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Gentlemen and Players¹

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I

THE competence of businessmen in late Victorian and Edwardian England has come in for some hard knocks. Some were handed out by contemporaries; others have been added by later generations of historians and economists. For the most part the chronicle of alleged defects is limited to the period running, approximately, from 1860 to 1914. Why this limitation?

Before 1860, whatever criticism might be levelled at industrialism or the social consequences of the new men, none could be aimed at their enterprise *per se*. The reason was the simple one that there were no standards; nobody had seen the like of it all before. So foreigners came to envy and returned to emulate; and home-bred lyricists such as Andrew Ure and Samuel Smiles celebrated economic advance and found moral purpose in business endeavour. Thereafter, historians have been so preoccupied with trying to find out why it happened, or with striking economic and social balances of its effects, that they have barely had a chance to consider the quality of this early business enterprise. Its quantity has apparently been all too obtrusive.

For the years after 1914 neither the shortcomings nor the achievements of English businessmen receive much attention in the standard economic history texts. The sequence of war, depression, recovery, more war, and then readjustment of the British economy in a new and rapidly changing world: these have been and still are the dominant themes. Despite a mounting pile of books about management techniques and sundry Anglo-American productivity comparisons unflattering to the English, the student of our economic history over the last fifty years is not offered any such vision of drooping deficiency as he is for the preceding half-century.

Some of the reasons for the disparity are obvious enough. For the later nineteenth century, the shock to native pride induced by the discovery that, in some respects at least, this country was being overtaken by those unfortunate enough to live outside Victoria's rule generated a violence of reaction which the historian can hardly miss. In later years the shocks were of a different order; and comment correspondingly so. Furthermore, though historians of industry have been busy amongst all sorts of pre-1914 records only a very few firms have allowed the

¹ One of the necessary items in the travelling baggage of the university teacher today is the seminar paper, ready to be produced on request. The present article started life in this way and is simply a final presentation of many preliminary drafts or short versions which have been given to sundry groups and seminars. I am grateful to those who, in ensuing discussions, have variously contributed to the final form. An earlier version of the article was read, separately, by Mr Arthur Knight and by Mr Malcolm Falkus, and I would like to thank them particularly for many helpful comments. They bear no responsibility, however, for the opinions expressed herein.

For some readers the title perhaps needs one piece of explanation: the Gentlemen v. Players cricket match was played at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, annually (with only a few breaks) from 1806 to 1962.

inquiring eye of the scholar to peer into their post-1914 files. There is also a reason of a different sort. The influence alike of the ideas of Keynes and of the overpowering facts of depression, recovery, and war have combined to push our approach to the economic past into certain distinctive routes. Obsessed since the Second World War with the problems of economic growth, we ask aggregative, or at most sectoral, questions about the economy ever since the First World War. Impressed by the need to measure, equipped with the tools of post-Keynesian economic theory, and supplied with an abundance of statistics, we advance on pre-determined lines. The ideas and behaviour of men have come to be regarded as virtually irrelevant. Nor has this approach been confined to the post-1914 period. Arguments based especially on factor-endowments and the rates of growth of markets—treated as independent variables over which businessmen, either as salesmen or as lobbyists of governments, had no control—have also been applied to the classic period of alleged entrepreneurial decline. Their effect has been to downgrade the importance of businessmen's behaviour in attempts to compare the economic performance of Britain and other countries. Prof. Habakkuk, affirming that he knew "no way of forming more than a general impression of the relative importance of . . . non-economic influence", plumped for certain economic factors as adequate to explain this country's lag behind America in the adoption of new industrial methods during the later nineteenth century.¹ No sooner had Dr Aldcroft canvassed the idea of general "entrepreneurial failure" in Britain, 1870-1914, than Prof. Temin rejected it as a cause of British decline, relative to the USA and Germany, in the steel industry during the period 1880-1913.² Comparative factor-endowments and growth-rates are thus combined to exonerate businessmen from deficiencies once held against them.

But what are we to do when faced with such comments as the following, so widely spaced in time? Here is the U.S. Consul in Bradford in 1879:

The Channel of commerce is changing . . . instead of changing with the stream, English manufacturers continue to sit upon the bank of the old water-course and argue from plausible but unprofitable scientific and commercial premises that it had no right to alter . . .³

And here is the U.S. Minister for Economic Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in London in 1955:

An American Observer in Britain is struck by the apparent prevalence of basic attitudes towards industry in considerable contrast with those at home . . . There is the familiar point of industry's somewhat uncertain social status . . . There is a sense of doubt concerning the social utility of industry and the legitimacy of profit . . . Profits are often considered somewhat shameful . . .⁴

¹ H. J. Habakkuk, *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century* (1962), p. 220.

² D. H. Aldcroft, 'The Entrepreneur and the British Economy, 1870-1914', *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. xvii (1964); P. Temin, 'The Relative Decline of the British Steel Industry, 1880-1913', in H. Rosovsky, ed. *Industrialization in Two Systems* (New York, 1966), p. 154.

³ Quoted in J. Potter, 'The British Timber Trade since 1850' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester, 1949). I am grateful to my former colleague for telling me about this observation quoted in his thesis.

⁴ Quoted in R. S. Edwards and H. Townsend, *Business Enterprise: its Growth and Organisation* (1961), pp. 566-7.

The immediate message is not the same, but there is a common underlying view. Though the 1879 comment seems here to spell out complacency and conservatism, and that of 1955 adds allegations of guilt about profits to the well-known theme of industry's social inferiority, both carry with them the implication that in American eyes English businessmen are deficient in the pursuit of profit.

It is of course possible to take the view that observations of this sort—and many more could be quoted—should be used only as evidence about American attitudes and not about English attitudes. In practice such austerity has proved only too resistible and all manner of literary comment, native as well as foreign in origin, has been pressed into service in the debate about Britain's comparative decline, especially during the so-called "Great Depression" period, 1873–96.¹ Precisely because such observations can be given no quantitative value and because the debate has been conducted largely in terms of comparisons between the performance of various countries, so has the reaction against such evidence, and the influences to which it allegedly testifies, proceeded apace. The notion of adverse "social attitudes towards entrepreneurship" as a major factor causing retardation in economic development in nineteenth-century Europe has been scathingly dealt with by Prof. Gerschenkron.² Prof. Landes has continued to mount a powerful rearguard action, incorporating entrepreneurial attitudes in his study of European industrial advance.³ But economists and econometric historians have little time for business history or, indeed, any sort of inquiry not employing the techniques of an economic science seen primarily as something capable of prediction.

Such evidence as the attitudes of businessmen or the performance of particular firms and industries admittedly presents substantial methodological problems for the economic historian. They come to the fore in the attempts to compare national economic developments. How is entrepreneurship (even if it can be isolated) to be treated as an assessable factor? How can it be allocated a degree of contribution to national failings or achievements? Comparisons at an international level are of course extremely difficult: only too rarely do we possess enough information to make them with the degree of confidence which is only too often granted to their conclusions. But even if we abandon such premature claims and confine our attentions to examining the attitudes and achievements of English businessmen in a national context only, we have still to decide—and to make clear our decision—by what criteria their views and performances are to be judged. Let us assume that the attitudes indicated by the two comments from American observers in 1879 and 1955, quoted above, have some correspondence with reality, that they truly tell us something of English businessmen, quite independently of what they may reveal about American ways of thinking.

¹ For some examples, see A. L. Levine, *Industrial Retardation in Britain, 1880–1914* (1967); for an admirable survey of the debate, complete with bibliography, see S. B. Saul, *The Myth of the Great Depression* (1969); and for a still more recent discussion of the entrepreneur, see Donald N. McCloskey and Lars G. Sandberg, 'From Damnation to Redemption: Judgements on the Late Victorian Entrepreneur', *Explorations in Economic History*, ix (1971).

² A. Gerschenkron, 'Social Attitudes, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development' in his *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962), pp. 52–71.

³ David S. Landes, 'Technological Change and Development in Western Europe, 1750–1914', in *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vi, especially pt 1 (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 563–84; and, more recently, in his *The Unbound Prometheus* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 352–8 and 526–8.

Or let us suppose that we have contemporary letters, diaries, account books, or the like, showing the views and performances of particular English businessmen and firms. We may judge evidence of this sort by various yardsticks. For example: (a) by certain standards of efficiency and productivity in the firm involving assumptions about continuous profit-maximization and choice of best practice, such as we might use today; (b) by criteria obtained as a result of taking into account social costs and/or benefits, including various types of externalities, not all of which are readily measurable or customarily considered;¹ (c) by strictly contemporary standards, i.e. we may try to purge our minds as far as possible of current teachings, and consider our evidence in the light of what contemporaries saw as the relevant criteria. Whether (a), (b), or (c) should be used depends on our purpose. In an ideal world some combination of all three would perhaps commend itself. Here, I shall concern myself with (c), regarding this as a necessary first step before which no really valid historical or economic judgement can be made, even though for certain purposes it may well be inadequate and should eventually be replaced by a more complex standard.

So the intention of this article is to consider certain social and historical aspects of English² business behaviour, as suggested by the two quotations of 1879 and 1955 in the light of national and contemporary criteria, and firmly eschewing international comparisons.

II

What have been the recognized goals of success for the English businessman? What has a man hoped to do with a business fortune?

Prof. Perkin is surely right in stressing that social ambition provided an immensely powerful motor of business activity at the time of the industrial revolution. One does not have necessarily to accept his more comprehensive claims ("the pursuit of wealth *was* the pursuit of social status"; or "underlying causes were social causes").³ Yet it remains a fair deduction from the life-patterns of such as the Arkwrights, Strutts, Crawshays, Marshalls, Wilkinsons, Wedgwoods, or Courtaulds that social advancement was one of the most prized possessions to be bought by an English business fortune. There is nothing new about this; nor, it must be stressed, was it in the least new for the industrial revolution period. A long line of Cannings, Springs, Greshams, Baynings, Ingrams, Cranfields, Hicks, Childs, Banks, Claytons, Hoares, and many more stretches back into the English socio-economic past. Those of the later centuries differed from their predecessors merely in adding manufacturing industry to commerce and finance as the likeliest path to success. They acquired, controlled, and deployed their capital in rather different ways; they faced different problems in reaching similar ends. As a first step in getting into perspective the quality, rather than the quantity, of English business enterprise at the time of the industrial revolution it is perhaps worth emphasizing that making things (and often with less fixed capital than was once popularly supposed) instead of dealing in things is a difference only of means, not of ends. No more then than today was the maximization of profits an

¹ See, for examples, E. J. Mishan, *The Costs of Economic Growth* (1967), *passim*.

² English, not British. This article does not claim to say anything about the Scots, Irish, or Welsh even though some may be mentioned *en passant*.

³ H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (1969), pp. 63, 85.

end; it neither was, nor is today, the only means employed.¹ "A realistic analysis", it has been said of modern business, "must avoid the presumption of a profit motive, let alone a maximization of profit motive."² The ends are more intangible and varied: profits are a path to prestige, power, status, personal satisfaction, adventures made, purpose and achievements gained. Here is a mid-nineteenth-century statement on the subject:

It is not, so far as I know, by any means to mere *money* gain so much as success in well-contrived and well-conducted action that our interest and satisfaction in our business is found; the money gain is a legitimate result, and no doubt enhances the interest and satisfaction; but it is not the spirit and soul of it, infinitely less is it the *measure* of it.³

This is not to be dismissed as mere Victorian hypocrisy even though the man who wrote it—Samuel Courtauld in a letter to his nephew in 1856—had been helped to the £20,000–£30,000 a year profits which he was then making out of the provision of silk crape for Victorian mourners, by a powerful urge for personal social betterment. Despite its sententious manner and retrospective form it is not perhaps so very different in its implications from Lionel Cranfield's appeal to Arthur Ingram in 1607 that they should join in the purposive exploitation of all that fate might offer:

One rule I desire may be observed between you and me, which is that neither of us seek to advance our estates by the other's loss, but that we may join together faithfully to raise our fortunes by such casualties as this stirring age shall afford.⁴

It was to take Cranfield's and Ingram's successors, some two centuries later, longer than is commonly supposed to discover the true implications of the new "stirring age".⁵ It is possible that they were assisted in their failure by their continued pursuit of certain very English non-economic ends, and by the evolution of certain very English patterns of education.

III

The social structure of pre-industrial revolution England had only one really important division: between those who were Gentlemen and those who were Players. For all the elaboration of status and hierarchy distinguished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the line of greatest consequence was that older division which distinguished gentility from the common people. And the great game of life to be played by anyone possessed of ambition but born on the wrong side of the line was to cross that divide. Whether certain societies or certain groups within societies nurture abnormally vigorous growths of such ambitions;

¹ The progressive erosion of the orthodox belief in profit-maximization as a description of modern business behaviour can be traced in various works, empirical and theoretical. For a small sample, see R. A. Gordon, *Business Leadership in the Large Corporation* (Washington, D.C. 1945, 2nd edn. Berkeley, 1966) especially chs. XII–XIV; P. Sargent Florence, *The Logic of British and American Industry* (1953), especially pp. 292–334; Edith T. Penrose, *The Theory of the Firm* (1959), especially chs. III and VIII; and Robin Marris, *The Theory of "Managerial" Capitalism* (1964), especially ch. II.

² P. Sargent Florence, *op. cit.* p. 297.

³ Quoted in D. C. Coleman, *Courtaulds. An Economic and Social History* (Oxford, 1969), I, 175.

⁴ Quoted in Menna Prestwich, *Cranfield. Politics and Profits under the Early Stuarts* (Oxford, 1966), p. 72.

⁵ Below, p. 104.

and if so, why, when, and under what stimuli: these are questions which have been the object of much speculation but few definitive answers.¹ What at any rate seems certain is that in later eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Britain a changing economy greatly extended existing opportunities for crossing the great social divide.² In one sense the industrial revolution was a revolution of those who were not gentlemen. And, as usual in partial revolutions, sooner or later the values of the revolutionaries succumb to those of the surviving elite who, in turn, modify their own standards to fit the new situation. When the business and technological drive of the English industrial revolution loses some of its momentum in the later nineteenth century perhaps, in part at least, it is because too many of the revolutionaries are too busy becoming gentlemen.

The gentleman, both as idea and as reality, was a much elaborated topic of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The origins of the concept are of course much older, drawing upon classical and Christian ideals and upon the notion of chivalry, as well as the hard facts of medieval political power. In the sixteenth century, however, the dissemination to this country of renaissance culture from France and Italy, bringing with it *inter alia* the translation of Castiglione's *Courtier*, helped to give birth to a progeny of native works setting out the approved behaviour and ideals of the English gentleman.³ More economic opportunities and growing wealth brought more social mobility to Tudor England. As aspirations to gentility and grants of honours alike multiplied so did the literature of definition and the machinery of heraldic approval. The gentleman became an English institution.⁴ Sir Thomas Smith's famous words of 1583 go a long way to define all that appeared to be necessary:

as for gentlemen, they be made good cheape in England. For whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, who studieth in the universities, who professeth libral sciences, and to be short, who can live idly and without manual labour, and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called master . . . and shall be taken for a gentleman.⁵

The comment is shrewd enough and it comprehensively embraced much of what was, and long remained, the ostensible nature and practice of English gentility. The ideals which lay behind it were also of great consequence. For they were to inform, however crudely and coarsely, however imperfectly, the teachings of numerous later generations amongst whom, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were a growing number of England's business leaders.

Here is a definition of 1608:

the means to discern a gentleman be these. First, he must be affable and courteous in speech and behaviour. Secondly, he must have an adventurous heart to fight,

¹ See M. W. Flinn, 'Social Theory and the Industrial Revolution', in T. Burns and S. B. Saul, eds. *Social Theory and Economic Change* (1967).

² One remarkable testimony to this is the otherwise astonishing popularity of Debrett's *Peerage of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (which went to 22 editions between 1802 and 1839) and Burke's *Peerage and Baronetage and Dictionary to the Landed Gentry*. See W. L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise* (1964, paperback edn 1968), p. 254n.

³ R. Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (Illinois, 1929).

⁴ On the relation between this development and the patterns of English education at the time, see L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 672-724; and Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 333-68.

⁵ T. Smith, *De Republica Anglorum* (ed. L. Alston, Cambridge, 1906), pp. 39-40.

and that but for very just quarrels. Thirdly, he must be endowed with mercy to forgive the trespasses of his friends and servants. Fourthly, he must stretch his purse to give liberally unto soldiers and unto them that have need; for a niggard is not worthy to be called a gentleman . . .¹

The cultivation of elaborate manners could easily be transmuted into the foppish wits of Restoration drama; and the possession of the qualities suggested by "an adventurous heart to fight" readily led to those bullying squires who litter the eighteenth-century scene, and to that admiration for well-bred ignorance and contempt for education which Defoe so deplored in his *Compleat English Gentleman*.² Yet the stress on justice, magnanimity, and generosity is as important as the wealth and position which they imply. Along with the well-known enthusiasm for certain sporting pastimes they too were to become embedded in the character-training activities of the English Public School system, during its great nineteenth-century efflorescence. The concept of the English gentleman, as evolved in the sixteenth century, is said to have put more emphasis upon a moral code than upon the military prowess which figures so largely in some continental models.³ At some points this moral code merged into the gentlemanly code of honour. In its most extreme form this meant the idiocies of duelling which did not finally peter out in England until the 1850's.⁴ But, more important, it also provided the basis for a luxuriant undergrowth of unwritten and unspoken rules of behaviour. The observance of such rules helped to give great coherence to the gentlemanly élite. So, naturally, they came to be peculiarly embedded in the practices and attitudes of the schools to which were sent the children not only of the existing élite but of those parents whose accumulated profits thus enabled the family crossing of the great social divide to be completed. At other points the moral code merged with the sense of *noblesse oblige* to lay high esteem upon the performance of unpaid public service.

The purgings which the gentlemanly concept received at the hands of the nineteenth-century religious revival, in its varied and often conflicting forms, left an ideal which was in many respects remote from the new world of competitive industrialism. Though they disputed as to means both John Henry Newman and Thomas Arnold wanted not an ancient knight or a bullying squire or a modern tycoon but a Christian gentleman. Here is Cardinal Newman's concept of the gentleman, significantly to be found in one of the essays of his *The Idea of a University*, published in 1852:

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain . . . He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversations, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to

¹ W. Vaughan, *The Golden Grove* (2nd edn, 1608), bk 3, ch. 16.

² D. Defoe, *The Compleat English Gentleman* (ed. K. Bülbbring, 1890), p. 237. For the gentlemanly ideals of the eighteenth century, see George C. Brauer, Jr. *The Education of a Gentleman. Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England, 1660-1775* (New York, 1959).

³ Kelso, *op. cit.* p. 48. ⁴ Burn, *op. cit.* p. 257.

those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best . . . He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles; he submits to pain, because it is inevitable, to bereavement, because it is irreparable, and to death, because it is his destiny. If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the blundering discourtesy of better, though less educated minds . . .¹

And so on. This aggregation of sentiments must surely have made Newman's ideal gentleman an egregious bore. But however admirably virtuous, he hardly sounds ideally equipped for the economy of industrial capitalism, the perfect transmitter for sustained economic growth. In this paradigm the only qualities which might be thought to be relevant to the world of competitive industrialism—leadership and an "adventurous heart to fight"—are now the least stressed.

Samuel Smiles, too, tried to purge the gentlemanly ideal of its ancient knightly obsession with a code of honour, with duelling, riches, and rank. It was to be made respectable. Yet it was to remain; and to remain moreover as the ultimate crown to be worn by those who had helped themselves. Hardly a better tribute could be paid to the persistence, with suitable modification, of the ideal than its appearance in the final chapter, 'The True Gentleman', of Smiles's *Self-Help* of which, let it be remembered, nearly a quarter of a million copies were sold in England between its publication in 1859 and the end of the nineteenth century.² Smiles turned the gentleman into the embodiment of virtuous character:

The True Gentleman is one whose nature has been fashioned after the highest models . . . His qualities depend not upon fashion or manners, but on moral worth—not on personal possessions but on personal qualities . . . Humanity is sacred in his eyes: and thence proceed politeness and forbearance, kindness and charity . . .

. . . The true gentleman has a keen sense of honour, scrupulously avoiding mean actions. His standard of probity in word and deed is high. He does not shuffle or prevaricate, dodge or skulk; but is honest, upright, and straightforward. His law is rectitude . . .

. . . Riches and rank have no necessary connexion with genuine gentlemanly qualities. The poor man may be a true gentleman—in spirit and in daily life. He may be honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping—that is, be a true gentleman.³

Whether or not this is best described as "the entrepreneurial ideal of the self-made man",⁴ it still seems scarcely the most likely formula for those ruthless, driving, dynamic tycoons who so impressed Schumpeter and who so fascinate business journalists today.

We do not have to suppose that such ideals everywhere coincided with reality; nor to imagine that Thomas Arnold and his numerous imitators and successors were uniformly successful in moulding the characters of all their charges to conform to the prescribed pattern of the English gentleman. But we should be foolish to belittle the persistence and continuity of these attitudes of mind well into the twentieth century. "Since Arnold's time", wrote Taine in 1862, after visiting

¹ J. H. Newman, *The Idea of a University* (new edn 1893), pp. 208–10.

² Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (ed. Asa Briggs, 1959), p. 7. ³ Ibid. pp. 372–4.

⁴ Perkin, op cit. p. 278.

Eton, Harrow, and Rugby, "the object of their education has been to turn them out as Christian Gentlemen."¹ He was far from complimentary about either the curricula or the fagging but he recognized the ultimate aim. So too at the ancient universities: "the thing that matters is always the ethical content, morale, cast of mind, the dominant inclination of the men in question."² Fascinated by the peculiarly English concept of gentility, he saw the English picture of the ideal:

a truly noble man, a man worthy to command, a disinterested man of integrity, capable of exposing, even sacrificing himself for those he leads; not only a man of honour, but a conscientious man, in whom generous instincts have been confirmed by right thinking . . .³

For all of Smiles's pious hopes for the poor man with the proper sentiments, it was the passage through the educational procedures of the Public Schools and ancient universities which was to grant membership of the right club. Taine recognized the universities as essentially clubs: "An English University is in many respects a club for young men of the nobility and gentry, or at least of wealth."⁴

The concept of the gentleman's club, be it the right school for the young, the right university for the adolescent, the right club for the adult, was an integral part of the gentlemanly ethos in practice, just as was the unwritten code of behaviour. Both as concept and as practice it has shown a powerful talent for survival.

As Dr Reader has shown in his recent work on the origins of I.C.I., the "Winnington Hall Club", started at Brunner Mond's Cheshire works towards the end of the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, was a management club with a membership chosen on a basis which mirrored the nature of English society:

Election to the Club was narrowly restricted. Technical men of graduate standing—meaning, for practical purposes, chemists—could perhaps take it for granted: no one else could, least of all engineers and commercial men . . .⁵

The whole structure rested on class distinction. University men and professional men (amongst whom engineers were by no means automatically included) were gentlemen: the rest were not, unless they achieved the status by consent of those already holding it.⁶

Here was a highly successful firm in a science-based industry adopting, in a suitably modified form, the essential tenets of Sir Thomas Smith's definition of three centuries earlier. Nor were such attitudes confined to this particular branch of "new" industry. The gentleman's club was still providing a model for the chairman of the dominant firm in the British rayon industry ninety years after Taine had commented on the social scene. Here is an observation of 1952:

For a long time there has been no fundamental change in the Board . . . The Executive Directors have directed and managed, and on the whole they have been successful. There has been a Gentleman's Club atmosphere in the Board Room,

¹ H. Taine, *Notes on England* (trans. and ed. by E. Hyams, 1957), p. 105.

² *Ibid.* p. 117.

³ *Ibid.* p. 145.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 118.

⁵ W. J. Reader, *Imperial Chemical Industries. A History, 1. The Forerunners 1870-1926* (Oxford, 1970), p. 218.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 219.

and I believe it is true to say that over the years this has spread to all the departments of our business. It is, in fact, part of the goodwill of the company which we must safeguard. On the other hand great care must be taken to avoid inefficiency.¹

Whatever the merits of the gentleman's club, even this advocate obviously saw that its relationship to business efficiency could be tenuous. Why? The answer is *not*, I think, to be found simply in that neglect of science which was the all too common reaction to gentlemanly education when it came under criticism in the later nineteenth century.

IV

Insofar as the great debate on English education touched upon the world of business at all, it did so through the concern for the country's deficiencies in scientific and technical education. As is well known, this was much paraded, in books and speeches by prominent persons and in evidence given to a series of committees and commissions, stretching roughly from the 1860's to the 1890's. The great importance which the Public Schools and ancient universities had long attached to classical learning seemed obviously suited to a class who were to "live idly and without manual labour". Furthermore, the contempt with which the intellectual leaders of Greek and Roman society had regarded the "mechanic arts"² readily fused with the concept of a classical "liberal" education to create the image of the educated amateur, his wits sharpened by contacts with antiquity and thus rendered capable of turning his mind to any task suitable for his social status. It was an essential part of this educational process that on no account should it contain elements of functional training directly aimed at a specific vocation.³ Training was for Players; Gentlemen were educated. Gladstone put it unequivocally in 1861: "the classical training" was the basis of a liberal education. But, this classical training:

can only apply in full to that small proportion of the youth of any country who are to become in the fullest sense educated men. It involves no extravagant or inconvenient assumptions respecting those who are to be educated for trades and professions, in which the necessities of specific training must more or less limit general culture.⁴

It was integral to this approach that whilst there might be something to be said for pure science as an intellectual exercise, there was very little to be said for technology. For a time, in the later seventeenth century, and in certain walks of life during the eighteenth century, the first fine enthusiasm of the scientific revolution had diffused ideas of the new science and brought interests in its practical uses amongst all manner of men.⁵ But in the nineteenth century reaction

¹ Courtaulds' Archives: private memorandum by Sir John Hanbury-Williams, Chairman of Courtaulds, sent to four of his senior directors, 25 July 1952. Quoted by kind permission of Courtaulds Ltd.

² See, e.g., A. J. P. Ubbelohde in C. Singer and others, eds. *A History of Technology*, IV (1750-1850) (Oxford, 1958), pp. 665-6.

³ For an adaptation, to another field of inquiry, of the theory behind this process, see M. Oakshott's essay 'The Study of Politics in a University', in his *Rationalism in Politics* (1962). See also G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (1962), pp. 263-4.

⁴ Parliamentary Papers 1864, xx, 395.

⁵ See A. E. Musson and Eric Robinson, *Science and Technology in the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester 1969), especially chs. I-IV.

against it set in; the academies declined; the hold of the classics was strengthened; and by the 1860's the advocates of change were having to "awaken interest in scientific education as if it never existed before".¹

A corollary of this failure of science to establish itself in education was a sharpening of the distinction between "pure" and "applied" science. The abstract study of the nature of the things—science—had been much pursued by the cultivated amateur; but the making of things, albeit with the assistance of new methods of inquiry, remained manual labour and thus to be comprehended within the proper tasks not of the gentleman but of what came to be called the "practical man". So there evolved and sharpened in the course of the nineteenth century two parallel distinctions: between pure and applied science; and between the "educated amateur" and the "practical man". Both are social phenomena, both have continued until very recent times and perhaps are only now disappearing. In industry the cult of the practical man has been the essential obverse of the cult of the amateur. They were complementary; and they both owed much to two historical influences: to the embodiment in English education of the idea of the gentleman; and to the social nature of the English industrial revolution.

Neither the improvements in the educational standards of the English nobility and gentry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries² nor their increasing involvement in urban and courtly life removed from the concept and practice of gentility its original associations with military prowess and rural life. Certainly the stamp of gentility came to be given to many persons wholly unconnected with matters military or rural. But this élite very rarely included amongst its members those who were to become the pioneers of industrialism.³ The prosperous merchants of eighteenth-century Leeds, for example, who had already achieved gentlemanly status, were not lured by the promise of profits into new and socially dubious adventures in manufacturing.⁴ It was, on the other hand, precisely from the ranks of "practical men" that these entrepreneurs were drawn. They came, in the main, neither from the gentry nor from the bottom of society. They were "not typically very poor men who struggled to greater affluence through their creative efforts".⁵ They came instead from what might be termed the middle order of Players, those just on the other side of the line: yeomen, traders, skilled artisans; from the "respectable farming family" which spawned the ironmaster Richard Crawshay; from the linen-draper father of the great flax-spinner, John Marshall; or from amongst the successful London silver-smiths who were the ancestors to the future textile Courtaulds.⁶ This middle stratum had its existence not simply in an urban business world, but also in that rural and military world with which the concept of gentility was so closely

¹ N. Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (1951), p. 210.

² See L. Stone, 'The Educational Revolution in England, 1540-1640', *Past and Present*, 38 (1964).

³ The practice of primogeniture amongst the upper class may well have contributed to a flow of younger sons into commerce but, before the nineteenth century at least, it was probably only their sons in turn who would produce some recruits into manufacturing industry.

⁴ R. G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants. The Merchant Community in Leeds, 1700-1830* (Manchester, 1971), pp. 121-34.

⁵ Everett E. Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (1964), p. 301.

⁶ J. P. Addis, *The Crawshay Dynasty* (Cardiff, 1957), p. 4; W. G. Rimmer, *Marshall's of Leeds, Flax-Spinners, 1788-1886* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 13; Coleman, op. cit. I, 3-8. In general, see the list in Hagen, op. cit. pp. 303-9.

associated. Just as non-commissioned officers carried out practical work which it was not deemed appropriate for the officer and gentleman to do, so did the steward, bailiff, or tenant farmer see to those practical matters of farming or agrarian improvement in which landowning gentlemen might take an active interest but did not physically execute. The "practical man" was the essential concomitant of the gentleman. But he remained a Player.¹

As the industrial revolution went its successful way, so did the "practical man" come into his own. Respect for practical achievement mounted; the acknowledged virtue of the "practical man" grew greater. The leadership role exercised by the Gentlemen in the countryside was now assumed in industry by the Players. But it was also universally seen and acknowledged that the ultimate goal of the "practical man", the Player, was still to cross the social divide and become a Gentleman. As industry consolidated its success and emerged as a recognized possible route to this ancient goal, so did further social developments follow. New occupational patterns were extruded: the industrial "practical men" were to be found amongst, for example, the ranks of mill and factory managers; in general, amongst the layer which, in time, was to stretch downwards to top foremen but upwards to stop short of the board room. Partners and directors, if rich enough, could become gentlemen; gentlemen might decently become directors. The "practical men" continued to look after practical, technological matters; they continued to be seen as needing training but not education. They remained Players. Promotion from the ranks was always possible. So the layers of "practical men" came to constitute a reservoir from which might be drawn directors and thus, eventually, Gentlemen. The partnership, in English manufacturing business, of the "educated amateur" and "practical man" had been formed, in concept and in deed.

The "mystique of practical experience", to use Prof. Landes's words,² grew apace in the course of the nineteenth century. When contemplating the quality of much of the early entrepreneurial achievement, the unusual must not be allowed to dazzle us too much: not every pioneer industrialist possessed Wedgwood's remarkable combination of commercial and organizational skills;³ there was a great intellectual gulf between the world of Watt and Black⁴ and that of a host of small, imitative factory masters; in the textile industry, as Prof. Wilson has observed, "the new machinery . . . involved no principles that an intelligent merchant could not grasp."⁵ Moreover, those practical Players from whom so many of the early entrepreneurs had been drawn, as had so many businessmen of earlier centuries, were peculiarly those who grasped the practical problems which they had to solve as well as, if not better than, the principles. They saw the industrial revolution as a triumph of practice rather than principles,

¹ One especial usefulness of "practical men" was evident in the early days of the *Gentlemen v. Players* matches. Players, those who received payment and who had originally been drawn from amongst "men engaged in rustic occupations", were lent to the Gentlemen in order to equalize the strength of the sides.—Sir Pelham Warner, *Gentlemen v. Players, 1806-1949* (1950), pp. 13-14. I am grateful to Malcolm Falkus for this reference.

² *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vi, pt 1, 572.

³ See various articles by Neil McKendrick, notably *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xii (1960) and xxiii (1970).

⁴ See E. Robinson and D. McKie, eds. *Partners in Science. The Letters of James Watt and Joseph Black* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970).

⁵ Singer and others, eds. *History of Technology*, v, 799.

of applied technology rather than scientific theory. It was the trumpeting of Smiles or Ure rather than the analysis of Babbage, which sounded the popular, and influential, response. Sir William Fairbairn's view in 1861 of the pioneer civil engineer of the industrial revolution gives a remarkable picture of the ideal of the "practical man":

The millwright of former days was to a great extent the sole representative of mechanical art . . . he was an itinerant engineer and mechanic of high reputation. He could handle the axe, the hammer, and the plane with equal skill and precision; he could turn, bore, or forge with the ease and despatch of one brought up to these trades, and he could set out and cut in furrows of a millstone with an accuracy equal to or superior to that of the miller himself. Generally, he was a fair arithmetician, knew something of geometry, levelling and mensuration, and in some cases possessed a very competent knowledge of practical mathematics. He could . . . draw in plan and section . . . construct buildings, conduits, or water courses . . . build bridges, cut canals . . .¹

No doubt many fell short of such an ideal. But how vastly remote from the paradigm of the gentleman, his upbringing, and his doings! Indeed, the two concepts exhibit clearly the contrasting contemporary views of these two elements, present in English society, and, in time, to come together in the organization and direction of industry.

It was one of the essential characteristics of the entrepreneurs of the industrial revolution period that few of them perceived the longer-term implications of what was happening. Naturally, there were exceptions in whom a vision of the continuous application of science to industry transcended the monetary and social ambitions of most of the new businessmen. But the majority probably saw innovation as a once-and-for-all event rather than the beginning of an era in which invention and innovation were to be built into the whole process of business life. They saw it, in short, as "practical men". And when in time they had made good and they or their successors and equivalents were faced with the challenge of competition in the post-1860 world they paraded the empirical virtues they knew. Here is John Whigham Richardson in 1911 inveighing against the improved technical education which many contemporaries saw as suitable for those who were not destined for the gentlemanly education:

technical education can surely only mean the teaching of an art . . . I can conceive of no better school than the workshop. You have there the experience and skill of the best artisans . . . you are in the very atmosphere of your 'craft . . . you are learning by doing . . .²

When combined with invincible ignorance and the more fatuous sort of patriotism, the "practical man's philosophy" achieved a rich idiocy. Here is one of the Players batting, for Lancashire, also in 1911:

My lad, never again let anybody in Lancashire hear you talk this childish stuff about foreign competition. It's right enough for Londoners and such like, but it puts a born Lancashire man to shame as an ignoramus. It's just twaddle. In the first place, we've got the only climate in the world where cotton piece goods in

¹ W. Fairbairn, *Treatise on Mills and Machines* (1861), Preface, p. v.

² Quoted in W. H. B. Court, *British Economic History, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 171-2.

any quantity can ever be produced. In the second place, no foreign johnnies can ever be bred that can spin and weave like Lancashire lasses and lads. In the third place, there are more spindles in Oldham than in the rest of the world put together. And last of all, if they had the climate and the men and the spindles—which they never can have—foreigners could never find the brains Lancashire cotton men have for the job. We've been making all the world's cotton cloth that matters for more years than I can tell, and we always shall.¹

V

Although the flow of industrialists' sons to the Public Schools started early in the industrial revolution, it was not until after the mid-nineteenth century that the flow became a flood. Moreover, it was normally not the first generation of sons who were thus dispatched to learn the gentlemanly arts, but the second, i.e. the grandsons or grand-nephews, as the whole family moved up the scale of wealth and status. One of the most striking examples of this lag is provided by the educational pattern of Matthew Boulton and his sons.² The father attended an academy near Birmingham but his education apparently included little formal instruction in sciences. He took considerable pains about his son's education, as did his partner James Watt, both men trying to ensure that those who were to succeed them in the business should be well-grounded not only in the "liberal arts" but also in mathematics, science, engineering, and foreign languages. Matthew Boulton, junior, did not go to a Public School. But, before he died, in 1842, he had sent his son to Eton. The urge to gentility and improved social status had been present in the father and in the sons. As Dr Robinson has observed, James Watt, though confessing himself a self-made man, was proud of his status as a "gentleman" which his genius had obtained for him; and his partner exhibited the familiar English class-worry that his son might acquire the wrong sort of accent, in this case that of Birmingham, described by the boy's schoolmaster as "a vicious pronunciation and vulgar dialect".³

The pattern is familiar elsewhere. Thus although Sir Richard Arkwright became a landed grandee in his own lifetime, it was the progeny of his only son, also Richard, who went to Eton or Harrow, followed by Christchurch or Trinity, Cambridge, thence to set up branches of the new landed gentry family.⁴ John Marshall's eldest son was educated by a private tutor and then sent to the Inns of Court; the younger sons went into the family business at an early age. But their children, from the 1840's, went to Arnold's Rugby and Trinity, Cambridge, to Harrow or Cheltenham.⁵ The Dissenting strain sometimes lasted out longer against the allurements of gentility. The Unitarian Kenricks, successful but less wealthy than the Marshalls or Arkwrights, persisted with Dissenting schools

¹ A reminiscence of a Lancashire cotton manufacturer's retort in 1911 to a comment on the growth of Japanese cotton spinning capacity, in B. Bowker, *Lancashire under the Hammer* (1928), p. 22, quoted Court, op. cit. p. 123. Meanwhile, as Bowker himself commented (p. 23), "Lancashire was sending out public-school man after public-school man to keep up British prestige, to refuse to learn Chinese for fear of losing caste, and to wait for trade to come to him."

² Most interestingly described by Dr Robinson in Musson and Robinson, op. cit. pp. 200-15.

³ Ibid. p. 201.

⁴ E. L. Jones, 'Industrial Capital and Landed Investment: the Arkwrights in Herefordshire, 1801-43', in E. L. Jones and G. E. Mingay, eds. *Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution* (1967), pp. 33-4.

⁵ Rimmer, op. cit. pp. 114-15, 225.

and the new London University until the third generation. So it was not until the 1880's that Kenricks began to go to Rugby and Balliol to read classics.¹ Similarly in the Unitarian Courtauld family, though richer than Kenricks, two generations went to Dissenting schools before, in the 1880's and thereafter, Rugby and Cambridge began to be the chosen venues.² The paper-maker, William Balston, married late in life, in 1806, and promptly fathered a large family. The eldest son had to go straight from the local school up to the mill. But the rest went in turn to Tonbridge, Rugby (2), Eton, and Westminster, all followed by Oxford or Cambridge.³ When Balston sent his third son to Eton in 1829 he dispatched the boy with an accompanying remark which adequately sums up much of the whole process: "Always remember, Edward, that you are not a gentleman." It is one of the nicer ironies that in 1862 the Headmastership of Eton passed to Edward Balston.⁴

Once Arnold had done his work at Rugby, between 1828 and 1842, and the reforms demanded by the Clarendon Commission in 1864 had been put in hand, the way was open for the dissemination of the idea of the gentlemanly education. The recommendations of the Taunton Commission of 1868 helped to push a number of grammar and proprietary boarding schools into the Public School world. The Public Schools multiplied; and more and more of those who were to lead British business in the first half of the twentieth century went through their character-forming procedures. Despite the attractions of the professions, an increasing percentage of school leavers went direct into business: 6 per cent from Marlborough in 1846 but 23 per cent in 1906; 6 per cent from Merchant Taylors in 1851 but 42 per cent in 1891; 9 per cent from Clifton in 1867 but 25 per cent in 1907; even Winchester sent 12 per cent of its leavers straight into business in 1893.⁵

Meanwhile, however, the attacks on the schools and ancient universities for their neglect of science increased in intensity and included formidable indictments by such men as Lyon Playfair or T. H. Huxley who stressed the importance of science to business. Huxley, for instance, told the Samuelson Committee of 1867: "If I intended my own son for any branch of manufacture, I should not dream of sending him to the university."⁶ Those who were prosperously engaged in business had to decide: should they send their sons to Public School and ancient university, to gain the gentlemanly education and the habits of confident social superiority, and thus to give them a good start in a stratified society; or should they attend to the dictates of their own experience or conscience which, in some cases at least, told them a different tale? Prof. Checkland has recently shown how, earlier in the century, the successful merchant and businessman, John Gladstone, "frequently and poignantly", as he said, aware of the inadequacy of his own education, determined that Eton was the place for his elder sons. Although he had to wrestle with his strict Evangelical conscience, because of the "very awful state of the Church" at Eton, the urge for the family's social

¹ R. A. Church, *Kenricks in Hardware* (Newton Abbot, 1969), pp. 80-1, 144.

² Coleman, op. cit. I, 207-9; II, 210.

³ T. Balston, *William Balston, Papermaker, 1759-1849* (1955), pp. 131, 133-5, 141.

⁴ D. C. Coleman, *The British Paper Industry, 1496-1860* (Oxford, 1958), p. 245.

⁵ W. J. Reader, *Professional Men* (1966), pp. 212-14.

⁶ Singer and others, eds. *History of Technology*, v, 790.

advancement and his hopes for political careers for his sons triumphed. But when it came to the education of another son, intended for the business life, it was soon decided that Eton should be replaced by Glasgow.¹ Later equivalents to John Gladstone, though less troubled by religious laxity at the reformed Public Schools, found themselves in a similar situation. The recollections of S. R. Lysaght, of the steel-making family of that name, as set out in an autobiographical novel of 1925, go back to the 1870's. His fledgling steelmaster is made to begin his business career without taking a degree and is told by his employer that that would be "of no commercial use" and that "university life was too easy and pleasant."² The sentiment was precisely matched in real life by the Courtaulds. Concerned about the education of one of his sons, the second George Courtauld, with over thirty years of business life behind him, remarked in a letter to his brother Samuel, in 1856:

I have had some little experience now; and my feeling is very strongly that, for the great majority of young men in our position in life, a college course is not fit preparation for a business life.³

A year later, when discussing the education of another of George's sons, Sam Courtauld, himself the main entrepreneur of the family, expressed regrets about his own education which nicely echoed those of John Gladstone, thirty years earlier, and posed a familiar dilemma:

I, through all my life, have so painfully felt the want of scholarship that I may perhaps over-estimate its importance.

His prescription for a nephew who was expected ultimately to go into the family business was:

to let Sydney at 17 go for his degree. He ought, I fancy, to be able to gain this starting-point in an Englishman's life . . . at the London University, if not at Cambridge . . . And as between Cambridge and London, my feeling is that the atmosphere of . . . London would be more favourable . . .⁴

But this was still a generation brought up in the original Unitarianism. The cry for a "liberal education" for the sons of businessmen was mounting. In 1867, as an Oxford don observed:

At present wealthy manufacturers and merchants are much disposed to send their sons to the best liberal schools, though not to the Universities, if they are intended for trade. But if liberal schools will not teach modern subjects, and if the Universities will not fully recognise their importance, there is a risk in such quarters as these of losing liberal education altogether.⁵

The risk and the danger were averted: a little reform and a little science, and social ambition did the rest. Despite some modifications, their curricula remained

¹ S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones. A Family Biography, 1764-1851* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 129-37.

² S. R. Lysaght, *My Tower in Desmond*, quoted in C. Erickson, *British Industrialists. Steel and Hosiery, 1850-1950* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 35.

³ [S. A. Courtauld, ed.] *Courtauld Family Letters, 1782-1900* (Cambridge, 1916), VII, 3785.

⁴ Ibid. VII, 3834-7.

⁵ C. S. Parker, 'On the History of Classical Education' in F. W. Farrar, ed. *Essays on a Liberal Education* (1867), p. 78.

heavily weighted towards the classics. The whole tenor of their thinking utterly rejected what John Gladstone's most famous son, William Ewart Gladstone, after Eton and Christchurch had left their mark upon him, was to call the "low utilitarian argument in matter of education for giving it what is termed a practical direction".¹

The reforming ideal, flourishing between the years 1870 and 1914, got some science; the preserving ideal—by now a nice amalgam of the institutionalized gentlemen of the sixteenth century, of Newman, Arnold, the Clarendon Commission, and compulsory games—ensured a measure of continuity with the past. Only Edwardian England could have nurtured so bizarre a phenomenon as Henry Newbolt's Public School poetry. Here the ancient themes of chivalry, military prowess, and a code of honour have been transmuted into a world in which cricket, moral virtue, and patriotism are identical. In the 1920's and '30's, despite debate and criticism and change, many of the essential educational ingredients remained. The Public Schools were not "moved to give a practical education of direct usefulness to business men".²

In 1951, a sample inquiry showed that approximately 58 per cent of the directors of the larger public companies in Britain had been at Public Schools.³ The average age of the directors in the inquiry was about fifty-five, though 62 per cent were aged fifty and over.⁴ No correlation between age and attendance at Public School was given, but it seems at least probable that a substantial proportion of the directors had been at an English Public School before the First World War or during it. The directors in the sample were asked to give their fathers' occupations. Of those directors whose fathers were described as "gentleman or landowner", 90 per cent went to Public Schools; so did 81 per cent of those whose fathers were also directors.⁵

This linkage of class, education, and business leadership—at least among the bigger companies—was a phenomenon which grew in strength during the years from the 1860's through to the 1940's.⁶ In the 1920's and '30's the top posts in business—as, more noticeably, in the Civil Service, Church, Government, and the Forces—tended to be filled by members of an extended club. The essential qualification for membership was a certain sort of education—though there were, of course, honorary members. During the industrial revolution period there had been a partially analogous pattern in the new business world of that time, as many of the Nonconformist pioneers consistently recruited their business partners from other Quaker or Unitarian families. It, too, had been a club of sorts; it lost its unique qualities in the historical scramble for social position. By the end of the nineteenth century, the vigorous social climbing of the earlier period had probably slowed down; a big business plutocracy emerged.⁷ Dr Erickson's inquiry into the leaders of the British steel industry shows a steady increase in those

¹ P.P. 1864, xx, 394, quoted Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education* (1960), p. 307.

² See Edward C. Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion since 1860* (New York, 1941), pp. 112 ff. and passim; also Kitson Clark, *op. cit.* pp. 267–74.

³ G. H. Copeman, *Leaders of British Industry* (1955), p. 101. The companies sampled were those with net assets of £1 million and over in 1950.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 106. ⁵ *Ibid.* p. 127.

⁶ For some evidence on this see P. Sargant Florence, *op. cit.* pp. 206–7, 303, 329–33.

⁷ Perkin, *op. cit.* pp. 425–37.

educated at Public Schools: for those in office in 1865 only 10 per cent had been at Public Schools; for the period 1875-95, it rises to 16 per cent; and then sharply to 31 per cent for 1905-25 and 33 per cent for 1935-47.¹ Likewise, during these same years of gain for the Public Schools, Oxford and Cambridge drew ahead of other universities as the favoured venues for the minority of those leaders who had been to universities: in 1865, 4 per cent had been to Oxford or Cambridge, 9 per cent to other universities; in 1953-47 21 per cent had been to Oxford or Cambridge, 10 per cent to other universities. And most who had been to the ancient universities had read arts subjects, not science. Her inquiry into the Nottingham hosiery industry showed by contrast that only a few Nottingham hosiers "received the education of the *élite*".² The leaders of this much smaller-scale industry, with its firms operating in a competitive, provincial environment, never achieved the social wealth and social status of the steel-makers. It seems likely indeed that, during the years, the larger the business the more likely would it be that its leaders had attended Public Schools or the ancient universities.

Analysis of the educational origins of Courtaulds directors as the firm grew through the First World War and into the 1930's reveals a picture very similar to that of Dr Erickson's inquiries into the steel industry:

	Ord. & Pref. Capital	Number of Directors	Directors of Courtaulds Ltd		At Oxford or Cambridge	At other University
			Directors at Public Schools			
			number	per cent		
1914	£2m.	6	3	50	2	1
1927	£20m.	10	6	60	3	1
1938	£32m.	17	14	82	6	1

By 1938 the average age of the Board was fifty; 56 per cent of all the directors were fifty years of age and over; all but one of those who had attended Public Schools had been at school before or during the First World War.³ And in 1952, after another World War had intervened, it was one of those directors, Sir John Hanbury-Williams, who made the observation, quoted above, praising the "Gentleman's Club atmosphere" and seeing it as part of the goodwill of the company.⁴

VI

To return to the questions posed earlier in this article. What *may* have followed from this long-enduring concern by English businessmen to push themselves and their families across the social divide, and from the powerful role played by an especial pattern of education in furthering this ambition?

It is of course possible that nothing at all flowed from these developments. To argue thus must imply certain assumptions. First, it could rest on a contention that the findings marshalled here were so unrepresentative of the English business community as a whole, or even of the leading parts of it, that they were not worth considering. This point can perhaps be settled by further empirical inquiry in business history. For the present, however, I shall assume that such historical evidence as we have is enough to warrant belief in its representative

¹ Erickson, op. cit. pp. 33-5.

² Ibid. p. 115.

³ Courtaulds archives.

⁴ Above pp. 100-1.

character, at least in the larger units of English business. Second, it could presuppose that all that has been claimed for a Public School education as a device for shaping character in a particular way, be it for good or bad, by supporters or detractors, was wrong; in short, that it did not work. This supposition seems improbable: improbable because of the very nature of the upbringing, because of the specific purposes for which it was designed, and because of its long historical association with gentlemanly status. It was a type of education peculiar to England (though occasionally copied elsewhere because recognized as distinctive); it aimed to create men with a specific outlook and approach to life. Are we to believe in its persistent failure, despite the very success signalled by the contemporary recognition of such men and such attitudes in 1950 as in 1850? Obviously it did not always succeed; obviously there were many who did not conform to type. But we can consider its likely influence only in general terms.

A third assumption which might be used to provide a basis for dismissing the case poses much more difficult problems. What if all the effects of the gentlemanly education, however real in some aspects of life, had virtually no effect upon the process of making business decisions? In brief, would business decisions, though not necessarily all other decisions, have been the same whatever the upbringing of those making them? This possibility has the merit of focusing attention upon the question of the channels by which it is supposed that such influences made themselves felt. Patently it is not enough simply to show that the educational processes in question embodied a powerful admiration for the idea of the gentleman; to note that the values thereby inculcated seemed to be incompatible with those inherent in business success. To do this in no way demonstrates any positive, causal relationship with the quite different phenomenon alleged to exist at the time and called "entrepreneurial failure". Just such a causal relationship between Public Schools and industry has, however, been assumed to exist. Of British entrepreneurs, and especially those in the older industries, Mr David Ward has stated categorically that "one reason for their failure in the late nineteenth century lay in the growth of the public schools."¹ Having marshalled the evidence about their values he concluded that they "facilitated the transmission of the culture of the landed and gentry classes to the industrial classes". This produced a "haemorrhage of talent" which helps to "explain the poor performance of these [traditional] industries".² But the notion of "entrepreneurial failure" is notably imprecise; it cannot simply mean "poor performance". Moreover in the sense of successful English businessmen retiring to the land and ensuring that their sons acquired "the culture of the landed and gentry classes" a "haemorrhage of talent" had been going on for such a long time that it begins almost to look like a candidate for explaining not the failure of English business after 1870 but its *success* before 1870 and well before that.

Indeed, a plausible hypothesis can be set up on these lines. It would argue that because manufacturing business was not seen as an occupation fit for gentlemen and because successful businessmen regularly withdraw their children from the

¹ David Ward, 'The Public Schools and Industry in Britain after 1870', *Journal of Contemporary History*, II, (July 1967), 38.

² *Ibid.* 52.

business world by sending them through the gentlemanly educational process, the field was continually being cleared for a succession of thrusting, ambitious Players. Some part of their very driving power, it might be argued, came not simply from social envy but from a sense of deprivation: deprivation socially, educationally, in some cases politically and in matters of religious worship. If, to take two of the examples quoted earlier, John Gladstone and Samuel Courtauld had in fact enjoyed the education the lack of which they lamented in later life, they would probably not have become businessmen but would simply have joined other gentlemen in the scramble for office, political power, professional activity, landownership, or whatever was considered meet for their social status. If successful businessmen, before and during the industrial revolution, had not been so anxious to attain a life of rural gentility might there not have ensued a much more rigid, inflexible, and unadventurous course of business enterprise than in fact there was? Might, indeed, the industrial revolution not have occurred when and where it did?

The pursuit of such hypotheses is not the concern of this article. But they may serve to demonstrate how close we are, in thus attempting to examine the relationship between business action and attitudes of mind engendered by a socially orientated educational process, to another intellectual location. This is one which is very familiar to economic historians. The location is that in which some scholars have carefully nurtured two other concepts thought to be causally related: Protestantism and Capitalism. That debate has surely gone on long enough to demonstrate the inadequacy of simply invoking the nature of certain Protestant doctrines, of parading a multitude of sermons. Those unwilling to go all the way with Kurt Samuelson¹ and deny any correlation have recourse to a variety of more complicated transmission mechanisms, ranging from class conflict to toilet training. So it is with the present discussion. If the contention that business decisions might, after all, have been just the same without the Public Schools is to be rebutted, we have to consider rather more complex patterns of transmission than one-to-one relationships between values and actions. The difficulty of the supposed one-to-one relationship can be seen in the many men who, having been through the gentlemanly mill, showed no lack of ability in areas of business life removed from manufacturing industry. Banking can hardly be successfully run without a good eye for profit; and English merchant banking, with its especial mix of finance and diplomacy, was, until only very recent times, almost a preserve of the older Public Schools; it was also very successful. So were many other financial activities of the City of London, so much so that they often sustained the British balance of payments when the balance of commodity-trade was in the red. Are we to suppose that bill-brokers and stockbrokers, Lloyd's underwriters, and bullion dealers all achieved their profits because they were free from the damaging intrusions of those who had been to Public Schools? So if in manufacturing industry there is a stronger case for suggesting an influence upon economic performance, it cannot be made to rest simply on the transmission of certain ideals supposedly incompatible with successful profit-making.

It is also necessary, on the other side of the equation, to refine the crude notion of "entrepreneurial failure". The joys of defining "entrepreneurial" could fill a

¹ K. Samuelson, *Religion and Economic Action* (1961), especially pp. 150-4.

whole volume. For the moment, however, here are three broad categories of entrepreneurial action:

- (1) The exploitation of innovations, technical and/or organizational, by the setting up of new businesses.
- (2) The exploitation of innovations, technical and/or organizational, within existing businesses.
- (3) The continuous adaptation of the technical and/or organizational structure of an existing business to small changes in the market both for factors and for final products.

The first two categories comprehend the familiar examples which come easily to mind, from Arkwright to Ford, from Bessemer converters to Marks & Spencers shops. But to leave it at that is tacitly to assume that entrepreneurship is confined to the big, spectacular, and comparatively infrequent. But much activity with an equal right to be called entrepreneurial is carried on in short- or medium-term situations, doing what is defined in the third category. That process of adaptation is not simply managerial; it is one of the essential entrepreneurial functions of a board of directors, often in practice dominated by one man who is the modern equivalent, within the joint-stock company, of the "classical" entrepreneur of the history books. Even in category (1) the innovation exploited may be quite a small matter of organization, either in production or in selling, in a small firm; but if it leads to higher productivity and profits than in existing larger firms in the same industry, then the small firms' subsequent growth in size and prosperity is a reflection of entrepreneurial ability.

After this digression it is possible to return to the questions posed earlier. They can now be reformulated. Is it possible that certain sorts of entrepreneurial activity were adversely affected by the gentlemanly ethos and the Public School education, and if so through what channels?

It seems at least a reasonable hypothesis that these educational patterns and social attitudes helped to perpetuate, well into this century, and longer than they might otherwise have continued, the twin cults of the "educated amateur" and the "practical man". Any consideration of the possible effects of the one implies examination of the other: they were, so to speak, in joint supply. Entrepreneurial activity in the first of my categories, i.e. the exploitation of innovations by the launching of new businesses, in manufacturing industry, had long been peculiarly a preserve of those who, in the shorthand of this article, I have called Players. So if we are to suggest that the gentlemanly ethos and the growing numbers of Public Schools later affected entrepreneurial activity, by directing talents elsewhere, then it is likely that their influence would have made itself felt by strengthening and continuing the repulsion which gentlemen had long felt for activities in category (1). Probably this did in fact occur; for the statistics quoted earlier suggest that the smaller and newer the company the less likely was it to have Public School men on its board. Therefore the task of innovation in manufacturing industry was still mainly left to the "practical men". It is important to stress, however, that this does not *in itself* tell one anything about "entrepreneurial failure". For, as suggested earlier, a plausible case can be made out for arguing that, in the English social structure before about 1870, the ranks of those deprived of certain social and educational advantages, yet imbued with ability and ambi-

tion, provided a full reservoir from which successful businessmen were continually drawn, much to the country's economic advantage. Can it be said for the later period, and relative to industry's needs, either that those ranks suffered depletion or that the quality of those coming forward was lowered? It is a topic worth investigating; and the relation between business recruitment and the ordinary grammar and secondary schools needs to be a part of the inquiry. The standard answer is to point to the poverty of technical education and the inappropriateness of Public School education; but this is clearly inadequate. Yet it is also possible that the perpetuation of the duality, in education and social attitudes, may have had an adverse effect on entrepreneurial recruitment.

In my second and third categories of entrepreneurial action, where evidently more Public School men were to be found as companies grew bigger, the joint supply of "educated amateurs" and "practical men" is still in evidence. For both sorts sat on boards of directors. The Players had owed their ascent either to successful activity in category (1) or to recruitment from the ranks. But once they had been merged at the top with those whose route thence had been different, individual responsibilities for business decisions were likewise merged. The historian is faced with a real problem of identification; and usually only access to documents far more revealing than board minutes will offer any answers. Certainly there is no reason whatever to suppose that the distinction between "thrusters" and "sleepers", detected in one recent survey of British management,¹ was in any way historically coincident with that other boundary line between "educated amateurs" and "practical men". Suffice it to suggest that if, during the period 1870-1950, there was "entrepreneurial failure" in categories (2) and (3) and if the influences here considered helped to bring it about, then the most likely channel of transmission seems to have consisted of two mutually reinforcing tendencies inherent in the joint "educated amateur-practical man" situation.

The first of these was the creation, or at least the strengthening, of a certain hostility towards innovation. It is important not to exaggerate the extent of this; and still more to note that it was not a unique product of the regard for the social *status quo* inherent in a traditionalist education. In Courtaulds in the 1930's for example, it was the "practical men", at board and managerial level, who were both the most stubborn opponents of new ideas and scientific research and the least willing to recognize trades unions or the need for change in the face of labour unrest.² It was the Public School- or university-educated leaders who showed initiative in bringing in scientists or in making organizational changes which the practical men opposed. At its worst, however, the combination could and did perpetuate inertia in business because both parties to it had a built-in distrust not simply of "science", but of any theoretically based knowledge. Economics, management techniques, industrial psychology: all were frequently looked upon with grave suspicion, for they represented attempts to professionalize an activity long carried on jointly by "practical men" and gentlemanly amateurs.

The second of the mutually reinforcing tendencies which may have constituted a possible route of influence depends in part upon a question of age. The average

¹ Political and Economic Planning, *Attitudes in British Management* (Harmondsworth, 1966).

² Coleman, *Courtaulds*, II, 222-43, 437-49, and *passim*.

age of directors in the samples quoted earlier was fifty to fifty-five; those who had reached the boards of big companies by the route of success as Players in smaller companies were unlikely to have been younger and more likely to have been significantly older.¹ In the social context discussed earlier they were therefore more likely to have been interested in the immediate gratification of social ambitions, in the playing out of certain social roles, than in direct profit maximization or innovational activity. What of the Gentlemen who sat with them around the board-room table? If at this stage we introduce the possibility of that direct connexion between educational influences and business decisions, then we *may* suppose that the long historical exposure to the gentlemanly concept and education produced a tendency somewhat to depreciate the aim of maximizing profits and somewhat to appreciate the aim of securing stability and order. These tendencies were sometimes made manifest in an attitude to business relations which emphasized careful strategical moves and the making of deals and agreements which lessened the intensity of competition. This last feature is complex in origin and in action hard to demonstrate. Obviously, such arrangements were made in other countries by persons whose education had been quite different. Obviously, it was likely in practice to be intertwined with short-term responses to the course of the trade-cycle and, especially, to the troubled and depressed circumstances of the inter-war years in Britain. Yet if it could be separated out from these more immediate influences it could perhaps be shown to have longer roots. It perhaps owed something to the social consciences of the radical dissenters who founded so many of the businesses which survived and prospered in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain; something to the tradition of public service, and to the unwritten roll of things done and not done embedded in the gentlemanly code; and something to both the Christian sense of guilt about money-making and profits, and to the Liberal influences which had borne upon the Public Schools over the years. It added up to a vague but persistent belief that some things were indeed more important than profits. Such a notion had a hard time to survive the influx of the plutocracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; it was frequently extinguished by a crass, jingoistic materialism; it was sometimes sustained simply by the wish to enjoy more leisure in a gentlemanly fashion, to pursue foxes rather than profits. However variously motivated, it seems to have existed. As shown by earlier quotations, it has perplexed American observers. In its ultimate result it is not uniquely English;² in its origins and forms it is. And it can hardly have failed to reinforce the sentiments of elderly Players that their main task in life was now to ensure that they and their heirs should behave like Gentlemen rather than like the successful innovators they had once been. Such a combination may then have acted to ensure a lower level of performance as entrepreneurs in categories (2) and (3) than might have been achieved in the absence of these social and educational constraints.

The counterfactual hypothesis poses questions peculiarly difficult to resolve. The social influences here considered bore historically upon English businessmen

¹ The position in 1938 in Courtaulds was: average age of directors educated at Public Schools, fifty; of those not educated at Public Schools, fifty-six.

² See, for example, the comments on some other European countries' failure to conform to American notions of an entrepreneurial ideal in the 1960's, discussed in Landes, *Unbound Prometheus*, pp. 526-7.

as upon other Englishmen. They bore, either not at all or in different environments or through different mechanisms, upon men in other economies. It seems unlikely that future generations of students will be told of some firm-seeming conclusion that x per cent of the entrepreneurial lag in English manufacturing business during the period 1870-1950 was attributable to y per cent of the entrepreneurs having been educated at Public Schools. Nevertheless, it is well to examine the assumptions which lie behind the too easy judgements which are readily made. Today, continuously told of an urgent need to attain maximum economic efficiency, we are also told that the class-conscious and socially divisive effects of the old Public School education have not been conducive to those ends. Yet we need to pause to ask what, historically, might have been the likely alternatives to the attitudes thus allegedly engendered. Here is a typical judgement:

The public school system, while producing first-class administrators, produced also an educational climate unfavourable to industrial advance. The second and third generations in manufacturing families were not always able or willing to maintain the single-minded drive of their fathers and grandfathers, preferring to devote themselves to public life or to establishing a position in society. Energy which might have gone into real ventures was diverted into more socially acceptable channels.¹

Whatever the truth of these brave words from Sir Alexander Fleck, then chairman of I.C.I., in 1958, they carry the built-in assumption that new business ventures have a value which transcends the maintenance of certain social patterns; that somehow businessmen are failing if they behave as other men; that "public life" or "a position in society" are, *ipso facto*, inferior goods. But how, historically, were the successful businessmen of Victorian or Edwardian England suddenly to learn to renounce the long traditions by which their predecessors had abandoned their counting houses and climbed into the gentry? And if, by some unlikely magic, they had turned themselves into single-minded, constantly profit-maximizing entrepreneurs, what sort of world might have resulted? If it is true that one of the costs of the Public Schools producing "first-class administrators" was some lag in industrial advance, how can we know that the price was not worth paying?

To pose these questions is neither to defend nor to attack the Public School system but rather to insist that if one condemns it as having been historically inimical to business efficiency, one must also take heed of the external costs, social as well as economic, of any historically likely alternative. Furthermore, as this article has tried to emphasize, just as it is important not to ignore the long historical roots of the class-based gentlemanly education designed to shape character and to imbue certain moral ideas so it is also important not to base explanations on supposed one-to-one relationships between educational values and business actions. Today, the leaders of British industry include many men who were not at those schools, so ironically called Public, and, amongst those who

¹ Singer and others, eds. *History of Technology*, v. 821. These sentiments echoed those of Prof. Sargent Florence's work of 1953: "This pervasive gentleman-ideal . . . is not a favourable climate for the provision of efficient business leadership" (op. cit. p. 330); and "while England has perhaps the ablest lawyers and civil servants in the world, her businessmen are on the average of lower attainments and keenness than their opposite numbers in the United States" (op. cit. p. 332).

were, many whose educative years were passed in the shadow of the depression, the dictators, and the Second World War. Many of the Public Schools themselves are changing; university expansion has altered the special position of Oxford and Cambridge. Even in the 1930's, the sentiments of Newbolt's Public School poems were good for a laugh; today they are the sober evidence of history. The end of the Gentlemen *v.* Players cricket matches in 1962 was perhaps symbolic. The joint cult of the "educated amateur" and the "practical man", of Gentlemen and Players, may perhaps at last be dying, as professionalism advances in business. "The change-over to modern professional management", it is claimed, "is a crucial phase in the development of a firm."¹ We need to ask the question: what will be the social cost, as well as the economic benefit, of that? In learning to ask, and in seeking to answer, such questions we are likely to be helped by a more careful understanding of the social and economic history of that curious but unloved species: the English businessman.

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¹ *Attitudes in British Management*, p. 61.