The Educational Ideas and Influence of Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)

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for the degree of

PhD

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June 1991

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr Walter Humes for his perceptive and helpful comments while I was preparing this study on Malthus; Carol Tallen for her conscientious attention to detail in typing the final draft; my parents for their constant support and my husband for his unfailing encouragement and assistance.

SUMMARY

A clear reflection of the commonly-held opinion about Malthus and his work can be found in the entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica [fifteenth edition] which confidently asserts: "Thomas Robert Malthus, English economist and pioneer in modern population study, is best known today for his theory, first stated in 1798, that the growth of population always tends to outrun growth of production, so that poverty is therefore man's most inescapable fate"(1). Other reference books tend to echo this view, and everyday references or allusions to Malthus and his theories emphasise the idea that he foresaw a future of suffering and starvation unless the growth of population could be checked, a possibility about which he was far from sanguine. When Aldous Huxley was writing Brave New World in 1932, he could assume that his audience would recognise the connotations of "Malthusian drill", and the term "Malthusian prophecy" is widely understood to refer to the widespread famine which is bound to occur when the world's food production fails to keep pace with the rapid increase in the world's population.

There is rarely any mention of Malthus's social and economic proposals for a better future, free from the threat of famine, or of the central place given to education in the creation of this improved and stable society. The popular view of the man and his theories is therefore incomplete, and insufficient emphasis has been given to his hopes for a better future which would be brought about by universal education.

In this study, the depth of Malthus's involvement in education will be seen. During his years at Haileybury College, Malthus proved himself to be a caring and conscientious teacher who, as will be demonstrated in Chapter III, was remembered with affection in later life by many of his pupils; he was a loyal member of staff who defended the college against critical reports in the press; he was concerned about the welfare of the boys in his charge, as well as an appropriate curriculum for them and fair methods of assessing their progress. A detailed examination of biographies, letters and published articles will provide ample evidence to prove these claims about Malthus.

The criticism has sometimes been made that Malthus wished to condemn the poor to a life made even more difficult by the withdrawal of the assistance offered by the Poor Laws, but the analysis of his theories which appears in Chapters V and VI of this study will demonstrate that this was not Malthus's intention. Far from wanting the poor to suffer increased privation, Malthus hoped that his proposals would offer them the chance to improve their situation and influence their own destiny. A critical study of his own words will show the importance of education in his vision of a better future. An educated populace would understand the reasons behind food shortage and would appreciate the necessity of delaying marriage, thereby slowing down the increase in population. Education would encourage the lower classes to strive for self-improvement; it would show them how to be careful and plan for the future; it would "have a considerable effect in the prevention of crimes and the promotion of industry, morality and regular conduct"(2); it would even bring about a more peaceful and stable society as an educated populace would understand the truth about their situation and would not be

persuaded by the "false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues"(3). It is certainly true that Malthus recommended the abolition of the existing Poor Laws, but this does not mean that he wished to condemn the poor to increased suffering. On the contrary, an examination of the historical background of the system of poor relief at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century will help us to understand Malthus's attitude to the Poor Laws, and a detailed analysis of his own proposals in Chapter VI of this study will explain how his ideas about Poor Law reform were linked to his theories about social and economic reform.

Finally, Chapters VIII, IX and X of this study will contain an examination of the extent of the influence exerted on public opinion by Malthus and his theories. The reactions to the man and his work will be considered in Chapter VIII, which provides evidence from reviews in journals of the period; newspaper articles and readers' letters; pamphlets and books; biographies; letters and sermons. Many of his contemporaries regarded him as an important and influential figure whose ideas

were worthy of serious consideration. He was not in any way isolated from public debate at Haileybury and Chapter IX will show that he was in regular correspondence with many public figures of the day and was frequently consulted by them on social, economic and educational matters. His opinions were also sought by Parliamentary Committees and the support he gave to the move towards universal education was extremely important. His influence was widespread and, as will be seen in Chapter X, he had a real effect on the attitudes of Members of Parliament as well as the opinions of the general public. He was instrumental in changing the climate of Parliamentary opinion to such an extent that the idea of government involvement in education, which Malthus advocated so strongly, could be regarded as a serious option. The texts of various debates which will be examined thoroughly in Chapter X of this study will show the extent of Malthus's influence, the importance given to his educational theories by his contemporaries and the way in which his support for state involvement in educational provision brought about an obvious change in parliamentary attitudes during the first

two decades of the nineteenth century.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Robert Malthus is still remembered today, more than one hundred and fifty years after his death, as an important economist whose keen interest in demography earned him a certain degree of notoriety both during his own lifetime and up to the present moment. He is not, however, usually associated with the idea of educational reform. His name is linked inextricably with his theories about the problems caused when the rate of increase in population outstrips the rate of increase in food production. He is sometimes criticised for the pessimism of this theory and for the harshness of his attitude towards the poor, from whom, it is said, he would have taken even the meagre assistance offered by the Poor Laws. Certainly, the suggestion that "the radical theory of popular instruction" might be regarded as "Malthusian in origin"(1) would come as a surprise to many people who had never considered Malthus as an educationalist at all, far less as a proponent of universal education. A more detailed examination of his life and his writing will, however, demonstrate that Malthus had important

and far-reaching ideas on education and that these ideas were central to his social and economic proposals for creating a better future. A further examination of contemporary documents will also provide evidence about the influence enjoyed by Malthus and his theories, and will show how he helped bring about a change in attitude towards increased educational provision during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

His theories about population are fairly well known. In 1798 he published his Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society in which he argued that population [which he regarded as increasing geometrically] would soon expand beyond the means of subsistence [which increased arithmetically and therefore more slowly]. He considered the situation in his own day, with large families growing to adulthood, marrying and having large families, while even improved agricultural methods could produce only limited amounts of food. The first results of this would be higher and higher prices, as competition over food supplies increased, then there would be famine and

starvation. The only way this expansion in population seemed to be halted, especially among the poor, was by checks such as poverty, disease and starvation which caused terrible suffering and misery.

This is the pessimistic view which is remembered by many of his critics but, after carrying out further research, Malthus modified his conclusions and all later editions of his work were more positive in their outlook. Human beings, he declared, were not helpless pawns who were doomed to a tragic future because of a population explosion; future generations would not have to suffer death from starvation and its associated ills; man is a rational creature who can take control of his own destiny. If people could only be educated to understand the importance of population control then they would delay marriage, thereby having smaller families for whom they would be better able to provide, and preventing the miseries of starvation and malnutrition caused by inadequate food supplies. This was one of Malthus's major reasons for supporting the idea of universal education, but it was not his only

reason, as the examination of his educational ideas in Chapter V of this study will demonstrate.

Later in this study it will also be noted that Malthus has sometimes been criticised for his recommendation that the system of poor relief operating in his day should be ended. He has been accused of condemning the poor to a life of hopeless squalor without even the sparse assistance offered by the Poor Laws. This was certainly not his intention, as a detailed reading of his work will show. The ending of this system of poor relief was an essential part of his overall plan to offer the poor the opportunity to improve their situation and control their future, once they had received the education which would enable them to do this. The close study of Malthus's attitude to the Poor Laws which is contained in Chapter VI of this study will demonstrate the weakness of conventional interpretations of his position.

Finally we must consider the extent of his influence on educational reform in the first part of the nineteenth century. It must be admitted

that there are few immediately obvious signs of his influence: he did not establish new schools, devise original methods of teaching or introduce reforming bills in Parliament. This does not mean, however, that there is no evidence at all of his contribution to improving educational provision for all. He was consulted by his contemporaries on many matters and his ideas on education contributed to the changing climate of opinion in favour of universal education. In addition to this he had a direct impact on parliamentary debates on education and was a decisive influence on the changing attitudes we can discern over the period in question. A detailed examination of the man and his work will establish clearly both the extent of his own interest in education and also how greatly his influence on educational reform has been underestimated.

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1 Halevy, E: The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism [trans. Morris, M], London 1927, p.244.

CHAPTER I
Educational and Social Background to the Ideas Contained in the Works of Thomas Robert Malthus

When Malthus came to consider the place of education in his overall view of society, his starting-point for any changes or developments would clearly be education as he knew it existed at the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, any proposals for improving the life of the poor would be inspired by the conditions with which he was familiar in his own day. Before considering his theories and proposals in any great detail it would therefore be appropriate to examine the social pressures and educational arrangements during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

In the early part of the century the population of the towns had been fairly small with the majority of people living largely self-sufficient lives in the country. With the exception of London, the largest English town before 1750 was Norwich(1) and most of the population of urban England inhabited a series of small market towns and ports. As the century progressed, however, swift and marked changes took place, creating the poverty, overcrowding and ignorance which concerned Malthus and many of his contemporaries.

A number of factors combined to produce these changes, one of the most important being the process of enclosing land and abolishing the old "open-field" system. The movement to enclose land had, in fact, begun gradually some time before but it really gained momentum towards the end of the eighteenth century. During the reigns of the previous three monarchs [Anne, George I and George II] only 245 private Bills for enclosure had come before Parliament; during the reign of George III [1760-1820] 3,266 such Bills were introduced as well as the General Enclosure Act of 1801. The scale of enclosure was vast: the total area involved was 6.8 million acres, about one fifth of the land area of England. As has already been mentioned the process was not spread uniformly across the century; during the 1760s and 1770s forty per cent of all parliamentary enclosure took place. There were obvious benefits to the new system which would have been appreciated both by livestock farmers and those farming arable land. It was easier to limit the spread of disease and to evolve flocks and herds of more uniform quality; it was possible to expand grazing area which had previously been confined to the commons,

wastes and post-harvest stubbles of open fields; the consolidation of lands helped reduce the amount of time and energy expended on working scattered strips of ploughland; damage from straying animals was reduced; in the long run the new system permitted farmers to experiment with different fodder crops which would eventually allow more animals to be kept on the same amount of land(2). However, not everyone benefited from the changes.

The owners of the old strips of land received compensation which was usually inadequate and they also lost the meadow and grazing rights they had formerly enjoyed. They became dependent on wages which, at the end of the eighteenth century, tended to be low while food prices were high. More and more often, they had to apply for relief in order to survive. In 1795, the Justices at Speenhamland introduced a system which linked the amount of relief with the price of bread. This system spread quickly to other areas and had the general effect of depressing wages. It is easy to see why Arthur Young thought, "By nineteen

Enclosure Bills in twenty the poor are injured, and in some grossly injured"(3).

At the same time the old cottage industries such as spinning, weaving and basket making were coming to an end. With the development of machinery and the use of steam power in the manufacturing industries, more and more factories were built and people flocked to find work in them. A rapid redistribution of population took place, with towns growing up swiftly around coalfields and industrial areas. The process of urbanisation was swift: at the beginning of the eighteenth century the population of Manchester had been about 10,000 but by 1801 it had increased to 84,000(4); during the same period Liverpool, Bristol, and Birmingham had experienced similar transformation and the people of the time expressed their amazement at such swift changes. In 1791, William Hutton looked back over the previous decade of change in Birmingham and wrote:

> "Streets and houses have arisen, on our right, out of solitary fields. The cattle have been turned out of their pastures to make room for man, and the arts are planted where the daisy grew. These additions are so amazing, that even an author of veracity will barely

meet belief. A <u>city</u> has been grafted upon a town."(5)

There was no planning or control of these areas where the population was increasing with such rapidity, and the crowded and insanitary living conditions experienced by the inhabitants frequently matched their appalling working conditions. Children were often employed in factories where they put in long hours in unpleasant and sometimes dangerous conditions for low wages. Their parents were powerless to object as they were dependent on the little extra money the children earned. There was no legislation either to limit children's working hours or to ensure that they received any form of education: many of the upper and middle classes tended to embrace a laissez-faire philosophy and condemn government interference. As a Committee of the House of Commons reported in 1806:

> "The right of every man to employ the capital he inherits or has acquired according to his own discretion without molestation or obstruction, so long as he does not infringe on the rights or property of others, is one of those privileges which the free and happy Constitution of this Country has long accustomed every Briton to consider as his birth-right."(6)

The improvement of social conditions was to be left to humanitarian and philanthropic activity. The poor were encouraged to individual exertion, self-help and, if necessary, resignation to their fate:

> "Let compassion be shown in action, the more the better according to every man's ability, but let there be no lamentation of their condition... Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion should be recommended to them."(7)

The curriculum of schools run by charitable groups during the eighteenth century would certainly have encouraged the development of the qualities recommended by this writer and many of his contemporaries.

A tradition of charity schools had already existed for some time in England. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge had been founded in 1698 and by 1760 had thirty thousand children in its schools. These schools, attended mainly by day pupils although there were some boarders, were associated with particular parishes and supported through legacies, endowments and voluntary contributions. The children were catechised by

the local clergyman and the masters or mistresses, members of the Church of England, were "to be of meek temper and humble behaviour; to have a good government of themselves; and to keep good order". Religious instruction and reading were the main items in the curriculum but the children were also encouraged to develop "habits of industry" while learning skills such as spinning, sewing, gardening or ploughing which would help them become domestic servants or labourers. The Roman Catholic and non-conformist churches also set up charity schools and the combined efforts of all these establishments may have contributed to the rise in literacy levels in England during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century which has been observed and documented by a number of historians.(8) It has not always been easy to calculate the levels of literacy but one interesting source of data has been marriage registers, which husbands and wives had to sign from 1754. In spite of all the problems of evaluating this information, historians have managed to make some assessments for various parts of the country. In 1760, for example, it has been estimated that some Yorkshire parishes had a

literacy rate of sixty-four per cent for men and thirty-nine per cent for women. There were, however great variations from place to place and, by the end of the eighteenth century, many establishments were being criticised for a lack of efficiency.

> "Notwithstanding the plan is still in force which was originally concerted for the purpose of giving the children educated by charity a comprehensive knowledge of Christianity and to exercise them betimes to the practice of piety, it must be acknowledged that the education of children brought up in the charity schools is, in general, very defective in these particulars."(9)

Complaints were also made about incompetent teachers in charity schools and about rote learning without real understanding. Whether or not these particular complaints were justified it is certainly true that there was a decline in the creation of new endowed schools in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Only eighty-one schools were founded in Derbyshire, Cheshire and Lancashire between 1750 and 1800; in the forty years before 1750 one hundred and thirty-one schools had been founded. The pattern was the same in other parts of the country(10). Perhaps

people who had previously endowed schools now used their surplus funds in other ways [eg enclosure, canal and turnpike investment]; perhaps it was simply that the religious tension motivating the charity school movement had slackened. Whatever the reason, the existing provision of schools would have been unable to accommodate the rising population which so concerned Malthus at the end of the eighteenth century. Added to this, more and more children were being employed in various industries, either because of technical changes or expanding production. Factories could usefully employ children at an earlier age than they could start full-time domestic weaving or farm work so it was even less likely than before that children could attend school long enough to acquire the skills of basic literacy. It would have been surprising if the charity school movement could have maintained its momentum under all these pressures.

Schools of industry had been recommended by John Locke as early as 1697(11) but they were never to enjoy great success. The children received instruction in practical skills such as spinning,

winding, knitting, sewing, gardening and plaiting straw. The products of their work were sold and the profits paid for the expenses of the school, meals for the children, instruction in Religion and reading and, occasionally, wages for the children. The schools of industry were in competition with the factories for child labour and the factories tended to win the struggle as they could provide a slightly higher wage. The Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comfort of the Poor tried hard to foster schools of industry but with little success. In 1809 they reported that out of 188,794 children aged between five and fourteen who were in receipt of parish relief only 20,336 were in schools of industry and therefore receiving some kind of education(12).

The only day of the week on which children were free from the demands of the factory was Sunday and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the rise of the Sunday School movement which was to provide opportunities for lessons in Religious Instruction and reading. While not the founder of this movement, Robert

Raikes is often linked with it and he did a great deal to publicise it and gain support among the general public.

A successful newspaper owner in Gloucester, Raikes had been interested for many years in prison-reform and he had used his journal to expose the evils of the local prisons and agitate for improvements. He was not only concerned with the prisoners' physical conditions; he also wanted to educate them. As he commented in the Gloucester Journal on March 3, 1786:

> "In the present state of ignorance, what can be expected of wretches who are on a level with the most unenlightened and savage nations?"

Raikes tried to arrange for some kind of moral or religious instruction for the prisoners. If he found a prisoner who could read or write he made use of him to instruct his fellow-prisoners and by this method some of the younger offenders attained some competence in reading. He did not, however, have much success in stopping criminals from repeating their offences.

"For years he attempted to deal with adult criminals, and failed; he paid the debts of small debtors, and they returned to jail; he interceded for prisoners and got their sentences commuted, only again to find them naked or chained to others in the dungeons. To deal with the criminal adult was to invite defeat; to deal with the prison authorities, and, through them, the Government, was heart-breaking to ordinary men. The only possible solution, as it appeared to him, was to prevent criminals being made."(13)

This may well have been one of his reasons for establishing his first Sunday School. Another and more immediate cause was what he described as the profanation of the Sabbath, and the influence of the public-house. Joseph Lancaster visited Raikes in 1810, about thirty years after the establishment of Raikes' first sunday School, and this is the story he was told:

> "This is the spot on which I stood when I saw the destitution of the children and the desecration of the Sabbath by the inhabitants of the city. As I asked, 'Can nothing be done?' a voice answered, 'Try.' I did try, and see what God has wrought."(14)

After opening his first Sunday School he publicised his actions and tried to gain support through articles in the Gloucester Journal. Clearly he could not yet speak of any tangible

results so early in the operation of the school but he had great hopes for the future:

> "The promoters of this design seem to concur in the idea that prevention is better than punishment, and that an attempt to check the growth of vice at an early period, by an effort to introduce good habits of acting and thinking among the vulgar, is at least an experiment, harmless and innocent, however fruitless it may be in its effect."(15)

The scheme gained supporters and spread rapidly. The public imagination was fired with enthusiasm and in 1785 the Society for the Establishment and Support of Sunday Schools in the different Counties of England was founded. Interestingly, in view of later events, local committees were made up of equal numbers of churchmen and nonconformists. Emphasis was put on Religious Instruction and reading [especially the Bible] but some schools began to open during the week and the curriculum extended to include practical work. Within a short time we find a number of people commenting on the better behaviour and morals of the young.

At the Easter Quarter Sessions in 1786, the Gloucester Magistrates passed a unanimous vote to this effect:

> "The benefit of Sunday Schools to the morals of the rising generation is too evident not to merit the recognition of this Bench and the thanks of the community to the gentleman instrumental in promoting them."(16)

From Bisley in Gloucestershire came the statement:

> "We now find our gardens and henroosts secure.... the children are becoming orderly in behaviour, cleanly in their persons, and diligent and tractable in their employment. - A blessing seems to have attended this amendment of morals, for there is now work for all the industrious."(17)

A sermon from 1785 brought out the same points:

> "This simple mode of cultivating the morals of the rising generation has already produced an extraordinary alteration in the children, who, from being savage and filthy in their manners and appearance, are now becoming decent, orderly, and attentive to cleanliness."(18)

Employers were also pleased to notice improved behaviour in their youthful work-force. A manufacturer of hemp and flax commented:

> "The change could not have been more extraordinary in my opinion, had they

> been transformed from the shape of tigers to that of men. In temper, disposition, and manners, they could hardly be said to differ from the brute creation; but since the establishment of Sunday Schools, they have seemed anxious to show that they are not the ignorant, illiterate creatures they were before... They are also become more tractable and obedient, and less quarrelsome and revengeful. In short, I never conceived that a reformation so singular could have been effected among the set of untutored beings I employed."(19)

Clearly these writers appreciated the Sunday School more for the improvements they observed in the pupils' attitudes and behaviour than for any change in their educational and spiritual well-being. They were not alone in this attitude, and the examination of Malthus's ideas in Chapter V of this study will demonstrate that he also considered the possibility of education as a means of social control.

Not everyone was so enthusiastic, however, and the Sunday School movement was not without its critics. From 1797 onwards the Gentleman's Magazine frequently criticised these organisations for raising discontent and fomenting rebellion. One writer, using the name "Eusebius", was particularly concerned that Sunday Schools would

teach children to despise manual labour, thereby encouraging them to refuse that kind of work and to steal work from middle-class children. In one article he put forward his view that:

> "We may therefore conclude that the Sunday School is very far from being the wise, useful or prudential institution it is said to be, that it is in reality a production of no valuable advantage, but on the contrary is subversive of that order, that industry, that peace and tranquillity which constitute the happiness of society; and that, so far from deserving encouragement and applause, it merits our contempt, and ought to be exploded as the vain chimerical institution of a visionary projector."(20)

In another article the same writer argued that:

> "Industry in the lower classes is better than scholarship... To give them the latter without the former is to put swords into their hands which may be instruments of their own destruction."

In spite of any criticisms, however, the Sunday School movement continued to flourish and some critics changed their opinions. James Hanway, another Gentleman's Magazine correspondent, originally feared the movement but later he changed his mind and came to believe that "religion is the prop of government"(21).

In 1787 about 250,000 children attended Sunday Schools throughout Great Britain and the next few years saw a rapid increase in this figure. By 1801, 156,490 children attended Sunday Schools in London alone. Sarah Trimmer, another early pioneer in the Sunday School movement, felt that she could understand what attracted so many children. "The truth is that many find Sunday, so far from being a day of rest, the most uncomfortable day in a week." Children living in "a miserable apartment" with "a morose father, or a scolding drunken mother" would be glad to escape "even for a single day" to the refuge offered by a Sunday School(22). For these children the Sunday School was not only their chance to get some kind of education it was also the only place where society seemed to show any interest in their moral welfare. It was, however, the result of individual endeavours rather than state intervention and this was the pattern of educational provision for the poor at this time, and, indeed, for those children whose parents could contribute towards the cost of their education.

Some wealthier members of society still felt that a classical education was important and so sent their sons to one of the grammar schools offering a traditional curriculum which concentrated on Latin and Greek. It has been estimated(23) that perhaps sixty per cent of the sons of peers attended one of the nine great public schools in England during the eighteenth century, with Eton and Westminster being the two most popular establishments. During the same period eighty-three per cent of all ministers of state had attended one of the more famous English endowed foundations. Learning the classics may no longer have been a vocational necessity, as it had been when many of these schools had been founded and endowed, but it was part of the traditional requirements of the system and was also believed to train the mind so that it would be prepared for other sorts of learning. Schools which continued to prosper often saw little reason for changing their curriculum. In the early years of the nineteenth century one parent was informed by the authorities at St Paul's School in London:

> "At St Paul's we teach nothing but the classics, nothing but Latin and Greek. If you want your son to learn anything

else you must have him taught at home, and for this purpose we give him three half-holidays a week."(24)

At times even the force of law seemed to support classical education, as the Governors of Leeds Grammar School discovered when they took their case to the Court of Chancery in 1795. They wanted to introduce subjects like algebra, mathematics, French and German into the curriculum but when Lord Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, finally gave his ruling in 1805 he refused their application. He declared that, as the school had been founded and endowed specifically for the teaching of the classical languages, any new subjects could be taught only as "ancillary" to the "fundamentals" of Latin and Greek.

In spite of these legal obstacles, however, some schools did attempt to be flexible in their curricular provision. In particular, those schools which were not favoured by the fashionable elite, who chose such establishments as Eton, often responded to the needs of the artisan and shopkeeping classes or the increasingly prosperous middle classes. Oundle Grammar School, for

example, had no pupils on its roll in 1791; when it reopened the next year it offered a mixed curriculum of classical subjects, geography, surveying, merchant's accounting and drawing, thereby attracting forty-five boys. Similarly, Manchester Grammar School prepared some boys for university while offering a commercial curriculum to the majority of its pupils who were destined for industry and commerce(25).

William Gilpin, headmaster of Cheam School in Surrey from 1752 until 1777, had also broken with the traditional supremacy of classical studies. He believed that the work of public schools should be more closely related to the pupils' future careers. Many of his pupils he expected to become "landholders, tradesmen and public officers"(26) and he felt they would benefit from the introduction of commercial principles and practice into the school curriculum. He was also concerned about long-established customs such as the bullying of younger boys by more senior pupils. Such behaviour could have a detrimental effect on the formation of character and Gilpin wanted to ensure the development of good attitudes in

pupils. He urged other schools to reconsider their position.

> "Let them candidly own whether it may not be worthwhile to try some new method; and to endeavour, if possible, to bring early habit, in the common instances of life, to fight in the causes of virtue and good manners."(27)

Some schools may well have reconsidered their position as Gilpin requested, but for most children of the period any debate about curriculum or methods was largely irrelevant. If their parents could afford to provide any education at all it was in rather more humble establishments than grammar schools.

Dame schools, usually kept by elderly women who offered rudimentary education for a few pence a week, were to last well into the nineteenth century. Often overcrowded, they acted as child-minding establishments for the increasing number of children whose mothers were working all day. Some elementary instruction may have been given but those in charge of such establishments had neither training nor qualifications. Their "only qualification for this employment [seemed to be]

their unfitness for any other"(28), their premises were often cramped and they had only a few books. For many children, however, they were the only source of any education at all.

Common day schools or private day schools provided elementary education for rather older children. Standards could vary greatly in these schools. Some masters had failed in other employment; some seem to have been cruel and ignorant; others, however, were hard-working and efficient, like Joseph Lancaster who devised his monitorial system while working in such a school. What they certainly had in common was that they charged fees. This would have put them out of reach of many families in both town and country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Parliament set up a committee to investigate the "education of the lower orders of the metropolis and beyond". Their findings pointed clearly to the need for greater educational provision; the existing haphazard and unregulated system was clearly failing to cope with the problem. There

was, however, a demand for increased educational provision and the committee members were keen to point to the "benefits of Education":

> "The Select Committee... have found reason to conclude, that a very large number of poor Children are wholly without the means of Instruction, although their parents appear to be generally very desirous of obtaining that advantage for them.
>
> Your Committee have also observed with much satisfaction, the highly beneficial effects produced upon all those parts of the Population which, assisted in whole or in part by various Charitable Institutions, have enjoyed the benefits of Education."(29)

No doubt the various "Charitable Institutions" were providing instruction for many children but they were unable to cope with such an enormous problem. A number of people recognised this and they suggested various remedies. Sarah Trimmer felt that the parish was the responsible unit and she wanted rate aid for a school of industry in each parish. In 1796 the Prime Minister of the day, William Pitt the Younger, also suggested that every parish should sustain a school of industry but the Bill to establish this system was unsuccessful. Although the parish was clearly seen by many people to be the level of authority

which should provide the resources for these establishments, the fear of increased costs for the poor rate provoked much opposition to these proposals and many people continued to recommend voluntary support for charitable establishments rather than any kind of state interference. Malthus was absolutely convinced both about the necessity of educational provision for all and also about the methods required to ensure its organisation and funding. This was far too important a matter to be left to voluntary workers and, as we shall see, Malthus was quite definite about the role a government should have in educating its people.

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CHAPTER II
Thomas Robert Malthus - His Own Experience of Education

Unfortunately we have little information about Malthus's early life and, although it is tempting to speculate on his education during these years, our first factual record of his schooling dates from 1773. We certainly know that his father, though "not a religious man", would never allow "light conversation on such a subject in his presence. If any of his children had behaved ill in Church or talked of the persons they had seen there, remarked on their dress or anything of the kind [unhappily so commonly done by persons professedly religious] they would have been severely reprimanded".(1) Malthus's sisters were educated at home without a governess and their niece, Louisa Bray, declared that she had seldom met with women of more cultivated minds than her aunts(2). Clearly their father, Daniel Malthus, was keen to develop a sense of respect towards others as well as teaching his family facts and this home background was enjoyed by Malthus during the first seven years of his life.

After spending some time travelling about, the Malthus family stayed at Claverton House in

Somerset, near Bath, during the spring and summer of 1773. When they resumed their wanderings, Robert remained at Claverton where he was to be educated by the Rev. Richard Graves, an old family friend, until he was 16.

According to a contemporary account, the school enjoyed a delightful setting. "The scene is truly romantic, wild and picturesque. An abrupt declivity, from the table-land of the Down, descends to a narrow ever-green valley, through which the river Avon meanders silently and sluggishly towards the west."(3) On the other side of Claverton Down lay Bath, where Sarah Siddons played during four seasons between 1771 and 1781 but which was notorious at the time for unpleasant odours. We can certainly see the beggars, stray dogs and deeply-rutted streets in prints of the time and, although Malthus may well have enjoyed visits to the theatre or to the race-course at Claverton Down, the unpleasant aspects of life in Bath may have fostered the distaste for towns which was to remain with him for life.

We have some information about Malthus's progress at school from letters sent by Richard Graves to Daniel Malthus. In 1780, when the boy was fourteen years old, we learn that:

> "Don Roberto, though most peaceably inclined, and seeming even to give up his just rights, rather than to dispute with any man, yet, paradox as it may seem, loves fighting for fighting's sake, and delights in bruising; he has but barely recovered his eyesight, and yet I have much ado to keep him from trying again the chance of war; and yet he and his antagonist are the best friends in the world, learn together, assist each other, and I believe love each other better than any two boys in the school."(4)

As well as this interesting information on his pupil's character, the tutor also informs the parents about their son's academic progress:

> "He has finished Horace, and has read five satires in Juvenal with apparent taste, and I never saw a boy of his age enter more instantaneously into the humour of the fifth satire, which describes so feelingly the affronts and mortifications which a parasite meets with at a great man's table. I never saw a boy show a quicker sense of the beauties of an author, or at least of any humorous and unexpected strokes."(5)

In 1782 Daniel Malthus decided to send his son to read with Gilbert Wakefield at Warrington in

Lancashire at the famous Dissenting Academy. Later, after the Academy had closed down, Robert went to study at Wakefield's own home at Bramcote.

This choice of school must have seemed strange to many of Daniel's contemporaries. Bishop Otter was certainly pleased to report in later years that the character of Robert Malthus bore few marks and signs "of the scenes and persons to which he had been entrusted for the specific purposes of education"(6).

At this period in England, and indeed since the Test Act of 1674, Protestant Nonconformists were restricted in both their careers and their education. In order to hold public office one had to receive Communion at least once a year according to the rites of the Church of England; only members of the Church of England could take a degree at Oxford or Cambridge. Many Nonconformists turned to industry and commerce and, as they prospered, they set up their own educational establishments. These establishments trained boys for practical and managerial work as well as for the dissenting ministry and they

frequently offered a wider curriculum than was available at the more traditional schools. Malthus certainly never regretted his father's choice of school:

> "I think I shall never repent having been this little time at Bramcot [sic] before my going to college, for I have, if I am not deceived, got into a more steady and regular way of study."(7)

Gilbert Wakefield had certainly had an impressive academic record. He was a scholar of Jesus College, Cambridge, by the time he was sixteen and four years later he was Second Wrangler and one of the Chancellor's Medallists. He was immediately made a fellow of his college and in 1778 when he was twenty-two years old he was ordained deacon and held curacies in Stockport and Liverpool. His studies in theology led to his becoming a Unitarian which deprived him of receiving any living from the Church and in 1779 he forfeited his fellowship through marriage.

We can imagine what Malthus's time at Bramcote would have been like from information in a letter sent by Wakefield:

"As every species of magisterial severity and distance is, and ever was, absolutely foreign to my thoughts, and inconsistent with my dispositions, an entire equality of association has ever taken place with all my pupils and my family, so that no more embarrassment as to any domestic enjoyment should attend them than if they were at home, and no affections prevail in me towards them but such as extend to my own children.

On this account the whole family becomes moulded anew, and the same alteration takes place merely by the admission of one gentleman, as of half a dozen: nay, in some respects more; as the want of associates renders a much greater portion of friendly intercourse necessary to render their lives happy; without which no literary improvement can ever be expected to take place. Out of the intervals of study, therefore, I should neither expect nor wish a young gentleman to be insulated in his own room, but to have a free communication with us all, as he finds agreeable, without any hesitation or formality."(8)

In later years we are to see some Haileybury pupils speak with affection of the welcome they received from Malthus who, no doubt, remembered his time at Bramcote. Another resemblance was that both men were always prepared to abandon their own work to spend time with a visitor.

William Empson wrote of Malthus:

"It is one of the blessings of well-ordered natures to be always comparatively at leisure and unconstrained.

> While [Mr Malthus] was most deeply engaged in his philosophical speculations, he could pass at once from his study to his drawing room with an elastic step and a placid countenance, to animate and share the cheerfulness around him."(9)

Wakefield was also noted for his willingness to give time to those who intruded on his hours of study. He declared, "I never denied myself to any visitor, of whatever rank or calling, on account of occupation, or any other cause, to my knowledge, in all my life"(10).

Robert Malthus remained at Bramcote until 1784. His father had "a partiality for [his] taking degrees"(11) and favoured Cambridge. Gilbert Wakefield seems to have made all the arrangements and on June 7, 1784, he set out from Bramcote with Robert to enter him at his old college, Jesus.

Daniel Malthus was no doubt pleased to hear how his son was settling in at Cambridge. On November 14, 1784 Robert was able to write:

> "...I was, upon examination yesterday, found prepared to read with the year above me, though I believe I shall attend a few lectures at the same time

with those of my own year... We have some clever men at college, and I think it seems rather the fashion to read. The chief study is mathematics, for all honour in taking a degree depends upon that science, and the great aim of most of the men is to take an honourable degree... I have read in chapel twice. It seems that it is the custom when the readers are absent that the two juniors should read the lessons, and I believe I am the junior of my year."(12)

During his years at Cambridge Malthus made a number of friends and one of them later wrote down his memories of Malthus.

William Otter, Bishop of Chichester, wrote a Memoir of his old friend. It was published in 1836 as a preface to the posthumous second edition of Malthus's Principles of Political Economy and contains the following passage:

"In these [his academical pursuits] he was always more remarkable for the steadiness than for the ardour of his application, preferring to exert his mind equably in the various departments of literature then cultivated in the college, rather than to devote it exclusively or eminently to any one, and evidently actuated more by love of excellence than by the desire of excelling. For this happy disposition he seems to have been indebted next to his own gracious nature to the peculiar character of his education, which while it had employed higher motives with good effect, had rarely brought into action the principle of competition, so

> generally resorted to in colleges and schools; and the consequence was that he read in a better spirit, reflected more freely and more usefully and acquired more general information than any of his contemporaries."(13)

He also tells us that Malthus "found sufficient time for the cultivation of history and general literature, particularly of poetry, of which he was always a great admirer and discerning judge". Malthus also, in spite of having been born with a hare-lip, "obtained prizes for declamations in Latin and English"(14).

Fortunately Malthus's physical health was good during his time at university, although he did suffer from rheumatism during the winter of 1785-86. He must have mentioned this in a letter to his father who replied: "Don't say rhumatism, but consider the derivation, and that no man should have a disorder which he can't spell, especially a man of Jesus"(15).

In 1786 Malthus wrote to his father about his interest in the practical application of knowledge:

> "I am by no means, however, inclined to get forward without wishing to see the use and application of what I read. On the contrary I am rather remarked in college for talking of what actually exists in nature, or may be put to real practical use."(16)

Daniel Malthus appears to have maintained a keen interest in his son's progress during his time at Cambridge: he wrote to him regularly, encouraging him and even suggesting topics and books for study. Robert, however, while undoubtedly appreciating his father's concern, had his own ideas about what he should be doing:

> "If you will give me leave to proceed in my own plans of reading for the next two years [I speak with submission to your judgement], I promise you at the expiration of that time to be a decent natural philosopher, and not only to know a few principles, but to be able to apply those principles in a variety of useful problems."(17)

These letters certainly suggest that Malthus was a keen student and, indeed, he actually stayed in Cambridge over the Christmas vacation of 1785 in order to carry out some private studies. In 1786 he was made an Exhibitioner of his college, an award which suggests that the authorities were fully aware of his diligence.

In January 1788, Malthus sat his final examinations. These lasted for four days and included a public argument defending a prescribed thesis [or "wrangling"]. At the end of this ordeal Malthus emerged with credit as Ninth Wrangler as an award for his outstanding mathematical ability. He was, indeed, the only man from his college among the Wranglers that year.

Once the celebrations were over it was time to think of the future. Some two years earlier, in April 1786, Malthus had written to his father about his plans to enter the church. He had discussed this idea with the Master of Jesus College, Dr Beadon, who had warned him that the defect in his speech "would be an obstacle to [his] rising in the Church, and he thought it a pity that a young man of some abilities should enter a profession without at least some hope of being at the top of it". Malthus had assured him "that the utmost of [his] wishes was a retired living in the country" and there seemed to be few objections to that. In fact, Dr Beadon commented that when Malthus "read or declaimed in chapel he

scarcely ever lost a single word"(18).

From the contents of a letter(19) written to his father on April 17, 1788 it appears that Malthus stayed on at college for some time after his examinations in order to prepare for ordination and to do some general reading. His years of formal education were now at an end, but over the next decade he would continue to develop his ideas and theories until, in 1798, he published An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers. Unfortunately, during this period of ten years we know very little about Malthus, with neither the Dictionary of National Biography nor his latest biographer, Patricia James, providing a great deal of information.

We do know, however, that he became the Reverend Robert Malthus in 1788 and was appointed perpetual curate of Okewood, a small rural parish, in 1793. Living standards for farm labourers and their families were poor in the latter part of the eighteenth century. A high proportion of their

income was used to purchase bread, their staple food, and, while some may have lived in cottages of brick and stone, many inhabited wattle and daub cottages with earthen floors and tiny windows.(20) Such poor living conditions produce the undernourished children described by Malthus in 1798:

> "The sons and daughters of peasants will not be found such rosy cherubs in real life, as they are described to be in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country, that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth, and are a long while arriving at maturity. Boys that you would guess to be fourteen or fifteen, are, upon enquiry, frequently found to be eighteen or nineteen."(21)

Here we can see quite clearly the awareness of the living conditions suffered by poor families which was to provide an important motive for Malthus in his attempts to suggest ways in which even the poorest members of society could improve their situation.

Two years before writing this description Malthus had made his first recorded comment on population. In 1796 he wrote, but did not publish, <u>The Crisis, a View of the Present Interesting State of Great</u>

Britain, by a Friend to the Constitution. In this work he commented:

> "On the subject of population, I cannot agree with Archdeacon Paley, who says, that the quantity of happiness in any country is best measured by the number of people. Increasing population is the most certain possible sign of happiness and prosperity of a state; but the actual population may be only a sign of the happiness that is past."(22)

Already he was aware of the problems created by a steadily increasing population and it was, of course, his analysis of these problems which would later bring him so much fame. It was also in 1796 that we find the first reference to another theme which would occur frequently in his later works: the importance of encouraging self-help and independence rather than cultivating a reliance on the relief offered by the Poor Laws. He believed that "...it is by no means to be wished that any dependent situation should be made so agreeable, as to tempt those who might otherwise support themselves in independence"(23).

When, in a later chapter, we make a detailed examination of Malthus's work, with particular reference to education and the Poor Laws, the

essential link between his educational proposals and his overall plan to improve the lot of the poor in society will be clearly demonstrated. However, it is important to remember that Malthus did not write only from a theoretical standpoint when he was considering education; he was for many years a professor at the East India College in Haileybury and the next chapter will examine his practical experience as an educator.

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CHAPTER III
Malthus as an Educator - His Years at Haileybury

On July 10, 1805 Malthus formally accepted the post of Professor of General History, Commerce and Finance at the newly founded College of the East India Company at Haileybury in Hertfordshire and by November he was settled in his new home.

The college had been set up because of the growing awareness in the East India Company that many of the young men coming out to work for them needed some kind of training before they could carry out their duties. Over the years, the Company had changed greatly and its servants "from being clerks, factors or writers,... [were] now advanced to the situation of judges, Ministers of State, and governors of provinces"(1). Untrained men were not prepared for such duties and, in order to remedy this situation, the Company decided to found its own college in England. The students were to be aged between sixteen and nineteen and they were to study Oriental languages, mathematics, science, the laws of England, general history and political economy, as well as the more traditional classical literature. The curriculum was designed with the needs of the parent company

in mind and, as the Edinburgh Review was quick to point out, it was a far wider course of study than was currently available at Oxford and Cambridge.

Malthus appreciated the reasons behind founding the college and regarded it as "one of those practical questions, which must often come before a statesman - how to accomplish a particular object in the best manner - how to supply a particular want most effectually, as well as most economically... A public school and three years' residence at one of our universities may be decidedly the best education for an English statesman; but for an Indian statesman, who must be acquainted with the Oriental languages, and habituated to Indian customs and manners before he loses his pliability, there is evidently not time for such a course. The Oriental languages are best taught in the East; but languages alone are not a sufficient qualification for the administration of the British government in India, and general knowledge is best taught in the West."(2)

He also expressed sympathy for parents who wished to help their sons' advancement but who were "unable to undergo the extravagant expense of a long residence at a public school". He felt that the new college would be welcomed by such parents who could "give their sons a good education in their own neighbourhood"(3) and then pay for two or three years at Haileybury.

The college had its share of problems and there were several occasions when news of disturbances and discipline problems appeared in the press. Malthus commented that it was "generally allowed that the age from fifteen or sixteen to eighteen is the hardest to govern. It is precisely that period when the character makes the most rapid change in the shortest time"(4) and, in addition, the college had particular problems with boys who had been sent to Haileybury in spite of having no desire to go to India.

As far as corporal punishment was concerned, Malthus had clear ideas:

> "One would really think that the people who talk about the wonderful effects of corporal correction had not only never

been at school themselves, but never seen a man who had been at one."(5)

"Those who go out to India must and will be men the moment they reach the country, at whatever age they may be; and there they will be immediately exposed to temptations of no common magnitude and danger. To prepare them for this ordeal, Mr Jackson and the silly writers in the "Times" recommend their being whipped till the last hour of getting into their ships. I own it appears to me that the object is more likely to be attained by a gradual initiation into a greater degree of liberty, and a greater habit of depending upon themselves, than is usual at schools, carried on for two or three years previously, in some safer place than Calcutta."(6)

He defended the college against complaints and criticisms and warned against paying too much attention to:

"...the ebullitions of disappointed fathers who, however justly they may be pitied, are the very last persons who should be heard as authorities, particularly as it is known that there have been persons of this description who, after having vainly attempted by misrepresentations and menaces to intimidate the college authorities, have most imprudently and rashly, as well as wickedly, vowed to pursue them with the most determined hatred and hostility."(7)

In the case of one boy who had been expelled and "about which Mr Hume seems to have made so silly a

parade" Malthus suggested:

> "Let it be seen, by an appeal to facts, whether he was not much more likely to corrupt others than be corrupted himself."(8)

His desire for justice can also been seen in his reply to an article in The Times of December 27, 1816:

> "I could not have conceived it possible that any English writer, with the slightest pretension to character, would have dared to avow that a lad of seventeen or eighteen, who offends against the criminal laws of his country, is not amenable to those laws because he happens to be a gentleman's son, and to be resident at some school or college..."(9)

He also writes with approval of the College's system of competitive examinations at a time when a young man's Rank in the Company's Civil Service was determined by the seniority of the Director who had nominated him:

> "If the lists of many successive years were examined with the most scrutinizing eye, I doubt if the slightest trace of general connexion could be found between the places of students in these examinations and the rank or supposed influence of their patrons."(10)

It is interesting to notice that Malthus felt it necessary to explain the procedure of a competitive examination to contemporary readers who would have been unfamiliar with both the idea and the organisation of such an event. [It was, in fact, to be some time before the East India Company's Court of Directors took it for granted that they should accept a list of Writers passing out of Haileybury, arranged in order of merit, without considering the importance of the sponsors.] The arrangements would all be familiar to us but Malthus explained clearly that the answers were "given in writing... without the possibility of a reference to books." The answer papers were then scrutinised by the professor of the department before being arranged in order of merit. Malthus assured his readers that "the whole collegiate body" controlled these arrangements which "require considerable time and attention, and are executed with scrupulous care and, I firmly believe, with singular impartiality."(11)

These examinations were, of course, the culmination of the students' time at Haileybury:

Malthus was also concerned with the process of education and with the curriculum at the college. A wide variety of subjects was studied and it had been "feared by some persons that this variety would too much distract the attention of students at the age of sixteen or seventeen, and prevent them from making a satisfactory progress in any department". Malthus, however, was pleased to report "instances of distinguished success in many of these studies at the same time" and he went on to point out "that this variety has not only been useful to them in rendering a methodical arrangement of their hours of study more necessary, but has decidedly contributed to enlarge, invigorate and mature their understandings"(12).

He was also interested in the actual subjects offered at Haileybury and whether or not they "were of too difficult a nature for young men of the age above mentioned". In particular, he was interested in the criticisms which had been made about the inclusion of political economy in the curriculum. He admits that he himself had experienced doubts as to the wisdom of teaching

such a subject to boys of that age, but the examples of "distinguished progress" and "the numerous instances of very fair progress" he has observed have convinced him that the topic is quite suitable for inclusion in the curriculum. Indeed, he felt able "to say with confidence that a youth of seventeen [and this is the most usual age at which the study is begun, as it is generally confined to the last year or year and a half] with a good understanding, is fully able to comprehend the principles of political economy, and is rarely inclined to think them either too difficult or too dull to engage his attention"(13).

It seems that Malthus was always conscientious about his duties at Haileybury, even when there were many conflicting demands on his time.

In January 1827 we find him replying to an invitation from Robert Wilmot-Horton to meet him in London to discuss the idea of emigration as a cure for pauperism:

> "It happens unfortunately that, as our term at the College commences tomorrow, I shall be so fully engaged every day

till thursday next as to make it extremely inconvenient to me to dine in Town.

> On monday I shall be occupied with the admission examinations nearly the whole day, but if thursday be too late, I think I could be secure of being spared for an hour or two at any time on tuesday morning, if it would suit you to call..."(14)

We are also told by Empson that, even at a time when:

> "...he was celebrated all over Europe, he continued, at an advanced age, to discharge with exemplary punctuality the most minute routine duties of the College at Haylebury [sic], of which he was so great an ornament. He presumed on nothing from his reputation; he sought to be excused from nothing on account of his standing and his years.
>
> ...[his] discretion and urbanity, his authority and attraction, make him the most enviable colleague that the members of a public body could ever wish to act with; and his union of the severe and gentle virtues was so rare and so complete, that he was equally the object of their admiration and their love."(15)

Unfortunately, we have no evidence about Malthus's involvement with, or influence on, the College Council apart from one reference:

> "I believe even that I was the first that proposed the present tests in the Oriental languages, as the absolute condition of a final appointment to India."(16)

This could have been but one of many occasions when his ideas were accepted by his colleagues, but we simply do not know. We do not even have any correspondence between Malthus and his colleagues so all we can do is speculate on his influence.

We do, however, have some information from some former Haileybury pupils and this gives us some further insight into Malthus in his teaching role.

In a letter from a newly-arrived student we can see how young men were welcomed to the college:

> "I saw Empson here last Thursday and he asked me to breakfast with him tomorrow, to meet one or two of the senior term, to whom he wishes to introduce me. I don't know whether I told you that I had been asked to Dr Batten's one evening; I met Malthus there, who is an extremely pleasant man, and I had a long conversation with him."(17)

Years later, the same Charles Merivale, by then the Dean of Ely, wrote down his memories of Malthus:

> "Very famous he was in those days, and his fame will never be altogether forgotten, though his book will, for his Essay on Population, in which he

> inflicts such dire discouragement upon young men and maidens who marry or are intending to marry. We called him Pop; not in derision, for we had a great but rather distant respect for him. Though his theories were so cruel, his heart and manners were most kindly and courteous. His lectures indeed were very dry. They consisted in reading a bare syllabus of facts and arguments without illustration of any sort; and this syllabus the students took down from his lips and got up for examination."(18)

In 1826, while still a student at Haileybury, Merivale had commented on political economy, "after a fortnight's attention to the study":

> "I have attended Mr Malthus's lectures two or three times already. The science seems lamentably undefined, and of a nature which can never admit of any unobjectionable arrangement. It does not appear, as might be expected in so new a branch of knowledge, to go on with a progressive improvement..."(19)

Another former Haileybury student remembered in later life the kind welcome he had received from Malthus. Brian Houghton Hodgson was at the East India College during 1816 and 1817 and, as an old man, he told the story of his life to a younger friend, William Wilson Hunter, who published it in 1896.

Hodgson was taken to Haileybury by a family friend who "settled him as a guest in the house of Malthus... until he should pass his entrance examination". Presumably this would have taken only a few days but "the foundation of an intimacy was thus laid which for the first time turned the young student into a thinker". At this time Malthus was "full of the ideas to be embodied in his crowning work on Political Economy published in 1820" as well as working on a pamphlet defending the College against criticism yet he took the time to welcome another new student who was lodging with him. If this is an accurate picture, we can understand why Hodgson declared that Malthus was "both the favourite and the hero of his fellow-students"(20).

Hunter was clearly impressed by Hodgson's conversation about his old professor and he tells his readers:

> "In the hands of Malthus political economy became a living science, dealing with the actual facts and needs of humanity, and quickening young minds with ideas instead of cramming them with formulae...
>
> The love of liberty and the generous respect for the liberties of others,

with a belief in their capacity for exercising those liberties aright, which Malthus impressed on Hodgson's awakening mind, resisted the effacing influences of time and of a bureaucratic career."(21)

Hodgson must have spoken in glowing terms of Malthus for Hunter to write in this way and to say that he was "the dominant influence in Hodgson's intellectual horoscope. He found him a young aristocrat in social feelings and sympathies; he left him as advanced liberal in politics"(23).

Another Haileybury student had clear memories of his college lecturers. John Venn attended the college from 1818 to 1820 and in his old age he reminisced about the happy time he had spent there:

> "The Professors at Haileybury were a very able set of men; and amongst them was the Professor of Political Economy, the well-known Malthus."(23)

The three men all share the same opinion of Malthus's kindness to his students though they do not agree about the quality of his teaching. Possibly the differences owe as much to the individual student's personality and aptitude as

to changes in Malthus's style of lecturing. Whatever the reason, Malthus certainly made a strong impression on the students in his charge even after a period of fifty years or more.

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CHAPTER IV
Attitudes to Education in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

As was already noted in Chapter I of this study, the increased educational provision offered by the Sunday School movement did not meet with universal approval, and a number of writers expressed severe criticism of the aims of its organisers. Before moving on to examine in detail the educational theories and proposals put forward by Malthus it would be useful to consider the attitudes of his contemporaries, in order to see the extent to which he was influenced by current views and opinions and the extent to which he was being innovative.

When trying to examine opinions held on any matter of public debate at the end of the eighteenth century or in the early years of the nineteenth century we are fortunate in having a wealth of varied resources to consider. In addition to pamphlets specially written for publication we also have a wide selection of documents giving us the texts of parliamentary speeches, addresses to public meetings, sermons, letters and diaries. Many of these texts are on the "interminable theme of education"(1), thereby giving clear evidence of

the importance with which this topic was regarded by the public, but their contents show that members of the public disagreed widely about the situation and what might be necessary to improve it.

In the early years of the nineteenth century there seems to have been a fairly widespread fear that educating the lower classes would make them dissatisfied with their lot and liable to be converted to revolutionary ideas. Evidence of this concern can be found in a number of documents and it was expressed particularly forcibly by Davies Giddy during a parliamentary debate on the Parochial Schools Bill:

> "Mr Davies Giddy rose and said, that while he was willing to allow the hon. gent, who brought forward this bill, every degree of credit for the goodness of his intentions, as well as for his ability and assiduity; still, upon the best consideration he was able to give the bill, he must totally object to its principle, as conceiving it to be more pregnant with mischief than advantage to those for whose advantage it was intended, and for the country in general. For, however specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of

> making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and, in a few years, the result would be, that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them, and to furnish the executive magistrates with much more vigorous laws than were now in force. Besides, if the bill were to pass into a law, it would go to burthen the country with a most enormous and incalculable expence [sic], and to load the industrious orders of society with still heavier imposts."(2)

This speech reveals Mr Giddy's most pressing concerns about the effect education would have on the "labouring classes of the poor": an educated working class would be ambitious; would develop independent [and possibly "seditious"] ideas; and would be much more difficult to control. Similar fears are expressed in a number of publications and debates of the period. In the years after the French Revolution and the subsequent Reign of Terror many people in Britain experienced great concern about the possibility of any kind of revolutionary activity among the lower classes in

this country. It was feared that adults had been influenced by the news from the continent and would follow the French example. Another danger was that unscrupulous teachers might deliberately "poison" the minds of the young:

> "At an epoch when the revolution of France has burst upon the world like an earthquake, and stifled the civil and political faculties of all Europe with its noxious vapours, every lunatic reformer and chimerical politician, from the National Convention or Legislative Assembly of France to the remotest extremity where French politics have undulated, has felt himself warranted to pour forth in harrangues [sic], in pamphlets or newspaper speculations, his crude and abstracted opinion on political topics, regardless of the mischief he might thus produce.
>
> The newspapers of all Europe, and more especially of these countries, have been filled with the eccentricities of the French patriots - and the popular brain has been maddened by the detail of arguments, projects, systems and falsehoods which seemed rather to have originated in one of their lunar temples, called madhouses, than in any nation or assembly of rational beings...
>
> But since the minds of the adult are irreclaimably poisoned, does it not behove the state to look to the rising generation, and see that they do not suck in with the seeds of scholastic instruction, the virus of political poison and future rebellion? Does it not behove the Legislature to enquire who and what are the men privileged or permitted to open schools for the instruction of youth, and what are the

books through which a principal part of that instruction is conveyed?"(3)

The anonymous author of this article was expressing fears which he shared with many of his contemporaries. He identified two inter-related problems: firstly, a literate adult population was being influenced by seditious literature and, secondly, there was a danger that unscrupulous teachers would abuse their positions of trust by teaching from "Tom Paine's Rights of Man, - or inculcating religion on their tender minds, from the same author's Age of Reason". He hoped that those in authority would deal with this problem which "materially concerns every man interested in the safety of the State, and the welfare of the rising generation".

This was a subject close to the hearts of many readers and over the next few years the correspondence column of The Times regularly contained letters on educational matters. Many correspondents felt that religion should occupy a central place in any school curriculum and they were concerned about any educational system which did not place sufficient emphasis on this aspect

of school life. In 1811, for example, an anonymous member of the Church of England expressed great doubts about Lancaster's proposed school for poor children in Spitalfields. He felt that there would be great danger in teaching children only "moral duties" and nothing about religion. He suggested that members of the Church of England should put forward a counter-proposal for a school on Dr Bell's plan(4).

The next day a reply was printed. The author pointed out that there had been a definite lack of zeal among Church of England members to educate the poor of Spitalfields in the years before Lancaster had suggested his school. Without the efforts of Lancaster and his supporters these children would have remained untaught and the current opposition to the scheme showed religious animosity rather than benevolence or Christian charity(5).

Correspondence on the topic was lengthy, eventually provoking the comment from one reader: "I am sorry to see an object of so much importance engendering the worst of all controversies - a

religious one"(6). He was writing in answer to 'Publicola' who had voiced his concern about the "difficulties and dangers" of appointing "a dissenter from the Church of England" as a teacher. Such a person had power over "the minds of youth throughout the kingdom"(7) and there was a danger that he might misuse his influence.

This religious controversy was to continue for some years with much debate on the position of religion in the curriculum and heated arguments between members of the Church of England and members of the various dissenting churches. The strength of feeling was never in any doubt and did, in fact, help delay for some years the start of state involvement in education.

Religious instruction, however, was not recommended only in the hope that it would make children "wise unto salvation"; it would also make them more law-abiding citizens. A sermon preached by the Rev. Daniel Wilson on behalf of a National School in Spitalfields provides us with a telling statement of this attitude:

> "In every country, but especially in this free state, the mass of your Poor, like the base of the cone, if it be unsteady and insecure, will quickly endanger every superincumbent part. Religious education, then, is the spring of public tranquillity. It not only cherishes the interior principle of conscience; but by infusing the higher sentiments of penitence and faith and gratitude and the love of God, communicates the elements of a cheerful and uniform subjection to all lawful authority."(8)

Malthus, as we will see in greater detail in the next chapter, was also a believer in the beneficial effects which would be brought about by educating the labouring classes, although he certainly did not limit his ideas to the effects of religious education alone. Like many of his contemporaries, including the author of the previous quotation, he felt that if the poor were to become educated they "would be on all occasions less disposed to insurbordination and turbulence..., would become more peacable and orderly, less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications"(9). Education would, he believed, "promote peace and quietness, prevent all unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the consituted authorities", rather than create increased unrest. In these ideas we can see a

clear link with writers earlier in the eighteenth century who had expressed similar attitudes. Joseph Priestley, for example, had commented in a work on education that if:

> "Those who have the poorest prospects in life can be taught contentment in their station, and a firm belief in the wisdom and goodness of providence... and consequently, apply themselves with assiduity and cheerfulness to the discharge of their proper duties, they may be almost as happy, even in this world, as the most virtuous of their superiors and unspeakably happier than the generality of them."(10)

Similar attitudes were being expressed by an ever-increasing number of people and an examination of documents from the second and third decades of the nineteenth century will find ample evidence that more and more people were starting to acknowledge the importance of education for all classes [and especially to promote the moral welfare of the poor]. There was not, of course, universal agreement on the subject. In 1811 we find a letter to The Times commenting that "there are men of considerable ability who maintain that the poor ought not to be educated at all". These "men of considerable ability" are not, however, being held up for approval and the author of the letter

advocated "such a portion of knowledge as may impress a due sense of moral and religious obligation"(11). Many of his readers would have supported this proposal but the suggestion that there was a need for government involvement was a much more contentious area.

Malthus made his position quite clear in his Essay on the Principle of Population:

> "...no government can approach to perfection that does not provide for the instruction of the people... and as it is the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it."(12)

Many advocates of universal education would have argued vehemently against this proposition. Priestley, Godwin [and, indeed, many Dissenters] were opposed to the idea that education should become a function of the state, as they feared it would be used to promote uniformity of thought and belief. Godwin contended that a government, once in command of a state system of education, would not fail to use its powers "to strengthen its hands and perpetuate its institutions"(13). Priestley expressed his concern that the spirit of

enquiry would be stifled and the pupils' minds would be "cramped by systems, habituated to servitude, and disinclined to think for themselves in their early years"(14). Even as late as 1859 John Stuart Mill was expressing his doubts about state education:

> "That the whole or any large part of the education of the people should be in State hands, I go as far as any one in deprecating... A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government... it establishes a despotism over the mind."(15)

In spite of these strongly expressed fears, a number of educational supporters did come to accept the need for state intervention. In 1814, when Joseph Fox was addressing a meeting in Glasgow of the Lancasterian Schools Society, he was keen to remind his audience that:

> "When Providence raises men to situations of authority and power, it is to constitute them the guardians of public good, and the protectors of the poor and needy.
>
> The improvement of the moral condition of man, must ever claim the first place in the consideration of the Legislator and the Magistrate; - as such, I am confident that the British system of

education will acquire a large share of your attention."(16)

Later in the same speech we again see the importance with which Joseph Fox regarded education when, in a statement strongly reminiscent of the views held by Malthus, he claimed that, "a state could only be respectable and powerful in so far as the members of which it was composed had received mental culture"(17).

The importance of government involvement was echoed by a number of writers, some of whom suggested practical ways of raising funds for this purpose. In 1825, for example, Peter Watt pointed out the obvious problem that, with the best will in the world:

> "A parent is possessed, at one period, of a fund capable to obtain a certain degree of education to his child, of which, at another period, he is entirely destitute."(18)

He felt that he had an ideal solution to this problem with his plan which was to "embrace all classes". Parents with adequate financial means could clearly provide extra funding if they so

desired but the scheme would guarantee basic education for all children.

Government backing was essential for his plan which was to be based on an Education Fund run by Trustees in each county. These Trustees [a body of country gentlemen] would receive a basic grant of one thousand pounds from the state which would be augmented by contributions from parents [either one pound on birth or six pence per week during pregnancy]. This money would be increased by compound interest as well as voluntary contributions from interested parties, and, of course, there would be the surplus "from the united contributions made on behalf of those children who have died before the term fixed for their admission into the school"(19).

Watt was confident that, with the additional backing of Government funding, "a day labourer, who chooses to forego, once a week, one single pint of beer at the tavern, may insure the equivalent of, perhaps, millions of pounds to his child, should it survive"(20). His scheme would also have encouraged thrift, rational planning and

temperance: qualities highly valued by many contemporary writers, including Malthus.

Many people, however, were still not convinced about the benefits of education for all and, even after the final defeat of Napoleon, feared that universal education would bring about a revolutionary fervour in Britain. We can find an expression of these fears in a sermon preached in Shrewsbury in 1820. William Otter recognised that recent "scenes of intestine disorder" and assemblies "for political purposes in the north"(21) were seen by many people to be the unfortunate results of the "general diffusion of Education amongst the poor"(22). He was concerned that:

> "Many warm advocates and active supporters of the Education of the Poor have been observed to stop short in their benevolent career, and to enquire, anxiously and doubtfully, whether their well-meant exertions were, indeed, likely to be productive of blessings to mankind."(23)

These worries were, he felt, caused by "the influence of dark surmises, and of insidious or unfounded fears"(24). He declared confidently

that the constitution was not in danger when the people were educated but, on the contrary, "when by a neglect of a due culture of the infant mind, barbarism and irreligion are suffered to overrun the lower orders"(25). In direct contrast to the fears of some people at the time, but in clear accord with Malthus, Otter stated confidently, "The more ignorant the audience, the more likely are they to be misled". Increased educational provision would therefore not bring about unrest; rather, it was essential for stability in the country. "It may be affirmed, with truth, that the virtues most essential to the Poor at this crisis, are not compatible with ignorance."(26)

Six years later, at an Assize Sermon in Chester, a similar message was being given. George Bonner felt that educating the lower classes would bring about two distinct changes for the better. It would not only raise them in the scale of being; it would also render them orderly, respectable and useful members of society, capable of:

> "Appreciating the reason and use of unequal distributions in the community; of seeing through the hollow professions and wild theories of political agitators, and so escaping the many

snares in which the ignorant are liable to be caught by those who are ever meddling and given to change."(27)

In an anonymous pamphlet provoked by riots at Bristol in 1830, the author again emphasises the importance of education in protecting the lower orders from the persuasive powers of public speakers who would make them dissatisfied with their lot:

> "Ignorance and Disorder are akin, while the lies and false logic of the anarchist, the seductions of the traitorous and venal spy, and the exhortations of the incendiary and prison breaker, will meet, from the enlightened mind, with no feelings in response save those of odium, of reprobation, and of contempt. The deductions are manifest."(28)

Education, indeed, could be seen as being beneficial to all members of society:

> "It is proved by fact, that giving the people more knowledge, and more sense, does not tend to disorder and insubordination; does not excite them to impatience and extravagant claims; does not spoil them for the ordinary business of life, imposed by duty and necessity; does not make them the dupes of knaves, nor prompt them to seek the benefit of the improvement of their faculties in turning knaves themselves. Employers can testify, from all sides, that there is a striking difference between those bred up in ignorance and rude vulgarity, and those who have been trained through

> the well ordered schools for the humble classes, - a difference exceedingly in favour of the latter, who are found not only more apt at understanding and executing, but also more decorous, more respectful, more attentive to orders, more ready to see and acknowledge the propriety of good regulations, and more disposed to a practical acquiescence in them; far less inclined to ebriety [sic] and low company, and more to be depended on in point of honesty."(29)

Malthus, as we have already noted, made similar points in his writings and he was also quick to point out that it was possible to observe a lower crime rate in countries such as Switzerland and Scotland where there was "a more regular education among the lower classes"(30). This same point was made by a number of supporters of increased educational provision, including Baldwin Francis Duppa in his work on The Education of the Peasantry in England. He regarded education as an essential part of maintaining a nation's stability and avoiding revolution and disruption.

> "If, as a society, we are growing into manhood, let us show it... let us prove that history has not been cast away upon us, and that we know that there must be comfort and intelligence in the cottage to ensure security in the palace. Let us see the cow grazing upon the field of the cottager; let his children be reared up in habits of morality and industry, and blot that offspring of mistaken benevolence, the poor-law from the

statutes; let us, in fine, avoid revolutions, by striking at the causes of them."(31)

Other writers, including Malthus, were quick to identify the link between educating the masses and the abolition of the Poor Laws. Some thirty years before the publication of Duppa's work he had commented:

> "We have lavished immense sums on the poor, which we have every reason to think have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their conditions and of making them happier men and more peaceful subjects, we have been miserably deficient."(32)

Joseph Fox, talking to a Glasgow audience in 1814, declared unequivocally, "I am sure that the purchase of education will go very far to remedy the evils of pauperism"(33). William Otter, preaching in Shrewsbury in 1820, commented on the serious problem posed by "the pressure upon the property of the land through the medium of the poor rates". He argued that there would be no improvement to the situation unless the "habits and understanding" of the poor could be improved

through education. In the words of Burke he continued, "Teach the Poor, Patience, Labour, Frugality, and Religion; all the rest is downright fraud"(34). Otter then went on to refer directly to Malthus when he quoted "a celebrated writer on Political Economy" who had written:

> "There is but one class of causes from which any approaches towards a remedy can be rationally expected, and that consists of whatever has a tendency to increase the prudence and foresight of the labouring classes."
>
> "This", Otter declared, "is the touchstone to which every plan proposed for the improvement of the poor should be applied.
>
> Can we, with any degree of consistency, look to them for the exercise of prudence in marriage, economy before and after it - the cultivation of an independent spirit, and a regard to the future - and yet refuse them the means by which they may be enlightened as to their real situation, and their real interest?"(35)

The problem and its solution were also identified by writers from outside England. In 1834 a Scottish writer could point to the problems afflicting his "southern neighbours":

> "But perhaps the most gigantic evil, acting in cooperation with the ignorance of the working classes, is one which afflicts our southern neighbours of England more than ourselves; and that is, the abuse of the Poor Laws,

especially that unspeakable social gangrene the Allowance System, as it is called. By this, deficient wages are made up by alms, and a bounty offered for idleness, improvidence and abandonment...

The Poor Laws may be reformed, but it must be done with power; an immense pauper population will cling to their abuses with convulsive pertinacity; the only cure for the pauper spirit is popular education."(36)

During the same year the editor of the Scottish Guardian pointed out the benefits of a national system of education and the dangers inherent in its absence:

"For the public good, it must and ought to be so: private interests and resources have not made adequate provision for national education: for the last thousand years, England has acted on the "let alone" principle; and while she spends six and eight millions a year in feeding the poor, she has let them alone to live and die in ignorance, until every eighth or ninth man in England is a pauper, and every eleventh man a criminal."(37)

If proof were required to convince sceptics of the benefits of education for the labouring classes then many people would have pointed to Owen's work at New Lanark. In 1819 Henry Grey MacNab "impartially examined" Owen's arrangements at New Lanark and his suggestions for helping the

"distressed working classes". After considering the merits of Owen's methods MacNab commented favourably on the results in New Lanark where the people "were taught to be rational, and they acted rationally"(38). He explained how theft, drunkenness, falsehood and deception, dissensions and quarrels, religious sectarianism and "the irregular intercourse of the sexes" were all discouraged and came to be regarded by the people themselves as unacceptable:

> "Let it not, therefore, be longer said that evil or injurious actions cannot be prevented, or that the most rational habits in the rising generation cannot be universally formed. In those characters which now exhibit crime, the fault is obviously not in the individual, but the defect proceeds from the system in which the individual has been trained."(39)

Here we can see the optimism about the power of education to improve all classes of people which was becoming more common as the nineteenth century progressed. This was a major shift in attitude from the deep concern about the dangers inherent in educating the labouring classes which can be observed in documents from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During that period,

there had been great fears that education would make workers dissatisfied with their position in society and perhaps tempt them to follow the example of revolutionary France. Malthus, as we shall see in the next chapter, did not share these fears; he regarded education as beneficial to all levels of society. Gradually we can observe increasing numbers of the general public advocating the idea of education for all and declaring that this would help maintain social stability rather than destroy it. Parliamentary debates over the same period reflect a similar change in attitude and, as we shall see, speakers in these debates often openly acknowledged how Malthus had influenced their ideas. A clear expression of Malthus's hopes for improvements through education is contained in a letter written in 1829:

> "We are also quite agreed that in the capacity of reason and forethought, man is endowed with a power naturally calculated to mitigate the evils occasioned by the pressure of population against food. We are further agreed that, in the progress of society, as education and knowledge are extended, the probability is, that these evils will practically be mitigated, and the condition of the labouring classes be improved."(40)

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CHAPTER V
Thomas Robert Malthus - His Ideas about Education

Although the evidence in the previous chapter makes it quite clear that education was a topic of great interest to many people at the time when Malthus was carrying out his research, collecting statistics and writing the volumes which were to earn him lasting fame, we do not normally associate his name with this educational debate. Twentieth-century readers associate Malthus with the ideas behind Huxley's "Malthusian Drill" in Brave New World, or with the phrase "Malthusian Prophecy" in works on overpopulation and its tragic consequences. Quite naturally, they therefore tend to assume that Malthus was interested only in the problems created by an unrestricted, rapid growth in population and they do not realise that he also offered hope for a better future which would be made possible only by providing education for all members of every social class. In his own age it is certainly true to say that the "best abused man of the age"(1) was usually remembered for the controversies surrounding his ideas on population growth and the changes he recommended in the poor law system; he was not normally associated with the idea of

improving the conditions of the poorest members of society by ensuring that they could benefit from schooling [which would be provided by the state rather than the efforts of charitable foundations]. It can therefore be rather surprising to read what John Stuart Mill wrote in 1844:

> "Though the assertion may be looked upon as a paradox, it is historically true, that only from that time [ie from the publication of the Essay on Population] has the economical condition of the labouring classes been regarded by thoughtful men as susceptible of permanent improvement."(2)

If there is any truth in this assertion and Malthus did change the opinions of "thoughtful men", thereby encouraging not only increased educational provision for the poor but also government involvement in this process, we can better understand what lies behind Elie Halevy's comment from a book on philosophic radicalism:

> "As concerns the education of the poor in particular, the radical theory of popular instruction is Malthusian in origin."(3)

In order to assess the justice of these two quotations it will be necessary to examine in some

detail Malthus's writings in an attempt to discover his ideas about education and educational reform. There is not one particular work on education [apart from his defence of Haileybury College against its critics] but as we give careful consideration to his works on population and the Poor Laws we will see that his ideas on education were absolutely central to his proposals for improving the situation of the lower classes and preventing their suffering in times of food shortages.

The first edition of Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population was published in 1798. It contained a refutation of the kind of Utopia imagined by Godwin and Condorcet, with their faith in "the progressive nature of man" which would create an ideal society with the "abolition of all unnecessary labour, and the equal division of necessary labour among all [its] members"(4). Malthus might sympathise with some of their proposals but he was a practical man and he wanted to open society's eyes to a danger which he saw clearly while many were ignoring it.

He warned his readers about the dangers inherent in an increasing population. He reminded them that there was only a limited amount of land available for agricultural purposes so the supply of food could not go on increasing indefinitely. His readers were aware of the suffering felt by the poor during years of bad harvests but they might mistakenly believe that the solution lay in increased food production or greater assistance for the poor. Malthus denied this. He stated that, as long as the population kept on increasing, the human race could not escape from starvation and poverty and he condemned the use of so-called remedies which were costly and ineffective: palliatives only were conceivable(5).

The only solution lay in some kind of check to population growth and he identified two possible checks: the positive check which puts obstacles in the way of an increase in population which has already begun; and the preventive check which consists of a restraint which avoids a possible future increase. Among the positive checks Malthus included death from starvation or from an illness made more serious through malnourishment.

As he pointed out, the positive check operated among the lower classes while the preventive check operated only in the upper classes of society. Unfortunately, at this stage in the development of his theory Malthus associated the preventive check with the idea of vice:

> "The effects indeed of these restraints upon marriage are but too conspicuous in the consequent vices that are produced in almost every part of the world."(6)

He feared that delayed marriage would lead to abortions, resorting to prostitutes or the use of contraceptives, and he condemned all these activities as vice. Consequently, the first edition of the Essay was not particularly optimistic but as Malthus reconsidered his ideas he became more hopeful about the future.

The first edition of his book was a great success and a second edition appeared in 1803. In the intervening years Malthus had completed his theory by travelling for research and had then rearranged and developed the first edition. He apologised for not having brought enough statistical evidence in the first edition to justify his ideas about

the rapid rate of population growth but in this edition he was able to provide increased statistical justification from a number of countries. He spent much less time on the section criticising Godwin and Condorcet and consequently more time on his own ideas. Another major change was that he had broken the association between vice and the preventive check, envisaging a period of moral restraint prior to a later marriage, and declared the need to develop this check to population. In order to encourage this it was essential that the poorer classes should be educated. He spoke about "the future improvement of society" and "the progress of mankind towards happiness" which would be brought about if his suggestions were followed and it seems clear that he regarded universal education as an important part of his plan:

> "Till the language of nature and reason has been generally heard on the subject of population, instead of the language of error and prejudice, it cannot be said that any fair experiment has been made with the understandings of the common people; and we cannot justly accuse them... till they act as they do now after it has been brought home to their comprehensions that they are themselves the cause of their own poverty."(7)

Malthus believed that universal education was so important that it could not be left to voluntary organisations or local initiatives; it should be the duty of the State to accept responsibility for educating all its citizens:

> "We have lavished immense sums on the poor, which we have every reason to think have constantly tended to aggravate their misery. But in their education and in the circulation of those important political truths that most nearly concern them, which are perhaps the only means in our power of really raising their conditions and of making them happier men and more peaceful subjects, we have been miserably deficient. It is surely a great national disgrace that the education of the lowest classes of people should be left entirely to a few Sunday schools, supported by a subscription from individuals who can give to the course of instruction in them any kind of bias they please. And even the improvement in Sunday schools [for, objectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement] is of very late date."(8)

For too long the poorer classes had been left without any chance of receiving the most basic education. They were criticised for acting carelessly and improvidently but no one had shown them any other course of action. They blamed the government and ruling classes for their suffering,

as they had never been taught how they could improve their own condition by having smaller families. In their ignorance they might well fall prey to the "false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues"(9).

Education would clearly bring about two great improvements in society: it would root out pauperism by teaching the poorer classes to exercise moral control, thereby decreasing the size of their families, but it would also be an important means of social control. As Malthus pointed out, if the labouring classes could only be educated they:

> "Would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence..., ... would become more peaceable and orderly, less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications."(10)

Education would help "promote peace and quietness [and] prevent all unreasonable and ill-directed opposition to the constituted authorities"(11). It would also "powerfully assist all the favourable consequences to be expected from civil and political liberty"(12) thereby "gradually

improving... governments without the apprehension of those revolutionary excesses"(13).

In the years after the French Revolution of 1789 there were great fears of a similar uprising in Britain, so Malthus was putting forward a powerful argument in favour of education when he put forward these claims. If providing education for all could ensure stability in society then it would certainly be a worthwhile investment.

This was not, however, the only benefit for society as a whole which Malthus envisaged. He claimed that "education appears to have a considerable effect in the prevention of crimes and the promotion of industry, morality and regular conduct"(14). To prove this point Malthus asked his readers to consider a negative correlation observed between education and crime:

> "Mr Howard found fewer prisoners in Switzerland and Scotland than in other countries, which he attributed to a more regular education among the lower classes of the Swiss and the Scotch."(15)

It is clear, then, from what Malthus wrote that he regarded education as an important means of social control but this was not the only reason to make him recommend education so strongly. He claimed it:

> "Raises them from their present degraded state and approximates them in some degree, to the middle classes of society, whose habits, generally speaking, are certainly superior."(16)

By inculcating "a taste for the conveniences and comforts of life"(17) education would encourage the labouring classes to strive for self-improvement.

The benefits of education would also influence people who were not themselves educated. As Malthus observed, "the raising of one person may actually contribute to the raising of others... his conduct... tends to improve the condition of his fellow labourers"(18).

Malthus realised that not everyone agreed with his point of view: some feared that an educated populace would be more affected by revolutionary ideas than an ignorant one, while others were

concerned that menial work would be despised by people who had received some kind of education. These arguments were, he felt, "not only illiberal but to the last degree feeble"(19), and he refuted them most strongly and thoroughly. He felt that it was the duty of the State not only to provide a favourable environment for educational development but also to provide the right types of education.

> "With regard to education, it might certainly be made general under a bad form of government and might be very deficient under one in other respects good: but it must be allowed that the chances, both with regard to its quality and its prevalence, are greatly in favour of the latter."(20)

He left no possible shadow of doubt as to what his opinion was when he declared:

> "No government can approach to perfection that does not provide for the instruction of the people... and as it is the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it."(21)

Malthus's attitude is absolutely clear and unequivocal: education should be provided for all and it was the government's duty to see that this should happen. To many of his contemporaries this must have seemed a radical proposal so we can

certainly appreciate Halevy's comment which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Malthus did not himself offer a detailed description of the curriculum and methods he would recommend but he did offer his support to Adam Smith's proposal for establishing a system of parish schools. In a discussion on the principle of population he stated:

> "The fairest chance of accomplishing this end [ie population check] would probably be by the establishment of a system of parochial education upon a plan similar to that proposed by Dr Smith. In addition to the usual subjects of instruction, and those which he has mentioned, I should be disposed to lay considerable stress on the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes... as affected by the principle of population and their consequent dependence on themselves for the chief part of their happiness or misery."(22)

Adam Smith had suggested that geometry, mechanics and economics could be "made sufficiently clear to be of considerable use"(23) but Malthus did not see any value in the inclusion of these subjects. Instead he maintained that:

> "If... a few of the simplest principles of Political Economy could be added to the instructions given in these schools,

the benefit to Society would be almost incalculable."(24)

Here we can see Malthus's optimism and hope for the future. He firmly believed that once people were taught the true facts of the situation they would act logically and sensibly. In this attitude he was not alone and we can read in contemporary documents about the work of various educational reformers. In 1791, for example, The Times published a letter in which an anonymous correspondent declared confidently:

> "As no subject is of greater importance than education, so none has more employed the attention and labours of the learned and ingenious in all the civilized ages and countries of the world. The writers upon this interesting subject in our own language are so exceedingly numerous, that there seems now scarcely any thing to be said new upon it... Education cannot be begun too early, continued with too much perseverance, nor occupy too long a period of time."(25)

Was this writer correct when he put forward with such confidence the suggestion that there was nothing new to say about education? Does this mean that Malthus had nothing original to contribute to the debate? On first considering the evidence we could possibly decide that there

might well be some justification for such an opinion. Chapter VII of this study, which examines possible influences on Malthus's theories, demonstrates clearly the links between Malthus and other writers and shows the ideas which they had in common.

There are, however, two points concerning Malthus's ideas about education which make them worthy of a detailed examination. The first point is the extent of the influence which his ideas had on public figures of his day and, in particular, the effect they had on government action. This issue will be examined in greater detail in a later chapter of this study.

The second point lies in the importance of what he actually thought and said about education. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Malthus did not see education <u>only</u> as a means to ensure social stability, to prepare people for work, to teach them about God, or to encourage them to cook in a new and more economical way(26), valuable or useful as these objectives may have been. He saw education as a means of freeing people from the

worst of their poverty, struggles and despair by showing them that they were not helpless pawns but that they could actually do something to help improve their own situation. Once they had been taught about the reasons for their plight they would be able to act independently to prevent its continuation. As soon as they had been shown the pain and distress caused by a rapid increase in population, which could not be matched by an equally rapid increase in food production, they would see that it was only sensible and practical to delay marriage until they could afford to support a family. Malthus was not simply trying to help alleviate the suffering of poor families living in his own day; he was trying to improve the situation of generations of families to come. He saw clearly the problems caused by a rapidly increasing population and he tried to make others appreciate the extent of these problems, but this did not make him pessimistic about the future. He put forward suggestions about possible courses of action which would create a better future and at the heart of his proposals was the absolute necessity for universal education.

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The view of Malthus's aims and objectives which was expressed at the end of the previous chapter would not be accepted with any degree of conviction by those commentators who criticise his harshness in wishing to abolish the system of poor relief which was operating at the end of the eighteenth century. In his own day he was condemned for his suggestions relating to the Poor Laws and this attitude persists even to the present day:

> "For the state to relieve the misery of the poor and wretched, he [ie Malthus] and especially his half-literate followers averred, was not just burdensome on the rest of the community: it made the situation worse. State relief must be cut back, for it only encouraged the feckless. The truly deserving would be saved by the charity of individuals."(1)

A detailed analysis of Malthus's writings on the Poor Laws will demonstrate not only that he does not deserve such harsh condemnation but also that an understanding of his attitude to the Poor Laws is an important element in appreciating his educational ideas. A brief consideration of the historical background against which he formulated his ideas would be a useful starting point.

During the years when Malthus was preparing and writing the various editions of his Essay, more and more people were finding it necessary to accept poor relief in order to survive. By 1803 more than four million pounds had to be raised by local rates on the value of land in order to meet the costs of this system. This was a large sum for a country already supporting the expenses of a war and it was a sum which was increasing at a worrying rate. Of equal concern to many people was the fact that the condition of the poor did not show any signs of improvement.

> "It is a subject often started in conversation, and mentioned always as a matter of great surprise, that, notwithstanding the immense sum which is annually collected for the poor in this country, there is still so much distress among them."(2)

Various reasons were suggested for this worrying state of affairs: perhaps some of the money was embezzled; false claims might have been made by people who were not destitute; churchwardens and overseers might have spent it on dinners for themselves; certainly it must have been ill-managed. These reasons were all vigorously rejected by Malthus, who believed that "a man who

looks a little below the surface of things" would be astonished if poor relief made any real difference to the condition of the poor. The problem was that:

> "...while the present proportion between population and food continues, a part of the society must necessarily find it difficult to support a family, and this difficulty will naturally fall on the least fortunate members."(3)

Even if the poor could be given much more money, this would not change the amount of food available for purchase; it would only increase the competition for a limited quantity of food. Prices would increase "and the commodity would not be divided among many more than it is at present".

> "When subsistence is scarce in proportion to the number of people, it is of little consequence whether the lowest members of society possess eighteen pence or five shillings. They must at all events be reduced to live upon the hardest fare and in the smallest quantity."(4)

At the heart of the discussion on poor relief lay the real problem, as Malthus saw it. "An increase of population without a proportional increase of food" will bring about distress and tragedy. In countries which have been occupied for a long

time, the best and most productive land is already in use. Any extra land which is brought into use will not produce vast quantities of crops and, sooner or later, there will not be any new lands to cultivate. The only solution was "an obvious truth" which Malthus had put forward in the preface to the first edition of his Essay: "population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence"(5).

In the 1798 edition of his Essay, Malthus had identified two "checks" to population increase: the positive checks of misery, disease, malnutrition etc. to an already existing population and the preventive check of postponement of marriage, thereby reducing the size of families. Originally he had feared that postponement of marriage might lead to vice ["either a promiscuous concubinage, which would prevent breeding, or to something else as unnatural"(6)] but by 1803 he had identified moral restraint as a preventive check. He defined this as "the restraint from marriage which was not followed by irregular gratification"(7), and he felt that this was:

> "...the only mode of keeping population on a level with the means of subsistence which is perfectly consistent with virtue and happiness. All other checks, whether of the preventive or the positive kind, though they may vary greatly in degree, resolve themselves into some form of vice and misery."(8)

He was pleased to note that this preventive check was operating "in some degree through all the ranks of society in England" and he examined in some detail the considerations which influenced those "in the highest rank", young men "of liberal education", the sons of tradesmen and farmers and labourers. The fear that the increased expenses and responsibilities of family life would cause a deterioration in their standard of living might be trivial among those of "the highest rank", but it is an important consideration for those of lesser means.

> "...Two or three steps of descent in society, particularly at this round of the ladder, where education ends and ignorance begins, will not be considered by the generality of people as a fancied and chimerical, but a real and essential evil."(9)

The sons of tradesmen and farmers are frequently discouraged from marrying when they are young, and

they often find it necessary to follow this advice. The scarcity of farms and the competitive nature of business ensure that such men must wait some considerable time before being settled and able to support a family.

There were, of course, occasions when young couples ignored these considerations and did marry and:

> "...it would be hard indeed, if the gratification of so delightful a passion as virtuous love, did not, sometimes more than counterbalance all its attendant evils. But I fear it must be owned that the more general consequences of such marriages are rather calculated to justify than to repress the forebodings of the prudent."(10)

For the labourer, earning only eighteen pence a day, the situation was very difficult. He could manage quite comfortably as a single man but how could he support four or five people on "that pittance"?

> "...Harder fare or harder labour he would submit to for the sake of living with the woman that he loves, but he must feel conscious, if he thinks at all, that should he have a large family, and any ill luck whatever, no degree of frugality, no possible exertion of his manual strength could preserve him from the heart-rending sensation of seeing

> his children starve, or of forfeiting his independence, and being obliged to the parish for their support. The love of independence is a sentiment that surely none would wish to be erased from the breast of man, though the parish law of England, it must be confessed, is a system of all others the most calculated gradually to weaken this sentiment, and in the end may eradicate it completely."(11)

Here we can see one of the dangers which Malthus feared from the Poor Laws: the poor would come to depend on parish relief and lose their independence. "Dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful"(12) and there were profound moral issues in the long-term distribution of parish relief. The authorities were actually encouraging the poor to give up their struggle to be independent by subverting them into pauperism. This was a mistaken policy which might have terrible consequences:

> "it is by no means to be wished that any dependent situation should be made so agreeable, as to tempt those who might otherwise support themselves in independence."(13)

Malthus wished to encourage a prudential postponement of marriage among the poorer classes so that they could remain independent. Clearly

this would involve educating the poor and inculcating habits of self-reliance and self-respect which would contribute to the elevation of the labourer's moral character. It was also necessary for the lower classes to have confidence in their rights to build up their savings and to be protected by the law.

> "Of all the causes which tend to encourage prudential habits among the lower classes of society the most essential is unquestionably civil liberty. No people can be much accustomed to form plans for the future, who do not feel assured that their industrious exertions, while fair and honourable, will be allowed to have free scope; and that the property which they either possess or may acquire will be secured to them by a known code of just laws impartially administered. But it has been found by experience that civil liberty cannot be permanently secured without political liberty. Consequently, political liberty becomes almost equally essential; and in addition to its being necessary in this point of view, its obvious tendency to teach the lower classes of society to respect themselves, by obliging the higher classes to respect them, must contribute greatly to the good effects of civil liberty.
>
> With regard to education, it certainly might be made general under a bad form of government, and might be very deficient under one in other respects good; but it must be allowed that the chances, both with regard to its quality and its prevalence, are greatly in favour of the latter. Education alone could do little against insecurity of

property; but it would powerfully assist all the favourable consequences to be expected from civil and political liberty, which could not indeed be considered as complete without it."(14)

Here we can see that Malthus favoured a long-term and extensive policy to assist the poorer classes, rather than keep them in "dependent poverty" with no chance of improving their position. He regarded poor relief as a major barrier in the way of implementing such a policy; indeed, he felt that the existence of the Poor Laws helped magnify the problem.

As we have already noted, a poor man may well be deterred from marrying by the thought of his future wife and family suffering from hunger and all the attendant miseries of poverty. However, Malthus argued, the existence of poor relief changed the situation. "A poor man may marry with little or no prospect of being able to support a family in independence."(15) The Poor Laws may therefore be said to encourage an increased population which will then have to be kept alive by poor relief.

The actual amount of food produced in the country is not increased by the action of the Poor Laws but it has to be shared by an increased population. In addition, the fact that the poor who are in receipt of parish relief now have more money than before, will tend to increase the price of basic foods and keep wages low, which will make life more difficult for all the labouring poor, including those who do not benefit from the provision of the Poor Laws.

Another problem identified by Malthus was that the system did not encourage any attempt to provide for the future.

> "A man who might not be deterred from going to the ale-house from the consideration that on his death, or sickness, he should leave his wife and family upon the parish might yet hesitate in thus dissipating his earnings if he were assured that, in either of these cases, his family must starve or be left to the support of casual bounty."(16)

While admitting that the poor relief system was founded out of the most charitable of motives, and accepting that it may have helped individual cases, Malthus felt obliged to insist that the

overall effect of the system was pernicious.

> "...If men are induced to marry from a prospect of parish provision, with little or no chance of maintaining their families in independence, they are not only unjustly tempted to bring unhappiness and dependence upon themselves and children, but they are tempted, without knowing it, to injure all in the same class with themselves. A labourer who marries without being able to support a family may in some respects be considered as an enemy to all his fellow-labourers."(17)

Added to this, the laws of settlement made it hard for workers to leave their home parish in search of employment and thereby subjected the "common people of England" to a "set of grating, inconvenient and tyrannical laws, totally inconsistent with the genuine spirit of the constitution"(18).

Malthus could see no alternative to the abolition of the Poor Laws. If they had never existed he felt sure that "the aggregate mass of happiness among the common people would have been much greater"(19). He wanted instead to encourage voluntary charity. This, he felt, would have a number of benefits.

The donor would not only be practising the virtue of charity; he would also gain a personal knowledge of the poor and their conditions, thereby creating closer bonds between the different social ranks.

Voluntary charity would be uncertain so the poor would see the necessity of industry and foresight rather than depending on poor relief.

Charity would not be given indiscriminately. It would be awarded to selected deserving cases, to industrious, prudent individuals who were suffering unmerited misfortunes. These people would feel gratitude towards those who helped them and would not display the indifference of the recipients of poor relief.

At all times the deserving objects of charity could retain their self-respect, unlike the paupers who were subjected to the extinction of honourable feelings by the doling out of poor relief(20).

Malthus realised, however, that too many families relied on the provision of poor relief and could not cope if the system ended abruptly. He recommended, therefore, the gradual phasing out of poor relief with legitimate children born a year after legislation having no right to relief and illegitimate children born two years after legislation in the same position. It would be essential to explain the necessity of this action and the labouring poor should:

> "be made to understand that they have purchased their right to a provision by law, by too great and extensive a sacrifice of their liberty and happiness."(21)

He made his suggestions out of the best motives, confident in the belief that the poor would benefit from the results of his recommendations. He felt that he had "no occasion to defend [his] character from the imputation of hardness of heart"(22). He was acting to prevent the painful consequences of the positive check to population which were confined chiefly to the lowest orders of society.

As he pointed out, the rates of child mortality were high among those "who may be supposed unable to give their offspring proper food and attention, exposed as they are occasionally to severe distress and confined, perhaps, to unwholesome habitations and hard labour"(23). Malthus had worked in a country parish and he knew the harsh realities of life for the labouring poor.

> "The sons and daughters of peasants will not be found such rosy cherubs in real life as they are described to be in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth, and are a long while arriving at maturity. Boys that you would guess to be fourteen or fifteen are, upon inquiry, frequently found to be eighteen or nineteen... a circumstance which can only be attributed to a want either of proper or of sufficient nourishment."(24)

He was not hard-hearted and was prepared to admit that there might be a practical necessity for poor relief in times of particular distress. For example, when considering the allowances made to the poor by magistrates during a time of very high bread prices, he commented, "I hardly see what else could have been done"(25), in the face of starvation. He also spoke of "the great moral

duty of assisting our fellow creatures in distress"(26) and was prepared to admit in times of distress that the employment of the poor on temporary public works might be useful "to avoid the bad moral effects of idlesness"(27). In the long-term, however, he felt that the best prospects for the poor lay in ending poor relief and educating the lower classes, both to raise their level of learning and to explain to them the necessity of delaying marriage until they could afford to support their family.

This, surely, is not the portrait of a man who would willingly leave the poor to suffer a life of misery. On the contrary, it shows us a man who was prepared to face up to a difficult situation and do his best to solve it. He had a solution to the problem and at the heart of that solution lay the necessity for universal education. Once the poor had been educated they could set about improving their situation; without education they were condemned to a life of poverty and suffering.

In his writings Malthus may, indeed, have given a "melancholy hue" to his view of life but this

must be seen as a recognition of life's real problems, not a counsel of despair.

"Evil exists in the world not to create despair but activity. We are not patiently to submit to it, but to exert ourselves to avoid it. It is not only the interest but the duty of every individual to use his utmost efforts to remove evil from himself and from as large a circle as he can influence, and the more he exercises himself in this duty, the more widely he directs his efforts, and the more successful these efforts are, the more he will probably improve and exalt his own mind and the more completely does he appear to fulfil the will of his Creator."(28)

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As we have seen in previous chapters, Malthus knew about Adam Smith's proposals to establish a system of parochial education and he mentioned the idea with some approval in his Essay on the Principles of Population(1). It would be interesting at this point to examine in greater detail the educational ideas of Smith and other writers of the period to see if we can trace any links between their theories and the suggestions put forward by Malthus.

Neither Adam Smith nor Malthus set out to give a detailed plan for educational development in Britain. They were both writing about education within the wider context of Political Economy and, while differing about some details, both regarded education as a positive investment for society as a whole as well as for the individuals directly concerned. So influential was Smith's argument in favour of popular education that it was summarised in James Mill's article on education in the Encyclopaedia Britannica [1818] and in Dr J Kay's The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes in Manchester in 1832, both works which

were widely read. Malthus regarded Smith's proposal for establishing a system of parish schools as "The fairest chance of accomplishing this end [ie population check]"(2) although he would have wanted the syllabus to give greater emphasis to "the frequent explanation of the real state of the lower classes... as affected by the principle of population...".

As far as Malthus was concerned, expenditure on education would be a worthwhile investment if the increase in population could be slowed down. Smith also wanted to show education as a positive investment but with a different outcome.

> "A man educated at the expense of much labour and time... may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expense of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of an equally valuable capital..."(3)

> "The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labour and which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit."(4)

These were obviously important benefits but Smith also appreciated the part education could play in preventing disorder and ensuring, as Malthus suggested, that an educated labouring class "... would be on all occasions less disposed to insubordination and turbulence... would become more peacable and orderly..."(5). Smith explained at some length:

> "The more they [ie people of lower rank] are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, amongst ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one... They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition and... less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgement which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it."(6)

There were, however, difficulties to be overcome before education could be available to all. Some people might not see any long-term benefits in educating their children and, even if they did,

could "scarce afford to maintain them even in infancy. As soon as they are able to work, they must apply to some trade by which they can earn their subsistence"(7).

> "In rich and commercial nations the division of labour, having reduced all trades to very simple operations, affords an opportunity of employing children very young. In this country [ie Scotland], indeed, where the division of labour is not far advanced, even the meanest porter can read and write, because the price of education is cheap, and a parent can employ his child in no other way at six or seven years of age. This, however, is not the case in the commercial parts of England. A boy of six or seven years of age at Birmingham can gain his threepence or sixpence a day, and parents find it to be in their interest to set them soon to work; thus their education is neglected."(8)

In view of this situation, Smith came to the conclusion that the State must accept the duty of providing education, especially to the labouring classes who could not otherwise afford it, as this would be of great benefit to society as a whole.

> "The duty of the sovereign... is that of erecting and maintaining those public institutions [including educational institutions]... which, though they may be in the highest degree advantageous to a great society, are, however, of such a nature that the profit could never repay the expense to any individual..., and which therefore cannot be expected that

any individual... should erect and maintain."(9)

As we have already noted, Malthus was in no doubt about the duty of a government to "provide for the instruction of the people"(10) and he thoroughly approved of Smith's suggestion that a school, similar to the Scottish parish school, should be set up in every parish or district. He did not, however, concur with the proposed syllabus. Smith's suggestion was that:

> "If, instead of a little smattering of Latin, which the children of the common people are sometimes taught, and which can scarce ever be of any use to them; they were instructed in the elementary parts of geometry and mechanics, the literary education of this rank of people would perhaps be as complete as it can be. There is scarce a common trade which does not afford some opportunities of applying to it the principles of geometry and mechanics." (11)

Malthus was in agreement that there were subjects more important and relevant than "a little smattering of Latin", but he would not have chosen geometry and mechanics as being of prime importance. He did however recognise the importance of Smith's proposed system of parish schools and both men were in agreement about the

importance of education in maintaining social stability and also about the need for State intervention.

Another writer of the period whose works merit an examination is William Godwin, who published his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice in 1793, a year after reaction to the Rights of Man had forced Thomas Paine to flee to France. Godwin's work enjoyed a wide circulation and was received warmly by a number of his contemporaries. William Hazlitt declared:

> "No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist."(12)

As reaction against the post-revolutionary developments in France increased, Godwin's popularity diminished but he remained loyal to his principles and later wrote with some pride that his works "gave the occasion, and furnished the incentive, to the producing so valuable a treatise"(13) as the anonymous Essay on the Principle of Population. Whether or not it was

true that Godwin's publication had provoked Malthus's work is not certain but Malthus did spend considerable time examining Godwin's ideas in every edition of the Essay until the fifth edition was published in 1817. Indeed, the first edition contains the name of Godwin in almost every chapter as Malthus attempts to disprove Godwin's theories. Godwin produced a vast amount of writing during his career but it was in the Enquiry that he gave the best picture of his educational theories so it is to this work that we must turn in order to compare his ideas with the suggestions put forward by Malthus.

Unlike Malthus, Godwin had little practical experience of education although he had once publicised his intentions to establish a small school in Epsom(14). His plans came to nothing but five years later, in 1788, he did become responsible for the education of one twelve year old boy, a distant relative of his mother. The experience does not seem to have been particularly pleasant for either master or pupil. The boy, Thomas Cooper, complained that Godwin called him "a foolish wretch, a Brute, a Viper, a Tiger" as

well as saying he had "no proper feelings" and sometimes thrashing him.(15) Godwin defended his position by claiming that any apparent harshness and unkindness were in fact "the fruits of the greatest kindness". All his actions sprang from "motives of kindness"(16) and he wanted only the best for the boy.

Cooper stayed with Godwin until he was seventeen when he left to become an actor, later finding success in America. Godwin must have wondered about the success of his teaching but in later years he found cause for optimism:

> "I have again and again been hopeless concerning the children with whom I have voluntarily, or by the laws of society, been concerned. Seeds of intellect and knowledge, seeds of moral judgement and conduct, I have sown; but the soil for a long time seemed ungrateful to the tiller's care. It was not so; the happiest operations were going on quietly and unobserved, and at the moment when it was of the most importance, they unfolded themselves to the delight of every beholder."(17)

It is this great optimism and faith in the powers of education that we can observe again and again in his work.

He believed steadfastly that everyone could benefit from education and that upbringing and training were much more important than heredity and family background:

> "There is for the most part no essential difference between the child of the lord and of the porter... The muscles of those limbs which are most frequently called into play, are always observed to acquire peculiar flexibility or strength. It is not improbable, if it should be found that the capacity of the skull of a wise man is greater than that of a fool, that this enlargement should be produced by the incessantly repeated action of the intellectual faculties, especially if we recollect of how flexible materials the skulls of infants are composed, and at how early an age persons of eminent intellectual merit acquire some portion of their future characteristics."(18)

Certainly, there are many real differences between children from the very moment of their birth; some are strong and healthy while others are weak and sickly. Education, however, can help them all:

> "The essential differences that are to be found between individual and individual, originate in the opinions they form, and the circumstances by which they are controlled. It is impossible to believe that the same moral train would not make nearly the same man... In fine, it is impression that makes the man, and, compared with the empire of impression, the mere differences of animal structure are

inexpressibly unimportant and powerless."(19)

In spite of any problems he might have experienced in trying to educate the young, Godwin had tremendous faith in the possibilities of enlightening them:

> "Speak the language of truth and reason to your child, and be under no apprehension for the result. Show him that what you recommend is valuable and desirable, and fear not but he will desire it. Convince his understanding, and you enlist all his powers animal and intellectual in your service. How long has the genius of education been disheartened and unnerved by the pretence that man is born all that it is possible for him to become? How long has the jargon imposed upon the world, which would persuade us that in instructing a man you do not add to, but unfold his stores?... Education will proceed with a firm step and with genuine lustre, when those who conduct it shall know what a vast field it embraces; when they shall be aware, that the effect, the question whether the pupil shall be a man of perseverance and enterprise or a stupid and inanimate dolt, depends upon the powers of those under whose direction he is placed, and the skills with which those powers shall be applied..."(20)

There were failures, of course, but these were caused by some human imperfections rather than any weakness in education itself. Perhaps remembering his own experiences, he considered some of the

problems:

> "The miscarriages of education do not proceed from the boundedness of its powers, but from the mistakes with which it is accomplished. We often inspire disgust, where we mean to infuse desire. We are wrapped up in ourselves, and do not observe, as we ought, step by step the sensations that pass in the mind of our hearer. We mistake compulsion for persuasion, and delude ourselves into the belief that despotism is the road to the heart."(21)

Malthus would certainly have been in favour of "persuasion" rather than "compulsion" when dealing with pupils. He spoke strongly about the importance of appealing to students' intelligence and reason rather than using force:

> "One would really think that the people who talk about the wonderful effects of corporal correction had not only never been at school themselves, but never seen a man who had been at one."(22)

He also believed that the "language of nature and reason" should be used at all times and that people would respond to this approach. Education was "probably the only means in our power of really raising their [ie the lower classes'] conditions and of making them happier men and more peaceful subjects"(23). If people are taught to

understand what is right and wrong they will choose what is right. This optimistic belief can be observed in the works of many writers of this period as well as Malthus. Thomas Paine had expressed it clearly in the Rights of Man:

> "No man is prejudiced in favour of a thing, knowing it to be wrong. He is attached to it on the belief of its being right; and when he sees it is not so, the prejudice will be gone."(24)

Another writer who gave powerful expression to similar views was Godwin who declared:

> "... the excellencies and defects of the human character, are not derived from causes beyond the reach of ingenuity to modify and correct. If we entertain false views and be involved in pernicious mistakes, this disadvantage is not the offspring of an irresistible destiny... Show me in the clearest and most unambiguous manner that a certain mode of proceeding is most reasonable in itself or most conducive to my interest, and I shall infallibly pursue that mode, as long as the views you suggested to me continue present to my mind. The conduct of human beings in every situation is governed, by the judgements they make and the sensations that are communicated to them."(25)

In his examination of education Godwin considered in some detail the varying ways in which we can receive our education and he gave us three

distinct interpretations of the concept: first, "those impressions we receive independently of any design on the part of the preceptor"; next, the commonly accepted definition of education with someone deliberately passing on information; finally, "political education, or the modification our ideas receive from the form of government under which we live"(26). He regarded "the education of design" as the most powerful, with any failures due to some weakness in the instructor. With proper education and persuasion there would be no limits to possible improvements.

A key issue in the educational debate of the period was the role of government in the education of the nation. We have already noted that Adam Smith and Malthus both thought that the state should assume some responsibility in this area; now we will examine Godwin's position.

In Book VI of his Enquiry Godwin noted that "several of the zealous advocates of political reform" seemed to be in favour of the notion of some sort of government superintendence so he felt

that the question deserved a "deliberate examination"(27).

After considering the arguments in favour of the idea, he declared himself to be firmly against a national system of education. In the first place, he was concerned about the "idea of permanence" which any public establishments seemed to possess. They might be fairly efficient at passing on "whatever of advantage to society is already known, but they forget that more remains to be known... they must inevitably become less and less useful as they increased in duration"(28). Worse than this, they "actively restrain the flights of mind, and fix it in the belief of exploded errors". Pupils are not taught to doubt and question; rather they are instructed in "the art of vindicating such tenets as may chance to be established".

> "This feature runs through every species of public establishment; and, even in the petty institution of Sunday schools, the chief lessons that are taught, are a superstitious veneration for the church of England, and to bow to every man in a handsome coat..."(29)

With this argument Malthus would have had to disagree. He was, as we have already seen, firmly in favour of a national system of education and, while recognising that Sunday schools were "objectionable... in some points of view, and imperfect in all [he could not] but consider them as an improvement"(30). He might, however, have had more sympathy with some of the ideas Godwin used in the next part of his argument, although he would not have agreed with his conclusion.

Godwin felt that the idea of national education took little account of an important aspect of human nature: "Whatever each man does for himself, is done well; whatever his neighbours or his country undertake to do for him, is done ill"(31). The important thing is to make people act for themselves, "not to retain them in a state of perpetual pupillage". Those who want to learn or teach will do so with enthusiasm and energy.

> "But the moment political institution undertakes to assign to every man his place, the functions of all will be discharged with supineness and indifference. Universities and expensive establishments have long been remarked for formall [sic] dullness..."(32)

If we have to work for something we will value it properly but we will not appreciate what we get for nothing. "It is an extreme folly to endeavour to secure to others, independently of exertion on their part, the means of being happy..."(33)

Malthus would certainly have agreed with the importance of encouraging individuals in their exertions to improve themselves. He was concerned about the effects of the Poor Laws because they diminished both the power and the will to save and thus weakened "one of the strongest incentives to sobriety and industry, and consequently to happiness".

> "Hard as it may appear in individual instances, dependent poverty ought to be held disgraceful. Such a stimulus seems to be absolutely necessary to promote the happiness of the great mass of mankind."(34)

Clearly Malthus agreed with Godwin in promoting "the happiness of the great mass of mankind" by urging individuals to work towards their own future; this agreement did not, however, extend to the area of education, which Malthus regarded as

so necessary to the future well-being of society that he advocated State involvement.

Godwin's third major objection to the idea of national education was:

> "its obvious alliance with national government. This is an alliance of a more formidable nature, than the old and much contested alliance of church and state... Government will not fail to employ it, to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions."(35)

Young people should not "be instructed to venerate the constitution, however excellent"; they should be taught to value truth and to examine with a critical eye all human institutions. A system of national education might "destroy in our understandings the discernment of justice and injustice"(36) and was therefore to be avoided at all costs.

After dealing with the evils inherent in a system controlled by the State, Godwin returned to the benefits of a worthwhile education:

> "Were we accustomed to an education, in which truth was never neglected from indolence, or told in a way treacherous to its excellence, in which the preceptor subjected himself to the

> perpetual discipline of finding the way to communicate it with brevity and force, but without prejudice and acrimony, it cannot be believed, but that such an education, would be more effectual for the improvement of the mind, than all the modes of angry or benevolent coercion that was ever devised."(37)

Later in the Enquiry he considered the historical importance of education. In the past, men were born to a certain station in life from which they had no opportunity to advance.

> "...Commerce was one engine for throwing down this seemingly impregnable barrier... Learning was another, and more powerful engine. In all ages of the church we see men of the basest origin rising to the highest eminence. Commerce proved that others could rise to wealth beside those who were cased in mail; but learning proved that the low-born were capable of surpassing their lords..."(38)

His hopes about the beneficial effects of education were not based simply on boundless optimism; the past had proved the power of learning and Godwin was hoping to see the process in action again.

We know that Godwin wrote at least one letter to Malthus, in August 1798. We do not have his

letter but we do have the text of Malthus's reply in which he makes it perfectly obvious that Godwin had been unable to convince him that he was mistaken in his beliefs. It was a long and detailed letter and Malthus apologised for "descending into particulars", commenting that "truth cannot be attained without it". He considered in some detail the "present form of society", Godwin's objections to it, and the importance of individual efforts to improve the situation.

> "I only approve of the present form of society, because I cannot myself, according to the laws of just theory, see any other form that can, consistently with individual freedom, equally promote cultivation and population... With the present acknowledged imperfections of human institutions, I by no means think that the greatest part of the distress felt in society arises from them. The very admission of the necessity of prudence to prevent the misery from an overcharged population, removes the blame from public institutions to the conduct of individuals. And certain it is, that almost under the worst form of government, where there was any tolerable freedom of competition, the race of labourers, by not marrying, and consequently decreasing their numbers, might immediately better their condition, and under the very best form of government, by marrying and greatly increasing their numbers, they would immediately make their condition worse."(39)

In 1801 Godwin published a refutation of Malthus's theories in Thoughts Occasioned by Dr Parr's Spital Sermon... being a reply to the attacks of Dr Parr, Mr Mackintosh, the Author of an 'Essay on Population' and others. He wrote with optimism about his faith in "the progressive nature of man, in knowledge, in virtuous propensities and in social institutions", and he condemned the pessimism of his critics. The publication does not seem to have influenced Malthus but neither did the criticism create any problems when the two men met on future occasions. In May 1805 Malthus was in London where he dined with Joseph Johnson and met William Godwin. Richard Lovell Edgeworth wrote home to his daughter:

> "Godwin is less presumptious - and more agreeable than I expected - he however talks paradoxically... Mr Malthus is much more of a gentleman than the other author - he is a sensible modest man."(40)

In 1820 Godwin published his second attack on Malthus and his work: Of Population. An Inquiry concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind; being an Answer to Mr Malthus's Essay on that Subject. It was a long work which Godwin

hoped would deliver the world for ever "from this accursed apology in favour of vice and misery, of hard-heartedness and oppression"(41).

The book was not a success and certainly did not put an end to the debate. Malthus publicly dismissed it in a note at the end of the 1826 edition and refused to "return abusive declamation in kind". In private he had no higher opinion of it. In February 1821 he had written the following in a letter to Francis Place:

> "Mr Godwin, in his last work, has proceeded to the discussion of the principles of population with a degree of ignorance of his subject which is really quite inconceivable."(42)

Malthus was clearly no longer interested in anything Godwin had to say. Indeed, he did not even retain the section on Godwin's ideas which had been in earlier editions of the Essay on the Principle of Population. When the fifth edition of the work appeared in 1817 Chapter 3 of Book III had been entirely rewritten. It was now entitled "Of Systems of Equality - continued" and was mainly concerned with Robert Owen. The corresponding chapter in the editions of 1803,

1806 and 1807 had concerned Godwin's 1801 pamphlet and had been entitled "Observations on the Reply of Mr Godwin". Presumably, Malthus felt that this would no longer be of particular interest to his readers, while Robert Owen was at the height of his fame.

In his book, A New View of Society, which was published in 1813, Owen expressed his concern about the "poor and working classes".

> "The characters of these persons are now permitted to be very generally formed without proper guidance or direction, and, in many cases, under circumstances which directly impel them to a course of extreme vice and misery; thus rendering them the worst and most dangerous subjects in the empire."(43)

He also explained his ideas about education and his belief that correct education could improve people's characters to such an extent that ideal societies would be formed. This was in direct contrast with the uncontrolled way in which character was left to develop. At New Lanark he tried to put his ideas into practice and many of

the people who visited him there thought that he was succeeding.

Owen's father-in-law, David Dale, had already introduced lessons for the children working in the mills at New Lanark, but these lessons took place from 7.00-9.00pm after a working day which had commenced at 6.00am. There were also two day schools for children under six years of age who were regarded as being too young to work.

Owen did not employ children before ten years of age and he provided educational facilities for both adults and children in New Lanark. Children between two and six years of age attended the infant school; from six to fourteen they attended the day school; adults and older children went to evening classes. Children who were old enough to work but who still attended the day school had a shorter working-day in the mill to enable them to spend five and a half hours at their lessons.

The monitorial system of learning was not used, as Owen wished questions and discussion to be encouraged. As well as reading, writing and

counting, geography, history, the natural sciences, music and dancing all appeared in the syllabus. The children were to be governed by kindness and encouragement; there were to be no punishments or prizes encouraging individual emulation. Although the Scriptures and catechism were both taught this was in deference to the parents' wishes and there was no sustained attempt to inculcate any doctrine. Instead there was a real effort to present practical moral principles and the teachers used any opportunity to "create enlarged ideas, to repress illiberal or uncharitable sentiments"(44).

Owen's enthusiasm for education was certainly appreciated by Malthus but they were not in complete agreement about everything. Malthus felt that the carefully planned villages of co-operation described by Owen would suffer from the same flaws as other suggested ideal societies: the lack of struggle encouraged by equality and common property would discourage hard work and moral restraint; all too soon the pressure of numbers would produce misery and starvation among the members of the community. Nevertheless, Malthus

showed his appreciation of Owen's benevolence when he declared that:

> "...every friend of humanity must heartily wish him success in his endeavours to procure an Act of Parliament for limiting the hours of working among the children in the cotton manufactories, and preventing them from being employed at too early an age. He is further entitled to great attention on all subjects relating to education, from an experience and knowledge he must have gained in an intercourse of many years with two thousand manufacturers."(45)

In 1821 Robert Owen saw Malthus at Haileybury while the guest of Dr Batten. Fanny Mackintosh records that he begged his host to ask her father and Mr Malthus to dine with him on Sunday, August 12: "Mr Owen was very full of his parallelograms - he gave Mr Malthus 4 hours before dinner and then until ½ to 11. Papa thought his manner mild and quiet."(46)

Years later, while writing the first volume of his autobiography, Owen was to remember his relationships with Malthus and other political economists of the day:

> "By this period of my life [from 1810-1815], my four Essays on the Formation of Character, and my practice at New

Lanark, had made me well known among the leading men of that period... But I must not forget my friends of the political economists - Messrs. Malthus, James Mill, Ricardo, Sir James Macintosh, Colonel Torrens, Francis Place etc., etc. From these political economists, often in animated discussions, I always differed. But our discussions were maintained to the last with great good feeling and a cordial friendship. They were liberal men for their time; friends to the national education of the people, but opposed to national employment for the poor and unemployed."(47)

Owen strongly disagreed with Malthus about the limits to population growth which the latter saw as so necessary. He considered that, "The earth is yet a wilderness for want of people..." and that celibacy, "beyond the period designed by nature" is "a great crime against nature"(48). Education was to be the means of ensuring sufficient food for all:

> "All men may, by judicious and proper laws and training, readily acquire knowledge and habits which will enable them, if they be permitted, to produce far more than they need for their support and enjoyment; and thus any population, in the fertile part of the earth, may be taught to live in plenty and in happiness, without the checks of vice and misery.
>
> Mr Malthus is however correct, when he says that the population of the world is ever adapting itself to the quantity of food raised for its support; but he has

not told us how much more food an intelligent and industrious people will create from the same soil, than will be produced by one ignorant ill-governed. It is however as one, to infinity."(49)

Owen also shared Malthus's concern about the Poor Laws. He felt that:

> "The next measure for the general improvement of the British population should be to revise the laws relative to the poor. For, pure and benevolent, as no doubt, were the motives which actuated those with whom the poor laws originated, the direct and certain effects of these laws are to injure the poor, and, through them, the state, as much almost as they can be injured.
>
> They exhibit the appearance of affording aid to the distressed, while, in reality, they prepare the poor to acquire the worst habits, and to practise every kind of crime; they thus increase the number of the poor, and add to their distress. It becomes therefore necessary that decisive and effectual measures should be adopted to remove those evils which the existing laws have created."(50)

For Owen, as for Malthus, education provided the solution to this difficult problem:

> "It is not intended to propose that the British Government should now give direct employment to all its working population: on the contrary, it is confidently expected that a national system for the training and education of the poor, and lower orders, will be so effectual, that ere long they will all

find employment sufficient to support themsleves..."(51)

As we have already seen Malthus do, Owen expressed his amazement that a government can stand by and let an entire section of the population remain uneducated and open to all kinds of dangerous influences. Surely the authorities must realise that the "training and education of the labouring classes" will lead to a well governed society? Owen wanted an Act to be passed "for the instruction of all the poor and labouring classes in the three kingdoms"(52). He recommended the setting up of a Government department to supervise the system, adequate funding for training and employing teachers as well as for the building and maintenance of "seminaries to receive all those who require instruction".

> "These are the outlines of the provisions necessary to prepare the most powerful instrument of good that has ever yet been placed in the hands of man."(53)

With such ideas it is scarcely surprising that Malthus devoted a chapter of his Essay to Robert Owen. Similarly, with the other two authors examined in this chapter, it is easy to see the

links between their ideas and what appeared in Malthus's published works. Later we shall examine any correspondence [or other links] between Malthus and various public figures in order to discover the extent of his influence on other people and also any areas of his own interest in education and provision for the poor which do not appear in his published works.

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CHAPTER VIII
Reaction to the Publication of Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population

The first edition of Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population "was written on the spur of the occasion and from the few materials which were within [his] reach in a country situation" and it was on account of the great interest which it provoked that the author gathered more statistics and turned his "leisure reading toward an historical examination of the effects of the principle of population on the past and present state of society"(1) for later editions. It is difficult to judge precisely the extent of the interest created by the publication of this work, although even Malthus's critics commented on the book's "rapid circulation and increasing fame"(2), and it had been printed in a sixth edition by 1826. Perhaps, however, there was some justice in the comment in the Edinburgh Review that the book had been "much more generally talked of than read, and more generally read than understood"(3). An examination of contemporary documents and parliamentary debates may give us a clearer picture of the nature and extent of the reaction to the theories and proposals in Malthus's publications.

The second and "very much enlarged" edition of the Essay appeared in 1803. This version of the work contained not only more statistical evidence, an examination of the situation in other countries and a discussion of population in Greek and Roman times, but also recommendations for "the future removal or mitigation of the evils" caused by overpopulation. Reviews of this work varied. The British Critic commented:

"A desire to leave nothing unsaid upon a subject of so much importance, has certainly led Mr Malthus to be rather diffuse. A more concise view might have been more pleasing to some persons, and better adapted for general reading. For ourselves, we can only say that we found every part of the work so curious, and so ably treated, that it did not appear to us too long."(4)

The Monthly Magazine and the Imperial Review also reviewed the Essay favourably, thus provoking Robert Southey to declare:

> "Malthus is as great a favourite with the British Critic as with the other voiders of menstrual pollution. I shall be very glad to lend a hand in some regular attack upon this mischievous booby, and... we may in a few evenings effectually demolish him."(5)

In the Annual Review for 1803 Southey was as good as his word:

> "What then is the purpose of this quarto volume? To teach us, first, that great misery and great vice arise from poverty; and that there must be poverty in its worst shapes wherever there are more mouths than loaves, and more heads than brains. Secondly, that the only remedy is, that the poor should not be encouraged to breed. There is not a man in England who was ignorant of the first fact, nor a mistress of a family who does not advise her servants not to marry. No wonder that Mr Malthus should be a fashionable philosopher! He writes advice to the poor for the rich to read; they of course will approve his opinions, and, understanding with perfect facility the whole of his profound reasonings, will of course admit them with perfect satisfaction.
>
> The folly and wickedness of this book have provoked us into a tone of contemptuous indignation; in affixing these terms to the book, let it not be supposed that any general condemnation of the author is implied, grievously as he has erred in this particular instance - Mr Malthus is said to be a man of mild and unoffending manners, patient research, and exemplary conduct. This character he may still maintain; but as a political philosopher, the farthing candle of his fame must stink and go out."(6)

Southey was not the only writer to attack Malthus because of his ideas about population. Thomas Love Peacock's novel Melincourt, which was first published in 1817, contained a Malthusian

economist, Mr Fax, who denounced the fact that paupers marry even in the workhouse, so turning it into a "flourishing manufactory of beggars and vagabonds". Another fanatical Malthusian was to be discovered in the pages of William Cobbett's satirical melodrama Surplus Population, in which Peter Thimble complains bitterly about "that great national scourge, the procreation of the human species". Coleridge, De Quincey and Hazlitt were also vehement in their denunciation of the Essay and would have joined with Southey in hoping that interest in Malthus's work would be short-lived. They were all to be disappointed.

The Essay sold well and, as early as January 1805, the Monthly Magazine could inform its readers that another new edition of the work was in the process of being prepared for printing. Indeed, such was the extent of the Essay's fame that it was translated into German in 1807 and into French in 1809. Discussion on Malthusian theories continued unabated. Harriet Martineau, whose Illustrations of Political Economy revealed her own passion for social reform, clearly felt as a young girl that there was too much time spent talking about

Malthus. She claimed to have been sick of the very sound of his name before she was fifteen [ie 1817], without having read a line of his book!(7) Little of this extensive debate, however, seems to have concerned Malthus's proposed educational reforms; it was his work on population and the Poor Laws which attracted attention and which earned him a degree of notoriety.

His suggestion that there should be some kind of check on population met with a great deal of opposition. In 1812 The Times printed a letter in which the correspondent expressed the greatest joy that the population was actually increasing, even after years of warfare(8), and in 1818 readers could find some interesting comments in a review of a pamphlet on the Poor Laws:

> "...But before we proceed to make any extracts from this interesting section, we must enter our strong protest against the barbarity and wickedness of attempting to prevent the poor from marrying when they think fit... With respect to Mr Malthus, whose work is so frequently quoted... and certainly with great respect, we shall insert one little remark in the shape of a general maxim. The efforts of a writer, be he who he may, that opposes the course of nature, are futile, and his work will only be of temporary duration..."(9)

Not only was Malthus opposing "the course of nature", according to some of his critics, he was also denying the goodness of a loving God. Dr Thomas Jarrold, a well-known physician, assured his readers that, "A wise and benevolent Creator has his eyes constantly upon us"(10). Any demand for human involvement in population control had to be blasphemous as it suggested that "the Almighty [was] much more unwise in planning, and weaker in executing, than man"(11).

The anonymous author of a book entitled A Summons of Wakening (or the Evil Tendency and Danger of Speculative Philosophy) was firm in his condemnation of "this impious and atheistical assertion, that the Almighty brings more beings into the world than he prepares nourishment for"(12). He was horrified by Malthus's proposals and demanded, "Is there no law in this kingdom for punishing a man for publishing a libel against the Almighty himself?"(13)

Malthus was, as we have already noted, keenly aware of the sufferings of the poor and genuinely desirous of helping them to improve their

situation. Amazingly, one of his critics suggested that he had been exaggerating when he wrote as if he:

> "regarded the distress, which is sometimes experienced by large families of the lower classes, as that species of misery, which is the most deplorable of any, to which human nature is exposed... Death must, sooner or later, overtake all, and is commonly preceded by pain and suffering..."(14)

It is perhaps worth mentioning that this comment which appeared in an attack on Malthus for his blasphemous suggestions, was written by a clergyman who expressed his faith in a loving God.

Not all reviews were unfavourable, however, and some reviewers defended Malthus against his critics. This can be observed, for example, in the Edinburgh Review's consideration of the work of Robert Ingram, author of the quotation cited above. While examining Ingram's work the reviewer praised Malthus for the "careful and detailed manner" in which he had considered the population issue. However,

> "the excellent work of Mr Malthus, though it has certainly produced a great and salutary impression on the public mind, appears... to have been much more

generally talked of than read, and more generally read than understood."(15)

With this in mind, the reviewer felt it necessary to give a brief account of the Essay on Population. The first part, he explained, is factual and its accuracy "neither is nor can be denied", while the second part contains "reasonings and practical inferences deduced from these facts". In his opinion, the study of the laws of population should lead to "a stricter adherence to the rules of morality and to greater acts of charity, but Malthus has been accused of sophistry, of presumption, of blasphemy, inhumanity, and love of vice and corruption...". This is clearly unjust and readers are reminded "that we are not permitted to reject truth, of which our senses and experience give us the firmest assurance".

In 1815 the Edinburgh Review considered two publications by Malthus on the effects of the Corn Laws and on the policy of restricting the importation of foreign corn. Clearly, the subject of these publications is not directly relevant to this study but it is interesting to note the

comments on the author:

> "the well-earned reputation of Mr Malthus - his total freedom from any interested bias - and, above all, the extreme candour with which his opinions are stated, entitle his publications to the patient attention of every impartial inquirer; and, as far as we can learn, the interest they have excited corresponds entirely to the high character and merit of their author."

On this particular occasion the reviewer disagreed with the policies advocated by Malthus but he felt obliged to give his readers an "abstract of the arguments of Mr Malthus" before giving his "reasons for dissenting from so respectable an authority"(16).

As we have already noted, not everyone held Malthus in the same high esteem as did the publishers of the Edinburgh Review and in 1821 they published a review of William Godwin's An Inquiry concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind. Being an Answer to Mr Malthus's Essay on that Subject which had appeared after the fifth edition of Malthus's Essay on Population.

The reviewers expressed surprise at the appearance of Godwin's work as they had, "for many years, been in the habit of considering the question of the principle of population as set at rest by Mr Malthus". They were also shocked that Godwin had not written a serious, scientific examination of the question; his work is condemned as an "old-womanish performance" containing the "zest of abuse", a number of factual errors which could result "from a total want of knowledge of his subject", and, more seriously, some inaccuracies which "seem as if they could only have arisen from wilful misrepresentation".

The work is condemned as "utterly disgraceful" and it is noted with shock and surprise "that it had made some impression in London upon a certain class of readers" and had even been referred to by a member of the House of Commons as "an elaborate work". That such a "mass of abuse, repetition, and irrelevant matter" could be taken seriously is not only amazing; "it would be a serious misfortune to society, and to the labouring classes in particular, that it [i.e. Malthus's theory] should be believed to be erroneous, when

it is not".

> "If the law of population be such as has been stated, it is a truth which it particularly concerns the poor to know: And, in fact, the general circulation of this truth must be the foundation of all essential improvement in their condition... we think that something very important would be done, if the poor were fully convinced that population has a powerful tendency to increase; that the main cause of low wages is the abundance of hands, compared with the work to be done; and that the only mode of raising them effectively and permanently, is to proportion more nearly the supply of labour to the demand for it."(17)

The authors of this review had not missed the essential link between Malthus's proposals about universal education, his theories of population, and his ambition to improve the conditions of the poorest members of society. Malthus would certainly have been pleased to read this demand for the poor to be educated about the realities of their situation and the chances they had to improve it without recourse to money from the public purse. As we have already seen, he regarded universal education as an absolutely necessary part of his scheme to improve the problems caused by over-population and, although many critics had failed to comment on this aspect

of his work and even some of his supporters concentrated on his detailed analysis of the situation or his proposed changes to the system of poor relief, some commentators made their approval known. His work, after all, was not only theoretical; it also offered advice about how to solve a very real problem which was being faced by society and this essential practicality was noted with approval by one author for the Edinburgh Review who praised Malthus's writings which were distinguished "not more by their originality and reach, than by their tendency to the practical improvement of society"(18).

Malthus, as we have observed in the preceding pages, was a well-known figure in the early years of the nineteenth century and it is not only in the pages of contemporary periodicals that we can find evidence of his fame or reactions to his ideas; he was called as an "expert witness" by a House of Commons Select Committee and his theories were discussed during a number of Parliamentary debates.

In 1827 a Select Committee was considering emigration from the United Kingdom and records show that the Rev. Thomas Robert Malthus was called in and examined on May 5. He was asked a number of questions on the conditions in Ireland and he spoke with some strength of feeling about the treatment meted out to the poorer members of Irish society: "One of the greatest faults in Ireland, is that the labouring classes there are not treated with proper respect by their superiors; they are treated as if they were a degraded people". The situation was not, however, completely hopeless. In the short term a "judicious system of emigration" might be necessary to alleviate the worst of the suffering, but Malthus had faith in the future of the country. "With education... Ireland might be a very rich and prosperous country, and... it might be richer in proportion than England, from its greater natural capacities."(19)

There will be a detailed examination of Parliamentary debates on population, education and the Poor Laws in Chapter X of this study but a brief consideration of one or two occasions when

Malthus was mentioned would be useful at this point to demonstrate the extent of his reputation and influence.

On February 19, 1807 Mr Samuel Whitbread, the reforming Whig Member of Parliament, asked leave to bring in his Bill which was "an attempt at the solution of the most difficult of all political problems; namely how to reduce the sum of human vice and misery, and how to augment that of human happiness and virtue amongst the subjects of this realm..."(20). His speech and the debate which followed it show both the strength of feeling aroused by this topic and also the extent of the influence being enjoyed by Malthus at this time.

Whitbread mentioned with gratitude "One philosopher in particular... who has gone deeply into the causes of our present situation"(21) and whose work on population has brought about a change of opinion with regard to the Poor Laws. This philosopher was, of course, Malthus and Whitbread went on to pay tribute to his "profound research" and benevolent intentions before moving on to consider the major part of his plan for the

"exaltation of the character of the labourer"(22): education. He felt it was needless "to dwell upon the beneficial effects of the general diffusion of knowledge" but, if there were any doubters present, he guided them to the description of the uneducated and uncivilised human being given by Malthus(23). This would, he confidently declared, prove beyond any possible doubt how important education was to society. Before concluding his lengthy speech he recommended his proposals about a national system of education as having "the support of the greatest authorities of the living and the dead" [ie Malthus and Adam Smith](24). During the debate which followed Whitbread's speech a number of his listeners expressed their admiration for Malthus and his theories. One speaker commented on the proposed national system of education that, "After such an opinion, from such a quarter [ie Malthus]... no sound objection could be made to this measure"(25). There were, however, at this stage too many Members of Parliament with reservations about the proposals for Whitbread to obtain a successful passage through Parliament for his Bill. As will be shown in more detail in Chapter X, it was to be some

time before all doubts and fears would be overcome.

What was clearly not at doubt at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the importance with which Malthus was regarded and the attention given to his theories. There is clear documentary evidence that his work was discussed informally, reviewed in many publications and even debated in Parliament. As we can see from Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, an understanding of Malthus's theory was "of infinite importance to the right understanding of some of the most momentous questions of interior policy". This theory was:

> "not founded on any remote or uncertain facts, or on a series of hypothetical statements, but established out of the materials which the most common experience supplies, and by a much shorter process of deduction than is usually required to establish the truths of science"(26).

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CHAPTER IX
Thomas Robert Malthus and His Contemporaries

Although Malthus, a conscientious member of the teaching staff at the East India College, spent most of the year at Haileybury, we must not imagine that he was in any way isolated or unable to contribute to the changing climate of attitudes and opinions during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Like many of his contemporaries he wrote regularly to friends and acquaintances, including some famous public figures, and we are fortunate in that many of his letters have survived. An examination of some of these texts will help to demonstrate the inter-relationship of Malthus's ideas on population, economics, the Poor Laws and education; it will also reveal the attitudes of some of his contemporaries towards Malthus and his theories.

William Godwin [1756-1836] had published his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice in 1793, a year after reaction to the Rights of Man had forced Thomas Paine to flee to France. His work enjoyed a wider circulation than might have been expected for one costing three guineas and it was warmly received by a number of his contemporaries.

William Hazlitt declared:

> "No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist."(1)

As reaction against the post-revolutionary developments in France increased, Godwin's popularity diminished but he remained loyal to his principles and later wrote with some pride that his works "gave the occasion, and furnished the incentive, to the producing so valuable a treatise"(2) as the anonymous Essay on the Principle of Population. Whether or not it was true that Godwin's publication had provoked Malthus's work is not certain, but Malthus was obviously interested in what Godwin had to say and he spent considerable time examining Godwin's ideas in every edition of the Essay until the fifth edition was published in 1817. Indeed, the first edition contains the name of Godwin in almost every chapter as Malthus considers and disputes Godwin's theories about society and the possibility of human perfectibility.

Godwin wrote at least one letter to Malthus, in August 1798. Unfortunately we do not have this letter but we do have the text of Malthus's reply. Presumably Godwin had been trying to convince Malthus that he was mistaken in his beliefs, but to no avail.

> "You think that the present structure of society might be radically changed. I wish I could think so too; and as you say I have completely failed in convincing you on this subject, will you have the goodness to remove a few of those difficulties which I cannot remove myself, and allow me to be convinced by you?
>
> I set out with granting the extreme desirableness of the end proposed - this is, the abolition of all unnecessary labour, and the equal division of the necessary labour among all the members of society. I ought also to premise, that in speaking of the present structure of society, I do not in the least refer to any particular form of government, but merely to the existence of a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, to the system of barter and exchange, and to the general moving principle of self-love.
>
> I can conceive that a period may arrive when the baubles that at present engage the attention of the higher classes of society may be held in contempt; but I cannot look forward to a period when such a portion of command over the produce of land and labour as cannot be within the reach of all will cease to be an object of desire. Moderate cloathing [sic], moderate houses, the power of receiving friends, the power of purchasing books, and particularly the

> power of supporting a family, will always remain objects of rational desire among the majority of mankind. If this be allowed, how is it possible to prevent a competition for these advantages? If the labour of luxuries were at an end, by what practicable means could you divide the necessary labour equally? Without the interference of Government, which I know you would reprobate as well as myself, how could you prevent a man from exchanging as many hours of labour as he liked for a greater portion of these advantages?"(3)

Here we can see clearly Malthus's attitude to such a major transformation in society as the one being considered in this correspondence. Malthus was essentially a practical man who argued as an economist from observed facts and data he had collected. His knowledge of human nature led him to reject Godwin's theories about alterations and improvements in people's behaviour. He was not satisfied with considering sweeping generalisations, and later in the letter he in fact apologised for going into so much detail and "descending to particulars", but, as he commented, "truth cannot be attained without it". In an important passage in the letter he also considered the "present form of society" and Godwin's objections to it.

> "I only approve of the present form of society, because I cannot myself, according to the laws of just theory, see any other form that can, consistently with individual freedom, equally promote cultivation and population... With the present acknowledged imperfections of human institutions, I by no means think that the greatest part of distress felt in society arises from them. The very admission of the necessity of prudence to prevent the misery from an overcharged population, removes the blame from public institutions to the conduct of individuals. And certain it is, that almost under the worst form of government, where there was any tolerable freedom of competition, the race of labourers, by not marrying, and consequently decreasing their numbers, might immediately better their condition, and under the very best form of government, by marrying and greatly increasing their numbers, they would immediately make their condition worse."(4)

In the opening sentence of this quotation we can see the great importance Malthus attached to "individual freedom" and in the rest of the extract it is easy to recognise the emphasis which he put on the power of the individual to act in such a way that he could improve his own situation, rather than looking to those in authority for help and support. We have already noted this attitude in Malthus's published work and it was, of course, one of his major reasons

for advocating universal education. He was confident that, once they had been shown the realities of the situation, people would act in a responsible way by delaying marriage and consequently having smaller families. This, he believed, was of vital importance in a world which was unable to supply limitless quantities of food.

The idea of providing a national system of education was debated on a number of occasions in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In 1816, Mr Curwen, after giving due consideration to Malthus's suggestions about providing education for the poor, commented that this was an "ideal time for discussing this momentous question". He did not wish to detract from the great renown of the country's recent naval and military exploits but he felt that they were not as important as Lancaster and Bell and their system of education "which in its progress will multiply the happiness of every succeeding age by increasing its habits of virtue and probity"(5).

As an advocate for the setting up of a national system of education Malthus may well also have

been impressed with the economy and efficiency of the monitorial methods used by Lancaster and Bell. As Lancaster pointed out, under this system one master could be in charge of a large school and:

> "alone can educate One Thousand Boys, in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, as effectually, and with as little Trouble, as Twenty or Thirty have ever been instructed by the usual modes of Tuition".(6)

Unfortunately, Malthus did not leave us any evidence of his attitude to this particular topic in any of his published works but we do have an extremely interesting letter from Francis Horner which shows that Malthus was willing to lend his support to Lancaster in his efforts to establish more schools for the poor.

The Royal Lancasterian Institution, which was established in 1809, was non-sectarian and gained support not only from dissenters but also from members of the royal family and the aristocracy. In 1811 the Church party established the National Society on the basis that education should be conducted according to the tenets of the Church of England. The King and a number of other patrons

were persuaded to change their allegiance and a protracted struggle ensued on the issue of secular education with James Mill among those who supported Lancaster. As a clergyman in the Church of England, Malthus might have been expected to support Bell and the National Society but this does not seem to have been the case. He had, of course, received part of his own education at a Dissenting Academy and this experience may have influenced him; equally, it is possible that he did not wish to see the move towards universal education slowed down by sectarian squabbles. Whatever the reason might have been, Horner's letter is certainly of interest:

"London, 7th February, 1812

My dear Malthus,

I am very glad it occurred to you, to offer Lancaster's committee the sanction of your name as a steward at our meeting; and I have written to Joseph Fox, telling him, that I have reason to believe you would not refuse to serve in that capacity, if it were proposed to you.

I entirely concur in your sentiments upon the subject, that both societies ought to be encouraged; nay I go a little further, for if I could be convinced that the church would sincerely and zealously set themselves [sic] to accomplish the work of national education, the church should have the

> best of my wishes by preference; inasmuch as I regard the establishment as our best preservative against fanaticism, though I am persuaded it can only operate effectually to that end, or indeed subsist long as an establishment, by acting upon the true principles of the Reformation, of which educating the common people is the most important..."(7)

From this letter it certainly seems that Malthus was interested in, and willing to assist, the efforts of both societies and regarded the aim of increased educational opportunity as much more pressing than the particular claims of either the established church or dissenting groups. This is certainly consistent with the important place he gave to education in his own proposals but it is interesting to note that he was willing to offer practical support when it was necessary, as well as simply writing about the importance of education.

At about the same time as Malthus was offering support to Lancaster's committee, he was also in regular correspondence with David Ricardo [1772-1823]. When they first met, in June 1811, Ricardo had not yet completed his chief work, <u>On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation</u>, in

which he was to set forward his views on prices, wages, and profits, and his theory of rent, but he was already deeply interested in the study of political economy and enjoyed his meeting with Malthus, already a famous author whose Essay on the Principle of Population was in its fourth edition. Only days after their first conversation the two men began to write to one another and the correspondence and the friendship lasted until Ricardo's death. They enjoyed sharing and discussing their theories and commenting on current events through their letters, and they also relished their meetings at Haileybury, in London, or at Gatcomb Park in Gloucestershire. There were obviously occasions when they did not share the same opinion [eg after a lengthy correspondence on rates of exchange Malthus commented, "it seems that we are not likely entirely to agree"(8)] but there was no rancour behind their disagreement and Ricardo was always interested to discover what Malthus had to say on "many interesting points of discussion"(9). When Malthus mentioned his plans for publishing an Inquiry into the nature and origin of rent, and the Laws by which it is governed his friend

replied with great enthusiasm:

> "I am pleased to learn that you are busy writing with a view to immediate publication. The public pay a most flattering attention to any thing from your pen, and you are not fulfilling your duty to society, if you do not avail yourself of this disposition to endeavour to remove the cloud of ignorance and prejudice, which every where exists on the subjects which have particularly engaged your time and reflection."(10)

Early in 1816 Ricardo wrote from Gatcomb Park that he had re-read the Essay on the Principle of Population:

> "The general impression which I retain of the book is excellent. The doctrines appeared so clear and so satisfactorily laid down that they excited an interest in me inferior only to that produced by Adam Smith's celebrated work."(11)

A few months later, in May 1816, he again demonstrated the respect he felt for his friend's opinions. Speaking of Major Torrens, author of a number of pamphlets as well as a larger work, Essay on the Production of Wealth, Ricardo informed Malthus that:

> "Mr Mill and I have exerted all our eloquence to bring him to the right faith... He is I think quite a convert to all what you have called my peculiar opinions on profits, rent, etc. etc., -

so that I may now fairly say that I hold no principles on Political Economy which have not the sanction either of your or his authority, which renders it much less important that I should persevere in the task which I commenced of giving my opinions to the public. - Those principles will be much more ably supported either by you or by him than I could attempt to support them..."(12)

Early in the following year Ricardo wrote to Malthus requesting his opinion on a matter of great importance:

"I want to hear your opinion of the measures lately adopted for the relief of the poor. I am not one of those who think that the raising of funds for the purpose of employing the poor is a very efficacious mode of relief, as it diverts these funds from other employments which would be equally if not more productive to the community. That part of the capital which employs the poor on the roads for example cannot fail to employ men somewhere and I believe every interference is prejudicial."(13)

Unfortunately we do not have a reply to this letter so we are unable to see exactly how Malthus responded to Ricardo's ideas. We do, however, have Ricardo's answer to Malthus's letter and it raises an interesting point about the way in which Malthus considered "immediate and temporary changes" as opposed to the long-term results of

any action:

> "It appears to me that one great cause of our difference in opinion, on the subjects which we have so often discussed, is that you have always in your mind the immediate and temporary changes - whereas I put these immediate and temporary effects quite aside, and fix my whole attention on the permanent state of things which will result from them. Perhaps you estimate these temporary effects too highly, whilst I am too much disposed to undervalue them."(14)

This was an interesting point of view and Malthus lost no time in replying to this letter:

> "I certainly am disposed to refer frequently to things as they are, as the only way of making one's writings practically useful to society... Besides I really think that the progress of society consists of irregular movements, and that to omit the consideration of causes which for eight or ten years will give a great stimulus to production and population, or a great check to them, is to omit the causes of the wealth and poverty of nations - the grand object of all enquiries in Political Economy. A writer may, to be sure, make any hypothesis he pleases; but if he supposes what is not at all true practically, he precludes himself from drawing any practical inferences from his hypothesis."(15)

In this revealing extract we can see not only Malthus's own definition of Political Economy but also an indication of his essentially practical

nature. He could not bring himself to ignore what was happening round about him; any plan or theory had to be based on reality in order to be worthwhile. This did not make him pessimistic about the future because he believed that his proposals about population control were absolutely practical and would be accepted by the population at large once they had been educated and so understood the importance of limiting the size of their families. Any plan for the future which ignored the realities of a rapidly increasing population and a slowly increasing food supply was doomed to failure.

In their correspondence, Malthus and Ricardo considered many of the important issues of the day and in 1818 we get a tantalising hint about Malthus's views on parliamentary reform from the comments made by Ricardo. Unfortunately the letter to which he was replying is missing:

> "Sir Francis [Burdett] is I think a consistent man. I believe Bentham's book [Plan of Parliamentary Reform] has satisfied him that there would be no danger in Universal Suffrage but his main object I am sure is to get a real representative Government, and he would think that object might be obtained by stopping very far short of Universal

> suffrage. With such opinions it is a mere question of prudence [as to the obtaining of his object] whether he shall ask for the more, or the less extended suffrage. I agree with you that it would be more prudent to ask for the less, and I agree also with you in thinking that with our present experience we should not venture on Universal Suffrage if it could be had." (16)

The text of Malthus's own letter would obviously have given us a much clearer idea of his opinions on this subject but even without this source of information we have some revealing clues in Ricardo's comments. Apparently Malthus supported some extension of the franchise as this would help provide a more representative government, but he drew the line at the idea of universal suffrage. Perhaps he feared a repetition of the excesses in post-revolutionary France, or perhaps he felt that the educated middle classes would be more responsible and more capable of carrying out the duties of democratic government. If the latter were the case, then his plans for universal education might have changed his opinion about further extension of the franchise in later years, but we cannot say this with any certainty. Malthus himself would not have dealt with such

speculative theory: he tried to base all his plans on reality.

In October 1819, after the events at St Peter's Fields which came to be known as "Peterloo", Malthus returned to the subject of parliamentary reform and the dangers of giving in to the "temper of the mob".

> "I can hardly contemplate a more bloody revolution than I should expect would take place, if Universal suffrage and annual parliaments were effected by the intimidation of such meetings as have been latterly taking place. These people have evidently been taught to believe that such a reform would completely relieve all their distresses; and when they found themselves, as they most certainly would, entirely disappointed, massacre would in my opinion go on till it was stopped by a military despotism... I hope and trust however that these extremities may be avoided."(17)

It must have seemed more vital than ever that the poor should be educated. As we have already seen in our examination of Malthus's work, he was firmly convinced that an educated populace was much less likely to be swayed by a skilled orator, and if the people had been taught the true causes

of their distress they would not be taken in by plausible but spurious theories.

Ricardo did not agree with Malthus about the immediate danger. He felt that the people did not have "such extravagant expectations" about the beneficial effects in any change in representation and that only "a very limited number" would "be glad of a revolution"(18). However, he did find one particular point in Malthus's Principles of Political Economy with which he agreed wholeheartedly:

> "I am particularly pleased with your observations on the state of the poor - it cannot be too often stated to them that the most effectual remedy for the inadequacy of their wages is in their own hands. I wish you could succeed in ridding us of all the obstacles to the better system which might be established."(19)

Not everyone was as enthusiastic about Malthus's ideas as was Ricardo, and his proposals about the Poor Laws, in particular, received their share of criticism. In September 1821, Ricardo wrote to Francis Place, who had been critical about this aspect of Malthus's work.

> "You acknowledge, that to delay marriage, and to prevent too many being born, are the only efficient remedies for the evils which the poor suffer. Mr Malthus proposes the gradual abolition of the poor laws as a means to accelerate this desirable end, - you no where I think shew that the means would not be efficacious."(20)

When Ricardo told Malthus about this correspondence, he received this reply:

> "I am much obliged to you for the representation you have made in my defence. I am not conscious of ever having said anything to countenance calumnious reports against the poor, and most certainly I never intended to."(21)

Indeed, it is clear that Malthus felt that his proposals would actually help the poor to improve their standard of living. Ricardo must have shared Malthus's desire for increased educational provision as he established a school, run on the Lancasterian system, for two hundred and fifty boys and girls at Minchinhampton. As we have already noted, Malthus was willing to lend his support to groups trying to provide more schools for the poor. He and Ricardo also shared an interest in encouraging the poor to save a small amount regularly by establishing workers' savings banks. The two friends were named as Managers of

the Provident Institution for Savings which was set up:

> "to afford to the labouring Classes, to Servants, Mechanics, and Tradesmen, and all other persons, a secure Investment in the Public Funds for such Sums of Money as they may wish to deposit at Interest; leaving them at liberty to withdraw the whole, or a part, whenever they require it."(22)

This involvement again demonstrates to us the practical ways in which Malthus wished to help the poor. If they were to be encouraged to save for their future there would have to be a secure place for them to deposit their money. The setting up of savings banks and provident institutions provided just such a facility.

His interest in the welfare of the poor also led him to consider the work of Robert Owen at New Lanark. In 1817 the fifth edition of the Essay on the Principles of Population no longer contained an entire chapter on Godwin and his ideas; the corresponding chapter in this edition was now entitled "Of Systems of Equality - continued" and was concerned mainly with Robert Owen.

It is clear from what he wrote in this chapter that Malthus was far from being in complete agreement with all of Owen's ideas. He felt that the carefully planned villages of co-operation described by Owen would suffer from the same flaws as other suggested ideal societies: the lack of struggle encouraged by equality and common property would discourage hard work and moral restraint; all too soon the pressure of numbers would produce misery and starvation among the members of the community. Nevertheless, Malthus appreciated Owen's benevolence and declared that:

> "...every friend of humanity must heartily wish him success in his endeavours to procure an Act of Parliament for limiting the hours of working among the children in the cotton manufactories, and preventing them from being employed at too early an age. He is further entitled to great attention on all subjects relating to education, from an experience and knowledge he must have gained in an intercourse of many years with two thousand manufacturers." (23)

In 1821 Robert Owen saw Malthus at Haileybury while the guest of Dr Batten. Years later, while writing the first volume of his autobiography, Owen was to remember his relationships with Malthus and other political economists of the day:

"By this period of my life [from 1810-1815], my four Essays on the Formation of Character, and my practice at New Lanark, had made me well known among the leading men of that period... But I must not forget my friends of the political economists - Messrs Malthus, James Mill, Ricardo, Sir James Macintosh, Colonel Torrens, Francis Place, etc., etc. From these political economists, often in animated discussions, I always differed. But our discussions were maintained to the last with great good feeling and a cordial friendship. They were liberal men for their time; friends to the national education of the people, but opposed to national employment for the poor and unemployed..."(24)

Owen strongly disagreed with Malthus about the necessity of limiting population growth. He declared that, "The earth is yet a wilderness for want of people..." and that celibacy, "beyond the period designed by nature", was "a great crime against nature"(25). Both men were in agreement about the importance of education but for Owen it was to be the means of ensuring sufficient food for all rather than limiting numbers of people to the amount of food which the land could produce.

"All men may, by judicious and proper laws and training, readily acquire knowledge and habits which will enable them, if they be permitted, to produce far more than they need for their support and enjoyment; and thus any population, in the fertile parts of the

earth, may be taught to live in plenty and in happiness, without the checks of vice and misery.

> Mr Malthus is however correct, when he says that the population of the world is ever adapting itself to the quantity of food raised for its support; but he has not told us how much more food an intelligent and industrious people will create from the same soil, than will be produced by one ignorant and ill-governed. It is however as one, to infinity."(26)

Owen also shared Malthus's concern about the bad effects of the Poor Laws and the need to change the system. He felt that:

> "The next measure for the general improvement of the British population should be to revise the laws relative to the poor. For, pure and benevolent as, no doubt, were the motives which actuated those with whom the poor laws originated, the direct and certain effects of these laws are to injure the poor, and, through them, the state, as much almost as they can be injured.
>
> They exhibit the appearance of affording aid to the distressed, while, in reality, they prepare the poor to acquire the worst habits, and to practise every kind of crime; they thus increase the number of the poor and add to their distress. It becomes therefore necessary that decisive and effectual measures should be adopted to remove those evils which the existing laws have created."(27)

For Owen, as for Malthus, education lay at the heart of the solution to this difficult problem:

> "It is not intended to propose that the British Government should now give direct employment to all its working population: on the contrary, it is confidently expected that a national system for the training and education of the poor, and lower orders, will be so effectual, that ere long they will all find the employment sufficient to support themselves..."(28)

He wanted an Act to be passed "for the instruction of all the poor and labouring classes in the three kingdoms"(29) and recommended the setting up of a Government department to supervise the system, the supply of adequate funding for training and employing teachers, and the building and maintenance of "seminaries to receive all those who require instruction". If those proposals were carried out the nation would see "the most powerful instrument of good that has ever yet been placed in the hands of man"(30).

Education may well have been one of the topics which kept Malthus and Owen talking for four hours before dinner and then late into the evening. All we know with any degree of certainty is that in

their later works both authors included favourable comments about some aspects of the other man's theories. Fortunately we do have more evidence about Malthus's links with other contemporary figures.

The Rev. Thomas Chalmers [1780-1847], leader of the movement which led to the founding of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843, enjoyed some degree of fame as a popular Evangelical preacher and in 1817 he preached to distinguished congregations in London. From 1821 we can find evidence of his correspondence with Malthus, starting with a latter of thanks from Malthus for a copy of the first volume of Chalmers' Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns. Later Chalmers sent him the second volume and when the two men met in St Andrews, where Chalmers had been appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1825, Malthus received the third volume as well as a copy of The Extent and Stability of National Resources. Unlike Malthus, Chalmers believed in voluntary parochial charity rather than state support for education, but there was no disagreement about their opposition to the Poor Law system or their

appreciation of the problem of producing enough food for an ever-increasing population. Malthus was delighted to read these opinions in the work of such a famous clergyman:

> "I have read with much pleasure and instruction the two works which you gave me. It is needless to say how much I agree with you on the subject of population, and how much I feel indebted to you for your most able and enlightened assistance on that question so vital to the happiness of the labouring classes of society. I feel indeed that what you have done on the subject is peculiarly and preeminently important as coming from a person with your known religious opinions; because from a strange misapprehension of the question some religious people have been strongly prejudiced against the doctrine of population."(31)

Malthus also confessed to Chalmers that he had experienced doubts and fears about the effect of his "plan for the gradual abolition of the poor laws" and he was pleased to read Chalmers' favourable account of the situation in Scotland:

> "Your personal experience of the practicality of throwing the poor almost entirely on their own resources, with little risk of extreme distress, even in such a town as Glasgow and at so unfavourable a period, is of the highest importance. I confess I had almost despaired on the subject, and almost begun to think that in a highly manufacturing state where so large a portion of the population must be

subject to the fluctuations of trade, and the consequent sudden variations of wages, it might not be possible entirely to give up a compulsory provision without the sacrifice of too many individuals to the good of the whole."(32)

Malthus was, nonetheless, far from confident that there was any real chance that a plan for the abolition of the Poor Laws would be put into effect in the foreseeable future. However, this did not make him downhearted; he still had faith in the power of education to improve people's understanding of the situation.

"I see little prospect at present of the opinion against the Poor Laws becoming sufficiently general to warrant the adoption of measures for their abolition. The subject of population is no doubt very much more generally understood than it was; but the actual situation of England with her poor laws, and her comparative exemption from famines and excessive poverty, together with a great fear of the increase of mendicity, operate very powerfully on the public mind, and it certainly would not do to attempt a fundamental change, without a pretty general conviction of the importance of it, among the higher and middle classes of society, and the best informed among the labouring classes. Practically therefore I am inclined to look forward to the first improvement as likely to come from an improved administration of our actual laws, together with a more general system of education and moral superintendence."(33)

Robert Wilmot-Horton [1784-1841] became a Member of Parliament in 1818. He was opposed to the Poor Laws which he believed to be responsible for the increasing numbers of poor people and he saw emigration as a cure for pauperism. He first spoke on the subject in the House of Commons in 1819 and thereafter he was to invest both time and effort in his attempt to persuade Parliament to accept his views.

Malthus had included emigration in Book III of his Essay as one of the "Different Systems or Expedients which have been proposed, or have prevailed in society, as they affect the evils arising from the principle of population" but he did not share Wilmot-Horton's optimism about emigration as a remedy for pauperism. He could cite plenty of attempts at colonisation which had failed; he felt sympathy for those who were unwilling to abandon home and family ties; and he believed that there would be a rapid increase in marriages and births which would soon make up for those who had emigrated.

However, in 1817 he did write about emigration as a temporary relief in particular circumstances. The demand for labour during the Napoleonic Wars had given a great stimulus to population for ten or twelve years and had then "comparatively ceased"(34).

> "The only real relief in such a case is emigration; and the subject at the present moment is well worthy the attention of the government, both as a matter of humanity and policy."(35)

As an important public figure Malthus would have been a valuable supporter for Wilmot-Horton so it is with little surprise that we note that he was sent a copy of the MP's Outline of a Plan of Emigration to Upper Canada in January 1823. When Malthus replied he expressed his doubts about the plan and stated his belief that, while governments should not do anything to prevent emigration, they should not actively promote it. Wilmot-Horton was not discouraged by this and four years later, when he was chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom, he again tried to enlist Malthus's support. Malthus does not seem to have been convinced that he had anything worthwhile to say to the Committee

but he was willing to do his duty.

> "I received this morning the order of your Committee to attend on the first of May. As I have no facts, or results of of [sic] personal inquiries to communicate, and my opinions on the subject of Emigration are already before the public, I was in hopes, as I told Sir Henry Parnell, that I should not be called upon. If however you think it advisable that I should be summoned it would be a great convenience to me in regard to my College duties that it should be deferred till the thursday or friday following."(36)

Malthus did give evidence before the Committee and it is interesting to notice the deference shown to his opinions in the following extract from the Committee's Third Report:

> "The testimony which was uniformly given by the practical witnesses... has been confirmed in the most absolute manner by that of Mr Malthus; and Your Committee cannot but express their satisfaction at finding that the experience of facts is thus strengthened throughout by general reasoning and scientific principles." (37)

When we come to examine Parliamentary debates on educational provision we shall see the same deference to Malthus's opinions and the extent of his influence in changing ideas on this subject.

In 1828 Nassau William Senior [1790-1864] delivered two lectures on population before the University of Oxford. The lectures were not published until 1831 but Senior sent the text to Malthus and the two men carried out a correspondence during the spring of 1829. Senior wanted to clarify certain aspects of their respective theories but he had already spoken in his lectures of his respect for Malthus.

> "Although Mr Malthus has perhaps fallen into the exaggeration which is natural to a discoverer, his error, if it be one, does not affect the practical conclusions which place him, as a benefactor to mankind, on a level with Adam Smith. Whether, in the absence of disturbing causes, it be the tendency of subsistence or of population to advance with greater rapidity, is a question of slight importance, if it be acknowledged that human happiness or misery depend principally on their relative advance, and that there are causes, and causes within human control, by which that advance can be regulated."(38)

In March 1829 he wrote to Malthus:

> "In an old country, under wise institutions, in the absence, in short, of disturbing causes, though population is likely to increase, subsistence is likely to increase still faster. In short, that the condition of a people so circumstanced is more likely to be improved than to be deteriorated. If I am right in this view, the only difference between us is one of

nomenclature. You would still say, that in the absence of disturbing causes, population has a tendency to increase faster than food, because the comparative increase of the former is a mere compliance with our natural wishes, the comparative increase of the latter is all effort and self-denial. I should still say, that, in the absence of disturbing causes, food has a tendency to increase faster than population, because, in fact, it has generally done so, and because I consider the desire of bettering our condition as natural a wish as the desire of marriage."(39)

When Malthus replied a week later he made it quite clear that their difference was not "one of nomenclature". He rejected Senior's theories and asserted that hope for the future lay in moral restraint rather than any attempts to increase the production of food. Furthermore, Senior's way of considering the issue might actually be harmful as it could direct attention away from the important subject of population towards less important topics(40).

> "The main part of the question with me, relates to the cause of the continued poverty and misery of the labouring classes of society in all old states. This surely cannot be attributed to the tendency of food to increase faster than population. It may be to the tendency of population to increase faster than food."(41)

In his reply, Senior was quick to defend his own position and also to point out the unfortunate conclusions drawn by some of Malthus's readers. "The proposition that population has a tendency to increase faster than food" was taken by many readers to be a proposition without qualification and made them fear that nothing could be done to improve the situation. There were also people who from "indolence, or selfishness, or a turn to despondency" made use of this idea because it provided "an easy escape from the trouble or expense implied by every project of improvement."(42)

> "Undoubtedly these opinions are not fair inferences from your work; they are, indeed, directly opposed to the spirit of the greater part of it; but I think they must be considered as having been occasioned by a misconception of your reasonings. They are prevalent now: before the appearance of your writings, they were never hinted at. I trust, however, that, unsupported as they are by your authority, they will gradually wear away; and I anticipate from their disappearance not merely the extinguishment of an error, but the removal of an obstacle to the diffusion of political knowledge."(43)

Malthus replied that, although he recognised that some of his supporters might have been incautious

in their statements, he felt that they were essentially correct in believing that increased food supplies would soon be swallowed up by a rapidly increasing population. There was nothing wrong in trying to improve methods of cultivation but it was considerably more important to strive for moral improvement, as the only real hope for the future lay in the development of the moral checks on increased population.

This belief, of course, lay at the heart of all Malthus's theories and, as can be observed in his private correspondence as well as his published works, it influenced his attitude to both poor relief and increased educational provision. The letters examined in this chapter demonstrate his awareness of current problems and his determination to help improve the situation where he could. He gave a clear analysis of the difficulties in his published work, then went on to show how increased educational provision could help bring about a permanent solution. He was willing to lend his support to schemes which would improve the lives of the poorer members of society and give them the opportunity to be educated and

to provide for the future by saving small sums of money when they could. In his letters to friends and acquaintances he regularly turned to the inter-related topics of population, the Poor Laws and education, and his ideas were frequently treated with interest and respect. His opinions were highly valued and frequently discussed, as we can see from comments from some of his correspondents, but this did not happen only among a limited circle of like-minded friends. As we shall see when we examine Parliamentary debates on population, the Poor Laws and education, his opinion was also respected and valued by those who were in a position to influence Government policy and action.

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CHAPTER X
Parliamentary Attitudes to the Poor Laws, Population and Education during the two decades following the Publication of the Essay on the Principle of Population

During the last decade of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth century Parliament had many weighty matters to consider. "Everything rung, or was connected, with the Revolution in France; which for about twenty years was, or was made, the all in all. Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event"(1). Revolution, the fear of invasion and concern about military campaigns were frequent subjects for debate in both Houses and it would have been quite understandable if there had been insufficient time to consider other topics. Some subjects, however, were obviously regarded as too important to ignore and Parliament managed to find time to debate the Poor Laws, population and education: subjects examined by Malthus in his first edition of the Essay on the Principle of Population in 1798 and in all the later editions and, as we have noted, subjects of considerable public interest.

In 1795, during a debate on the high price of corn, we find Charles Fox, a former Whig Foreign Secretary, commenting on the "melancholy and

alarming fact, that the great majority of the people in England - an enormous and dreadful majority, are no longer in a situation in which they can boast that they live by the produce of their labour; and that it does regularly happen, during the pressure of every inclement season, that the industrious poor are obliged to depend for subsistence on the supplies afforded by the charity of the rich"(2).

The subject of "the great mass of the labouring part of the community [who] were under the necessity of applying... for relief" concerned many people during this period and we have already observed articles and letters on this topic in newspapers and periodicals. It was also discussed in Parliament over the next few years and in 1800, during a debate on the Poor Removal Bill, strong feelings were voiced on the subject of the Poor Laws. It was pointed out that, "The poor laws stood generally in need of revision, as they contained the greatest absurdities"(3). For another member, however, revision was not enough: "Mr Buxton lamented the existence of the poor

laws, and wished that every man could be compelled to support himself"(4).

Concern that the moral standards of the labouring classes might be affected if assistance were given too readily was expressed by a number of speakers. Sir William Pulteney, for instance, did not want "to encourage idleness, dissipation, and want of economy"(5). He feared that the Bill:

> "would hold out a premium to idleness, an invitation to extravagance; and the want of economy was often the chief cause of poverty among a people.
>
> Men who knew they could not command relief when they wanted it, would take care not to be reduced to the necessity of asking for it; whereas others, who knew they must be supported were careless of their duty. If this bill was passed, those who were now frugal and industrious would become extravagant and idle. It would lay the foundation of the ruin of the middling tradesman, who found it difficult already to pay the poor-rates."(6)

Mr Ellison expressed concern about the adverse effects of a national system of relief on all classes of society. He feared it would tend "to increase indolence in the poor, and to check the bounty of those who were in superior conditions of life"(7).

There was also the danger that more and more people would come to rely on poor relief, as entire families came to adulthood, assisted by the financial support supplied under the Poor Laws, and they would themselves marry and have families, secure in the knowledge that they were entitled to support. The financial burden on the country seemed to be becoming unbearable in the eyes of many people and these fears were expressed in a number of debates at this time. During a debate on the Population Bill there were expressions of "surprise and astonishment, that a great, powerful, and enlightened nation like this should have remained hitherto unaquainted with the state of its population..."(8). How could adequate plans for the future be formulated when Parliament did not know the rate at which the population had been increasing?

In 1806 Mr Samuel Whitbread, the reforming Whig Member of Parliament, rose to give notice that, in the next session of Parliament, he would be:

> "proposing some regulations for the amelioration of the poor laws of this country... The poor laws of this country, had grown into a system so complicated and embarrassing, and were

become such a heavy and increasing expence [sic] upon the country that some revision of them was absolutely necessary."(9)

True to his word, Whitbread asked leave to bring in his Bill on February 19, 1807, in a lengthy speech which amounted to nearly one hundred pages when it was printed as a pamphlet. His speech and the extensive debate which followed it are both testimony to the strength of feeling aroused by this topic. They also demonstrate how much attention and respect were being accorded to Malthus and his theories in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Whitbread was keen to persuade his listeners of the vital importance of his Bill, which was "an attempt at the solution of the most difficult of all political problems; namely how to reduce the sum of human vice and misery, and how to augment that of human happiness and virtue amongst the subjects of this realm..."(10).

He agreed with Malthus that the overall effect of the Poor Laws had been to increase "human vice and misery" instead of helping to bring about any real

improvement in the conditions suffered by the poor, and he condemned these evil effects. Then, in a powerful statement which made explicit the connection between the Poor Laws and a growing population of indigent poor, he declared that the whole system had:

> "served to degrade those whom it was intended to exalt, to destroy the spirit of independence throughout our land; to hold out hopes which cannot be realized; to encourage idleness and vice; and to produce a superfluous population, the offspring of improvidence, and the early victim of misery and want."(11)

He wanted to impress on the house that he was a realistic man who was not about to suggest impossible goals; neither was he a revolutionary, wanting to destroy an orderly society:

> "Sir, I desire here to put in a rational claim to your attention, by assuring both you and the house, that I am no visionary enthusiast, seeking after universal plenty and comfort, and imaginary perfection. I know the laws of God to be immutable, and bow to their uncontroulable [sic] force. I believe man to be born to labour as the sparks fly upwards; that a certain portion of misery is inseperable from mortality; and that all plans for the lodging, clothing, and feeding of all mankind, with what may be called comfort, are quite impossible in practice."

After considering the wish of Henry IV of France that "every peasant in his kingdom should have a pullet in his kettle", Whitbread declared:

> "I will not indulge in such a wish with regard to the subjects of this kingdom, because I know that physically it cannot be accomplished. The earth does not produce wherewithal to gratify such a desire; and whatever may be the first impulses of our feeling, in order to do good, we must chastise and reduce them within the sphere of action."(12)

He was not the first member of the House to consider this problem but he had a great advantage over other honourable members who had not had all the information and statistics which he:

> "had the good fortune to possess; and the subject has lately been submitted to an investigation much more accurate than any it had ever before undergone. One philosopher in particular has arisen amongst us, who has gone deeply into the causes of our present situation. I mean Mr Malthus. His work upon Population has, I believe, been very generally read; and it has completed that change of opinion with regard to the poor laws, which had before been in some measure begun. Sir, I have studied the works of this author with as much attention as I am capable of bestowing upon any subject."(13)

After this indication of the extent of the influence currently being enjoyed by Malthus,

Whitbread then went on to pay tribute to the soundness of Malthus's "profound research" although he felt bound to differ from him in some of his conclusions. While believing Malthus's intentions "to be most benevolent, and that so much is to be collected from his writings", he thought that "any man who reads them, ought to place a strict guard over his heart, lest it become hardened against the distresses of his fellow creatures; lest in learning that misery and vice must of necessity maintain a footing in the world, he give up all attempt at their subjugation"(14). Some measures could surely be introduced to improve the situation.

The problems associated with the Poor Laws were all too obvious at this time and Whitbread agreed with "this philosopher" in stating that they had "not only failed in their object" but had actually "been productive of much more wretchedness than would have existed without them". He then quoted from Malthus about the evils produced by the Poor Laws which, "though they may have alleviated a little the intensity of individual misfortune, they have spread the evil over a larger

surface"(15), before moving on to look at two plans put forward for the gradual abolition of the Poor Laws.

Whitbread rejected both plans as he felt they did not "hold out any rational prospect of success towards the gradual abolition of the poor laws"(16) and he did not wish to see a return to the condition of society before the Poor Laws. What, then, did he suggest? Again quoting Malthus, he declared:

> "Thinking it unadvisable to abolish the poor laws, I have endeavoured to obtain a general knowledge of those principles which render them inefficient in their humane intentions, and to apply it so far as to modify them, and regulate their execution, so as to remove many of the evils with which they are accomplished, and make them less objectionable."(17)

His plan was not to get rid of the Poor Laws but, "by taking proper steps", to make them obsolete. He wanted to "exalt the labouring classes of the community" and to give the labourer "consequence in his own eyes, and in those of his fellows". He wanted:

> "to excite him to acquire property, that he may taste its sweets; and to give him

inviolable security for that property, when it is acquired. To mitigate those restraints which now confine and cramp his sphere of action. To hold out a hope of reward to his patient industry. To render dependent poverty, in all cases, degradation in his eyes, and at all times less desirable than independent industry."(18)

At this point in his speech Whitbread came to one of the most important elements in his plan: education.

"I think the house must anticipate that in the front of my plan for the exaltation of the character of the labourer, must appear a scheme for general national education. So it is; and upon its effects I mainly rely for the consummation of my wishes."(19)

He felt it was needless "to dwell upon the beneficial effects of the general diffusion of knowledge" but, if there were any doubters present, he guided them to the description of the uncivilised human being given by Malthus(20). This would, he was confident, prove beyond any possible doubt how important education was to society:

"In a political point of view, nothing can possibly afford greater stability to a popular government than the education of your people. Contemplate ignorance in the hand of craft; what a desperate weapon does it afford! How impotent

> does craft become before an instructed and enlightened multitude. - Sir, view the injustice and cruelty of ignorance; the violence and horrors of a deluded and infuriate mob; destroying its victims without selection or remorse, itself ultimately the victim of its own infatuation and guilt."(21)

Whitbread was an advocate of parliamentary reform and he had already spoken on a number of occasions about this subject. However, important as was this reform, he did not believe that "any scheme could be devised" which would be as beneficial as the general instruction of the people. One of the major benefits which he predicted would be the widespread diffusion of "the principles and practice of Christianity", so that everyone would have "an opportunity of knowing, weighing, and following the divine precepts"(22) contained in the Scriptures.

As we have already noted in previous chapters, many of his contemporaries agreed with Whitbread's wish to extend the teaching of Christianity; neither was he alone in his confident belief in the benefits of national education. He had:

> "the greatest authorities of the living and the dead, to recommend what [he proposed]. Adam Smith, Mr Malthus, the

> right honourable gentleman opposite me [Mr Rose], the benevolent editor of the tracts which come from the Society for bettering the Condition of the Poor, all agree in recommending national education as the first step towards the alleviation of your burthens, and the amelioration of the condition of your people."(23)

Whitbread was also quick to point to the experience in Scotland and to praise "her enviable state with regard to her poor". Scotland had a system of Poor Laws but they were almost totally in disuse. Everything was "regularity and order"and the country was "the theme of panegyric amongst all who have visited her"(24). The reason for this situation was easy to find. "What was the day-star then which shone forth and calmed these troubles? Education."(25) It was to education that Whitbread ascribed "the good morals, the social order, the loyalty, the paucity of crimes, the proper attendance on divine worship, and the increasing wealth of that part of the country"(26).

By way of contrast, he wished his listeners to consider the lamentable state of the poor in Ireland who "have no instruction"(27) and he

looked forward to "the happiest results" from plans for their education.

He recognised that some people might object to the expense of such a scheme, but he felt that education should be seen as a wise investment which would eventually save money [which would otherwise have gone on poor relief] as well as being a means of social control. As he pointed out to his listeners, "in the saving of poor's rate it will repay itself an hundred, and in order, morality, and virtue, ten thousand fold"(28).

The present time was ideal for the introduction of a national system of education as there was the possibility of using new and efficient methods for educating large numbers of pupils:

> "...this is a period particularly favourable for the institution of a national system of education [because of] the work of Joseph Lancaster [and his] rules, by which the object of learning must be infallibly attained with expedition and cheapness, and holding out the fairest prospect of eminent utility to mankind."(29)

Whitbread also assured his audience that, when they actually read the Bill, they would see that religious instruction, "the main spring of all that is good on earth" was an important element of his plan "and that the interests of the establishment are strictly guarded"(30).

After considering his educational proposals Whitbread turned to the importance of "exalting the character of the labourer" by encouraging him "to become possessed of property, that he may taste its sweets; and to give him full security for the possession of what he shall acquire"(31). Like Malthus, he believed that once a labourer had made the first step of saving a little he would go on to improve his condition, safeguard his future and advance towards independence. The problem was that he had only a small sum at a time and it was difficult to find a safe place to invest it.

Whitbread therefore proposed "the establishment of one great national institution in the nature of a bank, for the use and advantage of the labouring classes alone"(32). He was optimistic about the results of his scheme and he hoped there might

also be a possibility of arranging the purchase of annuities or death insurance.

Before concluding his speech, Whitbread examined the policy of building cottages for the poor and the worry expressed in some quarters that this:

> "should take away the preventive check on marriage which Mr Malthus has stated to be found in that scarcity of habitations: but Mr Malthus never intended to push his principles to extremes; and I trust his admirers will not fall into that error."(33)

At the end of this lengthy speech Whitbread gave his hopes for the future:

> "In the adoption of the system of education I foresee an enlightened peasantry, frugal, industrious, sober, orderly, and contented, because they are acquainted with the true value of frugality, sobriety, industry and order. Crimes diminishing, because the enlightened understanding abhors crime. The practice of Christianity prevailing, because the mass of your population can read, comprehend, and feel its divine origin and the beauty of the doctrines which it inculcates. Your kingdom safe from the insult of the enemy, because every man knows the worth of that which he is called upon to defend. In the provision for the security of the poor I see encouragement to frugality, security to property, and the large mass of the people connected with the state and indissolubly bound to its preservation."(34)

Again we can see clearly Whitbread's great faith in the power of education. It would not only improve the life of the individual citizen, it would also lead to a secure and orderly society safe both from external attack and internal revolt.

These proposals constituted a massive undertaking so it was not surprising when, on April 17, 1807, Whitbread announced some alterations to the original Poor Laws Bill. It would now be divided into four separate Bills and the first of these, to establish a Plan for the Education of the Poor, was brought to the House's attention on April 24. In the debate which followed we can see varying reactions to Whitbread's grand schemes and stirring speeches.

Mr Plumer approved of the plans for educational reform and "thought it was the most desirable object of the whole plan proposed by the honourable member"(35). Mr Curwen, however, had many objections to Whitbread's proposals and "the plan of education he thought too expensive"(36).

Mr Rose had serious doubts about the benefits of introducing educational provision for all. He expressed concern:

> "whether educating the lower orders of the people, upon the principle laid down in this bill, would have the effect either of ameliorating their condition in the degree which seemed to be hoped, or of alleviating the burthens of the poor's rates, by that means, within such a period as should in any degree convince the country of any benefit to be derived from a measure which, for a considerable time, must go to increase those burthens... The bill proposed two years of education between seven and fourteen. The advantages of two years' education would not be very considerable. Any longer would tend to raise their minds above their lot in life."(37)

He feared that "schooling would rather injure than serve them" if care was not taken to train them in "early habits of industry". Mr Sharpe disagreed with this and was confident that education would not give sentiments above the condition of the individuals:

> "Education would give habits of industry and attention. He wished for more than two years of instruction; but even in this short period the children, though they should forget all their learning, would have collected many beneficial habits of an indelible nature; habits of submission and respect of their superiors; habits of cleanliness and

> exertion, and the fear of punishment."(38)

These speeches by Mr Rose and Mr Sharpe encapsulate the hopes and fears of many of their contemporaries. The idea that educating the lower orders would unsettle them and leave them unwilling to do menial tasks was, as we have noted in Chapter IV of this study, a common one and Mr Rose would not have been alone in expressing this concern. Malthus was certainly aware of it and pointed out in his Letter to Samuel Whitbread:

> "the principal objections which I have ever heard advanced against the Education of the poor would be removed if it became general. A man who can read and write now may be discontented with his condition, and wish to rise about it; but if all his fellow labourers possessed the same advantage, his relative situation in society would remain the same as before, and the only effect would be that the condition of the whole mass would be elevated and improved."(39)

Mr Sharpe's hopes that education would contribute to the stability of society were also shared by a number of his contemporaries, including, of course, both Whitbread and Malthus. This debate in the House of Commons gave both groups an opportunity to air their views.

Mr Roscoe spoke strongly in favour of the proposals "as nothing could be more disgraceful than to leave them [ie the lower classes] in a state of ignorance". He then declared that the most important end of national education was that which appeared in a "Letter from Mr Malthus to the honourable mover of the bill, namely, as the learned writer stated, that 'as the first object was to elevate the general character of the poor, this or any measure which tended to it was entitled to support'. After such an opinion, from such a quarter, he thought that no sound objection could be made to this measure."(40)

In spite of Mr Roscoe's confidence about the persuasive powers of Malthus's argument, Mr Windham clearly did not agree with these ideas and he confessed to being a sceptic about the benefits of the diffusion of knowledge.

> "A knowledge of many of the fine arts, and of the mechanic arts, was very useful, but we were not all to be artists or mechanics; how awkward should we be situated if we were a nation of shoemakers, or carpenters, or taylors [sic]? If, on the other hand, all men were clerks, what should we do for labourers? This was a false idea; it was only giving the means of knowledge, without being certain that these means

would be rightly made use of. His friend, Dr Johnson, was of opinion that it was not right to teach reading beyond a certain extent in society. The danger was, that if the teachers of the good and the propagators of bad principles, were to be candidates for the controul [sic] of mankind, the latter would be likely to be too successful."(41)

When Whitbread heard this speech he found it hard to believe that "one of the most erudite men of his day" could argue against the universal diffusion of knowledge; "that the representative of a free people could say, that the people were the more free when they were the less enlightened"(42). Windham was not alone, however, and others of a similar opinion expressed grave misgivings about the effects of the proposals to extend and increase educational provision.

Two months later, during the second reading of the Parochial Schools Bill on July 11, 1807, Mr Davies Giddy frankly and openly expressed his opinion that:

"however specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious

> employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and, in a few years, the result would be, that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them."(43)

The problems of increased expectations and an unwillingness to accept menial positions were also mentioned by Mr Rose who:

> "had no doubts that the poor ought to be taught to read; as to writing, he had some doubt, because those who had learnt to write well, were not willing to abide at the plough, but looked to a situation in some counting house."(44)

Mr Luskington and Lord Milton, however, were both at pains to point out that a well instructed populace would be "better subjects from every point of view"(45) and Whitbread put forward a strong objection to the idea that the lower classes would be influenced by seditious pamphlets:

> "When a riotous mob was assembled, it was called an illiterate mob. If one man had knowledge, he would have a much better chance of leading a thousand ignorant creatures to mischief, than if

they were all so far informed as to read what might appear on both sides of the question."(46)

Whitbread also firmly rebutted Mr Pole Carew's complaint that he could see "neither utility nor morality in teaching writing and arithmetic"(47).

> "He would assert without fear of contradiction from any rational man, that writing and arithmetic, so far as they tended to exercise and improve the human understanding, tended also to improve morality; and that every vestige of knowledge, in progression from the humblest to the highest and most refined, operated proportionably to the improvement of morality amongst mankind."(48)

The arguments about the dangers and benefits to be derived from this Bill continued unabated in the Commons and we can find similar disagreement in the House of Lords. Whitbread was not having an easy time getting parliamentary approval for his ideas and on July 30, 1807 he announced his intention of abandoning his Poor Relief Bill for the present session(49).

During the Report stage of the Parochial Schools Bill and during its second reading similar comments were to be heard:

> "Mr Davies Giddy repeated some of his former objections against instructing the lower classes of the people, especially in writing and arithmetic, at the public expence [sic]. He thought also, that being enabled to read, they would waste their time in perusing inflammatory hand-bills, and other political productions; and that more mischief would be the result than good produced by it."(50)

Whitbread and his supporters continued to argue about the benefits which would be brought about by wider educational provision but many of their listeners remained unconvinced. They still maintained that the Bill "would tend to nothing more than raising the poor's rates, and affording them an education beyond what their situation in life required"(51). They felt it unlikely that "teaching the lower orders to read and write, would prove beneficial to the community at large"(52), and, indeed, suggested that contemporary experience was already disproving this idea:

> "Education was gaining ground by very rapid strides throughout the country, perhaps indeed too rapidly. Was the day labourer... happier, for being instructed in reading and writing? Did the house not recollect the mutiny at the Nore? He [Sir T Turton] might venture to state, from the information of an honourable admiral, that upon that occasion the mutineers had daily and

> nightly meetings on board the ships; at which meetings they employed themselves in reading the newspapers and other publications; and that this tended much to the consequences which ensued."(53)

Such doubts and fears proved too powerful and Whitbread failed to obtain a successful passage through Parliament for his Bill.

It may be hard for us to appreciate the arguments and counter-arguments expressed in these parliamentary speeches but we must try to understand the historical context of this debate. The eighteenth century had been a time of rapid change in both agriculture and industry, and these developments had, as was noted in Chapter I, contributed to the growth of towns as the population moved away from rural areas in search of employment. The problems caused [or made worse] by this rapid growth of towns have already been discussed, and these problems, combined with an actual increase in population, meant that Members of Parliament were faced with a scale of difficulties unknown to their predecessors. In addition to this domestic situation, Members were also deeply concerned with the events in France in

1789 and, as news of Revolutionary excesses and the Reign of Terror reached Britain, there was a genuine fear that a similar revolution could take place here.

Two possible responses to this concern are documented in Hansard's records of debates. A number of speakers declared vehemently that educating the lower orders would create dissatisfaction, restlessness and possibly even revolt. Instead of being satisfied with their station in life, the poorer classes would be able to read inflammatory and seditious literature which would encourage them to break with tradition and rise against the authorities. Even if they did not act in such an extreme way they would certainly be unwilling to continue working at the menial tasks for which their station in life had destined them. The earlier section of this Chapter provided numerous examples of speeches expressing these opinions, which proved to be too strong for Whitbread to succeed in getting parliamentary approval for his proposals. However, Whitbread was not alone in agreeing with Malthus about the need to provide a national

system of education. Speakers who supported his ideas were quick to express their belief in the power of education to ensure social stability. It had often been observed that members of a mob tended to be illiterate and ignorant of the facts of the situation. If they were properly educated they would have both the knowledge and the skill to argue with the rabble-rousers who were attempting to manipulate and control them. Another important advantage was that instruction in Christian morality would improve the religious climate of the country as well as bringing about greater social stability. Members of the House were also keen to emphasise the importance of ensuring that the lower orders were no longer left in a state of ignorance but were helped to improve themselves. Unfortunately, as we have already noted, Members who shared these opinions were in a minority in 1807 and failed to convince the House about the wisdom of Whitbread's suggestions.

From time to time, however, Parliament did return to a consideration of the problems of the poor and whether or not increased educational provision would help them. In 1811, during a debate on

Public Education in Ireland, it was stated that:

> "that man would be the greatest benefactor of Ireland, and of this country also, who succeeded best in the promotion of education, and by that means in the promotion of virtue and good morals."(54)

In this speech we can again see a clear expression of the belief that education would be of great benefit to everyone and would be a powerful instrument in the struggle to promote a higher standard of behaviour among those who had previously been denied the opportunity to learn.

Concern about the links between an increasing population, the Poor Laws and the happiness and well-being of the populace can be observed during a debate following the results of an investigation into the Population of the Several Counties of Great Britain in January 1812. The traditional belief that a growth in population was a sign of a nation's well-being was expressed by Mr Rose who had "great pleasure" in informing the House of an increase in population and felt it to be a "matter of great congratulation"(55) after heavy losses of men in the army, navy and merchant service during

the recent years of hostilities. Mr Brougham, however, could not accept that a growing population was necessarily beneficial and he suggested that:

> "an account of the increase of the Poor's Rates ought to have been laid on the table along with the documents to which the right honourable gentleman had alluded. That, perhaps, would have shewn, that the comfort and happiness of the people had not increased with their numbers."(56)

Mr Whitbread, who had of course been influenced by so many of Malthus's theories, would doubtless have welcomed Mr Brougham's comments. He was always interested in any consideration of ways to improve the conditions of the poor. Indeed, even if reforming measures did not succeed in becoming law, he believed that:

> "...it was impossible but that the agitation of such questions should do a great deal of good. The public mind was thus, step by step,. drawn to a due attention to objects which required their continual deliberation. He himself had not been so fortunate as to carry the great measure which he proposed some years ago with similar views: but he did not repent of the attempt; nor did he doubt that, though it failed, the very discussion of it had produced important benefits."(57)

From the evidence of some of the subjects being debated in the House during the second decade of the nineteenth century it would appear that Whitbread was correct in his analysis of the situation. The following examples certainly suggest that this was the case.

In April 1816, the State of Children in Manufactories was the subject of a debate during which Sir Robert Peel delivered the statement that "The House were well aware of the many evils that resulted from the want of education in the lowest classes". His Bill had the intention of enabling children, employed in factories, to receive a little education, "such as plain reading and writing", and he hoped that "these poor children would experience the protection of the House". While recognising that there might be objections to his proposals he was nonetheless confident that the benefits of the scheme would be obvious to his listeners:

> "It might, perhaps, be said, that free labour should not be subjected to any control; but surely it could not be inconsistent with our constitution, to protect the interest of those helpless children."(58)

Here we can see a clear recognition of the need for the State to become involved in providing education for the poorest children in society, a need which Malthus had identified and discussed in his Essay some years before this debate.

Only a few weeks after Peel had introduced this Bill, the House was considering the formation of a select committee to inquire into the state of the education of the "Lower Orders of the people in London, Westminster, and Southwark". Mr Brougham complimented the work of voluntary societies but he feared the problem was too vast for their resources. "He trusted, however, that parliament would not allow any practicable measures for the education of the poor to want adequate funds."(57)

Once again we see Parliament being asked to consider State involvement in the funding of education for the lower orders. Seven days after this suggestion had been put to the House, a similar idea was being considered during a debate on Mendicity of the Metropolis when Mr Rose mentioned the suggestion that young children who were apprehended for begging should be provided

with an education to enable them to become self-sufficient(60).

Reform of the Poor Laws was considered again during this parliamentary session and, during a plea for a select committee to consider the problem, Mr Curwen reviewed previous attempts to improve the situation. The ideas of Pitt, Whitbread, Malthus and Sir William Pulteney were all considered and Curwen was forced to agree with Malthus that "nothing less than a total change of system can cure the evil". Whitbread had recognised the importance of encouraging the poor to plan for the future and to provide for themselves, rather than relying on poor relief. His proposed remedies had included the extension of educational provision for the poor and the formation of a national savings bank. Curwen went on to tell his listeners:

> "The blessed effects of a general system of education, I hold equally high with Mr Whitbread, and consider it as the foundation on which is to be built any system for bettering the condition of the people of England. Whatever can lead men to curb their passions and teach them to oppose the future to the present, must be attended with the most important results to their happiness."(61)

This clearly Malthusian interpretation of the situation met with no opposition in the House; Curwen seemed to be expressing ideas shared by many other Members of Parliament.

Enthusiasm for the proposed Savings Banks could also be observed during 1817 and 1818. Lord Castlereagh expressed his approval for a system of saving which would teach the lower orders "the ideas of independence, and make them look for relief - the relief that must always be the most grateful and effectual - from their own ingenuity, prudence and labour"(62). In March 1818, some nine months after the passing of the Saving Banks Act, Mr Babington commented that the "public would be repaid by the improved morality of the lower orders"(63). Malthus would doubtless have approved of these comments and of the new Act. As we noted earlier, he not only suggested the creation of such a savings system for the poor, he also supported the voluntary establishment of savings banks.

Debates still continued on poor relief and state involvement in educational provision. From the evidence of speeches on the Poor Laws it seems clear that by 1818 most Members agreed with Malthus and Whitbread that there was "not a subject of more vital importance - no measure could tend more to produce that prosperity which he [ie Mr Curwen] wished to see spread over the face of the country, than a wise revision and alteration of the poor laws"(64). As far as education was concerned there had been a clear change in attitude from the earlier debates discussed in this chapter. No longer do we find expressions of concern that the lower orders will suffer by being made dissatisfied with their position in society if they are educated; there are no worries that employers will find it difficult to find workers to fill menial positions; certainly there are no fears that literacy will encourage revolutionary activities among the poorer sections of the population. Instead we read of widespread acceptance of the educational theories proposed by Malthus in his Essay and presented to Parliament by Whitbread in a number of powerful speeches.

On May 27, 1818, in the House of Lords, the Earl of Rosslyn could say with confidence that it:

> "was not necessary for him to expatiate on the advantages of education to all classes of society, as he believed that this advantage was now generally acknowledged, and that the prevailing prejudices on the subject had all gradually been worn away."(65)

A similar feeling could be detected in the House of Commons where Mr Brougham reminded the Members that, only eleven years earlier, "the benevolent views of Mr Whitbread then met with great opposition" and had "strong prejudices to encounter, even in men of high character and talents".

> "It is a most comfortable reflection that such prejudices and fancies have now entirely died away... During this, and the two last sessions, in all the discussions that have taken place, both in the House, in the committee, and in the country, I have never heard a single whisper hostile to the universal diffusion of knowledge... The only question entertained is, touching the best, that is the surest and most economical method of carrying it into effect."(66)

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CONCLUSION

When, during a debate on the Education of the Poor Bill in May, 1818, Mr Brougham commented that the changed attitude towards education was a cause for "comfortable reflection"(1) and that the "strong prejudices"(2) encountered by Mr Whitbread some eleven years earlier had "entirely died away", he was expressing a satisfaction which seems to have been shared by the vast majority of his parliamentary colleagues. Certainly, an examination of Hansard's records of parliamentary debates for this year and, indeed, for most of the decade will reveal many speeches in the House of Commons expressing approval for the idea of increased educational provision, while in the House of Lords the Earl of Rosslyn could declare confidently that the old "prejudices had all gradually been worn away"(3). No longer do we read in accounts of debates that Members of Parliament had given warnings about the evil effects of providing education for the poor. This had not been the case during the early years of the nineteenth century and, in particular, during the lengthy debate on education in 1807. As has

already been noted in this study, there had then been great concern about the dangers of increased educational provision which, it was feared, would teach the poor to despise their lot in life and be insolent to their superiors(4). It would be prejudicial to their morals and happiness and would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity. It was even suggested that not only was literacy already the major cause of much of the unrest in the country but that it had also been a factor in the outbreak of the mutiny at the Nore where many of the mutineers had been in the habit of reading various books, pamphlets and newspapers(5). As we move into the second decade, however, there is scarcely any evidence of such doubts and fears. Instead there is a general acceptance that increased educational provision for all sections of society would bring about beneficial rather than dangerous results, and this acceptance can be seen not only in parliamentary debates but also in pamphlets, magazines and newspaper articles, letters and editorials. It is not difficult to find a great deal of evidence to show that attitudes had changed; what is less

straightforward is to demonstrate the extent to which Malthus had been influential in bringing about these changes.

Had he been a politician the situation would have been quite different. A close examination could have been made of his contribution to educational debate, his membership of any relevant committees, and any Bills he might have introduced into the House. Unfortunately this is not possible, but this does not mean that there is no evidence to prove the impact of Malthus's ideas on the educational debate during the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Malthus had a powerful effect on the climate of opinion at the time and it is possible to find many examples of situations where he was cited as an expert, both in publications of the period and during parliamentary debate. Many important and influential figures sought his opinion or requested his approval for their own ideas. His published works created great public interest, receiving attention from the general public, parliamentarians, public figures and reviewers in various publications. As has already been noted, his works sold well, with

the Essay on the Principle of Population being translated into both French and German, as well as appearing in its sixth English edition in 1826, only twenty-eight years after its first publication. His opinions were also valued by a number of Members of Parliament and, on occasion, actually influenced parliamentary debates.

Certainly, many of his contemporaries had no doubts about Malthus's importance and influence. During their long correspondence Ricardo often requested his friend's advice and he had great confidence in the power of the effect on the public created by Malthus's published work:

> "The Public pay a most flattering attention to any thing from your pen, and you are not fulfilling your duty to society, if you do not avail yourself of this disposition to endeavour to remove the cloud of ignorance and prejudice, which everywhere exists on the subjects which have particularly engaged your time and reflection."(6)

He also commented in the most flattering way on his own reactions to Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population in which "the doctrines appeared so clear and so satisfactorily laid down that they excited an interest in me inferior only

to that produced by Adam Smith's celebrated work"(7).

The link with Adam Smith was also made by Nassau William Senior who, during a lecture on population at the University of Oxford in 1828, spoke of Malthus as a "benefactor to mankind on a level with Adam Smith"(8).

Robert Owen, who met Malthus at Haileybury in 1821, remembered the meeting some years later when he included Malthus in the list of political economists whom he regarding as "friends to the national education of the people"(9). This seems a fitting comment on a man who, as we have already seen, not only spent most of his adult life as a teacher but also wrote powerfully in favour of a national system of education.

Admiration and respect for Malthus can also be observed in many publications of the period. In 1817 a writer for Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine remarked that "the profound and original inquiries of Mr Malthus have cast a new light on many subjects, which [have] either been entirely

neglected, or only cursorily noticed by Dr Smith"(10). A later edition of the same publication included the comment that an understanding of Malthus's theory of population was "of infinite importance to the right understanding of some of the most momentous questions of interior policy"(11). A number of articles on education appeared in the magazine and in 1820 one writer expressed his approval that over the previous ten years "the wisdom of extending as far as is possible the blessings of education" had occupied both the minds and the pens "of the deepest thinkers, and the best writers of England"(12). No longer, he claimed, could any British statesman accept the "degrading doctrine, that 'it is possible to have an over-enlightened population'"(13). The security of the state has not been endangered by men of education. In both England and Scotland the situation is the same:

> "The enemies of our peace in both countries have been found among the most ignorant inhabitants of both; and the scenes of tumult in both, have been precisely the most ignorant districts of both. In both kingdoms, the public tranquillity has been assaulted, only by a set of poor, ignorant, and deluded creatures... Where was the tranquillity of England assaulted? In the manufacturing districts of Lancashire and

Yorkshire, by far the most ignorant districts between the Tweed and the Land's end. Where was the tranquillity of Scotland assaulted? In the manufacturing towns of Lanarkshire, and Renfrewshire, and Ayrshire, the very places in all Scotland where it may be demonstrated that the means of education are most inadequate to the extent of the population... in consequence of a sudden and unforeseen accumulation of inhabitants, taking away every thing but the name of parishes... in effect, depriving these places of all that is most valuable... both for their general and their spiritual instruction."(14)

After discussing the work of Dr Chalmers in relation to education in the Glasgow area, the author then moved on to encourage those who supported Malthus to become involved in some aspect of this important work:

> "The disciples of the Malthusian philanthropy, who keep back when they think that publicity is harmful, [should] come forth on every occasion when publicity is harmless. That is the time of their vindication; and then it is in their power to meet, on the same arena, with those Lilliputians in charity, who think that they do all, when, in fact, they have done nothing but mischief."(15)

This author obviously recognised the central position occupied by education in Malthus's social and economic theories and he also appreciated the idea put forward in the Essay on the Principle of

Population that education could be used as an effective instrument of social control. If the poorer classes could be educated they would be "less disposed to insubordination and turbulence..., ...would become more peacable and orderly, less influenced by inflammatory and seditious publications"(16).

Admiration for Malthus and his ideas can also be observed in sermons of the period. While preaching at Shrewsbury on the importance of education for the poor, William Otter spoke most favourably about Malthus, "a celebrated writer on Political Economy", and praised his desire to "increase the prudence and foresight of the labouring classes" by educating them about the true reasons for their misfortune and making them appreciate the importance of having fewer children. Such was the significance of Malthus's work that it should be "the touchstone to which every plan proposed for the improvement of the poor should be applied". Otter then went on to ask his congregation:

> "Can we, with any degree of consistency, look to them for the exercise of prudence in marriage, economy before and

> after it - the cultivation of an independent spirit, and a regard to the future - and yet refuse them the means by which they may be enlightened as to their real situation, and their real interest?"(17)

In this sermon we can see a clear example of how Malthusian ideas about education could be passed on to groups of people who might not have had the opportunity to read any of the "celebrated writer's" work. Another example of this can be detected in the work of a theologian who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1816, John Bird Sumner published his Treatise on the Records of Creation in which he wrote persuasively about the value of self-denial and the blessings of the small family which could be given everything it required(18). The approval of such eminent clergymen may well have made Malthus's ideas seem theologically respectable and so more acceptable to many Anglicans.

It must also be remembered that it was not only in Britain that Malthus and his ideas were famous and influential:

> "...the high estimation in which he was held was not confined to this country... In truth the principle [of population]

> he had laid down found fewer prejudices to encounter in other countries than in this; ...he was honoured with distinctions from several sovereigns of Europe, and elected a member of many of the most eminent literary societies, especially the French Institute and the Royal Academy in Berlin."(19)

His ideas were widely known both at home and abroad and, as has already been noted, the allusions in contemporary publications both to the man himself and to his theories are legion. He was a famous man and he had plenty to occupy his time, with his duties at Haileybury as well as his research and writing, yet he was always willing to give some of his valuable time to causes in which he believed.

He felt that it was important to provide the poorest members of the population with access to a secure savings bank which would accept even the smallest deposit and he explained the reasons for this in his work. No doubt he influenced a number of his readers in this way and in 1815 we have a report in The Times of a public meeting about savings banks during which a speaker commented on "Mr Malthus [whose name can never be mentioned without warm approbation]"(20). He could easily

have continued to support the savings bank movement through his writing alone but, in addition to this, he also gave up some of his limited free time to be one of the Managers of a Provident Institution for Savings which would "afford to the labouring Classes... a secure Investment in the Public Funds for such Sums of Money as they may wish to deposit at Interest" (21).

Malthus was also willing to use his influence in order to promote the cause of increased educational provision by offering "the sanction of [his] name as a steward" at a meeting of the Lancasterian society(22). Although a member of the Church of England and, indeed, a clergyman respected as "a most conscientious one, pure and pious"(23), Malthus felt that the spread of education among the lower classes was far too important to be the subject of sectarian squabbles and he was willing to lend his name and reputation to help the cause.

The parliamentary debates examined in Chapter X of this study provide clear illustrations of the

respect enjoyed by Malthus during the opening decades of the nineteenth century but perhaps the influence of his work will be better understood after a further consideration of Samuel Whitbread's speeches on the Poor Law in 1796 and in 1807.

In his speech in 1796 Whitbread considered the practical problems inherent in the administration of the Poor Law and he demanded that Justices of the Peace should be authorised to fix the wages of labour at every three months' Session. Eleven years later, however, encouraged and influenced by Malthus, he was no longer trying to improve the existing system of poor relief; instead he proposed "to exalt the labouring classes of the community". He spoke with admiration of Malthus as the "one philosopher... who has gone deeply into the causes of our present situation"(24), before informing his listeners:

> "I think the house must anticipate that in the front of my plan for the exaltation of the character of the labourer, must appear a scheme of general national education. So it is; and upon its effects I mainly rely for the consummation of my wishes."(25)

Any doubters were reminded that "the greatest authorities of the living and the dead [including Malthus]"(26) recommended what was being proposed.

Whitbread gave a clear indication of his debt to Malthus and his ideas in his speech, and there is also evidence from another source of the support Malthus offered Whitbread. In a letter written before Whitbread put his proposals to the House of Commons, Malthus expressed hearty approval for Whitbread's ideas about general education and commented, "Should you only be able to accomplish this part of your Bill, you will in my opinion confer a most important benefit on your Country"(27). He then went on to make an interesting comment about the effect education would have on social stability:

> "The principal objections which I have ever heard advanced against the Education of the poor would be removed if it became general. A man who can read and write now may be discontented with his condition and wish to rise above it; but if all his fellow labourers possessed the same advantage, his relative situation in society would remain the same as before, and the only effect would be that the condition of the whole mass would be elevated and improved."(28)

Universal education would bring nothing but benefits to the country: the people would be happy and content; they would understand the theory of population and so avoid bringing large families into a world of poverty and starvation; their moral welfare would benefit from religious instruction; they would not be tempted to revolt against the proper authorities; and, finally, none of these improvements would jeopardise the stability of society. Other countries did not fear education and it seemed that there were "few countries in Europe in which the peasantry [were] so ignorant as in England and Ireland"(29). Surely Parliament would want to rectify a situation which put England in such an inferior position?

Whitbread was obviously influenced by Malthus's ideas and, as the debates on education in the first decades of the nineteenth century demonstrate, he was not the only Member of Parliament to be impressed by the man and his theories. During the debate on Whitbread's proposals a number of speakers mentioned the importance of Malthus's theories and the great

respect they had for the man and his work. This attitude clearly reflects the favourable opinion in the country at large towards Malthusian ideas, and Mr Roscoe was speaking for all those who had been influenced by Malthus's proposals about improving the conditions of the poor by offering them the benefits of education when he said:

> "But the most important end of national education... [was] that which appeared in a Letter from Mr Malthus to the honourable mover of the bill, namely, as the learned writer stated, that 'as the first object was to elevate the general character of the poor, this or any measure which tended to it was entitled to support'. After such an opinion, from such a quarter, he thought that no sound objection could be made to this measure."(30)

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1 Hansard op.cit., Vol.XXXVIII, p.560.

2 Ibid, p.591.

3 Ibid, p.975.

4 Ibid, Vol.IX, pp.538-547.

5 Ibid, p.1050.

6 Ricardo, D: op.cit., Vol.VI, p.169.

7 Ibid, Vol.VII, p.2.

8 Senior, NW: op.cit., p.51.

9 Owen, R: op.cit., p.59.

10 Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol.I, No.II, Edinburgh 1817, p.175.

11 Ibid, Vol.IV, No XX, 1818, p.207.

12 Ibid, Vol.VII, No.XL, 1829, p.419.

13 Ibid, p.420.

14 Ibid, pp.420-421.

15 Ibid, p.427.

16 Malthus, TR: Essay, 1806, p.419.

17 Otter, W: op.cit., pp.10-11.

18 Sumner, J: A Treatise on the Records of the Creation, and on the Moral Attributes of the Creator, London 1816.

19 Otter, W: Memoir of Robert Malthus, reprinted New York, 1951, p.xli.

20 The Times, December 21, 1815, p.4.

21 Hume, J: op.cit., p.8.

22 Horner, F: op.cit., pp.97-98.

23 Edinburgh Review, Vol.LXIV, 1835, p.481.

24 Hansard, op.cit., Vol.VIII, p.869.

25 Ibid, p.875.

26 Ibid, p.878.

27 Malthus, TR: A Letter to Samuel Whitbread Esq. M.P. on his proposed Bill for the Amendment of the Poor Laws, Second Edition, London 1807, p.14.

28 Ibid, p.35.

29 Ibid, p.34.

30 Hansard, op.cit., p.541.

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