 Aug. 1832.

2. Biogr. Refs; Pigot and Dean's Manchester and Salford Directories.

3. Fraser, Urban Politics in Victorian England (1976), 285.

farmer; he was evidently successful for when he died in 1802 he left a £12,000 fortune. Thomas (1773-1845) and Richard (1778-1842) were the third and fourth of four sons. They gained an early business training at the family shop and farm and then moved into textiles. The Manchester warehouse was established in 1801 by Thomas and an elder brother William, with capital supplied by their father. Richard joined them almost immediately, after having been a draper's assistant in Birmingham. William left the firm in 1806.¹ Thomas and Richard steadily accumulated great wealth and became extremely prominent in Manchester affairs. Their warehouse and office were moved from 43-4 Cannon Street to more commodious premises at 90 Cannon Street in the 1820s. They took a partner, S. H. Norris, in 1830. When Norris retired in 1836 he was replaced by F. Taylor. Soon after this Thomas's son John, also to be very active in local affairs, was made a partner. The Potter residences reflect their affluence and standing; by 1824 Thomas was living at Broomhill in Pendlebury and by 1832 at Buile Hill, Pendleton. At Buile Hill, well away from the central commercial district, Thomas built a large mansion for his family set in modest but impressive grounds. Richard was living at Chorlton Row by the mid-1820s, and by 1832 he had moved to Stony Knolls, on Bury New Road. This was after he had been thinking of buying a rural estate, an idea he abandoned because of the expense.²

1. On the Potters, see R. Potter Colln., especially vols. i, iii, iv, xiiiA; G. Meinertzhagen, From Ploughshare to Parliament. A short memoir of the Potters of Tadcaster (1908).

2. Pigot & Dean Directories; T. Swindells, The Rise and End of a City 'House' (n.d.); Sir Thomas Potter, first Mayor of Manchester (in Biogr. Refs); R. Potter Colln. xiiiA f.181-3.

In the early years Richard did much of the travelling for the firm and Thomas concentrated on expanding its business and increasing profits. They were active in commercial as well as political campaigns. Thomas was a prominent member of the Chamber of Commerce and a Director during the 1820s. He was also on the special committee of four members appointed in December 1820 to make a report on the state of the cotton trade, a good indication of his high reputation for business knowledge and talent.¹ Richard was also a member of the Chamber and with others, like Prentice, could be outspoken in his advocacy of liberal commercial ideas at its meetings. The Potters participated in many charitable, cultural and 'improving' ventures. Like others in the band they were aware of the responsibilities that went with status and wealth. Those in this group were also proud and assertive and jealously protected their good name and reputation. When Cobbett made some disparaging remarks about the Potters' humble origins in 1832 (at the time of Richard's campaign to be elected M.P. for Wigan), Richard responded immediately with a piece on the Potters' social advancement since they had left Tadcaster. Their careers showed what could be achieved by a wholehearted adoption of the creed of self-improvement and personal progress.²

Though the Potters' mother was a Methodist, in Manchester the brothers were committed Unitarians. They joined the Cross Street congregation and became closely involved with the liberal-Dissenting body's advance into the public arena. Thomas was a trustee of the Cross Street chapel from

1. Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Monthly Record, 33 (1922), 105-6.

2. Meinertzhagen, xv.

the 1820s.¹ Of the two Richard was probably the more active politician, at least before about 1830. From his youth, as his diaries show, he was extremely interested in contemporary political issues. He seems to have been always ready to express an opinion and to act upon it. He was apparently so single-minded in his public career that he had little interest in anything except political and religious debate. John Shuttleworth of the band joked about this in a friendly letter to Richard Potter of March 1829. Shuttleworth enclosed a religious tract for Potter to read and added: 'I have no news that you have any interest in, for I imagine unless it was connected with Radicalism or Unitarianism you would set no value upon it'.² As Richard became increasingly involved in local politics the Potters' business was left largely to Thomas, who was to be renowned for his application and devotion to trade. The firm continued to prosper. It was already a flourishing concern in 1815. In that year the Potters' warehouse was rated at £140, ranking 20th in rateable value among the 110 warehouse firms participating in the opposition to the proposed export duty on cotton manufactures. The new Potter warehouse at 90 Cannon Street was a special purpose-built five storey edifice constructed in the early 1820s. Most of the wealthier firms built such premises in the 1820s and 30s, finding the older warehouses (often converted cellars or houses used because of their central location) wholly inadequate to deal with Manchester's expanding trade. As the business district expanded southwards to take advantage of lower rents

1. R. Potter Colln. iii, iv; J. T. Slugg, Reminiscences, 173-4; T. Baker, Memorials of a Dissenting Chapel (1884), 117-18.

2. Meinertzhagen, 251.

and more space the Potters were among the first to move their premises, from Cannon Street to George Street in 1836.¹

Richard's involvement in political campaigns and Thomas's initial concentration on business was an arrangement that apparently suited the brothers. Richard's grand-daughter (G. Meinertzhagen) remembered him for his 'keen enthusiasm for philanthropy and reform', while Thomas was 'quite as keen but not as hot as Richard, a practical man of few words and less writing, and not so apt to be run away with his feelings'.² If Richard was the archetypal agitator, a man who - like Prentice - would ceaselessly express his advanced opinions and who would be willing to do so even if it meant standing almost alone (which it sometimes did), Thomas tended to be less impatient and insistent. He would join a campaign once it had started, but was not necessarily among its most active initiators. He was painfully aware of the ease with which political agitation could get out of hand and as a man of property, wealth and business he disliked excessive radical plebeian involvement in politics. When he chaired an open-air reform meeting on Camp Field in October 1831 he was disgusted and inconvenienced by the swamping of the assembly by the rowdy supporters of the local plebeian radical

1. J. T. Slugg, Reminiscences, 20; R. Lloyd Jones and M. J. Lewis, Manchester and the Age of the Factory (1988), 219-21; R. Smith, 'Manchester as a centre for the Manufacture and Merchanting of Cotton Goods 1820-30', University of Birmingham Historical Journal (1953), 64; D. A. Farnie, 'The Commercial Development of Manchester in the later 19th century', MR 7 (1954-6), 329.

2. Meinertzhagen, X.

leadership.¹ Prentice remembered Thomas as 'benevolent, strong of purpose and energetic, always willing to aid the cause of reform but taking little or no part in public questions'.² This moderation in his conduct probably helped to pave the way for his rise to the office of Mayor after Manchester was incorporated in 1838. Members of the band were the leaders of the incorporation campaign. Both Potters had previously been Police Commissioners. Contemporaries remembered them for their charity, their commitment to political and religious liberty, their simple, unequivocal oratory, their sense of duty, their industry and perseverance, and their wealth and influence.³ Thomas, for example, paid the whole of Bright's election expenses incurred at the 1843 Durham by-election.⁴ This was a family that rose, through the creation of wealth and participation in public affairs, to join the 'governing classes'. As well as being Mayor Thomas became a magistrate and was knighted when the Queen visited Manchester in 1840. Richard was M.P. for Wigan 1832-9 and showed particular interest in political, economic and educational reforms. When he left the Commons he retired to Cornwall and died in Penzance in July 1842. Thomas died at his Buile Hill mansion three years later. One of Richard's daughters married the brother of Lord Macaulay

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1. Absalom Watkin, Extracts from his Journal 1814-56 (ed. A. E. Watkin 1920), 153-6; Prentice, Sketches, 398-40; Times, 15 Oct. 1831; Guardian, 22 Oct. 1831.
 2. Sketches, 73-4.
 3. E.g. Sir Thomas Potter, Knight, Magistrate...and first Mayor for the Borough of Manchester (1840); A Prayer and Sermon in Cross St. Chapel Manchester, on the Sunday after the interment of Sir Thomas Potter (1845).
 4. K. Robbins, 'John Bright and the Middle Class in Politics', in ed. J. Garrard et al., The Middle Class in Politics (1978), 23.

and another married Captain (later Admiral) Anson. Richard's son, also named Richard, was a lawyer and later Chairman of the Great Western Railway. Thomas's first son John was also Mayor of Manchester and was knighted in 1851. When a candidate at the 1857 Manchester parliamentary election it was stressed that Sir John Potter 'follows his father's principles'. Thomas's second son, Thomas, was M.P. for Rochdale and spent over 30 years in the Commons.¹

John Edward Taylor (1791-1844) began contributing articles to Cowdroy's Gazette in about 1812, having been in Manchester since 1805.² He was born in Ilminster, Sussex, the son of a Unitarian schoolmaster and minister. The family had Manchester origins, though, and moved up to the town when the father secured a post at the Hulme boys' academy. By now Taylor's father was a Quaker, but he himself remained a firm Unitarian. He attended the Cross Street chapel and by 1840 was a trustee.³ In 1824 he married his cousin Sophia Scott, daughter of a Unitarian minister in Portsmouth. When his father died in July 1817 he wrote some stanzas which reveal much about his character. The emphasis was on independence, on thinking and acting for oneself according to the dictates of one's own conscience, on the importance of allowing one's conduct to be based on

1. Biogr. Refs; Meinertzhagen, 260-1.

2. On his life and career, see D.N.B.; Prentice's Sketches; D. Ayerst, Guardian: Biography of a Newspaper (1971); W. H. Mills, The Manchester Guardian. A Century of History (1921); I & C. Scott, A Family Biography (75 copies printed for private circulation, 1908); H. McLachlan, 'The Taylors and Scotts of the Manchester Guardian', in his Essays and Addresses (1950); Biogr. Refs.; obit. in Guardian, 10 Jan. 1844.

3. J. T. Slugg, Reminiscences, 173; Baker Memorials, 117-18.

reason and altruism.¹ Such sentiments were common to others in the band too. In 1806 Taylor had been apprenticed to the manufacturer Benjamin Oakden, who later made him a partner. But Taylor preferred the merchanting to the production side of the cotton trade and soon formed a partnership with John Shuttleworth. They were dealers in cotton, twist and weft and had premises in the Toll Lane Buildings.² Taylor involved himself in local affairs at an early age. He became the secretary of the Manchester Lancasterian School, for example, while still in his apprenticeship. He was very interested in political journalism and active in local liberal circles by the time of the Exchange Riot of April 1812. This disturbance was partly caused by the Regent's decision to retain the Tories in office when constitutional checks on his powers lapsed. The local 'establishment' blamed some of Manchester's respectable reformers for agitating the lower ranks, and it was rumoured that Taylor and Shuttleworth were especially culpable as authors of a placard entitled 'Now or Never'. This accusation against him prompted Taylor to make the comments which resulted in his trial for libel in March 1819 (a time when Manchester Tories were eager to strike a blow at their opponents). Taylor was acquitted, and the affair gained some notoriety because it was the first time a defendant was allowed to call evidence in justification for an alleged libel.³

1. 'On Viewing the Dead Body of My Father', in I. & C. Scott, 150.

2. Pigot & Dean Directories.

3. Gazette, 3 April 1819; Prentice, Sketches ch. IX; J. E. Taylor (ed.), A full and accurate Report of the Trial of Mr. J. E. Taylor of Manchester, for an alleged libel on Mr. John Greenwood of the same place, at Lancaster on Monday March 29th 1819 (1819).

Taylor made a telling contribution to the Peterloo controversy with his Notes and Observations, which served as a clarion call for the local liberals,¹ and when the band and their allies decided to establish a new reformist newspaper in 1821 (the Guardian) Taylor was selected as editor. As Prentice recalled, Taylor had evinced 'a youthful ardour for liberty which promised fair to continue under any circumstances'.² Taylor continued his business partnership with Shuttleworth until March 1823, and then devoted himself full-time to the Guardian. By the mid-1820s he seemed to have moderated the tone of the paper, which caused a rift between him and some of the others in the band. This was exacerbated as he increasingly sided with the 'high' party in local affairs. There was still some common ground between Taylor and others in the band, though, on political questions and matters of social, cultural and economic improvement. Taylor was a leading member of the Chamber of Commerce, and his Guardian was to be renowned for its business coverage. He made the newspaper an extremely profitable venture. He was to be remembered for his literary abilities, strict morality and staunch Unitarianism.³ He was also culturally active and was elected a member of the 'Lit. and Phil.' in April 1828.⁴ He was a Police Commissioner before and a Town Councillor

1. Taylor, Notes and Observations, Critical and Explanatory, on the Papers Relative to the Internal State of the Country recently presented to Parliament: To which is appended a Reply to Mr. Francis Philips's 'Exposure' (1820).

2. Sketches, 73-4.

3. E.g. Biogr. Refs.; 'A Brief Memoir of Mr. J. E. Taylor' in Christian Reformer March 1844 (possibly written by Shuttleworth); A Sermon preached in the Cross St. Chapel Manchester, January 14th 1844, on the occasion of the death of Mr. J. E. Taylor (1844).

4. Members & Officers of the Lit. & Phil. Soc.

after incorporation. He lived in Islington Street Salford until about 1829 - (next door to Prentice for a time) - and then with growing wealth moved to more comfortable locations, the Crescent in Salford, Woodland Terrace, Broughton and Beech Hill, Cheetham.¹ He died at home in this pleasant suburb in January 1844; he had suffered from a bronchial complaint of increasing severity from 1829.

John Shuttleworth (1786-1864) was Taylor's business partner for a number of years.² In 1815 he was living in Oldfield Road, Salford; he soon moved out to Ardwick, then still a semi-rural suburb, and from the mid-1820s had homes in Chorlton Row. When his partnership with Taylor ended he took commercial premises alone in the New Market Buildings.³ Unlike the rest of the band Shuttleworth was a native Mancunian, born in Strangeways. He was a Cross Street Unitarian and his brother was a Unitarian minister.⁴ Shuttleworth took a lively interest in contemporary political and social issues. Prentice described him as 'intellectual, eloquent and bold'.⁵ As well as being allegedly involved in the agitation which caused the Exchange Riot of April 1812 Shuttleworth participated in the petitioning campaigns of veteran reformer Major Cartwright in 1812-13, and in the organising of the defence of the Manchester Thirty-Eight, a group of mainly plebeian reformers charged

1. Pigot & Dean Directories.

2. On Shuttleworth, see Shuttleworth Scrapbook, Biogr. Refs., and obits. in Guardian, 28 April, 3 May 1864.

3. Pigot & Dean Directories.

4. Slugg, Reminiscences, 174.

5. Sketches, 73-4.

with administering an illegal oath in August 1812. Richard Potter also took part in these activities, as did Thomas Walker - the aging Unitarian reformer and merchant who had been president of the Manchester Constitutional Society in the early 1790s.¹ Shuttleworth was beginning to write for Cowdroy's Gazette at this time and in later years wrote many articles for local newspapers, and not just on politics. His survey of education in Manchester appeared in the first Guardian (5 May 1821), and his pieces on concerts, exhibitions and other social and cultural events were used by the Gazette and Chronicle, among others. He did not write much for the Guardian after about 1825-6, which reflects the rupture between Taylor and others in the band. Shuttleworth was also able to gratify some of his literary and cultural interests through membership of the 'Lit. and Phil.' which he joined in October 1835. He later wrote papers for the Manchester Statistical Society, of which he was a member, and in 1861 wrote a history of the Manchester gas establishment. He was appointed auditor of the gas accounts after the passing of the 1824 Manchester Gas Act. Shuttleworth's commercial expertise is reflected in the many pieces he wrote on the cotton trade.²

Along with others in the band Shuttleworth was active in 'improving' ventures, charitable work and political campaigning. He was a member of

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1. Letters from Thomas Walker (21 Aug. 1812) and Cartwright (24 Feb. 1813) in Shuttleworth Scrapbook (loose leaves); A Correct Report of the Proceedings on the Trial of Thirty Eight Men, on a charge of Administering an Unlawful Oath... At Lancaster, on Thursday 27 August 1812. With introductory narrative by John Knight, one of the Defendants (1812); R. Potter Colln. xiiiA f.176, 181-3.
 2. Seeselection of articles in Shuttleworth Scrapbook; Members & Officers of the Lit. & Phil Soc.; Shuttleworth, Some Account of the Manchester Gas Works (1861).

the Chamber of Commerce and, like his friends, a convinced free trader; he took part in many of those campaigns and meetings staged in Manchester which concerned local economic interests. He had a reputation for good oratory; he was tall, with a loud and distinct voice, and would prepare his speeches on trade, reform and other questions beforehand and learn them by heart. In 1831, though, one critic did say that his speeches lacked imagination and contained too much reason and not enough emotion.¹ Shuttleworth retired from business in 1857. He was a Police Commissioner before incorporation and one of the first aldermen elected in 1838. He retired from this position in 1860. He also became a magistrate in the later 1830s. He was the local Distributor of Stamps for 25 years, appointed in 1834 (some said for political services to the Whig government, others that this was a tactic to make him tone down his radicalism). After Peterloo and during the 1820s and 30s he was an active and valued correspondent of several MPs and prominent reformers in other regions. He was remembered for his 'liberality and public spirit'. He died at the age of 78, having outlived most of his old friends and political comrades.²

Fenton Robinson Atkinson (1784-1859) was an attorney in Manchester, though he was born in Leeds. He was a Unitarian. His father was a manufacturer and the family moved from Leeds to Westhoughton near Manchester in the mid-1790s. Atkinson had no interest in trade and from his youth displayed strong literary and artistic tastes and talents. If

1. The Falcon, or Journal of Literature. No.1, 5 Nov. 1831.

2. Guardian, 28 April, 3 May 1864; Slugg, Reminiscences, 174; much of his correspondence survives in Shuttleworth Scrapbook.

not for poor eyesight he might well have followed a career in the arts. Instead he entered the legal profession and qualified in about 1810. He was to gain a high reputation as a lawyer and literary man. He proved an avid book collector and put his first library up for sale in 1817, intending to give up this activity, but in the following years his obsession resulted in the collection of ^amassive library covering many subjects. He was said to be familiar with every single item. From 1817 he had his own law firm. He later took on three partners, including his own son who became the head of the firm when Atkinson died. By the late 1820s the firm was known as one of the best in the district; it still survived under the name of Atkinson, Saunders & Co. in the 1930s. F. R. Atkinson was known as a particularly good bankruptcy lawyer. In 1832 his talents and legal knowledge were held by his friends to qualify him for the vacant post of coroner for the Manchester Division, but as usual the post went to the nominee of the local Tory establishment.¹ Atkinson's attempt to become coroner could be seen as one aspect of the liberal-Dissenting body's challenge to local Tory dominance; on this occasion it was not successful. Still, Atkinson certainly made a success of his profession. By 1832 he was living in St. James's Square and he later moved out to Oak House, Pendleton, and the Grove in Withington. He was less active professionally during the 1840s and wanted to move further into the country. He had a rural retreat in Alderley Edge, Cheshire, and another sign of affluence is his ownership of railway shares.²

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1. Obit. in Examiner & Times, 12 July 1859; Biogr. Refs.; Brotherton Scrapbooks xi. 67-8; Guardian, 14 July 1832; Slugg, Reminiscences, 3.
 2. Pigot & Dean Directories for residences, also Biog. Refs.; for the rural retreat ('Woodleigh') and railway shares, Atkinson Family & Personal Papers, M177 Archives Dept. MCL.

Atkinson was remembered as a charitable, sociable individual, a keen researcher and collector of books and a member of several learned and cultural societies. He was very interested in public affairs and collected many political tracts.¹ When Prentice first met him he was 'an able lawyer and a thorough hater of oppression, whose legal knowledge and earnest love of liberty were soon to be effectively used on behalf of the illegally oppressed'.² He helped the Manchester Thirty-Eight in 1812 and was also J. E. Taylor's solicitor at the latter's libel trial in 1819. He provided legal advice and representation for some of the Peterloo wounded.³ Atkinson was mentioned in Cartwright's letter to Shuttleworth of 24 February 1813 concerning reform petitions, and his early interest in radical politics is also indicated in his letter to Shuttleworth sent in May 1810 from London - where Atkinson was completing his legal training. He asked his friend to send him a copy of Cowdroy's Gazette every week, told of his recent purchase of a collection of Paine's letters, and complained that he had not yet been able to procure any of Bentham's writings.⁴ Atkinson involved himself regularly in the band's public endeavours and had special interest in education and in commercial reforms. He often wrote articles for various journals, though normally on non-political subjects. He wrote some literary pieces for the Manchester Exchange Herald in 1809 and was a contributor to the

1. See Atkinson Papers

2. Sketches, 73-4.

3. Trial of Thirty Eight Men; Trial of Mr. J. E. Taylor; Gazette, 9 Oct. 1819.

4. Shuttleworth Scrapbook (loose leaves).

series 'Bibliographiana' which appeared in that newspaper in 1815-16. Some of his pieces on bibliography also appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine and Notes and Queries.¹ One of his friends was James Crossley, a lawyer, local antiquarian and at one time the president of the Chetham Society. Atkinson's letters to him highlight their mutual interest in literary matters.² As a renowned authority on books and literature Atkinson was on good terms with local writers, antiquarians and booksellers. He certainly remained a keen collector himself. He put his large, second library up for auction in May 1858. The sale lasted over ten days and the 13,000 volumes in the collection were sold for over £2,000.³

Another of the men mentioned in Cartwright's letter to Shuttleworth of February 1813 was Edward Baxter (1779-1856), a Unitarian cotton merchant. His partner was named William Croft. By 1820 he was living in the fashionable Mosley Street, then full of town houses (later part of the warehouse district), and the Baxter and Croft warehouse was at 35 Cannon Street. It was rated at £120 in 1815, ranking 30th in rateable value among the 110 warehouse firms participating in the opposition to the proposed export duty on cotton goods.⁴ Baxter attended the

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1. F. Leary, The History of the Manchester Periodical Press ms. (Archives Dept. MCL), 119; Exch.H. March-August 1815, January, April, June 1816.
 2. James Crossley Papers (Chetham's) Mun. E.36: six of Atkinson's letters remain, spanning the years 1829-56.
 3. Guardian, 10 May 1858; Exam. & Times, 5, 17 May 1858; sale catalogue is in Atkinson Papers.
 4. Pigot & Dean Directories; Lloyd-Jones & Lewis, 219-21.

Mosley Street Unitarian chapel; this congregation was smaller but only a little less wealthy and influential than the Cross Street body. In fact the two congregations were very closely linked, with some intermarriage and familial migration.¹ Baxter achieved the same kind of wealth and status as the Potters, and his respectability ensured that he gained a hearing at most important public meetings in Manchester and also made him a suitable chairman at such meetings. Prentice described him as 'a man of rough energy, whose prosperity in business had not yet abated his earnestness for reform'.² Baxter involved himself in many local commercial campaigns and was a member of the Chamber; like his friends he was persistent in his efforts to make the body more advanced in its advocacy of economic policies and principles. He was a generous subscriber to relief funds and other worthy causes, 'improving' ventures and institutions, as well as an active politician on the side of reform and progress. He was a Police Commissioner and active with his friends in the campaign for incorporation. Like them he was also a man of some culture and refinement. If Prentice and Atkinson were lovers of literature, Baxter's fondness was for painting and music. He built up a large collection of artwork which he offered for sale by public auction in 1829 because he was planning to take a long trip abroad (possibly to do the 'grand tour', long regarded by the wealthy as an essential part of the cultural enlightenment of the individual). There were 156 paintings,

1. Slugg, 175; V. A. C. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and the pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in Manchester 1790-1839', in ed. D. Fraser, Municipal Reform and the Industrial City (1982), 25.

2. Sketches, 73-4.

drawings and engravings listed in the sale catalogue, which also stated that many of the items 'would do honour to the best collections in this country'.¹ Baxter sometimes helped in the selection of pieces for local art exhibitions.² He indulged his musical interests through membership of such groups as the Friends of Apollo, a society of respectable townsmen who arranged concerts which were often staged in each others' houses.³

Joseph Brotherton (1783-1857) was one of those who, like Prentice, gave evidence on behalf of Taylor in the latter's libel trial in 1819 - evidence which 'seemed to tell on the jury'.⁴ He was born at Whittington near Chesterfield. His father John was an excise officer who was promoted to a post in Manchester in 1789. By the later 1790s John Brotherton had established himself as a cotton manufacturer in Oldfield Road, Salford, in partnership with Harvey and Booth. John Brotherton had married a Harvey and both families had roots in the same part of Derbyshire. Joseph Brotherton became a partner in the firm in 1802. In 1809 his father died and a new partnership was soon made with his cousin William Harvey. Joseph had married William Harvey's sister in 1806 so the two families were indeed very close. By 1819 Brotherton had made a modest

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1. A Catalogue of the extensive and valuable collection of Pictures, the genuine property of Edward Baxter Esq. of Manchester (1829), Arts Dept. MCL; R. Potter Colln. XiiiA, ff.181-3.
 2. E.g. Baxter to J. W. Winstanley, Secretary of the Manchester Institution, 25 March 1834 in Letter Book of the Royal Manchester Institution, Archives Dept. MCL.
 3. E.g. Baxter to Charles Bury (Salford calico printer), 14 Nov. 1823 in Bury Papers, Archives Dept. MCL.
 4. Trial of Mr. J. E. Taylor; Slugg, 284.

fortune. He decided to retire and devote himself to public service and religious pursuits. (Like others in the band his sense of duty and the need for action was considerably strengthened by Peterloo.) He had been a member of the Bible Christian church in King Street, Salford since 1805 and was greatly influenced by its minister William Cowherd, a convinced Swedenborgian who preached the necessity of abandoning all meat and alcohol. Brotherton and his wife became vegetarian and teetotal in 1809. Brotherton was to speak and write on vegetarianism and teetotalism in coming years, convinced of their use in promoting spiritual and physical health.¹ When Cowherd died in 1816 the church was in debt; Brotherton became its minister and helped to improve its financial situation, and in 1837 he, William Harvey and Harvey's partner Charles Tysoe became the trustees of the church and its assets after a legal suit initiated by Cowherd's heirs. Brotherton's whole approach to public affairs was based on an omnipotent morality, a conviction that his purpose was to do all he could for others. In his scrapbooks he noted that 'the self-interested man is the enemy of all other men', and 'the material man does not know God'. Like the Unitarians Brotherton favoured a rational approach to religion and morality; it was impossible to believe what could not be

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1. D.N.B.; E. O'Brien, Eminent Salfordians (1982) i, 17-35; W.E.A. Axon's biographical introduction to Brotherton's On Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquor (1890 edn., originally 1821); Brotherton's edition of William Cowherd's Facts Authentic in Religion and Science (1816); Brotherton's Commonplace Book (1809-16); Mr. Brotherton's Religious Opinions (pamphlet, no date); Brotherton's Scrapbooks, e.g. vol. iv, 39: 'Reasons for Abstaining from Eating the flesh of Animals'; A. Smith, Salford Sketches (1976), 27-30; obit. in Guardian, 13 Jan. 1857; Speech of Joseph Brotherton, M.P., at the Vegetarian Banquet held at Hayward's Hotel Manchester, 28 July 1848 (Vegetarian Tracts No.8); T. Costley, Lancashire Poets and Other Literary Sketches (1897), 64-5; Biogr. Refs.

understood.¹ His scrapbooks also demonstrate his great interest in public affairs and local issues. Prentice remembered him for his 'firmness of principle' and 'amenity of manner'.² Brotherton became known locally as a great 'friend of the people', as a man of philanthropic kindness, honesty and application. He was a benevolent employer and always eager to promote the better health and welfare of the cotton workers. One example of this is his prominence and consistency in the movement for factory reform. He was also a strong advocate of free trade and religious toleration.³ Under Brotherton's administration the King Street church was fully involved in improving causes; Brotherton himself had a lifelong interest in education and the provision of such facilities as libraries and institutions for the people. He promoted friendly societies and gave money to relief funds.

Unlike others in the band Brotherton had held local office before the 1820s. He was one of the overseers of the Salford Poor in 1812-13. His experiences at this time prompted one of his most successful public crusades, the reform of the Salford Charities.⁴ Brotherton was often on deputations sent to Parliament to represent local needs and desires. He was Salford's M.P. from 1832-57, having been instrumental in securing the town's inclusion in the Reform Act. His sense of duty prompted him to

1. Brotherton Scraps, ii. 17; Brotherton's Relig. Opinions.

2. Sketches, 73-4.

3. E.g. Brotherton Scraps. and Mr. Brotherton's Speech on the Corn Laws, at the Town Hall, Salford, 23 June 1841 (1841).

4. O'Brien, 22-4; Brotherton Commonplace Book; Gazette, March-April 1828; Brotherton Scraps. ix, 80, xi, 19, 34-5.

give his constituents annual accounts of his conduct as their representative.¹ He was a magistrate from the mid-1830s. In Parliament he distinguished himself for his quiet but effective work on behalf of liberal causes and - always an idiosyncratic man - was to be remembered for his habit of invoking the midnight rule for the ending of the day's business.² Brotherton resided in quite humble dwellings, for though he had retired with a modest fortune he was not especially wealthy and in any case made a merit of 'simplicity in living and the strictest integrity in all things'. He lived in Hampson Street, Salford, and then from about 1824 in Oldfield Road, Salford. By the time of his death he was living at Rose Hill on the Bolton Road.³ A modest man who was generally and genuinely respected, when he died a subscription was opened to pay for a statue in his honour. This was erected in 1858 and the inscription on the base was similar to a reply Brotherton had made in the House of Commons in February 1842, when he was accused of acting against the factory system to which he owed his wealth: 'My riches consist not in the extent of my possessions but in the fewness of my wants'. The money left over from the statue was used to purchase books for local libraries and establishments for workers' education.⁴

William Harvey (1787-1870) joined Brotherton in many of the latter's

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1. Several survive in the Salford Local History Library, Peel Park (The Crescent).
 2. Cartoon 'Mrs Brotherton putting the House of Commons to bed', F. R. Atkinson's Scrapbook.
 3. Biogr. Refs; Pigot & Dean Directories.
 4. O'Brien, 33-5.

activities.¹ He too was born in Whittington, the son of a retired Nottinghamshire yeoman. He came to Manchester in 1804 and was apprenticed to a cotton manufacturer named Railton. He later joined the firm of his relatives the Brothertons and then entered into partnership with his brother-in-law Joseph. When the latter retired in 1819 Harvey formed a partnership with his friend and fellow Bible Christian Charles Tysoe. Harvey was of advanced political views and 'wore the Radical white hat when it required some moral courage to do so'. He was teetotal, a vegetarian and pacifist, and was also to be involved in the anti-tobacco movement. He entered public affairs with the same kind of benevolent, moralistic approach as Brotherton displayed; both men based their conduct on a practical and rational Christianity. Harvey was to be known as a charitable and philanthropic employer. Harvey, Tysoe & Co. had an office and warehouse in New Cannon Street and a spinning factory in Canal Street, off Oldfield Road, Salford. The Morning Chronicle reporter A. B. Reach visited the mill in 1849 and found the proprietors to be 'gentlemen who exert themselves to the utmost to promote the social comfort and improvement of their workpeople. In the admirably-ordered establishment which they possess are workmen who have toiled for the same masters for more than forty years'.² Harvey lived in Regent Road and then in Trafalgar Square, Salford, by 1832. Later he moved to Acton Square.³ He retired from business in 1864 and his sons took charge

1. The main sources for Harvey are obits. in Salford Weekly News, 31 Dec. 1870, Guardian, 31 Dec. 1870, Courier, 29 Dec. 1870.

2. Reach, Manchester and the Textile Districts in 1849 (1972 edn.), 13-14.

3. Pigot & Dean Directories.

of the firm. Harvey joined the others in the band in most of their political and social activities. He spoke at public meetings dealing with important reforms and supported many charitable and improving ventures. Like several of his associates he had also 'arrived' in local society and affairs by the mid-1830s. He was a Constable of Salford in 1834 and later a Police Commissioner. After Salford's incorporation in 1844 he was one of the first aldermen elected and remained one until his death. He was twice elected Mayor, in 1857 and 58, was Boroughreeve in 1852-3, and became a magistrate in 1858. Like most of the band Harvey was one of the earliest members of the Anti-Corn Law League.

Another man who was as active in Salford as in Manchester affairs was John Benjamin Smith (1794-1879). Smith was a Cross Street Unitarian.¹ He was born in Coventry; his father Benjamin was a silk throwster. In 1808 Smith entered the office of his uncle Joseph, a Manchester cotton merchant, and by 1813-14 he was managing the whole correspondence of the firm and regularly attending sales in London (much to the firm's profit). Benjamin Smith left Coventry and became the partner of his brother Joseph, but this arrangement ended in 1826 and there were then two separate firms. When his father died in 1830 J. B. Smith became the head of Benjamin Smith & Sons, later known as J. B. Smith & Co. The firm had a warehouse and office in Cotton Court. Smith

1. Slugg, 173. For what follows see J. E. Cornish's short biography (1887) in Memoranda and Letters on certain public and private affairs. With biographical sketches of J. B. Smith; also Smith's Reminiscences and Newspaper Cuttings of Speeches and Letters by J. B. Smith and articles referring to him; F. A. Bruton's biogr. intro. to Smith's account of Peterloo in Three Accounts of Peterloo by Eyewitnesses, ed. Bruton (1921); Biogr. Refs.

made a large fortune and retired in 1836. He had been interested in public affairs for many years and had kept records of his thoughts on them. He was a particularly avid free trader. The copy of the Wealth of Nations in his father's library had been an object of much veneration: 'I used when a boy to pore over this book with more pleasure than any other. I was captivated with its simplicity, sound sense and convincing arguments'.¹ Though he had been politically-interested during the war, and though his liberal views were confirmed by the 1815 corn law, he does not appear to have been active in local politics until after Peterloo. He mixed socially with others in the band and joined them in the local political and commercial controversies of the 1820s and 30s. He devoted himself fully to this activity after his retirement from business. He became a magistrate in 1835. He was a leading member of the League, became President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1839, and was M.P. for Stirling 1847-52 and Stockport 1852-74. (He had already stood unsuccessfully for Blackburn in 1837 and Walsall and Dundee in 1841.) His prominence made him the target of heated attacks, as in March 1852 when the Tory Stockport Advertiser condemned his political principles, Unitarian religion, oratory and involvement with the failed joint stock bank established in Manchester by the band's circle in 1829.²

With reference to the era of Cobden and the League N. C. Edsall has applied the same dismissive epithets to Smith as to Prentice.³ The fact

1. Reminiscences, 1-2.

2. Newspaper Cuttings, 29.

3. Edsall, op.cit. 42.

is that Smith, Prentice and their fellows had been locally active in the reform interest for years before Cobden appeared, and they had played an essential role in the formation of the support base which Cobden later used in his personal rise to national significance. Back in the 1820s and early 30s Smith joined others in the band in their public efforts and was often a speaker at important public meetings. A man of literary talent, he would also help in the drawing up of petitions, resolutions and other public statements of the respectable reformers. He was an extremely active propagandist during the 1832 parliamentary elections in Manchester and Salford.¹ In 1835 he was asked by a local Unitarian minister to help form a body of talented writers who would use their skills to spread religious truth.² Smith also wrote on the cotton trade and the plight of the handloom weavers in the 1830s.³ His wealth and status are indicated by his residences: like some of the others in the band he was able to move away from the commercial centre towards the suburbs and countryside. He lived in Islington Street, Salford, and later in Pendleton. By the time of his death he had gone to King's Ride, Ascot.⁴

Absalom Watkin (1787-1861) was born in London, the descendant of a long line of Flintshire landowners and farmers.⁵ His father had been a

1. E.g. Smith Papers and Letters relating to the Parliamentary Elections in Manchester and Salford 1832.

2. Revd. J. R. Beard to Smith, 9 March 1835, Mem. & Letters, 6.

3. See pieces in Mem. & Letters.

4. Mem. & Letters; Biogr. Refs (obit.).

5. On Watkin, see his Journal and Fragment No.1 (ed. E. W. Watkin, 1874), Fragment No. 2 (ed. E. W. Watkin, 1878).

soldier, wheelwright and vintner, but died during Absalom's youth and so the latter came to Manchester to receive a business training with his uncle John, a cotton merchant. In 1807 Watkin became the master of the firm. Its premises moved several times, but were mostly in Cannon Street,¹ and the firm was still doing business in the 1920s. Watkin was registered as a calico, twist and weft dealer. But his greatest loves were gardening, books, study and debate - not business. He seems to have been a pious man who rejected materialism and felt that merchants should concern themselves with higher things. He had some oratorical talent; J. T. Slugg was to name him and Shuttleworth as 'perhaps the most effective speakers in Manchester' during the 1820s and 30s, 'Watkin being the more refined and Shuttleworth being possessed of more power and energy' (though in 1920 the Guardian was to state that Watkin had spoken with 'a sepulchral voice and an awkward manner').² Watkin had literary skill and this was recognised by his friends and sometimes put to use in the reformers' campaigns. It was Watkin who drew up the public remonstrance after Peterloo, many of the pro-reform addresses and resolutions of 1831-2, and some of the earliest statements of the anti-corn law movement in the later 1830s. Watkin was a member of the renowned Literary and Philosophical Society (elected in January 1823),³ and among his other intellectual and cultural interests were education, poetry, country walks and travel in general - as displayed by the kind of books he read and

1. Pigot & Dean Directories.

2. Slugg, 174; Guardian, 24 April 1920 (a review of Watkin's Journal).

3. Members and Officers of the Lit. & Phil. Soc.

lectures he attended. He was sociable and an interesting conversationalist. In October 1807 he helped to form the Sciolous Society for mutual improvement, and in 1810 he joined the Literary and Scientific Club. He later became its historian. He liked to recall his meetings and conversations with such men as Thelwall, Cobbett and Carlile. Watkin became a magistrate in the mid-1830s. His third son Alfred was also a magistrate, and a Town Councillor for over 20 years and Mayor of Manchester in 1873-4. Another son, Edward, was a writer and M.P., was knighted, and married into a wealthy publishing family.¹

Watkin differed from the rest of the band in that he was an Anglican, but like his friends he sympathised with a rational approach to religion (and believed that the world had a coherent plan to it); he was not anti-Dissent and favoured religious liberty as strongly as political and commercial liberty. He was not a staunch reformer early on, but Peterloo convinced him of the need to question the conduct of the established authorities and he already had strong social and business links with others in the band. He joined them increasingly in their political, charitable, commercial and improving activities and campaigns - but remained reluctant to become too involved in public life. He was remembered as a modest and unobtrusive man. Certainly he was of a very serious frame of mind. At the age of only 23 he made out a full and detailed plan for his future life. He wanted to train his mind to renounce unnecessary conversation and trifling pursuits. He calculated that when he was 35 he would have money and knowledge enough for

1. Journal, 107; T. Swindells, Manchester Streets and Manchester Men (1907) 37-9.

extensive travel, to which he would devote seven years. He would return and write an account of his experiences in order to show the effects of real Christianity on the happiness of mankind, and then he would actively engage in work which would promote the spread of Christianity and happiness.¹ Watkin was not able to do all that he had hoped, but his strongly moralistic approach to public questions meant that he supported many activities designed in his view to promote the causes of philanthropy and progress. As he recorded in June 1831: '...to take an interest in the affairs of our fellow men is one great source of comfortable feeling'.² He was a man of wealth and respectability. Like some of his friends he was able to move out to the suburbs, to Broughton in the 1820s, to Stony Knolls on New Bury Road by 1832, and later to the pleasant rural village of Northenden. His business success also made him a natural candidate for a place on the board of such institutions as the Manchester Fire Assurance Company, established in 1824.³

The participation of these men in public affairs, and the direction this activity took, were in some measure an outcome of the theological and moral imperatives operating within the band. Their whole approach was characterised by reasonableness, by a spirit of toleration and by an assertiveness which came naturally to men rising in social and commercial importance but which could also often be a response to prejudice or criticism from outside. Shared political and economic principles bound

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1. 'A Plan for the Proper Employment of my Time from this Day, May 18 1810, to the Day of my Death' in Fragment No.1, 9-19.
 2. Journal, 151.
 3. Pigot & Dean Directories.

members of the band together, but so did a serious and often moralistic way of looking at the world. The two 'Cowherdites' Brotherton and Harvey gained from their Bible Christianity a readiness and a motivation to engage in activity that could benefit others. Their sect was imbued with a sense of 'religious brotherhood' with all other Christians which disposed them to charity, fellowship, understanding and loving their neighbours. There were elements of mysticism in their creed, but there was also a dominant role for 'reason' - as seen by the interest in science and Bible criticism, and in a wider social setting the attempt to serve the cause of reason through educational and philanthropic work. The zeal for reforms was related to the view that much within the Church-State system could not stand up to the test of reason. The need and desire for reforms could also be Bible-based and related to a particular interpretation of scripture. The Bible Christians were often assailed, though, for being eccentrics and for holding dangerous tenets.¹ William Cowherd himself was apparently a temperamental and unstable character who broke with the Established Church and then with the main body of Swedenborgians,² and his followers seemed to many to be the agents of schism, confusion and error. The future Manchester Boroughreeve Benjamin Braidley, a staunch Anglican merchant, keen educator and home visitor, was horrified when one of his acquaintances became a Cowherdite and tried in vain to talk him out of this conversion. Braidley regarded the 'fall' of

1. W. R. Ward, 'Swedenborgianism: heresy, schism or religious protest?' Studies in Church History, 9 (1972); V. Tomlinson, 'Postscript to Peterloo', MRHR III (1989).

2. Monthly Observer, Feb. 1859.

this individual as an instructive lesson for others.¹ There was controversy in 1820 when a 'True Nonconformist' wrote to the liberal Gazette and rejected the notion of religious unity as unrealistic and harmful. 'A Swedenborgian' (possibly Brotherton) replied with a defence of fellowship and understanding,² but this did not stop the sect of Brotherton and Harvey from being disliked and distrusted. Perhaps these attacks and the comparatively small size of the Bible Christian group helped to make it more cohesive and assertive. In any case the Bible Christians had a high public profile, being active in many 'good causes' of the period.

Much of this holds true for the Manchester Unitarians, who had seven of the band among their number. The Manchester Unitarians were also of a tolerant and rational character and do not appear to have been strongly sectarian. They often had to close ranks when attacked, though. One 'very respectable' correspondent of the radical Observer in 1820 rejected the charge that he and other Unitarians were blasphemers and non-Christians. He argued that Jesus was a Unitarian and that the Bible did not support ~~the~~ the doctrine of the Trinity.³ On the whole the

1. Benjamin Braidley, Diary (Archives Dept. MCL) i. 148, 152, 157.

2. Gazette, 28 Oct. 1820.

3. Observer, 26 Feb. 1820. For what follows see F. Kenworthy, Cross St. Chapel in the Life of Manchester (n.d.); R. Wade, The Rise of Nonconformity in Manchester, with a brief sketch of the History of Cross St. Chapel (1880); Baker, Memorials; E. Wright, Mrs. Gaskell. The Basis for Reassessment (1965), 25-36; H. McLachlan, 'Cross St. Chapel' and 'Our Aims and Ideas' in his Essays and Addresses; F. Kenworthy, 'The Unitarian Tradition in Liberal Christianity' and F. Micklewright, 'A New Approach to Unitarian History', both in TUHS, 8 (1943-6); R. V. Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England (1938. 2nd edn. 1952).

Unitarians were fairly relaxed regarding doctrine, believing that one's conduct and lifestyle were more important than any rigid adherence to particular theological tenets. At Cross Street there was no doctrinal test on ministers or members of the congregation - the atmosphere was liberal, tolerant and informal. Some dissatisfaction with this had prompted a group to break away and establish the Mosley Street chapel in 1788-9. This smaller but very respectable congregation preferred to use a regular printed form of prayer¹ and felt that the preaching in Cross Street had been insufficiently Unitarian. But the two congregations remained very close despite this difference, and cooperated in many educational and other efforts. The dominant Cross Street body never became strongly sectarian and its relaxed approach probably helped to foster good relations between the Unitarians in the band and men of other Dissenting sects in reform movements - because the differences in theology were not allowed to be obstacles to public cooperation. The Unitarians in the band were characterised by a concern for individuals and for society. Manchester Unitarians tended to be outward-looking but not evangelical, undogmatic, concerned about ethics and conduct more than doctrines, tolerant, reasonable and liberal. The movement away from doctrine could be linked with a belief in the freedom of each person to interpret the Bible as he liked, and with the individualistic and libertarian ideas of the moderate majority. The Manchester Unitarians were noted for their wealth and respectability. They were social and cultural leaders. Perhaps a narrow sectarianism might have harmed their ability to rise. They wanted to remove obstacles, not to encourage

1. J. Aston, A Picture of Manchester (1816), 96-7.

them. Forward-looking and progressive, but with a keen sense of tradition and intellectual heritage too, the liberalism in theology complemented and confirmed (and was confirmed by) the liberalism in politics. The desire was to impose their own image of what society should be, to whatever extent possible.¹

The Unitarians in the band were socially and politically assertive. They were impatient with the present, with civil disabilities, a static and exclusive political system, unadventurous and restrictive commercial policies, difficulties in the way of personal advancement. The desire for reform meant a predilection for radicalism of a rational and constructive kind. Benthamism was attractive because it seemed to offer avenues which could lead to progress, reform and efficiency.² But the theology was always present in the background, no matter how engulfed in politics and power relationships the Unitarians in the band became. It could be that the Arian roots of Unitarian theology are of key importance here. Arius (c.250-336, born in Libya) was probably the first important theologian to make a clear distinction between God and Jesus: he did this because of the notion that there was no necessary connection between the existence of an ordered world and the 'Logos', the divine capacity to

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1. On some of these points see J. Seed, 'Unitarianism, Political Economy and the antinomies of liberal culture in Manchester 1830-60', SH, 7 (1982), and 'Gentlemen Dissenters: the Social and Political Meanings of Rational Dissent in the 1770s and 80s', HJ, 28 (1985).
 2. I. Sellars, 'Unitarians and Social Change' Hibbert Journal, 61 (1962-3): I. Varieties of Radicalism, II. Benthamism and Liberty; also Sellars, 'Prelude to Peterloo: Warrington Radicalism 1775-1819' MRHR, III (1989). The links between (non-Trinitarian) heterodoxy and political radicalism have also been investigated in J. C. D. Clark, English Society 1688-1832 (1985).

create an ordered world. Arianism sought to reconcile God's utter freedom with His rationality. Jesus was a knowable likeness of God but not part of the life of God. God was knowable only in His world-orientated aspect; apart from this He was unknowable and free. These matters were taken further by Socinus (1539-1604, born Siena) who clearly denied the divinity of Jesus - but dogma was to be less important than its implications for real situations, at least as far as the Manchester Unitarians were concerned in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Arian emphasis on the utter independence and separateness of God undermined the notion of 'God's Will', and this could lead to an extreme form of voluntarism. Nothing was settled, so there could be opportunities for reforms in the public sphere and advancement in the personal sphere. Perhaps members of the band adapted their faith and theology to suit their own circumstances and ambitions. It was not clear that God had decided that some should be rich and others poor, some have authority and others none. God was absolutely free and was not tied to such a formula. So there was nothing to stop an individual from rising in the world or engaging in movements to reform and improve his state and society. What was needed was effort, faith, self-dependence and good works. What this entailed was a concern about conduct rather than strict dogma.¹

The Unitarians were the dominant group within Manchester's liberal-Dissenting body. As they became more and more prominent in local affairs, indeed, it was the Unitarians who were often singled out for

1. On Socinus and Arius, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (2nd edn. 1974) and especially R. Williams, Arius. Heresy and Tradition (1987), 175-7, 230-33.

attack by the local Tory establishment - both because of their politics and their theology. The Tory Mercury condemned a Unitarian dinner in April 1823 for drinking to the 'Sovereignty of the People' while refusing to toast the king's health - and this after the organisers had declared that politics would be avoided. In the mid-1820s the Guardian used the parliamentary debates on Unitarian Marriage Bills to stress the Unitarians' right to profess and promulgate their principles and to demand that Unitarianism should cease to be an offence at common law; in 1827 the Tory Courier hoped that the latest measure for relieving Unitarians from the Anglican marriage ceremony would be soundly defeated - because even if limited relief to tender consciences was partly bearable this bill was offensive to 'the soundest principles of religion and morality'.¹ In 1832, when Unitarians were leading movers in the election campaigns to secure the return of liberal, free trade candidates for Manchester and Salford, one writer condemned this 'seditious Junto' and described Unitarianism as based on 'confidence and obstinacy, deceit and hypocrisy, interest and design, and every wicked principle which needs a forgery to give suspicious falsehood the appearance of truth'. Unitarians were characterised as having promoted discord, faction and mischief for decades, always being active in opposition, and hated by every other sect. The Courier felt that Unitarian involvement in the parliamentary reform campaign and 1832 elections proved that the Church was in serious danger.² Earlier controversies in Manchester had related to articles in

1. Mercury, 29 April 1823; Guardian, 10 April 1824, 11 June 1825; Courier, 7 July 1827.

2. 'To the Free and Independent Electors of England', July 1832, handbill in Brotherton Scrapbks, xi. 14; Courier, 16 June 1832.

local journals about the deity of Christ and correspondence on the divisions between Unitarianism and 'Orthodox Dissent', religious 'truth', the movement from moderate Arianism to Socinianism and 'error', and the Unitarians' claims to their chapels and endowments.¹ These attacks on the Manchester Unitarians probably increased their self-assertiveness, as did their inner strength, belief in reform and progress and consciousness of social and economic importance. Cross Street provided a religious and political base for Manchester's respectable reformers. The congregation was cohesive and exclusive, dominated by men of wealth and status who were ready to enter provincial public life. Factors influencing their conduct included their minority position, their resentment against constitutional barriers to full citizenship, the long open trust dispute over the Cross Street body's right to occupy and administer property originally entrusted to its Trinitarian predecessors (a dispute in which members of the band became involved and which was settled in 1844), the close family connections and kinship ties within the congregation, and its liberal doctrine and selective membership (in contrast with the more sectarian and more popular newer Unitarian chapels).² Cross Street provided a headquarters and a forum, a launching-pad for a public career, and a base not only for political activity but also for educational and philanthropic work and full involvement in Manchester's cultural advancement.

1. E.g. Braidley, Diary, ii. 102, 122-3; The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield M.P. (Archives, MCL), 87-92; The Manchester Socinian Controversy (1825).

2. Gatrell 'Incorporation', 25-8; R. M. Montgomery & F. Hankinson on 'Dissenters Chapels Act 1844' in TUHS, 8 (1943-6); Holt, Unitarian Contribution, 338-9; on respectability of Cross St. body J. Aston, The Manchester Guide (1804), 121; Slugg, 173-4; and Baker, Memorials, for the trustees.

Though he was not a Unitarian or a Bible Christian Prentice differed little from his friends and allies in the way he approached the salient questions of the age. He was as tolerant as they were, and shared in the desire for improvement, justice and liberty. Like them, for instance, he opposed disabilities on account of religious opinions. When writing in 1830 of the restrictions on Jews he denounced disabilities as 'equally adverse to sound policy and the tolerant spirit of Christianity'. He later recalled of Sidmouth's 1811 measure to control Dissenting preachers that the Dissenters' submission and loyalty during the war years was 'rewarded by a kick ... which taught them that to retain even the share of liberty they possessed they must energetically demand those which were denied to them'.¹ As he favoured the use of reason in politics, so also did Prentice look into the application of rationality in religion. He felt that the 'truths' of science came from God, and in 1825 he called religion 'the great master science'.²

Members of the band were reacting against many things. Some of the matters discussed above may have made them feel like "outsiders". They were regarded as different; the early gatherings in the Potters' warehouse surprised some contemporaries because it was not usual (or wise) for commercial men to ally themselves with political movements unless these were in support of the local and central authorities.³ The desire for change and the desire to be active characterised the band's involvement

1. Times, 10 April 1830; Sketches, 21.

2. Gazette, 19 March 1825.

3. Swindells, City 'House', op.cit.

in many social, political and economic spheres, and behind it all was a belief in personal merit and effort, voluntarism and self-reliance. There was a recognition of the need to change the Church-State system and to create alternatives to it, to give attention to matters not dealt with by local or central authorities, to find new ways of dealing with the dominance of a Church that was unacceptable and an exclusive and corrupt political system to which the band could not fully belong. There was an animus against privilege, monopoly and perceived injustices - rooted both in theology and in liberal political opinions. Parliamentary, ecclesiastical and commercial reform would provide openings and opportunities for the band and their children. Their religious nonconformity and their political liberalism formed essential parts of their self-understanding and identity,⁴ and they may also have been influenced by and participated in the rise of a "middle class" consciousness. Certainly, theirs was the peculiarly middle class political creed which K. Robbins has identified, based on efficiency not indolence, merit not privilege, the commercial and industrious north not the effete south, free churchmen and a free state in place of the established order.⁵ Members of the band must also have been influenced

1. Times, 10 April 1830; Sketches, 21.

2. Gazette, 19 March 1825.

3. Swindells, City 'House' op.cit.

4. See useful comments in R. E. Ritchey, 'The Origins of English Radicalism: the changing rationale for Dissent', Eighteenth Century Studies, 7 (1973-4).

5. Robbins, 'Bright & the Middle Class', 21.

by a sense of urban pride, identity and responsibilities which prompted their participation in local government disputes and also in educational, cultural and philanthropic activity. The "gentrification" which A. J. Kidd has seen as one characteristic of the Manchester middle class in the nineteenth century¹ was only partly achieved by some members of the band. There was certainly the seeking after social and political ascendancy, acceptance, property and the movement towards the suburbs or country (and even Cornwall or Ascot), but this took a long time and did not destroy all connections with Manchester. In the 1810s, 20s and 30s no member of the band failed to act on a sense of duty to improve the town and the lives of its inhabitants in some form or other.

2. Reformers in Manchester c.1787-1815

Among the other influences affecting the band was the example set by their predecessors in Manchester reform movements before the end of the war. An identifiable reforming party was active in Manchester from the late 1780s to the late 1790s. Its leaders were well-to-do Dissenters from the local business community, well-educated and public-spirited men who were successful in commerce and manufacturing and who also displayed a wide range of philosophical, scientific and political interests. Several belonged to the renowned Literary and Philosophical Society. Among the most prominent of these reformers were George Philips, from a

1. Kidd, 'The Middle Class in 19th Century Manchester' in eds. A. J. Kidd & K. W. Roberts, City, Class and Culture (1985).

wealthy Unitarian cotton family, James Watt jun., son of the inventor, Thomas Cooper, a Paineite lawyer and chemist, and Thomas Walker, a wealthy Unitarian merchant and manufacturer.¹ Walker (1751-1818) was the leader of the group. The first important political campaign in which these men engaged was the anti-slave trade agitation which was most forceful in the years 1787-92. This agitation involved men of differing political and religious opinions and was only clearly the work of the respectable liberals after about 1790.² By this time party divides in Manchester were more clearly defined. The 1787-90 campaigns for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts solidified these distinctions and, as a local historian J. Wheeler was to say, signalled the beginnings of 'a constant ferment in the town, which after the commencement of the war never subsided'.³ The locally-dominant Anglican-Tory oligarchy and its supporters celebrated the Dissenters' defeat by establishing the Church and King Club in March 1790; this gave the conservatives and loyalists a central, public and locally-prominent organ that could serve as a focus for their various political activities in the town. Before long the

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1. For what follows Biographical Memoir of Thomas Walker, esq., of Manchester (1820); F. Knight, The Strange Case of Thomas Walker (1957); D. Malone, The Public Life of Thomas Cooper (1926); E. Robinson, 'An English Jacobin: James Watt jun. 1769-1848', CHJ (1953-5); T. Walker, A Review of Some of the Political Events in Manchester during the last five years (1794); P. Handforth, 'Manchester Radical Politics 1789-94', TLCAS (1956); L. S. Marshall, The Development of Public Opinion in Manchester 1780-1820 (1946), ch. VI; Prentice, Sketches ch. I & II.
 2. E. M. Hunt, 'The Anti-Slave Trade Agitation in Manchester', TLCAS, 79 (1977).
 3. G. M. Ditchfield, 'The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts 1787-90', THSLC, 126 (1977); J. Wheeler, Manchester: its political, social and commercial history, ancient and modern (1836), 92.

group collecting around Walker had founded a rival liberal association. Their enthusiasm for the activities of the French revolutionaries and their desire to provide local reformers with a forum for discussion, information and mutual encouragement, as well as a counterweight to the Church and King Club and an impulse for perseverance despite the disappointment on the matter of the Test and Corporation Acts, led them to establish the Manchester Constitutional Society in October 1790.¹ Walker was President and Cooper chief propagandist. The printer Matthew Faulkner helped with the publication and distribution of the Society's enlightening handbills and pamphlets.

The liberals could get no coverage from the established local newspapers and so it was eventually decided to set up a new paper, an alternative organ of communication and information that would enable the reformers to present their case more effectively. Finance came from the wealthier reformers, Faulkner and his partner Birch were printers and publishers and Cooper the main editor and most influential contributor. The first issue of the new Manchester Herald appeared on 31 March 1792. As the prospectus declared, 'no fear nor favour shall prevent us from making our publication decidedly the PAPER OF THE PEOPLE'.² The newspaper was quickly known for its extensive reportage and comment on public affairs. As D. Clare has said, it was 'probably the first

1. Rules and Orders of the Manchester Constitutional Society, instituted October 1790 (1791).

2. Prospectus is in J. Harland, Manchester and Lancashire Collection (scrapbook), 256, and Leary, Periodical Press, 70.

provincial newspaper to be established for purely political reasons'.¹ The notion of the provincial paper as a political organ capable of creating and directing opinion really begins with the Manchester Herald - and was to be fully acted upon by the band in later decades. The Tories soon recognised the importance of a newspaper to the success of the radical cause, and the effectiveness of the Manchester Herald can be judged by the bitterness of the campaign against it. Eventually, in the spring of 1793, five ex-officio informations and six indictments were laid against Faulkner and Birch. They fled to the U.S.A. and the last issue of the newspaper appeared on 23 March 1793.²

The notoriety of the Constitutional Society had increased dramatically in April 1792 when Cooper and Watt presented its address of congratulation and encouragement to the Jacobin Club in Paris. Burke drew attention to the matter in the Commons, accusing Cooper, Watt and the Constitutional Society of dangerous and disloyal designs. Cooper responded with a pamphlet attacking Burke's 'gross blunders and obvious misrepresentations'.³ The Manchester conservatives began to look for ways to combat the rise of advanced views but reformist zeal in the district would not die down. May and June 1792 saw the formation of two largely plebeian radical clubs, the Patriotic and Reformation Societies, committed to peaceful reforms and operating under the patronage of the

1. Clare, 'The Local Newspaper Press and Local Politics in Manchester and Liverpool, 1780-1800', TLCAS, 73-4, (1963-4), 107, 112.

2. Leary, Periodical Press, 73-6; Handforth, 95-6; Walker, Review, 25; A. Goodwin, The Friends of Liberty (1979), 228-30.

3. Cooper, A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective against Mr. Cooper and Mr. Watt in the House of Commons on 30 April 1792 (1792).

Walker group. Their members were mainly weavers, labourers and journeymen, and concern was expressed because they had respectable backing.¹ From early summer 1792 the Manchester Tories were preparing themselves for a trial of strength. On 4 June 1792 after a loyalist meeting and an illumination to mark the King's birthday, a large and unruly section of the assembled crowd attacked two Dissenting chapels (one of them the Mosley Street Unitarian chapel). The authorities did not intervene.² The propaganda campaign against Walker and the Constitutional Society was stepped up and in September 1792 a total of 186 Manchester innkeepers and publicans signed a declaration of loyalty and banned reformers' clubs from their premises. Some had probably had their licences threatened.³ Henceforth the Constitutional Society met at Walker's house in South Parade and the plebeian Patriotic Society was given the use of Walker's warehouse to the rear of the living quarters.⁴ Controversy and argument continued unabated and the public mind was continually agitated as the French Revolution began to take a more extreme and violent path. Meanwhile George Philips had written his influential The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform in Parliament. This advocated the admission of every citizen (except children and the insane, but including women) to the vote, electoral districts containing equal

1. Knight, 79; Goodwin, 235.

2. Prentice, Sketches, 6-7; Walker, Review, 33-40; Knight, 76-8; Malone, 57.

3. Copy of declaration in Hay Scrapbks.xiv (unpaginated); Prentice, Sketches, 7-8 (in which he condemns the sordid alliance of parsons and publicans); Handforth, 99; one Manchester public house still had its 'No Jacobins Admitted' sign up in 1825: J. Reilly, The People's History of Manchester (1859), 281.

4. Walker, Review, 41-43.

numbers of voters, voting by ballot and the closing of the poll in one day, regulations to prevent disorders and undue influence at elections, the paying of M.P.s and abolition of qualifications so that each citizen would be eligible to act as an M.P., annual parliaments, a system of rotation so that no M.P. could sit for more than three years and no more than two-thirds of the members of one parliament could sit in the next, the separation of ministers from the legislative assembly, and the authorising of constituents to discharge unsatisfactory representatives.¹ The resilience of local radicalism brought forth another spate of loyalist-inspired mob activity in December 1792. The Manchester Herald offices were attacked, so was Walker's house and that of spinner William Gorse, where the Reformation Society had been meeting. As before the authorities did not stop the disturbances. Walker's protests were upheld by Fox and Grey in the Commons on 17 December 1792.²

From 12 December 1792 the Manchester conservatives had an active and powerful organ designed to put paid to Walker's party in the Association for Preserving Constitutional Order and Liberty as well as Property against the various efforts of Levellers and Republicans.³ (The name

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1. G. Philips, The Necessity of a Speedy and Effectual Reform in Parliament (1792), 54.
 2. Walker, Review, 54-68, 70-85; Knight, ch.9; Prentice, Sketches, 9-11; A. Booth, 'Popular Loyalism and Public Violence in the Northwest of England 1790-1800', SH, (1983), 299, 301; handbills in Hay Scrapbks. xiv.
 3. Hay Scrapbks. xiv (unpaginated); Assoc. for Preserving Const. Order constitution and minutes of committee (ms. in Chetham's); Prentice, Sketches, ch. XXVII (supplementary chapter); Knight, ch.10 and 11; Handforth, 99-100; A. Mitchell, 'The Association Movement of 1792-3', HJ, (1961).

resembles that of the Reeves Association founded in London in November 1792 but Manchester loyalism had a dynamic of its own and did not have to depend on promptings from elsewhere. There is no evidence in the APCO's records of any close collusion with the Reeves body). The APCO worked hand in hand with the local authorities; indeed the magistrates and town officers were among its leading members. The body undertook to discover and bring to justice all authors, publishers and distributors of seditious and treasonable writings, 'and especially all persons who shall be engaged in any societies or combinations for the dispersion and promotion of such doctrines'.¹ The APCO set up a system of surveillance of suspect persons and aimed to better the reformers in every department - publicity, propaganda, influence over public opinion, control of Manchester affairs. The APCO was behind the move forcing Faulkner and Birch of the Manchester Herald into exile, and then the trial of Walker for conspiracy in April 1794.² Walker was acquitted but his personal wealth was seriously depleted by the trial and his health suffered too. The trial also frightened many reformers into inactivity.

Walker would probably not have been the victim of such persecution, and the Manchester Herald and Constitutional Society would not have

1. APCO minutes, inaugural meeting 12 Dec. 1792.

2. APCO minutes, committee meeting 24 Dec. 1792; Prentice, Sketches, 5-6, 11-15; T. Walker (ed.), The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of an indictment against Thomas Walker of Manchester (and others) ...for a conspiracy to overthrow the Constitution and Government, and to aid and assist the French (being the King's enemies) in case they should invade this kingdom (1794); Handforth, 102-4; Walker, Review, 96-122.

come to such ignominious ends, had the local reform party not been so isolated. Isolation exacerbated the problems likely to be faced by any group in a minority position, and it is not only^{to} be explained by reference to the seemingly irrepressible wave of loyalist sentiment which was spreading over the country in the early 1790s. The years 1789-93 were good ones for the Manchester cotton trade but many workers felt insecure, largely because of rising mechanisation, while masters remembered the bad years of the 1780s and were anxious to retain their newly comfortable status. Loyalist propaganda could appeal to both classes by emphasising the links between security, prosperity and the established order - and the likelihood that reforms would mean uncertainty and disruption. A. Booth has suggested that the reformers could not secure a wide basis of support because they failed to direct their appeal to the economic self-interest of the working man.¹ There might be something in this. The Walker party did concentrate on public affairs and political principles; less attention was paid to the 'bread and butter' concerns of the workers and to economic issues in general, although the economic consequences of government politics were increasingly discussed in the reformers' propaganda after the start of the war. If the Constitutional Society had made a mistake in neglecting to offer something to the lower ranks it was one that was not repeated by the band after the war. The band engaged wholeheartedly in the discussion of economic theory and policies. Then again, after 1815 Manchester's business system was becoming far more developed, and the cotton trade's dynamic role in the nation's overall economic expansion was also far more in evidence, so circumstances

1. Booth, 'Popular Loyalism', 303-5.

dictated that reformers had to address themselves to social and economic issues whether they liked it or not.

Whatever the reasons for the downfall of the Constitutional Society its efforts certainly were not forgotten. Walker and his allies provided an example and a stimulus to younger men who began to be active in Manchester reform circles towards the end of the war. Certainly the band were aware of what had happened in the 1790s and were inspired by the struggles of Walker's group. This is obvious from the early chapters of Prentice's Sketches. Walker's fame as a reformer lived on, and his son was to be a prominent Manchester liberal too. C. J. S. Walker (1788-1875) sometimes joined members of the band in their activities from the end of the 1820s, and was later a Town Councillor and local magistrate.¹ When he spoke at the meeting of 22 September 1831, held to urge the Lords to pass the Reform Bill without delay, he was followed by Richard Potter. Potter climbed onto a table,

and with a voice struggling with emotion, but with the greatest energy, exclaimed: 'This is the son of the late venerable Thomas Walker, the great patriot, who was mobbed in his house and tried at Lancaster for being an advocate of that reform which is now sanctioned by the king and his ministers. (Tremendous applause.) I rejoice to see the day when his principles are cherished by a whole people. I especially rejoice to see the son thus nobly advocating the cause in which the father suffered so much.' The applause which followed this emphatic address was deafening, and was repeatedly renewed after Mr. Potter had taken his seat.²

1. Biogr. Refs. His christian names were chosen in honour of his two godfathers, Fox and the Earl of Derby: Charles James Stanley.

2. Times, 24 Sept. 1831.

Two points made by Walker in the conclusion of his Review of 1794 were to have a special influence on the activity and thinking of the band.¹ The first was Walker's recognition that it would take a long time to correct embedded injustices and anomalies; Walker stressed that reformers should not be put off by the obstacles facing them but should persist with their efforts even if they saw no immediate results. These results might only be evident in future generations. Members of the band fully shared such sentiments, and their perseverance was one of their greatest attributes. Without it the Tory hold on local affairs would not have been shaken off for decades. Prentice echoed Walker's view and in the Sketches and his newspapers often expressed a determination to engage in good works even if the intended beneficiaries failed to see that in Prentice and the band they had friends and defenders. The second point made by Walker was that the progress of reform was often retarded by ignorance, that a political campaign needed the assistance of education and information. What was needed was a complete and universal system of education. Again the band agreed. The band's enthusiasm for all kinds of formal and informal education stemmed from the belief that more education would mean more support for reform, as people saw what was wrong with the established order, and there was also the conviction (influenced by the writings of the Benthamites) that education should be and would be the basis of political rights. The band were keen to 'educate' those sections of society they deemed worthy of enfranchisement, and devoted much time, money and attention to libraries, mechanics' institutes, lectures, infants' schools and many similar organs of improvement.

1. Walker, Review, 126-7.

After Walker's trial reform activity in Manchester died down, not least because the war brought with it an increased pressure to conform. There was a peace movement in the town, led at first by respectable Unitarian textile masters like Walker, George and Robert Philips, Samuel Greg and John and Arthur Clegg, but the anti-war meetings of the 1790s were not as effective as they might have been because they were denied official sanction (the town officers refused to preside) and because they were nearly always countered by loyal meetings and addresses.¹ Still, the events and arguments of the war years became a central part of developing radical folklore. Many of the grievances of the postwar era were traced back to the war; blame was attached to those responsible for the conduct of the war and those who, in the local environment, had supported those responsible. Members of the band were to become fully imbued with the sentiments of Manchester's wartime liberals, recording their opposition to the war and sense of outrage at its effects.² The crucial connection between 'rational Christianity' and the ebullience of liberalism and protest during the war has been highlighted by J. E. Cookson.³ The opponents of the war tended to collect around religious congregations. In part the protests were a natural progression from the Test and Corporation Acts repeal campaigns of 1787-90. It is significant

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1. On meetings of 1791 and 1795 see reports and handbills in Hay Scrapbooks xiv (unpaginated), xvii, 55-7, 148-52; APCO minutes, Nov. & Dec. 1795; Wheeler, History, 93; Prentice, Sketches, 29.
 2. E.g. Watkin, Fragment No. 1, 59-64, Fragment No. 2, 47; Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 79-80, Sketches, 18 and ch. I-V passim; R. Potter Colln. i. 50-4, 59-65, 88, 179, 189-90, iii.27; Meinertzhagen, 63-4, 71, 73, 112-13; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 2.
 3. Cookson, The Friends of Peace (1982), 5, 23, 191.

that many Unitarians provided local leadership and direction; this was the case in Manchester. Many of the salient characteristics of the wartime Friends of Peace can certainly be ascribed to Manchester's liberal-Dissenting leaders, both during and after the war: some "class" consciousness, a provincialism, rational Christianity and nonconformity (and so religious grievances), a desire to respond to the impact of loyalism, concern about the effects of war and government policies on commerce, some cohesion due to the feeling of being outsiders, and the 'animus against oligarchy' which could not fail to draw in disciples from a provincial, industrial, non-Anglican middle class. Manchester was not free in these years from a more threatening brand of radicalism and protest than that articulated by the respectable Friends of Peace. A Manchester Corresponding Society was operating from early 1796 and there was some United Irish and United English activity too, but this does not seem to have had much respectable involvement and the surveillance and repression of the authorities prevented any serious risings.¹ Local officers were among the most committed and active of participants in the politics of alarm in the war years, and the Manchester district saw the establishment of several loyalist associations and clubs and Volunteer units. There were close links between the loyal associations and the

1. Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, 399, 433, 439; J. Ann Hone, For the Cause of Truth. Radicalism in London 1796-1821 (1982), 89, 103; A. W. Smith, 'Irish Rebels and English Radicals 1798-1820', P & P, (1954-5); M. Elliott, 'The Despard Conspiracy Reconsidered', P & P, (1977); A. D. Harvey, Britain in the Early 19th Century (1978), 85-7; Marshall, Public Opinion, 121-25; A. Booth, 'The United Englishmen and Radical Politics in the industrial Northwest of England 1795-1803' International Review of Social History, 31 (1986); on fears about possible French invasion of Ireland Hay Scraps xiv.

Volunteers.¹ Protest movements were muzzled or rendered relatively impuissant in the 1790s. In 1808 the protest against ^{the} Orders in Council was matched by a pro-war address.²

Still, reformist sentiment in Manchester of the moderate, respectable and constitutional kind survived even though the liberals remained numerically weak. Petitions for peace in 1807 and 1808 gained over 41,000 signatures between them,³ some tribute to the efforts of reformist leaders during the preceding ten or twelve years. The determination and strong convictions of these men had been displayed by such things as the foundation of the Manchester Thinking Club, which began meeting in the mid-90s. The meetings were avowedly political demonstrations, for members would sit in complete silence from beginning to end as a protest against coercive legislation. Members took the Foxite position that the government was subverting English liberties and showed the authorities that however draconian the law became it would never stop a man from thinking. The Gazette praised the Club and its escape from 'constitutional muzzles' through silent contemplation: Manchester men could and would think for themselves.⁴ It was the

1. R. Dozier, For King, Constitution and Country (1983), 140-54; APCO minutes, Oct. 1794, Jan.-Feb. 1797; Wheeler, History, 97; Prentice, Sketches, 27-9; J. R. Western, 'The Volunteer Movement as an anti-revolutionary force', EHR, 71 (1956); J. E. Cookson, 'The English Volunteer Movement of the French Wars 1793-1815: Some Contexts', HJ, 32 (1989).

2. Cookson, Friends of Peace, 222.

3. Gazette, 22 Aug., 28 Dec. 1807, 3, 12 March, 25 May 1808.

4. J. W. Hunter, 'The Clubs of Old Manchester', Papers of the Manchester Literary Club, ii. (1876), 24.

establishment of the Gazette in 1795 that was probably of greatest importance in ensuring the survival of a respectable liberalism in Manchester during the war years. William Cowdroy was its editor and printer, and sole proprietor from 1799. He had an established liberal reputation and appears to have been a friend and correspondent of such London radicals as Hardy and Thelwall.¹ The Gazette did well, circulating widely in Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Sales reached a wartime high of 1700 a week in the summer of 1796 and never fell below 1000. The Gazette followed the Manchester Herald in the greater attention given to politics and the regular insertion of editorial comment. D. Clare feels that its success showed that many in the region were still sympathetic to the cause of reform and that a provincial paper could realistically hope to exert influence on public opinion.² These seem fair assumptions. The Manchester Tories tried to interfere with the Gazette's circulation and distribution in the later 1790s, and in the spring of 1798 William Cowdroy's sons (Thomas and William junior) were arrested on a charge of printing treasonable matter. They were released after 12 weeks.³

So a residue of committed liberalism does seem to have survived in Manchester despite the pressures to conform. There was, in addition, an extremist quasi-revolutionary wing among Manchester's plebeian reformers - though this was short-lived and fragmentary and never seems to have

1. Leary, Periodical Press, 81, 87; Ann Hone, 103, 106, 110, 137, 150.

2. Clare, 107-8, 113-14.

3. Gazette, 6 Feb., 16 April 1796; Leary, Periodical Press, 84-5.

posed so much of a threat as the local authorities believed. But economic hardship¹ did at times provide a wider support for radical nostrums - both moderate and extreme - swelling the number of townsmen who were willing to sign a petition or attend a meeting demanding change.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century the challenge to the establishment in both its local and national forms became closely associated with the activities of Joseph Hanson of Strangeways Hall, a radical manufacturer who advocated universal suffrage and allied himself with working men on such matters as wages and working conditions. Hanson was born in 1774, the son of a wealthy Manchester check manufacturer. The family were Unitarians and attended Stand chapel in Pilkington, just outside Manchester.² Hanson first rose to public notice in November 1798 when he became involved in a dispute over local officers' salaries and conduct. He urged local leypayers to keep a clear check on what was done with the public funds.³ In 1803 Manchester became gripped by another wave of Volunteer enthusiasm and Hanson raised his own unit, but by December 1805 he had become disillusioned and dissatisfied with the movement. Units had originally been formed for good patriotic purposes, but these had been lost sight of as men pursued personal and party ambitions. Hanson issued a shilling pamphlet (printed by William Cowdroy

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1. G. W. Daniels, The Cotton Trade during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, (1916) useful on the Manchester economy.
 2. Biogr. Refs.; R. T. Herford, 'Joseph Hanson, the Weavers' Friend', TUHS, 8 (1943-6); A Short Sketch or Memoir of the late Joseph Hanson, esquire, of Strangeways Hall (1811).
 3. Hanson's address of Nov. 1798 is in Hay Scrapbks xvi. 317-18.

junior) condemning such developments and advocating a reform of the Volunteer establishment - including new training methods and better allowances for clothing and attendance. A bitter pamphlet war ensued, with Hanson being accused of misrepresentation and disloyalty. Some of Hanson's supporters wrote in his defence.¹ His controversial career continued as he became involved in the peace movement. In December 1807 he tried unsuccessfully to get the town officers to call a public meeting to petition for peace. He had prepared a petition of his own, dealing with the effects of the war on commerce and especially with the low wages, poverty and unemployment - a sign of Hanson's growing concern for the plight of the labouring classes. Yet another phase of print warfare followed the appearance of a pamphlet by Hanson defending the peace movement. This work dealt with political and economic grievances, with the injustice and impolicy of continuing the war, and with the faults in the arguments of the peace and reform movement's critics. The pamphlet gave a clear and forceful exposition of the views of Hanson and the rising number of Mancunians who were beginning to look upon him as their representative. It was a measure of Hanson's effectiveness that his work sold well and that the response to it by local Tories was so vitriolic. One reply came from Alfred Mallalieu, member of a prominent Tory cotton and literary family, who accused Hanson of espousing 'a doctrine which, if not absolutely French, is of French extraction, rendered more

1. Hanson, Brief Remarks on the Present Volunteer Establishment (1805); A Letter to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Hanson, containing concise observations on his Brief Remarks, by A Volunteer (1805); A Letter to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Hanson. By an Englishman (1806); Cursory Strictures on the Concise Observations of a Volunteer. By an Advocate for Truth (1806).

palatable by an English dress'.¹

Meanwhile Hanson had been furthering his aim to win a seat in the House of Commons. His opponents put this down to vanity and personal ambition while his supporters pointed to his desire to serve the people and look after their interests in Parliament. He had previously stood as an independent in Chester and Stafford, but failed both times after entering the field too late. He may have felt he had a better chance at Preston in the summer of 1807, but again he entered the field late. Still, the potwalloper franchise gave some cause for confidence. Hanson's involvement in the weavers' campaign for minimum wage legislation and his independent, populist stance on other political and economic questions, assured him of a support base among the labouring ranks - but he was unable to extend his appeal to other groups of voters. The limited nature of his programme and the lateness of his arrival combined with the influence of the entrenched Stanley and corporation interests to deny Hanson the victory he sought, but he was gratified by the extent of his support among his "true" constituents and by the winning of over a thousand plumper votes.²

Hanson's greatest claim to fame rests on his championship of the handloom weavers' call for protective legislation. The weavers were

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1. Gazette, Dec. 1807-Jan. 1808; Hanson, A Defence of the Petitions for Peace (1807); Mallalieu, Remarks on Joseph Hanson's Defence of the Petitions for Peace (1808); A Reply to the Real Writer of the Defence of the Petitions for Peace, comprehending a review of the Assumed Author's proceedings for some time past (1808).
 2. Short Memoir of Hanson, 12, 24-5; also addresses in collection Address of Joseph Hanson to his Friends and Country, with many particulars from the contested Election in Preston, till his return from the King's Bench (1809).

probably suffering more than any other body of textile workers during the war years. A labour surplus, falling wages and the disruptive social and psychological effects of developing industrialism left them vulnerable and discontented. Hanson had had close personal contact with many weavers engaged in outwork around the Manchester district, and his family's firm was a substantial employer in the locality. A bond of sentimental attachment seems to have grown up on both sides.¹ Hanson was certainly concerned about the plight of the workers. In his pamphlet on the volunteer movement he had urged that working-class recruits should be paid a fair rate for their time and involvement, and one of the basic motivations for his interest in peace petitioning was his desire to protect the dignity and independence and improve the economic circumstances of working men. When the possibility of a minimum wage bill for weavers was seriously mooted early in 1807 Hanson was sympathetic, and he approved of the idea at the time of the Preston election that summer. By the winter of 1807-8 the weavers' leaders were beginning to consider widescale and prolonged industrial action in an attempt to force the established authorities to listen to their pleas. There was a solid strike throughout the Manchester area from May to June 1808. A minimum wage bill was drawn up and submitted for the consideration of the legislature, but was rejected.² Large protest meetings occurred in Manchester on 24 and 25 May 1808. Moved by the spectacle of poor and frustrated weavers walking to their meeting place

1. Short Memoir of Hanson, 22-3.

2. Mercury, 31 May 1808, for a copy.

on St. George's Fields, Hanson ordered £40 worth of bread and refreshment to be distributed among them. He also decided to attend the meeting of 25 May and address those present. The fact that there were disturbances after the meeting prompted the local authorities to single out Hanson for blame. It was suggested that his words and deeds had encouraged sedition and riot. He was indicted for a conspiracy and tried in March 1809. Despite a weak case the prosecution was successful and Hanson was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and a £100 fine. Richard Potter was present and remembered Hanson's impressive show of honesty and integrity, typified by his declaration: 'the consciousness of my innocence will enable me to support myself under this or any other punishment this honourable court might have thought proper to inflict'.¹

By now Hanson had become a popular hero, and about 39,600 people subscribed to a fund to purchase the gold cup that was presented to him on his release.² Prison ruined his health, though, and he retired to a villa in Pendlebury. Before his death he did cooperate with the weavers' leaders once more, in 1811 when a petitioning movement for relief spread across the northern counties. He also went to London to give evidence to the parliamentary committee appointed to consider the weavers' distress. Hanson died in September 1811, aged only 37. Thousands turned out for

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1. Short Memoir of Hanson, 14; Herford, 19-20; Address of Joseph Hanson; The Whole Proceedings on the Trial of Joseph Hanson...for conspiring to aid the weavers of Manchester in raising their wages (1809), R. Potter Colln. xi. 3; Wheeler, History, 103-4; Prentice, Sketches, 31-33.
 2. Hay Scrapbks. ix. 176; Herford, 24; Short Memoir, 15, 28; Address of Joseph Hanson (includes account of Hanson's return from prison, the presentation of the cup, and his reply to the 39,600 subscribers).

his funeral.¹ His fame outlived him and his reputation as "the Weavers' Friend" lasted into this century. His activities, like those of Thomas Walker, probably provided later Manchester reformers with examples and encouragement. Certainly members of the band admired Hanson. Prentice remembered him as 'impulsively benevolent'² and by including Hanson's career in the early chapters of the Sketches showed how Hanson's activities did have an effect on the 'progress of public opinion' in Manchester. Why Hanson has been neglected by historians of this period might seem puzzling. Cookson deems him 'perhaps the archetypal popular leader' and 'the first in a long line of notable radical demagogues in early nineteenth century Lancashire' - and yet only really mentions him in passing.³

The final years of the war were years of economic hardship and uncertainty in Manchester, punctuated only by modest and temporary recoveries.⁴ The Napoleonic decrees were still having some effect, and so was the deterioration in Anglo-American relations. The liberal-Dissenting leaders were prominent in the petitioning campaigns against the Orders in Council in 1808 and 1812, and when these were withdrawn this was claimed as a great victory by many provincial middle-class reformers. In Manchester a further impulse for reformist activity came from the political missionary tours of Cartwright in 1812 and 1813.

1. Herford, 24-5; Short Memoir, 16-18, 20-21; Hay Scrapbks, xiii, 7.

2. Sketches, 23.

3. Cookson, Friends of Peace, 187, 210.

3. Daniels, Cotton Trade, 76, 78-81; C. Emsley, British Society and the French Wars (1979), 130-32, 137-8, 153-7.

Cartwright visited Manchester and many nearby towns, and one of his most important contacts in the district was John Shuttleworth. The two men corresponded about reform petitions, and Cartwright, Shuttleworth, Atkinson, Richard Potter and Thomas Walker were also involved in the affair of the Manchester Thirty Eight, referred to above, helping to raise funds and organise legal defence. All thirty eight men were acquitted of the charge of administering an illegal oath; the most prominent reformer among them was John Knight, a schoolmaster and former small cotton manufacturer who had been an active radical in the district for some time.¹ Continuing political controversy was a cause and a result of the Exchange Riot of 8 April 1812. In a time of social and economic hardship the Tory rulers of Manchester organised a loyal meeting in support of the Regent's decision to retain the ministry in office. Constitutional restrictions on his power had lapsed and the respectable reformers had hoped for a new set of ministers - but their placarding of the town and their calls for a decisive expression of protest led to the disturbances of 8 April and, of course, to the accusation against J. E. Taylor that he had been the author of one of the offending handbills.²

Party feeling in Manchester was solidified by the formation of the Manchester Pitt Club in December 1812. This succeeded the APCO, which had ceased its activities in 1799, and provided the Tories with another

1. On petitions and the Thirty Eight Shuttleworth Scrapbk (loose leaves); R. Potter Colln. xiiiA f. 176, 181-3; Trial of Thirty Eight Men.

2. On the riot, see handbills in Shuttleworth Scrapbk (loose leaves); Prentice, Sketches, 48-52; Wheeler, History, 105; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 6; S. Bamford, Early Days (1849) (vol. i of Autobiography ed. W. H. Chaloner 1967), 295-7.

large, active, central organising body to coordinate the local political activities of conservatives and anti-reformers.¹ The appearance of the Club added to the increasing party and sectarian division in Manchester which had been extended by disputes over matters like the education of the poor. The winter of 1811-12 saw much controversy created by the Tory-Anglican leaders' decision to establish two National Schools in Manchester and Salford. Some Lancasterians objected and the correspondence pages of the local papers were full of comment.² (Shuttleworth, Atkinson and Taylor were to be prominent in the administration of the Lancasterian School, established in 1809). Tension increased as the region saw outbreaks of Luddism. In south Lancashire the disturbances of these times involved not only machine breakers but criminals, food rioters, radicals and trade unionists as well as spies and agents-provocateurs. Lancashire Luddism was a general protest movement. Its aims were not very clearly defined and this made it possible for the authorities to believe that some political purpose lay behind the disturbances. Many informants were sure that industrial aims were a cover for something else, and some magistrates said the same thing in their reports to the Home Office.³

1. Pitt Club ms., 1812-31 (Chetham's); Prentice, Sketches, ch. XXVI (supplementary chapter).

2. E.g. Exch. H., 24 Dec. 1811, 7, 21, 28 Jan. 1812.

3. For accounts of Lancashire Luddism M. Thomis, The Luddites (1970); F. O. Darvall, Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Regency England (1934, 1969 edn.); J. R. Dinwiddy, 'Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties', SH, (1979); V. Tomlinson, 'Letters of a Lancashire Luddite transported to Australia, 1812-16', TLCAS, 77 (1967)

Manchester's respectable reformers had an equivocal attitude to the events of these years. It was good that the Dissenters as a body had been taught a lesson by Sidmouth's bill of 1811 to control the licensing of their preachers: they saw now that quiet submission to the established authorities could do them more harm than good. It was also encouraging that many working people had been taught a lesson by a 'truthful teacher' - want. They were abandoning their old unthinking allegiance to the established order.¹ But the release posed problems, and the liberals among the Manchester merchants and manufacturers could hardly express anything but disapproval for Luddite excesses. 'A starving people are seldom a reasoning people', Prentice was to say; 'ordinary suffering leads to inquiry as to its real cause, but destitution directs attention only to the nearest seeming cause'.² This led to the masters being identified as oppressors, when many of them were genuinely concerned about the problems of their employees. The band wanted to make this clear, and wanted to point to the real causes of and remedies for contemporary political, social and economic ills. This was why it was so important to educate and inform. The Exchange Riot is significant because this was one occasion when the respectable reformers did mobilise the lower ranks - but alarmed by the size and character of the crowd gathering on 8 April 1812 they dissociated themselves from the protest movement. Characteristic middle-class fear of plebeian involvement in political affairs prompted those who had created the opposition to the pro-government meeting at the Exchange to think twice about stepping

1. Prentice, Sketches, 25, 34, 37-47.

2. Ibid, 47.

forward as the leaders of this opposition. Still, as Prentice recalled, the veteran reformer Thomas Kershaw (a calico printer who had acted with Walker in the 1790s) said that although the Exchange Riot was regrettable one good thing had come out of it: 'we had no Church and King mobs after that'. Another of Prentice's acquaintances reflected that after this event 'the old dominant party appeared to feel that they had an opposition to contend with, and they became less arrogant in their conduct'.¹ The greatest blame for the problems of the war years, and the immediate postwar period, was predictably reserved for the Tory government. 'No greater crime can be committed by rulers than to lunge into unnecessary wars, and to waste the blood and treasure of the community in avoidable and useless contests', declared Watkin in 1814.² In this and in the other statements and activities of the band here discussed, we can discern those features of their thinking on and approach to public questions which were most prominent in their post-war campaigns in Manchester. There was the desire to create and direct public opinion, to teach the distressed about the best ways of improving their condition, to describe and elucidate those anomalies and injustices in the system which needed to be removed. There was the identification of the Tory ministers and their local adherents as the villains of the piece. There was the recognition of the need to mobilise numbers, and the readiness to do so, but the suspicion that those mobilised would be uncontrollable once set in motion. The band aimed to recruit followers

1. Ibid., 48-52.

2. Watkin, 'The Wars against Napoleon' (a paper read to the Literary and Scientific Club), in Fragment No.1

from lower social strata but wanted to make sure these followers would not go beyond the programmes formulated on their behalf.

The political controversies which raged in Manchester from 1815 to 1832 took place in a town which was undergoing enormous social and economic change. The population was rising rapidly and so was Manchester's industrial and commercial importance. The local business community headed this expansion and seized on the advantages it made available, growing in wealth, pride and assertiveness, and looking forward to the time when it could shape national affairs as well as those of Manchester itself. This was particularly true of the liberal-Dissenting body, which for years had resented its almost total exclusion from the local power structure and which - during the two decades after the end of the war - channelled this resentment into positive action and launched a determined assault on local Tory dominance. It was the band, the 'missionaries of a new enlightenment' in Donald Read's phrase,¹ who stimulated and led most of the protest and assertive activities of Manchester's respectable middle class and 'middling' or menu people reformers after the war. They were a distinctive group. They were young, non-Mancunians apart from Shuttleworth, and with the exception of the attorney Atkinson they were all initially cotton merchants or manufacturers. Socially they were upwardly mobile. In religion they were Protestant Dissenters, particularly Unitarians. Only Watkin was an Anglican. They were a serious-minded and public-spirited set of rational, Christian, liberal reformers, strongly conscious of the moral impulses

1. Read, Peterloo. The Massacre and its Background (1958, 1973 edn.), 62.

that ought to be behind the drive for political and social improvement. David Prentice, cousin of Archibald, could have been speaking for the band when he wrote in 1832:

As every case of morals is included in the Divine injunction, to do to others as we would have others do to us, so every difficulty in politics is obviated by the maxim that what is morally wrong can never be politically right.¹

The band tended towards political liberalism in response to several factors, especially the injustices of a local and national structure of influence which was reluctant to admit any groups subscribing to political or religious heterodoxies. The band's nonconformity, provincial and class pride, economic and social prominence, intellectual and cultural pursuits, individual and collective assertiveness, and belief in the Benthamite principle that what was participated in by all would be to the benefit of all, gave the unit the kind of power, cohesion, permanence and will to succeed that was to be indispensable to the Manchester reformers as a body when they challenged the local ruling party. External and internal circumstances combined to make the band the disturbers of the accepted, leading them to deny that institutions were sacrosanct in themselves and to assert that what really mattered was the way institutions were used and the character of those who did the using. Events like Peterloo confirmed the band in their beliefs and their readiness to act, and enlarged the number of people who might be willing to join them. (On Peterloo see below, chapter VI(1)). Following S. G. Checkland we might identify two ways of looking at radicalism. We might concentrate on the "heroic" aspects, and regard the radical as a

1. D. Prentice, Letter to the Electors of the West of Scotland (1832).

spontaneous phenomenon, a man who can see how society must be changed and who can impose himself on events and carry them in a chosen direction. Or we might concentrate on the "social" aspects, and decide that it is the trends within society that produce both a radical point of view and its skilled and powerful spokesmen - men who are not prime movers (as they might think) but 'simply the most susceptible and effective among the moved'.¹ Both sets of influences helped in the making of the band. Baylen and Gossman have pointed out that radicalism cannot be defined by looking at issues alone - much was illogical and much depended on personalities and temperament. Radicalism was 'less a programme than a state of mind, a sense of moral outrage against privilege, waste and abuse of power'. There had to be a desire for change, a rejection of arguments based on custom and tradition. Radicals tended to belong to self-conscious and aggressive groups 'who saw themselves as the outsiders and drew spiritual nourishment from a Christian concept of mankind's duty to act on the command of conscience'.² These remarks, again, certainly fit the 'small but determined band'.

1. See Checkland's review of D. Read, Cobden and Bright (1967), in Ec.H.R. (1969).

2. J. O. Baylen and N. J. Gossman (eds.), Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals i (1979), ii, (1984) - introduction, especially i.5.

Chapter II

THE BAND AND THE MANCHESTER NEWSPAPER PRESS

1. The developing provincial press

Much has been written about the importance and influence achieved by provincial newspapers before the early nineteenth century. One contemporary wrote in 1836 that provincial papers 'have now a sway and importance far greater than is commonly assigned to them',¹ and more recent commentators have painted a picture of a politicised and politically-influential provincial press at work well before the end of the eighteenth century.² Though the press did not achieve the status and dignity of a "Fourth Estate" until after the middle of the 19th century,³ newspaper influence and an expanding readership were increasingly perceptible from the 1790s. It is difficult to determine exactly when provincial newspapers began to devote attention and space to public affairs, both local and national. The change from a mere advertising sheet, from pages filled with trivia and items of ephemeral interest - with no editorial comment, limited local intelligence and only out-of-

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1. 'The Journals of the Provinces' in Colburn's New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal, 48 (1836), 137-8; also J. Grant, The Newspaper Press. Its origins, progress and present position (3 vols. 1871-2), iii, ch. IX.
 2. E.g. G. A. Cranfield, The Development of the Provincial Newspaper (1962), 117-21, 271.
 3. G. Boyce, 'The Fourth Estate: the reappraisal of a concept' in (eds.) G. Boyce, J. Curran, P. Wingate, Newspaper History (1978).

date news taken from London papers - to the well-organised and impressive paper giving more coverage to events of local and national importance, and informed comment on those events, with clarity and good literary style - this change took decades to accomplish. It was a slow process; perhaps the decisive period, when change occurred quickest for the provincial newspaper (as for many other aspects of social thought and practice), came in the years 1790-1820. The events of these years inevitably created an unprecedented level of interest in public affairs and so a rising demand for information. The Manchester Herald in 1792-3 and Cowdroy's Gazette from 1795 were both distinguished for their coverage of and comment on important public issues. They spoke for Manchester's reformers. To some extent they were preaching to the converted and reflecting a body of liberal opinion that already existed in the neighbourhood. But they also helped to enlarge the number of people who were at least partly receptive to the reformers' doctrines and arguments; by popularising opinions, identifying abuses and injustices, and appealing for the exercise of reason rather than bias and intolerance on the part of the reader, the Herald and Gazette made people think (and for this they incurred the wrath of Manchester's ruling party). In most cases, of course, newspapers and public opinion had a symbiotic relationship. Most newspapers were as much led by public opinion as they were leaders of that opinion. The point about the band, and especially Prentice, is that they were determined to be leaders not followers.

It was many years before journalism was accorded the dignity and reputation of a respectable profession. Only in the 1820s and 30s did editors and proprietors come to be regarded as 'gentlemen', and their rise from an inferior social status had been a very slow one. Too many

had gone in for scurrility, blasphemy and falsehood in their attempts to satisfy the baser appetites of a reading public which, if it was interested in public affairs, was no less interested in being titillated and entertained by prurient and sensationalist matter. Respectable society regarded newspapermen as unscrupulous adventurers who lacked business acumen, integrity and good family connections. They were irresponsible, dishonest and immoral; they were especially unpopular among politicians.¹ But in time the situation changed. The early nineteenth century saw more men of education and literary talent engaging in newspaper work. Their conduct became regarded as more acceptable and they themselves became more respected socially. The character of the profession was raised both in London and the provinces. The Westminster Review said in 1829 that 'the general character of the Newspaper Press is high and honourable'.² Provincial editors began to be known for their deep knowledge of public affairs; they devoted many hours to political reading and familiarised themselves with all statistics, issues and arguments. By the 1830s, suggests G. A. Cranfield, provincial newspapers had taken their place among the most prominent of the factors influencing the course of both local and national affairs. They were nearly all devoting considerable space to such affairs, and 'had now completely abandoned any pretence to neutrality'.³ Certainly this was true of

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1. A. Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists at the beginning of the 19th century', Review of English Studies (1945); Grant, i. 229-30, ii. 452; A. J. Lee, The Origins of the Popular Press 1855-1914 (1976), 104-17; L. Brown, Victorian News and Newspapers (1985), 75-8.
 2. 'The Newspaper Press', Westm. Rev. XIX (Jan. 1929), vol.10, 233-4.
 3. 'Journals of Provinces', 139-41; E. Porrit, 'Newspaper Work when the Century was young', in Sell's Dictionary of the World's Press (1896), 17-29; Cranfield, The Press and Society from Caxton to Northcliffe (1978), 198, 201.

Manchester, and it is interesting that newspapermen were being regarded as increasingly respectable at the same time as their papers (and they) were becoming more politically partisan.

Along with developments in editorial techniques and the art of presentation came developments in production, organisation and printing methods. The Stanhope iron hand press (the first model used by the Guardian) was invented in 1798, and improved versions (the Columbian, Albion and Imperial) were made available in the first few decades of the nineteenth century - though these did not greatly increase the rate of output. The iron hand press was not capable of more than 250 impressions an hour. The Koenig steam press, capable of 1000 impressions an hour, was patented in 1811. Provincial proprietors did not have the money of their London counterparts and so were slower to pick up on new technology; in any case the lower circulations of their papers did not necessitate a conversion to steam for decades to come.¹ It is significant that the first two provincial papers to have steam presses were both Manchester papers - Sowler's Tory Courier in 1825 and the Guardian in 1828. Another aspect of the advance of the newspaper press was the growth of trade unionism among the workforce. Manchester had a small but active printers' association from the 1790s.²

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1. E. Howe, Newspaper Printing in the 19th Century (1943); A. E. Musson, 'Newspaper Printing in the Industrial Revolution', in Ec.H.R., 10 (1957-8); I. Asquith, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press 1780-1855', in Boyce et al. Newspaper History.
 2. A. E. Musson, The Typographical Association. Origins and History up to 1949 (1954) 3-15, 27-33; Manchester Typographical Society 1797-1897. Centenary Record (1897), which praised 'the energy, the foresight, the determination to combine' of early Manchester letterpress printers.

A provincial newspaper could be very expensive to run and so advertising income was essential. Charles Knight of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge estimated in 1836 that a provincial paper without advertisements would have to sell 3500 copies just to break even.¹ The vast majority of provincials sold less than a thousand copies a week. This helps to explain why many provincial proprietors were also printers. A small circulation paper could not normally generate enough income to exist as an independent enterprise, but it could supply useful additional revenue to a jobbing printer. Costs could be covered by the printing business as a whole rather than by the newspaper alone. Newspapermen valued advertisements as a source of income and also because they helped to increase a paper's circulation. Certain kinds of notice attracted certain kinds of reader, and increasing circulation in turn attracted advertising customers.²

It is clear that newspaper reading was becoming one of the essential habits of the age, and also that it was not confined to one particular social rank or class. Anyone who wanted access to newspapers could find it. Sales figures were not readership figures, and the stamp meant that newspapers could have free use of the postal service. Asa Briggs has pointed out that taxation 'was sometimes less burdensome than a first glance might suggest'.³ One commentator in 1836 thought that a

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1. Knight, The Newspaper Stamp and the Duty on Paper (1836), 41, cited in T. R. Nevett, Advertising in Britain. A History (1982), 48.
 2. Nevett, 48; Cranfield, Press and Society; Brown, Victorian News, 23.
 3. Briggs, 'Press and Public in early 19th century Birmingham', in Occasional Papers of the Dugdale Society 8 (1949), 115.

single newspaper was read by ten to twenty different people. In 1830 the Westminster Review stated that 'each copy of a liberal newspaper printed in Manchester has from fifty to eighty readers'. Such a figure was high but was supported by 'persons likely to be well-acquainted with the fact', and so 'it is but fair to state it'.¹

2. The foundation of the Guardian

When members of the band began to be active in Manchester affairs during the last years of the war they were in no doubt as to the importance of the press in the task of forming and directing local opinion. The examples set by the Herald and Gazette suggested that a well-conducted newspaper with a vigorous, explicitly reformist editorial line could be the most powerful and effective weapon in the Manchester liberals' arsenal. If the Herald and Gazette had been forerunners, however, it was left to the band to establish the genuine article - a newspaper that would enjoy a long life and a wide readership, that would give far more space to political news and comment than any provincial weekly had ever done before, that would gain the allegiance of much respectable opinion in Manchester and at the same time exercise a directing influence over men of lower social strata (sometimes encouraging, sometimes restraining - according to prevalent circumstances), and that would use the force of opinion to campaign for reform and the overthrow of the forces of reaction and intolerance which

1. 'Journals of Provinces', 142; 'The Provincial, Scotch and Irish Newspaper Press', in Westm. Rev., XXIII (Jan. 1830), vol. 12, 74.

were locally and nationally dominant. The Guardian was originally conceived in these terms. Unfortunately it failed to fit the bill, and this led to some disagreements within the band about the way it was being conducted. The more advanced reformers in the band felt they had to abandon the Guardian and look elsewhere for an effective newspaper organ; this gave yet another stimulus to the development of political journalism in Manchester.

For many years it was to Cowdroy's Gazette that Manchester's reformers looked for information and guidance. By about 1812 Shuttleworth and Taylor were writing articles for the elder William Cowdroy, who died in November 1814 and was succeeded as proprietor and editor by William Cowdroy junior. Prentice began to write for the Gazette after settling in Manchester in January 1815. On one occasion he asked Cowdroy junior if he ever felt he should refuse to insert some of the less restrained items submitted by his young and enthusiastic contributors. Did he not fear indictments? 'Not I,' Cowdroy replied, 'write away.' Despite Cowdroy's courage, though, the authorities' attitude towards the liberal press in the years after 1815 did sometimes prompt his contributors to tone down their articles for his sake.¹ Political tension in Manchester increased as the band, this new crop of young, energetic, respectable and reasonably affluent liberal-Dissenting leaders, emerged to articulate grievances and campaign for change. The ruling party was always keen to strike a blow at its challengers, and one opportunity came in July 1818 when J. E. Taylor was passed over for the minor office of assessor at a meeting of

1. Prentice, Sketches, 109; W. H. Mills, Guardian History, 20-21.

Salford Police Commissioners on the grounds that he was a reformer and, allegedly, the author of the handbill which had caused the Exchange Riot six years earlier. This latter accusation was made by a prominent Tory manufacturer, John Greenwood; Taylor denied all connection with the handbill but his demands for an explanation and apology came to nothing. Determined to uphold his good name he made the matter public and condemned Greenwood as 'a liar, slanderer and scoundrel'. He was indicted for libel and the case was heard at Lancaster in March 1819. Taylor conducted his own defence; he was advised by the lawyer Atkinson, Prentice and Brotherton gave evidence on his behalf, and others of the band were in court to give moral support. The verdict of Not Guilty was a great victory for the band and for Taylor.¹ He had shown courage and ability and emerged with credit from the affair, and he and his friends could carry on their political campaigns with the assurance that their opponents were not unassailable. Importantly, Taylor's performance led his friends to think that he might have the talents and principles that would make him a fine newspaper editor.

By now Taylor had been writing for the Gazette for six or seven years. His interest in political journalism had no doubt been encouraged when he visited Leigh Hunt in 1813 during the latter's two-year prison sentence for a libel on the Regent.² The agitations of 1817 and 1819 were of effect too, and Taylor made an important contribution to the

1. Prentice, Sketches, 132-45; Mills, Guardian History, 30-33; F. S.Stancliffe, John Shaw's 1738-1938 (1938), 161; Gazette, 25 July 1818, 3 April 1819; Chron., 31 Oct. 1818, 10 April 1819; Mercury, 4 Aug. 1818; Ayerst, 15-16; Trial of Mr. J. E. Taylor.

2. Ayerst, 17; Mills, Guardian History, 8-9.

post-Peterloo protests with his Notes and Observations. By this time the Gazette was heavily reliant on Taylor and Prentice for its best political pieces, and both men sent reports on Peterloo to the London papers immediately after the event, helping to establish the 'radical version' long before any 'official' version was presented - though Taylor later modified his view of Peterloo and this may have contributed to his estrangement from Prentice.¹ Peterloo gave the band a chance and a motive to step up their activities, and the number of people who might be prepared to act with them rose considerably - such was the outrage created by this event. The band entered the 1820s with enlarged prospects for the exercising of influence. To exploit these opportunities it was important to have the right equipment, and a vigorous reform newspaper was the top priority. It is also possible that the band, as propertied and well-to-do cotton businessmen, wanted to give reform campaigns a more respectable character and - importantly - a more respectable leadership. The excesses of popular radicalism in the preceding years had convinced many that calm discussion was better than mass meetings and wild speeches. This calm and rational discussion could be led by a newspaper in which the band could express their opinions accurately and effectively.

Prentice and the more advanced reformers in the band decided that the Gazette could and should be converted into a more efficient organ of liberal principles. The advice of John Smith of the Liverpool Mercury

1. Taylor's changing position on Peterloo has been investigated in works by R. Walmsley, Peterloo. The Case Reopened (1969) and unpublished ms. copies in Local Hist. Dept. MCL of Peterloo Magistrate and The Peterloo Reopener and his Critics (1967 and 1969).

and Edward Baines of the Leeds Mercury was sought, and Prentice also consulted the proprietors of the Scotsman and his own cousin David Prentice, founder, editor (1811-37) and part-owner of the Glasgow Chronicle. The first plan was to buy the Gazette and keep Cowdroy on as printer and publisher. The wealthier members of the band and some of their prosperous friends and business partners, predominantly Unitarians, agreed to advance the sums that would be needed and Taylor was spoken of as prospective editor. According to Prentice, Taylor was chosen because he was the only member of the band not fully occupied with business concerns and because he seemed to have the qualities required in a spirited advocate of reform.¹ For some reason Prentice makes no mention of Taylor's undoubted talent as a writer and the role this must have played in prompting others to see him as a newspaper editor. Perhaps Prentice was a little jealous that he himself was not selected - although, to be fair, there is no evidence that he sought the editorship or had any desire at this time to leave his muslin warehouse in Peel Street. Negotiations with Cowdroy failed and this made it necessary to establish a completely new paper.² The risk fell on the creditors who agreed that the money should be repaid only if the new paper was a success. The reformers knew that their paper would be in advance of public opinion and would need time to establish itself, so this arrangement was helpful. Ten men put up £100

1. Sketches, 202-3.

2. Cowdroy was still only 46 but he died within a year of his refusal to sell the Gazette, in March 1822. W. E. A. Axon, The Annals of Manchester (1886), 165; C. H. Timperley, Manchester Historical Recorder (1874), 87. Had Cowdroy died earlier the Guardian might never have been started because his widow would probably have sold up, as she did in 1824 when an offer was made by Prentice.

each and an eleventh £50; Edward Baxter and the Potters were among those contributing to the loan. The more advanced members of the band never expected the new paper to be cautious, or Taylor to need spurring on. Yet the prospectus of the new Guardian which appeared in the spring of 1821 was disappointingly vague and moderate. Some in the band did argue that care and patience was needed; potential advertisers should not be alienated and it was best to wait for the right opportunities to spread reformist ideas. Prentice was surprised that even before the first issue of the Guardian had appeared, business considerations were held to be almost as important as the paper's political content.¹

The first issue appeared on 5 May 1821. At first the newspaper made slow progress. Cowdroy's regular readers preferred to stay with the Gazette and Wheeler's Chronicle remained the most popular paper with advertisers, as it had been for many years. Some of those connected with the Guardian became discouraged and this may have made them more willing to conciliate readers and advertisers, though obviously they hoped they could avoid any sacrifice of principle. But as Taylor looked for ways to make the paper more acceptable to the influential, so the road down which he took it became more objectionable to the band's less moderate section. Prentice was certain that the slow progress of the Guardian made Taylor increasing^{ly} cautious in his liberalism.² The paper only prospered after the Dica trial of March 1823, which confirmed that the Guardian

1. D. Read, Press and People, 79-82; Ayerst, 22-3; Prospectus of the Manchester Guardian (1821); Prentice, Sketches, 202-7.

2. Sketches, 208, 228-9.

was going to be a commercial undertaking as well as, or even instead of, a political one. Dicas was a former Manchester attorney who had been imprisoned for fraud and who by 1823 had set up as a banker in Flintshire. Some of his notes found their way to Manchester and Taylor warned about Dicas's past, suggesting that these notes could not be trusted. This was important at a time when the local business community was concerned about the unsound currency and banking system of the country. Dicas took Taylor to court for libel but gained derisory damages and grateful Manchester businessmen helped Taylor out with the legal costs.¹ After the trial it seemed abundantly clear in which direction the Guardian was going. As Prentice recalled:

The paper had the advantage, from that time, of being considered the guardian of the commercial interests of the town and neighbourhood - a reputation much more valuable, in a pecuniary point-of-view, than the fame of being the advocate of popular rights.²

The Guardian started to make money and Taylor was soon able to pay back the £1050 advanced for the paper's establishment. He returned the last part of the loan in May 1824.³ Now he was sole and independent proprietor as well as editor. He could do what he wanted with the Guardian.

Taylor had a fixed and clear approach to journalism. He liked to have a dialogue with his readers, and did not want to appeal only to men

1. Guardian, 7 Sept. 1822, 1 Feb., 29 March, 12 April, 7 June 1823; Mercury, 25 March 1823; Read, Press and People 83-4.

2. Sketches, 239-40.

3. Ayerst, 53.

of one set of political opinions. His cousin and fiancée Sophia Scott wrote only days after the appearance of the first Guardian that Taylor had received 'encouragement from all parties' - very gratifying in view of 'all the party feeling which has existed'. Taylor himself said in the first Guardian that political comments would be made in such a way 'that even our political opponents shall admit the propriety of the spirit in which they are written, however fundamentally they may differ from their own principles and views'.¹ Prentice was not the only one in the band to be dissatisfied with Taylor's management of the Guardian, but he was probably the first to express his misgivings with any force. Prentice's criticism of Taylor was made all the more heated by other quarrels between them - over Taylor's Malthusian stance on poor law reform in May 1821, and Taylor's eagerness to seem reasonable and respectable to Tories who sat on the Market Street Commission - the street improvement body on which Taylor also sat - expressed at about the same time.² Taylor and Prentice had originally been fairly close friends. They had lived next door to each other for a time in Islington Street, Salford, and Taylor was one of those who had first introduced Prentice to the rest of the band. But Prentice was touchy where allegiance to principles was concerned: to abandon sound aims and opinions and to turn one's back on the cause of the people was to give up all claims to the trust, confidence and admiration of others. Prentice stayed true to the reform

1. S. Scott to R. Scott, 8 May 1821, in I & C. Scott, 184; Guardian, 5 May 1821.

2. Prentice, Sketches, 209-10, 212-15.

cause and attacked Taylor because he thought Taylor had strayed from it,¹ and the criticism became more harsh after July 1824 when Prentice became a newspaper editor in direct competition with the Guardian.

Even if Prentice and others were disappointed by the Guardian's politics, as a provincial newspaper it set high standards from its first issue. Printed and published from offices at 29 Market Street (and then 64 Market Street from February 1831), it was a well-organised and neatly laid-out newspaper containing a good mixture of news and comment. There is no doubt that it was a trend-setter in provincial journalism and that other papers to a large degree followed and tried to emulate its techniques and presentation. But not everything the Guardian did was new. Donald Read has said that in its use of editorial articles the Guardian 'was breaking virtually new ground in Manchester journalism'.² This is questionable, for the Manchester Herald and Gazette had both given regular and detailed editorial comment. The Guardian did not really innovate in this field, but did confirm that the editorial would be a regular and recognised feature of the provincial weekly. Taylor's assistant was Jeremiah Garnett, a production manager who had practical experience of printing and newspaper work and had formerly worked for the Manchester Chronicle. Garnett was to become a full partner and for forty years or so took on much of the reporting and production work at the paper. He was a Unitarian, like Taylor, a moderate reformer, the

1. Obituary in Guardian, 10 Jan. 1844 (probably written by his partner Jeremiah Garnett), denied that Taylor had retreated from an advanced reforming liberalism.

2. Read's intro. (1970) to Sketches.

son of an Otley paper manufacturer and originator of an effective shorthand style which helped enhance the Guardian's reputation for good reporting. Taylor's literary skills also aided the Guardian's progress; as his fiancée said in 1821, 'he writes and composes with greater facility than any person I ever saw', and the writer of one obituary notice after Taylor's death pointed out that - though some disliked the editorial line he had followed - nobody could deny that his writing was of the highest standard.¹

As did other provincial weeklies the Guardian laboured under duties on paper and advertisements as well as the 4d. stamp duty - which necessitated a charge of 7d. for each issue. Early income from sales was not high, which made advertising revenue important and also forced Taylor to offer printing services, as his competitors did. The workforce was small to begin with, but grew as the Guardian prospered. Late in 1825 Taylor purchased a Columbian press, a slight improvement on the Stanhope model, and in 1828 he installed a steam press. By now the Guardian was selling 3,000 copies a week, so a steam press was essential if Taylor was to keep up with demand.² The appointment in 1830 of the Guardian's first full-time reporter, another Unitarian John Harland (formerly a printer

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1. I and C. Scott, 184; Mills, Guardian History, 55; 'A Brief Memoir of Mr. John Edward Taylor', The Christian Reformer, March 1844 (possibly written by Shuttleworth).
 2. Ayerst, 23, 25, 26-30; Slugg, 283-7; Brown, Vict. News, 38; Mills, Guardian History, 44-8, 64.

with the Hull Packet)¹, was the first stage in a greater specialisation of functions at the Guardian and soon at other provincial weeklies too. To some extent staff did remain interchangeable, which led to some problems with the Manchester Typographical Society on matters like wages and functions, but no serious disputes seem to have occurred.² Taylor recognised that if the Guardian was going to be a success it would have to give readers what they wanted. This was why there could be no total devotion to politics. Politics would be featured but not to the exclusion of other matter. Above all it was to be journalistic excellence that was to make the Guardian's reputation, and to some extent the other Manchester papers followed the lead of their newest competitor in improving their style and presentation. This was necessary to retain readers. By the time of Taylor's death in 1844, says W.H. Mills, 'the Guardian was respected for fulness and accuracy of news, but was not read for ideas'.³

In the early years the two outside pages of the Guardian were made up and printed by Thursday night or midday on Friday, ready for publication on the Saturday. The first page was normally devoted to advertisements. If there were not enough to fill it the page would be left open until the last minute in the hope that more would be sent in. Wheeler of the Chronicle would not accept any notices after 1 p.m. on a

1. Read, Press and People, 86-7; also 'John Harland: the father of provincial reporting', MR, 8 (1957-9), and Harland's Annals (microfiche, Local Hist. Dept. MCL).

2. Details in Manchester Typogr. Soc. Centenary Record.

3. Mills, Guardian History, 38, and his 'Manchester and its Press' in (ed.) W. H. Brindley, The Soul of Manchester (2nd edn. 1974), 158.

Friday, but the Guardian would often accept advertisements up to the very moment of going to press. The back page would be given to miscellaneous items of news and trivia, letters to the editor, and such regular features as a weekly list of bankruptcies. Apart from the regular features and any important news stories, much of the matter appearing on the back page was of a kind that could be held over if there was unexpected pressure on space. Friday was a busy day because of the arrival of the London mail. The two inside pages would be kept open until late in the evening, so the latest foreign news, parliamentary reports and commercial information could be inserted. The inside pages might carry accounts of the Stock Exchange, the Liverpool cotton market and various other commodity markets. Leading articles appeared on the inside pages. They normally dealt with national or international politics, local issues and important commercial questions. Their position on the inside pages made it possible for them to be written on Friday night, or brought up to date if they had been written earlier.¹

It was perhaps inevitable that there should have been a close identification between the Guardian and the local business community. That community would have to provide Taylor with most of his readers and advertising customers, so he was bound to try and give it the kind of newspaper it wanted. It is also significant that the proprietors of all the other Manchester papers were primarily printers or booksellers, while Taylor and his circle had long been involved in various branches of the textile trade. Taylor himself had started out as a manufacturer's

1. Ayerst, 30-38; Mills, Guardian History, 37.

apprentice and was later in partnership with Shuttleworth as a cotton and twist dealer, Watkin and J. B. Smith were cotton merchants, the Potters traded in fustians, linens and other cotton goods, Baxter in gingham and shirtings, Brotherton and Harvey were master spinners and Prentice a muslin merchant. Taylor soon set himself up as an expert on commercial affairs, giving lengthy articles in the Guardian on the currency, labour relations, market trends, the causes of and remedies for business depression - and the paper also sometimes carried articles on trade by some of Taylor's circle (like Shuttleworth, though his contributions dwindled from the mid-1820s, supporting the idea of a rift between Taylor and others in the band). From its earliest issues the Guardian seemed determined to serve the business community. Taylor and Garnett both subscribed to the Exchange and Garnett was often to be found there, gathering information and assessing opinion. *Dicas v. Taylor* signified and confirmed the bond between the Guardian and the Manchester business community. So did Taylor's coverage of the activities, meetings and campaigns of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.¹ On the occasion of the centenary of the Guardian's foundation Sir Edwin Stockton, President of the Chamber, sent the best wishes of that body to the paper's editor C. P. Scott (Taylor's nephew) and assured him of the great service the

1. L. S. Marshall thinks that the establishment of the Chamber in 1820 and of the Guardian in 1821 were to have a controlling influence on the social, political and economic development of Manchester in the nineteenth century. They demonstrated that "liberalism" was to dominate. See Marshall's Public Opinion. Such a thesis is open to question, not least because "liberalism" was only one of many creeds that influenced social, political and economic thought and activity in nineteenth-century Manchester, and it could be argued that "liberalism" never achieved ascendancy. Marshall's time-scale is defective in any case. There were relatively few "liberals" in Manchester in the 1820s.

Guardian was still doing to local commerce. If not for the Guardian Manchester businessmen would have been 'as a rudderless ship on an uncharted ocean'.¹ Such remarks demonstrate that J. E. Taylor's ambitions and hopes for his paper had been completely fulfilled.

Sales of the Guardian were initially about 1000 a week. They reached 2000 by the end of 1823 and 3000 in 1825.² The first issue of the Guardian contained 47 advertisements but the weekly average for 1821 as a whole was 31.³ The average for 1822 was 39 advertisements per issue and for 1823 (the year of the Dica's trial) 65. Late in December 1823 the Guardian carried 100 notices in a single issue, the target Taylor had long been setting himself. On 28 December he told his fiancée that he had been 'astonished' at the number of advertisements. He also said he had decided to purchase some small type 'to enable me to compress the advertisements into less compass. This will be an expense of £150 or £170, which I did not intend incurring at present; however, I really cannot say that I regret being obliged to do so'. Certainly the Guardian was doing well; all expenses were being covered by newspaper profits and by job printing, and Taylor expected a net profit of £550 for the second half of 1823.⁴ In 1824 the Guardian's number of advertisements per issue hardly fell below 80 and was sometimes over 100, the yearly average being

1. Manchester Chamber of Commerce Monthly Record, 32 (1921).

2. Appendix in Read, Press & People; Ayerst, 38; A. P. Wadsworth, 'Newspaper Circulations 1800-1954', TMSS, (1954-5).

3. This and the following averages are based on figures collected for every fourth issue of the Guardian.

4. Taylor to Sophia Scott, 28th Dec. 1823, I. & C. Scott, 189.

85. The average for 1825 was 104, for 1826 it was 125, and 136 for 1827 and 1828. The average for 1829 and 1830 was 143 and for 1831 was 158. In May 1832 the paper reached over 200 advertisements for the first time; the average for 1832 was 184. Most advertisements were for medicines, new publications, lotteries, services like shipping and coaches, property for sale, private schools, entertainments, missing persons, situations vacant, and there were also 'official' announcements from the Police Office or in the form of resolutions passed at important town meetings. Sometimes local politicians would address the public on important matters with statements taking the form of advertisements and carried on the front page. It is clear that the Guardian's reputation and circulation made it attractive to advertisers. The lawyer George Hadfield, a congregationalist and an ally of the band from the early 1820s, was disappointed by the Guardian's politics and yet 'I was an ardent supporter by Adverts'.¹ So even though Taylor's services had been lost to the advanced reformers, Hadfield recognised that Taylor's paper was a good one to advertise in.

3. Archibald Prentice and his newspapers

There can be no doubt that Prentice's ceaseless agitation for reforms - on the platform as well as in print - helped to create an environment in which the band and their allies could realistically hope to have some influence on the course of local events. Although we should be wary of the self-praise exhibited occasionally in his own writings, it does seem

1. Hadfield, Narrative, 67, 81.

that Prentice played a significant role in the informing and directing of local opinion (and his relative neglect by historians could be deemed puzzling in view of this). It is difficult to determine precisely how important his role was, though Prentice himself was pleased and satisfied in 1850 that he could look back on his career and see that many of the principles he had consistently advocated were now widely shared and many of the reforms he had anticipated were now realised. His whole attitude and behaviour had been governed by his principles, those of the 'rational radical', which he had never abandoned (unlike his erstwhile colleague J. E. Taylor); he always believed that they would one day be successful and he was convinced that he himself had a role to play in this success.¹ But Prentice was not the only one campaigning for reform and trying to influence local opinion, nor was the agitation of the band the only factor that mattered in the shaping of local affairs. Prentice's newspapers, moreover, were not the best sellers in Manchester because his advanced ideas and his style of newspaper management were found by many to be unpalatable. So his advocacy of reform and liberal principles was only one of many reasons for their advancement and successes.

Prentice was one of those who was convinced that the Manchester reformers should have their own newspaper. He realised that an efficient independent organ was needed if they were going to expound their views with clarity and effect. An example had been set by the Herald and Gazette, of course, and in postwar Manchester liberal-minded men recognised the value of an outlet for their views and a means of

1. E.g. Sketches, 246, 332.

exercising influence. Prentice was to be very much the heir of this kind of journalism and it was largely thanks to his work that Manchester should have been the place in which the idea of a reform press as an influence on local, and through local on national affairs, received its fullest expression in the early nineteenth century.¹ Prentice played a prominent part in the negotiations which eventually led to the establishment of the Guardian in 1821 though he did not himself put up any money, never achieving the same high affluence enjoyed by his friends the Potters and Baxter. Disappointed and angered by Taylor's 'apostacy' from liberal principles as editor of the Guardian, Prentice, the Potters, Baxter and some of their colleagues decided that a second newspaper would have to be secured to give the true reformers the outlet they required. In the summer of 1824, encouraged and financially backed by his friends, Prentice purchased the Gazette from Cowdroy's widow and set out to make it what the Guardian SHOULD have been - the active organ of middle-class radical opinion.² (Prentice had probably been influencing the Gazette's editorial policy for years anyway, from the time of his early contributions and particularly after Taylor had gone to the Guardian in 1821 and William Cowdroy junior had died in March 1822. It is unlikely that Cowdroy's widow, proprietor from her husband's death, wrote the Gazette editorials herself). Prentice paid £800 for copyright and

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1. P. Ziegler, 'Archibald Prentice': not altogether sympathetic towards Prentice but at least prepared to admit that he 'shared in the pioneer growth of the provincial weekly as a medium of opinion'.
 2. Years later even the Guardian was forced to admit that its sternest critic had never abandoned a principle and had been unswerving and uncompromising in his adherence to the good causes in which he believed. See obit. in Biogr. Refs.

materials, with a further £100 to be paid annually for the next eight years. He also spent £300 on a new press and type.¹ The prospectus for the new series of the Gazette emphasised 'a hatred to misrule' and 'a wish to promote, and a disposition to rejoice in, all that tends to ameliorate and improve the condition of mankind'. The conductors would not be partisans but nor would they make the paper

a mere chronicle of news without any decided political character. They claim as journalists the right they would exercise as individuals, not unnecessarily to obtrude on others their religion, their politics or their literature, but firmly and independently to advocate and defend the principles on which they act.²

Members of the band helped out with the Gazette, notably Shuttleworth, and Prentice was also assisted by his brother-in-law Philip Thomson (another Scot of some literary merit). Prentice's main financial backers appear to have been Richard Potter and Baxter, and Prentice was also keen to open the venture up to other "shareholders" so as to relieve his friends from too heavy a financial commitment.³ Still, the immediate outlay of £1100, with a further £800 to be paid in instalments, was a very large sum and considerably more than the £1050 donated for the establishment of the Guardian three years previously.

The first Gazette edited by Prentice appeared on 10 July 1824 and was issued from offices he had taken in Police Street. The office was moved in June 1825 to Market Street, a more central location, 'for the

1. Sketches, 246; Leary, Manchester Periodical Press, 160.

2. Prospectus is in Brotherton Scrapbks., ii.31.

3. E.g. Prentice to Potter, 5 May 1828, R. Potter Colln. xii, ff.195-6.

greater convenience of our readers and advertising friends'.¹ Prentice had decided on his new venture for two reasons: his belief that an economic depression was on the way and that his cotton business would not survive, and his desire to 'contribute something to the formation of a right public opinion'.² It has been stated that he had great faith in his principles and a firm belief that they would one day prevail. It was in this spirit that he ran his newspaper. He wanted to instruct and to guide and the emphasis was on political comment - apparently at the expense of items normally expected from a newspaper (even though the prospectus had promised an eclectic content). The Gazette reached a circulation of about 1700 a week in September 1826, a considerable advance on the 1000 when Prentice took over, but by now the Guardian was averaging over 3000 sales a week.³ If respectable Manchester readers wanted a reformist newspaper then they wanted the moderate Guardian rather than the more advanced Gazette.

It was not poor sales, though, that forced Prentice to relinquish his newspaper in August 1828. By January of that year he was in serious financial difficulties, something he explained at length in an address 'To the Readers of the Gazette' dated 12 January 1828. As was characteristic of his style the address took the form of a direct and personal communication between Prentice, the teacher, and his flock, the Gazette readers. He explained that his newspaper was beginning to do

1. Gazette, 11 June 1825.

2. Sketches, 246.

3. Read, Press and People, appendix.

very well; its circulation was improving, as were its journalistic standards, profitability and reputation for influence and honest opinions. 'But having accomplished this much I find myself, for a time at least, overwhelmed with engagements resulting in a great measure from my efforts to improve my paper, and to make it that which was capable of being made'. Prentice's financial resources had been exhausted and he now faced bankruptcy. The commercial depression of 1826 had harmed one of his creditors and there was also the burden of stamp payments. Prentice accepted that he had been unable to be as watchful over his accounts as he should have been. His attention had been taken by editorials, circulation and advertising matters and he had also been distracted by a serious illness at home. He concluded the address by hoping for the continued patronage of his readers - 'for everything which improves the condition of my paper will improve the situation of my creditors, and facilitate my arrangements with them. Of those who owe me money, I earnestly solicit an early payment'.¹ Prentice continued with the Gazette in his straitened circumstances for a further six and a half months until he had no option but to sell up. He appears to have paid his creditors back at a rate of only 10d. in the pound.² Unlike J. E. Taylor Prentice never made much money from his newspapers (and when he left the business in the late 1840s he could not afford not to work, and took employment in the gas office). His concern to save money while a newspaperman led to the one main incident in his career when he fell foul of the Manchester Typographical Society. In 1825 his desire to cut costs

1. Gazette, 12 Jan. 1828; Sketches, 328.

2. Read, Press and People, 88.

led him to adopt a piecework system at the Gazette; the Typographical Society opposed this but Prentice enjoyed the respect and affection of his printers and they stood by him rather than take action against him. They were expelled from the Society as a result. In spite of the Society's opposition, moreover, piecework was soon introduced on the other Manchester papers.¹

As a business venture the Gazette was a failure, but then Prentice was never interested in a newspaper as a business venture. To him a newspaper was a political organ. Still, his claims about the extent to which he had improved the Gazette were far from empty. He had increased its sales considerably, by roughly 70% in fact, and he had also attracted more advertisements. The average number of advertisements per issue from January 1815 to July 1824 (when Prentice took over) was 33. In Prentice's first five months as proprietor and editor (August to December 1824) the average was 40. For 1825 the average was 43 per issue, and 44 for 1826 and 1827. For January to August 1828 the average was down to 38, possibly a reflection of the paper's growing financial difficulties and the declining confidence in it of advertising customers.² Prentice had improved the Gazette's presentation and layout and had supplied a good deal of useful news and information as well as entertaining miscellanea - correspondence, poems, extracts from literary classics. He had also included commercial news, though not as much as the Guardian contained.

1. Musson, Typographical Association, 32; Manchester Typogr. Soc. Centenary Record, 8-9.

2. These averages are based on figures taken for every fourth issue of the Gazette.

But the Gazette did not attract many general readers because of its concentration on local and national politics. Prentice was not too concerned about giving his readers variety, and this probably held his sales down. The Gazette never became the paper of a particular "class" of reader in the way that the Guardian became the favourite paper of the Manchester cotton businessmen. Prentice's appeal was directed more to the 'middling sort' and to the literate or 'thinking' portion of the labouring ranks, but there were a limited number of newspaper buyers among these groups.

Prentice had to give up the Gazette in August 1828 but this did not mark the end of his newspaper career. Despite the 'disastrous and almost heartbreaking' failure of the Gazette Prentice was determined not to give up: 'There were duties to be done, and I resolved with the help of God that they should be done'.¹ His creditors assured him that he had suffered because he was in advance of public opinion and because of circumstances over which he had no control. Several helped to form the joint stock company which established the new Manchester Times in the autumn of 1828; the Potters and Baxter again put up much of the money that was needed. Members of the band clearly valued Prentice's public services enormously; he had the talent and determination and they had the means to help him use his abilities on behalf of good causes. He began as editor of the Times and then purchased full control in May 1832 in partnership with William Cathrall, a Wesleyan who had some experience of the newspapers business, had worked for the Manchester Chronicle, and

1. Sketches, 332.

who for some years had acted as the Manchester reporter for The Times of London. Prentice and Cathrall were joint managers, printers and publishers of the paper and also carried on a general printing business. The first issue of the Manchester Times appeared on 18 October 1828, published from offices in Angel Court just off Market Place. (The premises moved in March 1829 to Market Street). Prentice promised to be tireless in his advocacy of reforms, especially parliamentary reform, the repeal of the corn laws and the separation of Church and State. In 1850 he could look back and say that this pledge had been kept. Other newspapers might have called for reforms, but not as persistently or continuously as the Times - 'which waited not for the favourable tide of public opinion, but strove to create it'. The prospectus of the Times solicited the support of all who wanted Manchester to have a paper devoted to the welfare of the people, and also attacked the Guardian - 'of which the apostacy is so notorious'.¹

Under Prentice the Times did well and established a sure footing in the provincial newspaper market quite quickly. By December 1828 it had agents in many large towns and cities, including London, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dublin.² Weekly sales began at about 1400 and passed the 2000 mark within a year. After a slow start the number of advertisements per issue picked up too. The average for October to December 1828 was 29. In April 1829 the number of notices in a single issue passed 50 and the average for the whole year was 43. There were 77 advertisements in the issue of 1st May 1830 and the average for 1830 was 48. The average

1. Sketches, 333; Times, 14 March 1829, 28 April, 19 May, 4 Aug. 1832; Swindells, Manchester Streets, 53-4; Slugg, 288-90; Leary, Periodical Press, 181 (and 174-5 for prospectus).

2. Times, 19 Dec. 1828.

for 1831 was down to 39 and that for 1832 was 40.¹ (As will be seen, circulation figures never matched the peak of 1830 - so not for nothing was 1830 also the best year for advertisements in this period.) Clearly Prentice was losing out to the Guardian where advertising was concerned, but he was at least getting sufficient income from advertisements to help keep his newspaper in operation. The quality of the Times as a newspaper was higher than the Gazette. The Times was better organised. There were bolder headings and similar material was grouped together, such as market prices or commercial information. The print was larger and easier to read and there were clear titles for important news items. Prentice probably began with a Stanhope or Columbian iron hand press, but by the mid-1830s the Times seems to have been using a steam press partly operated by hand.² Prentice was more concerned than he had previously been about making his newspaper attractive as well as informative. In November 1828 he told readers that he would endeavour to stick to an 'arrangement': foreign news and political discussion on page two, domestic news and correspondence on page three, local intelligence on four and five, 'literature and miscellaneous intelligence forming light table talk' on six and seven, and 'markets, bankrupts etc.' on page eight. He was also keen to sort out potential problems on the administrative side. Correspondence containing news was welcome at any time but other letters should be received by Thursday of each week, and should be signed since 'we cannot state facts on anonymous authority'. Advertisements should be

1. The averages are based on the number of notices in every fourth issue of the Times.

2. Slugg, 288-90.

sent as early in the week as possible, and not later than 2 p.m. on Fridays.¹ For all his concern about making the Times a newspaper with a reasonably wide appeal, though, Prentice's main interest remained political news and comment and he still faced complaints from readers who wanted a proper newspaper rather than a weekly political tract.

Was Prentice as successful a journalist-commentator-instructor as he liked to think? It would be going too far to call him conceited; he honestly thought he had achieved something, and was pleased and proud to recall his endeavours - as anyone would be. He said he was regarded as a "political teacher" by men who had read his newspapers from their youth to adulthood;² his calls for reason and restraint during the economic distress of 1825 had helped to prevent an accumulation of bitterness between workers and employers;³ his advocacy of Benthamite ideas through his career helped to make them 'the guiding principles of many ardent friends of liberty';⁴ his June 1826 list of one hundred boroughs returning two hundred M.P.s while they had a combined population lower than that of unrepresented Manchester aided the cause of parliamentary reform because 'men committed it to memory and taught from it as from a text';⁵ his July 1826 leading articles 'On the Causes and Cure of the Present Distress' were reprinted as cheap pamphlets and 'carried

1. Times, 21 Nov. 1828.

2. Preface (Dec. 1850) of Sketches, first edn.

3. E.g. Gazette, 10, 17, 24, 31 Dec. 1825; Sketches, 270.

4. E.g. Gazette, 25 Dec. 1824 for an early editorial advocating the greatest happiness of the greatest number; Prentice, Recollections of Bentham, 3; Sketches, ch. XXIV.

5. Gazette, 3, 24 June, 1 July 1826; Sketches, 283; Organic Changes, 18.

instruction to tens of thousands who seldom had a chance of seeing a seven penny newspaper';¹ his constant exposure of 'landlord fallacies' helped to make Manchester the leader of the anti-corn law movement:

Certain it is that during that memorable contest I was often cheered by the assurance of young, able and energetic men, throwing their life and soul into the agitation for free trade... that their first lessons in a generous political economy were derived from me.²

Such self-congratulation may seem excessive, but Prentice was in the position and did have the ability to exercise influence. Nor was he just out to sing his own praises. What he wanted was to set an example, to show what could be done if an individual had the energy and determination to do it. Prentice wanted to encourage others, and this was the motivation behind his political and newspaper career.³

Obviously it is difficult to measure influence, but Prentice did have an audience - and a constant one too. His newspapers, admittedly, were not the best sellers in Manchester. As we have seen, sales of the Gazette reached over 1700 per week in September 1826. Sales of the Times began at about 1400 a week in October 1828, cleared 2000 in October 1829, reached a high of over 4000 in July 1830 (overtaking the Guardian and becoming one of the best-selling provincials in the country), then fell to about 2400 in the mid-1830s. Circulation figures then fluctuated, though never went below 2400 and were frequently above 3200. The Guardian never

1. Gazette, 15, 22 July 1826; Sketches, 284.

2. Sketches, 334.

3. Sketches, 332 and preface; Donald Read thinks that the self-congratulatory reminiscences of provincial newspapermen, and their belief in their own influence, were 'undoubtedly justified'. Read, 'North of England Newspapers and their Value to Historians', P.L.P.L.S., viii, part III (Nov. 1957), 208.

fell below 3000 copies a week after 1825 and by the mid-1830s sold well over 4000. When it became a bi-weekly in 1836 the weekly sale was over 4900. The Tory Courier, established January 1825, was selling about 1800 copies a week in 1828 and reached 2400 in May 1829. Its sales reached 4000 in 1839.¹ But even if Prentice's papers were not on the whole the best sellers, there is always the fact that circulation figures are not readership figures. A correspondent of the Times in 1836 reckoned it had 25 readers per copy.² Prentice did have a sizeable audience for his views. He was well-known locally (though not always liked). Others were affected by what he thought and wrote. He was instrumental in the adoption of Charles Poulett Thomson as a second reform-free trade parliamentary candidate in Manchester in 1832: 'having the direction of such influence as a popular newspaper possessed, some importance was attached to the course I might pursue'. Prentice exposed another candidate, S. J. Loyd, as lukewarm on reform and so helped to prevent his return. Cobden admitted to Watkin in September 1837 that Prentice had played a key role in Loyd's defeat.³ Yet Prentice's style of writing and editorial policy present problems, and he was possibly not as influential as he could have been or as he thought he was. Accepting no half-measures, ceaseless and single-minded in his advocacy of reforms, he

1. Read, Press and People, appendix.

2. Times, 1 Oct. 1836.

3. Prentice, League, i. 20-21; Watkin, Journal, 191-2. Prentice commented on the unsuitability of Loyd in virtually every issue of the Times between July and December 1832. In addition, he almost single-handedly destroyed Loyd's credibility as a reform candidate by his insistent questioning at an election meeting in Chorlton on 2 August 1832.

led by example and lived his public life according to the adage that 'the only way to move men is to show that you yourself are moved'. But this very single-mindedness damaged the appeal of his newspapers: they were too political. Prentice was to lose his Times in the late 1840s partly because of his over-concentration on political comment; he devoted his columns to the anti-corn law campaign but the League's leaders saw that such a paper could only have a limited appeal and readership. They wanted a true newspaper, one that was commercially successful as well as politically useful, and Bright helped to establish the Manchester Examiner in 1846. So strong was this competitor that Prentice retired from the Times in 1847 and his paper was subsequently absorbed by its new rival.¹ Prentice was never interested in providing a general newspaper, and even 'A Constant Reader' felt he had to tell Prentice in 1831 that 'the most hearty reformers have WIVES and SISTERS and DAUGHTERS, who have not all their ardency in political affairs, and to whom a little more LIGHT READING than you have given us would be most acceptable'.²

Prentice's editorials, like his books and pamphlets, were clear, concise and well-written, but his frequently pedagogic tone might also have put people off. Prentice thought of himself as a teacher. He seemed always to be claiming, for instance, that he knew what the workers' best interests were even if they themselves sometimes did not. He often had trouble getting his message across because, not surprisingly,

1. One of Prentice's closest friends, John Childs (Suffolk printer, free trader and campaigner for the ending of the monopoly on the printing of the Bible), was outraged by the way he had been treated by the League leaders. See comments in Dunlop, 'Archibald Prentice'.

2. Times, 5 Feb. 1831.

the intended beneficiaries of his advice and guidance resented being spoken down to. Prentice would also associate himself with causes that were not particularly popular with working people, like Sabbath observance or temperance. Such causes, and the manner in which they were advocated, may have distanced Prentice from the ordinary man. Certainly he came in for censure from popular politicians and journalists. On the slavery issue Cobbett condemned him for his 'worse than animal ignorance' in 1828, and in 1833 one local radical paper called him 'the most noisy in self-applause of all reformers'.¹ At the first public meeting of the Manchester Political Union in November 1830 one worker denounced him as a 'saucy Scotsman', and a large operative contingent at an Exchange meeting early in the Anti-Corn Law League's campaign gave 'three groans for Archibald Prentice'.² Perhaps Prentice was misunderstood. Although genuinely concerned for the well-being of the operatives he was only fleetingly successful in communicating this concern. And when people refused to listen he carried on regardless. 'Though it is a thankless task to serve the public', he told Richard Potter in 1827, 'my temperament would lead me to serve them even in spite of their abuse'.³ Samuel Bamford thought Prentice 'a shrewd and clever man, worthy of more substantial respect from the public than he receives'⁴ - a comment indicating that working men and others could indeed find Prentice

1. Prentice, League, 3-6; Manchester and Salford Advertiser, 31 Aug. 1833.

2. Times, 27 Nov. 1830; League, 116.

3. Prentice to Potter, 3 Oct. 1827, R. Potter Colln. xii. ff.119-21.

4. See John Evans's interview with Bamford, Lancs Authors, 18-19.

unconvincing, though he believed he was acting in their own best interests. Of course he was not always unpopular among local operatives. In July 1825 he was toasted by the spinners' union for his help in the agitation for Hobhouse's Factory Bill of that year, and when he became a Town Councillor in 1838 it was as an elected representative of New Cross ward, in the working-class Ancoats district.¹ But he probably did talk over the heads of some workers. Most respectable reformers must have had this problem of communication. In Manchester it seems that the operatives never completely trusted the middle-class reformers. A cleavage between the classes was one of the main features of the structure of the cotton industry and the 'them and us' mentality gave psychological support to the already wide economic and social gap.

Prentice was more effective in communicating with the politically, socially and economically assertive and ambitious reformers of the 'middling sort', the publicans, shopkeepers, clerks, small traders and craftsmen to whom his instruction and guidance might have been quite palatable: they picked up on his messages of encouragement and self-reliance, his belief in progress, reform and personal merit. If sections of the labouring classes found Prentice objectionable, despite his devotion of so much time and energy to their causes, so too did many larger merchants and manufacturers in the business community. Prentice's papers, vehicles for his own opinions and principles, had only limited appeal for the well-off men of property and commerce. On most political and economic questions they preferred the Guardian - which, incidentally,

1. Gazette, 16 July 1825; Brotherton Scrapbks., x. 31.

was far less interested in working-class hopes, claims and aspirations than were Prentice's Gazette and Times. Prentice was very much in favour of some paternalist protection for workers, for example, whereas Taylor took the employers' side against such interference.¹ In 1842 the Exchange newsroom, frequented by the merchants and manufacturers, was taking twelve copies of the Guardian twice a week (a total of 24) and only four copies of the Times per week.² The Guardian seems to have told its readers what they wanted to hear, gradually inserting its own principles until it could be said to both form and reflect local opinion. Prentice evidently was not discreet enough, and his ideas failed to attract a wide following from the affluent while his tone and language limited his appeal to the labouring classes. In 1836 one commentator said that the art of good editorial writing consisted in finding a middle way. The editor had to write with force and authority but ensure that his articles were not pitched too highly; he should give instruction without seeming to give instruction.³ This happy medium seems often to have eluded Prentice. Still, he was certainly sincere. Perhaps he thought that this was enough and that readers would appreciate honesty and straightforwardness. This was the basis of his appeal. He tried to sell integrity. It is debatable whether, once sold, integrity remains integrity.

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1. The Westm. Rev.'s idea ('Provincial, Scotch and Irish Press', 73) that the Guardian was the 'temperate medium of reconciliation between the extravagant commands of the masters and the unjust demands of the workmen' is quite untenable. It was always very clear whose side the Guardian was on.
 2. Read, Press and People, 202.
 3. 'Journals of Provinces', 147.

But Prentice would not have changed even if he could. The way in which he conducted his newspapers stemmed from his powerful sense of duty and mission, an adjunct of his strict morality and Presbyterian creed. A newspaper was not just a commercial venture. Nor was it meant merely to entertain. The journalist should be an instructor. Prentice had clear notions on the relationship between the press and public opinion:

Although in the first instance, a newspaper may be established in consequence of the demand for the expression of particular opinions, and may be continued mainly to reflect the political feeling of a portion of the community, it begins to act upon the public mind and, in its turn, assumes to dictate or insinuate the views of its conductors, and from being an organ becomes an instructor - for evil or for good, as the case may be.¹

A newspaper editor should use the influence of his position. To Prentice, this was the only style to adopt. He was no J. E. Taylor. His purpose was to make opinion, not money. He told his readers in 1834 that 'the desire to promulgate sound opinions is quite as strong a motive with us as any mere business temptation'.² This is why he had no hesitation in devoting his newspaper to the anti-corn law agitation, to the almost total exclusion of other subjects,

an occupation of space for eight years, more probably than any weekly newspaper ever devoted to a single object ... I was often told that it would be more to my interest if I made the Manchester Times more of a newspaper. It mattered not. If journalism was not to effect public good it was not the employment for me.³

An avid reader of Bentham, Prentice clearly shared the Benthamite view of

1. Sketches, 211.

2. Times, 4 Jan. 1834.

3. League, 89. On Prentice's approach see also Somerville, 397; Grant, Newspaper Press iii. 362; 'Provincial, Scotch and Irish Press' Westm. Rev. (1830), 74.

public opinion as an essential safeguard against misrule and as something which could best operate through the medium of the newspaper press.

Was Prentice truly independent as a newspaper editor, or was he the tool of others? In attempting to laud and defend J. E. Taylor, D. Ayerst has cast doubts on Prentice's independence and seems to regard him as the creature of those who financially backed his newspapers - particularly the Potters and Baxter.¹ This is an unacceptable interpretation. Ayerst fails to fully appreciate why the Guardian was established in the first place; he defends Taylor but Taylor was the one at fault. It was because of Taylor's departure from the original plan behind the Guardian that the Potters and Baxter decided to put money into another newspaper. According to Ayerst Prentice was selected by them and then used by them, but it is clear that Prentice acted as he wanted to act. He was not used; such a thing would have been repugnant to him. Ayerst makes much of the fact that Taylor paid off his backers and became a free man; so did Prentice - but even before May 1832 he was not unfree, and he was probably more independent than Taylor in the sense that Taylor was far more concerned about such things as the good opinion of advertisers. Ayerst apparently misunderstands the true nature of the relationship between the Potters and Baxter on one side and Prentice on the other. They were extremely close friends. They had trust and faith in each other and thought alike on most important questions of the day. It is clear that the Potters and Baxter preferred Prentice's strongly political style of journalism. They believed in the propriety and usefulness of his long, detailed and unequivocal weekly editorials. Prentice had the

1. Ayerst, 52-4, 87-8.

talent, they had the money to enable him to use it. This was a partnership. Prentice was not their servant at all - and neither side would have regarded this as tolerable anyway. Prentice was not told what to say by his financial backers; they were his friends and political allies and there was already agreement between all of them on what a reformist newspaper should be saying.

There are plenty of signs that Prentice was independent. He often adopted opinions and courses which even his friends regarded as too radical. They remained aloof, for example, from the Political Union Prentice helped to establish in 1830 apparently because they considered its character more 'popular' than was prudent. Prentice was to give the Union extensive coverage in the Times.¹ In May and June 1828 Baxter expressed anger at Prentice's policy on the Manchester Police Bill, particularly his siding with some outspoken leaders of the 'middling sort' radicals,² and at a police meeting in June 1828 Prentice publicly disagreed with Richard Potter when Potter asked him - in the interests of conciliation - to withdraw his motion for the dismissal of the law clerks to the Police Commission. Prentice's argument was that they were the tools of the ruling party rather than the advisers of the whole police body.³ A few weeks after this Prentice was again at variance with Baxter, on the propriety of paying the expenses of the Manchester deputation sent to Parliament to present the town's case for the

1. For the Union's council see Times, 4 Dec. 1830. None of the band sat on it except Prentice.

2. Baxter to Richard Potter, 30 May and 25 June, 1828, R. Potter Colln., xii. ff. 235-6, 241-3.

3. Gazette, 24 May, 7 June 1828.

representation of corrupt Cornish borough Penryn. Baxter thought it fair to allow the expenses but Prentice opposed, claiming that the deputation had bargained for a £20 franchise which had not been approved by the town.¹ Another example of Prentice's independence relates to his coverage of a Unitarian dinner in August 1824. Unlike most of the band Prentice was not a Unitarian but a Presbyterian. In his remarks on the dinner he paid tribute to the benevolent and liberal spirit of the Manchester Unitarians but added:

For ourselves we must honestly declare that, highly as we respect many of the individuals of that sect, and readily as we acknowledge the goodness of their intentions, we should regret exceedingly the progress of opinions which we consider as founded on superficial and partial views of that written word to which we all appeal as the standard of religious truth.²

Prentice would never have made such comments had he been in the Potters' pockets. He was free to praise or criticise whenever he wanted to. His newspapers were and were meant to be the organ of a particular party, the band, but took this stance through choice and not compulsion. Prentice was an independent ally rather than a hired political hack. The Potters and others gave their money but did not expect or receive slavish adherence in return. All they wanted was for Prentice to write what he himself wished to write. It is true that Prentice's financial problems during the winter of 1827-8 did lead to discussion about inviting Absalom Watkin to succeed him as editor of the Gazette; Watkin felt that this plan fell through because of his desire for editorial freedom.³ But

1. Gazette, 26 July 1828.

2. Gazette, 14 Aug. 1824.

3. Watkin, Journal, 122.

Watkin misunderstood what was happening. There was still no doubt about Prentice's talents and Prentice did continue editing the Gazette until August 1828; then he was set up with the Times in October. The wealthier members of the band did not think of Watkin because they wanted a tool. They were looking for someone they knew, had confidence in, and who could be expected to conduct the Gazette in the same forthright and uncompromising manner Prentice had employed. They quickly realised that nobody fitted the bill better than Prentice himself; so although they might have been disappointed that the Gazette under Prentice had lost money, they were in no doubt that it was ~~the~~ worthwhile to continue backing him and enabling him to do the public service for which he was suited. The offer to Watkin does not appear to have been too serious anyway, and he was not passed over because he wanted independence. Prentice was never anything but independent. The simple fact was that the band preferred Prentice's brand of radical journalism to the more moderate alternatives (including Watkin's) that were possible.

Prentice's consistent and outspoken advocacy of reforms obviously made him unpopular with Manchester's Tories and dominant 'high' party. He and his papers were often attacked at Tory meetings and in local Tory papers. It seems that Prentice also suffered from the discrimination that the ruling party exercised in the patronage of, and placing of notices and advertisements in, the local newspapers. The kind of discrimination described by Aspinall in his study of the central government's dealings with the press could certainly have its local counterpart: 'local authorities ... must have followed the government's example in discriminating against newspapers politically hostile to themselves'. In May 1829 Prentice was certain that his Times was being

passed over by the Police Commissioners when they sent out their official advertisements.¹ Prentice frequently railed against the Manchester Tories in his editorials and it was not long before they were stung into some decisive action to try and silence him. An opportunity arose in March 1831 when Prentice wrote an article ridiculing the men behind a petition opposing the Whigs' Reform Bill. One of them had Prentice indicted for libel; this was the ruddy-complexioned John Grimshaw, a retired infantry officer, a member of the Tory John Shaw's Club and former vice-president of the Manchester Pitt Club, 'commonly called Captain Grimshaw', Prentice wrote, 'principally remarkable for giving bawdy toasts and for a countenance which seems to blush at his own lewdness'. The case was heard in July 1831 and Prentice conducted his own defence as Taylor had done in 1819. He reiterated the point that Taylor had then made, that the jury could not convict unless presented with proof that the statements in question were false. Prentice was also fortified by communications with Bentham, whom he had visited while in London in April 1831. The jury failed to agree on a verdict and so the prosecution failed, which to Prentice was as good as a full acquittal. Bentham sent his congratulations and Prentice and the band celebrated a victory over the local Tories - who were clearly alarmed at the growing strength of the Manchester liberals. As Prentice said during the trial, 'a labourer I have long been in the field of parliamentary reform, and for my labour in that field rather than for any injury to Captain Grimshaw, I suspect I owe my appearance before you today'. Prentice had in reality been on trial for his political opinions, and he had emerged from the contest

1. A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press (1949), 133; Times, 16 May 1829.

unscathed.¹

4. Newspaper warfare in Manchester

By the time the Guardian was established in May 1821 there were already six weekly papers in Manchester, four of which appeared on Saturdays. These were the Chronicle, British Volunteer, Observer and Gazette, while the Exchange Herald and Mercury appeared on Tuesdays. From January 1825 there was a new Saturday paper, the Courier. The Chronicle was owned by the Wheeler family and was a Tory paper, established in 1781. The Courier was owned by the Sowers and was ultra-Protestant and more obviously Tory than Wheeler's paper. The Exchange Herald was established by Joseph Aston in 1809 and was Tory, though more moderate than the papers of Wheeler and Sowler. Its publication day changed from Tuesday to Thursday in 1825, and then in October 1826 Aston sold up to Sowler. There was thus a change in editorial policy, and from the end of 1831 the Exchange Herald appeared on Wednesdays. The Mercury established in 1752 and British Volunteer established in 1804 belonged to the Harrops and were Tory papers. Both were sold to J. E. Taylor in December 1825. The radical Observer led a stormy existence from January 1818 to September 1822, and the plebeian radicals did not have another newspaper organ of their own until the end of the 1820s. The licensed victuallers of Manchester and Salford established the Manchester and

1. Times, 26 March, 16 April, 23, 30 July 1830; Sketches, ch. XXIV; Dunlop, 'Archibald Prentice'; Prentice, Recollections of Bentham, 12-14; Trial of Archibald Prentice; Leary, Periodical Press, 189; Stancliffe, John Shaw's, 133, 179; Pitt Club ms. ii.40.

Salford Advertiser in November 1828 on non-political lines; then it was briefly under the control of two Tory editors before being taken over in September 1830 by Irish-born radical pamphleteer and politician James Whittle. The United Trades Co-Operative Journal lasted from March to September 1830 and was the organ of radical trade unionist John Doherty. It was succeeded by the Voice of the People, edited by Doherty, which first appeared in January 1831 but only lasted for nine months.¹

Journalistic competition in Manchester was certainly very fierce. To survive and prosper a newspaper had to try and increase its share of the market by any means possible, for the number of people who could afford newspapers at 7d. a copy was limited. It has been estimated that Manchester's Saturday papers sold at a rate of about one copy for every nineteen or twenty inhabitants, which made saturation a dangerous possibility. It is true that Manchester was a rapidly expanding town, and the demand for newspapers was noticeably rising, and that many Manchester papers were sold outside the immediate neighbourhood - another factor of advantage to proprietors and editors. But the market was still limited and the ability to compete was still an essential requirement. Nor were business considerations the only factor making for intense rivalry. This period saw the local newspapers adopting editorial policies that were more and more closely related to party political lines. As Tories, liberals and radicals collided in local and national affairs, so

1. Leary, Periodical Press, is a useful general account; detailed information about the Manchester press is best gained from the newspapers themselves.

did the Manchester papers attack and argue with each other on all the main public issues of the time. This development was strongly influenced by the aims with which the band entered newspaper activity. The idea that a newspaper could and should be an effective political organ, capable of forming and directing opinion, lay behind the early contributions to Cowdroy's Gazette, the establishment of the Guardian, the purchase of the Gazette and the establishment of the Times. As the band began to speak up for Manchester's respectable reformers, so their newspaper opponents began to devote more space to political information and comment and to present alternative views of contemporary events. Party political animosities combined with business rivalry and made Manchester a veritable cockpit of newspaper warfare.¹

With competition so fierce it was necessary for a newspaper continually to improve the service which it offered - content, advertising, news, presentation, delivery: all these and related matters had to be gradually perfected in order to attract and hold on to a portion of the reading public. The Guardian was a trend-setter in many of these fields and, keen to impress, always took care to announce all new improvements it made in newspaper techniques, presentation and organisation. The introduction of smaller type, the enlargement of columns, the changes in format to provide more space, the use of new presses - all this was referred to by Taylor as proof that his newspaper was worthy of attention and support. He did occasionally have to

1. Some of these points are discussed in Ayerst, 41; Mills, Guardian History, 42-4; D. Read, 'Reform Newspapers and Northern Opinion', PLPLS, viii., part IV (Jan. 1959).

apologise, though, for late deliveries, and poor legibility.¹ The improvement of the Gazette was rather slower, although by the time Prentice took over in July 1824 it was a more organised, attractive and useful newspaper than it had been ten years earlier. In August 1824 Prentice altered the arrangement and format of the Gazette, putting advertisements on the inside pages for example, and opting for five wider columns per page rather than the previous six. A few months later Prentice gave notice that he was going to install improved printing devices. He explained that the smallest types were no good unless used on paper of very fine quality, and he hoped that his new machines would give a clear and distinct script that was well-suited to the paper the Gazette was obliged to use.² Lacking the kind of revenue from sales and especially from advertising that the Guardian enjoyed, Prentice's improvements were on a more modest scale than were Taylor's (and by his own admission Prentice was far more concerned with political content). Still, the need to compete for readers remained important and so Prentice continued to try and improve format and presentation and create more space as his newspaper rivals were doing. The Times was more polished and attractive than the Gazette had been, with larger print, clearer titles and the grouping of similar material. By 1831 Prentice apparently had the time, will, money and confidence to make major changes; the Times was published in folio form rather than quarto from the end of 1831, and there was smaller type and the use of other space-saving devices.³

1. Guardian, 1 May 1824, 17 June 1826, 6 Jan. 1827, 8, 15 March 1828, 24 Dec. 1831.

2. Gazette, 7, 14 Aug., 25 Dec. 1824.

3. Times, 24 Dec. 1831, 7 Jan. 1832.

As well as competing for readers the Manchester papers had to compete for advertising customers too. Frequent appeals would be made to prospective customers as newspaper proprietors and editors pointed to the advantages to be gained by placing notices in their particular paper. Naturally the main advantage was publicity. Those papers selling most copies each week would be of greater use to advertisers than those with poor sales. Advertisers might also be interested in reaching readers of a certain profession, class or locality, so this too could come into consideration. In the main, though, newspapers emphasised their circulation figures when soliciting advertisements.¹ (This was one reason why they disputed each other's circulation claims). Once a customer had been attracted to a particular paper he had to be secured and then regularly assured of the value of his choice as a medium for his notices. Another important requirement was that advertisements should reach their destination well before the time of going to press. Prentice, Taylor and their fellow newspapermen often made this point to customers. In August 1830 Prentice said that notices should reach the Times office by 7 p.m. on Friday nights. He was apparently unwilling to insert late advertisements if this meant leaving out important items he had planned to include.² Taylor had fewer qualms, and in December 1829 referred to a recent occasion when he had excluded news because of the late arrival of advertisements.³ If forced to make the choice, it seems, Taylor would

1. E.g. Gazette, 13 Nov. 1824.

2. Times, 28 Aug. 1830.

3. Guardian, 12 Dec. 1829.

put in advertisements instead of news and articles. Prentice would have disapproved but it was Taylor who made the most money, and this was largely because the Guardian was so popular with advertisers. For decades the Manchester paper carrying the most notices had been the Chronicle, but the Guardian surpassed it during the course of 1829.

Taylor also came out the victor when he and Prentice established rival Tuesday commercial papers in August 1825 (and this affair no doubt added to the rising personal animosity between the two men). The battle commenced when it became known that Aston was to change the publication day of his Exchange Herald from Tuesday to Thursday. This left an opening and Prentice was the first to act. On 2 August 1825 he issued a prospectus for a new Tuesday commercial paper, the Manchester Commercial Journal, to be devoted to mercantile news and miscellaneous items of general interest. Taylor followed two days later with the prospectus of his Manchester Advertiser. Prentice must have been furious. He had, after all, first mentioned a scheme for a Tuesday paper in his Gazette of 16 July 1825. Taylor claimed that his plan for a Tuesday paper had been 'frequently avowed in conversation with his friends'; Prentice was unimpressed. Why had Taylor not announced his plan openly 'till our preparations were commenced, and the public were appraised of our intentions?'¹ Taylor did not reply, but it does seem that Prentice's announcement about a new paper was the spur. On 8 August 1825 Taylor's wife wrote to her brother:

1. Gazette, 6 Aug. 1825.

Edward is intending to commence a new Tuesday's paper. He has long been thinking of it, and repeatedly urged to do it, but he felt reluctant to injure the others published on that day. When, however, Mr. Prentice announced his intention, Edward thought there was no further occasion for delicacy on his part, and felt it would not do to give him the start.¹

Taylor had already established a close relationship with the local business community via the columns of his Guardian; his Advertiser was to further this development. The Tuesday Advertiser seems to have left Prentice's Journal far behind, and the latter venture cost Prentice a lot of time, attention and money with only limited returns. The Journal does not appear to have lasted beyond the summer of 1826. This was not through lack of trying, though. Prentice repeatedly tried to drum up support for his Tuesday paper, advertising it in the Gazette and emphasising its value. He even transferred regular Gazette articles into the Journal, such as the series 'Men and Books', and was keen to point out that his two papers complemented each other and were equally deserving of patronage. The Gazette was suitable for the head of the family and the Journal for the whole family.² But such appeals failed to have much effect. Taylor had already found the formula that appealed to the local merchants and manufacturers, and the early lead gained by the Advertiser over the Journal proved irreversible. With the Advertiser to supplement the Guardian, Prentice's Journal was surplus to requirements.

Taylor soon decided to expand his journalistic activities even further. In November 1825 he purchased the copyrights of the Mercury and British Volunteer, previously owned by the Tory Harrop family. James

1. I. & C. Scott, 458.

2. Gazette, 10 Oct. 1825.

Harrop junior explained that 'family arrangements' had made it 'imperative upon him that these journals should be disposed of'. Taylor was very keen to acquire them, realising that they would give him a commanding position in both the Tuesday and the Saturday markets. He estimated that the purchase would add up to £800 a year to the income of his newspaper business. He purchased the copyrights for £1100.¹ The Mercury was amalgamated with the Advertiser and the Volunteer with the Guardian. Prentice and other critics of Taylor were to argue that the purchase of Harrop's papers made him even less of a reformer than he was already becoming before December 1825. To them it was clear that he modified his editorial line in the Guardian so as to retain the patronage of former readers of the Tory Volunteer. Whether or not Taylor was guilty of this, certainly the Guardian's circulation rose immediately after the amalgamation. In the five weeks before the event the Guardian sold about 2322 copies a week. In the five weeks after its sales went up to 3012 a week.² Many old readers of the Volunteer must have stayed with the combined paper.³ The rising sales of the Guardian must also have contributed to the continuing increase in its advertising business.

1. Mercury, 29 Nov. 1825; I. & C. Scott, 459.

2. Guardian, 7 Jan. 1826. A few months later Prentice was to lament that his own readership had been approaching the largest number any Manchester paper had EVER had, until 'the incorporation of the Volunteer with the Guardian placed the latter decidedly first'. Gazette, 17 June 1826.

3. Ayerst estimates that 500 of the Volunteer's 800 subscribers remained with the combined Saturday paper. Ayerst, 60. Prentice claimed that the deal with Harrop added 1000 Tory readers to Taylor's subscription list. Sketches, 286. On Taylor's alleged attempts to trim between liberal and Tory positions see 'The Radical Tailor turning his Coat' ('A most excellent new song') Brotherton Scrapbks. v. 24.

Taylor was not the only one interested in newspaper amalgamations. on one occasion Prentice himself effected such a coup. He had been forced to give up the Gazette in August 1828 and that paper had passed into the hands of James Whittle, the Irish-born Cobbettite pamphleteer and politician. But under Whittle the Gazette rapidly declined and by May 1829 was again up for sale. Now at the Times Prentice eagerly came forward as a buyer (the copyright cost him only £50), and then issued a long and enthusiastic address to the readers of the combined paper. He expressed his 'heartfelt gratification' at being able to renew his communication with Gazette readers and pointed out that the amalgamation would have no effect at all on the radical stances of either paper (unlike the situation with the Guardian and Volunteer). He was sure that the combined paper would do well and expected a circulation of 3,000 copies a week in the near future.¹ His confidence was justified. His incorporation of the Gazette and Times seems to have had a most beneficial effect on his sales and advertising business. Both were increasing before the amalgamation, but that event confirmed and perpetuated the development and may also have speeded it up. By January 1829 the Times was selling 1200 copies a week, and 2000 by April 1829. After amalgamation in May the circulation went up to 2200 in June 1829, 2500 in January 1830 and reached 3000 in the summer of 1830. The number of advertisements per issue went up too. In the six months before amalgamation the Times averaged 37 notices in each issue, and 47 in the six months after amalgamation.²

1. Times, 30 May 1829.

2. Circulation figures in Times, 20 Feb., 23 Oct. 1830; advertisement averages based on figures taken for every fourth issue of Times.

Unlike J. E. Taylor, though, Prentice never made large profits from his newspapers. His technological and organisational improvements were slower, and like most provincial newspapermen he had to exploit other possible sources of income. From early in 1826 he was running a letter-press printing service in the Gazette office in Market Street, and by July 1830 he had established a printing shop in Great Ormond Street, Chorlton Row. In 1832, now in partnership with William Cathrall, he extended his printing service with the purchase of new equipment. He became a bookseller, and regularly used his newspapers to advertise the items he had for sale. He also advertised his own books and pamphlets. Some of this material was based on his lectures or on editorials and articles he had originally written for his papers.¹ Manchester newspapermen could go in for printing and bookselling to increase their incomes, but they still had to find ways of making their papers more appealing. One tactic was to run special features and articles in the hope of holding on to readers or even attracting new ones. The Guardian always gave a lot of space to commercial news and comment but also began to offer special features such as the series 'The State and Prospects of the Cotton Trade' - lengthy and detailed articles which appeared periodically from September 1823. The early ones were written by Shuttleworth and the later ones by Taylor himself. Among the special features offered by Prentice was extra parliamentary coverage at times of particular political excitement. He also offered free supplements on occasion, packed with information, as in April 1831 when the House of

1. Gazette, 17 June 1826, 26 April 1828; Times, 30 Jan., 10 July, 4 Dec. 1830, 24 Sept. 1831, 4 Aug. 1832.

Commons voted on the Reform Bill. In December 1830 he gave away a free copy of the Westminster Review article on the ballot with each Times sold. In November 1831 his readers had a choice between the ballot article and Perronet Thompson's Catechism of the Corn Laws.¹ All this was costly, but Prentice always wanted to help create 'right opinion' and he must also have hoped to attract more readers by offering such special services. As well as these inducements newspapers might regularly devote considerable space to items calculated to create the most interest among sections of the local reading public. A newspaper might become renowned for its weekly attention to certain subjects or types of news, and readers might buy it primarily because they were attracted by such contents. Prentice was known for such things as his attention to politics, or to working class issues, and the Guardian for its commercial coverage. Prentice would also write on commercial questions but not as often as Taylor. Taylor gave much space to foreign news too - of value to Manchester businessmen whose trading interests were spread all over the globe. One-upmanship was rife among Manchester newspapers. To get a scoop was a major achievement and worthy of lengthy self-congratulation. In July and August 1827, during the long dispute in Manchester over the erection and furnishing of new Anglican churches, Prentice made much of the fact that his Gazette was the only local paper to give space to a recent Leeds vestry meeting which had refused to allow a rate to be levied for these purposes.²

1. Times, 18 Dec. 1830, 19 March, 2 April, 26 Nov. 1831.

2. Gazette, 28 July, 4, 11, Aug. 1827.

The competition amongst Manchester's newspapers meant that editors would make claims and boasts not only about scoops, general progress and usefulness, but also about the influence they were having. Nobody did this more than Prentice. Often the claims about influence were related to those about circulation figures. The latter were a subject of much argument. Prentice argued with the Courier in 1825 and with the Manchester and Salford Advertiser in 1829 about circulation figures. In March 1830 it was the Guardian's turn to argue with Prentice - but when he challenged Taylor and Garnett to allow an independent investigation of the sales of the Times and Guardian they declined.¹ A particularly heated argument over profitability and circulation was that between the Times and the Voice of the People, the workers' paper commenced by John Doherty and the National Association for the Protection of Labour in January 1831. Prentice considered his own Times the most suitable paper for thinking operatives and declared that those behind the Voice had no idea of the costs and effort involved in the establishing of a newspaper. Prentice continued his warnings and was attacked for 'labouring under the insidious character of a friend to the workman' and wanting 'the exclusive right of being the worker's teacher and counsellor'. Prentice probably was worried about competition from the Voice and the loss of some of his own working-class readers. Perhaps he did not like the idea of somebody else setting themselves up as journalistic champion of the labouring poor. Yes the operatives needed to be informed and instructed, but they needed the RIGHT instruction - the kind that could only come

1. Gazette, 4 June 1825; Times 14, 21 Feb. 5, 19 Sept. 1829, 22 Feb., 27 March 1830, Guardian, 13, 20, 27 March 1830.

from the Times. Perhaps Prentice was motivated by a real concern for the workers. He truly believed that Doherty was fooling them, using their money for a project that was not in their best interests and was bound to fail. All that he said about the problems which the Voice would face was vindicated in September 1831 when that paper had to cease publication. Prentice looked back on the whole affair and declared that it had been his duty to warn the workers of the costs which establishing and running a newspaper involved. He had been denied the credit of disinterestedly cautioning the workmen of their certain loss, but Doherty's party had known he was right and had kept the truth from them. The Voice had only lasted for nine months. It had cost the workers £1500 and in return they have received nothing - no rise in wages or other improvements, as advocated by the Voice in conjunction with the N.A.P.L., and no increase in political knowledge.¹

Manchester newspapers would attack each other for a wide variety of reasons. Comments might be made, for example, about inferior journalistic style - as when the Courier criticised the 'ponderous prose' of the Guardian in February 1830.² Accusations about inaccurate or biased reporting were legion, particularly in relation to local events such as meetings of the Police Commission.³ Editors would attack each

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1. Times, 20, 27 Nov. 1830, 19, 26 Feb., 1 Oct. 1831; Voice, 12, 19, 26 Feb., 5 March 1831; R. Kirby and A. E. Musson, The Voice of the People: John Doherty 1798-1854, trade unionist, radical and factory reformer (1975), 248.
 2. Guardian, 27 Feb. 1830; Taylor replied that yes, his prose WAS ponderous in the sense that it fell heavily upon those against whom it was directed.
 3. E.g. Gazette, 15 March, 12, 19 April 1823, 17 Nov., 1 Dec. 1827; Guardian, 29 March, 12, 19 April, 22 Nov. 1823, 24 Nov., 8 Dec. 1827.

other on the grounds of truthfulness and also of usefulness. The Guardian's claim to pre-eminence as a commentator on commercial affairs was often disputed. The Courier rejected most of what 'political economy' had to offer and repeatedly argued with Taylor on economic matters.¹ Prentice also attacked Taylor for claiming expertise and writing in the fashion of one who claimed to be alone in fully understanding commercial issues. In 1829-30 the two men argued over the approach, character and gravity of the latest cyclical depression in the cotton trade.² Shuttleworth also joined in the attack on Taylor. Shuttleworth had earlier written some commercial pieces for the Guardian which had been greatly admired in local business circles, but when Taylor began to print a new series of articles under the same title ('The State and Prospects of the Cotton Trade') Shuttleworth was keen to dissociate himself from the erroneous opinions he felt they contained. He wrote Taylor an open letter on the matter in January 1830.³ Soon there was an argument over Taylor's report and treatment of a town meeting on 25 February 1830, which had discussed taxation, the currency and the prevalent economic distress. Shuttleworth and Richard Potter both took exception to Taylor's stance and used the correspondence pages of the Times to publicise their arguments. One of the points at issue was Shuttleworth's view that 'the average rate of profits is perhaps the

1. E.g. Courier, 22 Aug., 5, 12, 19 Sept. 1829, Guardian, 29 Aug., 5 Sept. 1829.

2. Times, 14, 28 Feb., 8 Aug. 1829, 30 Jan., 20, 27 Feb. 1830; Guardian, 7, 28 Feb., 7 March, 1 Aug. 1829, 9, 16, 23 Jan. 1830.

3. Guardian, 30 Jan. 1830; Courier, 6 Feb. 1830; see also Shuttleworth's piece on Taylor's commercial articles (Jan. 1831) in Shuttleworth's Scrapbook.

most unerring criterion and the most certain standard of national property'; another was Taylor's verdict on the size and respectability of the attendance at the meeting.¹

Another prominent feature of newspaper rivalry in Manchester were the attacks editors made on each other because of alleged violations of respectable and appropriate journalistic conduct. The Guardian criticised Prentice in August 1830, for instance, because he had apparently restricted the access of reporters to a dinner in the Salford Town Hall attended by Henry Hunt. Prentice was on the organising committee and had suggested that no reporter should be admitted unless he purchased a dinner ticket. The Guardian seems to have felt that Prentice was trying to give his own Times an unfair advantage in the coverage of an event of great local interest.² An editor would sometimes feel it necessary to devote much space to vigorous self-defence if ever his good character as a newspaperman was brought into question. Prentice defended himself against character slurs in the Manchester and Salford Advertiser in September 1829 and November 1831, after being accused of dishonesty and impropriety,³ and he was also quick to respond whenever another paper touched on a subject he still felt strongly about - the bankruptcy which had forced him to give up the Gazette in 1828.⁴ In December 1822

1. Times, 13 March, 13 April 1830; Guardian, 27 Feb., 6, 13, 20 March, 10 April 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 75-7, Chronicle, 20 Feb. 1830.

2. Guardian, 21 Aug. 1830.

3. Times, 5, 19 Sept. 1829, 12 Nov. 1831.

4. E.g. Guardian, 27 Feb. 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbook, 77; Times, 13 March 1830, 12 Nov. 1831.

the Tory Chronicle was so vitriolic in its condemnation of Taylor's recent remarks about the conduct of local magistrates that he felt he had to defend his personal integrity and the purity of his intentions from such abuse. He stated that he had only criticised magistrates for specific acts in court, that he had been discriminatory in his remarks, and that if an individual was guilty of improper conduct in his public capacity then a newspaperman was perfectly free to comment on this conduct. Taylor then turned the tables on the Chronicle and accused it of a range of journalistic misdemeanours such as inaccurate reporting and mercenary tendencies.¹ In May 1823 it was Aston's Exchange Herald that incurred Taylor's wrath. Aston had accused Taylor of claiming personal exemption from all criticism.²

But the bitterest critics of Taylor were probably members of the band. Quite apart from charges of apostacy were allegations that Taylor was guilty of impropriety as the editor of a public journal. He seemed to be eager to cast aspersions on his former friends whenever he had cause to notice them in his columns. Arguments with Prentice were numerous, and differences with Richard Potter and Shuttleworth have been noticed above.³ In the summer of 1828 it was Baxter who engaged in disputation with Taylor. Baxter and the others had been disappointed and angered by the alliance of the Guardian with the 'high' party in local affairs, and particularly by that paper's advocacy of an unpopular Manchester Police Bill. At a police meeting on 16 July 1828 Baxter

1. Guardian, 21, 28 Dec. 1822, 4 Jan., 8 March 1823.

2. Exch. H., 15 May 1823; Guardian, 17 May 1823.

3. E.g. p. 126

pointed to inaccuracies in the Guardian's reports relative to the bill; there followed a much publicised correspondence between Baxter and Taylor on the matter, with Baxter also claiming to have been insulted by Taylor's coupling of his name with that of William Whitworth, the outspoken and volatile corn dealer who was a spokesman of the smaller ratepayers in opposition to the bill. The Guardian concluded that 'it is not we who have sought, in the difference of our opinions on a public measure, pretexts for the total disruption of a private friendship'. Prentice pointed to the irony that it had been he and Baxter 'who, in a mistaken estimate of (Taylor's) principles, originated the scheme of putting him into the station he now fills as proprietor of the Guardian... this unfortunate step is, in their estimation, the heaviest of their political sins'.¹ Taylor provoked another of the band, Thomas Potter, in March 1830 when he ran an article on the activities of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Footpaths. This body had been formed by the band and their allies to protect the public's right of way whenever local paths and roads were unjustly or illegally shut up. Taylor's article seemed to accuse Thomas Potter of hypocrisy since it emphasised that Potter himself had recently diverted a path which ran across his property in Pendleton. Potter was incredulous. His had been a legally sanctioned act and was done with the knowledge and approval of his neighbours: how could Taylor group him together with offending landowners, farmers and others who illegally blocked footways? He wrote to the Times rejecting Taylor's comments and stating that this insult

1. Guardian, 26 July, 2, 9, 16 August, 1828; Gazette, 9 Aug. 1828.

only adds to the disgust with which I had previously regarded Mr. Taylor's public career, and to the exceeding regret I had for several years felt that I and my brother, by our pecuniary aid and by our personal exertions and influence, were instrumental in establishing a paper which instead of being the honest defender has been the inveterate foe of popular rights.¹

The charges of apostacy came so often from his former friends that Taylor must have quickly tired to replying to them. Every few months, though, he would feel obliged to write a piece in self-defence to illustrate his honesty and consistency. He often repeated the point he had made in letters to Richard Potter in October 1826: it was not his views that had changed but prevalent political circumstances. Toryism was not as rampant and unreasonable as in the past, and public men had a duty to adapt their conduct and statements according to changing conditions.²

At times it seemed as if the newspapers of Taylor and Prentice hardly agreed on anything. On certain public issues, of course, they did agree - perhaps differing on the speed and extent of the reforms required, but reasonably united on the need for reforms and the general direction those reforms should take. Much of the disputation was due as much to personalities as to issues, and another important feature common to both was their criticism of their Tory newspaper opponents. Criticism came not only on political grounds but could also be related to what is being discussed here, alleged violations of correct journalistic conduct. The target of comment was often the Courier. The Courier was established

1. Mercury, 9 March 1830; Times, 13 March 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 77. Such was the bitterness created by this affair that in a fit of temper Shuttleworth even threatened to subject Taylor to a flogging. R. Potter Colln. xi. 141.

2. R. Potter Colln. xii. ff.107-8, 111-16; Meinertzhagen, 226-34.

in January 1825 because some local Tories felt they needed a more vigorous and accomplished organ than they could then rely on to combat the papers of Prentice and Taylor. These two editors were quick to attack its improprieties and did so with almost as much force as they attacked its politics. In October 1825, for example, Prentice condemned the Courier for printing literary extracts which had been 'surreptitiously obtained' and inserted without permission. During the subsequent controversy he questioned the Courier's honesty and sources of information.¹ The most important non-political quarrel between the Guardian and the Courier in these years related to the latter's issuing of unstamped supplements with its main issues during the summer of 1827. Taylor and Garnett wanted to do the same thing, such was the pressure on available space, and pointed to the Courier's conduct when informed by the Stamp Office that such supplements could not be allowed. Sowler was outraged and dubbed them 'The Informers'. The Guardian was quick to reject his charge about 'discreditable feelings of uneasiness at the success of rival publications'.²

'The Manchester Newspapers of the present day are polished and urbane in their conduct towards each other, compared with what they were about the time of the calamitous event called The Manchester Massacre.' So said the Westminster Review in 1830.³ It is a view that clearly cannot be accepted. The same goes for what was said by a writer on the press in 1836. He thought that the personal responsibility under which a

1. Courier and Gazette, 1, 8, 15, 22 Oct. 1825.

2. Courier and Guardian, 18, 25 Aug. 1, 8 Sept. 1827.

3. 'Provincial, Scotch and Irish Press', Westm. Rev., (1830), 73.

provincial editor was placed

renders him careful to guard himself against personal violence or invectives; and there is scarcely an instance in which any attacks on private character appear, or that the war of words between journalists, which makes up so large and so vulgar a portion of the daily prints, rages in county papers.¹

None of this applies to the Manchester newspapers in the period under review. The heated criticisms and persistent attacks which editors made against each other on a wide range of issues relating to political stance, truthfulness, usefulness, journalistic conduct, popularity and influence among readers, demonstrate that moderation, urbanity and courtesy had no place in the Manchester newspaper arena. The examples given above represent only the tip of the iceberg; every single week brought forth some kind of unfavourable comment from one newspaper about another. Rivalry was intense because the newspapers were competing for readers and advertisers. The market was limited and it was impossible that an editor could have any choice but to enter into newspaper warfare. The strong political divides in the town likewise meant that there would be no peaceful coexistence among Manchester's editors. To some extent the local papers were all political organs, some more persistently and more clearly than others, but all of them commenting on the major public issues of the day according to particular political creeds. Thanks largely to the exertions of the band - exertions to create and direct opinion which necessitated a firm response from their enemies - a Manchester newspaper in these years was no place for the timorous and non-committed. The essence of Manchester journalism in the pre-Victorian era was commercial competition, political rivalry and personal rancour.

1. 'Journals of Provinces', 139, 148.

Chapter III

THE BAND, LOCAL AFFAIRS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Manchester's local government institutions, archaic and insufficient as they were, were largely under the control of a dominant Tory oligarchy. Gradually this 'high' party was expanded to take in a number of wealthy moderates and 'Whigs', for the forces of conservatism and "respectability" needed more security and strength in the face of assaults from Manchester's 'outs' - the predominantly liberal and Dissenting anti-establishment body which sought a greater share of local influence. Members of the band spearheaded the attacks on the ruling party, and often provided leadership and spokesmen for the large number of reform-minded smaller ratepayers and menu peuple who were interested in the causes of economy and administrative improvement, and who began to take a far more active role in local government disputes during the 1820s.

1. The hegemony of the 'high'

In 1788 the manorial steward William Roberts stated that all political and religious disputation should be kept out of local government: the views of an officer were unimportant - all that mattered

was the proper performance of his public duties.¹ But as factional struggles gripped Manchester it was natural for local Tories to defend and seek to maintain their hold on local affairs. Among other steps there was a new ruling that the court leet and its officers had to be

men who testify an affectionate loyalty to the King, a veneration for the Constitution, and a proper sense of the blessings which flow from them, without which no man ought to be invested with any public trust whatsoever.²

The manorial court leet was the main unit of local government until the 1792 Manchester Police Act, and even after the Act continued to appoint the Boroughreeve and Constables, Manchester's chief civic officers.³ The fact that the 1792 Act could be sought and obtained was partly a mark of the confidence of the Tories. It is also true that Manchester certainly needed administrative improvement, that the Act may also have been viewed as a defensive manoeuvre (in view of the assertiveness of the Manchester Dissenters, who had played a prominent role in the recent Test and Corporation Acts repeal campaigns) and that police matters were current at this time (the 1792 session also saw the debates over the Middlesex Justices Bill, for instance). Manchester's rulers probably saw that they had a good chance of getting an Act and, more importantly, of getting the kind of Act they wanted. The outcome was the establishment of the new Police Commission; its promoters had good reason to think that control would fall to them - not least because the £30 qualification for

1. 'A Charge to the Grand Jury of the Court Leet for the Manor of Manchester' (1788) in ed. J. P. Earwaker, Records of the Manchester Court Leet (12 vols 1884-90), ix. 233.

2. Earwaker, ix. 252.

3. A. Redford, The History of Local Government in Manchester (3 vols. 1939), i. is the indispensable source for Manchester's local government in this period.

Commissioners ensured some selectivity. Early financial and organisational problems hindered any remarkable improvement in the standard of local government, but the Police Commission quickly superseded the court leet and by about 1810 the Tories had clearly monopolised all the main posts in the Commission just as in the manorial and parochial bodies (and on the exclusive county bench too). Any scandal that affected the prestige of one branch of the local administration inevitably affected the others too, since it was common knowledge that the magistrates, the jurors of the court leet, the Boroughreeve, Constables and manorial officers, the officers of the parish and the leaders of the Police Commission were all members of the same closely-knit oligarchy.¹

The oligarchy drew in members of such Tory bodies as the Association for Preserving Constitutional Order (1792-9), John Shaw's Club and the Pitt Club (established 1812). John Shaw himself, an innkeeper, was a market looker in the 1780s, and James Billinge, a fustian manufacturer and member of the APCO's executive, and a president of John Shaw's in the 1780s, was a churchwarden, a Constable and the Boroughreeve of Manchester for 1788-9. Billinge was also on the jury of the court leet, as were other John Shaw men at various times. The dye manufacturer Thomas Fleming was a member of John Shaw's and the Pitt Club, treasurer of the Police Commission 1810-19, a highway surveyor for nearly 20 years as well

1. Redford, Local Govt., i. 195-200, 240-3, 258; Gatrell 'Incorporation and liberal hegemony', 34-5, 60; D. Foster, 'Class and County Government in early 19th century Lancashire', Northern History, (1974). Before the band accusations about local corruption were made most forcefully by the public accountant and bail officer Thomas Battye, who wrote several pamphlets on the matter of which the most important was A Disclosure of Parochial Abuse in the Town of Manchester (1796). See also F. R. Atkinson's Scrapbook.

as a member of several executive committees. He was to be accused of corruption and improper procedure by the local reform party. Other John Shaw and Pitt Club men included manufacturer John Greenwood, a sidesman at the Collegiate Church in 1805, a juror of the court leet in 1813, Boroughreeve of Salford for 1818-19 (and the man who brought libel charges against J. E. Taylor). Of the 18 Boroughreeves and Constables who served in Manchester from 1792-7, 16 were members of the executive committee of the APCO.¹ Of the 511 men listed in the Pitt Club membership book at least 111 served as churchwardens, overseers, sidesmen, messengers and collectors for the parish in the period from 1790-1832.² A continuing presence of committed Tories within the parochial administration was assured when individual members of the Pitt Club could hold parish offices for several years at a time - three or four years was very common, but one man held offices for as many as eleven years and another for nine years. The parish was split into six divisions (Manchester, Salford, Blackley, Newton, Withington, Stretford), with several offices belonging to each. It was not difficult for the ruling party in Manchester to colonise particular divisions, and retain authority by having supporters switch to different divisions every so often. The same names recur again and again in the lists of officials.³

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1. Stancliffe, John Shaw's, 45-6, 97, 105, 133, 161, 179; Pitt Club ms., membership book; APCO minutes and proceedings.
 2. Figure reached by comparing Pitt Club membership book with ms. list of parish officers and JPs (1720-1912), compiled by P. Stephen from apprenticeship indentures - f. MSC 331. 86, Local Hist. Dept. MCL.
 3. Parochial appointments were advertised every April in the Mercury. The offices were filled at a parish meeting each Easter Tuesday.

The group holding sway in Manchester was very much a closed club, and though there was no professed 'test' local officers certainly had to have the right political opinions and credentials. This meant that the same men held several offices at once, or else changed from post to post within the local government structure. From 1814-33 nine men served as Constable and then as Boroughreeve; five men served as Constable or Boroughreeve for two successive terms.¹ Control over the offices of Boroughreeve and Constable was important for many reasons, not least because they had the power to veto town meetings on particular subjects. They would simply refuse to call them when requisitioned. Sometimes the reformers would go ahead anyway, but if they did their deliberations lacked official civic sanction and when they decided not to hold a meeting then the ruling party had successfully prevented the expression of opinions it found unpalatable. The jurors of the court leet normally included the local oligarchy's most prominent members, men who gave life to such organs as the Pitt Club and who for years selected themselves and their friends for the most important local offices. In 1823 the jurors included Joseph Green, a merchant, Constable 1814-15, Boroughreeve 1816-17 and also a churchwarden, Gilbert Winter, a merchant, Boroughreeve 1823-4 and also a churchwarden, J. B. Wanklyn, merchant, Constable of Manchester 1825-6 and Salford 1826-7, Boroughreeve of Salford 1829-30 and a senior churchwarden of Manchester in the mid-1830s, James Brierley, a future magistrate, a churchwarden and the Boroughreeve of Manchester 1820-21 and 1821-2, as well as calico printer Fielding, brewer Hardman and cotton

1. See lists in Harland's Manchester and Lancs Collection. These and other manorial appointments were made each Michaelmas.

merchant Garnett - who were all at some time the holders of parochial, manorial or police offices. In 1830 the jurors included former and future parochial officers like merchant John Bradshaw, merchant-manufacturer Aspinall Philips, master spinner John Barlow and calico printer John Chippendale, as well as banker Samuel Brooks, Constable 1827-8, master spinner Robert Ogden, Constable 1828-9, iron and timber merchant Thomas Sharp, Constable 1819-20, and manufacturer-merchant Benjamin Braidley, who had been a churchwarden and was to be Constable 1830-31 and Boroughreeve 1831-2 and 1832-3.¹

The control of the ruling group was self-perpetuating; not only was the selection of officers in the hands of the same individuals for long periods of time, but outgoing officers could themselves nominate their successors - as was the case with churchwardens and overseers. There was controversy in March 1823 when the Revd. W. R. Hay resigned as chairman of the Salford Quarter Sessions and was succeeded by T. Starkie. The Guardian suspected that there had been collusion to make sure Starkie was appointed. By parliamentary Act the Salford magistrates as a body had the authority to select their chairman, but this procedure had apparently been by-passed and it was no accident that Starkie was not only a man with the right political outlook but also the man favoured by Hay and those chosen few to whom Hay had first intimated his desire to step down.² The oligarchy controlled appointments to the police committees.

1. Lists in Guardian, 18 Oct. 1823, 16 Oct. 1830; Harland, Manchester and Lancs Colln.; occupations in Pigot and Dean Directories.

2. Hay Scrapbks xi. 175; Guardian, 1 March 1823.

In November 1830 when the membership of the finance committee was being discussed Richard Potter protested that it consisted solely of wealthy men. He pressed for the inclusion of a few shopkeepers to give it 'mixed blood' but his proposal came to nothing. The reconstitution of the Police Commission by the 1828 Manchester Police Act had given the 'high' party even more opportunity to monopolise key posts.¹ By 1832 many outside the Police Commission were complaining that local affairs were being controlled by a small select junto within the 'high' party. Much business was being dealt with by the improvement committee, and there was great collusion between this and other committees because the same individuals sat on several committees at the same time. Of the 30 men on the improvement committee, 18 were also on the gas committee, 11 also on the finance and general purposes committee, and four also on the paving and soughing committee.²

The growing number of townspeople in Manchester who demanded and campaigned for local reforms in the post-war period believed that local government could be cheaper and more efficient if it was made more representative. They also disliked being excluded from any real share in decision-making and influence. Members of the band attempted to articulate the aims and complaints of these people, increasing public awareness of important local issues and instigating confrontations with the ruling group on these issues. The band rose to new heights of activity, influence and effectiveness, and these controversies also

1. Times, 6 Nov. 1830.

2. Times, 14 April 1832.

demonstrated the importance of appeals to groups lower down the social scale. Numerical superiority at local meetings was to be essential to the respectable reformers in Manchester. They and their menu peuple allies had to find and exploit what John Garrard has called 'access points'¹ - points at which the local opposition could confront the ruling party and attempt to influence the course of local events. Town, police and parish meetings were crucial 'access points' and the ruling party could not always guarantee success at these assemblies. This was why, in the 1820s, the local establishment would often resort to the Sturges Bourne Vestry Act of 1818, which gave votes on a scale of one to six depending on rateable value and so gave a decided advantage to leypayers assessed at high amounts. In Manchester this system was used - or there was an attempt to use it - even when its applicability was open to serious question. The liberals' Gazette had seen the dangers even before the Act was passed, and Cobden was to condemn it in his Incorporate Your Borough of 1837.²

The notion that Manchester's local government was based on 'uncontaminated middle class influence' and that Manchester was the setting for an 'apartheid society' - with the wealthy competing for power without reference to or concern for their social inferiors - has been

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1. Garrard, Leaders and Politics in 19th Century Salford: A historical analysis of Urban Political Power (Salford University Dept. of Sociological and Political Studies), 19.
 2. Gazette, 25 April 1818; Cobden, 'Incorporate Your Borough!' (1837) in W.E.A. Axon, Cobden as a Citizen (1907), 30-61.

advanced by V.A.C. Gatrell.¹ But this gives an incomplete and misleading picture. Pressure from below could be a reality and could force the ruling oligarchy into precautionary or reactionary steps - as during the war years and in 1816-17 and 1819-20. Members of the band, moreover, made clear appeals to the lower classes in search of allies, particularly to the shopocracy and 'middling sort' of petty traders, publicans, smallscale manufacturers, clerks and some craftsmen - small ratepayers and the very men who would listen when they were told that public money was being wasted and public bodies were unrepresentative and self-seeking. Manchester's assertive menu people are in some ways analagous to R. S. Neale's 'middling class' - unstable, lacking in deference, dynamic, active and wanting to share in the privileges and authority of the locally dominant.² It is not surprising that the band often tried to tap the energy source represented by this stratum in the local political struggles of the 1820s and 30s. The political activity of the shopocracy and 'middling sort' was a crucial factor in the affairs of many towns, and the cleavage between large and small property and between ruling groups and "economy" parties is a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century urban politics.³ In Manchester the 'middling sort' were to provide

1. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and hegemony'.

2. Neale, Class and Ideology in the 19th Century (1972), 29-40.

3. E.g. T. J. Nossiter, Influence, Opinions and Idioms in Reformed England (1975), ch. 7; B. Barber, 'Municipal Government in Leeds' in Fraser, Municipal Reform and the Industrial City; Nossiter, 'Shopkeeper radicalism in the 19th Century', in Nossiter (ed.) Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences (1972); G. Crossick, 'Urban Society and the Petty Bourgeoisie in 19th century Britain' in (ed.) D. Fraser and R. Sutcliffe, The Pursuit of Urban History (1983); discussion on 'The Middle Class in 19th Century Politics' by Nossiter and Fraser in (ed.) Garrard et al, The Middle Class in Politics.

invaluable aid to the incorporators of the later 1830s, and 18 of the 64 members of the first Town Council were from retail trades. Still, it is important not to exaggerate the individualism, independence and radicalism of the 'middling sort'. It was not just the liberal reformers in the Manchester business community who made appeals to the social groups below them. Conservatism and loyalism had their attractions and influence at various times, as may be seen from the anti-reform mob activity of the 1790s, the favourable response to the local volunteer movement of the war years, and the high number of 'middling sort' applicants who offered to serve as special constables in 1817 and 1819. The main Tory organs themselves, the APCO and the Pitt Club, were admittedly dominated by textile businessmen and professionals; but when local Toryism had to be active its more affluent and socially respectable leaders were quick to recruit allies from groups further down the social scale. About 76% of the members of the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry on duty at Peterloo were drawn from the 'middling sort'-publicans, butchers, petty businessmen and traders, skilled workers and artisans.¹

1. Social character of members of APCO and Pitt Club determined by comparing their membership lists with local commercial directories: very few representatives of the 'middling sort' are present, while the dominance of textile merchants and manufacturers is readily apparent. They formed by far the largest occupational group - 58 of a sample of 109 members of the APCO and 141 of a sample of 345 members of the Pitt Club. On the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry see list in Observer, 11 May 1822.

2. Resistance to the local establishment on the matter of new churches,
church rates and tithes

In view of the numerical strength and political assertiveness of the Dissenters in Manchester it is not surprising that the reformers' challenge against local Tory dominance was particularly powerful in the denominational sphere. Serious disputation began in January 1816 when the local oligarchy backed the plan of an Anglican-Tory amalgam led by such men as the Revd. C. D. Wray of the Collegiate Church, for a new free church in Manchester. After negotiations the Dissenters withdrew their opposition on the understanding that the Anglicans would bear all the costs involved.¹ But the probability of future collision was clear as pro-Church commentators pointed to the alleged lack of Anglican accommodation in Manchester and as a campaign began to take advantage of the flm. grant established by Parliament in 1818. A parish meeting in the Collegiate Church on 27 January 1820 considered the purchase of suitable sites for new churches but descended into arguments as members of the band raised objections. Richard Potter pointed to the high cost of sites and maintenance and then made the arguments that were to be repeatedly used against the establishment in subsequent years: there was

1. Gazette, 6, 13, 20 Jan., 10 Feb. 1816; Chronicle, 23 Sept., 9 Dec. 1815; H. Wray, Memoir of the Revd. C. D. Wray (1867); Revd. C. D. Wray, A Statement of Facts respecting the Population of the parish of Manchester, showing the Want of a new Free Church (1815); Prentice, Sketches, 29, 59. On the perceived shortage of church accommodation in Manchester see also Wheeler, History, 375; R. G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (1959), 68; W. R. Ward, 'The Cost of Establishment: some reflections on church building in Manchester', Studies in Church History, 3 (1966). The balance in favour of Dissent was clear by the time of the religious census of 1851: Manchester Anglicans had 36,000 worshippers, 38,000 sittings and 32 places of worship, and the Dissenters had 44,000 worshippers, 40,000 sittings and 78 places of worship. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and hegemony', 36.

no need for new churches, the existing ones were never full, and it was improper and unjust that Dissenters should be made to pay towards the building and upkeep of Anglican places of worship. J. E. Taylor contrasted the peaceful settlement of 1816 with the present attempt to lay heavy charges on the whole parish - Dissenters included - for the building of churches that were not needed. He also gave expression to a market theory of religion:

Church of Englandism, like everything else (I do not use the term offensively), is a marketable commodity, by which I simply mean that the supply will always be equal to the demand. If more churches are wanted, more will be built; but it is not right that, without looking to the necessity of them, or indeed under any circumstances, that Dissenters should be obliged to contribute to the support of an establishment, the doctrines of which they do not approve, and in the principles promulgated by which they do not coincide. Let the friends of the establishment build what churches they like; but do not let them force their Dissenting brethren to contribute thereto.

On a show of hands the meeting sided with Potter and Taylor, but the Tories invoked the Sturges Bourne Vestry Act and manufactured a victory. The reformers were outraged that the purchase of sites had been sanctioned in this fashion.¹ Still, another meeting was necessary to levy a rate and this was fixed for 8 June 1820. As Richard Potter recalled, 'we immediately set to and made every exertion to induce the parish to attend'.² After speeches by Potter, Taylor, Baxter and their allies the meeting refused to approve a rate and even a scrutiny under the Vestry Act could not change this outcome. The reformers had evidently secured a formidable attendance of their own people, and the result was

1. Gazette, 29 Jan. 1820; R. Potter Colln. xi, 90; Hadfield, Narrative, 66.

2. R. Potter Colln. xi. 91.

warmly celebrated in their Gazette.¹ The Tories' desire for revenge after 8 June prompted a public notice which appeared a few days later:

The members of the Established Church are requested to withdraw their subscriptions from, and to withhold their benefactions to, those Institutions connected with the Methodists and Dissenting Societies of all Denominations; and they are solicited to increase their subscriptions and to enlarge their benefactions to all those Institutions promoting the interests of their own Apostolic Church.²

Though the meeting of 8 June 1820 had denied the necessity for new churches and refused to grant funds for the purchase of sites, the report of the Parliamentary Commissioners published in May 1821 stated that three churches were nevertheless to be built in Manchester. The next parish meeting was on 6 June 1821, but the churchwardens argued that it was not competent to consider any matter other than their latest accounts. When Richard Potter demanded that any correspondence between the churchwardens and the Parliamentary Commissioners concerning new churches be laid before the meeting, he was told that there had been no such correspondence. When he suggested that there should be a proper investigation into the rate issue and the attendances at all places of worship in Manchester parish, he was told that this was irrelevant to the present meeting.³ This was to be the pattern at subsequent assemblies. The reformers were denied the chance to protest openly and formally about the new churches. It was difficult for them to gain a hearing at meetings which were concerned primarily with the passing of the quarterly

1. Gazette, 10 June 1820; Axon, Annals, 161.

2. Gazette, 10, 17 June 1820.

3. Gazette, 2, 9 June 1821; Hay Scrapbks., x. 119.

accounts, and if they tried to introduce other topics for discussion they were ruled out of order.¹ Unable to make headway at parish meetings they turned to the newspapers. In letters to the Guardian, for example, Richard Potter laid out statistics to show that attendances at local Anglican churches had actually been declining in the early 1820s and that one, St. John's, was hardly ever more than a quarter filled. The Chronicle disputed Potter's figures but he was adamant; Manchester did not need new churches.² But the reformers had to accept that they were going to be built. The ruling party had somehow convinced the Parliamentary Commissioners that Manchester was short of church accommodation and that the motion passed on 8 June 1820 was irrelevant or unrepresentative. The disappointment of the liberal-Dissenting leaders was increased in March 1824 when they learned that the government was planning to devote another half a million pounds to the building of new churches. They organised a petition pointing out that the average Sunday attendances at five main Anglican churches in Manchester (St. Ann's, St. Michael's, St. Paul's, St. Luke's and St. George's) did not exceed 1100 in total, while the total capacity of these five churches was 6000.³ Protests along these lines did continue, but by now there were other matters to attend to.

Chief among these was the question of whether church rates could be used to pay for certain repairs, salaries and furnishings. In the latter half of 1823 the churchwardens had taken legal counsel and gained the

1. E.g. report of meeting in Gazette, 15 June 1822.
2. Guardian, 6, 13, 20 July 1822; Chronicle, 13 July 1822; R. Potter Colln. xi., 92.
3. Guardian, 27 March 1824; Gazette, 22 May 1824.

decision that church rates could be resorted to for these purposes. The reformers were not satisfied and at a leypayers' meeting in June 1824 Richard Potter, Taylor, Baxter, Harvey and their allies carried a motion that the churchwardens should seek further counsel.¹ This the churchwardens did not do, and in June 1825 they provocatively included charges for plate and furnishings for two of the new churches (St. Matthew's and St. Philip's) - built, of course, in opposition to the recorded decision of the leypayers - in their quarterly accounts. There was a large attendance at the parish meeting of 30 June 1825 and Prentice asserted that even if the churchwardens were bound to provide the items required for a decent administration of the sacraments, 'yet surely the parish was the best judge as to what was decent and what should be the scale of expenditure'. But Richard Potter's motion that the charges for plate be disallowed was negatived.² As the Tory newspapers condemned the reformers for their stance³ there was talk of an appeal to the courts. That the band and such 'middling sort' allies as the radical draper P. T. Candelet were considering this course was made clear at a parish meeting in July 1827. The churchwardens agreed at last to take further counsel, that of J. W. Nolan, the premier parochial lawyer in the kingdom. In September Nolan ruled that the earlier decision had been sound: the churchwardens were bound to provide all the articles necessary for the celebration of services. Still, the reformers were encouraged by resistance to new churches and the necessary rates in Sheffield,

1. Gazette, 5 June 1824.

2. Gazette, 25 June, 2 July 1825.

3. E.g. Courier, 2 July 1825.

Clerkenwell, Birmingham and especially Leeds. The Leeds ratepayers' decision to pay none of the costs incurred during the erection of new churches (July 1827) was given great publicity in Prentice's Gazette, which was in fact the only local paper to report and discuss it. Prentice also wrote to Edward Baines of the Leeds Mercury for further information.¹ Richard Potter made use of the Leeds decision at a parish meeting on 22 September 1827 and his 'small but clamorous faction' was attacked by the Courier;² for all the continuing protest and controversy, though, the band could not stop the churchwardens proceeding with the policy that had received legal sanction and the backing of recent parish meetings. All that Potter, Prentice and their friends could do was to go on pointing to the injustice of the affair, and criticising such statements as that of Bishop Sumner of Chester, who consecrated one of the new Manchester churches in December 1828 and declared that it was blasphemous to grudge the cost of a building where the name of God was to be praised.³

The ill-feeling produced by the struggles of the 1820s was to give added force to the campaign against church rates as a whole in the early 1830s. Dissenters had for years resented having to pay church rates and their unease was only increased by the controversial uses the Church - in the local context - had been making of its privileged position in recent

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1. Gazette, 14, 28 July, 4, 11 Aug., 8 Sept. 1827; Chronicle, 14 July 1827; Hay Scrapbks. xii. 19-20; R. Potter Colln. xi. 93-4.
 2. Gazette and Courier, 29 Sept. 1827; Hay Scrapbks. xii. 11-12.
 3. Times, 12 Dec. 1828.

times.¹ The parish meeting of 1st June 1832 took place at a time when feeling against church rates had reached unprecedented^{-ed} heights, when respectable and 'middling sort' reformers had some experience of working together, and when demands were rising for greater accountability on the part of officers who controlled the expending of public funds. At this meeting objections were raised to many items in the churchwardens' accounts and Prentice made the point that the system was at fault, not necessarily the churchwardens (who had to make the payments they thought they were required to make). He recommended that the meeting should approve only a very low rate for the next year - to encourage greater economy and to register disapproval of the principle of church rates. Prentice's proposal for a rate of half a penny in the pound was approved. This was a victory for the Leypayers' Association which had been formed by mainly 'middling sort' reformers to try and keep a check on local expenditure.² The Courier was critical of what had happened but Prentice's Times followed the victory with articles on pluralism, corruption and the need for ecclesiastical reform.³ In 1833 he and his allies tried to wrest control of the parish offices from the local oligarchy. They were unsuccessful, but progress was made on the church rates issue. A parish meeting in July 1833 passed Richard Potter's motion that no rate was necessary. The churchwardens levied a rate

1. E.g. 'Twenty Reasons why Dissenters should not be compelled to pay Church Rates and Tithes, or in any way support the Church of England' by 'Christianos', Times, 26 May 1832; Brotherton Scrapbks., xi. 54.

2. Times, 2 June 1832.

3. Courier, 2 June 1832; Times, 23 June, 20 Oct. 1832.

anyway but many refused to pay. The same thing happened in 1834, and then in July 1835 the churchwardens bowed to the pressure of the opposition and announced that no rate would be sought.¹

The liberal-Dissenting body was as ideologically opposed to tithes as to church rates,² but its leaders had little practical involvement in the celebrated Manchester Tithe controversy of 1804-29 because this was of most importance to the landowners, farmers and rural tenants of the parish. The reformers were still interested in the affair, though, and it received a lot of attention in the newspapers of Taylor and Prentice. The root cause of the dispute was the Collegiate clergy's attempt to enforce payments in kind - which though widespread in the region had been dying out and in the Manchester parish had only applied to corn. The clergy secured a decision in the Court of Chancery that the substitute payments which had long been made in lieu of tithes should be discontinued and all tithes of milk, potatoes, cattle and hay should be paid in kind. As the Guardian said, this would mean that the income of the Warden and Fellows of the Collegiate Church would be 'prodigiously augmented'.³ The Manchester reformers backed the opposition campaign and denounced the Collegiate body's legal prosecution of recalcitrant parishioners.⁴ Prentice did not want the tithe burden to be passed wholly on to tenants by the landowners, and - the odious corn laws never

1. D. Fraser, Urban Politics, 37-9; S. D. Simon, A Century of City Government: Manchester 1838-1938 (1938), 64-5; Times, 11 July 1835.

2. E.g. J. E. Taylor on 'Remarks on the Consumption of Public Wealth by the Clergy', Guardian, 13, 27 July 1822.

3. Guardian, 22 March 1823.

4. Guardian, 28 June 1823, 24 Jan. 1824; Gazette, 28 June 1823.

far from his mind - he argued that the tithe question affected everyone

for this plain reason, that not only the rent of the land but all charges upon it, whether tithes or taxes, or in any other shape, ARE INCLUDED IN THE PRICE PAID FOR THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE.¹

Eventually, in 1829, the churchwardens mediated and a settlement was worked out providing for financial payments per acre in lieu of all tithes, not just the ones in dispute.²

3. Questions of accountability, officers' salaries, manorial rights and county rates

One of the best ways to highlight the need for reform and a more just distribution of local power was to launch determined attacks on the conduct of prominent local officers. If it could be shown that an officer was guilty of irregular conduct then both he and his allies in the ruling party could be subjected to great pressure, and the willingness of townsmen to scrutinise officers' activities was appreciably increased.

The aforementioned Thomas Fleming, treasurer of the Police Commission from 1810-19 and the holder of several other offices besides, was to come in for much accusation in the years following the end of the war. No officer was more prominent than Fleming in his day, and the fact that he achieved such a noticeable personal ascendancy served his critics because it made it easier for them to gain publicity.

1. Times, 4 July 1829.

2. Guardian, 11 July 1829; Courier, 4 July 1829.

His chief antagonist from 1816 onwards was the radical leader Thomas Chapman, who kept a fruit shop in Fennel Street. He was also part-owner and editor of the radical Observer in the first half of 1819 - but had to give this up when several libel actions were filed against him; one of them was brought by Fleming and resulted in Chapman being fined £250 in February 1820.¹ The campaign against Fleming was given great publicity in the liberals' Gazette. The main accusations against him were that he bypassed the normal procedures for conducting official business and took decisions without waiting for the proper consultation, and Chapman was also to suggest that he was corrupt. When Chapman was offered the chance to inspect Fleming's accounts, though, he declined.² Fleming took much of the blame for three major scandals in local government in 1818-19 - speculation in the provision of bran for police horses, the acceptance of a very high tender for work at the gas establishment from a firm with a partner on the gas committee, and irregular payments for cement used in the extension of the gas works.³ Fleming was a target in the drive for greater answerability on the part of town officers. As 'J.B.' (possibly J. B. Smith) warned in a letter of November 1818 to the Gazette:

Perhaps Mr. Fleming and his friends are not aware that if any money is paid for which the treasurer cannot produce vouchers, having the signatures of three Commissioners, any nine Commissioners ... can procure the treasurer's commitment to jail unless the money is repaid or the receipts produced.⁴

1. Leary, Periodical Press, 129; Timperley, 83.

2. Gazette, 8 June 1816, 1 Feb. 1817, 13 March 1819.

3. Redford, Local Govt., 262-71; Gazette, 3 Oct. 1818, 13 March 1819.

4. Gazette, 7 Nov. 1818.

At the end of 1819, though nothing was ever proven against him, Fleming decided to resign as treasurer of the Police Commission.

Another notorious local officer who was subjected to a tirade of accusations and criticism was Joseph Nadin, Deputy Constable of Manchester from 1802-21. A principal executive agent of the local authorities and a highly successful thief-taker, his methods were regarded as oppressive and improper by many, and his participation in local political persecution - on his masters' behalf - made him particularly odious to both respectable reformers and plebeian radicals. Prentice called him 'the real ruler of Manchester', but though the Deputy Constable had a high public profile he was clearly a servant rather than a master.¹ Criticism of Nadin's conduct, and of the local police in general, became especially prominent after 1815. Nadin was often accused of conniving at crime and this accusation gained considerable strength after the Hindley affair of 1818. Nadin and one of his agents, William Hindley, had tricked two youths named Hill and Lea into receiving stolen property and then arrested them for having this property in their possession. The Observer and the Gazette demanded an immediate inquiry and further accusations against Nadin came thick and fast. He had refused to give back money taken from a Blanketeer. He had improperly accepted a considerable reward for helping out when a warehouse caught fire, and such was his cupidity that he had returned to the firm claiming he had lost part of the money and so was paid a second time. The same thing happened when he assisted a merchant who had been robbed. The

1. Prentice, Sketches, 34; Read, Peterloo, 79-80; Marshall, Public Opinion, 93-5.

Boroughreeve and Constables did agree to an inquiry but this only resulted in the dismissal of Hindley. Correspondents of the Gazette denounced this as a whitewash and cover-up: why had not anything been done about Nadin? The ruling party protected him because in so doing it was protecting itself. Every Boroughreeve and Constable of Manchester from 1802-18 signed a document expressing complete satisfaction with the ability, integrity and fidelity of Nadin during their own periods of office. The Gazette found all this 'anything but satisfactory', but though the rumours and suspicions continued the authorities never allowed a full investigation into Nadin's conduct.¹ Other local officers were attacked at the time of the Hindley affair, particularly the Revd. W. R. Hay. As Chairman of the Salford Quarter Sessions Hay delivered an address on recent events to the Grand Jury in April 1818 and rejected the accusations which had been made against Nadin. The Gazette considered these remarks 'very improper' and a correspondent named 'Civis' argued that the allegations against Nadin were not the concern of the Grand Jury and that Hay had made an improper use of his position by publicising his own private opinions.²

Hay was another prominent local officer who came in for much criticism, in fact, though not for corruption and criminal conduct but rather the political and party motivations behind some of his actions. At the time of the Hindley affair 'Civis' was not the only one who felt

1. Redford, Local Govt., 90; Gazette, 7, 21, 28 Feb., 7, 14 March, 4 April 1818; Read, Peterloo, 65-6; Hay Scrapbks. viii. 34-41, 42, 47, x. 32; Chronicle, 14 March 1818.

2. Hay Scrapbks. xi. 145-6; Gazette, 18, 25 April 1818.

that Hay had overstepped the proper limits of his magisterial functions. Manchester's liberals were always complaining that the administration of the law was in the hands of men who would readily use their privileged positions to defend the ruling party and its servants. Hay had taken an active part in implementing policies of restraint and social control during the war years and immediately after; he and his fellow clerical magistrates had a reputation for their hatred of reformers. Hay was sometimes criticised for the harsh sentences he meted out in court on the grounds that as a clergyman he should be more temperate and charitable.¹ Hay was at the centre of controversy at the end of 1818 when it was proposed that his salary should be raised. As Chairman of the Quarter Sessions he already received £400 a year - for only about nine or ten days' attendance per quarter. This salary was ample, it was argued, and a further burden on the local rates would be unjustified.² Hay's role at Peterloo aroused much comment and tarnished his reputation for ever, and his appointment to the rich living of Rochdale soon afterwards only added insult to injury in the eyes of many local inhabitants.³ Other magistrates besides Hay came in for condemnation in these years for improper conduct - like Ralph Wright in 1811, for prosecuting his Methodist gardener for stealing potatoes which were actually part of the latter's wages,⁴ the Revd. C. W. Ethelston for his outburst of September

1. E.g. Gazette, 13 June 1818.

2. Gazette, 7 Nov. 1818.

3. Gazette, 4 Dec. 1819, 8 Jan. 1820; Prentice, Sketches, 178; Axon, Annals, 158.

4. Hadfield, Narrative, 49.

1819 at one defendant - 'some of you reformers ought to be hanged',¹ and Manchester stipendiary James Norris, who wrongly imprisoned an epileptic in December 1824 for vagrancy. Of the latter affair Richard Potter was to recall:

We regretted exceedingly not being able to proceed against Mr. Norris ... but were advised not; as the courts always leaned so much to ~~watch~~ ~~be~~ the magistrates, it was almost impossible to punish them however ill they behaved.²

Nadin's successor as Deputy Constable was Stephen Lavender, formerly of the Bow Street runners,³ and he was to be at the centre of controversy in the 1820s and early 30s because of his salary and conduct. At leypayers' meetings in the mid-1820s Prentice, Baxter and Richard Potter often protested that Lavender's salary of £600 a year was too high and that extra privileges like the paying of his rent and medical costs would be inappropriate.⁴ Then in 1830 a former beadle named Jefferson accused Lavender of inefficiency, ineptitude and laziness and recommended that Lavender's salary (now equivalent to about £800 a year) should be split into three parts and given to three chief officers appointed for different parts of the town. Prentice's Times agreed that £800 a year was scandalously extravagant and was bound to impair Lavender's efficiency (though Prentice dissociated himself from Jefferson's personal abuse of the Deputy Constable). The economy-conscious smaller ratepayers flocked to the next leypayers' meeting (27 October 1830) and passed a

1. Taylor, Notes and Observations, 172-3.

2. R. Potter Colln. xi. 85-6.

3. Slugg, 237. Lavender was Deputy Constable 1821-33.

4. E.g. reports of meetings in Gazette, 24 April 1824, 30 Dec. 1826.

motion cutting Lavender's salary to £400 a year.¹ The Guardian, by now an ally of the 'high' party in local affairs, blamed Prentice for this unjust treatment of Lavender and hoped that the matter would be reconsidered. It was not right to allow a settlement to be imposed 'by a convocation of the readers of the Times'.² Each side in the dispute attacked the other as the weeks passed, with frequent recourse to the correspondence pages of the local papers.³ But in August 1831 Prentice informed his readers that Lavender's salary still had not been changed.⁴ Further acrimonious leypapers' meetings followed, with Prentice, Richard Potter, P. T. Candelet and the radical shopkeeper Nightingale speaking for those who insisted on a cut in Lavender's salary. The town officers proposed a compromise of £500 a year but the meeting of 5 October 1831 decided on £400 a year and free accommodation. This success for Prentice and his allies did not last. Much to the pleasure of the Guardian and Courier the appeal to the Sturges Bourne Vestry Act at the meeting of 3 October 1832 brought the 'high' party a crushing victory and Lavender's salary was fixed at £600 a year.⁵ The differences which by now existed between J. E. Taylor and other members of the band were highlighted by the former's comments on the Vestry Act. Taylor admitted that he had

1. Times, 23, 30 Oct. 1830.

2. Guardian, 30 Oct. 1830.

3. E.g. Times, 6, 13, 27 Nov. 1830, 22 Jan. 1831; Guardian, 4 Dec. 1830.

4. Times, 6 Aug. 1831.

5. Times, 13 Aug., 8 Oct. 1831, 6 Oct. 1832; Guardian and Courier, 29 Sept., 6 Oct. 1832.

formerly disliked the voting system laid down in the Act but said he had modified his views. It was unfair to allow smaller contributors to the rate as much influence over its disposal as that enjoyed by larger contributors, he said, and it was also necessary for there to be some countervailing influence to that of numbers. This would ensure that the men of intelligence and station who paid the bulk of the rate were not dictated to by the more numerous smaller leypayers. Recent meetings had been very large and it was difficult to get through business when assemblies were crammed, packed, excitable and tumultuous. It was necessary that leypayers' meetings should be run on a "representative" basis.¹

Among the other local controversies with which the band were closely involved was that relating to the lord of the manor's rights, particularly those relating to the regulation of the markets. Complaints about inconveniences and obstructions arising out of the difficulties connected with market regulation often commanded the attention of the Police Commission in the 1820s and 30s. From 1825 Prentice, Atkinson, Baxter and Richard Potter led a campaign within the Police Commission for an inquiry into the lord's rights and for some settlement guaranteeing the proper provision of space, stalls and access in the markets. Several committees were appointed but many Police Commissioners disliked the idea of interfering with manorial rights and the local ruling party apparently wanted to avoid any confrontation with the lord, Sir Oswald Mosley, for as long as possible. Mosley did occasionally undertake to do something

1. Guardian, 6 Oct. 1832.

about the nuisances complained of, but the situation did not improve. The whole affair was marked by procrastination - both from the lord of the manor and from Manchester's ruling group - despite the reformers' eagerness to bring about a much-needed local improvement.¹ The manorial rights were not purchased until after incorporation, for £200,000 in 1846. An earlier attempt to buy Mosley out had failed in 1808-9 because his asking price of £90,000 was deemed excessive. That disappointment had seriously harmed the Police Commission's hopes for a more efficient system of local government, as had the lord's decision in 1808 to sell Manchester's waterworks to a private company.²

The band was also involved in a campaign to reform the system of county rates. Richard Potter, Baxter and Prentice brought this matter up at several parish meetings in the 1820s, pointing out that Mancunians paid an immense contribution to the county rate and yet had no influence over or even knowledge of the way it was spent. As with the manorial rights so this affair was marked by long delays interspersed with activity only when the respectable reformers could actually force the ruling party to do something. In October 1823 and July 1826 the churchwardens did agree to look into the matter and did accept the reformers' argument that ratepayers had a right to examine county expenditure, but it was difficult to get the county authorities to provide copies of their accounts. The reformers did not think that the

1. Gazette, 9 April, 18 June 1825, 16 June, 24 July, 11 Aug., 13 Oct. 1827; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 283-4.

2. N. J. Frangopulo, 'The Growth of Manchester' and 'A Story of Municipal Achievement' in ed. Frangopulo, Rich Inheritance. A Guide to the History of Manchester (1969), 46, 58; Redford, Local Govt., 233-8; Marshall, Public Opinion, 82-8.

churchwardens were trying hard enough. Prentice's Times kept the pressure up and on one occasion calculated that the county magistrates were spending £100,000 a year of which one-tenth came from Manchester alone; since none of the contributors had any say in the way their money was used there seemed no way to prevent wasteful or illegal expenditure. In 1827 Prentice and Richard Potter pressed for an inquiry into county expenditure and a consideration of ways to reduce it, but progress was slow and it was not really until incorporation in 1838 - and Manchester's separation from the county - that the reformers could rest satisfied.¹ Closely connected with the county rates affair was the unsuccessful campaign of 1823-4 against the magistrates' decision to provide new accommodation for judges sitting at the Lancaster Assizes. Members of the band were involved, as were men of all parties, and ratepayers in Liverpool also joined in. The people of Manchester and Liverpool hoped for a transference of the Assizes to their own towns, and in any case objected to the cost of a new judges' mansion in Lancaster. But the scheme went ahead, with Richard Potter telling a leypayers' meeting in April 1824 that it was

a most singular state of things that a set of magistrates should be suffered to act, and expend the money of the county of Lancaster after the leading towns of Manchester and Liverpool had publicly protested against the measure.²

1. Gazette, 1 Nov. 1823, 29 April, 29 July, 16 Sept. 1826, 28 July 1827; R. Potter Colln., xi. 133.

2. Gazette, 8, 22 Feb. 1823, 24 April 1824; Guardian, 8 March, 30 Sept. 1823; Hay Scrapbks., xi. 204-5; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 100-101.

4. Controversies relating to local rates, local expenditure and street improvements

The different branches of local government in Manchester suffered from a lack of funds during this era. Two of the most important local rates levied to pay for local government were the poor's rate and the police rate, and insufficient yields from both were to produce much disputation in the period under review as attempts were made to change assessments or increase exactions from groups hitherto largely exempt or rated at only low amounts. The poor's rate was applied to for so many different purposes that its low yield was particularly worrying. Its assessments were also used for other local rates,¹ so to solve the problem of low yields generally meant the reform of the poor rate assessments as an essential first step. In March 1817, when a House of Commons committee was considering the state of the poor laws, the Manchester churchwardens recommended that the owners rather than the occupiers of tenements valued at under £12 a year should make the contribution due for their property. This would mean a return to the system which had prevailed before the 1790s and would also mean higher yields and the removal of a serious burden from the poorer classes. But the owners of low-value housing would not agree to this 'invidious, unjust and oppressive' proposal, and the liberals' Gazette sympathised. A long dispute ensued (dealt with below - chapter IV (3)).

Arguments over the poor's rate were to be succeeded by controversy relating to the police rate. Ever since its creation in 1792 the Police

1. i.e. police, highway and county rates - see S. D. Simon, City Govt., 61-5.

Commission had experienced serious financial difficulties and was more often in debt than out of it. Complaints were often made about wasteful expenditure, lax management of public funds, too high a number of exemptions, and gross neglect on the part of rate collectors.¹ After the remodelling of the Police Commission by the 1828 Act, the problem of the police rate grew in magnitude not least because one of the promised advantages of this Act had been greater police efficiency. When debts continued it was natural that questions should be asked and changes proposed. J. E. Taylor, by now an ally of the ruling party and a member of several police committees, was in favour of a hard-line approach. In 1830, for instance, he favoured the Police Commission's attempt to enforce payments of arrears dating back to 1825-6. Prentice wondered if coercion and legal proceedings were really justified, but Taylor had no doubts. The Guardian claimed that the old unreformed Commission (which had included representatives of the groups Prentice often praised for their vigilance and efficiency in public affairs - shopkeepers, publicans and small traders) had left its accounts in a very disorganised state, that the reconstituted Commission had to sort out a mass of arrears, and that summonses for non-payment (after due warnings) were the only means of doing this.²

Some Police Commissioners favoured a rationalisation and simplification of the collection of the rate, with a clear line being drawn between those who should and should not be exempt. Between 1830-32 the case for exemption was made most forcefully by Richard Potter, the respectable

1. E.g. report of police meeting in Gazette, 3 Oct. 1818.

2. Times, 19 June 1830; Guardian, 26 June 1830.

carver and gilder Thomas Hopkins and radical draper P. T. Candelet. Prentice's Times provided newspaper backing. Here was another contest involving the rights of small property. Potter, Hopkins and Candelet argued at successive police meetings that small cottage dwellers should be exempted from the police rate because of penury and because the cost of collecting their rates was sometimes higher than the resulting income. Hopkins recommended that no rate contribution should be exacted for houses assessed below £6 a year.¹ But progress was slow and most Police Commissioners seem to have agreed with J. E. Taylor that everyone who could pay should pay. The town could not afford not to enforce payments for low-assessed property. The policy of the collection was clear, what about the humanity of it? Was payment really being unjustly forced from persons who could not afford it?

We know of no reason for arguing the matter with reference to that feeling, as regards assessments below £6 per annum, which would not equally apply to those of a higher grade. No doubt there are many persons rated at less than £6 to whom the payment of the police rate is very difficult. But there are also many rated at £7 or £8 to whom it is equally so, and we do not see the justice or propriety of a general exemption in one case any more than in the other.²

Potter, Hopkins and Candelet were soon complaining about the harsh methods used to exact payments from cottage occupiers, the court cases and confiscations of personal property. At a police meeting on 31 August 1831 they managed to secure the promise of a full inquiry into the rates question, but the ruling party was just buying time and a little respite from reformist agitation. Three months later on 30 November 1831, the

1. Times, 17 July, 28 Aug. 1830.

2. Guardian, 11 Sept. 1830

Police Commissioners voted in favour of continued exactions by a large majority, with J. E. Taylor arguing that many people living in low-assessed houses had good incomes, were able to pay the police rate, and ought to contribute in view of the Commission's programmes to extend street paving and cleaning services and the fact that the poorer parts of town would benefit most from this.¹ The reformers did not give up. In April 1832 it was pointed out that the rate on some large houses amounted to only 2½% of their value while the rate could be as much as 7% on some small dwellings; it was only fair to alter assessments.² But the decision of 30 November 1831 was solid and unchanging, and continuing protests did not cause the ruling party much concern. Potter, Hopkins and their allies were not a large enough body within the remodelled Police Commission to win many contests in the early 1830s against the determined opposition of the ruling group. This was one of the reasons why incorporation was to be so important for Manchester's reformers.

The respectable reformers' involvement in disputes over local expenditure gained them great publicity and extensive (if only for one particular protest at a time) general support. It was quite an achievement on their part to raise public awareness about and interest in the uses made of the town's funds, and in time the Gazette's wish that the passing of accounts should be 'something more than a mere matter of form, without any inquiry or investigation'³ was repeatedly fulfilled.

1. Times, 3 Sept., 3 Dec. 1831.

2. Times, 14 April 1832.

3. Gazette, 25 April 1818.

From quite an early stage the reformers would make an issue even of rather trivial charges in order to gain publicity and draw attention to local expenditure in general - as in 1817, when they objected to the inclusion in the Constables' Accounts of fees for the ringing of church bells on the anniversary of Waterloo.¹ Members of the band could present themselves as the advocates of economy and the guardians of the public purse, doing the ratepayers a valuable service by trying to make sure that the town's money was not wasted. Sometimes they played this role so well that their opponents were shown up in a most unfavourable light. Two rival deputations travelled to Westminster at the time of the Police Bill controversy of 1827-8; Baxter, Brotherton, Prentice, Shuttleworth and Richard Potter were all on the liberal one at various times, and after the terms of the bill were finalised they declared that their deputation would make no claims upon the town for their expenses. The deputation of the 'high' party made no such statement.² It is clear that members of the band were at their most threatening when circumstances favoured some cooperation, however loose or fleeting, between respectable reformers and men from humbler social ranks. If a large number of working men and 'middling class' townsmen could be motivated to attend important meetings the band's natural leadership capabilities could come to the fore and grievances could be forcefully and effectively articulated. About 1500 people attended the parish meeting of 30 April 1818 at the height of the Hindley affair, a time of

1. Gazette, 21 March 1817.

2. Gazette, 21 June 1828.

great public agitation when the oligarchy seemed vulnerable. Richard Potter protested about Boroughreeve Joseph Green's refusal to allow him to examine past Constables' Accounts (Green called the request 'a sly Presbyterian trick'), and Taylor objected when he found that a recent advertisement defending the conduct of Nadin had been charged to the town: 'the expense of Nadin's justification and defence ought to fall upon himself and not upon the leypayers, who were quite unconcerned in it'. The meeting opposed the passing of the latest accounts on a show of hands, but the ruling party conducted a scrutiny and overturned this decision. The Tory Chronicle approved, but the controversy this created only helped the band's campaign for more accountability.¹

More opportunities to attack the ruling party came during the long-running dispute over local military barracks which began in 1820. Members of the band claimed that Manchester's rulers were guilty of improper expenditure of public money, and that the town had been far more peaceful in recent times than its rulers had claimed - making extra troops unnecessary. Baxter and Richard Potter led the attempt to have barrack charges removed from the Constables' Accounts in April 1820, but were unsuccessful. J. E. Taylor drew attention to the use of troops for political purposes in May 1820, when he objected to the sum charged to the town in the third quarter of 1819 for paying soldiers who had assisted in the arrest of Middleton radical leader Samuel Bamford.² As

1. Gazette, 2, 16, 23 May 1818; Hay Scrapbks., x. 70-79; Chronicle, 2 May 1818.

2. Gazette, 22 April, 3 June 1820.

controversy continued the town officers took legal counsel on the matter of barrack charges and found that the town did not in fact have any obligation to pay them. After discussion with the magistrates it was decided that the county rate should be applied to, but Richard Potter reminded the leypapers at a meeting of 5 January 1821 that the county rate was something 'over which we have no control whatever'. Application to the county rate was fraught with dangers for public liberty and its legality was by no means clear.¹ Since the magistrates had approved it, though, it apparently went ahead. Potter, Harvey and Taylor brought the barracks issue up again on subsequent occasions and managed to force the repayment of some barrack charges which the town had already paid out.² Further arguments occurred in the spring of 1823, with Taylor, Prentice, Shuttleworth, Baxter and Richard Potter claiming that some of the military quarters previously established in the town had caused financial losses and inconvenience to the public and had represented an improper use of town property.³ In July 1826, a time of commercial hardship when the town officers evidently feared civil disorders, a large sum was included in the Constables' Accounts to pay for the accommodation of extra military. Richard Potter told a leypapers' meeting on 27 July that this was an improper use of the poor's rate and that it was up to the central government to pay all costs relating to the military forces under its direction; but the meeting sided with the Boroughreeve William Lomas, who

1. Gazette, 27 Jan. 1821.

2. Gazette, 4 Aug., 27 Oct. 1821, 20 July 1822.

3. Gazette and Guardian, 10 May 1823; Chronicle, 17 May 1823; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 42, Hay Scrapbks. xi. 205.

said that the charges were justified in the present circumstances of the town.¹ The town officers were under pressure at this time from another direction: the Board of Ordnance wanted them to find the money to pay for arms and equipment supplied to the civil authorities in recent years which had not been returned or accounted for. They complained about this to the Home Secretary, Peel, and pointed out that even though a compromise had been worked out on some of the barrack charges (they would be allowed provided they formed no precedent) - as for the lost arms and ordnance, 'a successful application on that subject to the leypayers is quite out of the question'.² The band were quick to pick up on many other items of expenditure that could be deemed questionable, like charges 'for useful information' as in April 1820 and January 1821, or charges which had clear party motivations as in May 1820 when Taylor, Baxter and Richard Potter managed to get some of the expenses incurred by loyalist meetings in the summer of 1819 removed from the Constables' Accounts.³

For years members of the band kept up their attempts to check the expenditure of public bodies, and to remind such bodies that they were answerable for their conduct. In May 1829 Prentice declared that local government was becoming more and more unsatisfactory. Control over expenditure was becoming lax, and he scorned the recent decision to spend yet more money on the Town Hall - with plans for its future enlargement - when even the present edifice was not yet properly completed. The 1828

1. Gazette, 29 July 1826.

2. Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 107, 182-3, 184-8.

3. Gazette, 22 April, 3 June 1820, 27 Jan. 1821.

Police Act had remodelled the Police Commission and given control more clearly to the men of 'gentlemanly habits' (a Guardian phrase) by depriving the shopkeepers, publicans and small traders of much influence. The change had been sought by the 'high' party on the grounds that it would improve the standard of local government, but this had not been the case.

Instead of plodding, industrious, keen-sighted men, whose business occupations, requiring much attention to detail, peculiarly fitted them for the economical administration of public affairs, and who were gratified by holding office and made it a matter of conscience to discharge its duties, we have gentlemen of wealth and respectability, well-educated and gentlemanly-habited no doubt, but who have neither time nor inclination to dive into the mysteries of lamp-lighting, street-scavenging or watch inspecting, and who, so far from exercising that rigid economy which characterised their predecessors and saved our pockets, scruple not to pay unexamined accounts to the amount of three or four thousand pounds ... and while they profess to be unable to plaster the Hall in which they meet, lay out a thousand pounds to secure the power of enlarging it 20 years hence!¹

Prentice attempted to curb excess in local expenditure in March 1829 when a leypapers' meeting considered the Manchester and Liverpool Railway Company's plan to build a bridge over Water Street. Several speakers pointed to the problems of dirt, smoke and noise and stated that the bridge should be higher than the level proposed. A committee would be appointed to secure this change, but Prentice argued that the meeting should not assume the power to appoint a committee that might spend thousands of pounds on such a relatively unimportant matter. 'I have seen enough of such committees to make me desirous to have limits set to their power'. Argument followed, with Prentice proposing a limit of £200 and then £500 when he was pressed, but the meeting eventually decided

1. Times, 2 May 1829.

that no limit~~ed~~ would be set.¹ Disputes about the accuracy and accessibility of local accounts were to go on into the 1830s and in 1834 the senior overseer of the parish, N. Gardiner, admitted the need for more thoroughness and publicity to satisfy local opinion. Gardiner informed the Poor Law Commissioners that Mancunians wanted better accounting: 'nothing is calculated to satisfy them but a rigid yearly investigation by legal powers, and a summary of the accounts made public'.² So the efforts of the band had not been unavailing.

Street improvements provoked a great deal of controversy and discussion during this period; such improvements were certainly long overdue, but problems of financing, authorisation and compensation were to perplex the town for many years. An earlier scheme in the 1770s to improve the St. Ann's Square-Market Place area of town had been complicated by argument over financing and had eventually had to depend on voluntary subscriptions.³ The most ambitious project of the 1820s was the improvement of Market Street, a central and much-used thoroughfare long noted for its obstructions and narrowness. An Improvement Act was obtained in 1821 and this provided for the establishment of a Market Street Commission to oversee the improvement and the raising of the necessary sums through bonds, mortgages and a contribution from the highway rate. The Commission consisted of both reformers and

1. Times, 14 March 1829.

2. Report from H.M. Commissioners on Poor Laws 1834. Appendix B2 III, IV, V, p.68K Parliamentary Papers, 1834, vol.36.

3. C. W. Sutton, 'Manchester Improvements 1775-6', TLCAS, 31 (1913).

conservatives, including five of the band - Baxter, Shuttleworth, the Potters and Taylor (though the latter became increasingly distanced from his former friends). The participation of reformers did not stop the 'high' party dominating. Criticism of the project and of the Commission came especially from Prentice, F. R. Atkinson, P. T. Candelet and a prominent 'middling sort' spokesman Nicholas Whitworth, a radical corn dealer (brother of William Whitworth, mentioned above, p.129). These commentators pointed to the massive costs incurred, the lack of consultation with the general body of leypayers, and the methods employed by the Commission in dealing with complaints and claims for compensation.¹ The promoters of the improvement scheme claimed it would be near completion by the summer of 1826, but in fact it was still being finished off in the mid-1830s. Prentice used his newspapers and also used leypayers' meetings, along with Whitworth and the others, to draw attention to the unsatisfactory way the project was being managed. A meeting of 15 September 1824 saw Prentice speak on behalf of the residents and shopkeepers of Market Street who were complaining about the piles of rubbish being left outside their properties. In December 1824 Prentice wondered if certain individuals stood to profit by particular improvements and the contracts they involved, and he contrasted Manchester's methods with those of Glasgow: in Glasgow a joint stock company was managing street improvements, which meant no outlay of public money and good profits for stockholders. A meeting in April 1825 heard allegations that some Market Street tenants were being forced into agreements relating to the improvement, and in November 1826 Whitworth

1. E.g. Gazette, 10, 24 March, 7 April 1821, May to June 1823; Hay Scrapbks., x. 116-19.

and Prentice attacked J. E. Taylor for accepting £250 in compensation for moving the Guardian's Market Street office when a solicitor who had been forced to move received only £40. In April 1829 Prentice contrasted the generous award to Taylor with the forced eviction - without compensation - of a long-established coach company from its Market Street premises.¹ Prentice persistently condemned the Market Street Commissioners for their high-handed approach to compensation claims: time and again they forced tenants and landlords to go to the courts - only to lose the actions and have to pay compensation and costs. 'Arrangements which might have been effected by friendly bargaining between the parties became the subject of bitter contest and expensive litigation'.²

The enormous cost of the Market Street project meant that when further and related street alterations were proposed in 1830 there was a strong desire to keep expenditure as low as possible. The new plan was to open a street to link Market Street and Cannon Street - but how much would it cost? It was pointed out during a Police Commissioners' meeting of 26 May 1830 that the Market Street project had already produced debts of £100,000 and that a further £200,000 would be needed before the project was completed.³ The town officers complied with a requisition to call a town meeting to discuss the new scheme, signed by men of all parties including Shuttleworth, Watkin and Taylor. Taylor had already

1. Gazette, 18 Sept., 4, 11 Dec. 1824, 14 May 1825, 18 Nov. 1826; Times, 25 April 1829.

2. Times, 24 Oct. 1828, 25 July 1829.

3. Times, 29 May 1830.

recommended the new plan to the readers of the Guardian.¹ Prentice felt that most people would agree on the utility of the proposed alterations but feared that the cost would be much higher than the promoters claimed. He hoped that the town meeting would come to a fair decision on how much the town ought to pay.² Prentice got his wish. The meeting of 21 June 1830 decided that the limits on expenditure should be £8000 if the new street was ten yards wide and £10,000 if twelve yards wide.³ There was still controversy, though. Some felt that local taxation was already too high and that no new exactions were acceptable, and others argued that those who resided away from the improved area should not have to pay anything towards the new scheme.⁴ The Tory Courier could not accept that the public value of the improvement would justify the expenditure, which it estimated at £18,000 or more when claims for property, compensation and other matters were added.⁵

5. Gas, police and the struggle for mastery

It was a source of pride in Manchester that the town was the first place in which the regular and complete application of gas for economic purposes was successfully tested. This occurred at a cotton mill in

1. Guardian, 1 May 1830.

2. Times, 5, 19 June 1830.

3. Times, 26 June 1830.

4. E.g. printed sheets signed 'A Publican' and 'An Extensive Cotton Spinner' in political tracts, Atkinson Papers.

5. Courier, 19 June 1830.

1805. The successful use of gas aroused the interest of the Police Commission. It was thought that gas could be used for street-lighting and that the Commission could even engage in the profitable manufacture of gas. From 1807 gas was used to light the Police Office and the streetlamps in the most frequented parts of town. Soon an increasing number of townspeople were asking that gas be made available for private consumption. Meanwhile streetlighting by gas was extended; at a leypayers' meeting on 30 April 1817 it was resolved to increase the police rate from 1s. 3d. to 1s. 6d. in the pound to finance streetlighting by gas in the whole of the central district. The management of the gas works was entrusted to a gas committee of Police Commissioners. In 1823 there was some disputation over whether or not the police body had the right to manufacture and sell gas to private consumers. It therefore became necessary to obtain a parliamentary Act to legalise what had been done and permit the further extension of the gas works. The matter was brought to a head in September 1823 when a new joint stock venture, the Manchester Imperial Gas Company, gave notice that it was going to seek parliamentary authority to allow it to light the streets of Manchester. This was the first that the town had heard of the Company and its chief promoters were completely unknown in Manchester. A special police meeting on 5 November 1823 decided that the plan of this new private concern had to be opposed, that the position of the town's gas works had to be regularised and its profits put towards town improvements, and that the 1792 Police Act would have to be extended to allow speedy and efficient improvements in the supply of gas for homes, businesses and streetlamps. These were the aims of the 'high' party, the old Tory rulers joined increasingly by such respectable and moderate Whig-

reformers as J. E. Taylor and prominent merchant G. W. Wood. Taylor, indeed, was to be an outspoken advocate of town-owned gas works. He and others continually stressed the lesson to be derived from the waterworks episode of 1809, when control of the water supply had been lost to a private concern that soon proved inefficient and bankrupt and did nothing to extend Manchester's appallingly insufficient water supply. The same thing should not be allowed to happen again. Baxter spoke in favour of applying the gas profits to useful public transactions, like the purchase of the manorial rights. Both Taylor and Baxter were on the committee appointed on 19 November 1823 to supervise the application to Parliament for a Gas Act.¹

Over the coming weeks the local newspapers were deluged with correspondence on the question. One correspondent of the liberals' Gazette thought that the Imperial Gas Company should be allowed to compete for customers with the Police Commission, since competition would mean lower prices and gas of good quality. Interested parties were trying to dictate to the townspeople and deny them choice. In February 1824 another correspondent attacked the gas committee of Police Commissioners for not acting in the interests of the town as a whole. Plenty of gas was available for public use, particularly for the lighting of streets, yet the desire for profit was making the committee give preference to private consumers. This represented a strange sense of priorities.² By March 1824 Parliament was considering the draft bills

1. Shuttleworth, Gas Works, 5-9; Gazette, 8, 15, 22 Nov., 6 Dec. 1823; Guardian, 29 Nov., 6 Dec. 1823; Fraser, Urban Politics, 95-8.

2. Gazette, 22 Nov., 6 Dec. 1823, 7 Feb. 1824.

of both the Gas Company and the Police Commissioners. The placing of advertisements and the writing of letters continued. Some agreed that the Company would be a private interest group unconcerned with the general good and opposed to the sentiments of most inhabitants, while others felt it was dangerous and impolitic to allow the Police Commissioners to enjoy a monopoly. As Parliament considered the matter it became clear that the Company was guilty of frauds in its petitioning campaign.¹ The parliamentary committee discussing the question eventually adjourned without making any report, but the Company's bill had been lost by the end of March and the feeling provoked against it helped to secure the passing of the Police Commissioners' bill. The Company's fraudulent petitioning may have been decisive. Parliament took a serious view of such misuses of constitutional privileges and this was partly why Manchester got its Act. Parliament was not necessarily against the idea of private utility companies at this time - for April 1824 saw the passing of an Act instituting a private concern to control gas supplies in Dublin.² Baxter, Taylor and Richard Potter had all been involved in meetings in Manchester against the Gas Company's plan. John Shuttleworth was one of the auditors of the gas accounts appointed after the passing of the Act.³

By the Manchester Gas Act of 1824 the existence and future

1. Guardian, 27 March 1824.

2. Manchester Gas Act is 5 Geo. IV c. cxxxiii; Dublin Act 5 Geo. IV c.xlii.

3. Shuttleworth, Gas Works, 6, 8; Guardian, 3 April 1824; Gazette 20, 27 March, 10 April 1824.

management of the town's gas works were fully legalised and regularised. Early municipal ownership of the gas works in Manchester was to arouse much envy among the governing bodies of other towns. In Leeds, for instance, during the many years of negotiation between the ruling body and the two local gas companies, councillors and improvement commissioners were always pointing to Manchester as a precedent for municipal ownership (and jealously looking at the funds municipal ownership made available for other purposes). In Leeds, though, the purchase of the gas works was not accomplished until 1868-9, 44 years after municipal ownership in Manchester was confirmed by the 1824 Act.¹ Local companies controlling such utilities as gas, water and the markets could occasionally be centres for influence and power in rivalry to municipal governments, particularly when liberals controlled the governments and Tories dominated the companies. This was true of Rochdale and Bolton, where companies fought long and hard to resist attempted public takeovers.² It was therefore most fortunate for Manchester's respectable liberals, who won the battle for incorporation in the later 1830s and then dominated the new Town Council, that gas was already in public hands and that water soon would be. It was also fortunate for the town itself. Many crucial local improvements would have been impossible without the help of the gas profits - especially the extension and improvement of the water supply.³

1. B. Barber, op.cit. pp.85-9.

2. J. Garrard, Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns (1983), 119-20, 123, 166, 170.

3. Frangopulo, 'Municipal Achievement', 57-8 on the Longendale Valley project of the 1840s and 50s.

Although the 1824 Manchester Gas Act settled the questions of the ownership, legality and future extension of the works, matters could not rest there. The Act had not explicitly stated what could and what could not be done with the gas profits. By the second half of 1827 the profits realised by the gas establishment were becoming very large. The average yearly profit from 1819-24 was £3000 but from 1825-39 it rose to £11,500.¹ At a police meeting on 5 September 1827 the Act of Parliament committee recommended that a new Act should be sought to allow the gas profits to be used to help pay for the widening of streets and other local improvements. The 'low' party leader William Whitworth protested that the gas profits should go towards reducing the police rate; it would be unfair to force gas consumers to pay for street improvements. He demanded that gas prices be reduced and the Act of Parliament committee dissolved (so that no new Act would be sought). Bitter arguments followed and the meeting came to no conclusion. The position of the band, as outlined by Baxter, was that the report of the Act of Parliament committee should be fully discussed, since this would not necessarily bind the Police Commissioners to anything. Prentice agreed, though went further than his friend and denounced the plan to use gas profits to pay for local improvements. In the Gazette he said that no trust could be placed in those individuals who would be given the management of such improvements.²

Prentice printed a long address on the front page of his Gazette of 20 October 1827. This address argued that it would be scandalous to make

1. Shuttleworth, Gas Works, 13-14.

2. Gazette, 8, 15 Sept. 1827.

gas consumers pay for local improvements and so subject them to a perpetual and unjust burden. Those proposing an application to Parliament had presented three main arguments. First, that the gas works were originally paid for out of the police rate, that most payers of the rate were not gas consumers, that the gas works were therefore the property of non-consumers of gas, and that the Gas Directors (the 30-man executive body established by the 1824 Act) had the right not only to charge what prices they thought proper, but also to apply their profits to local improvements. Second, that gas prices in Manchester were no higher than in other towns. Third, that gas consumers could not claim to be the victims of 'oppression' since nobody was forcing them to take gas. These arguments, claimed the address, were easily refuted. The gas consumers did not owe the town anything. The profits arising from the gas supply since 1817 had been much greater than the sums expended in establishing it - so in fact it was the town that was indebted to the gas consumers. Manchester's gas prices were higher than in other towns, sometimes 45% higher. Also, though nobody was forced to take gas it was very necessary for some people to do so. If the neighbours and competitors of a shopkeeper or small businessman had gas it was important to him that he had it too. The author of the address (probably Whitworth or Prentice) concluded by saying that town improvements were obviously needed - but the point was that everyone should pay and that burdens should be equal. One particular group should not be singled out and forced to pay a disproportionately heavy share.¹

1. Gazette, 20 Oct. 1827.

In the Guardian of the same date Taylor argued that the statements against using the gas profits for town improvements were based on erroneous ideas. This was not a question of effecting improvements at the expense of gas consumers, but concerned 'a mode of applying to one public purpose that fund which is now applied to another - namely, aiding the police rates'. Taylor continued:

If improvements are to be effected it will not make a farthing of difference to the gas consumer whether the profit arising from the sale of gas to him be directly expended in these improvements, or applied in the reduction of one rate while another is raised ... for improving the town.

Some consumers were saying that the gas works should make no profit, that the price of gas should be so far reduced as to pay only for the cost of production. But the gas works were a commercial speculation; the police body had run risks and so was certainly entitled to profits - and it was fitting that these profits should be used for the benefit of the town. Taylor emphasised that the gas establishment had not been beneficial to all inhabitants.

Many persons finding it to their advantage to consume gas have become customers of the Commissioners and have benefited beyond the other inhabitants of the town inasmuch as they have been enabled to substitute a better and cheaper light for the one they had previously used; and that advantage the consumers of gas now possess over those who cannot consume it.

It was clear that gas consumers could not expect to be free of town charges for improvements, but Taylor did concede that if gas prices were unnecessarily high consumers had reason to call for a reduction.¹

By now the party and 'class' divides were becoming ever more clearer on the gas issue. The majority of gas consumers were from the 'middling

1. Guardian, 20 Oct. 1827.

sort' - shopkeepers, craftsmen, tradesmen and publicans - men concerned about frugality in both public and their own private spheres, men who if they were not reformers were at least willing to be guided by respectable liberals like Prentice and other members of the band in the gas dispute. They were opposed by the dominant group in the Police Commission, the larger manufacturers and merchants, most often wealthy and respectable Tories, Whigs and moderates. The next police meeting, on 24 October 1827, was predictably very large and noisy. Whitworth's motion to dissolve the Act of Parliament committee was carried by a large majority, to the disgust of the Guardian and Courier. In November a police meeting decided by 147 votes to 110 that gas profits should not be applied to town improvements. The gas controversy was now becoming entwined with the wider struggle over the proposal to reconstruct the Police Commission. The 'high' party wanted to restrict membership of the Police Commission because numerical advantage was increasingly being enjoyed by its opponents, and police meetings were becoming more tumultuous and noisy by the month. Both sides were actively urging their friends and supporters to present themselves for qualification, so meetings were very much larger than in the past. Under the 1792 Act any inhabitant who wanted to serve, had paid all his rates, and who owned or occupied premises valued at £30 a year could qualify as a Police Commissioner. 'The men of "gentlemanly habits" will qualify to put down the shopkeepers', said Prentice; 'The shopkeepers will qualify to protect their own rights'.¹ An agitated and crowded police meeting took place on 30 January 1828 after a good deal of active canvassing and propaganda by

1. Gazette, 27 Oct., 24 Nov., 15 Dec. 1827; Courier, 24 Nov., 8, 29 Dec. 1827; Guardian, 1 Dec. 1827.

both sides. The gas consumers were ready to compromise but all negotiation was rendered impossible when the Boroughreeve, manufacturer and 'high' party stalwart Charles Cross, tried to take the chair and fell back into the crowd. There were scuffles, several persons were injured, and the radical Whitworth was accused of assault and urging his party on to acts of violence. The meeting had to be abandoned; it provided excellent propaganda material for the 'high' party and its press allies in their campaign to raise the qualification for Police Commissioners. The 'high' party soon sent an account of the meeting and recent police affairs to Home Secretary Peel, something Prentice attacked as an attempt to prejudice Peel's mind and make it easier for the oligarchy to secure a new Police Act. About 150 Police Commissioners signed a counter-memorial to Peel containing the liberals' observations about recent events. A fund was also opened to pay for opposition to any attempt to remodel the Commission or appropriate the gas profits to town improvements without making all inhabitants liable to pay towards street lamps.¹

The 1828 Manchester Police Act (9 Geo. IV. c.cxvii) failed to end the gas controversy. It did not provide for the statutory regulation of the gas profits, so this was left open. But the 'low' party was able to secure a reduction in gas prices in June 1828, from 14s. to 12s. per thousand cubic feet, before the new Act robbed it of its recent influence in police affairs. The 'low' party also managed to get some of its nominees elected as Gas Directors and Prentice and others pressed to ensure that the gas accounts would be accorded a regular and wider

1. Gazette, 2, 16 Feb. 1828; Prentice, Sketches, 312-15; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 278-83, 285-9.

publicity, so the affair at least succeeded in bringing about greater answerability in the future.¹ Argument over gas prices went on and in November 1828 Prentice's Times carried an address which announced that a new application was to be made for a Gas Bill that would break down monopoly and deliver shopkeepers, innkeepers and other consumers from injustice. It pointed out that Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool and other places had two gas companies each, and competition there meant a fair deal for customers. The question of town improvements had also to be settled.² Nothing came of this scheme; instead the Police Commissioners formulated their own plans for applications to Parliament - for statutory powers that had not been sought in 1828 but which had since come to be regarded as necessary or desirable. By May 1830 a new Police and Gas Bill was well on its way through Parliament. The 'low' party had hoped for a limitation in the price of gas. As Richard Potter had pointed out at a police meeting in December 1829, gas was charged at only 10s. per thousand cubic feet in towns such as Bury, Rochdale, Huddersfield, Leeds and Halifax, while Manchester had only just recently seen a reduction from 14s. to 12s. A further reduction was required.³ The Times was hopeful, but the leaders of the Police Commission were sure to avoid any price limitation and this matter was not covered in the new Act (11 Geo. IV c.xlvii). The clauses relating to the gas establishment enabled the Police Commission to borrow up to £25,000 for the further extension of

1. Redford, Local Govt., 309; Gazette, 28 June 1828.

2. Times, 7 Nov. 1828.

3. Times, 2 Jan. 1830.

the gas works, and to use gas profits for general improvements under the direction of the improvement committee.¹ Thus the gas consumers and their respectable spokesmen were defeated on the question of the appropriation of gas profits. Subsequent years saw them concentrate on the call for price reductions. Prentice and Richard Potter led the campaign and their pressure paid off in November 1830 when the Gas Directors agreed to cut the price to 10s. 6d. per thousand cubic feet.² Further reductions were secured over the next decade. In 1839 the price stood at 7s. 6d.³

The 1828 Police Act could have been much worse for the local reformers than it actually was. Even so, in its early operation it was rather less favourable to them than they had anticipated. After the riotous meeting of 30 January 1828 and the alleged assault on Boroughreeve Charles Cross, the Exchange Herald, Courier, Guardian and Chronicle were all in favour of a considerable increase in the property qualification required of Police Commissioners.⁴ The ruling party rapidly drew up a bill which provided for a great change in the constitution of the police body: occupiers assessed at £25 a year to the police rate would be eligible to vote in the election of 240 Commissioners, who would qualify for this office if assessed at £35. One third of this main body would go out of office each year but be eligible

1. Redford, Local Govt., 319-23; Times, 15 May 1830.

2. Times, 6 Nov. 1830.

3. Shuttleworth, Gas Works, 13-14.

4. Exch. H., 31 Jan. 1828; Courier, Guardian, Chronicle, 2 Feb. 1828.

for re-election. The main body would appoint an executive of 48 Commissioners and again one third of the executive would go out of office each year but be eligible for re-election. The main body would control all appointments and accounts and would have to approve any town improvement costing over £500. Members of the band led the opposition to this scheme. Baxter feared that Manchester would come to be controlled by a 'closed corporation' and Prentice found it outrageous that some townsmen could wish to see power taken from the whole body of Police Commissioners - of whom there were now over 1700 - and give it to 'a little junto of FORTY-EIGHT'. Baxter's correspondence on the question saw him argue that the qualification for voters should be £15 a year - then local government would at least have a much more representative and popular basis even if Commissioners themselves had to be assessed at £35 a year. He also thought that all accounts should be sanctioned by the leypayers as a whole, not just the main body of 240 Commissioners.¹ But Manchester's rulers quickly pressed the matter forward and tried to prevent all discussion; they invoked the Sturges Bourne Vestry Act at the public meeting of 28 February 1828 - despite its doubtful applicability - and this gave the bigger ratepayers a convincing victory. The application to Parliament went ahead at once. In fact it had been decided upon at a private meeting before the public was even consulted.²

The polarisation of parties proceeded apace, and was also affected by disagreements within the concurrent campaign by the Manchester

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1. Prentice's editorial and Baxter's letter in Gazette, 23 Feb. 1828.
 2. Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 285-9; Gazette, 1, 8 March 1828; Prentice, Sketches, 318-9.

Representation Committee to secure for the town the parliamentary seats of corrupt Cornish borough Penryn. The men on either side of the local government debate were often the same ones arguing over Manchester's parliamentary representation. (On the Penryn affair, chapter VI(2) below). Members of the band carried the local government contest into the newspapers and town assemblies and in April 1828 Baxter and Brotherton went as a deputation to Parliament to oppose the 'high' party's bill in committee. Shuttleworth, Prentice and Richard Potter soon joined them, as did the radical Whitworth. (Whitworth's presence caused friction, in fact, because Baxter disliked him personally and all of the respectable reformers felt that Whitworth wanted too much and would endanger their chances of modifying the bill and getting parliamentary sanction for it.) The band made useful contacts with Hume, Brougham, Lord Holland and other M.P.s, and a favourable impression was made on the parliamentary committee - chaired by Lord Stanley. On 25 April Baxter wrote to Richard Potter with important news: 'We have seen Mr. Peel and we think neutralised him'. Prentice kept up the appeal for funds from supporters back in Manchester and Harvey did his best to solicit further donations. Both Peel and Stanley, and the majority of M.P.s on the committee, wanted the rival deputations to reach a negotiated settlement but the representatives of Manchester's ruling party (including J. E. Taylor) would not agree to any of the proposals put forward. A compromise was finally worked out as the leading members of the parliamentary committee pressed for a settlement: the assessment for Police Commissioners would be £28 and that for electors £16.¹ The Courier was disappointed

1. Prentice, Sketches, 316, 320-27; R. Potter Colln. iv.40; xii. ff.135-6, 136-8, 141, 141-2, 143, 143-4, 149-51, 153-6, 157, 159-60, 160-1, 167-8, 181, 187-9, 192-3, 195-6, 199-200, 203, 205-9, 217-18, 219-20, 221, 225, 235-6, 245-8.

and felt that the qualification for voters was too low.¹ Prentice's Gazette found the measure acceptable though far from perfect.

We must not look on the bill as the best which could be framed but as the best which could be passed; and although it is very far from being one deserving unqualified approbation, and though it may be doubtful how it will work, there can be no difference of opinion amongst the independent and thinking part of our community, that we are likely to have much more useful Commissioners at a qualification of £28 than at one of £35, and that the control exercised over those Commissioners will be much more effective when their election is in the hands of persons assessed at £16 than if it had been in the hands of persons assessed at £25.²

The 'high' party had been taught a lesson and members of the band could feel pleased that they had secured lower qualifications than those originally proposed. They and their allies celebrated the passing of the new Act at a police meeting on 16 July 1828, but they were soon left wondering whether or not any victory had actually been won. It was difficult to tell how much the new Act would alter the local balance of power but it was clear that it could not be classed as a particularly liberal measure. Subsequent years were to see pressure in favour of extending the municipal vote to all ratepayers, as was the case in Salford after 1830. The exclusive nature of the Manchester Act was brought home in August 1828 when the churchwardens issued the lists of persons meeting the new qualifications. About 2000 townsmen were able to vote, 1200 of whom were eligible to serve on the Commission of 240 members.³ So only about two and a half per cent of adult males⁴

1. Courier, 14 June, 4 July 1828.

2. Gazette, 14 June 1828.

3. Gazette, 9 Aug. 1828.

4. Fraser, Urban Politics, 97.

had any say in who became a Commissioner or what the Commission did with its authority. By 1835 the electorate had risen to about eight and a half per cent of adult males,¹ but the representation was heavily biased in favour of the wealthier districts because the more rates a district paid the more Commissioners it elected. The early elections under the 1828 Act were decisive victories for the ruling party, much to the satisfaction of the Courier and Guardian.² The influx of convinced reformers was slow. Richard Potter and Shuttleworth were elected in October 1829, Thomas Potter in October 1830, Brotherton in October 1831,³ and gradually more and more of their respectable and 'middling sort' allies joined them but real progress had to wait until the mid-1830s. Prentice continually attacked the exclusive Commission in his Times and contrasted its performance with that of the old Commission, in which men of humbler social strata had enjoyed a taste of minor office and had begun to effect a more economic and efficient administration. It was often argued that only the wealthier inhabitants could be expected to possess the time, money and breadth of view necessary for public service, but one of the premises of the criticism of the 1828 Act was that the wealthy did not necessarily make the best local rulers. Continued ill-feeling about the exclusive nature of police affairs led to the formation in May 1832 of the Manchester Leypayers' Association for the protection of rights and the redress of local grievances.⁴ This body was the

1. Gatrell, 'Incorporation and hegemony', 22.

2. E.g. Courier and Guardian, 30 Aug. 1830.

3. Times, 4 Oct. 1829, 23 Oct. 1830, 29 Oct. 1831.

4. Times, 5, 12 May 1832.

organ of the 'middling class' allies of Prentice and the band, and continuing cooperation between these two reformist groups was to be the basis for the successful incorporation campaign of the later 1830s.

Chapter IV

THE BAND AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS

1. Education and improvement

The band were extremely interested and active in the causes of education and 'improvement'. Their own educational experiences no doubt shaped their attitudes and approach to these questions. All of them seem to have become educated and cultivated thanks primarily to their own efforts. Some may have had a basic elementary schooling; they then used this to advance by themselves in their teens and early twenties. They were substantially self-made men in this respect, and rose because of their own perseverance, self-discipline and resourcefulness. These were the habits they later attempted to encourage among the lower classes, an attempt which saw the band involve themselves in a wide range of educational and improving ventures.

Prentice spent six years attending a parish school in Lanarkshire and later recalled that the teaching there was of poor standard. He considered the parochial school system to be far behind the requirements of the time, and like others in the band was to argue that educational provision in general was inadequate both in extent and quality. He owed most to his father, who helped him with his reading. Then he was able to borrow books from the parish library, of which his father was a founder. As with others in the band Prentice had to reach high intellectual attainments by his own efforts. He was an avid reader and enjoyed the benefit of moving in cultured literary and political circles while a

manufacturer's apprentice in Glasgow.¹ Taylor received some early education from his schoolmaster-father, and when he was fifteen he was able to take lessons in mathematics from the renowned Manchester scientist John Dalton. The young Taylor was especially interested in the rise of the Lancasterian school movement, and after the Manchester school was established (1809) he became its secretary while still a manufacturer's apprentice.² Brotherton also lacked a proper formal education. He was working in his father's mill from about fourteen years of age but studied in his free time, becoming adept in shorthand and French. He often attended lectures at night, moreover, in sciences and engineering. The desire for improvement hastened his rise in business and later in public life.³ J. B. Smith did receive an elementary education, attending a school in Warwick until he was fourteen. Then he entered the office of his uncle, a Manchester cotton merchant, so again his future intellectual advancement depended on personal effort and initiative.⁴ Watkin attended school as a young child but the death of his father forced him to leave at the age of thirteen. Soon he began to work in his uncle's Manchester warehouse, but he continued to study by himself. When he was 23 he resolved to spend three hours a day in study. He believed in the value and necessity of self-education and of training oneself in good habits of order and regularity. He enjoyed books and

1. Details in Dunlop and Somerville.

2. Mills, Guardian History, 6-7.

3. O'Brien, 19; Costley, 64-5.

4. Smith, Mem. and Letters: short biogr. by J. E. Cornish (1887).

lectures, especially on literary topics, and in his mature years was renowned in Manchester for his refinement and education.¹ So was Atkinson, who exhibited wide literary tastes from his youth and was to be a keen collector of books. He enjoyed a reputation in Manchester as a man of superior literary attainments, a keen researcher and extremely well-read in biography, French literature, constitutional questions and curious historical topics.² Richard Potter was another of the band who lacked a proper formal education but was determined to improve himself. In his youth he was helped by his brothers and then he moved on alone to books and poems. He would write out long extracts as a rewarding educational exercise. He learnt to speak French and wrote one of his diaries entirely in French. He was a keen reader whose earliest taste was for travel books. As he noted in 1797, 'I generally employ my leisure hours in reading'. In the late 1790s, while working in a Birmingham draper's shop, Potter began to collect volumes of poetry and hymns and also items in French. Increasingly enthusiastic for his own educational advancement he joined a newsroom and library and helped to form a debating society. Such activities were continued when he moved to Manchester in about 1801.³

The educational history of the band shaped their views on education, and they may also have been influenced by the example set in the late eighteenth century by the circle of public-spirited rational Dissenters

1. Watkin, Journal, 7-12, 20, 23; Fragment No.1, 5, 9.

2. Exam. and Times, 5, 17 May 1858, 12 July 1859; Guardian, 10 May 1858; also details in Atkinson Papers.

3. R. Potter Colln., i. 1, 8, 79; ii. (French diary); iii. (diary 1801-23); v. (account book); Meinertzhagen, 116.

collecting around Dr. Thomas Percival. These scientists, physicians, enlightened masters and reformers (mostly Unitarians) interested themselves in education and other social questions and gave life to the Literary and Philosophical Society (established 1781) and Board of Health (established 1795), and the Warrington and Manchester Academies. A leading motive behind their activity was the Dissenters' general dissatisfaction with prevalent 'establishment' ideas and services and their desire for alternatives.¹

The band were convinced of the inadequacies of existing educational provisions, of the need for more schools, libraries and other institutions and tools, of the value of encouraging the individual's desire for knowledge and improvement and of the need to provide him with the opportunities to act on this desire. Prentice was always ready to praise individual effort and was particularly proud of the progress being made in his home district of Covington in Lanarkshire. In 1815 he wrote that knowledge brought in its train self-respect, virtue, morality and the habits of industry and frugality. These things made better workers and better citizens. Prentice attacked the opponents of popular education and denied that education encouraged the lower ranks to lose

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1. The Works of Thomas Percival M.D. (1807, 4 vols); S.E. Maltby, Manchester and the Movement for National Elementary Education (1918), ch. 2; W. Turner, 'A Historical Account of the Warrington Academy' Monthly Repository (1813-15); B. Simon, Studies in the History of Education (1960), 25-6, 29-30, 32-6, 56-62; L. Burney, Cross Street Chapel Manchester and its College (1983); R. Angus Smith, A Centenary of Science in Manchester (1887), 186-7, also ch. II and Appendix B; M. E. Sadler, 'The Story of Education in Manchester' and C. L. Barnes, 'The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society', both in Brindley, Soul of Manchester.

respect for their betters.¹

The band were not slow to act on their concern about educational provisions. In some ways they were themselves 'educators', particularly Prentice, whose writings and lectures were often directed at groups who wanted (or were thought to want and need) 'improvement'. When Brotherton became the minister of the Bible Christian church he helped to establish a day school for children, night classes for working adults and also a lending library and reading room attached to the King Street premises. In 1820 Thomas Potter established a day school in Irlam at his own expense. In September 1829 he helped to establish a mechanics' institute in Pendleton; he was chairman of the subscribers and remained a liberal benefactor for many years. In 1829 he also helped to found a library and library society in Pendleton, and was one of the earliest subscribers to the fund for the library's support.² The band were keen to encourage the establishment of libraries. Prentice was convinced that no matter how small or where located, libraries were always of great use. The provision of libraries for the working population was a special interest of Brotherton. Even before he became Salford's M.P. in 1832 he had helped to establish a subscription library in the town, and in later years he was at the forefront of the public library movement.³

1. Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 150-54.

2. O'Brien, 21; Sir Thos. Potter, first Mayor of Manchester; Times, 5 July 1829, 2 Oct. 1830.

3. Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 45, 115, O'Brien, 21, 31-2; J. S.Cowan, 'Joseph Brotherton and the Public Library Movement', Library Association Record May 1957, 156-9; R. D. Altick, The English Common Reader 1800-1900 (1957), 214-16, 223-6.

Shuttleworth was another who was keen to further the cause of education. He wrote the article on schools in Manchester which appeared in the first issue of the Guardian. This painted a bleak picture and was no doubt partly intended as a spur to action. Shuttleworth thought that the provision of schools in Manchester was insufficient and the standard of instruction generally poor. In the Guardian Taylor was regularly to publicise valuable work in educational fields. He was particularly interested in the moral and social effects of education, and in February 1827 expressed his belief that better education was producing changes in the conduct of the working classes¹ The social value of education also interested Prentice. He thought that the provision of education was related to social justice and to social order. Popular instruction, the offer of books and classes, the cultivation of the mind - this was the way to lift the labouring people out of the degrading ignorance to which they had long been condemned. Prentice also believed that tyranny could not be exercised over an educated people. Another such self-evident truth was that the educated man was peaceful and law-abiding, and Prentice was also optimistic enough to feel that popular education could mean better social relations. The workers would be grateful if they were given instruction and if their dignity and talents were recognised. Humane sympathy on one side would be met with grateful esteem on the other.² Throughout his newspaper career Prentice was to give continuing support and publicity to the cause of education. He covered Brougham's speeches and activities, the work of new educational institutions (and he

1. Guardian, 5 May 1821, 10 Feb. 1827.

2. Times, 30 Dec. 1831.

often looked to his native Scotland for exemplars), and prevalent fashions in teaching and educational theory - like phrenology, which he developed an interest in during the 1830s. Manchester had a Phrenological Society from 1829.¹ Like his friends Richard Potter supported and promoted many educational establishments in Manchester in the early decades of the nineteenth century. He was also able to draw the attention of the House of Commons to educational issues when M.P. for Wigan 1832-9, and was one of those forcing the government to take action in 1833. He had helped to press for a national system but the government preferred to offer annual Treasury grants. (Salford M.P. Brotherton voted against the first grant in disgust). From the mid-1830s Potter was involved in the work of the Central Society of Education, a lobbying body that also published papers on teaching methods, child psychology and foreign educational systems. The Society campaigned for such things as the abandonment of monitorial methods, more government action in educational fields, and the separation of secular and religious training.² J. B. Smith had a lifelong interest in education and participated in many efforts on its behalf. One of his most important activities was his role in the establishment and early life of Owen's College, founded in 1851. A chair of English Literature was endowed in his honour after his death.³

1. Times, 2 Oct. 1830, 13, 20 Aug., 1 Oct. 1831. Prentice was a friend of renowned phrenologist George Combe; see correspondence in Coombe Papers (National Library of Scotland), Mss. 7243 f.136, 7387 f.318, 345. The letters relate to lectures in Manchester in the spring of 1837.

2. D. G. Paz, The Politics of Working Class Education in Britain 1830-50 (1980), 5, 11-25, 69-70.

3. Cornish's biography in Mem. and Letters.

The Unitarians in the band were probably also active in educational work through their congregations. The Cross Street Chapel had a library and schoolrooms attached, and classes were also run in connection with the Mosley Street Chapel. The Unitarians' most lasting and impressive venture was the establishment of the Lower Mosley Street schoolrooms in 1836. These survived until 1942.¹ Manchester Unitarians' interest in "useful knowledge" led them to support societies for tract distribution and to involve themselves in the efforts of the S.D.U.K. established in 1826. The Unitarians were well-represented on the first council of the Manchester Institution, and eleven of the twenty-two men on the founding committee of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute were Unitarians.² Members of the band were prominent supporters of both these establishments but do not appear to have been closely involved with the work of the S.D.U.K. Still, they could well have sympathised with the aims of the body. Brougham's seminal pamphlet of early 1825, Practical Observations Upon the Education of the People, was well-received by Prentice and Taylor.³

Though there continued to be complaints about Manchester's educational and cultural shortcomings the town did develop an impressive range of educational, diffusionist and improving institutions in the pre-

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1. General Regulations of the Library belonging to Cross St. Chapel (1812); L. Burney, Cross St. Chapel Schools Manchester, 1734-1942 (1977); R. Wade, Sketch of the Origin and History of the Lower Mosley St. Day and Sunday Schools (1898).
 2. Seed, 'Unitarianism and liberal culture', 5, 12; Holt, Unitarian Contribution, ch.6.
 3. Gazette, 19 March 1825; Guardian, 5 Feb. 1825.

Victorian era. Men of all parties and sects participated, and the local establishment and the Tory newspapers were on occasion as enthusiastic about these institutions as were the liberal-Dissenting leaders and their press organs. But the main impetus for educational and improving work did often come from the liberal-Dissenting body; as leaders of this body the band were usually prominent supporters and allies of Manchester's developing educational establishments.

The Manchester Sunday school movement began in the 1780s. There was some interdenominational cooperation at first but this broke down with the fears and controversies created by the French Revolution and the wars. By 1821 the Dissenters had taken a clear lead, with twice as many Sunday schools and pupils as the Church in Manchester. The schools normally taught only reading and religious instruction, but they did so successfully. Many observers commended them for instilling basic skills; the 1834 educational report of the Manchester Statistical Society showed that the Sunday schools were doing useful work and serving over 33,000 pupils, considerably more than all the other classes of educational establishments in Manchester put together.¹ Prentice praised their work and considered their teachers 'quiet but effective labourers for the production of thought'; Sunday schools taught their pupils to think, which was ~~was~~ a crucially important preparation for the proper exercise of one's social and political duties. Prentice was sure of the social and

1. A. P. Wadsworth, 'The first Manchester Sunday schools', BJRL, 33 (1950-51), 299-320; Maltby, 36-8 and appendix V (B) and (C); P. H. Butterworth, 'The Educational Researches of the Manchester Statistical Society 1833-40', British Journal of Educational Studies, 22 (1974), 340-59.

educational value of Sunday schools and like many others in this era he appreciated the schools' useful restraining influences. He believed that it was largely thanks to the efforts of Sunday school teachers that there was no revolution in 1817-19. Watkin was also interested in Sunday schools and the problem of idle and disorderly children. This was an interest he first cultivated as a young man, when the work of Sunday schools was one of the topics of the many lectures he attended.¹

The band were strong supporters of the Manchester Lancasterian School. Prentice found it a praiseworthy institution, while Shuttleworth was closely involved with the opening of a fund in 1815 to purchase an annuity on behalf of Joseph Lancaster. He wrote an influential circular that was sent to potential sympathisers, full of praise for the Lancasterian system and urging a good response to the appeal:

To rescue the unfriended poor from the sad and lamentable evils that result from a want of instruction, to impart to their untutored minds a knowledge of their duties, to teach them to adore God and love virtue, must ever have been the object of anxious desire to the wise and good. But to extend the blessings of education to all the destitute was an undertaking far beyond what even the most sanguine philanthropy deemed practicable; the time and expensiveness of regular instruction were fatal obstacles to the establishment of any general plan until, by the persevering application of an unsupported individual, that system of education was matured which, in reference to its founder, is denominated THE LANCASTERIAN.²

The governing body of the school remained a mixture of Anglicans and Nonconformists, though with a rising number of respectable liberals and Dissenters over time. Some Anglicans withdrew their support because of the controversy surrounding the establishment of two National Schools in

1. Prentice, Sketches, 116-17; Watkin, Journal, 19.

2. Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 222; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 11.

June 1812.¹ J. E. Taylor had been appointed as secretary of the Lancasterian School by January 1813, and Atkinson and Shuttleworth were on its executive committee by about 1814. An especially grand and gratifying occasion for the promoters and supporters of the school came on 25 October 1815, with the celebrations marking its sixth anniversary. There was an exhibition at the Exchange, followed by the reading of a congratulatory letter from the school's royal patron the Duke of Kent. Among the speakers at this event were Taylor and Shuttleworth.² Though the Tory papers sometimes covered the school's affairs they were more concerned with the National Schools, and the main publicity organ continued to be the liberals' Gazette.

Members of the band played a key role in the beginnings of the infant school movement in Manchester in the 1820s. The first important step came in August 1825 when it was decided to establish an infant school in Chorlton Row. Richard Potter was to be active on the Chorlton Row infant school committee and was one of the organisers of the August 1825 meeting.³ Prentice was a regular visitor at the school and joined Potter on the committee in 1827. He continued to publicise the school in his newspapers, particularly when the pupils were examined or

1. Memoir of Revd. C. D. Wray, 9-14; M. Sanderson, 'The National and British School Societies in Lancashire 1803-39: the roots of Anglican supremacy in English education' in (ed.) T. G. Cook, Local Studies and the History of Education (1972), 1-36; Exch. H., Dec. 1811 to Feb. 1812.

2. Gazette, 28 Oct. 1815.

3. Gazette, 27 Aug., 12 Nov. 1825; Guardian, 24 Dec. 1825; Chronicle, 27 Aug., 7, 24 Dec. 1825, 9 Dec. 1826.

meetings were held at which he or his allies were speakers. During the unrest and commercial depression of 1826-7 he pointed to the good social and moral effects of the school; he was sure that infant schools improved conduct and created good citizens and responsible adults and workers:

These schools make characters rather than scholars, and train the dispositions rather than the intellect, and thus fit and prepare the mind for the duties of life in the station in which the individual may be placed.¹

An infant school was established in Salford at the start of 1827 following a public meeting on 27 December 1826. Prentice was a speaker, and pointed to the advantages not only of early tuition but also of sectarian rivalry; this rivalry was a good motivating force and would ensure continual and effective exertions in the field of infant schooling. In ~~the~~ later years Prentice gave the Salford school continuing praise and publicity and was also a regular visitor.² Prentice publicised the infant schools in the Ancoats and St. Michael's - Newton districts of Manchester in the later 1820s.³ In addition he was a leading member of the educational committee of the St. Andrew's Society, which held meetings on infant schooling and established a school in March 1832 near the Lees Street chapel in Ancoats.⁴ By the autumn of 1830, when Prentice began to tour around the Manchester region delivering lectures on infant schooling, he had been advocating the cause for over

1. Gazette, 22 April 1826. For further coverage of the school Gazette, 1 July, 16 Dec. 1826; Times, 2 Jan., 26 Dec. 1828, 26 Feb. 1831.

2. Guardian and Chronicle, 30 Dec. 1826; Gazette, 30 Dec. 1826, 12 April 1828; Times, 26 Dec. 1828, 28 Feb., 11 April 1829.

3. E.g. Gazette, 27 Oct. 1827, 12 April 1828.

4. Times, 25 June, 10, 17 Sept. 1831, 3 March 1832.

five years. His lectures went well and he followed them with a pamphlet offering guidelines about the establishment of infant schools and how and what the children should be taught. Published in December 1830, the 6d. pamphlet sold well and reached its third edition within two years. A fourth edition appeared in 1847. Prentice felt able to claim that his efforts had been of some use. He and other campaigners had helped to make many schools prosperous and self-supporting and had interested a large section of public opinion in early instruction.¹ The Statistical Society's report of 1834 lamented that there were so few infant schools in Manchester, because they seemed to be well-managed, well-designed, and they did useful work.²

The Manchester Mechanics' Institution began operations in March 1825. The preparatory work began following an inaugural meeting on 7 April 1824, which appointed an executive committee. Brotherton and Shuttleworth were on this committee and Baxter, Harvey and J. E. Taylor were speakers at the inaugural meeting. The Gazette backed the project, as did the Guardian: 'We cannot too strongly recommend it to the liberal support of our townsmen'.³ Over the coming years the Tory papers covered the meetings, proceedings and lectures at the Institute and seemed generally sympathetic (apart from the Courier), but the main

1. Prentice, Sketches, 340-42; Somerville, 394-7; Times, 4, 18 Sept., 23 Oct., 13 Nov., 4 Dec. 1830, 29 Jan., 12 Feb., 10 Sept. 1831; UTCJ, 11 Sept. 1830; Prentice, Remarks on Instruction in Schools for Infants (1830).

2. Butterworth, 346.

3. Gazette, 10 April 1824; Guardian, 19 June 1824; M. Tylecote, The Mechanics Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire before 1851 (1957), 129; J. W. Hudson, The History of Adult Education (1851), 125.

newspaper support continued to come from Prentice. The Potters, Brotherton and Shuttleworth were among the earliest financial benefactors of the Institute and in December 1824 Brotherton made a gift of 16 volumes to its library.¹ Brotherton, Shuttleworth and Richard Potter were all on the Board of Directors at various times from the mid-1820s to the mid-30s. Potter and Shuttleworth were among the honoured guests at the ceremony held to open the new Cooper Street building in May 1827, and such was the value placed on Prentice's constant publicity that he was often offered free tickets for the Institute's functions and exhibitions.² Taylor noticed certain lectures in the Guardian, particularly when the speaker was a celebrity.³ Prentice's coverage of lectures was impressive and did a valuable service. As he pointed out, his detailed reports meant that even those who did not attend a particular lecture could still benefit from it.⁴ Prentice regretted that politics and religion were excluded from the Institute, for these were the very topics in which working men were most interested,⁵ but he remained quick to defend it when it was criticised. In July 1825 he rejected as nonsense the Courier's claims that the Whig and radical

1. Gazette, 22 May, 11 Dec. 1824.

2. Times, 22 May, 5 June 1830; Brotherton Scrapbks. xii. 28; Chronicle, 9 May 1827; Hay Scrapbks. xiv (unpaginated); Mechanics' Institute Letter Book (Archives Dept. MCL), 1828, 73.

3. E.g. Cobbett: Guardian Jan. to Feb. 1830.

4. Lectures were covered in, for example, Gazette, 2 April 1825, 15 April, 13 May 1826, 27 Oct. 1827, 26 Jan., 14 June 1828; Times, Nov. to Dec. 1828, 11 April, 5, 26 Dec. 1829, 9, 30 Jan., 19 June 1830, 4, 11 June, 24 Dec. 1831, 21 April, 5, 12 May 1832.

5. Gazette, 19 March 1825.

promoters of mechanics' institutes were tricksters and that these establishments were being used as political organs while being presented as a laudable means of enlightening the lower orders.¹ The government of the Mechanics' Institute was originally very exclusive and in time the ordinary members pressed for more influence. Prentice was one who welcomed the gradual relaxation of the control of the wealthy and respectable Directors. In 1832, for instance, the number of Directors was reduced from 21 to 18 and it was agreed that half of these would be elected by the whole body of subscribers. Prentice had advocated this back in May 1831: 'There is no doubt that the arrangement will give mechanics a great deal of additional interest in the institution'.²

Dissatisfaction with the way the Manchester Mechanics' Institute was being governed was a main impulse behind the founding of the New Mechanics Institute in March 1829. The promoters were a group of radical politicians and educators collecting around Rowland Detrosier, the commercial clerk, lecturer and radical leader whose rise to celebrity owed something to the band.³ The new establishment was to be aimed

1. Courier, 16 July 1825; Gazette, 23 July 1825.

2. Tylecote, 134-7; Hudson, 127-8; Times, 28 May 1831.

3. Shuttleworth, Brotherton and Prentice gave Detrosier much help and patronage. They found him work, gave him money gifts, encouraged his reading and lecturing, publicised his activities and arranged for the publication of his lectures. Detrosier came to the attention of Bentham, Place and Mill and moved to London in 1831. Both the band and the Bentham circle used him as an exemplar. Shuttleworth, Memoir of the late Rowland Detrosier (1834), and A Sketch of the Life of Rowland Detrosier (1860); Shuttleworth Scrapbk. 135 and loose leaves; G. A. Williams, Rowland Detrosier, working class infidel 1830-34 (Borthwick Papers 28, 1965); Times, 30 Jan., 6 Feb., 10, 24 April 1830, 1 Oct., 31 Dec. 1831; R. Glen, Urban Workers in the Early Industrial Revolution (1984), 267-70.

specifically at working people, many of whom had for nearly four years been complaining about the cost of membership of the original institute, its ban on political and religious topics and newspapers, and the social gulf between the sponsors and intended members. The New Mechanics' Institute began operating in Pool Street in March 1829 and Detrosier was elected president. Members of the band were involved too, for Thomas Potter agreed to act as treasurer and Prentice gave the project press support:

We regret that the exclusion of the ordinary members from any share in the management of the Mechanics' Institute should have rendered a new school necessary; but with our notions that they who contribute to the support of a public institution should take part in its direction we heartily wish the new Institute success.¹

The Times covered the lectures, meetings and general affairs of the new Institute while continuing its publicity for the original. About 100 members of the latter left to join the new establishment. The involvement of members of the band in the affairs of the NMI does show that it was not entirely an 'unsponsored' institution. Thomas Potter's treasurership, Prentice's publicity and his readiness to lecture there (on infant schools, for example, in September 1830), and other marks of approval and help from middle-class reformers, did not rob the NMI of independence but did mean that this independence was not complete. The NMI recognised its debt to its respectable allies, as can be seen in such things as the presence of Prentice and Richard Potter as honoured guests and speakers at the public supper of March 1832 to mark the Institute's

1. Gazette, 7 Feb. 1829; R. G. Kirby, 'An Early Experiment in Workers' Self-education: the Manchester New Mechanics' Institution', in (ed.) D.S.L. Cardwell, Artisan to Graduate (1974), 88, 90; Detrosier, Address delivered at the New Mechanics' Institution (1831); Slugg, 270-71; Times, 28 March 1829.

third anniversary.¹ A new and ambitious project in adult education for the lower classes was announced at the end of 1831. This was the Mechanics' Hall of Science, again to be specifically for the use of working people. The total cost was estimated at £4000 and shares of £1 each were offered to all interested parties. The Potter warehouse was one of the places listed where applications for shares could be made.² A long list of subscribers appeared in November 1832; Detrosier had taken six shares, P. T. Candelet (the draper, a leader of the band's middling sort allies) five, Thomas Potter 100, Richard Potter 50, Baxter 20, their friends the merchant Mark Philips, manufacturer J. C. Dyer and lawyer George Hadfield 50, 25 and 20 respectively, while Prentice - less affluent than his fellows - had taken one share.³ But the whole project quickly lost momentum and the plan for a Hall was not revived until the local Owenites took it up in 1839. Meanwhile the NMI had declined and been dissolved, partly thanks to Detrosier's departure for London and the failure of the Hall project.⁴

Those respectable Mancunians who were interested in the evolution of their town's cultural, institutional and educational facilities envisaged the Mechanics' Institute as a service primarily for the lower middle classes and selected sections of the working classes. Another important establishment was intended primarily for the wealthier sections of the

1. Times, 31 March, 1832.

2. Detrosier, An Address on the Advantages of the intended Mechanics' Hall of Science (1832); Kirby, 'Early Experiment', 93-5.

3. Times, 24 Nov. 1832.

4. Kirby, 96-7.

middle classes. This was the Royal Manchester Institution for the promotion of Arts, Literature and Science, inaugurated at a public meeting on 1st October 1823. Prentice later recalled that the response to the opening of a subscription fund was particularly impressive: it was not long before £14,000 had been donated. Baxter was one of the first advocates of an institution for the arts in Manchester and was an early contributor to the fund, as were the Potters and such allies as Hadfield. The Gazette backed the project and was certain that it would provide useful opportunities for the promotion of improvement. Taylor expressed his approval in the Guardian.¹ Members of the band were among the supporters and patrons of the Institution over the coming years. Watkin enjoyed its exhibitions of paintings and sculpture and Prentice also had an appreciation of art. (In his younger days he had been greatly impressed by collections he had seen in Edinburgh.) The early ledgers of the Manchester Institution contain records of Prentice's payments for the years 1825 and 1827-9: he was evidently a regular user of its facilities.² Baxter was an art lover and of course a keen collector, and he was closely involved with the activities of the Institution. On one occasion he took part in the selection of paintings for its exhibition of Ancient Masters.³

1. R. F. Bud, 'The Royal Manchester Institution' in Cardwell, Artisan to Graduate, 119-20; Prentice, Sketches, 243; Gazette, 27 Sept., 4, 11, 18, 25. Oct., 1 Nov. 1823; Guardian 4 Oct., 29 Nov. 1823, 8 Jan. 1825.

2. Watkin, Journal, 134; Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 80; Ledgers of the Royal Manchester Institution (Archives Dept. MCL).

3. See letter of Baxter to Winstanley, secretary of the Institution, 25 March 1834, Letter Book of the Royal Manchester Institution (Archives Dept. MCL).

The Manchester Institution was dominated by the wealthy and cultured among the local business community.¹ The Manchester Athenaeum, established in 1836, was aimed at social groups slightly below those that formed the bulk of the Institution's membership - young professionals, clerks, retailers, mercantile servants and men of small means. The Athenaeum project was often discussed during the early 1830s but it was Thomas Potter who took the matter up, proposed the erection of a grand new edifice worthy of the plan, and opened a fund with a gift of £500. Watkin was also an early contributor. The government of the Athenaeum combined openness with oligarchy. All subscribers paying their 30s. a year and aged over 21 were eligible to serve on the Board of Directors. In practice, though, most Directors were drawn from the wealthiest and most respectable section of the membership. The Athenaeum was a "democracy" but with continuing business elite control. It could be said that this was the model that respectable and liberal-minded Mancunians like the band favoured, not just for local cultural societies but also for the State itself. Here was an open system with participation for all members, but with effective control in the hands of the wealthy and respectable. Of all Manchester's educational and improving organs the Athenaeum perhaps approached most nearly to the band's view of how these establishments should be organised and managed.²

In his remarks on education Prentice often gave expression to one of

1. Bud, 122.

2. On the Athenaeum, Hudson, 110-24; Wheeler, History, 416; S. D. Simon City Govt., 35; H. M. Wach, 'Culture and the Middle Classes: Popular Knowledge in Industrial Manchester', Journal of British Studies 27 (1988), 380.

his abiding obsessions: no system could work properly or be of any use unless it included a prominent religious content. Religious teaching had to form the basis of any education for the lower ranks. He often complained, for example, that the exclusion of religion from mechanics' institutes was a mistake. 'We think that every system of popular education which does not provide for religious instruction is essentially defective'.¹ Nor did Prentice feel that religious education would be wasted on the young: nine or ten was not a premature age for serious religious impressions.² Prentice opposed secular education. This was a matter on which he could not agree with his idol Bentham (though he did agree with the Benthamite notion that education could and should open the door to full political participation for the mass of the people). Prentice felt that schools should be controlled by the sects, and was against state control. A strong voluntaryist in the 1840s and unenthusiastic about public funding, he slightly modified his position after visiting the U.S.A. in 1848 and admitted that public funding might be less objectionable in certain circumstances.³ There was much argument in Manchester over funding, state action and the role of the sects. In 1837 the National Education Society was founded in the town to press for a secular and non-sectarian system based on a mixture of government and voluntary support. Prentice had to agree to disagree with some of his friends, for Richard Potter, Watkin and Brotherton were among the leaders

1. Gazette, 19 March 1825.

2. E.g. Life of Alexander Reid, 3 (footnote).

3. See D. Read's intro. (1970) to 3rd edn. of Sketches, xiii; Ziegler; Prentice, A Tour in the United States, 123-4.

of the N.E.S. In 1847 Brotherton was one of the founders of the Lancashire Public School Association, which advocated a measure of local control and local taxation. In 1850 this body was renamed the National Public School Association. Its first conference was held in Manchester, and Brotherton, Harvey and Shuttleworth were all involved in its work.¹

One of the reasons why the band were so interested in education was their belief in the connection between education and political rights. As mentioned above, they seem to have understood the complaint made by Thomas Walker in the 1790s, that ignorance created an indifference to reform. The idea was that better education would mean more backing for the middle-class liberals. The liberals' Gazette made this point in the aftermath of Peterloo.² The band were probably also influenced by the views of Bentham and the philosophic radicals on the matter. Emphasis was placed on the independence and responsibility of the individual; he had to use his education and his mind to exercise the vote properly and not merely accept conclusions and arguments without thinking for himself. Maybe Bentham's circle and the band misjudged the "reasonableness" of the people or the speed at which the masses could be made ready for full rights. The optimism of the philosophic radicals and their provincial emulators could be deemed excessive, but it is to this optimism that much

1. Maltby, 49-56 and ch. V-IX; N.P.S.A. Records (M136 - Archives Dept. MCL); Butterfield, 354-6; C. B. Dolton, 'The Development of Public Education in Manchester 1800-1902', in Frangopulo, Rich Inheritance, 77-80; Fraser, Urban Politics, 272-4; A. Howe, The Cotton Masters 1830-60 (1984), 216-18, 220-7; F. W. Hirst, Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School (1903), 479-87.

2. Gazette, 2 Oct. 1819.

of the band's educational activity is attributable. Certainly it helps to explain Prentice's enthusiasm for infant schools. In March 1832, when he published the third edition of his pamphlet on the subject, he added a new preface pointing to the likelihood of parliamentary reform and emphasising that education not only made a man deserving of the vote but also ensured that he would use it properly and responsibly:

The probability of a great extension of the elective suffrage makes it the duty of all who have the welfare of their country at heart, to promote the means of enabling those to whom the right is to be extended, to exercise it for the public good. I know of nothing to effect so desirable an end than the establishment of schools that not only instruct the child, but make it a most influential teacher of the parent, by awakening a perception of social relations and the obligation of social duties.¹

There was an unmistakable and genuine spirit of philanthropy among the Manchester middle classes. This prompted activity on a whole range of social issues (which tells against V.A.C. Gatrell's thesis about "the stranglehold of political economy" and the unyieldingly self-referential psyche of the Manchester middle classes).² A generous and humanitarian concern for the education of the labouring ranks was at least as important as the desire for social control and conditioning in the

1. Prentice, Remarks, preface to 1832 edn.; Sketches, 342.

2. See especially Gatrell's 'A Manchester Parable' in (ed.) J. A. Benyon, Studies in Local History (1976), 28-36.

prompting of educational work in the town.¹ Benevolent, moral and religious impulses existed alongside considerations of "class" interest and social order. In the statements and activities of the band the philanthropic impulse comes through as clearly as anything else, although it is true that concern about control could also be clearly expressed. As well as philanthropy there was the voluntary ideal and a view of contemporary society that owed something to Benthamism, developing Mancunian liberal thought, and the respectable reformers' conviction that urgent steps had to be taken to tackle the social problems created or exacerbated by industrial progress. Many contemporaries did feel that the education issue was closely related to several other necessary social and economic reforms - and all of these were part of the concern about the quality of life and the whole of what was to become the 'Condition of England' question. The band and other Manchester educators and respectable liberals shared an approach to education that was based on certain assumptions and predilections. The most important were dislike of authoritarianism, conservatism and obscurantism, faith in progress and in human rationality (which led some to exaggerate the speed at which results could be achieved), and belief in the worth of the individual

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1. Useful discussions of education as social conditioning can be found in J. M. Goldstrom, The Social Content of Education (1972); J. Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974), 188-9, 191-2, 194; E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', P & P 38 (1967); R. Johnson, 'Notes on the schooling of the English Working Class', in (eds.) R. Dale, G. Esland, M. McDonald, Schooling and Capitalism. A Sociological Reader (1976), and 'Really Useful Knowledge: radical education and working class culture 1790-1848', in (eds.) J. Clarke, C. Critcher, R. Johnson, Working Class Culture: studies in history and theory (1979); F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845, 1973 edn.), 149-53.

and in the need for self-improvement and rational recreation. It was felt that a man's potential, his merit and dignity and his ability to share in culture and society, were not (or should not be) rigidly set by birth, rank or employment. It was also felt that to turn this man away from objectionable pursuits depended on offering him guidance and better alternatives.

2. Health and social welfare

Early nineteenth century Manchester suffered from all the problems attendant on rapid industrial development and uncontrolled urban expansion. It was many years before concern about public health, housing, sanitation, food and water supply and basic social services resulted in any effective improvements in the situation. The local government apparatus (especially before incorporation) was out-dated and inefficient, so official meliorative measures achieved little. This placed heavy burdens on Manchester's charities and philanthropic societies. Despite the pessimism of some contemporaries the early nineteenth century did see achievements in the fields of health and welfare; problems were recognised and attacked, opinion was educated and converted into action, the organisational and institutional basis for health and welfare improvements began to appear. If the situation was still alarming in the mid-1830s at least a useful beginning had been made. Members of the band helped to bring this about. Like many of a similar social standing they were concerned about the quality of life in Manchester's streets and houses. They participated in the increasing discussion and analysis of prevalent social questions and in the

activities adopted to deal with them.¹

Much attention was given to the perceived causes of social ills. Some blamed the factory, others the character failings of the workers. Many believed that reformation should begin in the home rather than in the workplace. Sometimes the comments that were made were flavoured by a good deal of prejudice and didacticism. The band were most interested in the discussions of the time. Brotherton and Prentice favoured factory reform and like some of their friends would not have regarded the factory or the employer as entirely blameless regarding Manchester's social problems. But even Prentice - genuinely concerned about the working and living conditions of the lower ranks, an advocate of generous aid for the unfortunate and needy, and a critic of the more heartless aspects of orthodox political economy - nevertheless felt that the workers themselves were partly to blame for the conditions in which they lived. They needed to be hard-working and sober, to take a pride in themselves, to seek after education and religious faith, to concern themselves with domestic economy and good morality.² Prentice welcomed J. P. Kay's Moral and Physical Condition in 1832 and thought it a valuable and

1. Contemporary commentators were fascinated by Manchester and its social problems: e.g. J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester (1832, 1969 edn.); P. Gaskell, The Manufacturing Population of England (1833); L. Faucher, Manchester in 1844. Its present condition and future prospects (1844, 1969 edn.); W. Cooke Taylor, Notes of a Tour in the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire (1842, 1968 edn.); Engels, op.cit.; Reach op.cit.; L. D. Bradshaw (ed.); Visitors to Manchester. A selection of visitors' descriptions of Manchester c.1538-1865 (1987).

2. See remarks in Letters from Scotland, 72, 75; Tour in United States, 153-4.

accurate representation of the evils under which working people suffered. He reproduced extracts in his Times to direct attention to the need for remedies. As for the causes of social malady he agreed that the manufacturing system was not necessarily culpable. His emphasis was on heavy taxation and the corn laws. In the Guardian Taylor argued that Kay had been too pessimistic. The moral and social condition of the people was not as bad as Kay was claiming. For Taylor the merit of Kay's study was not the description of working-class life in Manchester but the two central arguments - that improvement was possible and that social problems had more to do with commercial restrictions than with the factory system.¹

For years local government was to be ineffective and disorganised where health and welfare issues were concerned. The liberals sometimes put this down to the dominance of the Tories and the 'high' party, but this was not only or mainly a party issue. The very extent of Manchester's health and welfare problems was a factor. There was also apathy, argument about the pros and cons of interfering with private property, a confusing overlap of authorities and jurisdictions, and a lack of power to do anything even if the will was present.² The Police Acts of 1828 and 1830 did vest the Police Commissioners with wider powers, though, so this enhanced their ability to effect change. Manchester had its first statutory Improvement Committee from September 1828 and this was to be an active if at times controversial agency. J. E. Taylor rose to be its Deputy Chairman in the 1830s. The local

1. Times, 28 April 1832; Guardian, 21 April 1832.

2. Redford, Local Govt., i. ch. V, VI, VII.

authorities' growing concern for the health and welfare of the inhabitants during the 1830s and 40s was firmly encouraged by members of the band, particularly Prentice, who was a councillor for New Cross ward after incorporation. It was thanks to his motion that, in the summer of 1844, the Improvement Committee was ordered 'to make arrangements with the owners of property for the purchase of such buildings as obstruct the thorough ventilation of small courts and alleys, with the view of promoting the health and comfort of the working classes who reside therein'. In 1845 Prentice was largely responsible for the drawing up of drastic sanitary improvement proposals, and he continued to be concerned about the lack of public walks, playing fields and green open spaces for the healthy enjoyment of local people. When the Council appointed a Public Parks Committee in 1846 Prentice was one of its original members.¹

Such later improvements may be seen as the corollary of earlier activities in Manchester, unofficial and voluntary as well as official. An important pioneering role was played by the circle of well-educated professionals, physicians, scientists and influential cotton masters (most of them rational Dissenters and members of the Literary and Philosophical Society), who came together to form the Board of Health in 1795. Two leading members were the Warrington graduate Dr. Thomas Percival, an enlightened medical man and correspondent of French philosophes, and Dr. John Ferriar, originally from Roxburghshire and now a physician at the Manchester Infirmary. The Board set out to inform and educate but it lacked authority to implement the improvements it

1. Redford, i. ch. XIII, 346, 354, ii. 28-9, 41, 152, 213-14, 219; A. Briggs, Victorian Cities (1963), 107.

favoured, and local government was not yet ready to act on the advice offered. Opinion is divided on the value of the Board's work.¹ It would be unfair to judge the Board simply on what it achieved during its short lifetime; it should also be remembered that the propagandists of the Chadwickian era deliberately painted the worst possible picture of the social welfare situation and minimised the achievements of the past in order to prompt reforms in the present. One lasting achievement of the Board was the foundation (1796) of the House of Recovery for fever patients.² The Board was probably of greatest impact, though, in providing encouragement, avenues of inquiry, and examples for later social reformers to follow. Some of the methods and ideas it established became relevant again during the cholera scare of 1831-2. New Boards were established in Manchester and Salford in November 1831. Brotherton and Harvey were involved in the work of the Salford body, Baxter, Watkin, Taylor, Prentice and the Potters in the work of the Manchester Board.³ The measures adopted by the latter were designed to meet a specific threat and so in themselves were of little long-term effect in improving Manchester's health and welfare situation. Pamphlets were distributed,

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1. B. Keith-Lucas, 'Some influences affecting the development of sanitary legislation in England', Ec.H.R. 6 (1953-4); E. P. Hennock, 'Urban sanitary reform a generation before Chadwick?' Ec.H.R. 10 (1957-8); C. H. Hume, 'The Public Health Movement' in (ed.) J. T. Ward, Popular Movements 1830-50 (1970), 183-200.
 2. W. P. Povey, 'The Manchester House of Recovery 1796, Britain's first general fever hospital. The Early Years', TLCAS 84 (1987); Mercury, 23 Feb., 12 April, 7 June 1796; Marshall, Public Opinion, 60-64; Exch.H., 7 Feb., 1 Aug. 1815, 10 Nov. 1825; Guardian, 1 Oct. 1825.
 3. Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 46-7, 215-18; Guardian, 5, 19 Nov. 1831, 11 Feb. 1832; Times, 5, 12, 19 Nov., 3, 31 Dec. 1831, 7 Jan., 11, 18 Feb., 10 March, 7 April, 7 July, 4 Aug., 6, 20 Oct. 1832; R. Potter Colln. xi. 188; S. D. Simon, City Govt., 23, 26.

the worst streets were drained and cleaned and the worst habitations whitewashed, but real advances still waited on an extension of the functions and powers of local government. The activity of the Board nevertheless weakens the notion that the town's respectable classes washed their hands of Manchester's social problems and abdicated their urban responsibilities. The Board was also important in providing an opening for J. P. Kay, its secretary, to begin his long and distinguished career as a social reformer. The Board gave members of the band an outlet for their health and welfare concerns, providing them with more of the experiences, knowledge and encouragement they needed to satisfy their taste for good works, to act in ways that would materially benefit the lower classes, to make their names as prominent philanthropic townsmen, and to push themselves further into Manchester's public life generally. As an M.P., moreover, Brotherton was to help further the cause of health and welfare improvements nationally as well as locally. He was a persistent supporter of the public health movement and the calls of Chadwick, Kay and their social reform party for legislative action, and acted as mediator between the local authorities and the promoters of the 1848 Public Health Act.¹

In early nineteenth-century Manchester there was a great expansion of interest in social investigation and particularly social statistics. The Manchester Statistical Society was established in 1833 but the local interest in this approach to social questions can be traced back to

1. U.R.Q. Henriques, Before the Welfare State (1979), 126-31; Redford, Local Govt., ii. 167.

Percival, Ferriar and the pioneers of the 1790s.¹ Many of the founders and members of the Statistical Society were Unitarians and members of the Literary and Philosophical Society, so the body was very much part of the social and cultural milieu in Manchester that produced the town's most significant improving ventures.² None of the band was involved in the Society's foundation, but they were part of the same circle as the founders and Thomas Potter and Shuttleworth joined the Society within a year or two of its establishment. Shuttleworth seems to have been an active member, reading papers on such topics as temperatures in cotton factories and acting as one of the Society's delegates at an assembly of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in August 1838.³

Obsessed with the need to provide social reformers and legislators with information the Statistical Society conducted a range of surveys on education, housing, crime, factory conditions and working-class morality. The position on many issues was strongly interventionist - though not on the poor law or factory conditions. Cullen has detected in the Society's activity a tension between moralism and environmentalism, 'between a moralistic attitude of condemnation of laziness, lack of self-reliance and improvidence, and an environmentalist appreciation of the effects of lack of education and atrocious living conditions'.⁴ Such a tension

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1. T. S. Ashton, Economic and Social Investigations in Manchester 1833-1933 (1934), 2.
 2. M. J. Cullen, The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain (1975), 105-9; Ashton, Investigations, 4-12.
 3. Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 148 and loose leaves; Cooke Taylor, Tour, 261; F. Smith, The Life and Work of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth (1923), 26; Ashton, Investigations, 48; J. Morrell and A. Thackray, Gentlemen of Science (1981), 396-411.
 4. Cullen, 110.

existed in the approach of many respectable Mancunians to the social problems of the age. There was genuine concern and a desire to help others, but there was also an analysis of the causes of health and welfare problems which placed some responsibility for them on those who suffered most. Perhaps the targets of philanthropy had brought suffering on themselves because they knew no better: this was why education and the training of minds and morals were so crucial. Many respectable townspeople refused to be so dominated by rigid dogmas, though, that they lost their charitable and benevolent impulses or failed to act upon them. Political economy and laissez-faire may have suited their commercial interests, but many decided that these ideas had less to offer when it came to a consideration of social issues.

Certainly the band was ready and willing to act in charitable and philanthropic causes, and they often helped out with relief funds and other benevolent ventures. They were subscribers to, collectors and managers of funds collected for the Peterloo wounded, the Manchester poor, the Irish poor, the sufferers of a factory accident in October 1824, Spanish and Italian refugees in London in 1825, and the Salford poor.¹ They acted in other ways too. William Harvey, for instance, sank a well near his mill in Canal Street, Salford, for the use of his workers. They paid a penny a week and the proceeds went towards a mill library fund.² Members of the band were keen philanthropists who gave

1. Gazette, 16 Nov., 28 Dec. 1816, 11 Sept. 1819, 22 Jan., 19 Feb. 1820, 18 May 1822, 23 Oct. 1824, 5 Feb. 1825, 11, 18 March, 1, 29 April 1826; Brotherton Scrapbks. ii, 17; Prentice, Sketches, 167-71.

2. Reach, 9-10.

much time, money and attention to worthy causes. They had a sense of the responsibilities that went with wealth and position, a zeal for the welfare of the community, and a passionate belief that the worship of God must issue in the service of man. Richard Potter could have been speaking for the whole band when he wrote in his diary of his sense of duty and belief that it was a luxury to do good.¹

Among the philanthropic institutions in which the band took a close interest was the Deaf and Dumb Institute established in 1823. The Potters and Baxter gave money for the foundation and Prentice was among the subscribers from 1825.² Richard Potter was a founder of the Chorlton Row Dispensary established in December 1825. Prentice gave the scheme newspaper support and among the earliest benefactors were Prentice, Richard Potter and Shuttleworth. Brotherton was one of the trustees of the Salford and Pendleton Dispensary established at about the same time.³ Prentice and Taylor interested themselves in the problem of juvenile delinquency and the need for an institution to rehabilitate young offenders, and Prentice also wrote articles on the sound supervision of young working-class children.⁴ One of Brotherton's most important contributions was his campaign to reform the Salford Charities. By the early nineteenth century they were being totally mismanaged. Brotherton found out about this problem while an overseer of the poor. He then

1. R. Potter Colln., iii. 261.

2. Gazette, 14 June 1823, 5 Feb. 1825.

3. Gazette, 10 Dec. 1825, 14 Jan. 1826; Chronicle, 10 Dec. 1825; Brotherton Scrapbks. vii. 25.

4. Gazette, 20 Aug., 1 Oct. 1825, 8, 15 Dec. 1827; Guardian, 17 Sept. 1825; Times, 13 Aug. 1831.

spent several years in patient investigation of the abuses of local trusts and funds and wrote a long account of the history of the Charities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He brought so many irregularities to light that many Salfordians began to demand an inquiry. In March 1826 Brotherton wrote an open letter to Salford's town officers calling for closer checks on the handling of trust money and recommending that the receipts and disbursements of all the Salford Charities be published annually. He felt it was up to the town officers to take care of this since they distributed much of the charity on offer and were in a position to gain the attention of the trustees of the funds in question. Following much argument and negotiation the trustees eventually agreed to publish the accounts each year after a parish meeting of April 1829 had approved this step.¹ The Unitarians in the band were also philanthropically active through their congregations. This was part of their ethic that public service was a religious duty, that chapels were really associations of men for beneficial ends and that wealth was a gift from God and should be used to serve one's neighbours. As well as these moral impulses good works were also motivated by the desire for prestige and authority. They were part of the process by which respectable Unitarians became well-known local figures and identifiable social leaders. The Unitarians went in for home visits, tract distribution and savings clubs - all of which were normally centred on their Sunday schools, and they also promoted social reform through the Domestic

1. Brotherton's Commonplace Book 1809-16; O'Brien, 22-3; Gazette, 5, 12 April 1828; Chronicle, May-June 1828, 25 April 1829; Brotherton Scrapbks. xi. 19, 34-5.

Mission Society founded in January 1833. The Potters and Taylor were among its participants.¹

One of the most important contributions that the band helped to make to social thought in early nineteenth-century Manchester was the notion that the worker should be regarded as a person and not just an economic adjunct of the factory unit. Among the many palliative measures that were discussed at this time was the need to promote the reformation of the individual. Certainly the band were keen to spread sound moral and religious principles. This involved them in such ventures as the promotion of a better observance of the Sabbath. In the summer of 1825 Prentice called for the establishment of a Manchester society to promote Sabbath observance: an end had to be put to the gambling, drunkenness and idle lounging from which the working-class areas of town suffered each Sunday. As well as the moral rectitude of Sabbath observance Prentice also emphasised its practical service to working people:

We have shown with respect to many subjects that we have the welfare of the working classes at heart ... we wish not to abridge their pleasures. But we do wish to see them weaned from courses which in many instances lead to jail and the gallows.²

Prentice was glad and proud that Sabbath observance was so widespread in his native Scotland and he linked this with the admirable religious ardour of his countrymen.³ Sabbath observance was one of his favourite subjects as a lecturer. He felt that Sunday was an essential day of rest

1. Seed, 'Unitarianism and liberal culture'; H. E. Perry, A Century of Liberal Religion and Philanthropy in Manchester. A History of the Manchester Domestic Mission Society 1833-1933 (1933).

2. Gazette, 25 May, 1 June 1825.

3. Letters from Scotland, 132-3.

and one that the worker should make good use of. It was a time not for sluggish idleness but for reflection, exercise and self-improvement. Prentice argued that the worker should be ready to defend his right to a day of rest, without which he would become a slave and fall prey to perpetual physical exhaustion. So there were moral and physical reasons to observe the Sabbath, and it made good sense to use the free time in a responsible way, to make proper use of recreation.¹ Others in the band shared Prentice's attitude. Watkin was convinced of the usefulness and rectitude of Sabbath observance and in the later 1830s opposed the opening of the Zoological Gardens on Sundays. Harvey was to be an active member of the Sunday Closing Association in his later years.²

The band were also concerned about Manchester's serious and noticeable lack of parks, green open spaces and pleasant rural walks where the hardworking populace could go for fresh air, exercise and healthy recreation. Prentice opposed the Irwell bridge project of 1817 because the charging of a toll would restrict the workers' access to the countryside:

The vindication of a right in small things keeps alive the spirit of resistance to greater unjust encroachments; and the man who preserves a footway where the humble mechanic can take his wife and children through fresh and verdant fields is as much a benefactor as he who gives the public a park or an arboretum.³

The band were steadfastly opposed to the obstruction of paths and encroachments on parks. Prentice loved the countryside and in some of

1. Prentice, One Day's Rest in Seven, 2-4, 8.

2. Watkin, Fragment No.1, 20; Guardian, 31 Dec. 1870.

3. Sketches, 119-21.

his writings included fond descriptions of impressive rural scenery.¹ Watkin also loved the countryside and was a keen walker and rambler, while Richard Potter was remembered for his 'love of the land and outdoor life'.² Potter was a vice president of the Manchester Floral and Horticultural Society established in 1824, and the treasurer of the Botanical Society established in 1827. Both bodies were at least partly an outcome of the growing interest in healthy recreation and in the provision of places where local people could enjoy space, fresh air, greenery and flowers. The Botanical Society opened some gardens in Old Trafford in 1831 and encouraged the study of flora and plant life. The opening of the Zoological Gardens in 1838 was another step in the attempt to remedy Manchester's deficiency in such facilities.³ One of the band's most important contributions in this sphere was the part it played in the foundation and campaigns of the Manchester Society for the Preservation of Ancient Footpaths. This body was established in November 1826 at a time of rising controversy, as local people were protesting about the closure and obstruction of public paths. The Potters, Prentice, Atkinson, Baxter, Taylor, J. B. Smith, Shuttleworth and Harvey all involved themselves in the work of the Society and it rose to great local influence. J. B. Smith recorded that 'such a wholesome fear of its power and influence was established as to lead landowners not to attempt any alteration in ancient footpaths without consulting the Society'.⁴ The

1. Especially Letters from Scotland and Tour in the United States.

2. Watkin, Journal; Meinertzhagen, preface.

3. B. Love, Manchester as it is (1839), 'Amusements' and 'Literary and scientific institutions'; Gazette, 18 June 1825; Slugg, 266.

4. Reminiscences, 30.

Society became involved in many disputes with farmers, landowners and magistrates and was extremely successful in upholding the public's rights of way. Soon it was asked for its help in disputes over pathways in other regions.¹

Temperance was another health and welfare issue which interested the band. The two Bible Christians, Brotherton and Harvey, turned teetotal (and vegetarian) after 1809 when their minister Cowherd proclaimed the spiritual necessity of such self-restraint. The Manchester Cowherdites, indeed, played a leading role in the developing temperance movement despite their small number.² Harvey was a founder and the chairman of the U.K. Temperance Union established in 1853, and president of the Manchester^{and} Salford Temperance Union established 1851.³ When the Morning Chronicle reporter A. B. Reach visited the Harvey and Tysoe mill in Canal Street, Salford, in 1849 he noted that 'the partners are steady adherents of the teetotal system, and lose no opportunity of inculcating the

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1. On disputes over pathways and the activities of the Society, Gazette, 8 May, 24, 31 July, 20, 27 Nov. 1824, 22 Jan., 23 April, 7 Oct. 1825, 14 Oct., 11, 18 Nov. 1826, 16 June, 22, 29 Sept., 27 Oct., 3, 10 Nov. 1827, 14 June 1828; Prentice, Sketches, 289-92, 359-61; R. Potter Colln. iv. 34, xi. 140-1; H. E. Wild, 'The Manchester Association for the Preservation of Ancient Footpaths', MR 10 (1963-5); Chronicle, 24 July, 27 Nov., 4, 11 Dec. 1824, 22 Jan. 1825, 18 Nov. 1826, 16 June, 27 Oct. 1827; Guardian, 8 May, 24, 31 July, 20, 27 Nov. 1824, 22 Jan., 23 April 1825, 7 Oct., 18 Nov. 1826, 16 June, 22, 29 Sept., 27 Oct. 3, 10 Nov. 1827; Times, 31 Jan., 6 June 1829, 23 Jan., 12 June, 18 Sept., 30 Oct. 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk. 77; Cooke Taylor, Tour, 133.
 2. B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815-72 (1971), 100, 164, 225-6.
 3. Guardian, 31 Dec. 1870; Courier, 29 Dec. 1870; Salford Weekly News, 31 Dec. 1870.

advantages of temperance upon their workpeople'.¹ Brotherton was on the committee of the Salford Society for Promoting Temperance, founded in January 1830. He was an unyielding advocate of total abstinence. In 1810 he wrote that indulgence in drink was 'not to be conquered by half-measures; no compromise with it is allowable', and he supported this with references from the Bible and some religious tracts. He was in no doubt that abstinence was good for both the spiritual and the physical health of the individual. His 1821 tract On Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquor attacked publicans, magistrates and central government for failing to act and urged all Christians and reformers to set an example and give up alcohol.² Others in the band shared such sentiments. Moderation in all things seems to have been regarded as a sign of good and sound character. In March 1800 Thomas Potter told his younger brother Richard that public houses were to be avoided and that a 'rigid system of industry and sobriety' was the key to personal and commercial advancement.³ Prentice exercised moderation and in his later years was converted to total abstinence. He was a prominent local lecturer on temperance and a founder and the treasurer of the Manchester and Salford Temperance League established in 1857.⁴ His contact with much drunkenness and excess as a young commercial traveller left a deep impression on his mind. He later

1. Reach, 13.

2. Times, 23 Jan. 1830; Brotherton's Commonplace Bk., entry for 2 April 1810; O'Brien, 20; Brotherton, On Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquor (1821, 1890 edn. by W. E. A. Axon).

3. R. Potter Colln. xii. ff.1-4.

4. Dunlop; Read's intro. (1970) to 3rd edn. of Sketches, xi.; Ziegler; Prentice, Sanitary and Political Improvement promoted by Temperance and Lecture on Wages...as affected by Temperance.

warned potential emigrants to the U.S.A. to discipline themselves and avoid drink in spite of its cheapness.¹ Watkin also criticised excess, and thought that respectable persons could benefit from temperance just as much as the working classes could.²

Manchester and Lancashire played an important role in the progress of the temperance movement.³ An important impulse seems to have been the drunkenness and disturbances which accompanied the ill-organised civic celebrations to mark George IV's coronation in July 1821.⁴ By the later 1820s the temperance issue was becoming more important because of the attempt of brewers, publicans and free traders to reform the licensing system.⁵ As the campaign for freer trade in spirits and beer began to bear fruit the Guardian lamented the direction which government policy was taking, and in November 1829 Taylor pointed to rising consumption of alcohol and the bad effect this was having on public morals.⁶ Although they were all free traders the band apparently thought that drink should be an exception. Prentice's Times backed the temperance campaign, reported meetings and commended the Salford Society for Promoting Temperance and the Manchester Temperance Society (both established in 1830). He said it was a Christian duty to attack the evil of habitual

1. Letters from Scotland, 31, 37; Tour in United States, 15-16, 187-8.

2. Journal, 96-7.

3. Harrison, Drink and Victorians, 107-9, 139, 197-8.

4. Watkin, Journal, 93-4; Prentice, Sketches, 216-18.

5. Harrison, Drink and Victorians, ch.3.

6. Guardian, 14 Nov. 1829.

drinking and in December 1829 stressed the harm drink did to the individual, the family and to society as a whole. Intemperance led to crime, to arguments and violence, and inevitably to beggary, misery and ruin. 'What heart does not stand appalled at the progress of this many-headed monster!'¹ Prentice may have linked the drink issue with those of education and political rights: like ignorance, intemperance represented an obstacle that had to be overcome so that "responsible" working men could be granted the vote. Temperance was also an attractive issue for the liberals because it would add to the dignity of the reform cause and help to combat drinking and hooliganism - identified as tools used by their opponents during elections. The use of drink as a bribe meant that many voters did not use their right in a responsible and acceptable way. This problem was brought home to Shuttleworth, Taylor and others when they assisted the local reformist manufacturer John Wood in the Preston election of 1826. Both the Cobbettites and the Stanley faction offered free drink, 'and the effect is abominable'.²

Always keen to show the lower ranks how they could best help themselves, the band energetically encouraged habits of thrift and providence via the promotion of savings banks, building societies, benefit and sick clubs. Brotherton's short pamphlet Useful Information to Members of Friendly Societies (apparently written in the early 1820s) showed how to establish and organise such bodies and included a table demonstrating the relationship between monthly contributions and sick

1. Times, 19 Dec. 1829.

2. Wood to Shuttleworth, 31 May 1826, Shuttleworth Scrapbk. (loose leaves).

allowances.¹ In March 1825 Prentice wrote a long article on the aims and organisation of building societies, benefit clubs, savings banks and other such bodies for his Gazette, convinced that they would 'ultimately effect not only a favourable change in the condition of the working classes as regards their command over the necessities and conveniences of life, but a decided improvement in their intellectual and moral state'.² Prentice often urged workers to save a little each week and use this money for education, clothing and furniture. To save was to improve one's standard of living. He also showed that savings could give workers something to fall back on during wage disputes.³ Taylor also advocated savings banks, sick clubs and benefit societies, but he felt that these institutions had to be under respectable control; otherwise there would not be sufficient security for their funds nor guarantees of sound management.⁴ Many observers probably did feel that workers could not run sick and benefit clubs themselves, and there was also concern about the diverting of their funds to support combinations and turn-outs. The 'improper' use of funds remained an issue even after the repeal of the Combination Acts.⁵ Members of the band themselves helped to found a savings bank in December 1828. This was a commercial as much as a philanthropic venture. Thomas Potter, Baxter and J. B. Smith were leading shareholders in the joint stock company behind the Manchester

1. Brotherton Scrapbks. v. 3.

2. Gazette, 5 March 1825.

3. E.g. Lecture on Wages, 2.

4. Guardian, 25 Sept. 1824.

5. A. Aspinall, Early English Trade Unions (1949), docs. 140, 185, 213, 261-4.

Savings Bank, and were among the Bank's Directors and trustees. Unfortunately the Bank collapsed in 1842; Smith, by now its chairman, lost £12,000 in shares.¹

Of the various other solutions to the social and moral problems of the lower classes and suggested measures to promote their future well-being, two of the most controversial were birth control and Owenite 'cooperation'. Among the band only Taylor seems to have come out clearly in favour of birth control, and he circulated printed bills on the subject. Prentice was against birth control on moral grounds and also because he believed it was unnecessary: free trade would produce plenty for the world's growing population. Prentice's disapproval of Place's advocacy of birth control was made clear when he met Bentham in April 1831. Watkin shared Prentice's position. Speaking to Richard Carlile when the latter was in Manchester in August 1827, Watkin admitted that too many births sometimes exacerbated social and health problems but denied the wisdom of a general publication and recommendation of contraceptive methods. As Watkin put it, 'to teach the means of gratifying the sexual appetite with impunity was to loosen the bonds of moral obligation and to license an almost general prostitution'.²

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1. Times, 5 Dec. 1828; Brotherton Scrapbks. x. 75; Declaration of the Trusts upon which the Bank of Manchester is held, 9 Jan. 1829, Mr. Edward Burdekin and his sureties to the Trustees of the Company, 31 Aug. 1829, (both in Archives Dept. MCL); J. B. Smith Speeches and Letters; Grindon Manchester Banks, ch. XIX.
 2. Report of the Proceedings on the Trial of an action Taylor v. Cuff and others, for libel, Lancaster Spring Assizes, 25 March 1833 (1833); Ziegler; G. Wallas, Life of Francis Place (1918), 81-2; Watkin, Fragment No.1, 5-10.

Members of the band disagreed about Owenite ideas and practices. Watkin found them unrealistic and impractical, and was particularly condemnatory towards "National Regeneration". He did not feel that 12 hours' wages could be given for an eight-hour day and scorned theories about the reconstruction of society on 'scientific principles' with no religion, laws, prisons or marriage and with children as the property of the state. Watkin doubted that any of this could truly benefit the labouring classes. Taylor was highly sceptical about cooperation - by which he meant the creation of small self-sufficient communities of workers who joined together, cut out middlemen and conducted their own trades by themselves. Such experiments had all failed in the past; abstract reasoning was against it because it ignored the principles of supply and demand and the division of labour, employment could not be found for all descriptions of labourers who might join a cooperative society, and such societies would not be controlled by men of any business acumen. Prentice was more sympathetic. He had visited New Lanark in 1815 and had not been impressed, but in later years he did express his approval for certain aspects of the cooperative ideal. At least the Owenites were looking into ways of improving working-class living conditions and encouraging self-dependence, dignity and respectability. In December 1829 Prentice praised cooperative societies for instilling habits of prudence and foresight. He also used his newspapers to publicise lectures on cooperation at the Mechanics' Institute and NMI. Prentice was not interested in any indiscriminate condemnation of cooperation, and although he did not always find it praiseworthy he still looked into the

good it could do.¹

3. Poverty and poor relief

The problem of poverty and the giving of poor relief were matters that attracted great attention in Manchester, for the town was a magnet for migrant labour² and also had many thousands of settled workers who lived near or below bare subsistence level. The periodic depressions associated with the trade cycle inevitably accentuated the effects of what was in truth a continual presence of large numbers of poor and needy. Pity and philanthropic concern, a sense of public duty and an interest in the quality of life mixed with alarm about what poverty could lead to. There was some discussion of the connections between poverty, environment and crime, for example, with Richard Potter arguing for leniency and patience towards the "criminal" who acted out of harsh necessity - like half-starved pilferers of foodstuffs.³ Some working people did reject the social arguments of their betters and occasionally also the aid that was offered, because they saw it as rooted in hypocrisy and patronising self-interest. A similar view could also be taken of the middle classes' educational, welfare and other efforts. This development had much to do with the radical politics and "class"-orientated appeals

1. Watkin, Fragment No.2, 21-3; Guardian, 26 Dec. 1829; Prentice, Letters from Scotland, 145-6; Times, 19 Dec. 1829, 14 June, 4 Sept. 1830, 4, 11 June 1831.

2. E.g. Aston, Manchester Guide, 211; Gaskell, Manuf. Pop., 288-9.

3. R. Potter Colln. xi. 106-10, 113-18.

and activities of the postwar era.¹ The band often participated in activity aimed at the alleviation of poverty and distress. They seem to have imbibed the notion that poverty should not be regarded merely as a 'natural' condition but as a social problem worthy of organised collective (and perhaps state) action. Certainly the Gazette made much of the duty of 'universal sacrifice' in the summer of 1816.² Manchester liberals could disagree, though, on the aims and methods of poverty relief.

It was not just the existence of poverty that aroused concern, but its seemingly unstoppable increase. In 1775-6 Manchester township paid out about 16.5% of the poor rates for the whole of Salford Hundred. By 1802-3 the proportion was 22.5%. Annual expenditure on poor relief in Manchester in 1802-3 was five times what it had been 26 years earlier, and in Salford Hundred only about three times what it had been, so Mancunians could easily notice the expansion of their own poverty problem in comparison with the surrounding area.³ G. B. Hindle has shown that Manchester was a town in which the poor rate burden was 'generally bewailed and universally attacked' and in which the massive rise in relief expenditure after the mid-1790s encouraged the ideas that the poor were idle and immoral and that relief contributed towards this. But

1. For plebeian radical views on poverty and 'respectable' aid, Observer, 7 Nov. 1818, and 'To the Land Proprietors, Fundholders and Large Capitalists of Great Britain' by JUSTITIA, Hay Scrapbks. xviii. 188.

2. Gazette, 3, 31 Aug. 1816.

3. See figures in Abstract of the Answers and Returns made pursuant to ... An Act for Procuring Returns relative to the Expense and Maintenance of the Poor in England (1804).

there was continuing concern for the needy, and the very men who complained about the poor rates were also the first ones to act on their benevolent impulses in times of distress.¹ Great importance, though, was placed on making relief discriminatory.² Manchester's rulers and leading townsmen did not want to see wasteful and slack liberality creating more dependency and a belief among the lower ranks that relief was automatic and unconditional. In December 1816 the Exchange Herald was horrified to find some workers expecting relief as if they had an incontestable right to it.³

Propertied Mancunians were usually generous when appeals for voluntary aid were made and when relief was well-administered and discriminatory. Compulsory benevolence in the form of poor rates was tolerable for many provided that demands were reasonable and fair. This was a controversial matter, though, and Manchester saw a long-running dispute over poor rate assessments. This bitter conflict also involved related matters such as the friction between small and large property-owners and the rising protest against the way local government was being conducted. In the late 1790s the parish authorities had agreed to a change in the local administration of the poor laws. The occupiers of all tenements were called upon to pay the poor rates instead of the bulk of the contribution being borne by the landlords and owners, as was

1. Hindle, Provision for the Relief of the Poor in Manchester 1754-1826, Chetham Soc. 3rd series, 22 (1975), 3-6, 8.

2. As a county Lancashire was very discriminatory in its provision of relief and highly adept at cutting its relief bill when opportunities arose. See figures in Appendices B, C, D and D² of Report of Select Committee on Poor Rate Returns 1824, Parl. Papers 1824, vol. vi.

3. Exch.H, 24 Dec. 1816.

'formerly the established custom' in Manchester. In March 1817, however, the churchwardens and overseers complained that this change 'has ever since occasioned very serious losses' and decided that the poverty of occupiers of houses valued below £12 a year 'furnishes an irresistible ground of exemption from the payment of the poor's rate'. The authorities wanted the owners of this low-valued property to pay the contribution due for it: this would mean a greater levy and would remove a direct tax from the poorer classes.¹ The authorities' decision provoked arguments lasting several years. The owners of low-value property resisted, argued that larger property should pay more, and pointed out that the change in the 1790s had been necessary because of the difficulty they had experienced in collecting their rents from poorer tenants. J. E. Taylor sided with the churchwardens and those favouring the new assessments. He wanted an 'equalisation of charges upon property' - that is, he wanted the smaller property owners to pay their share. So did the Tory papers. The liberals' Gazette wanted a fair, peaceful and negotiated settlement, though it was more sympathetic towards the small property party and towards the view that the poor rate was and should remain a personal tax related to one's ability to pay. According to this view contributions should come from all inhabitants and occupiers because the Elizabethan statutes said nothing about taxing property as such - but demands should be related to means. The Gazette also occasionally accused the churchwardens of attempting to tyrannise

1. Gazette, 8 March 1817.

over the small property owners.¹ The arguments continued through the 1820s and there were several acrimonious parish meetings on the subject. By the early 1830s it was regular procedure in Manchester for landlords to pay the rate due for small houses, though abatements were normally granted. The system for property valued at under £10 a year seems to have been that the payment could be made by either the occupier or the owner. The parish authorities were concerned only to receive some of the rate due - it did not matter who actually paid it.²

Many of Manchester's respectable reformers were favourable towards the idea of poor laws, though there was disagreement about how they should be administered. The Gazette leaned in favour of a generous and liberal relief provision, especially after Prentice took over as editor, but even before this the paper had been for liberality rather than restriction - while emphasising the need for discrimination.³ The latter point was taken further by J. E. Taylor, who was probably the least sympathetic towards poor laws of all the members of the band (and more receptive than some of them of the tenets of political economy). He always insisted that precautions had to be taken to ensure that the undeserving received nothing. This applied to both voluntary and

1. Gazette, 8, 29 March 1817, 4 April 1818, 14 June, 30 Aug., 6, 13, 20 Sept. 1823; Guardian, 4 May 1822; Mercury, 20 April 1819, 16 Sept. 1823; Chronicle, 4, 11 May 1822, 13 Sept. 1823; Exch. H. 14 May 1822, 9, 16 Sept. 1823.

2. Report from H.M. Commissioners on state of the Poor Laws, 1834, Appendix A, 922, Parl. Papers 1834 vol. xxviii, Appendix B² Answers to Town Queries, 68, i. k, Parl. Papers, 1834, vol. xxxvi.

3. E.g. Gazette, 10 July 1819, 29 July 1820.

statutory relief. Taylor thought it an indignity for an individual to apply to the parish for aid: this betrayed serious character failings, ignorance, wickedness and laxity, and was 'repugnant to every man of right feeling who knows it to be his duty, and feels it his pride to maintain himself and his offspring'.¹ In 1828 Taylor told the local weavers that they should do all in their power to avoid dependence on the parish. In 1831 he blamed agrarian unrest on the Speenhamland System, saying of the disturbances:

They are undoubtedly attributable mainly to the pernicious custom which has been so prevalent in the southern and midland counties, of making up from the poor's rate the deficiency in wages, thus disconnecting subsistence from labour and thereby removing from the poor their natural and strongest stimulus to exertion and good conduct.

Excessive leniency meant less good sense and less moral restraint, a readiness to depend on parish allowances rather than the natural demand for labour, and larger families which put more pressure on the labour market and also helped to ruin the habits of industry.²

Taylor had displayed Malthusian tendencies years before, in May 1821 at the time of Scarlett's proposal to amend the poor laws. Scarlett wanted to abolish removal, fix a maximum to the amount paid out in relief, and limit relief to men who were unmarried at the time the new rules came into operation. While the Gazette found the measure to be against the interests of the poor Taylor denied that it was cruel or unjust. Aston's Exchange Herald also backed the bill, wanting reforms that would stop the relief system from demoralising the working classes.

1. Guardian, 11 March 1826.

2. Guardian, 12 April 1828, 5 Feb. 1831.

Public meetings in Manchester and Salford came out against the bill (which was withdrawn after its second reading). Prentice and Richard Potter attended and addressed the Salford meeting and were appointed to the committee which was to petition against Scarlett's plan. Many felt that a reform of the poor law system might be necessary but that this plan did not represent the right approach. To prevent removal, in particular, would ruin populous towns like Manchester. But the Guardian defended Scarlett's bill and it was after this that Taylor's relationship with Prentice began to deteriorate.¹

A year later Scarlett introduced a Poor Removal Bill, another attempt to serve the landed interests by preventing removal. Manchester opinion was decidedly against the measure. Prentice was a speaker at the Collegiate Church meeting of 23 May 1822, praising the principle of poor relief and criticising Scarlett's measure - especially the clause allowing magistrates to confine paupers who were suspected of idleness, extravagance or misconduct.² The ending of removal was opposed by the Tory papers, which feared the bankrupting of the parish.³ Scarlett's proposal was doubly alarming at this time because of rising distress in 1822, especially in agricultural regions, which made more migration to the big towns likely. These weeks also saw Richard Potter scorning the statements of government ministers that distress was only temporary, that

1. Gazette and Guardian, 26 May, 2 June 1821; Exch.H., 29 May, 5 June 1821; Prentice, Sketches, 212-15.

2. Sketches, 234-5; Gazette, 25 May, 1 June 1822; Hay Scrapbks., xi. 94.

3. Chronicle, 25 May 1822; Exch.H., 28 May, 4 June 1822; Mercury, 11 June 1822.

nothing could be done to reverse the natural tendencies of the economy, that people should be patient and submit to the dictates of Providence, and that the present suffering was due to abundance. Potter was incredulous: 'in the estimation of these men the Blessings and Bounties of Providence are an actual Evil'.¹ Prentice was of a similar outlook,² but there were plenty of local Anglicans still expressing Paleyite ideas and urging the poor to be thankful for their lot and endure hardship with patience and resignation.³

The Gazette was a consistent advocate of generous relief provision after Prentice became editor in July 1824. He had been an anti-Malthusian for some time. His Letters from Scotland had attacked what he regarded as the cruel relief system in Scotland and had also displayed his hostility to strict discrimination: 'The wicked and extravagant must not look for charity. No! The object must be deserving. Curse on the heartless morality which prates about deserving when a fellow creature wants bread!'⁴ Prentice did not feel that the poor themselves were primarily to blame for their predicament. His impressive leading articles of July 1826 'On the Causes and Cure of the Present Distress' argued that hardship could be traced to the corn laws, heavy taxation and interference with the currency. The Courier disputed some of Prentice's claims, but these well-written and forceful essays were

1. R. Potter Colln., xi., 31-2.

2. Sketches, 231-3.

3. Braidley, Diary, ii. 55-6.

4. Letters from Scotland, Letter XX.

reprinted in cheap pamphlet form and reached a wide audience.¹ Prentice felt that parochial relief was necessary and appropriate. Establishing a right to aid of some kind would mean that the poor man would not be degraded by the acceptance of it. Certainly the poor would retain their independence, morality and industry, and with a little self-denial they could also collect some modest savings in good times. The boon was that they would always have something to fall back on. In 1817 Prentice wrote a reply to an Edinburgh Review article by the Revd. Thomas Chalmers - a Malthus - inspired piece on 'The Causes and Cure of Pauperism' - which Prentice found ripe for refutation. Though Chalmerian views had gained some favour in Manchester, and Prentice was criticised for his pamphlet, he at least spurred the generous and humanitarian into action: 'My pamphlet was only a stone thrown into the strong stream, but the ripple it caused was seen by others able to throw stronger impediments into the current.'² In his Gazette and Times Prentice often wrote in favour of a liberal poor law administration and complained that too many people were not covered by the parochial aid system. He made the latter point most notably in periods of economic distress when those who for various reasons did not qualify for official relief quickly became a hungry and desperate multitude. In his view the parochial system was inadequate. It needed to be extended, not subjected to new restrictions, and its weaknesses meant that the need for voluntary action could not be emphasised enough. Occasionally Prentice would claim that too many applications for relief were being denied. He praised certain

1. Gazette, 15, 22 July 1826; Courier, 22, 29 July 1826; Prentice, Sketches, 284.

2. Sketches, 119; Biogr. Refs.; Somerville, 391.

magistrates for their benevolent attitude and their castigation of parish officers who had been high-handed and cold-hearted towards applicants for parochial aid.¹

At a leypapers' meeting of 27 Jan. 1830 it was Richard Potter's turn to impress upon the parish officers the need for more compassion during this period of economic depression and cold weather. Potter said that the public would prefer the churchwardens to err on the side of liberality rather than parsimony. The churchwardens replied that they were willing to relieve all who were distressed and would pay more attention to cases neglected by their subordinates. Prentice found this undertaking highly commendable. January 1830 also saw the Tory Courier adopt a characteristically paternalist line on the prevalent distress. The Courier was in favour of poor laws and also recognised that statutory relief was not enough. It therefore called for more voluntary effort, particularly on behalf of the Manchester weavers. Food and fuel had to be made available to this most vulnerable class of workers.²

Although it was to be known for its efficiency in later years, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the poor law administration in Manchester was confused and disorderly. The provinces of particular officers and authorities were not clearly defined and there were many local variations in procedure. The system was strained by complicated matters like the giving or withholding of relief, the assessment and collection of rates, laws of removal and settlement, the

1. Prentice's clearest statements on the poor laws came in Gazette, 26 Aug. 1826; Times, 28 Nov., 26 Dec. 1829, 9 Jan. 1830.

2. Times, 30 Jan. 1830; Courier, 16 Jan. 1830.

administration of the workhouse and decisions about outdoor relief, how to treat different classes of pauper, policy towards vagrants and bastards, and the problem of official corruption within the parish government. In time the situation was said to have improved. A detailed description of the Manchester system was made by the Assistant Commissioner G. Henderson and included in the Poor Law Report of 1834. Henderson was generally complimentary, though he did point out that 'as admission is rather a matter of favour, little use can be made of the workhouse as an alternative to repel improper applications for relief'. Further pertinent points were revealed in the replies made to the Town Queries by Gardiner and Lings, two of Manchester's overseers. They made it clear that the two fundamental features of the Manchester system - constant visitation and strict discrimination - were never abandoned.¹ Many Mancunians decided that, as far as their town and region was concerned, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was unnecessary. Many of the changes suggested in 1834 had already been implemented under the old system. Opposition to the reform also came on moral, political and economic grounds. Manchester opinion was divided. Influential social commentators like J. P. Kay and Peter Gaskell had condemned the old system, the Statistical Society was pro-reform, and J. P. Culverwell of the Manchester Athenaeum (the translator of Faucher's study of Manchester) was to argue in 1844 that the giving of relief was more

1. Hindle, ch. II-V; Redford, Local Govt., i. ch. VIII; 'Report from H.M. Commissioners' Appendix A. Part I, Parl. Papers, 1834, vol. xxviii, Appendix B². Parts I-V, Parl. Papers, 1834, vols. xxxv and xxxvi.

creditable to the donor than beneficial to the recipient.¹ Yet laissez-faire did not have intellectual and practical dominance in Manchester. Considerable numbers favoured the old system - including the band, apart from Taylor. Taylor welcomed a fixed and discriminating system in which nothing would be given to the idle and undeserving, and dismissed the opposition to the 1834 Act as the affair of a small and noisy minority. But humanitarians like Brotherton and Prentice, less tied to rigid doctrines, were against the reform.²

4. The Manchester Irish

Manchester had a very large Irish population. Estimates of its size during the 1830s and 40s varied between 40,000 and 60,000 persons; according to the census Manchester had 142,026 inhabitants in 1831.³ Contemporaries were clearly conscious of a substantial Irish presence. The Irish influx was a central topic in the discussion of health and welfare problems and of the causes and effects of rapid urban growth. Attention was given to the living conditions of the Irish, their diet, appearance, health and habits. The evidence given to the parliamentary Poor Inquiry (Ireland) in 1835 was representative of contemporary observations and opinions. It cannot be denied that the Irish presence

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1. Kay, Moral and Phys. Condition, 45-54; Gaskell, Manuf. Pop., 216; Cullen, 109-10; Culverwell's preface in Faucher, Manchester in 1844, xi.
 2. Guardian, 12, 26 April, 26 July 1834, 7 Feb. 1838, 26 Dec. 1840, 18 May 1842; Mr. Brotherton and the New Poor Law (1841); Times, 21 June, 26 July 1834, 28 Jan. 1837, 28 Aug. 1841.
 3. Bradshaw, Visitors to Manchester, 32-3; Wheeler, History, 194, 246, 340; Engels, 99-100, 128-31; Times, 11 June 1831.

was greeted with alarmism, prejudice and misconception, but the Manchester witnesses in 1835 generally agreed that the Irish immigrants led depraved and deprived lives.¹ Recent commentators have revised the older picture of slums, illness, improvidence and ghettoisation,² but it seems that the Manchester Irish did live - substantially - in the way that many contemporaries and many later writers of 'old-fashioned' accounts said they did.³

The Irish presence in Manchester was controversial. There were constant accusations about the immigrants' bad habits and objectionable conduct. Many regarded the Irish themselves as responsible for the squalor, overcrowding, illness and other social problems of the areas they lived in. Irish criminality was often emphasised; it was difficult to stamp out because it was tied in with old habits and traditions of violence and feuding, and there was also a link with the secret societies that formed an inherent part of the culture and customs of the

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1. Report on the State of the Irish Poor in Britain. (Appendix G of Poor Inquiry (Ireland) 1835), Parl. Papers 1836 vol. xxxiv. Part III, Irish poor in Manchester and towns of Lancashire and Cheshire.
 2. D. Fitzpatrick, 'A Peculiar Tramping People. The Irish in Britain 1801-70', and 'Emigration 1801-70', both in (ed.) W. E. Vaughan, A New History of Ireland, V. Ireland Under the Union (1989); D. Fitzpatrick, 'A curious middle place: the Irish in Britain 1871-1921', C. Pooley, 'Segregation or Integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain', G. Davies, 'Little Irelands', all in (eds.) R. Swift and S. Gilley, The Irish in Britain 1815-1939 (1989).
 3. E.g. J. Werly, 'The Irish in Manchester 1832-49', Irish Historical Studies 18 (1972-3); M. A. G. O'Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in 19th century Britain: problems of integration', TRHS 31 (1981).

immigrants.¹ A prominent complaint was that the Irish took too much of the charity and public and private relief that was on offer, and practised widespread trickery and deceit to secure it.² The main concern, though, seems to have been the effect the Irish had on wage levels and the living standards of the host community. Even the humanitarian Prentice joined in with the general tide of opinion which held that the Irish influx meant more labour on the market and so a fall in wage levels. The way the Irish lived, he agreed, could also depress living standards generally.³ Watkin felt that the 'bad example' set by the Irish was having ruinous effects and that Manchester wages would rise if the Irish influx was stopped. Other witnesses at the time of the 1835 inquiry told the same story,⁴ and the idea that the Irish dragged the English down to their level was shared by such varied commentators as Kay, Gaskell, Cobden, Tocqueville, Wheeler, Engels and Reach.⁵

Although the Irish influx posed many problems, at first it was economically useful if not necessary to Manchester. The Irish were

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1. Gaskell, Manuf. Pop. 113, 125-7; Report on Irish Poor, 48, 62, 75-7; R. Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in 19th century Britain', in Swift and Gilley, 163-82; Fitzpatrick, 'Tramping People', 646-9; Werly, 355-6; J. A. Jackson, The Irish in Britain (1963), 57-62, 67-8; G. P. Connolly, 'The Catholic Church and the first Manchester and Salford Trade Unions in the Age of the Industrial Revolution', TLCAS 83 (1985).
 2. Report on Irish Poor, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 73.
 3. Gazette, 10 Feb. 1827.
 4. Report on Irish Poor, 48, 49, 61, 67, 68, 72.
 5. Kay, Morals and Phys. Condition, 21-2; Gaskell, Manuf. Pop., 113-125-7; Cobden, 'Ireland', in Hirst, Manchester School, 35-70; Tocqueville is cited in Bradshaw, Visitors to Manchester, 32-3; Wheeler, History, 194, 340; Engels, 99-100, 128-31; Reach, 55-6.

attractive to many employers because they were in plentiful supply and on the whole willing to take the lowest wages. The Manchester poor law authorities' relative generosity to the Irish before the late 1820s was partly a recognition of the immigrants' contribution to the local economy. It may also have been felt that too many removals might mean a labour shortage when boom followed a trade depression. But by about 1830 Manchester's masters had decided that the local economy could not absorb any more Irish. This was made very clear in the evidence given to the 1835 inquiry (and casts doubts on J. Williamson's thesis about the absorptive capacity of the home economy). Some witnesses also said that the Irish were disruptive and refractory workers, more trouble than they were worth.¹ The cost of Irish pauperism was a main point of concern in early nineteenth-century Manchester. Parochial relief was given to Irish people who had been resident for ten years, but sometimes this qualification was waived, and in general Irish poor were not removed unless they were bad characters. This tolerant policy was expensive and Irish pauperism continued to rise - from 12.6% of the Manchester total in 1827 to 21.5% in 1831. Irish poor without settlements took 16.9% of Manchester's expenditure on outdoor poor in 1831-2.² Manchester's Irish population was so large that extensive removals would be difficult, impractical and expensive. The need for labour may have been important, and the authorities also saw that to be too parsimonious would mean

1. Report on Irish Poor, 51, 61, 62, 64, 67-8, 72-3, 78-9, 82; J. Williamson, 'The impact of the Irish on British labour markets during the Industrial Revolution', in Swift and Gilley, 134-62.

2. Based on figures in Report from H.M. Commissioners ... on Poor Laws, 1834, Appendix A. Part I, 920-22, Parl. Papers, 1834, vol.xxviii.

sentencing thousands of Irish to starvation. Policy and pragmatism demanded relative liberality, but such a course began to create problems in the 1820s. As G. B. Hindle has shown, Manchester's leniency attracted 'baser elements who would not work and only made the town a depot for their wives and families'.¹ The directing overseer N. Gardiner expressed alarm about the rise in Irish pauperism in Manchester at the time of the 1835 inquiry: the numbers and expense of 'our own poor' had doubled in ten years, but Irish pauperism had increased fivefold in number and fourfold in expense. The Governor of the Manchester Poorhouse, W. Robinson, thought that Manchester's liberality had increased her Irish pauperism and formed an unfavourable comparison with 'her more politic neighbours'.²

The size, character and conduct of the Irish population of Manchester encouraged much discussion. Interest in Ireland and in the Irish who came to Manchester rose considerably, and there was a desire to find out why these people did come to Manchester. Richard Potter had first-hand experience of social and economic conditions in Ireland and a long-standing interest in Irish affairs. The Potters were importers of Irish linens and Richard was often in Ireland on business after 1803, particularly in the 1820s. On one occasion (August 1824) he was accompanied by Shuttleworth. It is possible that the Potters' attention (and that of others) was drawn to Ireland's problems for commercial as well as humanitarian reasons.³ It is also possible that Richard Potter's

1. Hindle, appendix A.

2. Report on Irish Poor, 44-7.

3. R. Potter Colln., i. 105-12, iii. 110, iv. 7-9, 13-16, 38-9, 40-41; Meinertzhagen, 74, 173.

knowledge of Ireland's problems was made use of by the liberals' Gazette in its treatment of the Irish influx into Manchester. The Gazette appreciated that hardship in Ireland was bound to mean a rise in emigration. Hardship in Ireland became newsworthy in Manchester,¹ and suggestions were made about possible social, political and economic reforms in Ireland. These, it was hoped, would make emigration from that land less desirable and necessary. Manchester's respectable liberals were keen to promote reforms in Ireland on humanitarian grounds as well as in the cause of influencing more Irish to stay at home.

One matter given serious consideration was Irish tithes. The Gazette argued that a tithe settlement was a cardinal requirement. Manchester's liberal-Dissenting leaders were against tithes in principle, for they objected to national church establishments. In Ireland the problem was exacerbated by the nature of social and economic relations there. These seemed to be based on 'extortion', a word the Gazette used frequently in its treatment of the Irish question.² In the early 1830s, by which time systematic resistance to tithes had become well-established all over Ireland, Prentice argued for abolition and was not satisfied with the Whig government's consideration of commutation. He wanted the problem to be settled in such a way that tithes were not confused with private property: their proceeds should remain applicable to public purposes. Taylor was also in favour of abolition, and wanted the proceeds to go towards public improvements and the expansion of

1. E.g. Gazette, 2 March 1822, 18 Sept. 1824, 14 Jan. 1826; Guardian, 26 Jan. 1828, 8 May, 1830.

2. Gazette, 21 Oct., 25 Nov. 1815, 3 Nov. 1821.

educational opportunities.¹ The Tory papers opposed abolition and argued that if there was to be any tithe reform this should not be designed to appease the Irish people but to give the Protestant clergy a proper and secure provision.² The Tithe Act of 1832 brought little satisfaction. It made composition permanent and compulsory (voluntary composition had been allowed by an Act of 1823) and also transferred payment from tenants, reducing the number of tithe payers by over a third. But for the reformers, and for Ireland, it did not go far enough. The tithe issue was bound up with the campaign to reform the Established Church of Ireland. March 1823 saw the Gazette praising Joseph Hume's Commons speech on the matter. Taylor hoped that continuing discussion and pressure for change would eventually achieve something. Certainly reform was needed:

That the Irish Church Establishment is replete with the grossest abuses, that it furnishes a most enormous income to a number of clergymen who perform no duties and have in fact no duties to perform, because their parishioners are almost exclusively of a different religion, and that its emoluments are bestowed as rewards for political services in and out of Parliament, are facts as notorious as any that could be mentioned.

Prentice also argued for reform, as did Richard Potter. He wanted Irish Church property to be at the disposal of the legislature and was amazed at the abuses in the Irish Church establishment - typified by the attempt in the 1820s of the clergy in the rich see of Derry to saddle the general public with the cost of repairing Derry Cathedral.³

1. Times, 29 Oct., 24 Dec. 1831, 11 Feb., 17 March 1832; Guardian, 24 Dec. 1831, 18 Feb. 1832.

2. Chronicle, 17 March 1832; Courier, 24 Dec. 1831, 11 Feb. 1832.

3. Gazette, 8 March 1823, 26 Feb., 18 June 1825; Guardian, 15 March 1823, 9 Oct. 1824, 13 March 1830; R. Potter Colln., xi. 45-7.

Among the reforms Prentice advocated for Ireland was the extension of education.¹ Some of Manchester's Tories advocated this too, though their views about the ends of education no doubt differed from those of Prentice. The Courier often argued that the real answer to the Irish problem was a Protestant Reformation there, to be achieved by Bible and Education Societies, discussions and writings and the circulation of sound religious tracts.² (The Courier did not make clear what social and economic improvements might come out of this so-called 'New Reformation'). The most important development in this era in Irish education came in 1831-2 when the Whig government established a Board of National Education in Ireland to manage a parliamentary grant. The body included Protestants and Catholics and the schools it administered were open to clergy of both faiths for religious instruction. Prentice, Taylor and Richard Potter agreed that the promotion of education and better sectarian relations in Ireland was much needed, but the reform aroused much controversy in Manchester.³ This largely sectarian wrangling of early 1832 mirrored earlier Manchester disputes in the 1820s over the activities of Bible Associations and the use of the Bible as a tool for education in Ireland.⁴

The band often participated in voluntary relief activity on behalf of the suffering Irish. Baxter, Taylor and the Potters were on the

1. E.g. Gazette, 11 Dec. 1824.

2. Courier, 2 Dec. 1826, 27 Jan. 1827.

3. Times, 24, 31 March 1832; Guardian, 3, 31 March 1832; Chronicle and Courier, 31 March 1832.

4. Chronicle, 7 Dec. 1822; Guardian, 11 Dec. 1824; Mercury, 15 Feb. 1825.

committee established¹ May 1822 to supervise the collection of a fund (following a poor potato-harvest in Munster), they and their friends made donations and Baxter, Taylor, Brotherton and the Potters were also among the district collectors.¹ The suffering of the poor in Ireland normally aroused the paternal instincts of the Tory papers. Though they were ready to advocate and excuse coercion in times of disorder they were also in favour of voluntary aid. The Tory papers approved the relief fund of 1822, while the Chronicle also welcomed that of 1831.² The latter was opened at a meeting in July 1831. The Potters, J. B. Smith, Shuttleworth, Prentice and Taylor were among the organisers of the event, which went ahead despite the lack of official sanction. The town officers had refused to convene a public meeting, possibly on account of the excitement of these weeks due to the Reform Bill controversy.³

Prentice's first leading article as the new editor of the Gazette in July 1824 dealt with the Irish problem. In it he advocated three main remedial measures: a forceful policy to ensure that food reached the places where it was most needed, works of public utility to provide employment and improve the quality of life in Ireland ('self-interest and humanity in reciprocal action'), and that reform he was to advocate persistently in coming years - poor laws for Ireland. He regarded the latter as essential to any realistic attempt to improve social conditions

1. Gazette, 18, 25 May, 1, 15, 22 June, 6 July 1822; Prentice, Sketches, 236; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 57-70.

2. Chronicle, 18 May, 8 June, 6 July 1822, 11 June 1831; Exch. H., 21 May 1822; Mercury 21 May, 9 July 1822.

3. Times, 2, 9, 16 July 1831.

in Ireland, and was sure it would help the Manchester working classes by encouraging and enabling more Irish to stay at home. Prentice attacked the Irish landowners for their unwillingness to support their own poor, and Parliament for failing to act in a decisive manner. He knew his arguments were unfashionable but he often defended them against so-called 'experts' of his day. In February 1827 he denounced McCulloch as a 'most mischievous political quack'. McCulloch's hard-line, pro-emigration approach to the Irish population 'surplus' was deemed inhuman by Prentice, who repeated his earlier calls for poor laws. He was to go through the same arguments time and again, hoping to awaken, convince and prompt others into action. In the later 1820s he was glad to find his views quoted in some London papers.¹ Watkin also favoured poor laws for Ireland. He addressed a public dinner on the matter in 1833, engaged in regular correspondence and later planned to publish some of the papers he had written on it during the previous years.² Taylor was less convinced that poor laws could provide the solution to Ireland's ills, and more willing than Prentice to accept certain fashionable dogmas. Aid for the sick, aged and infirm was one thing, but it would be impolitic and unjust

1. Gazette, 10 July 1824, 10, 24 Feb., 3, 17 March, 23 June, 18 Aug. 1827, 12 April 1828; Times, 25 April 1829. Prentice's cousin David, of the Glasgow Chronicle, also argued in favour of poor laws for Ireland; Prentice's Gazette of 2 April 1825 commented on a recent Glasgow Chronicle article on the subject. For the wider debates on poor laws, emigration and public works see R. D. Collinson Black, Economic Thought and the Irish Question 1817-70 (1960), ch. IV, VI, VIII. When an Irish Poor Law was eventually passed in 1838 it did little to improve the situation because it contained no settlement rules and because the Great Famine of 1845-9 prevented the new system from becoming fully operative. R. B. McDowell, 'Administration and the Public Services 1800-70', in Vaughan, 538-61.

2. Watkin, Fragment No.2, 19-20, 24-7, 32.

to give an able-bodied man the right to claim support for himself and his family and so take the fruits of the labours of others. What was really needed, said Taylor, was more education - to teach men about the consequences of their actions, to encourage moral restraint and self-improvement and so place checks on population growth in a nation where the resources could not support it. Taylor stuck by these theories although he did suggest after Catholic emancipation that selfish Irish landlords, ordering many tenants to quit now that they had lost the vote by the disfranchisement of 40s. freeholders, deserved to suffer the imposition of poor rates. (Taylor had accepted the disfranchisement on the grounds that the 40s. freeholders were not wholly independent as voters.¹) Manchester's Tory papers were generally favourable towards poor laws for Ireland, as was the Irish-born radical and labour leader John Doherty, who advocated them in his Voice. But Taylor was not alone with his reservations; J. P. Kay opposed poor laws for Ireland, as did Cobden, and the Prentice school of thought was not well-represented among those Mancunians who gave evidence to the 1835 inquiry.²

Manchester's respectable reformers were in favour of granting civil and political rights to Ireland's Catholics and viewed the question of emancipation as a central part of the wider Irish problem, not least because the controversy created by the emancipation issue was a cause of disorder in Ireland. Emancipation, it was hoped, would ease social and

1. Guardian, 19 April 1828, 23 May 1829.

2. Exch.H., 11 May 1826; Courier, 12, 26 June 1830, 21 May, 3 Sept. 1831; Voice, 11 June, 3 Sept. 1831; Kay, Moral and Phys. Condition, 83-4; Hirst, Manchester School, 58-60; Report on Irish Poor, 48, 51, 78-83.

political relations in Ireland. The liberal-Dissenting leaders also favoured emancipation on principle: it would serve the ends of justice, freedom and equality. Opinion in Manchester was sharply divided on the matter; two anti-Catholic petitions in 1825 received 28,000 and 38,000 signatures.¹ The Tory papers were ~~were~~ steadfastly opposed to emancipation,² while the Gazette and Guardian argued for concession all through the 1820s. The difference between Prentice and Taylor was that Prentice was not prepared (unlike Taylor) to accept any tampering with the Irish franchise as the price of concession. Taylor, Shuttleworth, Baxter, Prentice and Richard Potter organised and spoke at pro-emancipation meetings in the 1820s. Potter's visits to Ireland may have strengthened his desire to see emancipation granted. During one stay he joined O'Connell's Catholic Association, and addressed two Association meetings in Ireland in 1827-8.³ Another suggested solution to Ireland's social and political problems was the repeal of the Union, but this was something with which few of Manchester's middle-class politicians had any sympathy. The Anglican-Tory leaders were hostile and the Courier feared that to change the system of Irish government would open the door for an

1. Courier, 14 May 1825.

2. Courier, 8 Jan., 23 April, 24 Sept. 1825, 29 April 1826, 15 March, 30 Aug. 1828, 7 Feb., 9 May 1829; Chronicle, 17 April 1819, 21 April 1821, 12 Feb. 1825, 4, 18 Oct. 1828, 21 Feb., 14 March, 11 April 1829; Mercury, 13 May 1817, 16 March 1819, 19 April 1825.

3. Gazette, 30 June 1821, 6 April, 29 June 1822, 30 April, 7, 14 May, 19 Nov. 1825, 17 Feb. 1827, 12 July 1828; Guardian, 10 Nov. 1821, 2 Feb., 4, 18 May, 14 Dec. 1822, 30 April, 9 July, 15 Oct. 1825, 10 March 1827, 17 May 1828, 7 Feb., 14 March 1829; Times, 21 Nov. 1828, 7 Feb., 4 April 1829; Prentice, Sketches, 338-9; R. Potter Colln., iv. 38-9, xi. 95-8, 100-102.

attack on the Irish Church.¹ In October 1830 Taylor criticised O'Connell's repeal campaign as a clear threat to public order.² Prentice told a meeting of 'Friends of Ireland' in January 1831 that a reformed Parliament at Westminster could do more for Ireland than could a separate Irish assembly. It was folly to believe that Irish distress was solely attributable to the Union. At about this time he also renewed his call for poor laws for Ireland.³

Some commentators felt that Ireland's problems might be eased by a relaxation of commercial restrictions. The Guardian argued in November 1821 that freer trade between Britain and Ireland would be greatly beneficial, though Taylor was probably as concerned about Manchester masters' ability to secure more business as about Ireland's ability to solve her social and economic problems. Shuttleworth, Atkinson and Taylor all took part in a meeting of May 1821 which called for - among other things - freer trade with Ireland.⁴ The gradual freeing of the Irish trade in 1820s was also welcomed by the Tory Mercury which in September 1823 remarked upon the large increases in the amount of Irish calicoes sold in Manchester and Glasgow. The signs were that this trade was likely to increase further. This would enable the Irish weavers to gain work at home and in time wage levels in Ireland would rise. It was hoped that

1. Courier, 15, 29 Jan., 12 Feb. 1831.

2. Guardian, 30 Oct. 1830.

3. Times, 8, 22, 29 Jan., 19 Feb., 11, 18 June, 2, 9 July 1831.

4. Guardian, 24 Nov. 1821; Gazette, 2 June 1821.

the influx into Manchester would be considerably reduced.¹

5. Labour issues

The attitude of Manchester's respectable liberal reformers towards strikes and combinations was normally rather ambivalent. Many of them were themselves employers and so had their own economic interests to serve and protect, but their political and religious outlooks also made them sympathetic towards the claims of the working population and interested in the promotion of political and social justice. Like others of similar opinions and background the band tended to adopt a middle ground in the matter of strikes and combinations, viewing industrial conflicts according to the circumstances of each case. So there could be a mixture of sympathy, censure, praise and blame in the written and spoken statements of the band. Prentice was probably the most interested of this group in working-class issues. It was not unusual for his views to differ from those of Taylor and the Guardian. On labour relations Prentice's position was generally one of sympathy for the workers, provided their claims were reasonable and their conduct not illegal, and of support for those masters who were willing at least to listen to these reasonable claims. He preferred peaceful, negotiated settlements to trade disputes.

Manchester's liberals liked to give full and fair consideration to both sides in any trade argument. When possible the Gazette tended to

1. Mercury, 9 Sept. 1823.

give coverage equally to employers and operatives, as in 1815 during a strike of journeymen calico printers.¹ By publicising the arguments of both sides the Gazette was giving its readers the information they needed to form their own conclusions. During the long and bitter spinners' strike of 1818 the Gazette pointed to the rectitude of some of the operatives' claims but could not extend its sympathy to the point of approving of the strike - on the grounds that the state of trade did not justify the wage advances being sought.² Respectable reformers were more closely behind the workers when there was clear evidence that employers were conspiring to keep wages low, as in March 1823 when the master spinners of Bolton combined together and engineered a dispute to try and force wage cuts.³ (Such apologists as E. C. Tufnell, of course, were to deny that masters combined to lower wages or for any other purpose.⁴) The local weavers seem to have suffered from such mistreatment for many years. Their plight was a leading concern of social commentators. Their standard of living was threatened by an oversupply of labour and the introduction of machinery and new production techniques. The 'grinding system' caused problems too, as masters pushed down wages to enlarge profit margins and make themselves more competitive. J. B. Smith was to write replies to the reports of 1835 and 1841 published after parliamentary inquiries into the condition of the weavers. He emphasised

1. Gazette, 21, 28 Jan., 4 Feb. 1815.

2. Gazette, 18, 25 July, 1 Aug. 1818.

3. Gazette, 5 April 1823.

4. Tufnell, The Character, Objects and Effects of Trade Unions (1834), 98-101.

the threat from machinery and foreign competition, and the effects of the corn laws on the weavers' living standards.¹

Prentice was steadfastly opposed to the Combination Acts and a convinced advocate of their repeal in 1824. The Gazette, very much under his influence once Taylor had gone to the Guardian in May 1821 and William Cowdroy jun. had died in March 1822, strongly backed Hume's repeal motion of February 1824. There was no desire to enflame the minds of the workers against their masters: 'we wish only that the poor man's property, his labour, may be equally protected with that of the rich man, whose wealth may lie in houses, lands or money'. All men were supposed to be equal before the law and yet masters formed their own associations at will; the repeal of the Combination Acts was vital for the cause of justice and for the pride and independence of the worker.² L. S. Marshall goes too far in his assertion that Manchester economic opinion at this time was purely liberal.³ There were exceptions. Not only the workers but also their sympathisers like Prentice were against the idea that the labour market had to be left completely free. Admittedly, though, while Prentice was concerned about justice and the dignity and welfare of the labourers, J. E. Taylor's (Placean) position had more to do with his laissez-faire opinions and his view that the cotton masters

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1. J. B. Smith, Mem. and Letters, 29, 32-53. On the weavers see also D. Bythell, The Handloom Weavers. A study in the English Cotton Industry during the Industrial Revolution (1969); R. Glen, Urban Workers, ch. 7-10; P. Richards, 'The State and Early Industrial Capitalism: the case of the handloom weavers', P. & P. 83 (1979).
 2. Gazette, 21 Feb., 6, 13, 27 March, 10 April, 10 July, 18 Sept. 1824; Prentice, Lecture on Wages for retrospective comments on the Combination Acts.
 3. Marshall, Public Opinion, 211-19.

had nothing to fear from repeal. The Acts were against good principle because they placed limits on the workers in the matter of wage adjustments and so prevented wages from finding their own natural level according to supply and demand. Combinations would not greatly inconvenience employers because in any dispute they could win by simply relying on their capital, whereas workers had nothing to fall back on. After repeal Taylor argued against the reimposition of the Acts. Something had to be done to control the workers' conduct but not the commodity of labour. The free movement and sale price of labour could not be subjected to 'legislative tinkering'.¹

The repeal of the Combination Acts was followed by a new and powerful wave of trade union activity in Manchester.² By the end of 1824, for example, there were new general unions of weavers and fustian cutters.³ Taking its familiar position as the ally of the cotton masters the Guardian was unenthusiastic about the weavers' combination. Prentice was glad to see workers taking full advantage of their rights, but advised caution. There should be no intimidation or illegality.⁴ He often defended combinations against their detractors, as in April 1825 when he criticised the anti-union stance of the Tory Courier.⁵ His

1. Guardian, 2 Aug. 1823, 15 Jan., 9 April 1825.

2. R. A. Sykes, Popular Politics and Trade Unionism in South East Lancashire, 1829-42 (Manchester University Ph.D. thesis 1982), for a detailed account of trade unionism in the Manchester area in the first half of the 19th century.

3. Gazette, 18 Sept., 6 Nov. 1824, 22 Jan. 1825.

4. Guardian and Gazette, 25 Sept. 1824.

5. Courier, 2, 16 April 1825; Gazette, 9, 23 April 1825.

standing among some Manchester workers was high. He was a valued supporter and regularly publicised their activities, including the campaign against the reimposition of the Combination Acts. One meeting passed a vote of thanks to Prentice 'for his constant attention to the working classes'. It was carried 'by three simultaneous cheers'. In coming years Prentice's newspapers carried pieces on the state of the law regarding combination, showing workers what they could and could not do and so enabling them to avoid legal penalties.¹

Combinations continued to have a bad reputation because they had been associated with violence, disorder and intimidation. Watkin was a little more equivocal about them than Prentice. As he said of the workers in 1833:

When they associate for legitimate and proper purposes their Unions are not only lawful but praiseworthy, and will have the approbation of every right-minded man. But unfortunately they sometimes unite to forward schemes which tend only to inconvenience others and do mischief to themselves.

Watkin also rejected the argument that the working classes were the sole producers of wealth in the community; wealth was produced by the combined exertions of the whole, not by a part.² Through the 1820s and 30s Prentice continued to treat combinations in a sympathetic fashion. His views on turn-outs did not change: workers should always follow only legal courses, if their arguments were reasonable then they should be given a proper hearing, employers guilty of unfair practices should be censured and punished, and when possible disputes should be settled through negotiation. He also advocated thrift, temperance, 'improvement'

1. Gazette, 16 April, 30 July 1825, 2 Dec. 1826.

2. Watkin, Fragment No.2, 21.

and education - all of which could make workers better able to stand up to grasping masters. The Guardian tended to be hostile towards turn-outs while Prentice tried to help the workers in various ways. He printed communications from the associated spinners' secretary John Doherty in 1829, for example, calling for mediation and compromise, condemning workers' disorder but at the same time attacking such masters as H. H. Birley (of Peterloo fame) who had their factories guarded by armed men and sought to 'obtrude a fortification on the eyes of a suffering people'. In 1830-31 he publicised the activities of the new Doherty-inspired general union of trades, the National Association for the Protection of Labour. He soon quarrelled with Doherty, though, when the latter decided to establish a new workers' newspaper - the Voice of the People.¹

Prentice's attitude towards strikes and combinations was closely tied in with his views on other aspects of labour relations, particularly wages. He agreed that in normal circumstances the forces of supply and demand controlled wage levels,² but he also believed that other factors were important and was not afraid to argue the point with men of formidable intellect and wide renown. In January 1825 he wrote on James Mill's The Elements of Political Economy and disputed Mill's view that

1. Gazette, 23 June, 30 July, 24 Dec. 1825, 11, 18, 25 Feb., 4, 11 March, 22, 29 April, 6, 13 May, 16, 23 Sept., 9 Dec. 1826, 27 Jan., 3 Feb. 1827; Times, 24 Jan., 28 March, 4, 11 April, 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 May, 6 June, 8, 25 July, 8, 15, 22, 29 Aug., 12, 19, 26 Sept., 3, 10 Oct. 1829, 3, 17, 24 Oct., 6, 13, 20, 27 Nov. 1830, 19, 26 Feb., 12, 19 March 1831; Guardian, 11 March 1826, 3 Feb. 1827, 10 Jan., 21 Feb., 8 Aug., 10 Oct. 1829, 23, 30 Oct. 1830, 26 Feb. 1831.

2. E.g. his views on Adam Smith in Lecture on Wages.

wages were determined by the relationship of supply and demand and population and capital.

There are circumstances which occasion a reduction of wages although the ratio which capital and population bear to one another remains the same. That these circumstances have been overlooked by the economists is obvious ... In order to account for the poverty and misery of the great mass of mankind they have supposed that population has a tendency to increase faster than capital and that the insufficient reward of labour is the necessary consequence of that increase. They have entirely lost sight of the difference in the conditions of the employers and the employed which is sufficient to account for a fall of wages when there is no diminution of demand.

Prentice argued that the dissolution of the contract between worker and master inconvenienced the former more than the latter, for the worker lost his whole income while the master suffered only a slight loss - which could be made up when he employed another worker. Combinations could conceivably enable workers to leave a master as a body, but even then the two sides were not on a par because the master could fall back on his capital. Here were circumstances that influenced wage levels but had nothing to do with supply and demand and population and capital. Despite Place's taking exception to his comments, Prentice continued to take this line on wages, notably in his April 1829 piece 'On the circumstances which regulate the Wages of Labour'.¹ Prentice sought some future industrial utopia in which peaceful wage settlements were possible and normal and master-worker relations were cordial. To bring this about the workers had to be stronger. Combinations would help them but more important was the need for them to improve their means of self-support and sustenance (that is, to develop their own 'capital'). Prentice was a

1. Gazette, 22 Jan., 19 Feb. 1825; Times, 4 April 1829.

paternalist too, though, and put faith in humane masters who were concerned about their hands. He favoured mutual agreements within separate trades and the fixing of wage minimums. In some cases legislative action would be necessary.¹ Taylor, by now one of the most avid readers and popularisers of political economy in Manchester, was wholly against legislation to regulate wages and felt there could be no exception when sound principle was at stake. Hence his opposition to the Manchester weavers' campaign for parliamentary action on wages in 1823 and the request for an Act by the Macclesfield silk weavers in 1828.²

The introduction of machinery aroused much discussion in this period. Such was the alarm of weavers at the spread of the powerloom that a meeting of November 1822 in Rossendale, just north of Manchester, advocated a tax upon the extra profit produced by powerlooms. The Gazette sympathised: machinery was not evil in itself but exception could be taken to the use made of it. Mechanisation was enriching the few and harming the many.³ Taylor wrote for the masters. He said that the workers should not fear machines. Machines could only be introduced slowly and workers had time to prepare for the change. Machines created new work as well as superseding old kinds of work, and they cut production costs - which was good for consumers and so good for the working classes. Taylor spoke of the march of progress and pointed to the beneficial results of mechanisation in spinning. (He apparently

1. Gazette, 27 May 1826.

2. Guardian, 17 May, 16 Sept. 1823, 27 Sept., 15 Nov., 6 Dec. 1828.

3. Gazette, 30 Nov., 7, 14 Dec. 1822.

ignored the fact that circumstances in the spinning branches of the cotton trade were very different from those in weaving). He dismissed the idea of a tax on profits produced by powerlooms as absurd; this profit had to be protected because it would add to the facility of production, enable more reductions in the price of articles, and so make it easier for employers to fight off foreign competitors.¹ Prentice's position was that mechanisation - if in some ways objectionable - was nevertheless inevitable and so had to be accepted. Machine-breaking was no answer to the workers' problems. It would increase unemployment and prompt masters to refuse relief. Attention would be better given to the 'system', to the need for corn law repeal, a sound currency and a massive reduction in public expenditure.²

There was much argument in Manchester over the restrictions on the exportation of machinery. Many vested interests were involved. The desire to protect the productive powers of the south Lancashire cotton industry could conflict with the application of free trade ideas. This issue, in fact, demonstrates that self-interest lay behind the Manchester business community's advocacy of free trade. There was no theoretical consistency because ideas were abandoned when they came into conflict with practical commercial considerations.³ Merchants, manufacturers

1. Guardian, 23 Nov. 1822.

2. Gazette, 6 May 1826; Times, 1 Jan. 1831.

3. A. E. Musson, 'The Manchester School and the Exportation of Machinery', Business History 14 (1972); also Marshall, Public Opinion, 184. Marshall says little about attitudes towards machinery exportation, perhaps because the strong opposition to it in Manchester goes against his notion that free trade opinion ruled the town by about 1820.

and machine-makers argued over machinery exportation for years. The Chamber of Commerce, always more concerned about the protection of its members' interests than about free trade ideology, favoured continued regulation.¹ Taylor sided with those who wanted the removal of restrictions.² This issue was one on which he could not agree with the Chamber, which he supported and praised on so many other occasions. He was such a keen doctrinaire that when theory came into conflict with practical commercial considerations he almost always upheld the former. Prentice does not appear to have interested himself in the question.

Great ill-feeling was created by the truck system. Respectable liberals usually sided with labour spokesmen in the outcry against truck.³ The matter was especially current late in 1830 as a Truck Bill was introduced into the Commons by E. J. Littleton, the reform-minded Whig M.P. for Staffordshire. Thanks partly to the extraparliamentary campaign in its favour it was passed in 1831. Prentice was quick to join in the agitation, used his Times to back it and attended meetings like that in Bolton on 9 November 1830, when he told his audience of the mischief of truck and criticised those M.P.s who had voted against Littleton's measure. He also denied the validity of Hume's recent speech against 'intervention' in the relations between masters and men.⁴ Taylor backed Littleton's bill; although masters and men should be free to come

1. Chamber. Annual Reports, especially 1825-8 inclusive.

2. E.g. Guardian, 28 Feb., 24 April, 1824.

3. E.g. Gazette, 21 March 1818, 1 May 1824.

4. Times, 13 Nov. 1830.

to their own arrangements over wages, he argued, a bargain with goods was not the same thing as a bargain with money. In practice no bargain for payment in goods could be made on terms of equality.¹

Of the various solutions that were suggested for the benefit of workers displaced by machines or suffering from a lack of employment in times of commercial depression, emigration was particularly prominent. It seemed an answer to many social and economic ills. Removing people could help to remove problems. Prentice's was an equivocal position. He was not keen to see unemployed workers being forced by circumstances or encouraged by legislators to leave their homes, but he recognised that in some cases emigration could be necessary for survival. Emigration would not be necessary if there were reforms, if trade was freer and taxation lower, but until such reforms were achieved it had to be considered as a serious option. This was the stance he took on the Bolton weavers' petition of June 1826, praying for government aid for emigration to Canada. Emigration had to be properly organised, though, and Prentice was keen that all arrangements should be taken care of. He thought that 'a great deal of trash' was talked about emigration, and cited a report of October 1827 which estimated the total cost of shipping off the surplus population of Britain at £100 per family. The report claimed that the families would be able to raise this sum themselves, which Prentice found absurd. Nobody who had any knowledge of the conditions of cotton workers in south Lancashire could ever accept such an assertion.²

1. Guardian, 20 Nov., 18 Dec. 1830.

2. Gazette, 8 July 1826, 6 Oct. 1827.

Emigration was one of the topics on which Prentice lectured between the 1820s and 50s. After his visit to the U.S.A. in 1848 he was in a good position to advise audiences about emigration to that particular country. It was a land of opportunities but he stressed that he himself was not out to encourage emigration, only to help others to make up their own minds for or against. Certain requirements were essential, like taking up the right trade in one's new home, avoiding alcohol and bad habits, and especially the saving of about £20 to £30 to provide the basis for a new life. Those workers whose labour was not in great demand in the U.S.A. certainly should not go there.¹ Emigration was hardly ever discussed in the Guardian at any length, and Taylor seems only to have concerned himself with the laws preventing the emigration of skilled artisans. These laws were rooted in concern about the security of Britain's manufacturing supremacy, but Taylor felt that such restrictions - like those on machinery exports - represented obstacles to free trade and so were against good policy. He was certain that removing the restrictions on artisans (and machinery) would not harm British manufacturing.²

The debates on factory regulation in this period focussed mainly on the overworking of children, although it was clear to both factory reformers and their opponents that a limitation of the hours of work for children might also eventually mean a limitation of the hours for adults. The spring of 1825 saw a campaign in Manchester in favour of Hobhouse's

1. Prentice, Tour in the United States, 197-210.

2. Guardian, 28 Feb. 1824.

Factory Bill, which aimed to reduce children's labour to 11 hours a day. Even before the measure was introduced in May, over thirty leading Manchester mill-owners had publicly expressed their readiness to concur with the wish of their spinners that the working week should not exceed 66 hours. Among these masters were Brotherton and Harvey. Prentice found their declaration commendable and hoped it would influence Parliament. He also welcomed it as a sign that industrial relations in Manchester were improving and an effective reply to the Courier's recent remarks about tension being caused by combinations and workers' meetings.¹ Prentice favoured a limitation of factory hours.

We know that an argument may be raised against a compulsory limitation of the hours of labour on the ground that it would diminish the national wealth, and if wealth constituted the happiness of a state we would allow that the argument had some force. But if wealth is to be accumulated only by a great sacrifice on the part of the majority of the people, it becomes a question whether the acquisition is worth the price which is paid for it; and surely it will be conceded that a state of constant labour, unbroken by rest or recreation, and which leaves not a moment for the acquisition of knowledge, is not that in which a people has the greatest amount of enjoyment.

In response to those employers who opposed legislative regulation on principle, Prentice argued that its disadvantages had been exaggerated. Any reduction in output would not be in proportion to the reduction in hours; a worker who exerted himself for less time became less exhausted, so output per head per hour was bound to rise. Of course legislation would not be necessary if masters and men could come to some voluntary agreement, but this was difficult to achieve and there could be no guarantee that all involved parties would stick to it.² It seems

1. Gazette, 23 April 1825; Courier, 2, 9 April 1825.

2. Gazette, 23, 30 April 1825.

that Prentice had first visited a Manchester factory in 1815. Although he accepted the proprietor's point that cotton workers were not seriously unhealthy and were no more liable to disease than other types of worker, yet he noticed the factory hands' tired expressions and anaemic appearance. They did not have the ruddy faces of farm workers:

When I experienced the heat of the factory and learned that everyone in it was employed fourteen hours a day, and saw the paleness of visage which unremitted toil in such an atmosphere occasioned, I could not exult in the prosperity of our manufactures.¹

J. E. Taylor's position in 1825 was that a reduction in hours was probably necessary, so he undertook to support Hobhouse's bill provided it covered all manufacturing activities. (In fact the bill was limited to cotton establishments.) Opposition to the bill in Manchester was headed by a group of master spinners who petitioned against it in mid-May.² The passing of the bill was celebrated by its supporters, and at the operative spinners' dinner of 9 July a toast was proposed to 'Our friend and advocate, Archibald Prentice, Esq.' The greatest praise was for Joseph Brotherton, the most active supporter of the bill among Manchester's philanthropic reformers. He had procured many masters' signatures for the operatives' petition, had attended masters' meetings to argue for protection for factory children, had gone to London to canvass M.P.s, had advised and assisted the operatives' in every way he could, and throughout had given his time, attention and money without a second thought. The spinners' leaders Foster and McWilliams felt he was 'a man who could not be too much praised'. Brotherton subsequently took

1. Letters from Scotland, 223.

2. Guardian, 16 April, 21 May 1825.

part in activity to prevent evasions of the 1825 Act, as did Prentice and Richard Potter, but an operative-led campaign of surveillance and prosecution was not very successful.¹

Hobhouse introduced a new Factory Bill dealing with child labour in February 1831. Doherty's Voice backed it,² and so did Prentice, who was particularly keen that Parliament should prohibit all factories from working between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. So he apparently envisaged a limit on the adult working day as well as the child's. He welcomed the call of the spinners' leader Foster for philanthropic individuals, intellectuals, clergymen, writers and others to come forward and join the campaign on behalf of factory children. This was a cause which should be advocated by every class of Christians in the land, for what was at issue was the health, morality and happiness of the labouring population. To persist in the working of children for fourteen to sixteen hours a day was to turn a healthy and robust population into 'a puny, degenerate, squalid, sickly and short-lived race of beings that will be a disgrace to the political and religious institutions of the country'. But even as the campaign for a new Act gathered steam, cases of the overworking of factory children continued to come to light.³ Hobhouse's measure received the royal assent in October 1831. It prohibited nightwork (between 8.30 p.m. and 5.30 a.m.) for persons aged under 21, and fixed the working day for persons under 18 at twelve hours. The Guardian

1. Gazette, 28 May, 4, 25 June, 16, 30 July, 17 Aug. 1825, 30 Dec. 1826; Brotherton Scrapbks., iii. 49; Chronicle, 15 Nov. 1828.

2. Voice, 9 April 1831.

3. Times, 17 April 1830, 22 Jan. 1831.

welcomed it and hoped that masters would obey it, not just because it would help improve the health and morals of the workforce but also because it would benefit the cotton industry in general. To tackle overworking, for example, was to combat overproduction.¹ As usual Taylor had his eyes on what would serve the interests of the cotton masters; he was also - apparently - one of those champions of laissez-faire who felt that factory children presented a special case as 'unfree' agents.

In later years the member of the band most actively involved in the struggle for factory reform was Brotherton. He was Salford's M.P. for 25 years and during that time was at the forefront of the factory movement along with Ashley, Fielden, Hindley and others.² Others in the band were interested too. Watkin spoke in favour of Sadler's Ten Hours Bill at the Exchange in 1833.³ Extending the protection for working children was part of the programme of the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association of 1838, of which Thomas Potter, J. B. Smith, Watkin and Prentice were founders and members.⁴ Prentice supported the ten hours campaign through the 1830s and 40s on humanitarian grounds, though did want the workers to accept that less hours would mean less wages.⁵ Taylor was more hostile

1. Guardian, 29 Oct. 1831.

2. O'Brien, 29-30; Brotherton, Speech on the Ten Hours Factory Bill (1857); 'Some Reminiscences of the Ten Hours Factory Act' and 'Speeches of John Fielden and Joseph Brotherton', both in Fielden Papers (JRL), Box 1; Brotherton's role can also be followed in J. T. Ward, The Factory Movement 1830-55 (1962).

3. 'Report of the Public Meeting in the Exchange Dining Room, 14 Feb. 1833', Fielden Papers, Box 1.

4. Address of the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association (1838).

5. Times, 23 Feb., 23 March 1833, 9 April 1836, 20 April 1844, 19 Feb., 7 May 1847.

and would not accept further intervention unless it could be achieved without affecting production and prices and the home cotton industry's competitiveness.¹ Though in the past Richard Potter had favoured parliamentary action and wanted the Acts to prevent the overworking of children to be properly enforced, his position in the 1830s was probably closer to Taylor's than to that of Brotherton and Prentice. He does not seem to have been convinced of the need for and policy of further parliamentary action.²

It was not only the respectable liberals, and not only men who were active in local politics, who engaged in discussion of and remedial work related to social problems. The band's role in this discussion and work was nevertheless a very prominent one. They believed in self-reliance and hoped to instil in others an impetus for personal advancement. They were willing to provide help and wanted to extend opportunities so as to facilitate the rise of those who could not yet depend on themselves; one day these people would be self-reliant. They would take responsibility for their own actions and be able to occupy their rightful place as citizens. But on their way up they had to adopt ideas and behaviour that would prevent their decline back into ignorance, poverty, immorality, ill-health and recalcitrance. The band preached a gospel of social reformation which gave full scope to their religious zeal and moral premises. They acted on philanthropic and charitable impulses, on their

1. Guardian, 19 Jan., 20 April 1833, 20 March 1844.

2. Ward, Factory Movement, 80, 108, 141, 143, 156, 167.

commitment to 'good works' and the voluntary ideal. They were also interested in social conditioning but usually placed more emphasis on kind encouragement, corrective remedies and benevolent guidance than on coercion and condemnation. The band wanted to extend educational (and cultural) provisions for all classes and age groups. They were keen to increase health and welfare facilities, improve living conditions, encourage preventive measures, extend social teaching and bring about the greater involvement of local government in such spheres. Something had to be done about the quality of life in Manchester, and the band were especially preoccupied with the need to show the lower classes how they could help themselves. Most of the band favoured a generous provision for the poor and denied that relief encouraged poverty and idleness. Humanity demanded that the distressed should have something to fall back on. This idea also conditioned the band's thinking on the Irish problem. Concern about the habits and conduct of immigrants, and the effects of the influx on the host community, led to discussion about reforms that might enable and encourage more Irish to stay at home. The band also engaged in discussion of industrial relations, combinations, wages, machinery, truck, emigration and factory regulation. They were concerned about those in the lower ranks as workers as well as citizens. If society was to be reformed then attention had to be given to the workplace as well as to homes and streets. This notion existed alongside an interest in the working population that was based on economic grounds. Members of the band seem to have believed that it would be both inhuman and impolitic to pay insufficient attention to the health, dignity, morality and conduct of working people.

The band's consideration of all these social issues featured an

obvious conflict on the matter of how perceived social problems could best be solved. There were disagreements, particularly between Prentice and Taylor. The latter was fond of theory and evinced a strict laissez-faire approach to many social questions, notably poverty and industrial affairs. Prentice's position (more characteristic of the band as a whole) was infused with a paternalist and humanitarian outlook. If there could be agreement on what was wrong and on the need for action there could also be differences on matters of approach, analysis, aims and preferred solutions.

Chapter V

COMMERCIAL AFFAIRS AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CORN LAWS

1. The band and commercial issues

The first section of this chapter will deal with some of the important commercial campaigns and discussions which took place in Manchester in the 1815-32 period, outlining local opinion on the relevant issues and describing the views and activities of the band. Attention will be paid to the Chamber of Commerce, the representative body of the business community, and to several taxes and duties that were of most concern to those engaged in local commerce and manufacturing. The controversy over the exportation of yarns and twist demonstrated that there could be divisions within the business community on some commercial matters. There will also be a discussion of commercial theory, the preoccupation with foreign trade and Manchester's access to foreign markets, interest in government policies and the desire for local commercial interests to be properly represented, advanced and defended in Parliament. There will then be a consideration of commercial practices, particularly the problems relating to fraud, credit, liability and speculation, and this section will end with an investigation of Manchester debates on currency and taxation.

The decision to establish the Manchester Chamber of Commerce was taken at a meeting in the Police Office in May 1820. Manchester's merchants and manufacturers had long felt the need for some organisation

in which they could join together for mutual benefit. There had been some cooperation on commercial questions in previous times, notably in 1784-5 over Pitt's fustian tax, and many committees were formed to look out for local interests. But all of this lacked permanency. Even the Manchester Commercial Society, founded in 1794, had ceased operations in 1801.¹ The Chamber gave the needs and desires of the Manchester business community proper institutional form, continuity and collective weight. Its membership was eclectic, a mixture of cotton masters, other businessmen and public figures as well as men not active in local politics. The first Board included men of varying political and religious creeds, mostly in cotton and largely drawn from the local 'establishment'. Most of the band were or had been engaged in trade, and all of them were now heavily involved in Manchester's public affairs, so they were naturally interested in the foundation of the Chamber. They were sometimes among its most outspoken members. The Potters and J. B. Smith were among the earliest members; Baxter, Taylor, Shuttleworth and Prentice were also members during the 1820s, 30s and 40s, intermittently if not constantly. Thomas Potter was a director from 1823-6, Smith from 1837. Smith was the Chamber's president from 1839.² Thomas Potter,

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1. E. Helm, Chapters in the History of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (1901), 1-60; A. Redford, Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade (1934), ch. I-V; Marshall, Public Opinion, 184-5; Howe, Cotton Masters, 191-206; E. R. Street and A. C. Walters, 'The Beginnings of the Manchester Chamber', Manchester Chamber of Commerce Monthly Record 32 (1921), 223-5, 287-9, 293.
 2. Gazette, 16 Dec. 1820, 15 Feb. 1823, 14 Feb. 1824, 19 Feb. 1825; Redford, Merchants, 69-72; Street and Walters, 393-4; Chamber. Annual Reports (1821 onwards).

Taylor and Baxter were among the speakers at a town meeting on 30 January 1822 called to consider the support and extension of the Chamber, and Baxter was on the special committee appointed to assist the directors in extending the body's activities.¹ These activities, particularly the meetings, reports and representations to government, received regular coverage in the local newspapers, Tory as well as reformist. They were all ready to promote and publicise the Chamber's efforts, though Prentice was to be a prominent critic of the Chamber's equivocal stance on the corn laws.

Much controversy was created in the early decades of the nineteenth century by taxes and duties of special concern to the Manchester business community. There had been agitation on these questions even before the Chamber's foundation. In the spring of 1815 there were protests against a proposed tax on the rents and windows of warehouses, factories, shops and other commercial premises. Taylor and Shuttleworth were among the speakers at a town meeting in March 1815, though the opposition campaign was mainly the affair of the ruling party. Newspaper support came from the Gazette, Exchange Herald and Mercury, and there was celebration when the ministry abandoned its plan. The Mercury concluded that such suggested replacements for the income tax were bound to be unpopular; maybe it would be best if the income tax was retained, though with modifications to make it work better.² The early months of 1815 also saw a campaign against the introduction of new duties on cotton wool imports,

1. Gazette, 2 Feb. 1822.

2. Gazette, 11 March 1815; Exch.H., 7, 21 March 1815; Mercury, 7, 14, 21 March 1815; Marshall, Public Opinion, 197-8.

in conjunction with pressure for the removal of the existing ones. There was also alarm because of the government's suggestion that a duty on cotton exports could be imposed as a substitute for the duty on imports of the raw material. In the end the Chancellor, Vansittart, decided that the import duty should remain in force, (though it was modified in subsequent years). The Potters and Baxter took part in this Manchester campaign of 1815, which was based on arguments that were to be repeated often in the Manchester businessmen's communications with policy-makers. Duties and restrictions could only benefit foreign manufacturers. Europe already had the capital and the local advantages to pose a threat to Manchester's cotton trade; the continental cotton industry had expanded fivefold since 1808 while Britain's had been 'stationary'. Labour abroad was also about half the price of labour in Britain. Harmful duties led to depression and a loss of markets.¹ In the spring of 1818 concern in Manchester about duties on cotton imports and exports was raised again by Vansittart's plan for customs regulation. The Gazette reminded readers of Vansittart's previous schemes and encouraged opposition.² Another scare came in May 1822 when it was rumoured that the tax on cotton wool imports was to be increased; the Chamber investigated and was glad to report that the rumour was groundless.³ In these years the liberals' Gazette often argued that Parliament's understanding and treatment of

1. Gazette, 6, 13, 20 May, 3 June, 8, 15 July 1815; Exch.H., 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 May, 27 June 1815; Mercury, 18, 25 April, 2, 16, 23, 30 May 1815; Marshall, Public Opinion, 196-7; Helm, 69-70; Timperley, 77, 83.

2. Gazette, 11 April 1818; Hay Scrapbks., xi. 142.

3. Exch.H., 14 May 1822.

commercial matters left much to be desired. By adopting the positions they did, Cowdroy and the respectable liberals behind the Gazette could gain credit for pointing to the need for the better representation of commerce, defending the interests of local business, highlighting the legislature's lack of attention to these interests and - thereby - making a case for parliamentary reform that might appeal to moderates as well as liberals among Manchester's men of affairs.

The 1820s saw the gradual spread of free trade opinion in Manchester. There was some enthusiasm for the doctrines of free trade and some adherence to theory, but this should not be exaggerated. More important were arguments rooted in self-interest and a belief in the practical advantages of freer trade. For a combination of reasons, then, there was concern about taxes and duties which did not fall directly on the cotton trade and its requirements but which were regarded as in some way affecting the foreign trade situation and so potentially damaging to Manchester's commercial prospects. This partly explains the interest in the question of East Indian sugar. The Chamber was active on the issue in the 1820s and 30s, sometimes cooperating with the Liverpool East India Association.¹ Shuttleworth made a forceful speech in favour of freer trade with the East Indies at a town meeting on 31 May 1821. The arguments soon spread to cover the objectionable privileges of the East India Company, and much was made of the fact that West Indian sugar was given preferential treatment over East Indian sugar. This involved the strong anti-slavery lobby in Manchester - in which members of the band

1. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1820, 1821, 1828, 1830, 1831.

were prominent - because British consumers were having to pay more for sugar produced by free labour and less for sugar produced by slave labour. This served the interests of slave owners and perpetuated the heinous system of slavery. There was also general concern about Britain's Eastern trade and the chances for Manchester men to gain good returns for their activities in the East.¹ J. E. Taylor always considered the matter to be simple: it was so obvious that freer trade could benefit all and that the merchants' interests were everyone's interests that the answer to the East Indian sugar question was the same as the answer to all other commercial questions. Restrictions were harmful and should be abolished. He wrote in 1823:

If it be desirable for every consumer to supply himself with articles of the best possible quality at the lowest possible rate, it is alike desirable, as regards us all, that we should derive those comforts and luxuries for which we are dependent on other countries, from those markets where, as they are most cheaply produced, they may be most advantageously acquired.²

Here was one of Taylor's clearest statements of the absolute necessity of buying in the cheapest market, later to be a fundamental doctrine of the 'Manchester School'. The Tory Mercury was also in favour of reducing the duties on East Indian sugar, and on South American sugar too. These were burdensome for home consumers and represented harmful restrictions of Britain's foreign trade.³

Complaints were often voiced in Manchester about the stamp duties relating to commercial transactions. Members of the band were prominent

1. Gazette, 19 May, 2, 30 June 1821.

2. Guardian, 19 April 1823.

3. Mercury, 1 Nov. 1825.

at the many meetings on this issue: the merchants among them could always give impressive and informed speeches based on their own commercial knowledge and experiences. The attorney Atkinson could also speak about the legal aspects of the problem, while Taylor's Guardian constantly complained about the restrictive tendencies of the stamp regulations. At town and Chamber meetings Atkinson, Taylor, Baxter, Shuttleworth and Richard Potter were among those expressing the business community's views on the expenses and inconveniences relating to transactions involving rents, title deeds, mortgages, land sales, sea, fire and other insurances, bills of exchange, receipts and legacies. Manchester men wanted the revision and reduction of stamp duties, on which several petitions were organised by the Chamber during the 1820s and 1830s.¹

Another leading concern of sections of the business community was the excise duty on printed calicoes. The Chamber pressed for repeal throughout the 1820s, as did the Guardian, and the various short-lived movements of the decade also had the backing of the Tory papers. But no progress was made despite the effective articulation of the arguments that duties were in themselves vexatious and against good principle and that the calico duty pressed severely on the poor and was more expensive and troublesome to collect than the net income warranted. A new campaign was launched late in 1830. Deputations from Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow were in London in November, the Manchester body including

1. Gazette, 2 June 1821, 1 June 1822, 18 Feb. 1826; Guardian, 2 June 1821, 8 May 1830; Chronicle, 12 Jan. 1828; Exch.H., 4 June 1822; Redford, Merchants, ch. XV; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 72-7; Chamber Annual Reports, 1820, 1826, 1827, 1830, 1831; 'The Chamber A Hundred Years Ago' in Manchester Chamber of Commerce Monthly Record 33 (1922), 104-5.

Brotherton. On 25 November there was a pro-repeal meeting in the Town Hall. Shuttleworth was a speaker and was also on the committee appointed to further the purposes of the meeting. The Chamber was active again, and so were the master calico printers as a body. Soon it was found that the government was considering the abandonment of the excise duty on printed goods in exchange for an increase in the tax on raw cotton imports to 1d. per lb. (it then stood at about 1/2d. per lb. and was levied in the form of a 6% ad valorem duty). The Chamber protested that the cotton trade was to experience only a change in the form of its taxation while for years the general trend had been to remove or reduce commercial duties. Eventually Althorp and Poulett Thomson (Chancellor and Vice-President of the Board of Trade) agreed to a compromise - the removal of the excise duty on printed calicoes and the imposition on raw cotton imports of a fixed tax of 5/8d. per lb. (and 3/8d. for cotton grown in the colonies). The Guardian welcomed the settlement as the best that could be achieved.¹

Another matter of special concern, particularly in the immediate postwar years, was the income or 'property' tax. Opinion in Manchester was generally in favour of its removal once the war was over, but gratitude for repeal in 1816 was tempered in succeeding years by the fear that the tax might be reimposed. Middle-class resentment against the tax was certainly a reality and may have been one of the factors making the

1. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1823, 1826, 1830, 1831; Guardian, 2 Sept. 1826, 27 June 1829, 20, 27 Nov. 1830, 26 Feb. 1831; Chronicle, 18 Nov. 1826, 27 Nov., 11 Dec. 1830, 5, 19, 26 Feb. 1831; Exch.H. 17, 31 Aug. 1826; Times, 27 Nov. 1830, 19 Feb., 5 March 1831, 18 Feb. 1832; Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 1-5; Helm, 70.

"middle class".¹ It seems that merchants and manufacturers were not as badly affected by the income tax as were the landed interests, because it was easier to get away with low claims in trade and industry,² but Manchester businessmen still regarded the tax as a burden and restriction, and resented it as an insulting and tyrannical inquisition into a trader's private concerns. Many also argued that trade and industry were being asked to pay too great a share of the nation's revenues. The Gazette came out in favour of repeal in January 1816; so did the Exchange Herald in February, though with more caution.³ The respectable reformers took the lead in Manchester's repeal campaign. When a requisition was presented to the town officers they declined to call a public meeting, possibly because a large number of reformers' names were among the signatures, but it went ahead anyway in the Exchange on 7 March. Baxter was in the chair and Atkinson and Taylor were also speakers. It was resolved that the income tax was 'peculiarly repugnant to the feelings of Englishmen' and that if the government exercised economy, reduced the military establishment and abolished sinecures and unnecessary pensions, the income tax would not be needed. The Gazette commended the meeting. It was also reported in the Exchange Herald, which upheld the town officers' right of veto. The Mercury had already

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1. Asa Briggs, 'The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century Britain' in his Collected Essays (1985) vol. i; also his 'Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics 1780-1846', P. & P. 9 (1956); cf. J. C. D. Clark's argument that the essence of middle-class identity and ideology was not new and forward-looking but traditional: Clark, English Society 1688-1832 (1985), 83, 92.
 2. Harvey, Britain in Early 19th Century, 336-7.
 3. Gazette, 27 Jan., 17 Feb. 1816; Exch.H., 27 Feb. 1816.

suggested that local businessmen might be reconciled to the continuation of the income tax if ministers spread its burden more equally.¹ The fact that the Mercury could take this line, that some Manchester businessmen actually signed a petition in favour of an income tax that was efficiently and fairly administered, and that the town officers refused to call a public meeting demanded in the main by respectable reformers who favoured the removal of the tax, lends credence to L. S. Marshall's view that this became a party political issue in Manchester.² It is possible that some of Manchester's Tories were prepared to accept the income tax in peacetime because this was what the government wanted. In the event the executive bowed to pressure from inside and outside Parliament. There was continuing concern that the tax might be reimposed. The Gazette was against this, but in 1822 the Exchange Herald wondered if reimposition would aid in the removal of distress by allowing the government to reduce other forms of exaction.³ Some plebeian radical pamphleteers wanted reimposition too, provided it was fair and properly based on ability to pay. One writer said in 1816 (correctly) that the removal of the income tax stemmed from ruling-class self-interest.⁴ When Peel proposed the reintroduction of the income tax in 1842 Prentice was an outspoken critic. In one lecture he condemned Peel as a 'slavish serf

1. Gazette, 9 March 1816; R. Potter Colln., xi. 8; Exch.H., 12 March 1816; Mercury, 21 March 1815, 12 March 1816.

2. Marshall, Public Opinion, 198-9.

3. Gazette, 13 Dec. 1817; Exch.H., 29 Jan. 1822.

4. 'The Wonders of the Magic Lantern... the Distress of the Country and some of the consequences of the late war', in Wray Pamphlets (Chetham's).

of the aristocracy' and repeated some of the arguments that had been current in 1815-16: it was an anomalous and unjust tax which favoured the landowners and struck at commercial and manufacturing men; it was tyrannical and forced individuals to suffer the humiliation of having to reveal their private affairs.¹

One of the most divisive issues discussed by Manchester's cotton masters during these years was the exportation of yarns and twist. The master spinners wanted to be free to sell their products abroad so that they did not have to depend on the home market and could be assured of customers even when home demand was slack. But those engaged in other branches of the cotton trade were against the exportation of yarns and twist on the ground that it was too much to the advantage of foreign manufacturers. The matter had often been debated in the past,² but took on a new urgency in the second half of 1816 as the trade in piece goods began to slow down. Many blamed this situation on the free exportation of cotton twist, legalised by the government in 1815. In these months the correspondence pages of the local newspapers were full of comment, and for as many arguments in favour of exportation there were arguments against. The band may have been equivocal on the subject since they

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1. Prentice, The Pitt-Peel Income Tax and the Necessity of Complete Suffrage (1842); N. Gash has praised Peel's bold measure and argued that 'the paralysing grip of postwar siege economics' was only broken by Peel's income tax and corn law repeal - see Gash, 'After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars', TRHS 28 (1978).
 2. E.g. autumn 1794, spring 1800: Marshall, Public Opinion, 180-83; Redford, Merchants, 130; Hay Scrapbks., xiv. (unpaginated). This matter was one of those prompting some merchants and manufacturers to regard Parliament as indifferent to their interests and so in need of reform. G. Whale, 'The Influence of the Industrial Revolution on the demand for Parliamentary Reform', TRHS V (1922).

included men engaged in both the spinning and the merchanting sides of the cotton trade. Most of the local papers adopted a neutral position, apart from the Mercury which opposed exports.¹ The campaign for restrictions achieved little and there was less urgency as the trade in piece goods picked up. The matter was discussed again in 1820, primarily because of rising concern about the plight of the handloom weavers. In February 1820 a correspondent of the Gazette claimed that the prohibition of cotton twist exports would be the best way to improve the weavers' condition.² The arguments over exports were closely tied in with a general lack of sympathy between the two business components of factory and warehouse. Before the 1820s there was a schism in the Manchester cotton trade as these two interests struggled for control over the direction of local economic advancement. Factory and warehouse represented different modes of production and followed different patterns of growth. But the rift was overcome in the 1820s. In the face of problems common to both factory and warehouse, as Lloyd-Jones and Lewis have shown, growing cooperation and unity allowed for the rise of a single cotton interest.³

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1. Gazette, 5, 12, 19, 26 Oct., 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Nov., 7, 14, 21, 28 Dec. 1816, 11 Jan., 1 Feb., 31 May, 28 June 1817; Chronicle, 12, 19, 26 Oct., 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Nov. 1816; Exch.H., 15 Oct., 31 Dec. 1816, 4, 11, 18 Feb., 13 May 1817; Prentice, Sketches, 117-18; Hay Scrapbks., vii. (unpaginated). The clearest statement of the Mercury's position is in Mercury, 1 Oct. 1816.
 2. Gazette, 12, 19, 26 Feb., 4 March 1820.
 3. See Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, op.cit., a useful study of the relations between factory and warehouse - perhaps flawed by insufficient attention to political and religious divisions in Manchester which meant that, despite the growing unity of factory and warehouse interests within the business community, "class" cohesion was not ever likely to be complete.

Manchester men traded with all parts of the globe and were always concerned about safeguarding and extending their foreign commerce. The cotton industry was markedly export-orientated but had an important role as an importer too. By 1820 Britain was the largest consumer of raw cotton in the world, and remained so until 1897.¹ The remarkable expansion of the cotton industry is also signified by the growth of capital investment in it; under £2m. in the 1780s, it rose to over £52m. by the 1850s.² It is not surprising to find the merchants and manufacturers of Manchester as preoccupied with foreign trade as they were in 1815-32, and in particular with the Eastern trade. Promising markets seemed to be available in the vast and wealthy regions of India and China, and Manchester men wanted more access to them.³ This desire involved Mancunians in the debate over the status and monopolies of the East India Company. Interest in the Eastern trade was expressed forcefully during the 1820s. In the early 1820s Mancunians demanded the Company's agreement to a liberalisation of this trade, beginning with free entry for Manchester goods to Canton and Singapore. Shuttleworth spoke on the matter at a town meeting in May 1821.⁴ As the directors

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1. D. A. Farnie, The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-96 (1979), ch. I and pp. 17, 82; Timperley, 88; R. Smith, 'Manchester as a centre', 53; J. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain (1926, 1950 edn.) i. 478-9; W. H. Chaloner's intro. to 2nd edn. (1968) of Prentice's League, ix.
 2. S. Chapman and J. Butt, 'The Cotton Industry 1775-1856' in (eds.) C. H. Feinstein and S. Pollard, Studies in Capital Formation in the United Kingdom (1988), 122.
 3. On Manchester's commercial relations with the East, Redford, Merchants, ch. IX. On the growing importance of India to the 19th century Manchester cotton trade, Farnie, Cotton Industry, ch.3.
 4. Gazette, 24 June 1820, 2 June 1821.

of the Chamber had said, India 'promises a market for our manufactures more extensive than anything we have hitherto known'. The Chamber energetically joined in the demands for freer trade with the East,¹ but progress was slow. The renewal of the Company's charter in 1813 had seen the opening of certain ports and stations, but the China monopoly remained and the Indian trade was subjected to a complicated licensing system. The exportation of cotton piece goods to the East did increase but more reforms were demanded.

In 1823 trade with India (except in tea) was freed but the China monopoly was maintained and in practice it could still be difficult to gain access to India. In November 1826 the Guardian claimed that Parliament could look at no more important question than the need to remove restrictions on the traffic with the East.² Early in 1829 Prentice demanded an assault on the privileges of the East India Company, an end to all monopolies and the equalisation of duties on goods imported from India and the West Indies (including sugar: Prentice was one of the most outspoken critics of that system of duties which rendered slave-produced sugar cheaper than sugar produced by free labour).³ The Guardian gave its readers statistical evidence to demonstrate the harm being done by the Company's restrictions. Taylor compared the extent and value of cotton exports to the East Indies going through the Company with

1. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1820; Walters and Street, 395; 'Chamber Hundred Yrs Ago', 135.

2. Guardian, 4 Nov. 1826.

3. Times, 31 Jan. 1831. The point about the perpetuation of slavery had also been made by Taylor, e.g. Guardian, 25 Aug. 1827.

those exports not subjected to Company regulation. The figures for 1828 were particularly instructive:

	<u>Cotton manufactures</u>		<u>Yarns</u>	
	<u>quantity (yards)</u>	<u>value</u>	<u>quantity (lbs.)</u>	<u>value</u>
'free trade'	42,089,565	£1,594,123	3,063,968	£273,990
E.I.C.	630,639	£21,513	412	£37

Taylor's point was clear: the demand for Manchester goods could increase remarkably if not for the Company.¹ The Tory Chronicle was also in favour of freer trade with the East, and even the Courier approved of some revision of the Company's charter. The Chamber became active again and Prentice pointed to the valuable example given by a recent Glasgow meeting which resolved to petition for the entire abolition of the Company's monopolies in every branch of the India and China trade.²

An important town meeting on 27 April 1829 came out strongly against the Company, much to Prentice's approval. Pride of place in his long report went to the speech of Shuttleworth. Judging by this speech Shuttleworth fully deserved his reputation for skilful oratory and commercial expertise. He spoke with a great gasp of detail, clarity and force, mixing in a few humorous asides and even some quotations from classic literary works. He was certain that the Company's monopoly should be abolished. He stressed the need for unanimity and a determined campaign, since the interests who wanted to maintain the monopoly were

1. Guardian, 31 Jan., 7 Feb. 1829.

2. Chronicle, 7 April 1827, 7 Feb., 25 April 1829; Courier, 31 Jan., 7 Feb. 1829; Times, 4, 25 April 1829.

strong in Parliament and in business circles. Shuttleworth also spoke of the inefficiency within the Company, the misuse of privileges and revenues, the opposition to reforms and the narrow desire to perpetuate its system of patronage. He blamed the Company for costing the nation a fortune in lost trade and emphasised that the East, especially China, had the potential to be an enormous and vital market for British goods.¹ The Courier, which gave the meeting a mixed reception and found some of Shuttleworth's comments excessive, was keen to promote local economic interests but was unenthusiastic about free trade doctrines when they were pushed too far, and cannot have been pleased to see Manchester's reformers and free traders taking such a prominent role in local affairs. The Courier had criticised them in the past, and also attacked Huskisson and the 'new school' which had influenced economic policy in recent years.² After the April 1829 meeting the campaign for freer trade with the East grew in strength. The Guardian, Chronicle and Times provided publicity and support, the Chamber continued its efforts and another important town meeting on 21 January 1830 (at which Shuttleworth was again a speaker) reaffirmed the views previously expressed. It was also pointed out that India could be a new supplier of raw cotton; Manchester men were always conscious of their dependence for raw cotton on the U.S.A. The government was applauded for its promise of a committee of inquiry, but Prentice and Taylor were disappointed by its first report

1. Times, 2 May 1829; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 63, 67; Guardian and Chronicle, 2 May 1829; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1829; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 358-65, 376-81.

2. Courier, 25 April, 2 May 1829.

(July 1830) which was favourable to the East India Company. Still, the pressure from Manchester and elsewhere was eventually rewarded when the India Act of 1833 arranged for the reorganisation of the Company's commercial business.¹

Another region of special interest to the Manchester business community was Central and South America. There were important markets for Manchester goods in this subcontinent, though Manchester men often complained about the trade restrictions imposed in the Spanish-controlled areas. Spain's domestic problems after 1815 and her weakening control over her American colonies were welcomed in Manchester. It was felt that trade with new independent states would be more plentiful and profitable than it had been when those states had been under Spanish rule. The early 1820s saw the local newspapers and the Chamber pressing for prompt diplomatic recognition of the newly independent states. The liberal Gazette welcomed developments in South America on commercial grounds and also because it was keen to support the cause of freedom.² Manchester's trade with the region continued to expand, but alarm was raised in 1830 when it was clear that Spain was planning an invasion to regain control of Mexico. There had been an Anglo-Mexican commercial treaty in 1825, and

1. Times, 23 May 1829, 9, 23 Jan., 20 Feb. 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 67; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 34; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 399-403; Courier, 23 Jan. 1830; Prentice, Sketches, 354; Guardian, 23 Jan., 6, 13, 27 Feb., 6, 20 March, 24, 31 July 1830, 11 Feb. 1832; Chronicle, 23 Jan. 1830; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1830, 1831, 1832.

2. Gazette, 12, 19 June 1824; Guardian, 5, 12, 19 June 1824; Chronicle, 19 June 1824; Exch.H., 6 Nov. 1821, 23 Dec. 1823; Courier, 8 Jan. 1825; Mercury, 2 May 1820, 7 May 1822; Redford, Merchants, 99-100; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1823.

the importance of the Mexican trade to Manchester had been highlighted by the Guardian in the summer of 1829.¹ Now, in 1830, a special meeting of the Chamber on 21 April decided to cooperate with Liverpool merchants in lobbying the government and urging it to deter the Spaniards from ill-advised action. Prentice agreed that commerce would be endangered if Spain went ahead but was more concerned about the threat to the liberties of a free people. The government replied to representations with a promise to do whatever it could.² Subsequent months saw discussions in Manchester on matters such as the port duties at Montevideo, naval protection for merchant shipping to South America, and Brazilian customs. Parts of Europe valued by Manchester as trading partners and the subject of meetings and correspondence included towns and territories in Russia, Turkey, Germany, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain. Often the concern was with the internal political instability of these areas, since this had obvious implications for commerce. Another concern was access to and passage through the Baltic.³

The concern of Manchester's merchants and manufacturers to defend and extend foreign trade involved them in debates about the government's commercial policies, and these debates were particularly animated during

1. Redford, Merchants, 103; Guardian, 20 June 1829.

2. Times, 24 April 1830; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1829, 1830.

3. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1820, 1821, 1825, 1826, 1827, 1829, 1830, 1831; Redford, Merchants, 87-8, 90-92, ch. VII, VIII; Gazette, 18 Feb. 1826; Walters and Street, 395; Exch.H., 16 Jan. 1816, 1, 8 Aug. 1820, 27 March, 1, 8, 15 May 1821, 6 Aug., 2 Oct., 13 Dec. 1822; Guardian, 22 Jan. 1825, 13 Sept. 1828; 'Chamber Hundred Yrs Ago', 81; Courier, 10, 17, 24 Oct., 7, 14, 21, 28 Nov. 1829; Mercury, 19 June 1821.

the 1820s when reforms and liberalisation seemed to be the order of the day and when attention was increasingly drawn to such matters as 'reciprocity', rules of navigation, tariff policy and commercial treaties.¹ The minister responsible for many of the reforms of these years, William Huskisson, had no firmer supporter in Manchester than J. E. Taylor. From early 1825 Taylor constantly praised and defended Huskisson's policies and was often astounded that the opponents of freer trade could claim that the Huskisson school had ruined commerce.² The Exchange Herald, before Aston sold it in October 1826, also approved of Huskisson and the liberal-minded members of the government who were advancing the cause of commercial freedom.³ The Courier seemed generally in favour of the relaxation of commercial regulations at first, but before long began to argue that Huskisson was going too far and to object to the details of many measures being proposed. In February 1826 the Courier opposed the commercial treaties being negotiated with Columbia, France and the Hanseatic Republics on the grounds that Britain was giving too much for what she would receive. 'Freedom', 'reciprocity', 'enlightened policy' and similar terms were all very fine, but they were too often incorrectly applied and uncritically appraised. The Courier began to blame free trade doctrines for rising commercial confusion and

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1. On contemporary commercial policy, C. R. Fay, 'The Movement towards Free Trade', Cambridge History of the British Empire (1961), ii. 388-414; Boyd Hilton, Corn, Cash and Commerce. The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815-30 (1977), possibly the most valuable conclusion of which is that 'the main purpose of theory was to justify, not originate measures'.
 2. Guardian, 26 March 1825, 17 Feb. 1827, 13 Dec. 1828, 4, 18, 25 July, 26 Sept. 1829, 17 April, 15 May 1830.
 3. Exch.H., 9 Dec. 1823, 29 March 1825.

hardship, and was soon an avid champion of the shipping interests and others who wanted the return of the old protective barriers.¹ The directors of the Chamber were more favourable towards Huskisson and the commercial reforms of the 1820s, and in May 1828 passed a vote of thanks to Huskisson on his retirement from office.² A new round of arguments accompanied Huskisson's visit to Manchester in August 1829; the Chronicle and Courier assailed his principles and past policies while the Guardian defended them.³ The Courier went on to attack the whole system of the new 'economists' and to praise the ideas of such Tory protectionists as the Newark M.P. Sadler, the future leader of the factory reform movement, who had recently declared that the national wealth and the people's welfare should not be sacrificed to capital, 'the mammon of political economy'.⁴ Taylor regretted Huskisson's death in 1830, and Prentice also mourned the loss of a useful public figure, though he had attacked Huskisson in the past for the latter's conduct on the corn laws.⁵

Manchester's business community was very concerned to secure for local trade an effective and influential parliamentary representation. The petitioning and campaigning of the Chamber and previous committees of merchants and manufacturers on commercial questions had certainly been useful, and local commercial interests had been served by the county

1. Courier, 26 March 1825, 11 Feb. 1826, 3 March, 12 May 1827.

2. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1825, 1828.

3. Chronicle, 29 Aug., 12 Sept., 10 Oct. 1829; Courier, 22 Aug., 5, 12, 19 Sept. 1829; Guardian, 5, 19 Sept. 1829.

4. Courier, 26 Sept. 1829.

5. Guardian and Times, 18 Sept. 1830.

M.Ps and by other M.Ps. who had some acquaintance with Manchester men and affairs, but the prospect of parliamentary seats for Manchester in 1827-8 during the Penryn affair and more importantly in 1831-2 made Manchester businessmen think increasingly in terms of sending their own representatives to sit in Parliament. As their oracle the Guardian said at the end of 1827, the real problem with the representative system was not the exclusion of the lower orders but that of the commercial middle classes.¹ The desire for parliamentary seats had been strong for years. One of the earliest acts of the Chamber was to send Parliament a petition in June 1820 in favour of transferring the Grampound franchise to the freeholders of Salford and Blackburn Hundreds.² There was much discussion in 1831-2 about the effects the Reform Bill might have on local commerce, and many felt that the vote should go to as many Manchester businessmen as possible. A meeting of the Chamber on 18 April 1831 heard complaints that the Reform Bill gave the vote to resident householders but not to gentlemen who conducted their business in Manchester but lived beyond the proposed borough boundaries. The 1827 measure to give Manchester the seats of Penryn had proposed to enfranchise householders and occupiers of warehouses and other property. Richard Potter, Prentice and J. B. Smith were members of the Chamber at this time and attended the April 1831 assembly. They argued that the Chamber should not act on the question of the franchise because it was not founded to consider political subjects and because political debate would destroy unanimity among the membership. (They may have suspected

1. Guardian, 22 Dec. 1827.

2. Street and Walters, 394.

that the Chamber was bound to favour a higher voting qualification than they themselves were hoping for, though they did not stress this.) After some argument their objections were overruled. The Reform Bill was soon altered in any case, with warehouses and counting houses included in the qualification, so agitation by the Chamber was not necessary.¹ As the voice of the business community the Guardian was anxious to see the franchise include business premises. By the autumn of 1831, moreover, Taylor was hoping that the Reform Bill would be passed without delay because the suspense and agitation were harming trade.² Meanwhile thoughts were turning to the kind of candidates that should be returned by commercial constituencies like Manchester. Many commentators, including Taylor, agreed that merchants would make excellent M.P.s. This was disputed by radical journalist and labour leader Doherty, and as far as Prentice was concerned commercial knowledge was crucial but only one of several requisite qualities in a representative of Manchester.³

There was much discussion in Manchester about commercial practices and procedures which had an unsettling effect on local trade or seemed to threaten the rights and welfare of the honest trader. A strong movement arose in the town against fraudulent debtors, for example, and many petitions were organised demanding that parliamentary attention should be

1. Times, 16, 23 April 1831, 18 Feb. 1832; Chronicle, 23 April 1831; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1831.

2. Guardian, 19 March, 29 Oct. 1831.

3. Guardian, 8 Sept. 1832; Voice, 9 July 1831; Times, 18 June 1831.

paid to the defective state of the laws on bankruptcy and insolvencies. October 1822 saw the establishment of a Manchester Society for opposition to Fraudulent Debtors, of which Taylor was a founder member. His Guardian, indeed, was to be a consistent advocate of parliamentary action on this matter. The other local newspapers were also favourable. In December 1822 Taylor and Thomas Potter were among those who requisitioned the town officers for a public meeting to petition Parliament for the repeal of the insolvent debtor laws, said to be too mild and an encouragement to malpractice. Manchester businessmen wanted more protection against the unscrupulous or inept trader.¹ In May 1823 the Guardian welcomed the parliamentary inquiry into the laws affecting the liability of merchants and factors. A prominent complaint relating to the law of principal and factor was that a person who purchased goods in the hands of an agent who had no authority to sell them could be sued by the owner, even though the purchaser had no way of knowing that the goods he brought were not the property of the seller. This was an anomaly Taylor highlighted in April 1824, when he welcomed Huskisson's decision to have the law repealed.² In the following month the Guardian came out strongly in favour of Althorp's bill to facilitate the recovery of small debts.³ Members of the band who were still engaged in trade must have had plenty of experience of the problems caused by lenient laws. In

1. Gazette, 28 Dec. 1822, 11 Jan. 1823; Guardian, 11 Jan. 1823; Chronicle, 11 Jan. 1823; Exch.H. 3, 31 Dec. 1822, 14 Jan. 1823; Mercury, 9 March, 18 May 1819; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 83-7; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1820.

2. Guardian, 24 May 1823, 17 April 1824.

3. Guardian, 8 May 1824.

November 1825, for instance, the Potters had to arrange to 'look after' the affairs of a London customer who could not meet his engagements.¹ The Chamber was also active on these issues during the 1820s and 30s.² The unsettling and damaging effects of speculation were of concern too, and members of the band involved themselves in local discussions of this problem. The local newspapers were most condemnatory of rash speculative activities and the carrying on of business without secure foundations.³ It is interesting, though, that in the winter of 1829-30 when local trade was depressed the Guardian suggested that speculative buying of cotton would be of advantage. This was a curious reversal of policy for Taylor, prompted by his observation that the consumption of cotton was increasing faster than imports. Prentice and others doubted that speculation could ever be advantageous, while a meeting of Manchester manufacturers on 26 January 1830 came out against speculative buying of cotton. Prentice's Times was soon claiming that Taylor's commercial advice was faulty and that the Guardian's usefulness on this score had been greatly overrated.⁴

Manchester businessmen were always very interested in the safety and efficiency of the circulating medium used in trade, and evinced a decided preference against the issuing and use of local banknotes and more

1. R. Potter Colln., iv. 21-2.

2. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1825, 1828, 1832.

3. Prentice, Sketches, 248; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 26-7; Guardian, 18 June, 19 Nov. 1825, 5 April 1828; Courier, 15 Jan., 9 April, 3, 17 Dec. 1825; Exch.H., 27 Oct., 15 Dec. 1825, 9, 16 Feb. 1826.

4. See Times and Guardian, Jan.-Feb. 1830; Chronicle, 30 Jan. 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 37.

generally the use of any paper not backed by specie.¹ Members of the band were prominent in the debates and activities relating to the currency question. An important public meeting in the Exchange on 23 August 1821 set the tone for many that were to follow. Baxter, Taylor, Shuttleworth, the Potters, Atkinson and Harvey were all among the requisitionists, and Taylor, Baxter and Atkinson were among the movers and seconders of resolutions. The meeting decided that a secure currency could not involve any reliance on individual credit and that bank failures and general distress would be the inevitable results of the issuing of local notes. Alarm was expressed about the issue of local notes elsewhere in the region, and it was decided that Manchester banks should issue no notes at all, lest they be regarded as having sanctioned and encouraged the practice. Notes that had already been issued were to be confined in circulation and not used for distant payments. They were not to be regarded as legal tender nor accepted as payment for rent or debts. They could not be used as a basis for loans. Baxter emphasised the dangers of this latter practice and said it could lead to overtrading and improvident speculation. Finally the meeting resolved that the issuing of local notes was especially dangerous in times of commercial hardship and would mean potential disaster for the whole district. Therefore local business would continue to be based as far as possible on gold coin and Bank of England notes. Security was to be the watchword, and a special committee was appointed to prevent the introduction into

1. Grindon, Manchester Banks, for a useful account of local banking activities and ideas in this era.

Manchester of dangerous and unsatisfactory currency.¹ Further steps were taken after another meeting on 24 October 1822; this time Taylor, Atkinson and Baxter were appointed to the committee formed to further the purposes of the assembly. The Chamber approved these steps and in October 1822 also recommended the local fixing of a recognised basis of values between notes of different amounts, coin and bills of exchange.²

The business depression and financial crisis of 1825-6 excited renewed concern. The Chamber called for legislative restrictions on the circulation of local notes, and in March 1826 Prentice was glad to report that local notes had been almost entirely excluded from the town and district.³ There was also much discussion of the government's withdrawal of small notes from circulation (provided for in an Act of March 1826, but not to take full effect until April 1829), the establishment of branches of the Bank of England, and the provision that joint stock banks could be established beyond a 65-mile radius of London. The Guardian was enthusiastic about these reforms and welcomed the establishment in Manchester of a branch of the Bank of England in September 1826.⁴ There were some dissentient voices, though - those of the Exchange Herald (which preferred joint stock banking)⁵ and of

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1. Gazette, 18, 25 Aug. 1821; Observer, 1 Sept. 1821; Chronicle, 25 Aug. 1821; Mercury, 28 Aug. 1821; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 33-55; Hay Scrapbks., x. 121; Prentice, Sketches, 218-23.
 2. Gazette, 2 Nov. 1822; Chronicle, 26 Oct. 1822; 'Chamber Hundred Yrs Ago', 320-21.
 3. Gazette, 17 Dec. 1825, 18 Feb., 18 March 1826.
 4. Guardian, 3, 17, 31 Dec. 1825, 21 Jan., 11, 18 Feb., 4 March 1826, 6 Oct., 15 Dec. 1827; Grindon, Manchester Banks, ch. XVIII.
 5. Exch.H., 3 Aug. 1826.

country bankers who feared competition. (Taylor pointed out that his approval of Bank of England branches did not mean that he approved of its monopoly. He opposed monopolies in principle but felt that the Bank's charter was a fait accompli and could not justly be interfered with while it was in force.) Members of the band soon became involved in joint stock banking schemes. Thomas Potter, Baxter and J. B. Smith were among the founders and directors of the new Manchester Savings Bank established in December 1828 (see above, chapter IV (2)). There was continuing discussion of local financial arrangements. A meeting in December 1828, attended by Taylor, Prentice and Richard Potter, decided on new regulations to prevent the circulation of local notes that was likely to follow the suppression of small notes under the 1826 Act.¹ The currency was increasingly discussed in the local papers, especially the Guardian. In January 1829 Taylor argued against the Attwood view of the currency system and also against the Potter-Prentice argument (expressed at a meeting on 18 December 1828) that if small notes were withdrawn the value of money would rise and so make it impossible for many people to pay their taxes - which meant that the withdrawal of small notes would have to be accompanied by a considerable cut in taxation. Taylor denied that the nation could not pay the taxes being exacted; business was expanding. All that was needed was an issue of coin to make up for the withdrawn small notes. There was no reason why the pressure of public burdens should increase. In January 1830 Taylor discussed the views of Cobbett,

1. Times, 5, 19 Dec. 1828; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 340-54; Chronicle, 20 Dec. 1828; Courier, 20 Dec. 1828.

then lecturing in Manchester, and decided that Cobbett had exaggerated the ill-effects of the withdrawal of small notes. Since Cobbett's premise was wrong it followed that the rest of his argument was wrong too, particularly his view that economic distress was due to a change in the value of currency and could not be relieved except by reducing taxation to its 1791 level. Various suggestions from landed men, Tories and others at this time, that small notes should be reintroduced and the currency depreciated, were met by Taylor with derision.¹

On general matters relating to the currency there was a good deal of bullionist orthodoxy in Manchester. Paper was forcefully condemned by the Gazette for example, during the troubled weeks of late 1825. Prentice often wrote of the dangers and inconvenience of paper money and of the need to restrict the circulation of paper in favour of 'true coin'. Harvey criticised the 'paper system' at a public meeting in August 1826. In June 1829 Prentice approved of Peel's stand against a Birmingham demand for reflationary policies and an issue of banknotes: Prentice argued that an issue of banknotes might for a time stimulate trade but this would produce a false prosperity which would soon disappear. This was no time for such stimulants. What was required was a specie-based currency along with tax cuts and corn law repeal.² Taylor was also an advocate of a metallic circulating medium. Specie meant confident and sound business dealings, paper meant confusion and artificiality. In the later 1820s he often condemned Attwoodian demands

1. Guardian, 6, 13, 20 Sept., 22 Nov., 13, 20, 27 Dec. 1828, 3 Jan., 25 April 1829, 9, 16, 23 Jan., 6, 20 Feb., 4, 18 Dec. 1830.

2. Gazette, 10, 17 Dec. 1825, 19 Aug. 1826; Times, 13 June 1829.

for reflationary policies and the repeal of Peel's 1819 Act restoring cash payments.¹ The Tory Chronicle was against tamperings with the currency, hostile towards paper, in favour of secure policies instead of stopgap measures, and critical of Attwood. Aston's Exchange Herald was also in favour of a sound specie-based currency.²

Currency matters, taxation, corn laws and other issues like parliamentary reform were often regarded as closely related and so not discussed in isolation from each other. Prentice's leading articles 'On the Causes and Cure of the Present Distress' in July 1826 argued that corn law repeal, a stable currency and a reduction in taxation were the three essential and interconnected reforms necessary to solve the nation's ills and provide both cheap food and cheap government.³ A meeting to consider the prevalent distress on 17 August 1826 decided to petition for the twin reforms of corn law repeal and lower taxation. Baxter, Shuttleworth, Richard Potter, Harvey and Prentice were among the organisers (in the absence of any cooperation from the churchwardens) and speakers. Harvey dwelt on the evil effects of paper currency, Baxter attacked the churchwardens, Shuttleworth spoke on the corn laws, and Prentice and Potter on taxation. Potter argued that the government could reduce taxation if it was more efficient and economical. Prentice thought that if the government abandoned 'the not palpable juggle of the sinking fund' and exercised retrenchment, the nation could be relieved of £10m.

1. Guardian, 12 Jan., 2 Feb. 1822, 16 May, 20 June 1829.

2. Chronicle, 9 Jan., 12 June 1830; Exch.H., 7 Oct. 1817, 15 May 1821.

3. Gazette, 15, 22 July 1826.

in taxes per year. This meeting was an important event for the band. It was reported and discussed all over the kingdom. The band had taken the leading role and can be said to have spoken to a truly national audience (perhaps for the first time since Peterloo). Richard Potter later recalled that 'the proceedings excited much attention', and soon after the event Prentice was rejoicing that 'no meeting held in Manchester ever created so general an interest or received so general an approbation'.¹

Prentice had much respect for Cobbett's views on taxation and the financial system and gave extensive coverage to the latter's lectures in Manchester early in 1830. Two of Cobbett's arguments seemed to be particularly sound: that high expenditure and high taxation were prominent causes of social and economic distress, and that it was wrong to separate the questions of currency and taxation as if they were unrelated - in truth they were branches on the same rotten tree.² A public meeting on the state of the nation in February 1830 heard more speeches by members of the band and decided to petition for a reduction in taxes and government spending, the repeal of the corn laws and other commercial restrictions, and an end to the disturbance of commerce by

1. Gazette, 5, 12, 19, 26 Aug. 1826; Chronicle, 5, 19 Aug. 1826; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 42; R. Potter Colln., iv. 29; Prentice, Sketches, 284-7.

2. Times, 16, 23, 30 Jan. 1830; Sketches, 353. At the end of Jan. 1830 Prentice published a 3d. pamphlet entitled 'Opinions on the Currency Question with a review of Mr. Cobbett's lectures', based partly on his recent newspaper editorials.

alterations in the currency.¹ Prentice often made the connection between parliamentary reform and the taxation and currency issues - and the corn laws for that matter - as had many plebeian radical leaders (to judge by their meetings during the years). Prentice often commended them for their sound opinions on these related subjects.²

The Prentice-Potter argument that the withdrawal of small notes should be accompanied by a reduction in taxation has been referred to. They made this point at the Town Hall meeting of 18 December 1828, but Taylor, G. W. Wood and others carried the majority with them when they retorted that the meeting should stick to the currency issue and leave taxation to be discussed on some other occasion.³ Soon the Times was complaining about the harmful effects of the withdrawal of small notes. Many traders, businessmen and manufacturers were experiencing difficulties in carrying on their transactions, and the latest depression was deepening all the time. In February 1830 Prentice repeated that economic distress would not be so bad had the government reduced taxation

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1. Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 403-7; Times, 20, 27 Feb., 13 March, 3 April 1830; Chronicle, 20, 27 Feb. 1830; Guardian, 13, 20 March, 10 April 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 75-6; Prentice, Sketches, 354-8; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 34-5. Smith considered the most memorable part of the meeting to have been the speech of Richard Potter, 'who in describing the wretchedness of the poor man's cottage became so overpowered by his feelings as to be unable to proceed'.
 2. On the workers' meetings e.g. Gazette, 28 Oct. 1826, 24 March 1827; Times, 19 Sept. 1829, 22 May 1830; Chronicle, 28 Oct. 1826, 24 March 1827; Courier, 28 Oct. 1826. For some of Prentice's comments, Gazette, 2 Dec. 1826, 13 Jan. 1827; Sketches - especially ch. XXII; Times, 16 May, 25 July, 29 Aug. 1829, 28 April 1832.
 3. Times, 19 Dec. 1828. Prentice estimated that the 1820s saw a reduction in the amount of paper currency in circulation of fl1m. in a five-year period. Sketches, 220.

at the same time as it withdrew small notes from circulation.¹

Prentice's argument with Taylor on the matter in December 1828 indicates only one of the many issues on which they disagreed. It followed an earlier argument over taxation in August and September 1826, when Prentice drew attention to Taylor's remarks on the ability of the nation to pay the taxes required of it. Taylor's view was that the level of taxation was supportable. Yet he had ignored the fact that the value of money had been altered in recent times. As Prentice said, the weight of taxation was not to be estimated by referring to the amount of money paid but rather its worth. Taylor replied that he had purposefully left depreciation out of his calculations because he wanted to test the Gazette! The argument went on for weeks, and soon involved the problem of the national debt. Taylor accused Prentice of favouring a Cobbettite 'equitable adjustment' - 'the robbery of the public creditors'. Prentice denied this; all he wanted was justice. The burden of taxation should be shifted from those who had suffered most to those who had suffered least. Economic conditions dictated that the fundholders could no longer be indulged as formerly. Prentice did not make it clear precisely what he advocated with regard to the national debt. Apparently he was in favour of some alterations but not to the degree Cobbett was demanding.²

Prentice's views on taxation were probably more representative of the opinions of Manchester's respectable reformers than Taylor's were, and certainly more representative of the band's opinions. 'What a fine country England would be', he once wrote to Richard Potter, 'were it

1. Times, 14 March 1829, 6 Feb. 1830.

2. Gazette, 12 Aug., 2, 16, 30 Sept. 1826; Guardian, 26 Aug., 9, 23 Sept., 7, 21 Oct. 1826.

taxed less heavily'.¹ The consensus was that taxation was too heavy and that the burden had been increased by changes in the value of the currency. Special attention was sometimes given to those taxes which pressed disproportionately on the commercial middle classes. Prentice focussed on these in February 1824.² In 1826 he said that the anomalous and unjust system of direct taxation diminished the profits of the shopkeeper, merchant and manufacturer but left the demands on them unchanged. Nor did Prentice forget those taxes on necessities which burdened the labouring ranks. The taxes on malt, soap, beer, tea, tobacco, leather and other items meant that the poor weaver paid out a full 50% of his meagre earnings each week in indirect taxation. In reality he was handing his pennies over to the fundholder, sinecurist, placeman and pensioner.³ Again the need for parliamentary reform was clear: tax and currency improvements and a more representative system of government were inseparable.⁴ Taylor occasionally made this point too. In the early 1820s he condemned the financial management of the government and regularly wrote on budget proposals and the state of the revenues. He considered the interest on the national debt an unbearable burden, though could not approve of adjustments that would unduly disadvantage the public creditors - so he disagreed with Cobbett. Anyone who lost out

1. Prentice to Potter, 27 April 1828, R. Potter Colln. xii. ff.153-6.

2. Gazette, 28 Feb. 1824.

3. Gazette, 15 July 1826. These remarks were scorned by local Tories: Courier, 22, 29 July 1826.

4. C.f. N. Gash, 'Cheap Government 1815-74' in his Pillars of Government and other Essays on State and Society (1986), 43-54. Belief in the connections between parliamentary corruption, high government spending, heavy taxation, the national debt and currency regulations had a long intellectual ancestry behind it, but became all the more relevant because of the strain of the French Wars.

through some tampering with the national debt would have to be compensated. Besides, said Taylor, there should be no interference with the national debt until a programme of rigid economy had been fully tried. The things Taylor wanted - the dismantling of the sinking fund, the reduction of taxation and possibly some minor interference with the national debt involving compensations - were bound to be resisted, and this was where parliamentary reform came in. A more representative legislature would be more willing to adopt the bold remedial policies that were necessary.¹ Taylor's views on the national debt changed little over the coming years. After his argument with Prentice in August and September 1826 he wrote a long piece for the Guardian in February 1827 in which he stated that the nation's contract with its creditors had to be kept and that they could not be paid less than they had been promised.² The Chronicle and Exchange Herald were also against the breaking of contracts with the public creditors. The Courier opposed Cobbettite 'spoilation' and was against any tampering with the sinking fund. The fame of Pitt rested in large measure on the wisdom of his financial measures, and they should not be abandoned.³

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1. Guardian, 9, 16 June 1821, 2, 16 March 1822, 18 Jan., 1 March 1823. Gash has called the sinking fund 'the final economic futility', a device to reassure the public that it was still the government's intention to pay off the debt - but one that involved the borrowing of sums at a high rate of interest to maintain a fund yielding a lower rate. Gash, 'After Waterloo', 155.
 2. Guardian, 10 Feb. 1827.
 3. Chronicle, 9 Jan. 1830; Exch.H. 7 Jan. 1823; Courier, 19 April 1828, 9 Jan., 20 Feb. 1830.

2. The band and the corn laws

Manchester opinion was generally hostile towards the corn laws but formal declarations usually fell short of demanding repeal, betraying the caution of the majority and its sense of policy and expediency. Prentice later recalled that feeling in Manchester on the 1815 law had been rather lukewarm. It was the band who most forcibly voiced the demand for full repeal and played a crucial role in converting many others to this position; they were later to be among the founders and most active leaders and supporters of the League. But it did take a long time to 'educate' Manchester opinion on this question. In part this was probably because this was such an emotive and complicated matter. Many agreed about the injustice and evil effects of the corn regulations, but there was some disagreement about what should and could be done about them in prevalent political and economic conditions. Also there were several related issues that aroused arguments - food prices, wage levels and the prospects for the export trade in Manchester goods. Before the time of the League, when opinion in favour of repeal had achieved a measure of ascendancy, the tasks of keeping the corn laws before the public, of stimulating debate and of influencing local opinion was performed most notably by the band. It was largely thanks to them that the main theoretical and practical arguments for repeal had been advanced and elaborated long before the founding of the League.¹

The law of 1815 was strongly condemned by Manchester's respectable

1. C.f. W. H. Chaloner, 'The Agitation against the Corn Laws', in Ward, Popular Movements, 136; T. S. Ashton, 'The Origins of the Manchester School', The Manchester School of Economics, Commerce and Administration (1931), vol. i; D. G. Barnes, A History of the English Corn Laws from 1660-1846 (1930), 216.

reformers. Their Gazette argued that the first object of government should be to feed the people at the cheapest rate. Ministers should not be swayed from this task by the demands of the landed interest, a tiny minority of the population. The key to the problem seemed to be land rentals. The Gazette felt that a restriction on corn imports would be unnecessary (even had landed men been justified in asking for it) if rents could somehow be abated. After all, it had to be remembered that 'on the price of corn depends that of almost every other article of consumption. It is the standard by which the price of everything, even of daily labour, is regulated'.¹ But the town meeting of 27 February 1815 (predominantly a local establishment affair) was a disappointment to the band. The resolutions had more to do with Mancunian businessmen's self-interest than with free trade principles, and the matters most discussed were Manchester's export trade and the cotton industry's need for cheap labour.² The meeting was one of the key events in the early history of the band. Prentice had only just settled in Manchester, and most of the others were still only beginning their careers as local politicians. What the meeting did was to draw these men closer together. They shared a common outlook on contemporary affairs and an enthusiasm for rational and sensible reform, and in February 1815 they disagreed with some of the statements that had been made at the corn law meeting. They thought that opposition to the corn laws could not be based merely on cheap labour and Manchester export trade arguments. This was only part of the issue. The corn laws affected the whole community, employer

1. Gazette, 21 Jan. 1815.

2. Gazette, 25 Feb., 4, 11, 18, 25 March 1815.

and worker alike, and were bound up with matters like rent, agricultural production and farming practices as well as the needs and desires of the manufacturing and commercial regions.

All this was made clear by Shuttleworth in his 'Plain Observations on the Corn Laws', inserted as an anonymous advertisement in some of the local newspapers after the 27 February meeting. Shuttleworth argued that it was natural and right for land rents to fall in peacetime since the circumstances which had caused rent increases were now altered. The high price of subsistence necessarily raised that of labour and all commodities, but the link was variable rather than fixed: 'it is a delusion to hold out to the lower classes that wages or the price of labour can or will rise in the same extent with the proposed rise in the price of food'. Britain's foreign trade would cease if it could not be carried on more cheaply than that of her economic rivals. Less trade would mean unemployment and so a general fall in the rate of wages. Workers had patiently submitted to high provision prices in wartime and it would be scandalous if these were artificially continued. Also, 'the complaint of the landholders, that they are oppressed by protecting duties favouring our manufacturers, is a misapprehension; for the manufacturers furnish better markets for the products of agriculture than could otherwise be found for them'. Agriculture already had various protecting duties anyway, far higher than those protecting manufactures. Shuttleworth was convinced that corn laws 'can only be effectual when accompanied by legislative restrictions extended to rent, and as this cannot perhaps be practically enforced, the free importation of foreign corn alone can keep down prices'. Some lands should be taken out of cultivation, and if only the best land was used this would promote a

rise in output: 'The only equitable increase of rent must be drawn from the increase of the quantity of produce, and not from the increase of the price of it'. Artificial rent increases would be an injustice to all classes in the community and would only serve the landowners. If the high price of food was to be continued by legislative interference, then this should at least wait until rents had fallen to their just level.¹

Shuttleworth's arguments were those that the band were to advance for years to come. Prentice's 'open and strong expression' of support for them in February 1815 led to a visit from Baxter and Taylor, and after this he immediately joined that circle of respectable liberals which Richard Potter was to dub the 'small but determined band'.² J. B. Smith was another who was animated by the February 1815 meeting. An avid free trader from youth and a disciple of Adam Smith, he felt that wages depended on the demand for labour and rejected the notion that high food prices occasioned by the corn laws would have the effect of raising wages.³ The band also approached the question as one of humanitarian and moral idealism: corn laws were immoral, monopolies unrighteous, and the movement for free trade should be a religious and emotive crusade. Free trade was not just a matter of commercial self-interest but also concerned moral obligations. The 1815 law was objectionable on three counts (as Prentice put it):

... in the first place as an impious attempt to intercept, for the profit of a few, the gifts which God had bestowed for the benefit of all; in the second place, as an impolitic and

1. Gazette, 11 March 1815.

2. Prentice, Sketches, 69-74; Somerville, 385-90.

3. J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 1-2, 9-11.

impoverishing interference with the liberty of exchanging the surplus produce of other lands; and in the third place, as a gross injustice to the working classes, the great mass of the nation, tending at once to lower their wages and raise the price of food.¹

There was some equivocation in the policy of Manchester's Tory papers towards the 1815 law and the town meeting. It was felt that protection for agriculture was necessary and justifiable, but that the measure passed was probably too harmful to the commercial and manufacturing interests. The arguments relating to cheap labour and Manchester's export rate were lauded, and the Tory papers said little about free trade theory.² Once the corn bill was passed the discussion about it subsided. The majority became inactive on the question. Prentice felt that Manchester's opposition to the 1815 measure was faint and ineffectual - partly because it was based on erroneous principles (that high prices would raise wages, for example) and rooted in class interest rather than free trade doctrines. Free trade took a long time to gain a hold over Manchester middle-class opinion (and many workers saw the 'truths' about the operation of the corn laws long before their employers did). As Prentice said: 'I did not find many persons of my own class in Manchester whose opinions on free trade in corn were in accordance with my own'.³ It could be said that the February 1815

1. Sketches, 61-5, 68. The links between free trade and moral idealism are also discussed in Prentice's League, especially preface xxv and vol. i, 230; N. McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League (1958), 104; Cowherd, Politics of Dissent, ch. 10.

2. Chronicle, 25 Feb., 4, 11, March 1815; Exch.H., 21, 28 Feb., 7 March 1815; Mercury, 28 Feb., 7 March 1815.

3. Sketches, 69, 74-6.

meeting did not represent an attack on the corn laws generally - for what was at stake was not the corn duty itself but its proposed increase. The relative lack of interest in the question in 1815 could be linked with Manchester businessmen's preoccupation with other burdens that fell more directly on them, like the import duty on raw cotton or the proposed tax on the windows and rents of commercial premises.¹ It was many years, moreover, before the Chamber shook off its moderation and hesitancy on the issue and came out clearly for repeal.

Clearly some historians have exaggerated Manchester's devotion to liberalism and free trade. G. B. Hertz and L. S. Marshall have argued that economic and political liberalism dominated Manchester thought by about 1820, while V. A. C. Gatrell feels that laissez-faire came to have an unchallenged and total intellectual and practical hegemony over the Manchester business community.² But all this is too neat and simple. Could one body of doctrines really gain such ascendancy, and could there be such uniformity of opinion? Although W. D. Grampp rather oversimplifies the 'Manchester School' as 'a group of businessmen who forced Britain to repeal its corn laws and thereby to commit itself finally to free trade', he does at least make it clear that the School was never a uniform body. It was heterogen^eous, containing a number of distinct interest groups, lacking in consistency and coherence and only really united by a feeling against the corn laws.³ It seems that

1. Redford, Merchants, 134-5; Marshall, Public Opinion, 192-9.

2. Hertz, The Manchester Politician 1750-1912 (1912), esp. ch. III and IV; Marshall, Public Opinion, esp. ch. VIII and X; Gatrell, 'Manchester Parable'.

3. Grampp, The Manchester School of Economics (1960), preface and pp.1-15.

wholesale commitment to a body of economic doctrines was far less important than hopes and expectations about the possible results of free trade policies. There was more interest in practice than principles. It is important to recognise that the advance of free trade opinion in Manchester was slow. The real characteristic of the Manchester businessman was self-interest, not adherence to doctrine. If the relaxation of restrictions suited his interest he favoured it; if it did not he opposed it, as demonstrated by the disagreements over the exportation of machinery or of yarns and twist. Relatively few were convinced that free trade could provide all the answers. Even Watkin, a keen free trader, had to admit that Cobbett had a point when he said that free trade could do harm by allowing foreigners to supply articles previously supplied by fellow-Englishmen - early fruit and vegetables for example - which would increase home unemployment while there was no guarantee that the foreigners would buy English manufactures with their new profits.¹ As for the corn laws, Cooke Taylor's observation is well worth bearing in mind:

It is absurd to say that Manchester was either the birthplace or the cradle of free trade; it can only claim the merit of reviving the demand for the repeal of an impolitic law which had been allowed to slumber during a period of great political excitement and some commercial prosperity.

This fits in with Prentice's picture. Free trade opinion was not dominant in Manchester for many years and even then it did not enjoy a permanent or secure ascendancy. And its fundamental purpose was actually self-protection and self-preservation - to prevent or delay foreign industrial competition and give Manchester manufacturers a commanding

1. Watkin, Fragment No.1, 80-81.

position in existing and future foreign markets.¹ So there was a considerable amount of indifference to free trade doctrines and corn law repeal in Manchester for a long period. Agitation on the corn laws was in any case noticeably dormant during times of low wheat prices. At such times it was more difficult for campaigners like the band to influence people. Prentice later recalled that there had been 'seven years' sleep' on the corn law question in Manchester before the League appeared.²

After 1815 and in the knowledge that there was a distinct lack of general commitment on the corn law issue in Manchester, it was up to the more advanced reformers to keep the matter before the public in readiness for a time when a new campaign could be launched. Hence the Gazette's surveillance of grain prices and occasional warnings about potential food shortages.³ The Guardian also played its part in keeping the issue alive. Meanwhile J. B. Smith was recording his view that the agricultural problems of the early 1820s proved not only that the corn laws were useless but also that the interests of farmers, landowners and agricultural labourers were not the same, despite what the defenders of the corn laws were saying. The fall in the price of corn after a run of good harvests enabled the labourers to buy more food with their wages - so they had no reason to join in the alarmism and complaints of landlords

1. Sketches, 74-5; Somerville, 389-90; the Cooke Taylor quotation (which both Prentice and Somerville cite) is from his The Life and Times of Sir Robert Peel (1846-8).

2. Prentice, League, i. 88; Chaloner, 'Corn Laws', 137.

3. E.g. Gazette, 11 May 1816.

and farmers.¹ In the summer of 1824 when the U.S.A. imposed new tariffs on imported British manufactures, the Manchester liberals blamed the corn laws. Foreigners' reactions to British policy were bound to interest Manchester businessmen, and the Gazette pointed to the continuing economic retaliation Britain was likely to suffer because of the corn laws:

This is a measure to which the States have been impelled by our exclusion of their agricultural produce from our market; and we have thus drawn upon ourselves the double evil of paying a high price for food, and lessening the number of those who could afford to purchase our manufactures.²

Taylor made a similar point, and these arguments were repeated in 1828 when Manchester businessmen were again threatened by increased American protective tariffs.³ Concern about Britain's commercial relations with the U.S.A. rose considerably in Manchester in these years because of America's importance as a supplier of raw cotton (77% of Britain's raw cotton imports from 1815-59).⁴ Of course it could be said that the American government had home industries to protect and would have done so whatever Britain's agricultural policy, but at the time it was understandable for the band to use American tariffs as a propaganda weapon. Another argument was that by preventing foreign states from taking Britain's manufactures the corn laws encouraged these states to develop their own manufacturing industries. This was bound to raise alarm in Manchester. Many Mancunian businessmen, indeed, saw for

1. Guardian, 30 June 1821, 12 Jan., 2 Feb., 11 May 1822; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 25-6.

2. Gazette, 26 June 1824.

3. Guardian, 19, 26 June 1824, 31 May, 14, 28 June, 16 Aug. 1828.

4. Farnie, Cotton Industry, 15.

themselves the extent of foreigners' industrial progress on their commercial travels abroad. Shuttleworth was in Europe on business quite often. Knowledge about the development of foreign industry was rapidly built up during the 1820s and 1830s and became a leading topic of conversation.¹

Once Prentice became the editor of the Gazette in July 1824 that paper was hardly ever silent on the matter of the corn laws. He felt he had a duty to keep it constantly before the public and to improve the public's understanding of it. Convinced that the corn laws did make grain prices artificially high he often compared British prices with those abroad. Early in 1825 he gave the average prices for grains in England and France for October 1824:

	Wheat per qu.	Rye per qu.	Oats per qu.
France	32s. 3d.	18s. 8d.	13s. 2d.
England	58s.	32s.	20s.

This begged the question: how long could such a large difference in prices be tolerated?² Other points stressed in Prentice's articles were the false premises and mistaken direction of government policy, the failure of the corn laws to do what their supporters had hoped and

1. See remarks in Prentice, Tour in United States, 147; Cobden to W. Neild, 30 Sept. 1838, in E. Hughes, 'The development of Cobden's Economic Doctrines and his Methods of Propaganda: some unpublished correspondence', BJRL 22 (1938). C.f. J. Aikin, A Description of the Country from Thirty to Forty Miles around Manchester (1795), 184. See Shuttleworth Scrapbk. (loose leaves) for some of his passports.

2. Gazette, 8 Jan. 1825.

expected of them, the need for an energetic repeal campaign and for class unity in that campaign, the fact that all classes suffered from the operation of the corn laws and would benefit equally from repeal, and the effect repeal would have in promoting a general and cumulative prosperity. In November 1824 he called for masters and workers in the manufacturing regions to unite. They seemed to have forgotten the corn question. Controversies over wages and combinations meant that employers and operatives 'are forgetting in the struggle the operation of laws which are manifestly injurious to the interests of both'.¹

As years passed the problems inherent in the 1815 system became increasingly apparent. There was too much rigidity and also much confusion, with ports alternately opened and closed according to the price averages which were not in themselves a sound guide by which to judge Britain's need for corn. Another problem was the unpredictability of prices. There were growing calls for reform. Ricardo's Protection to Agriculture (1822) recommended a fixed duty beginning at 20s., to be lowered by 1s. a year to 10s. The leading advocate of commercial reforms in the government, Huskisson, also came to favour revision. His statements in favour of a fixed duty and his dissatisfaction with the system of averages were given great emphasis by the Chronicle in May 1824.² Opinion in Manchester in favour of corn law revision was

1. Gazette, 27 Nov. 1824.

2. Chronicle, 22 May 1824. On the operation of the 1815 law, Barnes, 157-79; C. R. Fay, Corn Laws and Social England (1932), 78-81. On Ricardo's opinions, J. R. Dinwiddy, From Luddism to the First Reform Bill (1986), 13-14. I am also grateful to Dr. A. Macintyre for a copy of an unpublished piece on Classical Political Economy which deals with the Ricardian position.

quite strong by early 1825, and the reformers continued to argue that agitation was necessary to urge the government forward in its liberalising commercial policies. A town meeting was held in the Exchange on 3 March 1825. Thomas Potter, Taylor, Shuttleworth and Baxter were among the participants. It was decided to petition for the revision of the corn laws, but Prentice later recorded his disappointment that in 1825 Manchester's merchants and manufacturers were still clinging to the fallacy that high food prices would compel them to pay higher wages. There had been little advance on the selfish and unenlightened position of 1815. J. B. Smith was as disappointed as Prentice.¹ In later years Engels was one who did accuse the Manchester businessmen of demanding corn law repeal only because they felt this would enable them to reduce wages.² In 1901 Elijah Helm argued that the League had not wanted repeal because this would mean lower wages.³ But this historian and former President of the Chamber of Commerce was a great admirer of the League, and his reading of the League's propaganda and records was unquestioning. Many of the Leaguers were strong-willed and self-interested cotton masters who did expect that repeal would benefit them - and they were hardly likely to complain if it did so at the expense of labour. Cumulative prosperity and Cobdenism might have been current by the early 1840s, but what about before this time? It is clear from the complaints of Prentice, J. B. Smith, Shuttleworth and their friends that

1. Guardian, 30 April 1825; Gazette, 19 Feb., 5 March 1825; Chronicle 5 March 1825; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 141-4; Prentice, Sketches, 251-2; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 27-8.

2. Engels, 312, 315-16.

3. Helm, 73, 79-80; c.f. Grampp, ch. 3.

the agitation against the corn laws was for many years based on the cheap labour argument. It was the band's self-appointed task to bring about a conversion and this did begin to occur, albeit very slowly.

Through 1825 the Guardian and Gazette kept up their coverage of the corn law issue; Taylor attacked the aristocracy and Prentice wondered why Huskisson was not doing more to extend his liberalising programme to the corn regulations. It is noticeable that Taylor was talking more about revision than repeal, and also more about the need for cheap labour and the relationship between food prices and wages than about cumulative prosperity and the way in which all classes would benefit from freer trade in corn. So in these important respects Taylor and Prentice were following different courses. This was a matter of how to get people interested in the corn question and how to inculcate sound opinions. Theory was not enough; not everyone accepted or understood free trade doctrines. Exploiting the individual's sense of self-interest was the key to a successful campaign. Prentice and agitators of his ilk recognised this as well as Taylor did, but were more concerned to stress collective interests and the public good alongside sectional and class interests. Meanwhile the Tory Chronicle was arguing in favour of the government's wait and see policy: there should be no changes until all relevant information had been collected and considered.¹

In the distressed months of 1826 Prentice continued to berate the stubbornness of those resisting full repeal. He later said of Canning's

1. Guardian, 26 Feb., 26 March, 16 April, 11 June, 10 Dec. 1825; Gazette, 5, 26 March, 30 April, 12 Nov. 1825; Chronicle, 30 April 1825.

May 1826 proposal to allow the temporary entry of foreign corn at a duty of 12s. a quarter: 'there was not a single argument used in favour of a temporary suspension of the corn laws that would not have been applicable to their total repeal'. At the time he also continued to stress that the government's policy on corn was out of step with the liberalising trend of its other commercial measures. Ministers were displaying 'a disposition to cling to office at a considerable sacrifice of consistency'. In July 1826 his articles 'On the Causes and Cure of the Present Distress' identified the corn laws as one of the fundamental problems that had to be tackled before there could be any improvement in Britain's social and economic conditions. Meanwhile the Guardian continued its detailed criticism of the arguments of the agriculturalists, and even the Literary and Philosophical Society discussed the corn question - unusual in view of its avoidance of public issues. On this occasion, 7 April 1826, Watkin was in attendance.¹ Thanks mainly to the persistence of the band a meeting on the prevalent distress was held on 17 August 1826. Baxter was in the chair and among the speeches was that of Shuttleworth in favour of corn law repeal. Early in 1827 anticipation mounted as it became clear that the ministers were at last going to act on the corn question. The Chronicle hoped for a fair compromise that would be acceptable to both agriculturalist and manufacturer.² Canning introduced a Corn Bill in March 1827 which provided for a sliding scale of duties to operate around

1. Gazette, 1, 29 April, 13, 20 May, 15, 22 July 1826; Prentice, Sketches, 281; Guardian, 31 Dec. 1825, 21 Jan., 11 Feb., 15, 29 April, 13 May 1826; Watkin, Journal, 108.

2. Chronicle, 10 Feb. 1827.

the pivot point of 60s. a quarter, ceasing entirely at 70s. a quarter. It was an advance on the 1822 Act which had introduced a scale of duties on foreign corn between 70s. and 85s. a quarter. This Act had aroused only limited discussion in Manchester and in any case was a dead letter because it did not repeal the 1815 clause prohibiting the entry of corn until the home price reach^{-ed} 80s. This price was never reached while the 1822 Act was in force.¹ Prentice regarded the 1827 bill as wholly inadequate and blamed the manufacturing districts for remaining too quiescent and placing too much reliance on ministers' firmness. Then Wellington carried an amendment in the Lords to prevent bonded corn from coming to market until the price reached 66s. a quarter, and Canning abandoned his measure in June. Prentice had expected such an outcome and was not sorry. The measure would have done little for consumers and the government remained too half-hearted in its readiness to effect reforms. Taylor had welcomed the sliding scale as a step in the right direction; it did not go as far as it should have but at least its moderation would give it a good chance of gaining parliamentary approval. He was outraged by Wellington's amendment and claimed that it had an immediate effect on Manchester's foreign trade. Orders had been cancelled and there had been a serious loss of business - especially for the calico printers. The Chronicle had approved of Canning's scheme on the grounds that protection was better than prohibition, and argued that the abandonment of the Corn Bill was a misfortune for the commercial

1. Exch.H., 9 July 1822; Barnes, 174; N. Gash, Aristocracy and People. Britain 1815-65 (1979), 120-21.

interests.¹

A town meeting was held on 5 July 1827 to discuss what had happened. All parties were represented among the requisitionists, who included Harvey, Taylor, the Potters, Prentice, Watkin, J. B. Smith, Atkinson and many of the band's allies. Shuttleworth, Taylor and Richard Potter were among the speakers, all three agreeing that the corn laws had to be removed and that the abandoned bill would at least have been a beginning. But members of the band were again to be disappointed by the resolutions passed at the meeting. As before these dwelt on Manchester's need for cheap labour and the implication of the corn laws for the export trade in Manchester goods. These were familiar arguments but they had relevance only for the merchants and manufacturers. The meeting advocated 'modification' - apparently along the lines suggested by Canning's sliding scale - but at least the reformers had been able to give expression to liberal sentiments. The Tory Courier and Chronicle did not approve of the meeting, claiming that many respectable townsmen had stayed away and that speakers had been disrespectful towards the House of Lords. Soon after the meeting the Courier printed some observations from the London press in which the Manchester merchants and manufacturers were condemned as hypocrites. They would not allow agriculture its just protection but had become rich thanks to the past protection of the cotton industry. The Guardian rejected this 'compound of twaddle and falsehood'.²

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1. Gazette, 10, 31 March, 16, 23, 30 June 1827; Prentice, Sketches, 296-9; Guardian, 9 Dec. 1826, 10, 17 March, 9, 16, 23 June 1827; Chronicle, 17 March, 16 June 1827.
 2. Gazette, 30 June, 7 July 1827; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 242-51; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 42; Prentice, Sketches, 302; Chronicle, 7 July 1827; Courier, 7, 14 July 1827; Guardian, 21 July 1827.

In the next parliamentary session the corn question was taken up by Huskisson and a new sliding scale was proposed which respected the desire of Wellington, now premier, and the conservatives not to anger the landed interests. The duties in the scale were higher than in Canning's and foreign wheat was not to be admitted 'free' (subject only to a nominal duty of 1s. a quarter) until the home price reached 73s. a quarter. Prentice attacked Huskisson and suspected that too much had been made of the 'guarantees' Huskisson had supposedly been given by Wellington concerning the moderate policies to be pursued by the government. Certainly the new Corn Bill was too favourable towards the corn growers, said Prentice, adding that Huskisson was being inconsistent in advocating the new scale when he had approved of the abandonment of Canning's after it had been modified: 'These resolutions show how little the people have to expect from the present ministry, and what value is to be attached to Mr. Huskisson's guarantees'. According to the Guardian the fault was Wellington's not Huskisson's, but Taylor was still as dissatisfied with the new measure as Prentice was. The Chronicle approved the new scale as a fair compromise, arguing that free trade was inadvisable and problematic and would not bring the boons which repealers were claiming. Despite objections from both reformers and protectionists the new bill passed quite easily. The government was probably influenced most by the reports it was receiving that foreign grain production was not on a scale that could mean the flooding of the British market. The 1828 system was not without its drawbacks. It encouraged speculative buying of corn and excessive price fluctuations, but apart from this seems to have worked well. Certainly the end of the 1815 system meant that supplies could be more easily brought in, as after the bad harvests of 1828-9. The harvests of 1830-35 were better and the repeal campaign only really revived with

the return of hard times in the later 1830s.¹

The band did not cease their efforts in the aftermath of the 1828 Act. Prentice continued his regular articles and comments on the corn laws and their effects, hoping to spread opinion in favour of repeal or at least to make people more aware of the issues at stake. In May 1829 he praised Perronet Thompson's 'exceedingly able' Catechism of the Corn Laws, recently published in 6d. pamphlet form and representing, in all its essentials, the ideas and arguments that Prentice had been advancing for several years. Soon Prentice made an arrangement with the publishers whereby copies of the Catechism would be delivered without charge around the Manchester region by the newsmen who distributed Prentice's Times. Later he gained permission to print copies of the pamphlet on his own presses, and he gave away a copy free with every sale of the Times on 29 August 1829. This was costly but he had always felt that when the public good was at stake the honest reformer should put all other considerations aside. His editorials continued to demand corn law repeal, sometimes in conjunction with a cut in taxation and radical parliamentary reform.²

1. Gazette, Guardian, and Chronicle, 5 April 1828; Gash, Aristocracy and People, 133; Woodward, Age of Reform, 61-2; Chaloner's intro. to League, xii-xiii; Chaloner, 'Corn Laws', 138-9; Fay, Corn Laws, 84-6; Barnes, 199-201, 208-10.

2. Times, 16, 23 May, 11, 25 July, 22, 29 Aug. 1829; Sketches, 352; T. Perronet Thompson, A Catechism of the Corn Laws (1827, 1940 reprint of 15th edn., 1831); L. G. Johnson, General T. Perronet Thompson 1783-1969: His military, literary and political campaigns (1957), ch. VIII. On repeal and free trade as promoters of the 'identity of interests' between rulers and ruled, E. Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism (1928, 2nd edn. 1952), 4, 153, 313-14, 487-98. Bentham's views on the corn laws were given in his Observations on the Restrictive and Prohibitory Commercial System (1821); see discussion in Dinwiddy, Luddism to Reform Bill, 14-17. The similarities between the positions taken by Prentice, Thompson and Bentham are striking, as one would expect.

The Courier expressed the views of those who were unsympathetic towards repeal. Sowler favoured revision but wanted security for agriculture, mistrusted 'free trade', and felt that repeal would not bring the marvels promised by its advocates.¹ Commentators such as B. Kemp and S. Fairlie have doubted that the corn laws truly had the effects their opponents were claiming and that repeal brought all the benefits that the free traders had expected and hoped for.² It should be remembered, though, that the true effects of the corn laws (which can be discussed now with the benefits of reflection and a mass of assembled historical data) are perhaps less important than what contemporaries thought and claimed were the effects.

While Prentice continued to press for repeal, Taylor's position in 1829 was that the time was not right for repeal nor for a major repeal campaign. There had to be a proper opportunity for full parliamentary deliberation on the matter, and a demand for repeal so soon after the passing of the 1828 Act would be inadvisable. The protectionists would simply argue that the new system had not been given a fair trial. Taylor did agree, though, that the 1828 system was unsatisfactory. Business was still being restrained, and despite the sliding scale there were times when the duties were entirely prohibitory: there were delays before home deficiencies in grain were signified by a rise in price. By the time

1. Courier, 26 March, 9 April 1825, 13 May, 22, 29 July, 9 Sept. 1826, 10 March 1827, 5 April 1828.

2. Kemp, 'Reflections on the Repeal of the Corn Laws', Victorian Studies V (1962); Fairlie, 'The 19th Century Corn Law Reconsidered' and 'The Corn Laws and British Wheat Production 1829-76', Ec.H.R. 18 (1965), 22 (1969).

Britain was ready to buy foreign corn the suppliers were aware of her shortage and commanded higher prices. There had also been speculation among British corn dealers, and this gambling spirit was not healthy for the trading community as a whole.¹ Prentice and Taylor continued their discussions through 1829-32 with use of statistics, extracts from other newspapers, Westminster Review articles, pamphlets by such writers as former Manchester banker Thomas Crewdson (now an influential advocate of repeal), J. P. Kay the physician and social reformer, and Lord Milton, a liberal-minded peer with substantial manufacturing interests, and any other material that seemed useful.² By now Taylor was spending much of his time arguing for a moderate fixed duty. In a discussion with local corn merchant Edward Swanwick he said that the fixed duty should be no more than 10s. a quarter and if possible as low as 7s.³ Arguments in favour of a fixed duty became louder after 1828 and the views of provincial commentators like Taylor were given more force by the agitation for a fixed duty by many prominent politicians and economists. Meanwhile Prentice was saying that corn law repeal would be the first task of the reformed Parliament, and he often introduced the subject at meetings he attended even if they had been called for other purposes. Notable examples of this are the December 1830 meeting to raise a subscription to help pay the expenses incurred in Hunt's successful Preston election campaign, a meeting organised soon afterwards by Doherty

1. Guardian, 17 Jan., 23 May, 22 Aug. 1829.

2. Times, 12 Sept., 31 Oct., 21 Nov., 26 Dec. 1829, 27 Feb., 19 June, 17 July 1830, 21 Jan., 28 April 1832; Guardian, 19 Sept., 26 Dec. 1829, 23 Jan., 17 July 1830, 6 Oct. 1832.

3. Guardian, 2, 9, 16 Oct., 13 Nov. 1830; for information on Swanwick I am grateful to R. Carr of Local Hist. Dept. MCL.

and the Manchester trades to discuss the assistance that could be given to the striking spinners of Ashton, and a meeting in January 1831 called by Ashton shopkeepers to discuss parliamentary reform. By this time Prentice was convinced that parliamentary reform would have to precede corn law repeal; Parliament was too exclusive and unrepresentative to grant repeal and so would have to be thoroughly reconstituted. Prentice linked the corn law and parliamentary reform issues in his speech at the public meeting on distress in February 1830. The Boroughreeve, in the chair, told him to stick to the matter in hand and he replied that he had done so. Social and economic hardship, the corn laws and the corrupt system of representation were inseparably wedded together.¹ According to Prentice, many Manchester reformers wanted parliamentary reform as a means to gain freer trade. The Reform Bill was seen as an instrument, and the end in view was corn law repeal.² He may have been unduly influenced in this interpretation by what followed the parliamentary reform campaign of 1830-32 in Manchester, but it does seem that the band and their allies did regard this campaign as in some sense a protest against monopoly, and did place importance on the need to secure the return of two liberal, free trade candidates at Manchester's first parliamentary election (and secure it they did).

Prentice's speaking at meetings attended by workers and members of the lower middle classes was all part of his attempt to educate the lower

1. Times, 1, 8, 29 Jan., 2 April 1831; Prentice, Sketches, 275, 354-8.

2. Prentice, League, ch. I and II; c.f. Barnes, 216.

ranks on the corn question. It has been mentioned that he wanted a repeal campaign based on class cooperation. The campaign would need the strength of numbers and popular support. It would have to be led by respectable and thoughtful reformers but they could not get far by themselves. Hence Prentice's desire to drum up support from the Manchester Huntites, the local trade union movement and the shopkeepers of Ashton. For some years he had been trying to influence and educate the workers, encouraging their self-expression and political participation and publicising their meetings, and he was especially pleased when he heard working men uttering sound statements on the corn laws. J. B. Smith was another who made much of the fact that the workers' spokesmen were for repeal, not just revision - which was too often the demand of 'respectable' meetings.¹ Throughout the 1820s Prentice's newspapers covered workers' meetings on the corn laws, addressed by such men as John Doherty and contacts of the band such as the lecturer Rowland Detrosier, the spinner Jonathan Hodgins and the radical draper P. T. Candelet.² Even before these meetings a good number of plebeian radicals had not been slow to join in the call for repeal. In 1818-19 the Observer had declared that the repeal of the 1815 law was essential. It was a 'Bill for Starving the People', based on audacity and folly, and representing a blasphemous disregard of God's will by denying the poor all access to the earth's produce merely in order to enrich the ruling class.³ All of this could have come straight from

1. Reminiscences, 29.

2. E.g. Gazette, 21, 28 Oct., 2 Dec. 1826, 13 Jan., 24 March, 11 Aug., 1 Sept. 1827; Times, 8 Aug. 1829, 22 May 1830, 1 Jan., 9 July 1831.

3. Observer, 7 Nov., 5 Dec. 1818, 9 Jan., 6 Feb., 26 June 1819.

Prentice. He was sure that the workers adopted sound opinions on the corn laws long before their employers did:

I can safely aver that in 1815, exclusive of the working classes, there were not more persons right as to the manner in which wages could be affected by that enactment than were wrong when the successful agitation for its repeal commenced in 1838.¹

Hoping for class cooperation in a repeal campaign and convinced that the middle-class radicals could not get far unless they attracted the interest and support of the workers, Prentice was bound to make a case for repeal that did not depend on cheap labour arguments. He and his allies advocated repeal in a fashion that would appeal to both employers and workers: repeal would increase the masters' profits and the workers' wages because it would mean more foreign demand for British manufactures in exchange for corn. Repeal would benefit everyone and all classes would enjoy a general prosperity if the odious corn laws were removed.² This was to be the position of the leaders of the League. They have been accused of calculating self-interest and dissembling, presenting their own sectional desires as if they represented the whole community, but judging by Prentice's own statements, writings and activities, the argument for 'cumulative prosperity' was not a mere tactic. He really did believe that the workers would benefit from repeal as much as the masters would. So did Brotherton, judging by his statements during the

1. Sketches, 74-6.

2. League, i. 94; cf. his Lecture on Wages, in which he pointed out that the corn laws had raised the price of food while keeping wages down - because they limited foreign demand for British manufactures and so limited Manchester employers' demand for labour.

1841 Salford election campaign - during which he also attacked the New Poor Law on the grounds that such an enactment was wholly unjust when the corn laws were still in force. It was outrageous to deprive the poor working man of both food and relief.¹ To Prentice, Shuttleworth, Brotherton and others in the band the corn issue was a humanitarian as well as a commercial one. They made this clear during the 1820s, when they also sought the cooperation of the lower ranks on the question. But not everyone shared Prentice's desire to have workers involve themselves in important public questions. Prentice himself and the workers' meetings of the time were frequently condemned by the local Tories.²

As well as the attempt to get a favourable response from the workers, Prentice and his friends also tried to secure powerful and unequivocal statements and determined actions from the Chamber of Commerce. But the body that was the voice and forum of the Manchester business community was not as responsive as members of the band would have liked. For much of the time the Chamber was silent on the question. When it did act this was usually only after much agitation by the free traders among the membership, and usually the action fell short of what had been hoped for. In 1820 the directors only interested themselves in the corn laws when they heard that the agriculturalists wanted to raise the price limit set in the 1815 Act from 80s. to over 82s. a quarter. There was no criticism of the Act itself.³ Repealers were in a

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1. Brotherton, Speech on Corn Laws, and Mr. Brotherton and New Poor Law.
 2. E.g. Chronicle, 28 Oct. 1826, 24 March, 11 Aug., 1 Sept. 1827; Courier, 28 Oct. 1826.
 3. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1820.

minority among the members for many years. All they managed to secure in 1825 was an undertaking that the Chamber would petition for revision and a statement in the annual report in favour of a lowering of duties.¹ For the band the Chamber was not persistent or unequivocal enough to be a useful ally. A resolution at the 1826 annual meeting favoured a 'material reform' in the corn law system but added that the membership 'abstains from urging the subject on the immediate notice of Parliament, in consideration of the other important questions with which their attention is already engaged'.² Most members do seem to have regarded the corn laws as productive of 'injurious consequences' but the free traders could not shake them from their ineffectual stance. Baxter told a special meeting on 8 November 1826 that full repeal was necessary and that 'the very existence of manufactures depended on the people having cheap bread', but the majority (which included J. E. Taylor) thought that too rapid a change would lead to worse distress - and so it was decided to petition for a moderate fixed duty. Prentice condemned the majority for its caution, but Taylor asserted that repeal was too drastic in prevalent circumstances and would ruin many agriculturalists. A fixed duty was preferable, to be lowered over time. The Chamber's annual report for 1826 would say no more than that the corn laws were 'impolitic'.³

When the Chamber discussed Canning's Corn Bill of 1827 it was resolved that:

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1. Gazette, 19 Feb. 1825; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1825.
 2. Gazette, 18 Feb. 1826.
 3. Gazette and Guardian, 11 Nov. 1826; Chamber. Annual Reports, 1826.

though the Bill proposes a scale of protecting duties higher than sound policy suggests, and the welfare of the general interests of the country requires, it is nevertheless founded upon just and salutary principles and tends to mitigate the evils of the existing corn laws.

Prentice protested that the wording made it seem as if the Chamber fully approved the principles of the bill. He suggested that the wording be changed to ... 'it is nevertheless founded upon more just and salutary principles than the existing corn laws, and tends in some measure to mitigate them'. Richard Potter seconded Prentice's amendment which was lost by a single vote. Surprised by the closeness of this margin Prentice tried again shortly afterwards, but again he lost by one vote. He had secured the conversion of one of those present who had previously voted against him, but now his erstwhile ally J. E. Taylor switched his vote away from Prentice on the grounds that, if amended, the resolution would not agree with the petition which had been prepared in favour of Canning's measure.¹ Why Taylor had not said this at the time of the first vote is not clear. Perhaps he just felt that, as on so many other issues, Prentice wanted to go too far too quickly. The directors' report for 1828 praised the new Act of that year but still there was no demand for repeal nor even radical revision, and there was also an acceptance of agriculture's right to some form of protection. In 1833 and 1835 the Chamber expressed itself in favour of a fixed duty but it was said that 'no favourable opportunity' had presented itself for action on the matter. In 1836, when wheat prices were about 50% higher than they had been in 1835, the directors called for 'thorough revision' - nothing

1. Gazette, 30 June 1827; Prentice, Sketches, 297-8, 301; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 32.

more.¹

The Chamber was not a free trade organ, nor was it meant to be. Cobden said in 1835 that both Manchester and England lacked societies to promulgate 'the beneficent truths of the Wealth of Nations'.² He spoke for many, including the band, who were anxious for the spread of free trade principles. The Chamber clearly did not fit the bill in 1835, otherwise Cobden and others would have said so. Elijah Helm, the historian of the Chamber, was led by his own predilections into a slanted view of the Chamber's early history when he stated that it was a truly liberal commercial body, animated by the same spirit present in the commercial policy of Pitt and the writings of Adam Smith.³ This view is credible up to a point, but only with the provisos here discussed. The members of the band who belonged to the Chamber were constantly attempting to secure its support for an unequivocal demand for corn law repeal, but all through the 1820s and 1830s they were up against the reluctance and hesitancy of the majority of directors and members. Prentice left the Chamber in disgust in 1834. J. B. Smith introduced a repeal motion at every annual meeting between 1828-35; his singlemindedness earned him the nicknames 'Mad' and 'Corn Law' Smith. Finally there was a breakthrough in December 1838. Smith, Cobden and their allies managed to get a repeal resolution passed at a Chamber meeting. Some directors resigned and opened the door for the rise to prominence of free traders.

1. Chamber. Annual Reports, 1828, 1833, 1835, 1836.

2. Cobden, 'England, by A Manchester Merchant' (1835), Hirst, Manchester School, 23-4.

3. Helm, 63-4.

(Meanwhile Smith, Watkin, Prentice, Taylor and Thomas Potter had helped to form the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association.) Smith then became the President of the Chamber in February 1839. A power struggle over the coming years saw the election of directors and officers become hotly contested and the Chamber split in 1845 when conservatives left and formed the Manchester Commercial Association.¹ Once the free traders had achieved dominance in the Chamber and once Smith had become President, only then could the Chamber be described as more avowedly a free-trade organ - though there remained a substantial group of conservative members until 1845. Certainly the Chamber had congratulated Huskisson and favoured the liberalising commercial reforms of the 1820s, but there was probably far more intellectual commitment to free trade after the December 1838 meeting, Smith's promotion and then the secession. In any case the commitment to the ideal of free trade was more obvious from the late 1830s and the rise to ascendancy of doctrinaires like Smith.²

It is clear that the campaigns and discussions in Manchester relating to commercial affairs were characterised by self-interest and moderation for much of this period. Mancunian businessmen and politicians of different parties did feel strongly about certain issues and policies

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1. J. B. Smith, Mem. and Letters; An Authentic Report of the late Important Discussions in the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, on the destructive effects of the Corn Laws upon the Trade and Manufactures of the Country, (1839); Redford, Merchants, 72; Helm, 74-7; Grampp, ch. 4; Fraser, Urban Politics, 243-4.
 2. E.g. J. B. Smith (President), Report of the Directors to a special meeting of the Chamber...on the injurious effects of Restrictions on Trade, March 11th 1841 (1841).

but their activity on these questions was normally intermittent and limited in extent. Once a specific goal had been achieved, once the government or Parliament had been made aware of Manchester's views on the corn laws or cotton wool imports, once a duty had been reduced or the issue of local bank notes curtailed, then the majority of campaigners rested satisfied until the next major controversy arose. Often it fell to the band to keep issues before the public, to advocate new campaigns and prompt the more moderate majority into action. The band had some success; certainly they were responsible for making sure that interest in the corn question did not disappear. They were active on other questions too and fully participated in the local debates on commercial policies and theory, the currency system, taxation, and the image that Manchester - through the Chamber and the many town meetings on economic issues - was presenting to the outside world. There could be disagreements within the band on matters of theory and practice, with Taylor once again the most obvious promoter of discord, but there remained agreement on many questions and a similar view of what was best for Manchester business and possibly also for the whole nation's economic wellbeing. All of the band were free traders. Many Mancunians also favoured freer trade - but not necessarily for the same reasons as the band - and this might also help to explain why the band had to be so active in informing, agitating and discussing. What is clear is that those who wanted more energetic commercial campaigns and more widespread and solid commitment to freer trade faced an uphill struggle in the years before 1832. Such a struggle was an indispensable prelude to the politics of Manchester - and hence of the country - in the 1840s and beyond.

Chapter VI

THE BAND AND PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

1. The postwar years, Peterloo and its aftermath

The parliamentary reform movement in the postwar years was primarily the affair of radicals and reformers from the labouring ranks. Charismatic heroes like Hunt and Cartwright rose to provide leadership on the national stage, and both were popular in Manchester, but the reform movement in the town lacked substantial respectable participation. Respectable reformers, including the band, did provide commentary, guidance and also direct help, but they were not true leaders during these years. They were consistent and benevolent allies of the movement which gained its main direction and numerical support from other social groups. Not surprisingly, the respectable reformers' own social and political preferences occasionally made them equivocal in their attitude towards popular radicalism.

One of the largest reform meetings of 1816 was that in Manchester on 28 October at which a new plebeian Union Society (or 'Reform Union') was established. The veteran radical John Knight was secretary. Baxter was one of several liberal merchants asked to preside at the assembly, but he declined. Some respectable sympathisers were in attendance, though, including the writer of the report which appeared in the Gazette (probably Taylor or Shuttleworth). The two themes stressed in this report were to become familiar over the coming years: the need for the popular radicals to conduct themselves peacefully and with propriety, and

the need for men of status and standing to come forward and lead a decisive campaign for parliamentary reform. Meanwhile the Tory press continued to condemn and ridicule the popular meetings.¹ Some middle-class reformers were prepared to help the Union Society to some extent. When it sent out circulars to wealthy local liberals in December 1816 asking for contributions to finance missionary and petitioning activity, Baxter's warehouse was one of the collection points.² It is possible that the band were involved on the fringes of the popular movement, offering money and encouragement, though it is unclear how influential they were. They may have hoped that by being cooperative they could keep the popular campaign sane and judicious. Yet this wave of activity was to culminate in the 'Blanket' affair, which the respectable reformers regretted, so any influence they had was distinctly limited.

As the reform campaign gathered momentum with its petitions, meetings, delegate networks and radical associations, the Manchester Tories and loyal ministerial supporters decided on precautionary steps. Arrangements were made for additional special constables, implementation of Watch and Ward, and in January 1817 a new Association in Support of the Civil Authority was established. The Pitt Club and the Orange

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1. Gazette, 28 Sept., 5, 12 Oct., 2 Nov. 1816; Hay Scrapbks., vii. 142, 244; informant's report in H.O. 40/3 cited by H. W. Davies, 'Lancashire Reformers 1816-17', BJRL 10 (1926), 67; Chronicle, 23 March, 31 Aug., 2 Nov. 1816; Exch.H., 15, 29 Oct., 12 Nov. 1816, 7 Jan., 4, 11, 18 Feb. 1817; Mercury, 5 Nov., 31 Dec. 1816.
 2. Circular is in H.O. 40/9; Hay Scrapbks., xviii. 187; W. W. Kinsey, Some Aspects of Lancashire Radicalism 1816-21, Manchester University M.A. thesis (1927), 79.

Institution also became active.¹ The Blanket scheme was originated and acted upon in this atmosphere of gathering radical assertiveness and rising Tory hostility.

The Gazette covered the Blanket meeting of 10 March 1817 with a mixture of sympathy for the 'dreadful misery' of the working classes, condemnation for the heavy-handed manner in which the authorities had dispersed the assembly and pursued and stopped the marchers, and regret that the cause of reform 'has here devolved, through the lukewarmness of its opulent friends, into the hands of those whose station and character afford, it must be admitted, scarcely a sufficient guarantee of the purity and wisdom of their proceedings'. Prentice later reflected that the meeting and march were understandable demonstrations of popular suffering and frustration, but were not likely to convince the respectable classes that the mass of the people was ready for enfranchisement. The Blanket affair was soon followed by the 'Ardwick Conspiracy'. The local authorities convinced themselves that Manchester revolutionaries planned an insurrection for 30 March. Arrests were made and suspects taken to London for secret examinations at the Home Office. Rumours circulated about entrapment by spies and agents employed by the civil powers. When the 30 March passed without incident, and all those arrested were later released without a single indictment or trial, it became clear that no plot had ever existed (at least not on the scale claimed by the Manchester authorities). Prentice reported at this time that all was

1. Gazette, 18, 25 Jan., 1 Feb. 1817; Hay Scrapbks., vii. 148-9, 151; Wheeler, History, 108-9; Wray Pamphlets for letters and addresses; Exch.H., 14, 21 Jan. 1817; Chronicle, 18 Jan., 22 Feb. 1817; Mercury, 14, 21 Jan., 4 Feb. 1817; Pitt Club ms., i. 73.

quiet and would remain so if only the people were left alone. The Tories were sure that Manchester was gripped by sedition and insurrectionary intentions, and this was one primary cause for a continuing propaganda battle in these months. The conservatives had some of their most effective spokesmen in local clergymen. Tory writers made regular use of the spectre of 'Jacobinism' in 1817 to recreate the conservative mentality of the 1790s and to ascribe un-English characteristics and intentions to the reformers.¹

Revelations about the activities of spies reached epidemic proportions around the time of the Pentridge Rising in June 1817, and the Gazette called the trial and the conviction of the Pentridge men 'a solitary example of success in the midst of the numerous attempts which have recently been made to prove the existence and to inflict the consequences of treasonable designs'. Prentice later recalled that it was partly thanks to the efforts of his circle that more damage was not done by spies and informers in Manchester. By putting the workers on their guard the band ensured that there was no Pentridge-style conspiracy in the local area. The Tory press rejected the claims being made about 'spies' and argued that Pentridge arose from revolutionary aims rather

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1. Gazette, 15, 29 March, 5 April, 13, 20, 27 Sept. 1817; W. D. Evans (presiding magistrate), Address...on discharging the prisoners apprehended on account of an illegal assembly at Manchester on 10th March 1817 (1817); Prentice, Sketches, 92-102; Wheeler, History, 110-11; Hay Scrapbks., vii. 160-83; Bamford, Early Days, 317-63, and Passages in the Life of a Radical (1844), ch. VI, XIII-XIX, XXIII; Chronicle, 15, 29 March, 5, 12, 26 April, 3 May 1817; Mercury, 11, 18 March, 1, 8 April 1817; Exch.H., 4, 11, 18, 25 March, 8, 15, 22, 29 April, 10 June 1817; Revd. C. D. Wray, The Street Politicians (1817) and The Speech of Mr. John P., Schoolmaster,...to take into consideration the expediency of parliamentary reform (1817); Revd. C. W. Ethelston, Patriotic Appeal to the Good Sense of all Parties (1817); Revd. M. Horne, A Word for My Country (1817).

than provocation by government agents.¹ In the autumn of 1817 the Gazette ran a series of articles on parliamentary reform addressed 'To the Labouring Classes'. They were written by 'The Poor Man's Friend' - probably one of the band: its members were by now Cowdroy's chief helpers, and this was the kind of political essay writing at which they excelled. These pieces attacked the 'spy system' and asserted that the working-class radicals would never involve themselves in revolutionary schemes; but such was the controversy created by the Ardwick Conspiracy that it was adviseable for the radical leaders to cooperate with the authorities and put the public mind at rest. The author (or authors) of the addresses extolled the virtues of 'moderate' over 'revolutionary' change. Clearly the respectable reformers were keen to restrain the popular radicals and turn them away from extreme aims and methods: what was needed was a respectful and conciliatory call for the correction of obvious abuses.²

The first Gazette of 1818 rejected the accounts of Manchester given by provincial and London Tory papers during 1817. They had singled the town out as a hotbed of treason and the band wanted to set the record straight. If events in Manchester had been the grounds for Parliament's suspension of constitutional liberties then there were no grounds at all

1. Gazette, 5, 19 July, 6 Sept., 1 Nov. 1817, 21 Feb., 14, 21 March 1818; Bamford, Passages, ch. XII and XXVI; Hay Scrbpks., xi. 130-40; Prentice, Sketches, ch. VI and VII (and p.112); Kinsey, ch. VIII (a rather uncritical view of available documentary evidence, which upholds the reliability and value of informers' reports and doubts the reformers' claims about provocation and invention); Chronicle, 14, 28 June, 1 Nov. 1817; Mercury, 24 June, 1 July, 11 Nov. 1817; Exch.H., 17, 24 June, 4 Nov. 1817.

2. Gazette, 20, 27 Sept., 4 Oct. 1817.

for such a suspension, Repression, said the band, was unjustified and had more to do with the preferences and prejudices of those in authority locally and nationally than with alleged threats to order posed by plebeian radicals. With more calmness in Manchester and the restoration of habeas corpus early in 1818 the band decided to act. They organised a petition to the Commons calling for a full inquiry into the events of the early part of 1817 and particularly into the conduct of the local authorities. This petition was introduced by George Philips, previously active with the Constitutional Society in the 1790s and M.P. for a succession of boroughs from 1812 under the patronage of the Duke of Norfolk, to whom he lent large sums of money. (He became a baronet in 1828). The House refused to grant an inquiry. The petition had been signed by twenty-six of Manchester's leading respectable and middling sort reformers; there were only twenty-six of them because they had undertaken to spend time and money in urging and aiding an inquiry - and presumably not all of their allies could make such an undertaking. Five of the band were signatories; Prentice, Baxter, Taylor, Shuttleworth and Harvey. Of the remaining signatories whose occupations can be traced there were six manufacturers, four merchants, two corn dealers and a coal dealer, an attorney, a hatter, a dyer, a calico printer and a commercial agent. The names of the Twenty Six were not given in the Gazette but they were posted in places of business by Tory opponents, a not-so-subtle suggestion that loyal friends of social order should not soil their hands by doing business with any critic of the local authorities. Some of Manchester's plebeian radicals were glad to hear of this effort by respectable liberals. The recently-established Observer commended Philips and the Twenty Six and argued that the alarmism of 1817 had been

wholly fatuous. The Tory papers were hostile and listed the petitioners in an attempt to create feeling against them and discourage them and others from similar activities in the future. Prentice and the others were not put off; indeed their indignation made them more determined to press for justice and redress. They were outraged when Tory Lancashire M.P. John Blackburne (of Hale Hall) told the Commons that the Twenty Six were not respectable men. 'To have any sympathy, then, with the poverty-stricken multitude', Prentice wrote, 'was to forfeit all claim to the name of gentleman'.¹

The respectable reformers were soon expressing more protests when it was found that the government was to propose a Bill of Indemnity to excuse ministers and local authorities from responsibility for actions they took in 1817 while constitutional rights had been suspended. The Gazette again emphasised that there had been no grounds for these actions and again the respectable reformers attempted to use the force of moral protest to strengthen their position and to win more support for 'rational' and necessary reforms. They remained anxious to restrain the popular radicals from unwise courses - hence their lack of enthusiasm for the St. Peter's Field meeting of 9 March 1818. Those behind the Gazette felt that a meeting was not appropriate at this time. The subsequent 'REMARKS - By one of the Twenty Six Petitioners' (signed 'B', probably Baxter) urged that the plebeians should ensure that they kept within the

1. Gazette, 3 Jan., 7, 14 Feb., 7 March 1818; Prentice, Sketches, 122-7, 129-31; R. Potter Colln., xi. 9-10; Hay Scrapbks., viii. 30, 43-4, 48-9; on George Philips, Howe, Cotton Masters, 91-2; Pigot & Dean's Directories; Observer, 14 Feb. 1818; Chronicle, 21, 28 Feb., 14 March 1818; Mercury, 24 Feb., 3 March 1818; Exch.H., 3 March 1818.

strict bounds of propriety, and pointed out that extremism only gave an excuse for repressive policies, harmed the cause of reform, and dissuaded respectable liberals from coming forward and taking the leading role for which they were fitted. These were becoming oft-repeated arguments and once again demonstrated equivocation in the ranks of Manchester's respectable reformers.¹ The Tory papers continued to attack both plebeian radicals and respectable liberals and the Pitt Club went on with its dinners and meetings, but the 1818 general election did give the reformers another opportunity to reflect on the faults of the political system. The Gazette condemned the electoral control exercised by such people as the Lowthers in Westmorland while J. E. Taylor and others worked on behalf of the reform-minded Lord Sefton in Liverpool (who was unsuccessful); and all reformers lamented the continued lack of contests in Lancashire county where the representation had long been shared by the Stanleys and the Tory interests.²

The band were continuing to progress in standing and influence, however. The trial of Taylor for libel was significant in this respect and represents an important event in the respectable reformers' rise to a higher public profile and a more assertive role in local affairs. The matter began in the summer of 1818 at a meeting of the Salford Police Commissioners. Taylor was proposed for a minor office but his name was

1. Gazette, 14 March 1818; Hay Scrapbks., viii. 44, 48; Observer, 14 March 1818.

2. Chronicle, 14 March 1818; Mercury, 10, 24 March 1818; Exch.H., 10 March, 21 April 1818; Pitt Club ms., i; Hay Scrapbks., vii. 367, 376-7, viii. 31, 33; Gazette, 4 April, 6, 13, 20 June, 4 July 1818; Observer, 27 June 1818.

rejected by John Greenwood, a quilt and muslin manufacturer, a member of the Pitt Club and a stalwart of the local government oligarchy.

Greenwood said that Taylor was a radical and the author of the placard 'Now or Never' which - to local Tories - had caused the Exchange Riot of April 1812. After Taylor's demands for an explanation were unsuccessful he publicly castigated Greenwood as a 'liar, slanderer and scoundrel'. Taylor's stand demonstrated the reformers' readiness to defend their cause and to protest against discrimination on the grounds of political opinions; if the matter achieved notoriety it could also serve as a useful rallying point. Greenwood's and the Tories' aim to teach the reformers a lesson failed when the libel trial at Lancaster in March 1819 resulted in Taylor's acquittal, a victory that bred increased confidence.¹

The Gazette began 1819 by reminding its readers of the activities of Thomas Walker and the Constitutional Society in the 1790s, and praised that body for its heroic attempt to lead and coordinate an energetic campaign for reform.² But the Gazette was wary about the proliferation and character of the workers' reform meetings during the summer of 1819. The band and their allies were not keen on independent working-class political activity and doubted that reform of the kind desired by some extremists could bring an automatic remedy to economic distress, as some were claiming. They were also concerned, as usual, that plebeian

1. Gazette, 25 July 1818, 3 April 1819; Prentice, Sketches, ch. IX; Observer, 3 April 1819; Chronicle, 31 Oct. 1818, 10 April 1819; Mercury, 4 Aug. 1818; Report of Trial of Mr. J. E. Taylor.

2. E.g. Gazette, 13 Feb., 20 March 1819.

activity and assertiveness might harm the cause of reform and frighten away respectable and propertied men who would otherwise be keen to participate in a responsible and well-conducted campaign. As the Gazette put it:

It is impossible to regard without deep commiseration the sufferings of our manufacturing population, arising from the inadequate wages and the scarcity of labour; and our pity for them is augmented by perceiving that they are pursuing measures which will infallibly aggravate their distress. It must be obvious to anyone who can reason at all, that the interference of the labouring classes in political matters has almost invariably an effect contrary to that which is intended. Harsh as it may appear, we must say that poverty incapacitates for public usefulness, for the poor man has no influence otherwise than by the exertion of physical strength, to which it would be absurd as well as treasonable to have recourse.... We can account for the apathy of the rich in the cause of reform, which it is most palpably their own interest to obtain, no otherwise than by supposing that it originates in an undefined fear of the designs of the poor.¹

The Tory press condemned and complained about the mass reform meetings of 1819. On 9 July a Police Office meeting approved a new Committee to Strengthen the Civil Power and recommended the swearing in of extra constables. Advertisements soon appeared encouraging volunteers to join armed associations. The local magistrates approved of this, as did the Tory papers. Another aspect of the conservatives' anti-radical activity was the continuing campaign against the Observer. Its conductors were suffering indictments for libel and fines for failure to meet stamp charges in the spring and summer of 1819, but it continued its coverage and advocacy of the radicals' cause and activity.² The Peterloo

1. Gazette, 19 June 1819.

2. Chronicle, 26 June, 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 July 1819; Exch.H., 22 June, 13 July, 10 Aug. 1819; Gazette, 17, 24, 31 July, 7, 21 Aug. 1819; Hay Scrapbks., xi. 190; Eng. Ms. (JRL) 1197/3, 9; Mercury, 13, 20, 27 July 1819; Observer, 13, 27 Feb., 8 May, 3, 10, 17 24 July, 7, 14 Aug. 1819.

~~Peterloo~~ meeting of 16 August 1819 took place in an atmosphere of mounting panic and bellicosity. Both sides in the struggle seemed to feel that a decisive coup was needed to tip the balance in their favour, and confrontation of some kind was desired and expected by the more uncompromising elements.

The crucial question after Peterloo was: who were the aggressors? For the Gazette the aggressors did not come from the ranks of the reformers but from the possessors (and allies) of authority. Although the regular troops had displayed 'coolness and comparative moderation', the Manchester and Salford Yeomanry had 'charged up to the hustings' (my emphasis) and the officers effecting the arrests had subjected Hunt in particular to unjustifiable mistreatment. Clearly the peace had been broken by the ordering of Yeomanry and then regular cavalry into the crowd. This was the position taken up by reform newspapers and protest meetings all over the country, of course, and the Gazette devoted a good deal of space to this press and platform activity over the coming weeks.¹

This 'radical version' of Peterloo was energetically disseminated by Prentice. His Sketches explain that he and Taylor wrote reports of the meeting and sent them to the London papers to take the place of the one Tyas (of The Times of London) would have sent had he not been

1. Gazette, 21, 28 Aug., 4, 11 Sept. 1819. The idea of wilful wounding is supported by evidence in M. and W. Bee, 'The Casualties of Peterloo', MRHR III (1989), 45-6. For the Yeomanry's and magistrates' version of events see narrative and reports in Eng.Ms. 1197/26, 67, 86, 89.

arrested on the hustings. R. Walmsley has pointed out with some justification that Taylor's treatment of Peterloo mellowed over time: so there were two Taylors - an imperfectly-informed one who believed the radical version and a better-informed one who did not. It is also interesting that Taylor never said he had sent a report to London or that anything he had written was ever used by the London papers; it must have been Prentice's report that appeared in The Times and told of an unlawful attack on a peaceful crowd. Prentice said that Tyas later corroborated this report, but in fact Tyas said that the crowd parted to let the cavalry through while in Prentice's account the cavalry charged into the crowd. It is also important to remember that Tyas was an eyewitness and Prentice was not; nor was Taylor. By Prentice's own account he had slipped away from the meeting intending to return later, and it was during his absence that the yeomanry arrived on the scene. Another significant matter is the enmity that developed between Taylor and Prentice from the mid-1820s. It had various causes but it could be that a disagreement over the validity of the radical version of Peterloo was of importance. Even if Walmsley is correct in assuming that Prentice's account of Peterloo is misleading, there can be no doubt as to the validity of Prentice's view of the underlying factors behind the 'massacre'. The real problem was a total absence of sympathy and understanding between the authorities and reformers; none of the local magistrates was acquainted with the real condition and opinion of the labouring ranks. However unreliable Prentice might be on the events of 16 August themselves, moreover, he is certainly accurate in his estimation of the effect Peterloo had on many respectable Manchester reformers:

It was the breaking up of a great frost. The middle classes had appeared as if they were bound up in the icy chains of indifference to the demands of their humble fellow-countrymen for their fair share of representation; but the sudden outburst showed that whatever opinions they might hold as to how far the elective franchise might be safely extended, they were not disposed quietly to witness death inflicted on men whose only crime had been that they asked for universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annual parliaments, and the repeal of the corn laws.

This is a highly suggestive analysis and reflects some of Prentice's strongest views on reform, especially the desirability of some class cooperation and the need for active middle-class involvement in any reform campaign - in the form of rational and respectable leadership.¹

The band played a prominent role in the evolution and dissemination of the radical version. Prentice was one of the most uncompromising writers on Peterloo and even claimed that the assault on a peaceful crowd had been planned beforehand. Shuttleworth's account survives in the form of the evidence he gave at Hunt's trial and during the case of Redford v. Birley. He was an eyewitness and was as firm in his belief in the radical version as his friend Prentice. Shuttleworth was active in the aftermath of Peterloo, corresponding with reformers around the country and keeping in almost constant communication with the Whig-radical Shrewsbury M.P. H. G. Bennet, one of the band's parliamentary contacts. He provided Bennet with much information on Manchester affairs, some of which was used by Bennet and also by Brougham and Holland in the parliamentary debates on Peterloo. It is not clear if Watkin was an eye-

1. Sketches, 152, 157, 159, 163, 166. Walmsley's views are best followed in his Peterloo. The Case Reopened (1969), ch. XV, XVI, XIX, XXVII, XXVIII, but see also two unpublished pieces by him (copies of which are in Local Hist. Dept. MCL), Peterloo Magistrate (1967), 203, 225, 234, 237, 300, The Peterloo Reopener and his Critics (1969), 9-10, 32-3, 35, 54-5.

witness, but he certainly believed that the Yeomanry had charged a peaceful crowd. Before Taylor's later retreat from the radical version he gave it forceful backing in his Notes and Observations of 1820, though (as we have noted) he was not an eyewitness. J. B. Smith, who was present, stressed at the time and long afterwards that the crowd had been peaceful and that aggression had come from the cavalry. The attorney Atkinson does not seem to have been an eyewitness but he did take part in the post - Peterloo protests and was also in touch with Hunt. Atkinson's reputation as a reformer who had given legal advice to and represented other reformers in the past prompted Hunt to write to him for assistance on 17 August 1819. Atkinson was prevented from seeing Hunt by the magistrates and could not wait in Manchester because he had to go on business elsewhere.¹

The respectable reformers' main concern during the aftermath of Peterloo was to utilise the local sense of grievance to strengthen their own position vis-a-vis their Tory opponents. Controversy followed the Star Inn resolutions of Thursday, 19 August, which thanked and commended the town officers, special constables, magistrates and military for their conduct at Peterloo. The reformers rightly claimed that these were not

1. Sketches, 157, 159-60; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., (loose leaves) for his correspondence on Peterloo; T. Dolby's publicn. of The Trial of Henry Hunt esq. (and others) for an alleged conspiracy...at the York Lent Assizes, 1820 (1820), 198-204; Report of the Proceedings in the Cause Redford v Birley and others...at Lancaster. Taken from the shorthand notes of Mr. Farquharson (1822), 153-63; Watkin, Journal, 78-9; Taylor, Notes and Observations; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 15-19, Mem. & Letters, 4-5, and Elections, 2-8; F. A. Bruton (ed.), Three Accounts of Peterloo, 59-74; the Hunt-Atkinson correspondence is in BR 942. 730731, Archives Dept. MCL.

the sentiments of the town but proceeded from a closed and unrepresentative assembly of partisans, summoned by circulars sent round to carefully selected persons. The Gazette had first-hand information from J. B. Smith, who had been in attendance at the Star Inn by accident or design and who did not approve of what had been resolved.¹ While the respectable reformers began to conduct energetic protest activity and try to win converts and direct opinion into anti-establishment channels, the Tory papers gave excuses and explanations for recent events, praising and defending the conduct of the military and civil authorities. The radical Observer was as indignant about Peterloo as the Gazette.²

The Star Inn resolutions prompted the band into a more decisive gesture. Early in September they and their allies issued the Declaration and Protest. This was composed by Watkin and received over 4,800 signatures, including those of men who had never before involved themselves in local politics. Among the earliest signatures were those of Baxter, Harvey, Shuttleworth, Taylor, Richard Potter, Atkinson and Prentice. The Declaration and Protest stated that the Peterloo meeting was 'perfectly peaceable', that if the Riot Act had been read it was done so 'privately or without the knowledge of the great body of the meeting', that 'unexpected and unnecessary violence' had been used to disperse the assembly, that the Star Inn proceedings were 'exclusively private' and 'no expression of dissent from the main object of the meeting was there

1. Gazette, 21 Aug. 1819; Eng. Ms. 1197/93; Smith, Reminiscences, 19-20.

2. Chronicle, 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug., 4, 18, 25 Sept. 1819; Exch.H., 10, 17, 24, 31 Aug., 14, 28 Sept., 12 Oct., 16, 23 Nov. 1819; Mercury, 3, 10, 17, 24 Aug., 21, 28 Sept., 12 Oct., 9 Nov. 1819; Observer, 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug., 4, 11, 18, 25 Sept. 1819.

permitted'. Two meetings followed the publication of the Declaration and Protest, both chaired by Baxter. The first approved the document, the second established a subscription fund to relieve the Peterloo wounded. The committee appointed at this second meeting included Baxter, Harvey, Prentice, Brotherton, Taylor, Shuttleworth and Richard Potter.¹ The most obvious immediate effects of Peterloo, therefore, were to encourage the band to confirm their position at the head of Manchester's respectable reformers, and to enable them to make use of the growing number of sympathisers who had previously been lacking but who had now been made available by the spread of moral outrage after 16 August. The band took advantage of these circumstances to enhance their local credibility and standing. Aside from tactical considerations, they believed in what they were fighting for. Their commitment, courage and honesty made their protests and demands that much more persuasive, and since their own preferences were for rational ends and respectable means, this too was to help them to appeal more successfully to an expanding constituency of potential supporters.

The main requirement was to keep the momentum going. The Gazette continued to report and discuss the meetings being held across the kingdom, and to encourage and publicise the attempts that were being made to have the aggressors at Peterloo identified and punished. These attempts, however, met with little success. Even when precise accusations could be made against certain individuals for 'cutting and maiming', the magistrates argued that the cases were not strong enough

1. Prentice, Sketches, 164-5; Watkin, Fragment No.1, 19; a copy of Declaration and Protest is in Archives Dept. MCL; Gazette, 21 Aug., 4, 11 Sept. 4 Dec. 1819; Hay Scrapbks., ix. 169; Smith, Reminiscences, 20-22.

for the granting of warrants. The reformers were also angered by the handling of the Oldham inquest on the body of John Lees, a Peterloo victim, which was repeatedly adjourned and then finally discontinued in December 1819 because of an irregularity. The coroner and the jury had not inspected the corpse together at the same time. It was claimed that the coroner and his superiors would have used any excuse to stop the inquest.¹ By mid-November the respectable reformers were ready to organise another formal expression of representative Manchester opinion. This was to be a direct appeal to the House of Commons for an inquiry into what had happened at Peterloo. The Gazette backed the move and the petition lay for signature in Cowdroy's office for about a fortnight. It was presented by H. G. Bennet on 29 November.² Like the Declaration and Protest it was a forceful and precise exposition of the views of the respectable reformers. As with their other efforts, though, it did not achieve its main object. There was no inquiry. Still, at least the band and their allies had created and perpetuated a protest movement and had gained valuable experience in the arts of political campaigning and challenging the holders of local and national power. The attack on the ministers was particularly heated in November and December 1819 at the time of the parliamentary debates on Peterloo and the bills that were to be the infamous 'Six Acts'. Prentice's Sketches suggest that the main effect of the post - Peterloo reaction was to make radicalism more thoughtful and deliberative. The silencing of the extremists gave

1. Gazette, 11, 18, 25 Sept. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Oct., 6, 13, 20, 27 Nov., 4, 11, 18, 31 Dec. 1819, 8 Jan. 1820; Prentice, Sketches, 174-5; Eng. Ms. 1197/79, 80; Bamford, Passages, ii. ch. V; also correspondence between Shuttleworth and Bennet in Shuttleworth Scrapbk., loose leaves.

2. Gazette, 20, 27 Nov., 4 Dec. 1819.

respectable middle-class men an interval of calm in which they could quietly consider the defects of the representative system undisturbed by agitation.¹ There is probably some truth in this, though Prentice wrote in 1850 in the knowledge that the reformers had eventually been successful. In 1819-20 he and his friends could not have been so sanguine.

Soon the Tory cotton master Francis Philips, a prominent member of the Pitt Club and the local ruling party, had published a 2s. pamphlet in defence of the local authorities and their conduct at Peterloo. The Gazette found it 'most licentious' but the most effective reply was Taylor's Notes and Observations, published early in 1820. Praise for Taylor's work came from near and far. It consisted of more than 200 pages of clear and effective analysis, justification, explanation and refutation and was dedicated to H. G. Bennet. What Taylor had written was a coherent and detailed account of Peterloo, its background and aftermath which, though biased, was also persuasive. Certainly many reformers were glad that their case had now been put with such skill and clarity. Shuttleworth urged Bennet to read the work. Bennet said he would do so, and discuss it with such allies as Brougham. Meanwhile the Tory papers praised Philips's pamphlet and also approved of the promotion to the living of Rochdale of the Revd. W. R. Hay, Chairman of the Salford Quarter Sessions. The reformers were to argue that this was a reward for Hay's role at Peterloo and his consistent service against the cause of progress. In the Pitt Club it was business as usual. At the eighth annual dinner in May 1820 all the familiar speeches and toasts were made, though they must have taken on a new significance since this was the

1. Sketches, 178, 199-200.

first annual gathering since Peterloo.¹

In the spring of 1820 attention turned to Hunt's trial at York. The Gazette gave the matter more than 23 columns over three weeks in March and April. Despite a 'brilliant defence' Hunt and the local radical leaders tried with him were convicted of unlawful assembly. H. G. Bennet emphasised to Shuttleworth that the verdict did not necessarily mean that the Peterloo meeting itself had been illegal, only that Hunt and others had acted illegally. No doubt this was of some comfort to the band and provided a justification for continuing protests. Manchester Tories were naturally satisfied with the way the trial had gone. The Observer had expected an acquittal and was shocked by the verdict.² In an investigation of Peterloo from the legal standpoint L. Webley has made two important suggestions: that the York verdict owed more to outside factors than to the evidence itself, and that the verdict may not have been particularly unwelcome even to some reform-minded people.³

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1. F. Philips, An Exposure of the Calumnies circulated by the Enemies of Social Order (1819); Gazette, 5 Feb. 1820; Taylor, Notes & Observations; Bennet to Shuttleworth, 30 Jan. 1820, Shuttleworth Scrapbk. loose leaves; Hay Scrapbks., x. 12, 19-20; Chronicle, 27 Nov. 1819, 8, 22 Jan. 1820, 28 Sept. 1822; Mercury, 4, 18 Jan. 1820, 24 Sept. 1822; Exch.H., 4 Jan. 1820, 1 Oct. 1822; also on Hay, Gazette, 4 Dec. 1819, 8 Jan. 1820; Prentice, Sketches, 178; J. M. Wilson, The Vicars of Rochdale (1905), 59-60; Axon, Annals, 158; on Pitt Club, Pitt Club ms., ii.
 2. Gazette, 25 March, 1, 8 April 1820; Prentice, Sketches, 180-92; Bamford, Passages, ii. ch. XII-XXX; Bennet to Shuttleworth, 6 April 1820, Shuttleworth Scrapbk., loose leaves; Chronicle, 18, 25 March, 1 April 1820; Exch.H., 28 March, 4 April 1820; Mercury, 14, 21, 28 March, 4 April 1820; Observer, 18, 25 March, 1, 8 April, 20 May 1820.
 3. L. Webley, Across the Atlantic: eight comparable episodes treated from the legal aspect in the history of Britain and the U.S.A. (1960), 275.

The latter point is interesting. Perhaps some of Manchester's respectable liberals were glad that Hunt had been removed from the scene for a while; this would be better for the cause of reform and better for the kind of reform campaign that the liberals of property and standing wanted to see conducted. In any case, Hunt's trial provided an opportunity for the further dissemination of the radical version of Peterloo. Shuttleworth was called as a witness on the sixth day. His evidence stressed that nothing about the assembly of the Peterloo crowd could have excited alarm about the safety of Manchester, that Hunt's language had been moderate, and that the people did nothing to resist the Yeomanry as the latter tried to ride up to the hustings.¹

Meanwhile the band were making difficulties for the local government oligarchy at leypapers' meetings, calling into question the authorities' conduct in the second half of 1819 and objecting to such financial burdens as those relating to the quartering of extra troops in Manchester and to loyalist meetings. The troops were unnecessary and used improperly, said Taylor, Baxter and Richard Potter, and the loyalist meetings had been private, party affairs for which the public funds should not have been used.² Another way of keeping issues before the town was to give constant reminders of the need for an inquiry into Peterloo. The Gazette often did this in the early 1820s, as did the new Guardian.³ Some of the band were given the freedom of the city

1. Trial of Hunt, 198-204.

2. E.g. meeting of 31 May 1820, in Gazette, 3 June 1820; Exch.H., 6 June 1820.

3. Gazette, 19 Aug. 1820, 19 May 1821; Guardian, 9, 16 May 1821.

of Nottingham in 1820 and 1821 in recognition of their efforts to gain redress for Peterloo: Taylor, Baxter, Richard Potter, J. B. Smith and Atkinson gained this mark of respect.¹

Another attempt to apportion blame for Peterloo and to gain redress for the innocent victims of aggression came in April 1822 with the trial of Redford v. Birley and others. Thomas Redford, a journeyman hatter wounded at Peterloo, brought an action for assault against the yeomanry commander H. H. Birley and three other Yeomen (Withington, Meagher and Oliver), and the case was heard at Lancaster between 4-9 April 1822. The Gazette of 13 April gave the trial seven and ^ahalf columns (nearly a third of all available space) and relished the chance to discuss Peterloo again. But the Gazette was not too surprised by the outcome, a victory for the defendants (whose costs were paid by the government). Hunt and the Observer denounced the trial as a sham and condemned the prosecution for being so ineffectual; Richard Potter remembered the lack of funds and the difficulty in getting witnesses to attend. In the Guardian Taylor argued that many people connected with Peterloo were afraid of having their conduct properly investigated, but he also felt that the trial harmed the cause it was supposed to help. It was ill-timed and ill-directed. (Here, perhaps, was an early sign that he was beginning to reassess his earlier attitude towards Peterloo, as Walmsley suggests). The Tory papers thought the outcome laudable. The evidence given by Shuttleworth on the second day of the trial is of special interest. His story was basically the same as the one he had given at Hunt's trial

1. R. Potter Colln., iii. 283; J. B. Smith, Mem & Letters, 3, Atkinson Papers.

but he did say things that he had not said at York. He suggested that there might have been a plan behind the Yeomanry's manoeuvres, and he was certain that the horsemen had struck out at the crowd on the way to the hustings. Walmsley, who thinks that the jury came to the correct verdict, points out that Shuttleworth was the only witness to say that there was striking and cutting on the way to the hustings, and that this was contradicted by other witnesses. But this does not necessarily mean that Shuttleworth was wrong. (Walmsley also says that Prentice left Redford v. Birley out of his Sketches because he knew it would weaken the radical version of Peterloo; there is no way of knowing if this is true). As to Shuttleworth's remarks, these were made two years after Hunt's trial at York and two and a half years after Peterloo. If we accept the accuracy of Shuttleworth's memory we still face the problem of why he had not said these things at York. It could be that he was not asked the kind of questions at York that he was asked at Lancaster - so his answers were bound to be different. It could also be true that the upholders of the radical version felt the need to be more definite, insistent and precise by the time of Redford v. Birley in view of their failure - so far - to gain any real redress for the events of 16 August 1819. Shuttleworth admitted that he had refreshed his memory by looking at his York evidence before he testified in Redford v. Birley. Now he went beyond his York evidence, and when cross-examined he made his position as clear as possible - and as favourable to the radical version

as possible.¹

After Redford v. Birley the campaign to set right the wrongs done at Peterloo became far more intermittent and lacklustre. Plebeian radicalism was not as strong as it had been, and the respectable reformers were preoccupied with other matters. Peterloo was still discussed in the Gazette and occasionally in the Guardian, but less often than before. Under Prentice the Gazette and then the Times were never to mention Birley or the magistrates Hay and Hulton or any of the other chief villains, without reminding readers of their association with Peterloo. But the 'massacre' did not become an issue again until the Reform Crisis of 1831-2. As the Reform Bill was making its way through Parliament and as reformers of all shades were looking for arguments to strengthen their own position and discredit that of their opponents, the causes and results of Peterloo became useful for morale and propaganda purposes.² At the end of 1831 controversy was aroused by the Whig Chancellor, Althorp, when he made comments about the conduct of the authorities at Peterloo. William Hulton, who had presided over the magistrates at Peterloo, protested and then resigned his commission of the peace. Francis Philips, author of the Exposure in 1819, also protested. Soon Prentice was discussing the affair, as were others in the band. The Tory papers regretted Hulton's resignation and accused

1. Gazette, 1 Dec. 1821, 13 April 1822; Hay Scrapbks., xi. 158; Axon, Annals, 163, 165; Wheeler, History, 121; Observer, 6 April 1822; R. Potter Colln., xi, 25; Guardian, 1 Dec. 1821, 16 Feb., 6, 13, 20 April 1822; Chronicle, 16 Feb., 6 April, 4 May 1822; Exch.H., 9, 16 April, 14 May 1822; Mercury, 16 April 1822; Report of Redford v. Birley, 153-63; Walmsley, Peterloo Magistrate, 186, 383.

2. E.g. Times, 20 Aug. 1831; Voice, 20 Aug. 1831.

Althorp of inappropriate and invalid conduct.¹ Prentice brought the Peterloo saga before his readers again in March 1832 when Hunt introduced an unsuccessful motion into the Commons for an inquiry into Peterloo. Prentice repeated the opinion he had often expressed in the past: the lapse of time was no excuse for refusing an inquiry, and the offenders of 16 August 1819 should not be allowed to remain unpunished. Taylor disagreed - again, perhaps a sign that his views on Peterloo had changed. The Guardian did not approve of Hunt's call for an inquiry so long after the event and doubted that any advantage could come of a re-agitation of the question. The Chronicle opposed Hunt's motion and the Courier asserted that the responsibility for the deaths and injuries at Peterloo would always rest with those who had made the interference of the authorities necessary.²

The early and mid-1820s saw the band continue their efforts to inform and direct local opinion on the matter of parliamentary reform. Manchester's liberals were swimming against the tide for much of the time, but they were rising in individual and group self-assertiveness. Their determination and perseverance ensured their advance as principal actors on the Manchester political stage. Sometimes they could do nothing positive and had to rely on protest and complaint. When Prentice met the Whig Duke of Hamilton in 1820 he complained that the Whigs were too cautious and should identify themselves more closely with the cause

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1. Times, 24, 31 Dec. 1831, 14 Jan. 1832; Brotherton Scrapbks., xi. 40-1; Guardian, 24, 31 Dec. 1831; R. Potter Colln., xi. 87; Chronicle, 24 Dec. 1831; Courier, 12 Nov. 1831.
 2. Times, 24 March 1832; Guardian, 18 Feb., 24 March 1832; Chronicle, 24 March 1832; Courier, 18 Feb., 24 March 1832.

of reform. At this time he was advocating the abolition of rotten boroughs, a transfer of seats, shorter parliaments and an extension of the suffrage to include 'the intelligence of the country' via a franchise that would include more than just payers of direct taxes. Richard Potter was meanwhile complaining that of the 658 members of the House of Commons, 307 were returned by only 154 borough proprietors. The Grampound affair was a disappointment to the band because, inevitably, it did not represent the first stage in a programme of sweeping reform. The matter aroused interest in Manchester because there was a chance that the seats might be given to the Hundreds of Salford and Blackburn, but in the end they went to the county of Yorkshire. Some local Tories were prepared to accept such cautious, piecemeal improvements but the Gazette and Guardian were condemnatory.¹

At the time of the Cato Street Conspiracy the Gazette discussed the role of spies and emphasised that Manchester and Manchester men had nothing to do with Thistlewood's party. The Exchange Herald was not so sure, while the radical Observer - though not approving of revolutionary designs - stated that violence was bound to increase in reaction to misrule and oppression.² During the Queen Caroline controversy the band attacked the government for its high-handed and irresponsible course, and also condemned the town officers for rejecting requests for a public meeting. This did not dissuade them from giving the townspeople an

1. Prentice, Sketches, 172-4; R. Potter Colln, xi. 18; Gazette, 18 Dec. 1819, 27 May, 17 June 1820; Exch.H., 21 Dec. 1819, 20 Feb. 1821; Mercury, 22 May 1821; Guardian, 7 July 1821.

2. Gazette, 26 Feb. 4, 11 March, 6, 13, 27 May 1820; Exch.H., 29 Feb., 7 March, 25 April 1820; Observer, 26 Feb. 1820.

opportunity to air their views, though, and Baxter chaired a meeting in the Manor Court Room on 4 December 1820. Taylor, Richard Potter and Shuttleworth were the main speakers. In the summer of 1821 Baxter and Potter objected to the organisation of civic celebrations to mark George IV's coronation, pointing to the way the Queen had been mistreated, and at a parish meeting in October 1821 the band opposed the customary vote of thanks to the outgoing town officers on the grounds that they had denied the townspeople an official meeting on the Queen Caroline affair.¹ The Queen's staunchest supporters in Manchester were the plebeian radicals and the men behind the Observer. The Tories were critical of the Queen and her allies, and keen to demonstrate their loyalty to king and ministry.²

To the reformers the use of and access to printed matter was absolutely essential to their chances of making any progress in the fight for political justice; the 'free press' remained an ideal to be jealously guarded against all encroachment. In the early and mid-1820s the band were active in this sphere. The Gazette was subjected to a libel

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1. Gazette, 17, 24 June, 8 July, 19, 26 Aug., 2, 9 Sept., 7, 21 Oct., 4, 11, 18, 25 Nov., 2, 9, 16, 23 Dec. 1820, 27 Jan., 30 June, 14, 21, 28 July, 27 Oct. 1821; Hay Scrapbks., x. 179, 183, xi. 15; Hadfield, Narrative, 66-7; Brotherton Scrapbks., ii. 18-20; Watkin, Journal, 81-3; R. Potter Colln., xi. 26-7; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 11; Guardian, 7 July, 11, 18, 25 Aug., 3 Nov. 1821; Prentice, Sketches, 216-18.
 2. Observer, 5 Feb., 1 April, 10, 24 June, 1 July, 2, 9, 16 Sept., 14 Oct., 18, 25 Nov., 2, 9, 16 Dec. 1820, 13, 27 Jan., 3, 10 Feb. 1821; Revd. M. Horne, The Political and Moral Crisis of England (1820), 22-7; Chronicle, 2, 9, 30 Sept., 18, 25 Nov., 9, 16, 23 Dec. 1820; Exch.H., 13, 27 June, 25 July, 8 Aug., 14, 28, Nov., 12, 19 Dec. 1820, 9, 30 Jan., 20 Feb., 3 July, 14, 21 Aug., 30 Oct. 1821; Mercury, 14 March, 25 July, 19 Sept., 21, 28 Nov., 5, 19 Dec. 1820, 13 March, 15 May, 3 July 1821.

accusation in May 1820. Atkinson rendered legal assistance and in the end no indictment was forthcoming.¹ More serious were the activities of the Constitutional Association. Local Tories welcomed this body but the band (and the Observer) were extremely alarmed and hostile. Members of the band came to the assistance of several newsmen, booksellers and pamphleteers in this period, notably David Ridgeway of Manchester and Joseph Swann of Macclesfield.²

The Gazette and Guardian kept parliamentary reform before Mancunians with articles and commentary and also gave coverage to the reform proposals submitted to Parliament. There was enthusiasm for J. G. Lambton's unsuccessful scheme of April 1821 for triennial elections, a franchise including all copyholders, leaseholders, resident householders and payers of direct taxes, and the redrawing of constituency boundaries in England and Wales. Two years later the Gazette had to accept another defeat, this time of Russell's proposal for gradual reform through the disfranchisement of rotten boroughs. Taylor welcomed this plan, though he was not in favour of pecuniary compensation for disfranchisement. He had previously regretted Russell's concentration on rotten boroughs and opposition to a uniform franchise. In the early 1820s the Guardian

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1. The report in question concerned the conduct of the local military commander. Gazette, 29 April, 6 May 1820; Mercury, 9 May 1820; Leary, Periodical Press, 144.
 2. Chronicle, 15 Jan. 1820, 13 Jan., 26 May 1821, 9 March, 31 Aug. 1822; Mercury, 11, 18 Jan. 1820, 8 May 1821; Exch.H., 29 May, 3 July 1821; Gazette, 12 May, 2 June, 4 Aug., 27 Oct., 17 Nov. 1821, 15 May, 24 July 1824; Guardian, 5 May, 9 June, 2, 8 July, 22 Sept. 1821, 11 Feb., 9 March, 31 Aug. 1822, 15, 22 May, 26 June, 17 July 1824; Observer, 20 Oct., 14 Sept. 1822; Hay Scrapbks., x. 158-9, 170-1; Leary, Periodical Press, 137, 148; Meinertzhagen, 209-14; R. Potter Colln., xi. 14, 19-20, 42, xii. ff.91-4, 95, 97, 99-101, 103-5, xiiA. ff. 143, 154, 155; Prentice, Sketches, 237-8.

(before it began to shake off its youthful vigour and radicalism, at least in the eyes of its critics) was keen most of all for a substantial extension of the franchise to cover the 'wealth and mind' of the nation.¹

Manchester's respectable reformers lacked the kind of institutional basis for organisation and action that was enjoyed by their conservative opponents. Though they had their religious congregations, they did not have Pitt Clubs or Orange societies or loyalist associations, and they were also substantially excluded from the direction of police affairs and the parish government. One possible compensation was the Cheshire Whig Club, founded in 1820 to foster and maintain the principles of 1688 and - in the political environment of the 1820s - to further the cause of moderate and sensible reform. The Club was dominated by local Whig landed notables, M.Ps. and other public men, and also drew in reformers of respectable but more modest standing in the north-west. Four of the band - Richard Potter, Baxter, Atkinson and Taylor - seem at some stage to have belonged to the Club. Prentice found it too cautious and aristocratic. He was pleased by a declaration of principles prepared by a special committee of members in October 1824 which called for the repeal of the Septennial Act, the exclusion of placemen from the Commons, better regulation of elections and the enfranchisement of direct taxpayers, but this declaration went too far for the majority of members and was never ratified. Prentice disliked compromise and was not keen on a taxpaying franchise in any case, because it bestowed or withheld the

1. Gazette, 28 April 1821, 3 May 1822; Guardian, 7 July, 4 Aug. 1821, 4 May 1822, 3 May 1823.

vote without reference to the character and competency of the individual and so represented an 'absurd' limitation. The Tory Exchange Herald used the dispute over ratification to ridicule the Club and point to the split between 'Old' and 'New' Whigs. Taylor was more favourable towards the Club than Prentice; the Guardian was a firm supporter and Taylor attended and addressed the annual meetings of 1824 and 1825. Meanwhile Prentice continued to attack the Club as a tame and useless ally, and he contrasted the moderation of George Philips, the Manchester Unitarian who was now an M.P. and a leading member of the Club, with Philips's radical stance back in the 1790s when he had acted with Walker and the Constitutional Society. Manchester's Tory press found the Club a foolish and harmless exercise.¹

Taylor made much of the political changes of the mid-1820s, the rise of 'liberal Toryism' and the redefining of political parties. At the time of Goderich's short premiership the Guardian was to state that 'our proper place is no longer amongst opposition journals',² but even before this Taylor had expressed approval for the policy followed by the more progressive Tory ministers. Prentice was not blind to political developments, but in March 1826 pointed out that until something was done about the corn laws and the representative system 'we must not go too far in our laudation of the ministers'. He was also amused by the problem posed for Tory editors by the new situation: they did not know whether to

1. Gazette, 9, 16 Oct. 1824, 12 Nov. 1825; Exch.H., 12, 26 Oct. 1824; Guardian, 13 Oct. 1821, 12 Oct. 1822, 11 Oct. 1823, 16 Oct. 1824; Hay Scrapbks., x. 125, xi. 167; Chronicle and Courier, 15 Oct. 1825.

2. Guardian, 5 Jan. 1828.

praise or condemn the 'Whig' measures proceeding from a Tory government.¹ The new situation seems to have perplexed members of the Pitt Club. The rise of 'liberal Toryism' (locally as well as centrally, perhaps) marked the beginnings of self-analysis and maybe even internal disagreement among some Manchester conservatives. There are signs that interest in the Pitt Club was declining. The attendance at the annual dinner of May 1826 was not as large as on previous occasions, and back in April 1825 it was said that only about 25% of members took much interest in these events. Resolutions were passed condemning this apathy and imposing fines for non-attendance. Too many were showing a lack of respect for the Club and its principles.²

Although the policies of the Tory government might have been less objectionable to the band than in the past, the state of the representative system was still a cause of complaint and resentment. The 1826 general election gave Prentice the opportunity to print a series of diatribes on this matter, and he calculated that of all the members of the Commons only 171 were returned independent of nomination. Peers nominated 300 and commoners 187 members of the Lower House.³ The band were involved in the 1826 Preston contest, to judge by the surviving correspondence between Shuttleworth and the reform-minded local manufacturer John Wood, who took one of the seats. The other went to Edward Stanley and Cobbett trailed in third. Wood's success was achieved

1. Gazette, 18 March 1826.

2. Hay Scrapbks., xiv. 290; Pitt Club ms., ii. 40.

3. Gazette, 3, 17, 24 June, 1, 8 July 1826.

despite much bribery and treating by supporters of the other two candidates.¹

The annual meeting and dinner of the Cheshire Whig Club in October 1826 was attended and addressed by Richard Potter. His position was the same as Prentice's (the Club was too timid and should be doing more to help the cause of reform along) but Potter was sometimes more restrained in his language than his friend. It is nonetheless likely that he discussed his speech with Prentice beforehand; certainly he used information Prentice had previously inserted into the Gazette, and he also had a copy of Prentice's list of 100 boroughs which returned two M.P.s each and yet had a combined population less than than of unrepresented Manchester parish. Potter's speech emphasised that parliamentary reform had become absolutely essential and that the principles of the Whig Club 'should lead to a correspondent practice'. The Gazette and Guardian covered the event, and the Tory Courier used the occasion to scorn 'Whiggery' in the northwest. Prentice's dissatisfaction with the Club prevented him from paying it much attention after 1826. His coverage of the 1827 annual meeting was very brief. Richard Potter had planned to address it but for some reason failed to do so. Prentice had advised him about suitable content for a speech in a letter of 3 October 1827, so we have some indication of what Potter might have said. In Prentice's view the following points had to be stressed. The premierships of Canning and Goderich had to be put into perspective, because even though the 'Old' Tories had (apparently) been overcome

1. See letters in Shuttleworth Scrapbk. (loose leaves) and Biogr. Refs., especially Wood to Shuttleworth, 31 May, 5, 6 June 1826.

it was doubtful if their successors would be willing or able to effect true improvements. The Whigs had to act with energy, cast off 'mere mouthing and lip service', and identify themselves more closely with the people. Prentice suspected that such a speech would be received with some indifference in the Club, but he told Potter that this would not matter. The whole idea was to show the public that the Whigs had to do much more to deserve the name of 'reformers'.¹

Taylor's Guardian regretted the departure of Lord Liverpool following the prime minister's stroke in February 1827, but was to be a staunch supporter of the Canning-Whig coalition and was sure that the new government would encourage the continued march of progress. Prentice was glad that Lansdowne gained office, and wanted Grey to be included in the new government too, but he doubted that ministers - even if they wanted reforms - could do much in a Parliament that did not represent the people. The Courier found the Canning ministry 'monstrous', and with the Chronicle expressed fears about the safety of Church and constitution. The Pitt Club was reinvigorated by the appointment of the Canning government. The more uncompromising of Manchester's conservatives sensed a time of trial approaching. Speakers at the Pitt Club dinner of May 1827 dwelt on the need for the defence of sound principles.²

The fate of the Test and Corporation Acts seemed to Manchester's

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1. Gazette, 14 Oct. 1826, 13 Oct. 1827; Guardian, 14 Oct. 1826, 13 Oct. 1827; Courier, 21 Oct. 1826; R. Potter Colln., xii. ff.119-21.
 2. Guardian, 24 Feb., 31 March, 1, 21, 28 April 1827; Gazette, 24 Feb., 14, 21, 28 April, 5, 12 May 1827; Prentice, Sketches, 300; Courier, 24 Feb., 3 March, 7, 14, 21, 28 April, 19 May 1827; Chronicle, 21, 28 April, 5, 12 May, 11 Aug. 1827; Pitt Club ms., ii; Hay Scrapbks., xiv. 291-2 (and xiv., xv. A and B generally for alarm on the Catholic issue).

liberals to suggest that fundamental reforms were possible despite the apparent strength of the obstructionists. These Acts were of special concern to them, of course, for most of them were Dissenters (and proud of it) and they were also interested in progressive principles and civil liberties in the abstract. The Gazette and Guardian gave full support and coverage to the repeal movement in Manchester, and Prentice in particular was insistent in his call for Manchester's nonconformist congregations to act decisively. An early lead in the agitation was taken by the Cross Street Unitarians. The liberal-Dissenting leaders in Manchester disliked church establishments and wanted a change in Church-State relations. When the Bishop of Peterborough argued that repeal would be the first step in a chain of developments that would overthrow the Established Church, Richard Potter commented without remorse: 'I believe the Bishop is quite correct'. Most Manchester Tories were dissatisfied with repeal, though some were more concerned about the Church's reputation for tolerance than others, and some were mollified by the new declaration which Dissenters would have to make on accepting office. No proof was needed, but this issue did show that religious and party affiliations tended to go hand in hand in Manchester. Catholic emancipation was also to show how powerful sectarianism could be; certainly sect was one of the main factors dividing the dominant respectable Manchester business community.¹

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1. Gazette, 31 March, 7 April 1827, 19 Jan., 1, 22 March, 26 April, 3 May 1828; Guardian, 13 Jan., 28 April 1827, 9 Feb., 1, 22 March, 5 April, 3 May 1828; G. I. T. Machin, 'Resistance to the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts', HJ 22 (1979), points out (among other things) that much of the anti-repeal propaganda stressed the influence of the Unitarians; R. Potter Colln., xi. 47, xiii.A ff. 171-2; Chronicle, 9 Feb., 1, 22 March 1828; Courier, 1 March, 26 April 1828.

2. Manchester's attempt to gain the Penryn seats, 1827-8

Manchester's campaign to secure the parliamentary representation of the Cornish borough of Penryn involved respectable men of both conservative and liberal leanings. For a short while it seemed as if party differences would be put aside, at least partially, so that the campaigners could present a united front to the outside world. The majority of townspeople thought that Manchester did deserve to return M.P.s and that this was the most effective way of having local concerns expressed and local interests (especially commercial ones) defended and advanced. For the reformers this was also a question of right and of principle. Some measure of cooperation looked possible. Moderate reformers and moderate Tories shared some common ground and had similar social and economic concerns. But for friction to be kept to a minimum there would have to be a readiness to compromise and perhaps to avoid difficult questions. The franchise qualification needed to be settled, though, and so differences of opinion were bound to be expressed sooner or later. In the event the campaign floundered for lack of agreement in Manchester and, probably more importantly, lack of a sympathetic hearing from the legislature. Still, for the band this was a crucial episode. They were deeply involved in the campaign to gain the Penryn seats and they thereby gained enormously in experience, influence and standing. In some ways this was a trial run for 1830-32.

Russell's statement on 3 April 1827, that if the Commons agreed to disfranchise Penryn he would move that the seats be given to Manchester, was apparently made without any prompting. Mancunians had no prior expectation of it and, as with the Test and Corporation Acts, the local reformers had to respond quickly to a stimulus given them from elsewhere.

The county M.P. Lord Stanley wrote at once to the Boroughreeve and Constables informing them of Russell's undertaking and the local papers quickly took the matter up. Prentice was keen for enfranchisement, recommended an immediate mobilisation in its favour, and argued that the two main requirements would be proper electoral regulations and a franchise based on 'the broadest recognised principle of suffrage'. It is not clear if he meant universal suffrage or something close to it, or the Preston suffrage. Later he spoke of a taxpaying suffrage. But he did recognise that Manchester's demands would have to be shaped according to a consideration of what Parliament was likely to grant. The Guardian looked forward to the better representation of local commercial interests, also wanted proper electoral regulations to prevent delay and disturbances, and also stated the desirability of a wide franchise. Yet Taylor did not go as far as Prentice. Quality was to be preferred to numbers: there could be no influence for 'that class which, from want of education and from penury, is least likely to use it with honesty and independence'. Prentice later accused Taylor of wanting too exclusive a suffrage. He made the same remarks about the Tory papers. The Chronicle thought that Peel's jury qualification of £20 might be acceptable, but added that Manchester might not even get the chance to stake a claim for Penryn's seats. The Courier was not enthusiastic about the prospect of enfranchisement, also pointed out that the evidence against Penryn was not conclusive, and made much of the fact that local opinion was divided on the franchise issue. Towards the end of April Prentice said that a £20 franchise would be acceptable if this was the very lowest that could be

secured.¹

A town meeting was called for 23 May 1827. The Potters, Harvey, Prentice and Taylor were among the requisitionists, who included prominent Tories and members of the ruling party as well as moderate and advanced reformers. Emphasis was placed on the need for unanimity and cooperation, though Prentice and his friends must have wondered how long such illusory unity could last. The Guardian was less sceptical and was sure that cooperation was possible. Two points are significant: Taylor agreed with those who wanted to shelve awkward questions, and he continued to talk about enfranchisement as if it was an issue that only affected and interested Manchester's cotton businessmen. Prentice later recalled that moderate Whigs and moderate Tories had only wanted Penryn's seats so that local commerce could gain clear representation; the decided reformers wanted the seats so as to secure some beginning for the amendment of the whole system of representation. They let the moderates take the lead because potentially the latter could command wider support. The town meeting approved a petition to the Commons and appointed the Manchester Representation Committee to conduct the campaign for parliamentary representation. The original list of members was altered because Prentice and others pointed out that it contained too many conservatives, Pitt Club members, present and former town and parish officers and friends of the establishment. It did not fairly represent all the groups taking an interest in the question. So the list was added

1. Manchester Representation Committee. Minutes and Proceedings, 1827-8 ms. (Archives Dept. MCL), 3 and press cuttings; Gazette, 7, 14, 21 April 1827; Guardian, 7, 14, 21 April 1827; Chronicle, 7, 21 April 1827; Courier, 7 April, 12 May 1827; J. M. Main, The Parliamentary Reform Movement in Manchester 1825-32, Oxford University B. Litt thesis (1951), 90-4.

to, and Shuttleworth, Atkinson, Prentice, Baxter, Taylor and Richard Potter were named on the MRC. This was some breakthrough, but the balance of power within the MRC would still be with the moderates and conservatives - and no less than 15 of the 31 men on the MRC belonged to the Pitt Club. The petition approved on 23 May stressed the usefulness and expediency of the representation of commercial interests. It said nothing about natural rights, liberal theory, the constitution or justice and freedom. The advanced reformers really were leaving the moderates and conservatives to take the lead.¹

The Boroughreeve George Neden, a member of the Pitt Club and chairman of the MRC, kept up communications with Russell and the county M.Ps. Stanley and Blackburne through May and June 1827 while members of the band were corresponding on their own account. Prentice wrote to Russell and Shuttleworth to John Wood, M.P. for Preston 1826-32, asking for advice, an assessment of parliamentary opinion, and discussing matters such as the franchise and the regulation of elections. In these weeks there seems to have been a general expectation that Manchester would receive Penryn's seats. J. M. Main is probably right when he says that the reformers saw they were in a minority on the MRC, knew they would be outvoted on important matters, and so tried to make up for this by cultivating their contacts with sympathetic M.P.s. Hence the letters of Shuttleworth and Prentice.² Prentice's Gazette was soon warning

1. MRC, 1, 5, 7, 8-9, 10-15 and press cuttings; Gazette, 19, 26 May 1827; Main, Reform Movement, 95-8; Hay Scrapbks., xiv. 292, 296; Guardian, 19, 26 May 1827; Prentice, Sketches, 305-8; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 217-40; Pitt Club ms. (membership book); Chronicle, 26 May 1827.

2. MRC, 7, 10-15; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 49; Main, Reform Movement, 99-100.

that other unrepresented places were making claims on Penryn's seats (including Glasgow, St. Pancras and Marylebone). The Chronicle expressed fears too, but Prentice's concern was for the cause of thorough reform:

We fear the effect of this competition will be a sacrifice of the principles on which every reform in the representative system ought to be founded. It is well-known that Parliament is averse to any very broad extension of the elective right, and we fear this may induce some one of the competing places to accommodate itself to this aversion, and to express its readiness to accept the privilege on the terms most likely to be acceptable to those who have it to confer.

Soon Parliament's attention was drawn to Birmingham's request to be given the representation of another corrupt borough, East Retford. The moderate Whig merchant G. W. Wood, later joined by the Tory H. H. Birley, went to London on behalf of the MRC to urge that Manchester should get priority. When the Guardian reported that Russell had decided to postpone his motion for the transfer of Penryn's seats to Manchester, Taylor assured his readers that this was nothing to worry about. He trusted in the liberalism of the Canning government, its strength in the Commons and its willingness to support Russell's plan. Taylor may have been assuming too much, and even he admitted ^{that} resistance in the Lords could prove a problem. Russell wrote to Neden on 14 June 1827 recommending that the MRC draw up a draft bill for the representation of Manchester, 'suited to their own opinions which may or may not coincide with mine'. Russell said he had not yet made up his mind about a voting qualification.¹ Soon Prentice was arguing that a wide suffrage for Manchester would be perfectly safe if the ballot was introduced, but he recognised that Parliament would probably not agree.²

1. MRC, 14-28 and press cuttings; Gazette, 2, 9 June 1827; Main, Reform Movement, 101-4; Chronicle, 2 June 1827; Boroughreeve's Papers, i 217-40; Guardian, 7 July 1827.

2. Gazette, 30 June 1827.

On 15 October 1827 the MRC appointed a subcommittee to prepare a draft Manchester Representation Bill. Its members were H. H. Birley, G. W. Wood, Gilbert Winter, R. H. Greg and William Cririe. Wood and Greg were moderate Whigs, Birley and Winter leading members of the Pitt Club and the local ruling oligarchy; Cririe, an attorney, was also in the Pitt Club but does not appear to have been very active in Manchester political life. A draft was ready by mid-November. This delimited the parliamentary borough, outlined basic qualifications for voters and laid out rules for the organisation of elections. The question of the appropriate property assessment for voters was not decided upon. At the eleventh meeting of the MRC on 14 December 1827, members of the band decided to try and have more of a say in the conduct of the Manchester campaign. They pressed for concessions from the MRC's majority. Atkinson and Shuttleworth argued that the Boroughreeve and Constables should not be named as returning officers in the draft (presumably because these town officials had too often been party men in the past), and proposed the Sheriff instead. Their motion was lost by nine votes. Further arguments occurred at the next meeting, on 20 December. Taylor and Shuttleworth pressed for a £15 assessment as the qualification for voters but lost by seven votes. By the same margin it was resolved that a £20 qualification would be best and that G. Winter and G. W. Wood should go to discuss this with Russell. The band were having no success in the MRC. Winter and Wood saw Russell for two hours at Woburn Abbey on 14 January 1828. He approved of the draft but said he wanted to consult Althorp and others before making a final decision. He accepted the £20 qualification while expressing concern about discrepancies between rentals and assessments; he suggested that householders should be

entitled to have their assessments raised to the level of their rents. He also suggested that counsel be employed to bring the draft into its proper form (Wood subsequently secured the services of a Mr. Wellbeloved of the Temple). Russell's and the MRC's suggestions were combined in a final draft, approved by the MRC in February 1828.¹

The divisions within the MRC at this time were matched by disputes over local government, for great controversy was being created by the attempt to reconstitute the Police Commission. As the 'high' party and the reformers struggled for control of police affairs, representatives of both groups were also arguing over the Penryn affair in the MRC. Of course the 'high' party was normally able to control the MRC's proceedings, the balance of power being decidedly in its favour. Meetings were mostly chaired by the Boroughreeve and attended also by the Constables and churchwardens. There was no obvious reformer on the sub-committee which drafted a Manchester Representation Bill, and though there were reformers in the main MRC their proposals were normally negatived. The band must have been highly frustrated. Tension probably increased in November 1827 when Charles Cross, the new Boroughreeve, began to chair MRC meetings. Cross was a leader of the 'high' party and unpopular with reformers for his role in preventing a town meeting on the slavery issue in 1826. Things were not going well for the band in the MRC. Prentice was certainly dissatisfied. There were 19 meetings between May 1827 and March 1828. He attended 8 of the first 9 meetings, then did not attend again at all until the very last meeting.

1. MRC, 28-57; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 253-75; Main, Reform Movement, 105-7.

Baxter and Richard Potter were more consistent in their attendance but Shuttleworth, like Prentice, appears to have decided that attendance was not likely to achieve very much. He was present at only 7 of the first 14 meetings and did not attend any thereafter.¹

In April 1827 Prentice had accepted a £20 qualification as a good and safe compromise between reformers and conservatives. At some point before the end of the year he changed his mind, deciding that £20 was too high and that liberals should not give up too much in the interests of compromise. He was probably affected by the way things were going in the MRC (and the police dispute); he may also have discovered that the Manchester electorate under a £20 franchise would in fact be much smaller than he had originally thought. In February 1828 as Russell was preparing to bring in the bill giving Manchester the elective right, Prentice openly protested against the £20 franchise. His main point was that the whole rate assessment system in Manchester was full of irregularities. Many assessments were inaccurate and this would mean that a high number of townsmen who deserved the vote, and strictly speaking did qualify for it, would be excluded. It is not clear if Prentice would have regarded the £20 qualification as less objectionable provided there was less discrepancy in Manchester between assessments to the rates - the basis of the voting qualification - and the rents paid for occupied property. Meanwhile the Courier was emphasising the need for a high voting qualification and the likelihood that Penryn's seats would go to the neighbouring hundreds. Taylor welcomed the £20 franchise

1. The attendances at each meeting are in MRC, passim.

as a fitting compromise between all interested parties, and argued that continuing disputes would harm Manchester's campaign: everyone should accept the qualification and be silent. Richard Potter wrote to a contact in Birmingham and expressed his own preference for the enfranchisement of all ratepayers, as provided for in Tennyson's bill to give Birmingham the Retford seats. As Potter said of the £20 franchise, the apparent sine qua non for the enfranchisement of Manchester, 'if it can only be got at such a sacrifice I for one would much prefer us not having the privilege'. Prentice went on claiming that Russell had been misled as to Manchester's readiness to accept a £20 qualification, while Taylor condemned the plan being mooted in Parliament for the transfer of Penryn's seats to the neighbouring hundreds rather than Manchester.¹

By the end of March 1828 it looked as if Manchester's chances of success were fading. The Manchester Representation Bill had been substantially modified in the Commons² and it was not clear how the Lords would act on the matter. There was also the problem of what the Wellington government wanted. Peel was speaking of some other destination than Manchester for Penryn's seats, while Russell appears to have lost confidence. Wellbeloved of the Temple saw Russell on 16 and 24

1. Gazette, 9, 23 Feb., 29 March 1828; Guardian, 23 Feb., 15, 29 March 1828; Courier, 9, 23 Feb. 1828; Hay Scrapbks., xiv. 296; R. Potter Colln., xiiiA. ff.179-80.

2. All the regulations relating to elections had been removed on the grounds that they were unnecessary or else already provided for in existing statutes. Russell said he would introduce a special measure to control Manchester elections - if the town desired it - at some future date. The band were angry that good clauses had been removed and the £20 franchise retained.

March and informed the MRC that he 'does not seem inclined to oppose Mr. Peel's wish, if it should appear to be of a decided nature'. G. Winter and G. W. Wood were deputed to go to London and press Manchester's claims. Prentice and Richard Potter argued at the MRC meeting of 26 March that Baxter should be added to this deputation, so that the reformers would be represented, but this motion was defeated by eight votes to three.¹ Discussion continued in Manchester with Prentice the most outspoken critic of the £20 franchise. At a town meeting on 24 April 1828, held to discuss the latest Constables' Accounts, Prentice objected to the sums claimed as expenses by the deputation which had gone to confer with Russell and other M.P.s on the enfranchisement of Manchester. He argued that the deputation had assumed a power not delegated to it when it 'bargained for an exclusive suffrage'. After much argument Prentice's motion was carried and the expenses were disallowed, but this was not the end of the matter. Baxter agreed with Prentice: Russell had somehow been misled about the propriety and acceptability of a £20 franchise. Baxter was in London in April 1828 to take part in the canvassing of M.P.s on the Manchester Police Bill, but the Penryn affair was on his mind too. He told Richard Potter he hoped to see Russell so that the mystery surrounding Russell's conversation with Manchester's 'parliamentary delegation' could be cleared up.²

By early May there was not even the pretence of unity in Manchester

1. MRC, 58-70; Boroughreeve's Papers, i. 290-2, 297-8, 302-24, 330-7.

2. Gazette, 16 Feb., 5, 19, 26 April 1828; MRC, press cuttings; Guardian, 5 April 1828; Prentice, Sketches, 308-9; Chronicle, 26 April 1828; Wheeler, History, 127; Baxter to Potter, 25 April 1828, R. Potter Colln., xii. ff.141-2.

on the Penryn affair. In fact the Lords received two petitions from the town, one praying for Penryn's seats and the other opposing enfranchisement on the grounds that the Manchester Representation Bill as it stood would not prevent electoral tumults. The bill had been lost in the Lords by the end of May. Prentice had not been keen on the measure but was still angry about the way the affair had gone. He was especially critical of the conduct of Peel, who had previously said that the Penryn and Retford questions should be settled so that one representation went to a commercial town and the other to the neighbouring hundreds, but who now seemed to favour a solution arranging for Penryn to retain its seats and for Retford's to go to the hundreds. Taylor also found Peel's conduct open to censure. Of course the Wellington government was seriously divided on the issue and eventually lost its more liberal-minded members because of the disagreements and misunderstandings. So Penryn was not disfranchised and Manchester did not gain representation. At the time Prentice argued that this outcome only served to prove the absurdity of the representative system and the necessity for thorough parliamentary reform. Later he said he was glad that Manchester had not gained Penryn's seats. This kind of piecemeal reform could have put off real reform for decades: 'The gradual process would have been much the same as standing still'. The Tory government might have spread over years the changes effected at once by the 1832 Reform Act.¹

1. Chronicle, 3 May 1828; Courier, 26 April 1828; Gazette, 24 May, 28 June 1828; Guardian, 24 May 1828; R. Potter Colln., xi. 138; J. Cannon, Parliamentary Reform (1973), 188-90; Main, Reform Movement, 113-14; MRC, press cuttings; Prentice, Sketches, 304-9.

After the defeat of this campaign, the recriminations began in earnest. Prentice was determined that the town should not pay the expenses of the MRC deputation which had, in his view, misled Russell on the acceptability of the £20 franchise. This was also an issue on which the advanced reformers could make a stand and try and enforce their own views of what shape parliamentary reform should take over those of the moderates and conservatives who had dominated the MRC and the recent enfranchisement campaign. Prentice had enough support among both respectable and 'middling sort' reformers to make an impressive showing at the leypayers' meeting of 24 July 1828. As before it was argued that, since the deputation had been appointed by the MRC and the MRC by an official town's meeting, the town ought to pay the expenses which the deputation had incurred. It was also said that if the expenses were disallowed then in future public-spirited men would be reluctant to act if they knew they could not claim back sums they expended on the town's behalf. Even Baxter was in some sympathy with this view, but Prentice would not be swayed and his motion that the expenses be disallowed was easily passed. Some called for the votes to be taken under the Vestry Act and there was uproar; the Act was not invoked since the sense of the meeting was clear enough. But the arguments were not silenced and in January 1829 it was revealed that the deputation's expenses would be discussed at yet another town meeting. These sums had been included in the latest Constables' Accounts to ensure another vote. The Tory Courier approved. Prentice pointed out that town meetings had twice rejected the expenses; a third attempt to make the town pay would be extraordinary and indecent, and Prentice urged the townsmen to register their disgust by attending in numbers and rejecting the charges once more. But his opponents had made superior preparations. A large gathering in the Town

Hall on 23 January 1829 heard Taylor argue that the opposition to the expenses had been rooted in the belief that the £20 qualification was too high - yet it had been necessary to fix some figure and this one had represented a compromise acceptable to most interested parties. Baxter felt that the MRC had been justified in sending the deputation but that it would not be right to pass the expenses after the town had rejected them twice. Undeterred Taylor proposed their acceptance and the meeting approved. Prentice's next editorial scorned Taylor's conduct, complained about the MRC and 'high' party victory won 'in consequence of an extraordinary muster of their friends', and made it absolutely clear that Russell had been misled about the £20 qualification. This was the ace up his sleeve:

How was it that Lord John Russell after writing to the Editor of this paper, 'you have convinced me that the qualification ought not to exceed fifteen pounds', afterwards fixed it at twenty?

Taylor defended his own conduct and the decision of the meeting in the next Guardian.¹

Tennyson's proposal to transfer East Retford's seats to Birmingham was finally lost in February 1830. Prentice was neither surprised nor regretful. Such a minor and marginal change was not enough. The greatest happiness of the greatest number could only be secured by 'the actual representation of ALL'. The Retford seats went to the neighbouring hundreds. Taylor felt that the failure of Tennyson's bill would not prove significant in the long run; every chief town would soon have M.P.s, such was the rapid spread of opinion in favour of substantial

1. Gazette, 26 July 1828; Chronicle, 26 July 1828; MRC, 75-6; Times, 17, 24, Jan. 1829; Courier, 17 Jan. 1829; Guardian, 24 Jan. 1829.

parliamentary reform.¹

3. The passing of the first Reform Act

Catholic emancipation was a great triumph for the cause of reform, and like the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts seemed to demonstrate that fundamental and sweeping amendments of the exclusive, oligarchic, Anglican constitution were not impossible. As Prentice never tired of pointing out, one change could easily lead to another. Both he and Taylor welcomed emancipation in their newspapers, though Prentice detested the 'base bargain' by which concession was secured in return for the disfranchisement of the 40s. freeholders. Most Manchester Tories were against emancipation.² For reformers parliamentary reform retained its position as the central remedy on which all else seemed to depend. Prentice continued to discharge what he saw as his patriotic and journalistic duty and set about organising and directing opinion on the question. Among his many articles on parliamentary reform in the late 1820s were detailed discussions of the borough and county representations, Bentham's views on reform, the spread of enlightened opinions and the faults and burdens of aristocratic government. In some of these pieces he seemed prepared to go as far as universal suffrage and annual elections (nor did he rule out votes for women). In 1829 and 1830 he also covered and commented on large meetings at which mainly lower

1. Times, 20 Feb. 1830; Guardian, 13 March, 24 July 1830.

2. Times, 2 May, 27 June 1829; Prentice, Sketches, 253-62, 334-39; Guardian, 14 March 1829; Chronicle, 11 April 1829; Courier, 14, 21 March, 4, 18 April, 9 May 1829, 2 Jan. 1830.

class radical leaders pointed to the links between the rising economic distress and an unrepresentative political system.¹ The Guardian also kept interest in reform alive in these months though Taylor was more discriminating about the kind of reform he wanted than Prentice was. Taylor used liberal language and spoke of a wide franchise and the proper recognition of individual rights, but he continued to see reform as something which ought only to interest and apply to the respectable commercial ranks. He opposed universal suffrage.²

In October 1829 the Cheshire Whig Club decided to dissolve itself, apparently because of declining attendances and the view that certain major reforms - like Catholic emancipation - had been secured and the work of the Club substantially done. Prentice reported the dissolution as 'a release from false friends'. By now Taylor had decided that old party distinctions of 'Whig' and 'Tory' were losing their significance; what mattered now was whether or not a man was a 'political economist'. Taylor found the dissolution understandable. The Chronicle, more stridently partisan after Catholic emancipation, was glad about the Club's demise and surprised it had lasted so long.³ In January 1830 Prentice welcomed the establishment of the Birmingham Political Union as a body that could set a valuable example to reformers all over the

1. Gazette, 5 July 1828; Times, 4 July, 19 Sept., 10 Oct., 12 Dec. 1829, 13 March, 22 May 1830.

2. E.g. Guardian, 22 Dec. 1827, 6 June 1829.

3. Times, 14 Nov. 1829; Guardian and Chronicle, 17 Oct. 1829.

country. He gave its early activity extensive coverage and continued to write about it in the coming months. The Tory press condemned such bodies.¹ Prentice stepped up his coverage of parliamentary proceedings early in 1830. Parliamentary news took up a third of all space in his Times of 20 February 1830, and one column was from 'our Private Correspondent'; it had been sent north on Thursday evening ready for insertion before Saturday's publication. Prentice reported the meetings of reform associations and began to think about the establishment of a Political Union in Manchester.²

The 1830 general election saw members of the band immerse themselves in campaigning and commentary; again they were gaining the kind of experience that would help them greatly in their future political endeavours. There was no contest in the county, as usual. Lord Stanley retained his seat and the Tory John Wilson Patten (a considerable landowner in Warrington and partner in a Manchester firm manufacturing patent rollers, later M.P. for North Lancashire, created Lord Winmarleigh) took over from the retired John Blackburne, who had been a county M.P. since 1780. The Times complained about the lack of a challenger. The Guardian had hoped that a sound commercial representative would be returned for Lancashire and was not impressed by Patten, unlike the Courier and Chronicle. It seems that a challenger was sought in 1830, possibly Edward Strutt of the Derbyshire textile magnates. Shuttleworth was the Strutts' Manchester agent and seems to have passed on an

1. Times, 30 Jan., 15 May, 9 Oct. 1830; Chronicle, 30 Jan., 16 Oct. 1830; Courier, 30 Jan. 1830.

2. Times, 20, 27 Feb., 22 May, 26 June 1830.

invitation to Edward Strutt asking him to stand for Lancashire. Strutt declined in favour of Derby, where he was successful. There was a contest at Preston, which Prentice covered in detail. Hunt came at the bottom of the poll, and E. G. Stanley and John Wood (one of the band's parliamentary contacts) retained their seats. The Cheshire county election was also contested and Prentice took up the cause of the reformer E. D. Davenport, who had a reputation for being a 'poor man's friend'. Prentice attended the hustings at Stockport and spoke on Davenport's behalf, but the entrenched county interests were too strong and as expected the Tory William Egerton of Tatton Park and 'aristocratical' Whig Lord Belgrave were returned. Prentice also covered the Yorkshire election in detail, throwing his weight behind the campaign of Morpeth and Brougham. Both were returned and at the end of September Prentice attended and addressed a Yorkshire freeholders' meeting at Saddleworth in their honour. The Chronicle complained that the election results as a whole were not very favourable to the Wellington government. The Courier still could not forgive the government for emancipation and felt that its limited success was a fitting reward.¹

Prentice's main concentration during the 1830 election was on the contest for Wigan and the connected campaign to have the Wigan franchise restored to its historic character. In recent decades it had been exclusively controlled by the corporation and the seats had been shared by corporation nominees and members of the Balcarres family. The only men who could cast valid votes were the so-called 'elect' or 'jury'

1. Times, 10, 17, 31 July, 7 Aug., 2 Oct. 1830; Guardian, 5, 12, Dec. 1829; 24 July 1830; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 78; Chronicle, 14 Nov., 5 Dec. 1829, 31 July, 14 Aug. 1830; Courier, 28 Nov. 1829, 16 July 1830.

burgesses. This went against the Wigan charter granted by Henry III, which stated that all inhabitants bearing scot and lot should enjoy the full rights of burgesses. Some of the band became involved in the attempt to change this situation, in support of Richard Potter. Potter became Wigan's chief advocate after mid-July 1830, when the inhabitants asked him to stand as a parliamentary candidate along with another respectable reformer, the bleacher James Hardcastle of Bolton. Potter, his brother, Prentice and other allies were in Wigan for the election. Potter's programme was to press for the restoration of the Wigan franchise and the removal of the corn laws, of the East India Company monopoly and of all restrictions on commerce. The poll took place on Saturday 31 July. Potter and Hardcastle gained the most votes, but not corporation votes, so they were declared unsuccessful. Potter promised to stand by the people of Wigan and lead a campaign for justice. Prentice also addressed the crowd. In September there were calls in Manchester for financial contributions to aid the Wigan effort, but in February 1831 a parliamentary committee of inquiry narrowly decided that the right of election did belong solely to the 'jury' and 'elect' burgesses. The Times urged the Wigan people not to give up, since the committee had been almost equally divided. The Guardian's coverage of the affair was far less extensive. Taylor did not seem to approve or disapprove of Potter's candidature and the Wigan franchise agitation.¹

Reform excitement in Manchester was also created or increased in the summer of 1830 by the French Revolution, which the band welcomed with

1. Times, 31 July, 7 Aug., 4 Sept. 1830, 26 Feb. 1831; Guardian, 31 July 1820; Hadfield, Narrative, 103.

great enthusiasm,¹ and by Hunt's presence in the town in August for the anniversary of Peterloo. After Hunt had addressed a meeting on St. Peter's Field he attended a dinner at which an argument broke out over the plebeian reformer and lecturer Rowland Detrosier's toast to 'the rights of man and Thomas Paine'. Prentice spoke for the bulk of those in attendance when he said that he could drink to Paine's politics but not Paine's theological opinions. The controversy created by the toast lasted for several weeks. Another toast at the dinner was to the Manchester Political Union. The draper P. T. Candelet, one of Prentice's political allies, read out the resolutions passed at a recent meeting in the Times office and said that 200 members had so far joined the Union.²

The fall of Wellington and the appointment of a Whig government committed to some measure of parliamentary reform was the breakthrough that the band and their allies had been waiting for. But now it had come what was the best course for them to pursue? On 13 December some prominent respectable reformers met in the York Hotel, King Street, to consider whether a public meeting on reform could or should be arranged. Baxter, Watkin and Richard Potter were among those present, as were allies like the attorney George Hadfield, the manufacturer Thomas

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1. Times, 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug., 13 Nov. 1830; Guardian, 31 July, 7, 14, 21, 28 Aug., 11 Sept., 9 Oct. 1830; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 35-6; Prentice, Sketches, 364-5; Report of the Proceedings in Paris on the delivery of the Resolutions passed in Manchester... Congratulating the Parisians and the French Nation on the Recovery of their Freedom (1830). Local Tories were more equivocal: Chronicle, 31 July, 7, 14, 28 Aug., 13 Nov. 1830; Courier, 21, 28 Aug. 1830.
 2. Times, 14, 21 Aug., 4 Sept., 2, 9, 23 Oct., 13 Nov., 18 Dec. 1830; on the Hunt dinner also Courier and Guardian, 21 Aug. 1830; J. Belchem, Orator Hunt. Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism (1985), ch. 7; Kirby & Musson, ch. XI.

Harbottle and the merchant Mark Philips. It was decided that a reform meeting should be held in the near future but not immediately. This would give time for the preparation of resolutions. Another reason for delay - and a problem that was to plague the respectable liberals all through the campaign in favour of the Reform Bill - was recorded by Watkin:

It was quite evident from what was said that there were serious apprehensions entertained as to the disposition of the working classes, and a fear of their interference provoked an evident disinclination to a meeting at present.¹

The weeks before the introduction of the Reform Bill saw much discussion and campaigning in Manchester. Members of the band were prominent and acted throughout as a reasonably cohesive unit. Some may have been more moderate than others, and indeed Prentice was the only one who had any real contact with reformers from humbler social ranks. None of his respectable friends joined the Political Union he helped to form and direct, though this may not have been because they doubted the usefulness and propriety of such a body but rather because they wanted to concentrate on other aspects of the reform campaign and felt it was best to leave such activity to one of their number who was best suited to deal with it. The only friction within the band was that initially produced four or five years earlier over the direction taken by the Guardian. It is true to say, however, that Prentice was perhaps more impatient than some of his friends and had less faith in the readiness to compromise which marked Manchester's attempt to gain some degree of cross-party

1. Watkin, Journal, 148; c.f. J. M. Main, 'Working Class Politics in Manchester from Peterloo to the Reform Bill', HSANZ (1955), on respectable reformers' fear of arousing a plebeian involvement that could not be controlled.

cooperation on behalf of reform. Moderates on all sides wanted an early show of civic opinion in favour of the idea of reform and seemed to feel that some cooperation was possible. At times Prentice was sceptical. In particular he did not want the advanced reformers to give way on important matters.

As arrangements were made for a public meeting Prentice hoped that the resolutions adopted would be 'such as decided reformers may support without any abatement of principle'. The meeting took place on 20 January 1831 and was chaired by Baxter. This was not an official town meeting because the Boroughreeve and Constables refused to comply with a requisition to call one, and local conservatives did not attend in any numbers. Watkin helped to compose resolutions and a petition before the meeting and Prentice approved of them. Some were framed in general and cautious terms but at least reformers of all shades could accept them. They dealt with the necessity for reform, the thanks due to the government for its promise to introduce a measure, and the fact that reform would not be satisfactory unless it rendered the House of Commons the home of 'the real representatives of the people', shortened the duration of parliaments and provided for the vote by ballot. A committee of 22 was appointed to further the purposes of the meeting. It was dominated by the band's circle and included Baxter, the Potters, Shuttleworth, Atkinson, J. B. Smith, Watkin and Prentice. Members of the band also delivered the key speeches, especially Baxter, Richard Potter and Prentice. The Guardian praised the unanimity and peaceful demeanour of the meeting and said that credit was due to the labouring ranks. Taylor did feel, though, that a commitment to the ballot might prove divisive in the future. The Tory Chronicle wanted only gradual and

moderate reform and felt that some of the speeches and resolutions went too far; the Courier dismissed the ballot as an absurdity and the meeting as 'far from respectable'.¹ Though the Courier remained strident Manchester's anti-reform Tories were by now declining in strength and influence. So far there were no signs of an energetic opposition movement, and the Pitt Club was rapidly heading towards inactivity. The number of its active members had been on the decline for a while, meetings were adjourned because of poor attendances, and May 1828 had seen the last annual dinner. In 1830 the constitution of the Club was changed so that new members could be admitted on the vote of 12 rather than 24 existing members. There was no election of officers in 1831 and indeed no more Pitt Club meetings after May 1831.²

Tension existed in Manchester in the winter of 1830-31 not only because of the reform agitation but also because of continuing local government disputes (over the salary of Deputy Constable Lavender, for instance) and a bitter spinners' strike involving much of south Lancashire and most menacing in the Ashton-Hyde-Stalybridge area just to the east of Manchester. The murder of the Hyde manufacturer Thomas Ashton raised fears about public order. The local ruling party raised the spectre of disturbance and were accused by the reformers of trying to dissuade the government from its reform plan. Meanwhile Prentice

1. Times, 18 Dec. 1830, 22 Jan. 1831; Watkin, Journal, 149; Prentice, Sketches, 369-71; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 86; Brotherton Scrapbks., x. 50; Guardian, 22 Jan., 5 Feb. 1831; Chronicle, 15, 22 Jan. 1831; Courier, 22 Jan. 1831.

2. Pitt Club ms., ii; also supplementary chapter in Prentice's Sketches.

continued to cover reform meetings all over the country. Brotherton and J. B. Smith figured prominently at the Salford meeting of 24 January 1831. This was part of Salford's campaign to be enfranchised; Smith and Brotherton were appointed to the committee to further the purposes of the meeting and Brotherton was one of four men deputed to go to London and press Salford's claims. Prentice used his Times to keep local reformers constantly supplied with advice and information and promised the best possible coverage of the latest parliamentary session and the debates on reform.¹

The band welcomed the Whigs' Reform Bill. Prentice and Smith recorded their pleasure that it was much broader than was anticipated. Of course it did not go as far as convinced reformers wanted, but Prentice was prepared to accept it as a valuable first instalment. His Times stated that the bill 'though far short of what we demand, and of what we shall ultimately have, sweeps away some of the most odious parts of the old rotten system and opens the way to a reformation of all other abuses, and we accept it with gratitude'. Some reformers regretted that there would be no ballot and no greater extension of the suffrage, but like the band they approved of the government proposals as far as they went. Manchester's dominant public men decided that any meeting should be an official civic affair, with the town officers' sanction. This would give a chance for cooperation between moderates of all parties. On the bill Taylor was more free with his praise than Prentice. He found it a bold plan certain to make the House of Commons a popular representative

1. Prentice, Sketches, 372; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 38; Times, 25 Dec. 1830, 8, 22, 29 Jan., 12, 19 Feb., 19 March, 2 April 1830.

assembly. He found the voting qualifications admirable (occupation of £10 premises in boroughs, £10 copyholds, £50 leaseholds and 40s. freeholds in counties); they would give the proper outlet to property, knowledge, mental energy and moral respectability - and best of all there would now be no convincing arguments for universal suffrage. Taylor certainly preferred moderate to radical reform; his closest friends were of a similar outlook and this stance on reform was a main reason for his growing estrangement from others in the band. The Chronicle was not opposed to all reform but argued that the Whigs' bill went too far; the Courier was totally against this 'revolutionary' measure. The Voice, edited by Doherty, was prepared to accept the Reform Bill as better than nothing, though it continued to stress the need for universal suffrage, the ballot and shorter parliaments.¹

The strength of the Manchester campaign in favour of the Reform Bill owed something to the Manchester Political Union (MPU). Prentice considered political unions useful tools for the organisation of reformers, the expression of complaints and needs, and the influencing of public opinion and the legislature. He was also impressed by the class unity aspects of the Birmingham plan, the way in which reformers of wealth and respectability could be joined in a single body with reformers from the labouring ranks and the shopkeepers and menu peuple. He would

1. Prentice, Sketches, 373-4; Smith, Reminiscences, 38; Times, 5 March 1831; Guardian, 5 March 1831; I. & C. Scott, 241; Chronicle and Courier, 5, 19 March 1831; Voice, 5, 26 March, 2 April 1831. Asa Briggs is mistaken when he says that Doherty opposed the Reform Bill - 'The Background of the Parliamentary Reform Movement in Three English Cities', CHJ X (1952) and his Collected Essays, i. 192; on Doherty see also Kirby and Musson, 423-34.

have liked to have fostered this kind of unity in Manchester, and on the face of it he was the right man to attempt this. His closest political allies were men of standing in the business community and he himself had been a muslin merchant. But perhaps his greatest appeal was to the lower middle-class reformers, men of small means interested in personal advancement and the causes of economy and 'improvement', and in gaining for themselves political rights and a secure social status. Prentice was also interested in working-class issues and showed great sympathy towards workers' complaints and desires. He was certainly more favourable than some of his allies towards a wide franchise encompassing the majority of working people.¹ Many impulses operated in Prentice's heart and mind - Benthamite radicalism, Christian egalitarianism, sensible and respectable liberalism and a charitable, humanitarian commitment to the little man who needed a helping hand to take his place in society. Prentice drew on all these impulses during his political campaigning, but he was unable to appeal to all classes of reformers simultaneously or consistently during 1830-2 and so the prospects for a united reform movement in Manchester were not good. Asa Briggs has shown that the social and economic organisation of Manchester did not favour such cooperation.² The

1. Prentice supported universal suffrage as an ultimate goal and a sound principle, but recognised that it might be difficult to proceed to it all in one go. He was very much in favour of a franchise linked to education - for as educational opportunities were improved and extended so more people would qualify for the vote. By the later 1830s he had decided that the vote should go to all who could read about the conduct of their representatives and write their names in the exercise of their constitutional right of petitioning. Bentham had favoured a simple reading test in his Radical Reform Bill of 1820. On Prentice's views, preface in 3rd edn. (1832) of his Instruction in Schools for Infants; Sketches, 341-2; Organic Changes; D. Read's intro. to 3rd edn. (1970) of Sketches; Somerville.

2. Briggs, 'Background'.

often strained nature of Manchester's social and economic relationships was to affect the history of the MPU, and behind the calls for unity was the undoubted fact that men like Prentice - if they wanted to bring workers' leaders into partnership - felt that this could not be a partnership of equals. One side should provide numbers, the other side leadership and guidance. Men like Prentice also probably did not appreciate how pedagogic and patronising they often appeared to men of humbler social ranks.

Interesting comments on the failure of Manchester reformers to stage a united campaign in 1830-32 have been made by N. C. Edsall and R. A. Sykes. Edsall emphasises the caution of the moderates, the failure of the shopocracy to advance and bridge the divide between respectable liberals and plebeian radicals, and the limited support for the MPU. He concludes that Manchester had no 'central reform tradition' before Cobden.¹ Perhaps he underestimates Manchester's contribution to the extraparliamentary campaign in favour of the Reform Bill. Even though Manchester's reformers were divided for much of the time this did not stop the town from having a significant effect on the events of 1830-32. Also, though it is true that the shopkeepers did not play the dominant role in 1830-32, the contribution of this body and agitators of similar standing was important. The MPU had special appeal for such people, and the shopocracy's input both in 1830-32 and later during the campaign for incorporation was indispensable to the success of the reform cause.

1. Edsall, op.cit., 30.

Sykes has highlighted the problem of the more advanced respectable liberals (that is, the band and their circle) who rose to predominance but had to ensure that they did not alienate the less publicly-active but far more numerous moderates. They were also conscious of the strained social relations in Manchester and did not want the workers to become too agitated. As for the plebeian radical leaders, many of them disliked the MPU because they found it too moderate and exclusive, but they also faced the problem of internal divisions because some were ready to accept the Reform Bill as a first step and others rejected it as insufficient. This prevented a united and consistent working-class response to what the government was offering and what the MPU and the respectable Reform Committee (established in September 1831) were advocating.¹ But some of Sykes's opinions seem open to question. He portrays Prentice as a moderate and cautious reformer who was anxious to make his activities palatable to the Manchester middle classes. This ignores the evidence as to his convinced and thorough radicalism and also underestimates the radicalism of the MPU. Its leaders always said they wanted more than the Reform Bill. Their activity in 1830-32 was a realistic adaptation of ultimate goals and preferred methods to suit prevalent conditions. The MPU had to deal in practicalities and it is wrong to call it 'moderate' without qualifying this description. Sykes is also uncharitable when he says that the MPU was 'completely ignored'. His view that the MPU ceded the leadership of the Manchester reform campaign to the more prestigious Reform Committee and then dwindled into insignificance assumes that the MPU had actually aspired to overall leadership - which is by no means

1. Sykes, Popular Politics, ch. 8.

clear. In the circumstances of the time it was inevitable that the several bodies that existed would conduct their own efforts as they saw fit (and the activity of one might or might not correspond with the activity of the others). Since both the MPU and the Reform Committee were working on behalf of the Reform Bill the question of 'leadership' need not have been significant or important. They could easily help each other and make their own useful and separate contributions to the common cause. Sykes also underestimates Prentice's potential role as a bridge between different groups of reformers. Though it may have been disappointing that Manchester's reform campaign was divided, realists knew that this was likely, and the fact of division did not prevent Manchester from making a suitably important contribution in the securing of the Reform Bill. There was no way that the plebeian leaders could have been allowed to be genuine partners anyway - and did they themselves even want this?

The MPU was to be controlled almost entirely by Prentice and his middling sort allies. This probably came about for three main reasons - the existence of a deliberate plan, the failure to interest many wealthy and respectable reformers, and the belief that it might be a mistake to trust or try to control large numbers of plebeians. The overriding concern was to keep the MPU cohesive, constitutional, and as respectable as possible. The MPU had been mentioned at the Hunt dinner in August 1830 and was next heard of late in October when the Times advertised a meeting of its provisional committee. Membership of the Union was not necessarily to be open to all. Prospective members had to provide a 'recommendation from some respectable neighbour'. Soon it was announced that members should apply for a card which would gain them admittance to

meetings. Prentice and his allies clearly felt it necessary to have as many checks as possible on the character of the membership.¹

The first properly-documented meeting of the MPU took place in the Mechanics' Institute on 24 November 1830.² It was chaired by the manufacturer Robert Bunting, who explained that the meeting was called as a result of the provisional committee's resolution that an executive Political Council would be elected as soon as the MPU's membership reached 500. The meeting was not a completely harmonious affair; Prentice was the dominant speaker but was occasionally heckled by plebeian radicals who had attended in force under leaders like the Irish-born weaver Nathan Broadhurst. Still, the meeting approved Prentice's call for a strong petitioning campaign and resolved to send a reform address to Parliament. Then the objects of the MPU were outlined: to use 'all just end legal means' to influence parliamentary elections and gain parliamentary reform as well as corn law repeal, tax reforms, the

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1. Times, 21 Aug., 23 Oct. 1830. Prentice's Times is the main source for the MPU. No substantial collection of MPU papers or records seems to have survived, and the other Manchester papers took little notice of the body except to criticise it.
 2. On what follows see Times, 27 Nov., 4 Dec. 1830; also Main, Reform Movement, appendix; Prentice, Sketches, 368-9. Prentice said that the MPU was the organ of those reformers who did not feel that they could have full faith in the Whigs. They formed the association because they wanted to be ready to support the government if it was sincere, or (more likely) urge it forward if it was not. Though the MPU was dismissed by some as lacking in influence and importance (E.g. Wheeler, History, 129), Prentice pointed out that the ministers did not think so when they needed its services, and anti-reformers did not think so when they saw that it had an effect in preventing violent disturbances.

abolition of the East India and other commercial monopolies, the end of slavery, and local reforms including the admittance of all ratepayers to the decision-making process (especially as affecting local expenditure). This was a wide programme, with the emphasis on the need for changes in the parliamentary system and particularly a wide taxpaying franchise, the ballot and the replacement of representatives after one year if their constituents found their conduct unsatisfactory. The management of the MPU was to be entrusted to a Political Council. MPU members would pay whatever subscriptions they could afford, but at least a shilling per quarter. A candidate for membership had to be proposed by a member of the Council or by a collector of subscriptions; it was then up to the Council to elect him as a member. The Council had the power to expel any member; any member acting illegally would automatically cease to belong to the MPU, which disowned and rejected all such conduct. In proposing names for the Council, Prentice emphasised that they should be men who were known to each other and could act collectively. He hoped that no names would be proposed in addition to those on his list. Influential men might prefer not to act with individuals with whom they were not acquainted. Prentice was on the list and the others were 'gentlemen' Henry Day and Edmund Grundy, manufacturers John and Thomas Fielden, Robert Bunting and Robert Froggatt, druggists Eli Atkin and G. H. Winder, drapers J. Barrow, P. T. Candelet, John Dracup, James Jones, and Roger Rayner, corn dealers G. Greenhough and W. T. Hesketh, woolsorters J. Hulme and W. Pickering, bookseller George Bentham, ironfounder James Cox, shopkeeper Elijah Dixon, commercial agent and lecturer Detrosier, joiner P. Gendel, grocer James Hampson, weaver John Massey, clerk Thomas Merry, shuttlemaker William Parr, tea dealer Ralph Shaw, spinner D. McWilliams and hosier John Whyatt. Prentice may have been right when he

said that there were 'persons of every rank' on his list, but it is clear that the bulk of the Council was to be provided by the middling sort - shopkeepers, small traders and craftsmen. As soon as Prentice had finished talking Broadhurst protested that there should be more workers on the list. Prentice reminded the meeting that the addition of other names might prompt some in the Council to withdraw. Arguments ensued, during which Prentice was denounced as a 'saucy Scotsman', but the meeting approved his list. The meeting was reported in the Times, and also unfavourably in the Chronicle. The latter approved the emphasis on legality but found the MPU's aims excessive and political unions in general unlikely to serve the public interest.¹ The MPU never received any substantial or sympathetic newspaper coverage except from Prentice's Times. So not only was Prentice the main founder of and dominant figure in the MPU, he was also its chief propagandist and publicist.

Soon the MPU was encouraging the establishment of branches in various parts of Manchester and by April 1831 there were groups in Newtown, Hulme and St. John's which professed adherence to the main body. A branch was established in Ancoats in November 1831. Prentice took part in and publicised these efforts to gain recruits, and help was also rendered by Candelet, Detrosier and others in the Council. It is not clear whether the stringent admission procedures for the main MPU were used in these working-class districts. Possibly the intention was to foster the establishment of small plebeian clubs and to use the MPU to guide and coordinate them but not to bring the operatives into full and

1. Chronicle, 4 Dec. 1830.

equal membership. There is an interesting parallel here with the activities of Thomas Walker and the respectable Constitutional Society of the 1790s, which acted as patron of the workers' reform associations of that time (the Patriotic and Reformation Societies), even on occasion providing them with rooms in which to meet.¹

The dissatisfaction of the Broadhurst faction with the MPU could have been one reason for the establishment of a rival political association in Manchester - which clearly put an end to any prospect (if there had ever been one) of class unity in the Manchester reform campaign. The new body was the Political Union of the Working Classes (PUWC), dominated by the Huntites and consisting mainly of weavers, shoemakers and other workers with some kind of skill. Among the leaders were Curran, Broadhurst and Ashmore, all weavers, Gilchrist a shoemaker and Brooks a locksmith. The PUWC was in being by April 1831 because it organised a meeting and dinner to mark the visit of Hunt on 6 April. Prentice was a speaker at the dinner and proposed a toast to the victims of Peterloo, so apparently he was not on bad terms with at least some of the leaders of the PUWC. Perhaps he was glad that the workers had their own organisation and hoped to be able to offer advice. But when Hunt came out against the Reform Bill, soon after his visit to Manchester, so did the PUWC. Prentice was prepared to accept it as a first instalment. Still, on 6 April 1831 he was willing to associate with Hunt and rekindle thoughts of Peterloo in aid of the reform cause.² In June 1831 the

1. See above chapter I (2) on Constitutional Soc.; on MPU branches, Times, 12 Feb., 16, 23 April, 12 Nov. 1831.

2. Times, 9 April 1831.

Tory Chronicle noticed that there were now two political unions in Manchester: unfortunately both of them were thoroughly radical, but the PUWC was more prone to wildness and folly and seemed to be trying to recreate the atmosphere of 1817.¹

J. M. Main says that the establishment of the MPU shows that reformist shopkeepers and traders were no longer willing to be led by respectable middle-class leaders, the ones who had been leading them for some time in local government battles.² This seems a misinterpretation, since Prentice was just one such leader and of course it was he who had proposed the members of the Political Council. It has been suggested that the shopkeepers and middling sort were men who, because they were eager for social and political self-improvement, were not as easily offended by Prentice's pedagogic manner as some workers were,³ and this seems a valid view. A letter of Bentham to Place, written after Prentice's visit to the former in April 1831, suggests that the MPU was entirely Prentice's creation. But Bentham referred to the two political unions in Manchester: 'one a mixed one, aristocratico-democratical of which it appears he (Prentice) was the organsier; the other a purely democratical one, of which it appears he is the influential director, having preserved them from breaking out into fits of mischievous violence'.⁴ This suggests that Prentice was somehow involved with the PUWC, even if this body does appear to have been established as a protest

1. Chronicle, 18 June 1831.

2. Main, Reform Movement, 167.

3. Read's intro. to Sketches.

4. Add. Ms. 35149, f.74, cited in Main, Ref. Movement, 168.

at the exclusiveness of the MPU's Political Council. Then again, the enmity between the two bodies only really became apparent when the PUWC decided not to support the Reform Bill. Perhaps some kind of cooperation, with Prentice as a link, had initially been possible. But whatever the nature of Prentice's early connection with the PUWC (if there was one) and whatever the true reason for the PUWC's appearance, the two bodies quickly fell out because of a disagreement over aims and methods.

The Political Council was extremely active in 1831 on behalf of the Reform Bill. The Council repeatedly held meetings and organised addresses and petitions for reform, accepting the government's measure as a first instalment while emphasising the need for something more than the Reform Bill. December 1830 saw a declaration in favour of parliamentary reform and the Grey ministry, and when Gascoyne successfully moved (20 April 1831) that the number of M.P.s for England and Wales should not be reduced the MPU was one of the first bodies to petition for the Reform Bill in its entirety. The MPU pressed again for 'the whole Bill' - without major amendments - in June and July 1831. At this time there was consternation because of a new restriction on the borough franchise: no vote would go to those whose rent was payable more frequently than half-yearly. This would exclude thousands who had been promised the vote in the original bill. The Council approved a petition to the Commons on this matter on 29 June. After some uncertainty Prentice's Times of 20 August 1831 was glad to report Althorp's assurance that all bona fide payers of £10 rent would receive the vote.¹

1. Times, 1 Jan., 23 April, 2 July, 20 Aug. 1831.

As the tension mounted in July and August 1831 because of the slow progress of the Reform Bill, the Council drew up a petition urging the Commons to end the delay, warning of the prospect of disturbances if delay continued and arguing that if the Reform Bill was going to be altered then it should be improved, not diluted, with provision for the ballot and a wider suffrage. Similar points were made in an address to Lord Grey in September 1831, by which time the Council had come out in favour of a creation of peers. The MPU's canvassing for members and organisation of meetings went on, as did the criticism of the PUWC. In this criticism Prentice and the MPU were joined by the Edinburgh Political Union, of which Prentice's elder brother John seems to have been a leading member. The Lords' rejection of the Reform Bill on 8 October 1831 made it likely that the government would water the measure down to overcome some of the peers' objections. The Council of the MPU could not countenance such a step and on 9 November resolved that what was really required was a scot and lot franchise for all boroughs (which would get rid of the 'invidious distinction between the man who pays a ten pound rent and his neighbour who happens to pay a pound or a shilling or a penny less'), an opportunity given annually to each constituency to replace its M.P. if he had not discharged his duties satisfactorily (which would overcome anti-reformers' claims that popular electorates would mean 'noisy and unprincipled' instead of 'able and virtuous' representatives), and the protection of the ballot (which would remove the danger that 'in large towns the respectable inhabitants will be deterred from the free exercise of their choice by the fear of personal violence'). The Council urged all reformers to throw aside their differences and unite in the common cause. Though its members wanted

more than the Reform Bill they would still accept it provided its essential character was not changed. 'Their principle is to ADVANCE - to the extreme point as speedily as possible - but at all events, to ADVANCE'. If the Council really expected that the government's bill would be amended in the desired fashion it was being more hopeful than realistic. Even so, Prentice was to be bitter about the Whigs' response to the approval and support they had received in 1830-32. Commenting on the above resolutions in his Sketches, he wrote:

Such was the generous waiving of present demands, considered just and reasonable, which the reformers conceded to the Whig administration, believing that when a beginning had been made, and made safely, they would acknowledge the principle of progression; and if they did not themselves urge on other reforms, would at least leave the shortening the duration of parliaments, the adoption of the ballot, and the extension of the suffrage as open questions. It was an ungenerous return to declare the doctrine of finality.¹

The PUWC continued to be active and the Guardian continued to condemn political unions as 'mock parliaments' that were irresponsible, divisive, and probably of no help in maintaining order - despite their claims.² The MPU went on with its activities through the winter of 1831-2 and kept up the pressure in favour of the Reform Bill. A royal proclamation of 1831 banned political associations composed of separate bodies and subdivisions, with a hierarchy of ranks and authority, and subject to the general control of a central committee. This was aimed against the Birmingham plan for sectional organisation, which was abandoned. The Council of the MPU met on 23 November to declare that their organisation did not come under the ban and so there was no reason

1. Times, 6, 13 Aug., 17 Sept., 1, 15, 29 Oct., 5, 12 Nov. 1831; Sketches, 403-4.

2. Guardian, 5 Nov. 1831.

for it to cease its activity. Prentice followed this up by printing a summary of the laws relating to political societies; this was designed to boost the confidence of members of the MPU and other such bodies, to show them that they were acting legally and constitutionally, and to advise them of the methods they should not employ. Taylor, for his part, approved of the proclamation and argued that political unions did not advance but created a prejudice against the cause of reform.¹

At the same time as Prentice was devoting much energy to the MPU he and the others in the band were involving themselves fully in the 'official' town campaign in favour of the Reform Bill. The respectable reformers dominated the public meeting held in the Town Hall on 9 March 1831, chaired by the Boroughreeve James Burt (a merchant and member of the declining Pitt Club). Richard Potter, Baxter, Watkin and Shuttleworth were among the requisitionists and Watkin was the writer of the petition to the king in favour of the government's bill, which the meeting approved. The Times gave the meeting a full seven columns of space and Richard Potter, Baxter, Prentice, Shuttleworth and Watkin were speakers. They dealt with the need for parliamentary reform and the other improvements it could make possible. The Guardian praised the meeting emphasising (as usual) that reform should primarily serve the interests of local commerce and the middle classes. The Chronicle pointed out that local Tories had remained absent from the meeting, which did not say much for cross-party cordiality, and complained about the wearing of white

1. Times, 26 Nov., 3 Dec. 1831; Guardian, 26 Nov. 1831.

hats by some members of the audience.¹ Soon a knot of committed Tories had organised a petition against the Reform Bill. Prentice's remarks about them and their petition led to his trial for libel in July 1831. He was really on trial for his political opinions (see chapter II(3) above). Victory vindicated him, was a great source of personal celebration and was also good for the cause espoused by Prentice and his circle. It strengthened their confidence, sense of duty and mission.

The success of Gascoyne's motion on 20 April was followed by a dissolution and a general election. The band were pleased that the cause of reform was not going to be abandoned by the government and looked forward to a contest for the county. Wilson Patten's vote in favour of Gascoyne's motion provided an opportunity for local reformers to insert a new candidate who would be committed to the Reform Bill. As the Courier defended Patten a committee combining moderate and advanced reformers from Manchester's respectable business classes discussed a suitable candidate. The body included Atkinson, Baxter, the Potters, J. B. Smith and Shuttleworth. Lord John Russell was the first choice but he preferred Devonshire, so the respectable reformers selected one of their own number, the wealthy Unitarian banker Benjamin Heywood. As the band and their allies wrote, spoke and canvassed for Heywood, it became clear that local opinion was very much behind him and the Reform Bill, and so Patten withdrew. Heywood's success was warmly welcomed in the Times and

1. Times, 12, 19 March 1831; Guardian, 12, 19 March 1831; Chronicle, 12 March 1831; Watkin, Journal, 149-50; Brotherton Scraps., ix. 67; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 86-7; Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 27-9; Prentice, Sketches, 375-6.

Guardian. Richard Potter stood for Wigan again, after declining invitations to stand for Preston and Blackburn. Hardcastle stood with him in Wigan, but as before the exclusive voting system prevented their return even though they gained the most votes from the burgesses at large. In the general election which produced a large majority favourable to the Whig government and the Reform Bill, the band had helped to ensure that Lancashire returned two supporters of the bill, one of whom was of their own circle.¹

Discussion soon turned to what would happen when the Reform Bill went up to the Lords. Manchester's respectable reformers, and Tories, also condemned the continuing reappearance in the town and neighbourhood of Hunt. He was having a disturbing influence. For the band's circle, of course, Hunt's stance on the Reform Bill and the willingness of many plebeian radicals to follow him was bound to cause friction in Manchester and embarrass the town's 'official' campaign in favour of the government's measure. Prentice wrote articles in May and June on 'The Proper Business of a Reformed Parliament', stressing that the Reform Bill was a means to further ends and would have to be made use of. The Guardian also considered this subject on occasion, though Taylor was more temperate in his comments than Prentice. Taylor was less impatient and wanted proper time and deliberation to be given to all reform proposals. Late in May the band and their allies marked the King's birthday with a

1. R. Potter Colln., xi. 168; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 40-42; Prentice, Recollections of Bentham, 6, and Sketches, 377-8, 394; Courier, 23 April, 28 May 1831; Guardian, 23, 30 April, 7, 14 May 1831; Times, 23, 30 April, 7, 28 May 1831; Chronicle, 7 May 1831, 6 Oct. 1832; Brotherton Scrapbks., x. 53.

special reform dinner. The Potters, Baxter, Atkinson and Watkin were among the organisers and Prentice was involved with a second dinner, organised by the St. Andrew's Society. Soon his Times was commenting on the delegate schemes and excessive language of some plebeian radicals. Prentice was keen to point out that the reform of Parliament would be nothing without the reform of persons. The workers were often let down by the individuals they followed, people like Nathan Broadhurst, unreliable, loud and unruly, who discredited the workers' cause and robbed it of any chance of success. The workers would get nowhere unless they learned to follow the right men, the inference being that Prentice and his allies were the right men.¹

The summer of 1831 saw Manchester gripped by controversy and indignation on account of the provision in the amended Reform Bill that, in boroughs, a man would be denied the vote if his rent was payable more frequently than once every six months. The band and their allies organised a meeting for 30 June in the Manor Court Room. It was chaired by Richard Potter. Some PUWC members attended and proved disruptive, demanding the approval of universal suffrage and trying to force Potter to leave the chair; the radical leader Doherty recommended a delegate scheme. But the band retained control and the meeting approved a petition to the Commons asking that the vote be given to all payers of £10 rents. Prentice's speech pointed out that the workers had many advocates and friends in the middle classes, and that he, Baxter, Richard

1. Times, 7, 28 May, 4, 11, 25 June 1831; Prentice, Sketches, 416-17; Guardian, 4, 25 June, 9 July 1831, 7 Jan. 1832; Chronicle, 28 May, 11 June 1831.

Potter and others were keen to give help and advice and did not deserve to be accused of self-interest. Nobody was forcing them to fight against restrictions on the franchise nor lend a sympathetic ear to the workers' views. The Times attacked those who had disturbed the meeting, criticised the government and the M.P.s who had been returned at the last election because of their commitment to 'the whole Bill' for a breach of faith, and stressed that it was no reflection on a man's character if he was required to pay his rent monthly or even weekly. The Guardian was glad that the plebeians had not been able to hijack the meeting and argued that the best part of the working classes were not hostile to the Reform Bill. In August the Times reported that all payers of £10 rents would be enfranchised. The Chronicle did not approve of this settlement, found it out of keeping with the principles embodied in other parts of the bill, and spoke of the franchise leading to 'pure democracy' in large towns.¹

By mid-September it was clear that the Reform Bill would soon complete its passage through the Commons. A requisition was presented to the town officers on 15 September asking them to call a public meeting to consider petitioning the Lords to pass the bill without delay. There were hundreds of signatures, of moderates as well as advanced reformers, menu people as well as prominent figures in the business community. The Potters, Shuttleworth, Harvey, Taylor, Baxter and Prentice all signed the requisition, as did most of their regular and occasional allies. Watkin had written the requisition on 13 September, along with some tentative

1. Times, 2 July, 20 Aug. 1831; Guardian, 2 July 1831; Chronicle, 2 July, 3 Sept. 1831.

resolutions and a draft petition to the Lords. The meeting was chaired by the Boroughreeve James Burt and took place in the Manor Court Room on 22 September, the day the Commons finally passed the bill. It was dominated by the respectable reformers although the band did have to put up with interruptions from some popular radical leaders. The main speeches came from Richard Potter, Shuttleworth, Baxter and Prentice. The petition was approved and a committee of 28 men (the Manchester Reform Committee) was appointed to further the purposes of the meeting and supervise the town's campaign until the Lords passed the Reform Bill. The Committee included the town officers and some moderates, but the advanced reformers were well-represented too. There were five of the band, the Potters, Shuttleworth, Baxter and Watkin, several of their closest allies, including Mark Philips, J. C. Dyer and Thomas Harbottle, as well as four members of the MPU's Political Council - Candelet, Hampson, Winder and Bunting. Prentice was not a member but did attend some of the Committee's later meetings; his Times gave full publicity and backing, and he was the close friend and ally of some of its members. (In various ways, then, he was involved in the Manchester reform campaign on three levels, with the predominantly 'middling sort' MPU, with the workers' PUWC (at least in its formative period, before its leaders adopted an anti-Reform Bill policy) and their branches attached to the MPU, and with the respectable Reform Committee.) The Manchester petition received over 33,000 signatures in only five days and was entrusted to Richard Potter and Baxter, who left for London on 29 September. The Guardian found the meeting 'important and satisfactory' and was glad that the Huntites had not been able to take it over, while the Chronicle welcomed it as a triumph for the cause of sensible reform. At this time the Courier was expecting and hoping that the peers would considerably

modify the ReformBill and make it less harmful.¹

The Committee established at the meeting of 22 September 1831 was to meet sixteen times between that date and the end of December. The attendance record shows how influential the band and their allies were, in contrast to what had happened with the Manchester Representation Committee during the Penryn campaign of 1827-8. Then the moderates and conservatives had dominated, much to the band's frustration. But in 1831-2 the respectable reformers were strong and influential. The Reform Committee spoke for the town and, more often than not, members of the band dominated the Committee's deliberations. Thomas Potter attended seven of the sixteen meetings, four of which he chaired. Richard Potter attended three meetings, chairing all of them. Shuttleworth attended nine and chaired three, while Baxter attended three and Watkin nine meetings. It is significant that the Boroughreeve and Constables were not regular attenders; nor were the moderates and conservatives who did not belong to the band's circle. So the situation in 1831-2 was almost the reverse of that in 1827-8. The band and the respectable reformers were determined and able to have more of a say this time. Between September and December 1831 at least one of the band was always present at Committee meetings, usually several, and members of the band chaired ten of the sixteen meetings. Close allies J. C. Dyer and Mark Philips chaired another five between then, so all meetings except one were presided over by men who were prominent in Manchester's liberal circles. In May 1832 the

1. Times, 17, 24 Sept. 1831; Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 98-104; R. Potter Colln., xi. 176; Prentice, Sketches, 395-6; Watkin, Journal, 152; also Watkin Papers for the draft resolutions; Shuttleworth Scrapbks., 88-9; Guardian, 24 Sept., 1 Oct. 1831; Chronicle, 24 Sept. 1831; Courier, 17, 24 Sept., 1 Oct. 1831.

Committee met a further four times, with Shuttleworth chairing three meetings and Thomas Potter the other. J. B. Smith, Brotherton and Prentice joined their friends and allies at these meetings, underlining once again the opening for and extent of the band's influence.¹

Through September Prentice reported the reform meetings being held all over the country, including that in Salford addressed by Brotherton and Harvey. Opinion seemed to be spreading in favour of a creation of peers, though Taylor preferred to think (almost until the last moment) that the Lords would pass the Reform Bill. Prentice called for a petitioning campaign in favour of a creation, and the establishment of local associations for the protection of persons and property - in case a rejection by the peers endangered the public peace. The Lords did reject the bill, on 8 October. The Guardian found the margin of 41 votes surprisingly large, but Taylor later said that a creation of peers should still be positively the last resort. The Courier asserted that the Lords had taken the most appropriate and statesmanlike course.² Members of the band reacted quickly when news of the peers' rejection reached Manchester, organising placards, resolutions and a requisition for a public meeting. This was arranged for 12 October in the Lower Mosley Street Riding School, but it did not go as planned. The PUWC leaders secured a large attendance of their supporters, succeeded in having the meeting moved to the open air on Camp Field, and then amended the respectable reformers' address for a creation of peers so that it called

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1. For attendance lists and details of meetings, Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 104-19, 158-62.
 2. Times, 17, 24 Sept., 1, 8 Oct. 1831; Brotherton Scrapbks., ix. 59, xi. 7; Guardian, 3, 10, 17, 24 Sept., 8, 15, 29 Oct. 1831; Courier, 15 Oct. 1831.

for annual parliaments, universal suffrage and the ballot, and the sending of writs to populous towns so as to secure a reform including these features. The band and their allies were embarrassed and annoyed by what had happened, and Thomas Potter was placed in the difficult position of being expected by the PUWC leaders to approve publicly of the amended address in his capacity as chairman of the Camp Field meeting. He had agreed to chair the huge assembly when the Boroughreeve refused to be involved in a meeting that would not be held in the Riding School, as arranged. Though he was disappointed at the way the meeting had gone, Prentice did use it to demonstrate that if the Lords did not reconsider their position on reform they would eventually have a far more radical measure forced on them. The Reform Committee did not want to let the Camp Field fiasco interrupt Manchester's 'official' campaign in favour of the Reform Bill. Thomas Potter wrote to Lord Grey to explain what had happened, the Committee refused to pay any of the expenses relating to the meeting claimed by the PUWC leaders, and when the latter demanded that Potter sign the amended address they met with another refusal. The Committee decided to send the original unamended address to the King. By early November it had received over 23,400 signatures. Some of the plebeian radicals threatened violence and the Committee decided that no more meetings should be held until they became absolutely necessary. Watkin noted 'an evidence dread of commotion in the Committee'; no further expression of local opinion on the Reform Bill would be attempted 'for fear of the Radicals'. R. A. Sykes might be right when he sees in Camp Field 'a decisive working class rejection of middle class political leadership'. Certainly the meeting gave the clearest possible expression of the split between the popular radicals and the respectable liberals in Manchester. The PUWC was never again to achieve such a mobilisation and

would soon be in decline, but from Watkin's evidence it is clear that the band's circle was greatly alarmed by plebeian radical activity and possible threats to order.¹

On 14 October 1831 a reform meeting in Salford was chaired by J. B. Smith. There was no attempt by popular radicals to hijack this affair, as had occurred in Manchester. The Salford meeting approved an address to the king urging the adoption of decisive measures to overcome the peers' resistance. Prentice's Times was enthusiastic and also happy to report that the Manchester address for a creation of peers which had been amended at Camp Field would be sent in its original form. The Camp Field controversy was not over, though, because the PUWC leaders attended a leypayers' meeting on 26 October to argue that the town ought to pay the expenses relating to the Camp Field assembly since the costs incurred by previous town meetings on reform, their petitions and deputations, had been covered by the Constables' Accounts. This argument was rejected; the Boroughreeve had expressly stated that he would not chair an open air meeting. The change of location from the Riding School made the claim for expenses unacceptable. Like the Times the Guardian approved of the resistance to the designs of the PUWC leaders and had been disappointed by what happened at Camp Field. Taylor called the PUWC 'a most dangerous conspiracy' and welcomed Thomas Potter's refusal to let

1. Prentice, Sketches, 398-400; Times, 15 Oct. 1831; Watkin, Journal, 152-6; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 88-9; Wheeler, History, 129-30; J. B. Smith, Reminiscences, 44; Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 111-19; R. Potter Colln., xi. 177; original resolutions in Watkin Papers; Sykes, Pop. Politics, 369.

his name be used by the victors of Camp Field. Prentice went on advocating a creation of peers, Taylor was more reticent, but both men pointed to the vote of the bishops on the Reform Bill as a sign of the improper role and position of the clergy in the state. The Courier defended the bishops.¹

Discussion was kept up as Prentice argued for something more than the Reform Bill (he was taking up household suffrage as a suitable objective), as the Bristol riots gave both reformers and conservatives useful propaganda material, and as the PUWC advocated a Declaration of Rights and a National Convention. The third Reform Bill was introduced on 12 December. Prentice was glad that the 'clogs' surrounding the £10 borough qualification had been removed, but the conservatives had mixed feelings. There was also the problem outlined by Shuttleworth in a letter to Grey in January 1832: by giving the vote to tenants and occupiers of houses and places of business whether they were resident or not the Reform Bill would create in Manchester up to 2,000 electors who had only a limited connection with the town. Grey referred the matter to Russell and an amendment was soon introduced to the effect that those qualifying for the vote in Manchester borough on the grounds of occupancy had to reside within seven miles of the borough limits. The Reform Bill passed the Commons on 22 March and discussion again turned to the peers' attitude. Prentice still pressed for a creation (and not just to pass the bill, but 'to neutralise on other questions the Tory creations of the preceding kings'), Taylor hoped that the peers would see sense and give way, the Chronicle suspected that a creation would be necessary and

1. Times, 15, 22, 29 Oct. 1831; Salford address is in Brotherton Scrapbks., ix. 70; Guardian, 15, 22, 29 Oct. 1831; Courier, 29 Oct. 1831.

the Courier predictably opposed such a step. Meanwhile Richard Potter was in touch with the radical M.P. Joseph Hume, who told him that Grey, Althorp and Durham were lacking in confidence and strength and that there were grounds for pessimism regarding the prospects for true reform.¹

On 7 May the government was defeated on Lyndhurst's motion and then resigned. There was much agitation in Manchester. When news of the resignation came through on Thursday morning, 10 May, crowds gathered in the streets, business was suspended, and hundreds rushed to the Town Hall where the Reform Committee was sitting. Shuttleworth chaired a hastily convened public meeting which approved a petition composed by Watkin and calling for the Commons to refuse to vote any supplies until 'a measure essential to the safety and happiness of the people, and the safety of the throne, shall be carried into a law'. By 6 p.m. that evening 24,000 signatures had been gained. Richard Potter, Shuttleworth and the radical manufacturer John Fielden carried the petition to London, spreading the news of Manchester's decisive response at each stopping point. They arrived late on Friday morning, 11 May, contacted the Preston M.P. John Wood, and the petition was presented that evening. It was the first formal expression of public opinion following the government's defeat.

1. Times, 29 Oct., 5, 12, 19, 26 Nov., 3, 17, 24, 31 Dec. 1831, 14, 21 Jan., 11, 18 Feb., 3, 10, 17, 31 March, 7, 21 April 1832; Guardian, 5 Nov., 17, 24 Dec. 1831, 7, 28 Jan., 11, 25 Feb., 10, 31 March, 14, 21 April 1832; Courier, 5 Nov., 17 Dec. 1831, 7, 28 Jan., 31 March 1832; Chronicle, 17 Dec. 1831, 31 March 1832; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 92; R. Potter Colln., xii. ff.253-5.

Back in Manchester Thomas Potter, Watkin, J. B. Smith and Baxter were helping to organise a public meeting, which was called for 14 May. Smith recorded the 'frantic enthusiasm' which had gripped Manchester and the determination to pay no taxes, and wrote to Shuttleworth in London on 12 May with information about what was happening. Shuttleworth replied on 14 May that he had passed the information on to some London papers, and that all the signs were that the king would soon have to recall the Whigs to office. Meanwhile Watkin was recording that the plebeian leaders were threatening once more to disrupt Manchester's 'official' campaign by promoting a movement against a creation of peers. The Tory Courier welcomed Grey's resignation and dismissed the Manchester petition as a dishonest and desperate measure.¹

The St. Peter's Field meeting of 14 May saw a good deal of unanimity between reformers of all ranks and shades. Thomas Potter, Prentice and Harvey were among the speakers and an address to the king calling for the reappointment of Grey was approved.² But behind the apparent cordiality there was continuing friction because the plebeian leaders were trying to exact concessions in return for their goodwill, while the band and their allies were trying to keep the plebeians in line. At the popular leaders' suggestion the address proposed at St. Peter's Field was more radical in

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1. Times, 12, 19 May 1832; Prentice, Sketches, 407-10; Watkin, Fragment No.1, 19, and Journal, 158-60; Smith, Reminiscences, 46-9 and Elections, 10; Shuttleworth Scrapbk., 96-7; Hadfield, Narrative, 109-10; Courier, 12, 19, 26 May 1832.
 2. Times, 19, 26 May 1832; Prentice, Sketches, 410-14; Boroughreeve's Papers, ii. 158-62; Wheeler, History, 131; Watkin Papers for resolutions; Brotherton Scrapbks., ix. 77 on Salford meeting of 16 May, addressed by Smith and Brotherton, adjourned because by this time news had come through that Grey had returned to office.

tone than the one originally envisaged. Some promise of cooperation was also embodied in the plebeians' scheme for a new Association to Promote Reform, which would unite moderates and radicals, masters and workers, in a body to fight for the Reform Bill and something more. The body would formally recognise the principle of universal suffrage. On 15 May Baxter, Shuttleworth, Watkin, Richard Potter and their occasional ally R. H. Greg accepted the plan in theory but said they wanted time to work out suitable rules for the proposed association. Days passed and the plebeians grew impatient. Finally on 21 May there was a meeting at Hayward's Hotel. To the anger of the popular radicals and their spokesman John Fielden, Shuttleworth, Baxter and Greg said that the association had been rendered unnecessary. The Whigs were coming back and the Reform Bill would be passed. The respectable reformers were accused of inconsistency and desertion by the bulk of the meeting and there was much argument. Still, the band and their allies had extricated themselves from an embarrassing and troublesome undertaking. Most of them felt as Watkin did: no cooperation with the plebeian leaders could work for long. They 'seek for confusion and want only the countenance of the wealthy to enable them to produce it'. It would seem that the plebeian complaint about a betrayal was not without foundation. The respectable reformers had spoken of compromise so that the 'official' Manchester campaign in favour of the Reform Bill could continue undisturbed, but now the need for concession had passed. The passing of the bill seemed and was secure.¹

1. Watkin, Journal, 160-63; Dinwiddy, Luddism to Reform Bill, 67.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

The 'small but determined band' (on whom this thesis has concentrated) were assertive, ambitious and public-spirited reformers. Their qualities of dynamism and persistence, facilitated by their talent, status and wealth, were squarely based on an impatience with the present and a confidence that they knew what was wrong with society, the economy and the political system. The ideas they advanced concerning solutions to the problems of their day were often based on theological and moral premises; the spiritual impulse was one of the main driving forces behind their public careers. The band also gained some encouragement from the examples set by their predecessors. Progressive middle-class reformers had remained active in Manchester before 1815 despite the lack of wide support, disapproval from the ruling party, coercive legislation and wartime persecution. The band appreciated the bravery and persistence of this earlier generation of reformers and paid tribute to their patriotism, determination and heroic struggle against a range of obstacles. There was, in addition, indignation about the treatment received by such men as Walker and Hanson. The band also saw, perhaps, that they could use their knowledge of what happened to previous Manchester reformers to make sure that their own campaigns would be more impressive and successful. They took Walker's stance on the link between reformist activity and educational provisions a stage further (and it is interesting that Walker had made the connection long before the

philosophic radicals popularised their ideas on the links between education and political rights). The band also paid more attention than had their predecessors to social and economic questions, and to the needs and desires of humbler social groups which contained persons to be valued as individuals as well as potential supporters for the reform cause.

Members of the band participated in the development of the provincial newspaper press. The Guardian in particular set new standards in newspaper business management, organisation and presentation, and was also an organ of opinion. Prentice's papers were more obviously and avowedly political organs, designed to create and direct opinion on the salient issues of the time. The Gazette and Times were the band's media of communication and representative mouthpieces. They played a crucial role in the discussions and mobilisations of this period. The significance of the band's contribution to the development of political journalism cannot be denied. As writers for and proprietors, editors and financial backers of newspapers, Prentice, Taylor, Shuttleworth, Baxter, the Potters, Smith, Watkin and the others helped to extend political agitation, propaganda and debate - and this was not only important for the viability of Manchester liberalism. Since many newspapers became political organs in some degree, to be used by conservatives as well as progressives, the way the press was employed became a dominant factor in the course of provincial urban politics generally and in contests for control of local affairs. The band made it clear that if local politicians wanted to have influence then they had to have a newspaper.

Among the band's main preoccupations was the movement against Tory

and then 'high' party control of Manchester affairs. What is striking is their readiness and ability to make the challenge. This activity, however, opened new rifts between Taylor and some of the others. Disagreements about the editorial line followed by the Guardian were strengthened as Taylor decided that he could not go as far as some of his colleagues in the attempt to open up the local government system: rank and property had to be protected against numbers. Prentice and the others initiated and engaged in local government disputes because they desired a proper balance between the rights of the townspeople and the conduct of local officials. They appealed to groups of lower social status and displayed great talent for agitation and organisation. What is more they made progress; the ruling party was often in difficulty. In pursuing more influence for themselves the band spoke and acted for those who felt excluded or improperly treated. They emphasised the need for change and improvement, all the time conscious of their own rising local status and public profile.

The 1820s represent a transitional decade in Manchester politics. The polarisation of parties became increasingly pronounced; the basically Tory-Anglican and liberal-Dissenting amalgams within the large business community collided on a range of issues connected with the questions of who was to possess local authority and how that authority should best be exercised. Sentiments and ideas which might have been difficult to express in the war years were increasingly articulated as the challenge to the ruling party gathered strength. Peterloo was important in this development because it encouraged Manchester's 'outs' to assert themselves: the ruling party no longer seemed so unassailable. The band rose to prominence and influence in the 1820s, preparing the way for

incorporation and the League, and forging links with reform-minded shopkeepers and others of the middling sort in the campaign for justice and reform in the local arenas. Successes required effort and persistence and at first were slow in coming. The crucial change was the increase in public interest and involvement in local affairs. Disputes became heated as attention was drawn to local expenditure, officers' conduct, accountability, salaries, rates and problems related to street improvements, and bitterness could increase with the infusion of sectarian feeling as in the arguments over new churches, church rates and tithes. The gas dispute encompassed several important questions. What, for example, was the best way to pay for local improvements? Manchester's inadequate and archaic system of local government, combined with the social and administrative problems posed by rapid urban and industrial expansion, certainly cried out for a large and permanent fund that could be devoted to remedial measures - but should there be a general improvement fund or an application of the rising profits made by the municipally-owned gas establishment? Which should prevail, the interests of the gas consumers or the welfare of the town as a whole, and was there a way of reconciling the two? Once the appropriation of the gas profits was a fait accompli, members of the band sought some form of reconciliation through gas price reductions - and these were gradually secured. But the gas dispute had put Manchester's rulers on their guard: the respectable reformers and (perhaps more dangerously) their humbler allies were becoming too assertive. The police body was remodelled in 1828 but the band were at least able to amend the Police Bill into a less objectionable measure than the one originally devised. This gave them another important taste of success, and encouraged them to mount new and more ambitious campaigns in the future.

The band were deeply involved in educational, welfare and relief efforts, and engaged in the social debates of the era with alacrity. They helped to identify problems and suggest solutions. They were concerned about the improvement of the lower ranks, about living and working conditions, health, morality and social conduct, and industrial relations and the rights, status and behaviour of workers as such. What are we to make of the picture of segregation and heartlessness in Manchester presented by Engels? Did the middle classes move out to the suburbs and wash their hands of the problems experienced in the more central working-class districts? Engels thought that even the charity that was given was worthless and hypocritical; the 'bourgeoisie' was giving back only a fraction of what it took from the workers, and the motivation was not true philanthropic concern but pure self-interest. Charity was meant to buy the workers' obedience.¹ Engels overstated his case. It would be going too far to say that all Mancunians of affluence and respectability were as unconcerned as he claims, just as it would be untrue to say that they all took a close interest in the conditions of the lower ranks. There was residential segregation in Manchester, and this became increasingly clear from the 1820s to the 1840s,² but it did not mean the complete removal of the town's natural leaders. Removal was not available or desirable for all, and even the middle-class Mancunians

1. Engels, 314-15.

2. E.g. K. Chorley, Manchester Made Them (1950), 137-9; Reach, 2-3; c.f. Engels, 64-6, 84-111

who left the central areas returned each day for business and for social and cultural activities. There was no complete detachment. Local government issues and the questions of education, social welfare, poverty and living standards continued to attract attention. There was a strong sense of duty and responsibility, manifested in a wide range of improving ventures, and there was also a desire for social prominence and the recognised rewards that such activity could bring. Altruism was mixed with self-interest. There was also a concern for and pride in urban society, a desire for 'culture' as well as status and authority, a belief in and eagerness to act on the voluntary ideal, and a desire to provide restraints, controls and alternatives as a means of dealing with social problems and objectionable conduct. Nor can we ignore the religious and moral imperatives behind the activity of the band and other public men.¹

The band were interested in the lives and views of the lower ranks. In political campaigns they cooperated with humbler allies. Like many middle-class well-wishers, though, on social questions they sometimes proved unable to communicate their genuine concern. To some workers the respectable reformers seemed patronising and self-interested, just out to

1. On these points see A. J. Kidd, 'The Middle Class in 19th century Manchester', and M. E. Rose, 'Culture, Philanthropy and the Manchester Middle Classes', both in Kidd and Roberts, City, Class and Culture; J. Garrard, 'The Middle Classes and 19th Century National and Local Politics', in (eds.) Garrard et al., The Middle Class in Politics, 54; Hindle, 3-6; Kay, Moral and Physical Condition, 99, 112; R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850. An Analysis', HJ 26 (1983); Dobbs, Educational and Social Movements, 92; R. J. Morris, 'The Middle Class and British Towns and Cities of the Industrial Revolution 1780-1870', in (eds) Fraser and Sutcliffe, Pursuit of Urban History, 303; Frangopulo, 'Municipal Achievement', 55; Pollard, Modern Management, 195.

restrain and control. As the spinner Jonathan Hodgins, a working-class contact of the band, told a Manchester meeting in May 1825:

I know there are gentlemen present of great eloquence, and much better qualified than I am to discuss the question; but then their eloquence is not always convincing to the working man's mind because it is frequently above comprehension; it is a dish of fish that he does not understand.¹

This illustrates the failure or inability of Manchester's middle-class philanthropists and reformers to hit the right note for the workers, and possibly also the workers' lack of the proper facilities for understanding and appreciating what was being done and said on their behalf. From the band's statements and activities it is clear how interested they were in matters such as education, social welfare issues, poverty, living conditions, wages and working conditions; they were also keen for workers to be accorded appropriate political and social recognition. Some workers did not want what was being offered. Their rejection of what they could not understand was only natural, as was their opposition to what appeared to be too overtly 'sponsored', designed to control and aimed at moulding the worker in the middle-class image. Some workers quickly recognised the truth of the point made by Henriques: 'Rescue meant conversion to the moral and social imperatives of the rescuers'.² With the band, though, philanthropic concern was at least as important as any ideas about social conditioning. The band believed in the worth of the individual and in the need for and value of 'good works'. To engage in such works was part of one's duty to God, self, neighbours and municipality.

1. Prentice, Sketches, 257.

2. Henriques, Before the Welfare State, 202.

The fact and extent of paternalist sentiment and activity in Manchester weakens Gatrell's thesis about the dominance of laissez-faire.¹ Most of the band do not fit neatly into the mainstream 'Manchester School' - and the School was a heterogeneous body in any case. The band represent one important section of Manchester opinion, perhaps best described as its 'liberal-paternalist' wing. They were not rigidly tied to doctrines, though this applied far less to Taylor than to some of the others. Prentice was not consistently Benthamite, as may be seen by his preferences regarding the 'best' educational system, his religiosity and his views on such moral and social issues as birth control. Nor was Prentice a true political economist, as his views on wages, factory regulation, poor laws and other questions demonstrated. Most of the band resembled Prentice in that they took what they wanted from the ideologies and value systems on offer, and mixed these borrowings with their own radical opinions and moral creed. Prentice's views on Ireland, especially his advocacy of productive public works and poor laws, had little to do with orthodox political economy. As in so many fields, of course, the band's interest in and discussion of the Irish question saw them contributing to a much wider debate - outlining principles and arguments and suggesting solutions that were to be taken up later by more famous figures. The success of the Guardian suggests that Taylor was most in tune with the views of the majority of liberal-minded Mancunians who took an interest in public affairs. He often spoke for the moderates who were far more numerous but normally less active than the liberal vanguard.

1. Expressed most clearly in his 'Manchester Parable'.

At times Taylor was obsessively enthusiastic about political economy. An avid reader of Smith, Ricardo, Mill and others, he imbibed all the main principles and arguments and then regurgitated them each week in the Guardian in a simplistic and straightforward form that appealed greatly to his readers among the Manchester business classes. In Donald Read's words:

The influence achieved among the generally untheoretical Northern businessmen by the theoretical principles of 'laissez-faire' was remarkable. Social psychologists would explain the development as an example of 'rationalisation'. Laissez-faire political economy, understood in its crudest and most unqualified form, rationalised the self-interest of the industrial employers into an apparently God-given system. Employers found their profit-making impeded by legislative restrictions and by vested privileges - Political Economy taught that such impositions and privileges were unnatural. The employers were readily converted and by the 1820s we find the hard-headed businessmen of Manchester hailing the new era in political science.¹

Like Gatrell, Hertz and Marshall, Read has exaggerated the intellectual and practical control that a particular body of doctrines could achieve in Manchester. Even many respectable liberals believed that laissez-faire could not be applied to each and every aspect of economic and social organisation. Nevertheless, the influence that laissez-faire did achieve owed much to Taylor and the Guardian. Prentice's newspapers were less dominated by doctrine. Prentice could not accept total laissez-faire because of, among other things, his strong Scots morality and paternalistic concern for the conditions of the operative classes. He believed in the value of some kinds of protective legislation to improve the workers' lot, for example, supporting the legal right to combine and

1. Read, 'Reform Newspapers', 307; also his Press and People, 31-2 and chapter IV.

rejecting the notion of a totally free and unfettered labour market on the grounds that it encouraged continual wage reductions. On most political subjects there could be broad agreement between Taylor and others in the band because their basic ideas and approach were the same; they differed on the methods to be employed, or on the speed at which desired reforms could and should be implemented. Perhaps the disagreements on social and economic questions were more important: Taylor was the most doctrine-bound of the band and it could be that the break between him and the others had more to do with the use and application of political economy than with disagreements on matters such as parliamentary reform. Then again, personality played an important part in the rupture and the disagreements were also all bound up with the direction taken by the Guardian. Since the Guardian dealt with all issues at the same time - social, economic, political - it might be simplistic and inaccurate to say that one particular subject was a greater cause of disagreement than another.

As men who were or had been engaged in trade and manufacturing the band were keenly interested in commercial questions and aware of the needs of local business. Their role was to assist in the articulation of grievances and in the campaign for more enlightened and appropriate government policies. But though the band were successful in mobilising townsmen and in enhancing their own local standing as businessmen, reformers and economic commentators, for much of the time Manchester's commercial campaigns faced obstructions despite a degree of cross-party cooperation. One of the most important obstructions was the government's concern to protect its revenues and to preside over a steady and cautious movement towards economic security after more than twenty years of war.

If we consider the politics of commerce in Manchester we find that campaigns were cautious and non-partisan in many cases, that the approach was an intensely practical one rooted in the desires to present particular local grievances and solicit favoured solutions. Interest and activity were largely limited to those matters of most concern to Manchester businessmen specifically. There could be tension, though, between moderates who were sometimes represented by Taylor, and more active and radical campaigners like Prentice and some of the others in the band. Taylor differed from them in his views on such matters as the national debt, minor currency and taxation questions, Huskisson's commercial reforms and to some extent the corn laws. As on other matters disagreement could be related to theory and also to the nature, extent and speed of desired changes. All of the band were free traders; this was a matter of ideological commitment, moral rectitude and sound commercial sense. But this approach to free trade was not that of the majority, which was concerned more with the practice and expected benefits of freer trade than with its morality or intellectual soundness. The growing commitment to free trade was insular and parochial in character, even cynical, and certainly inconsistent. If free trade looked like increasing his profits the typical Manchester businessman was for it. Otherwise he was not interested.

The corn laws became a central preoccupation of the band. They helped to keep interest in the corn question alive in the years from 1815 to 1832 and though for years they presented a view of the corn laws which differed from that of the majority, they gradually converted enough townsmen to make a campaign for full repeal a viable proposition. It is clear that the Anti-Corn Law League began with self-interested local and

class motives, but the participation of the band did mean that this was not the whole story. Of course in 1815-32 the meetings on the corn question in Manchester were characterised by self-interest, the main concerns being wage levels and the town's export trade. The notion that food prices and wages were directly linked was dominant (thanks largely to Ricardo); the most important contribution of Prentice, Shuttleworth and their closest allies was to deny this and to argue that repeal would benefit everyone. They were saying this more than twenty years before the establishment of the League. They also made the corn issue a Manchester issue. Local reformers regarded corn law repeal as very much a Manchester question, one on which it was urgently necessary that Manchester should act. The band constantly engaged in efforts to get Manchester to act on the matter and did have occasional successes in the 1820s and 1830s. But these efforts only really came to fruition in the time of the League, which also saw Manchester unmistakably at the forefront of the repeal campaign. The Manchester free traders' agitation and propaganda had a growing effect until large numbers of townspeople were moved. The situation was different in London, and Cobden was concerned about this because historically the provinces had always tended to follow the capital. But the Manchester reformers were happy to take the lead: repeal was a local issue. It was felt that the League's policy was and should be a Manchester policy. This was why Cobden could tell the Town Council in 1841:

... the question of the corn and provision laws is as much a local question in Manchester as that of poor rates, police rates or any other local matter; inasmuch as I believe that a vast amount of your local expenses arise out of the operation of these laws. I may, I believe, further congratulate you and the town generally, that we are now arrived at that point in which there is no-one to be found in Manchester who is in favour of the corn law as it now stands.

In 1846 the Town Council passed a vote of thanks to the League's leaders. The idea that the corn issue was a Manchester issue survived. In 1946 there was a celebration to mark the centenary of repeal. This included a grand exhibition of letters, books, prints and other items which described the League's campaign and emphasised Manchester's role as the League's birthplace and headquarters. Mancunians were still proud of the fact that the anti-corn law movement had gained its spirit and direction from Manchester men.¹

Throughout this period parliamentary reform retained its central position as the remedy of remedies and the means to further ends. The band engaged wholeheartedly in the reform movement. Peterloo was followed by a massive increase in the band's activity and influence, though at the time there was probably more cause for frustration than self-congratulation. For all their effort, honest indignation and effective marshalling of opinion the band and their allies had few true victories in the immediate aftermath of Peterloo. The affair was more important in the long term - because of what it enabled the respectable reformers to do and achieve later on - than in the short-term, when the force of reaction was clearly too strong for the reformers to secure major concessions. Peterloo did provide a valuable foundation to build on, though this was a cumulative process and the reformers needed time to arrive at the aims and methods which would work in prevailing circumstances. But an advance had been made: the Twenty Six of February 1818, for example, had become the five thousand or so who signed the

1. E. Hughes, 'Cobden's Economic Doctrines and Propaganda'; 'Corn Law Repeal Centenary', MR 4 (1946)

Declaration and Protest after Peterloo. Not all of these signatories would follow the band on each and every issue but at least the potential existed. This potential was fully exploited in the local government disputes of the 1820s, and also in the parliamentary reform campaign of 1830-32. In the latter movement, though, account had to be taken of the equivocation and disagreement that existed in Manchester regarding the Reform Bill. Manchester's social and economic organisation was such, moreover, that it was difficult to construct a united cross-class reform movement in the town. This continued to be the case, and it is significant that on the same day (24 September 1838) Manchester was to see a mass meeting on Kersal Moor at which Feargus O'Connor and J. R. Stephens led a demand for the Six Points, and the first meeting of the Anti-Corn Law Association in the York Hotel, King Street.¹

In 1830-32 some of Manchester's conservatives did not oppose the reform campaign and some did. Many plebeian radicals followed the Hunt line and condemned the bill, even if they had initially welcomed it, but others (notably John Doherty) felt it would be a welcome first step. With Manchester Toryism divided and with popular radicalism also divided, it was perhaps inevitable that the band should have come to the fore in the way that they did. There was talk of unity and compromise, and some hoped that all parties could join in support of a government and a measure that would tend towards the national good, but as usual such cooperation was not achieved in any true or lasting sense. If anyone was going to speak and act for the Reform Bill it was going to be the band and their circle, with some middling sort allies in support. The band truly came

1. Frangopulo, 'Growth of Manchester', 50.

of age as a political force in 1830-32, and the activities in which they engaged and their consciousness that they had helped to secure the Reform Bill's passage strengthened their confidence, prestige, and their ability and willingness to campaign for further reforms, particularly incorporation.

If the passing of the Reform Bill was a great victory for the band, another success came with Manchester's first parliamentary election in 1832, which saw the return of two reformist free trade candidates (Mark Philips and Charles Poulett Thomson, Vice President of the Board of Trade), and with the elections of Brotherton in Salford and Richard Potter in Wigan. Just as the band had played the key role in Manchester's campaign for the Reform Bill, so the return of these candidates also owed most to their efforts. The 1832 election provided the band with possibly their greatest triumph of this pre-incorporation and pre-League era, represented a fitting end to twenty years of activity in the cause of progress and reform, and showed conclusively that the band had truly arrived. From a position of weakness at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, they had risen to have a decisive influence on the course of local affairs. Prentice's Times was the only local paper to support both successful candidates in Manchester, and Prentice and J. B. Smith were particularly active propagandists on behalf of Philips and Thomson (as well as Brotherton and Potter). The others in the band dominated the election committees of all four candidates, canvassing,

writing and speaking on their behalf.¹ The bitterly contested Manchester election of 1832 showed how powerful the band had become, and also demonstrated how important was the connection between respectable liberals and their supporters from humbler social strata. A main reason for the liberal victory in Manchester in 1832 was the successful appeal to voters among the operatives, artisans, shopkeepers and petty traders. (Shopkeepers represented 22% of the Manchester electorate in 1832.) It could be that the campaign for incorporation in 1837-8 was based partly on the liberals' desire to cultivate and confirm their ties with the middling sort. The band and their allies could not ignore the fact that Manchester Toryism remained dangerously resilient despite the 1832 result - and the 'high' party still dominated the organs of local government. The Tory vote in Manchester's parliamentary elections, in fact, averaged 35.5% between 1832-80 and was frequently over 40%. In 1868 and 1874 it was over 50%.²

The idea that Manchester was a liberal town by about 1820 has been advanced most notably by L. S. Marshall and G. B. Hertz.³ It is untenable: neither commercially nor politically does the Manchester of 1820 fit this description. It is true that free trade and laissez-faire

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1. The local newspapers are the best source for the 1832 elections, especially the Times, Guardian, Courier and Chronicle from June to December 1832, but see also Prentice, League, i. ch. I and II; J. B. Smith, Elections and Reminiscences; Shuttleworth Scrapbk.; Atkinson Papers (political tracts); Hadfield, Narrative; Brotherton Scrapbks.; Main, Reform Movement, ch. 8; L. S. Marshall, 'The first Parliamentary Election in Manchester', AHR 47 (1941-2); Gatrell, 'Incorporation and hegemony'.
 2. See statistics in Marshall, 'First Election', 534-7; Gatrell, 'Incorporation and hegemony', 38-41; Fraser, Urban Politics, ch.9.
 3. Marshall, Public Opinion; Hertz, Manchester Politician.

principles were becoming more and more popular but this had everything to do with practical self-interest. The ideological commitment was far from complete and in any case there remained a strong body of opinion which opposed some forms of commercial liberalisation. Politically Manchester was in the hands of an entrenched conservative oligarchy. This was increasingly challenged by the respectable liberals and their middling sort allies (and sometimes by the popular radicals too). These 'friends of progress' faced an uphill struggle throughout the period before 1832. There were more reverses than successes. Gradually the 'high' party expanded to take in moderates and Whigs who were as keen as the conservatives to defend the position of men of wealth and property. The Police Act of 1828 did not weaken the ruling party's control, and it was to be another ten years before the reformers could capture a commanding position in the local power structure through incorporation.

What did it mean to be a liberal in early-nineteenth-century Manchester?¹ That brand of liberalism that was represented by the band consisted of several prominent features. Using the band as our guide we can say that, essentially, a liberal believed in progress, reform, freedom and inquiry, upheld the worth of the individual and wanted to protect and extend the rights and opportunities of the individual. An important feature of the band's liberalism was their attempt to make their political creed attractive and relevant to other social groups. This was not just a manipulative manoeuvre; they were also honestly

1. The term 'liberal' is as accurate as any that could be employed to describe the band. It was used at the time, though those in the band were possibly more likely to call themselves 'rational radicals', 'reformers' and 'friends of progress'.

trying to do something for these groups. The liberal reserved a central place in politics for morality, and felt that public activity was and should be based on spiritual and moral impulses and personal integrity. (This was the feature that most impressed Bentham about Prentice when the two met in April 1831. Bentham recorded that his visitor was 'juggical, Calvinistic; is descended from two parsonical grandfathers of considerable notoriety'.¹) The liberal was also animated and characterised by generosity, humanity, enlightenment, candidness and rationality. He was against unmerited privileges, unreasonable restrictions, obscurantism, exclusivity, corruption and inefficiency. The liberal was greatly dissatisfied with the present, and this was often the most obvious motive behind his public efforts. All of this had much to do with the situation, priorities and ambitions of those who were attracted to liberalism; no set of principles has an existence independent of the people who ratify, embody and advocate it. Liberalism as a programme of means and ends could also be modified, expanded and adapted over time, in keeping with prevalent circumstances. The ideas that were used and the ways they were used could be changed in the very process of employment. Respectable liberalism in Manchester encompassed such a wide field of concerns that cohesion and homogeneity were never guaranteed. The friction within the band can be seen as indicative of the friction within Manchester liberalism as a whole. As suggested above, if one of the most fashionable and persuasive liberal tenets of the age was laissez-faire, there could nevertheless be many disagreements about its applicability and relevance. This was perhaps most obvious in

1. Bentham to Place, 24 April 1831, cited in Wallas, Life of Place, 81-2.

debates over commercial policy, factory reform, public health and poverty relief. But there were also disagreements about the speed at which certain changes should be introduced and about the means used to secure these changes. This friction would lead to the breaking up of the liberal bloc in Manchester after corn law repeal, but it was evident decades earlier when the band began to be active.

On the whole the band did work as a unit. There was enough common ground on local, social, commercial and political questions to make this unsurprising, but internal arguments were still a feature of the band's existence. There were differences on matters of ideology, priorities, methods and conduct, and on the nature and extent of necessary reforms. Although on certain issues Prentice and Taylor were similar in outlook, they represented the two poles of opinion within the band. (Most of the others were closer to Prentice than Taylor.) Taylor conducted the Guardian as a business venture as well as an organ of opinion. His eagerness for reforms was clear but existed alongside an enthusiasm for political economy and a certainty that some men, locally and nationally, were more deserving of influence and power than most other men. He felt that reformers had to take account of prevalent circumstances, should not aim for too much, and should accept gradual changes if these were all that could be secured. Prentice was more impatient, more concerned about the unprotected and unrepresented, and his liberalism contained a paternalistic and humanitarian outlook that was not usually to be found in Taylor's words and actions. Prentice favoured poor laws, combinations, a wide franchise for local and parliamentary elections, and energetic interventionist policies to deal with the perceived moral and social problems of the lower classes. He was not for political economy

but for a 'generous' political economy. His stance was probably more radical than that of some of his friends, but an agitator such as Prentice was needed to make things happen, to prompt others into action and to provide men more moderate than himself with the information and encouragement they needed to make their contribution as reformers, citizens and Christians. His journalistic and political career has significance and meaning because it pointed the way forward.

What the band said and did in the period 1815-32 is important because of what followed. They laid the foundations for incorporation, the League, and Manchester's rise to prominence as the most important provincial centre in Victorian England - with its active politicians, influential newspaper press, wealth-creating commercial affairs, and pioneering role in cultural and social discussions and programmes. The band helped to bring all this about but have been relatively neglected.¹ Even Prentice, the most active and radical of them, has not been credited with the importance that his ceaseless exertions as writer, speaker and agitator deserves. If he is mentioned at all by historians who have studied nineteenth-century Manchester he is normally brushed aside as insignificant. N. C. Edsall, for example, has written: 'Essentially Prentice was a political busybody, intervening in print and in person in every aspect of local affairs; but he was no great agitator nor, for that matter, an especially skilled newspaperman'. Yet a much earlier commentator (Somerville in 1853) was convinced that: 'To bring [Manchester] men to their senses on public affairs, to direct them in the

1. Only three have entries in the D.N.B., Prentice, Brotherton and Taylor.

study of political science, to save the intellectual waste and out of it to form and give to Manchester a political mind, no single man has done so much as Archibald Prentice'. The leading modern historian of the League, Norman McCord, seems to lean towards the Edsall verdict. Although admitting that Prentice 'was far from being a negligible quantity', McCord feels that his role as historian of the League 'has tended to exaggerate the part he played'.¹ The statements of Edsall and Somerville display much bias. Somerville is writing a series of laudatory biographical sketches of free traders involved in the campaign against the corn laws; Edsall is trying to show that Prentice was not too important a figure in Cobden's early political career, that Prentice needed Cobden far more than Cobden needed him. Edsall fails to appreciate the valid point made by Donald Read, that Cobden's acceptance as a 'coming man' in Manchester owed 'something' to Prentice, who realised Cobden's promise and gave his writings and activities publicity in the mid-1830s.² Certainly Cobden's career would not have been all that it was without the earlier preparatory activities of Prentice and the band. The Manchester reformers of the years before 1832 laid the foundations; they created the climate of opinion that was necessary for the League to be established and effective. This is the fact that has often been ignored: the real history of the League (and incorporation), of the 'Manchester School' and of politics in Victorian Manchester begins with the ideas and activities of the band in the 1810s and 1820s.

1. Edsall, 34; Somerville, 381; McCord, League, 34-5, 42, 166-7.

2. Read, Cobden and Bright, 15-16.

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