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## Imagining corporate culture: the industrial paternalism of William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight, 1888-1925

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IMAGINING CORPORATE CULTURE: THE INDUSTRIAL  
PATERNALISM OF WILLIAM HESKETH LEVER AT  
PORT SUNLIGHT, 1888-1925

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
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by

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## **Abstract**

At Lever Brothers soap company in Port Sunlight, U.K., William Lever, between 1888-1925, instituted employee benefits that preceded the welfare state. Yet, in addition to providing tangible benefits for the employees (including free medical care, pensions, an employee profit-sharing scheme), Lever also created a strong corporate identity for his employees by cultivating a strong company and personal image, one constructed in response to national discourses surrounding industrialization, empire, national identity, and economic decline. Lever offered his company as a solution to national concerns and thus posited his workers as participants in patriotic efforts and empire-building. He forged an effective company culture by constructing a positive image of himself, his company, and his factory town.

Lever constructed and defended this image through various channels. In public addresses, he carefully constructed his own ethos. In Port Sunlight, architecture was a rhetorical method for constructing and consolidating a company image that looked to an idealized past. Media events, Lever's art collection, advertisements, and company, local, and national publications further promoted the company culture and the employees' roles in it. This carefully constructed image was an important element in the development of an overall corporate culture that helped thrust Lever Brothers (later Unilever) into multinational status. This dissertation shows that analysis of paternalist companies such as

Lever Brothers must be conducted through a wide lens to account for the influence of cultural factors on the company's success as well as to recognize the role of such factors in the successful construction of company identity.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

On November 28th, 1891, William Gladstone paid an official visit to the Lever Brothers factory in Port Sunlight, Cheshire. The great Victorian statesman accepted an invitation by William Lever--the founder and chairman of the company and acknowledged admirer of Gladstone--to formally open Gladstone Hall, a new village building that included a men's dining room and recreation room. At the opening ceremony, Gladstone praised Lever and his new factory by suggesting that Lever had found an answer to some of the social problems caused by modernization.

Gladstone began his speech by quoting Thomas Carlyle on the effects of economic and social "polarization" in modern Britain. "A very powerful writer," said Gladstone,

whose name has become widely known, especially since his death--I mean Mr. Carlyle--in one of those robust and penetrating phrases of which he was a greater master than any other English author of the nineteenth century--said we were approaching a period when cash payment was to be the only nexus, the only link between man and man. In this hall I have found living proof that cash payment is not the only nexus between man and man.<sup>1</sup>

At Port Sunlight, Lever created a model community and became an important voice in the national discourse on what Carlyle referred

<sup>1</sup>Viscount Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 56.

to in his essay on Chartism in 1839 as the "Condition of England Question." This debate was joined by other Victorian intellectuals such as John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold and during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, by businessmen and cultural critics including William Morris, George Cadbury, and Lever.

My study looks at the paternalism of William Hesketh Lever (1851-1925) at Port Sunlight, Cheshire, between 1888-1924, arguing that Lever constructed a positive and effective image of himself and his company that allowed for a vibrant company culture to develop at Lever Brothers. Lever's image was constructed in response to national discourses surrounding industrialization, empire, national identity, and economic decline. Lever constructed and defended his image through public addresses, architectural rhetoric, and by using company, local, and national publications. This sophisticated company culture helped to thrust Lever's company into multinational status.

Lever was born in Bolton, Lancashire, on September 19, 1851. He was the eldest son of James Lever, a successful wholesale and retail grocer, and Eliza Hesketh, the daughter of a cotton-mill manager from Manchester. James Lever was a nonconformist who instilled both William and his brother James Darcy with a strict Calvinist upbringing. William was educated in the Bolton Church Institute school at thirteen. Although the Church Institute was an Anglican operation, James Lever had been impressed with the "high moral character and lovable personality" of the Institute's



headmaster, William Tate Mason, and thus allowed William to attend school there.<sup>2</sup>

In 1867, however, at the age of sixteen, William Lever entered the family grocery business instead of continuing his studies to become a medical doctor, as William's mother had wished. He first worked as an apprentice for a shilling a week, providing menial labor such as sweeping the floors, cutting blocks of refined sugar into cubes, and, significantly, slicing and wrapping the soap (in those days, soap came from the wholesalers in long bars which had to be cut and wrapped for the customer). He then worked in the office as a bookkeeper, and later, learned the sales side of the business by working as a commercial traveler.

Also, importantly, on his sixteenth birthday, Lever was given a copy of *Self-Help* (1859), written by Samuel Smiles (1812-1904), the Scottish writer and social reformer. *Self-Help* was Smiles' most popular work, selling 20,000 copies in its first year, 50,000 after five years, and a quarter of a million copies by the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> Smiles' object in this work was to stimulate the young and impressionable to "apply themselves diligently to right pursuits . . . to rely upon their own efforts in life, rather than to depend upon the help or patronage of others."<sup>4</sup> According to this typically Victorian doctrine of hard work, one did not need genius to succeed, but instead one should always persevere,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. Asa Briggs (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

"evoking his best powers, and carrying him onward in self-culture, self-control, and in growth of knowledge and wisdom."<sup>5</sup> This was the essence of Smiles' message, and his book compiled an impressive list of contemporary examples--such as James Watt, Richard Arkwright, and Robert Peel--showing the success and value of hard work and perseverance. Smiles' book made such an impression on young Lever (this makes sense since one could argue that Smiles' doctrine is nothing more than secularized Calvinism) that he would make a habit of giving a copy to any impressionable young man in whom he was interested. Lever believed that the key to individual success could be extracted from Smiles' treatise. Lever's advice to young men was "to act on the principles taught in Smiles' philosophy. He will go further than his competitor who does not."<sup>6</sup>

Lever became a junior partner in 1872 and received a very high salary of £800 per annum. In that same year, Lever announced his engagement to a longtime childhood friend, Elizabeth Ellen Crompton Hulme, marrying her in 1874. In 1879, Lever expanded his father's grocery business by buying out a failing wholesale grocer in Wigan, and under his personal management turning this into a branch of Lever and Co. of Bolton. With the inclusion of the Wigan branch, by 1884, Lever and Co. was the largest wholesale grocery firm in Lancashire, outside of the two largest cities in the Northwest of England, Liverpool and Manchester.<sup>7</sup> In that same

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> J.P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976), pp. 15-17.

year, Lever decided to expand his horizons by taking the bold step of concentrating his business on one product--soap.<sup>8</sup>

In 1884, Lever decided to concentrate on the soap industry and borrowed £4,000 from his father for starting capital. Lever's brother, James Darcy Lever, joined him in this new enterprise, and hence the new soap company took the name of Lever Brothers.<sup>9</sup> Lever chose and registered the name of "Sunlight" for his new product, choosing the simple and fresh sounding name with its advertising potential in mind. Lever's new soap--which lathered more easily and lasted longer than other brands since it was made mostly with vegetable oils (copra or palm oil) rather than just tallow (animal fat)--was at first made for him by other manufacturers. When the cost of buying this soap rose too sharply, Lever decided it would be more efficient and cheaper to produce his own. In 1885, Lever and his brother leased a small soapworks in Warrington, inherited a first-class soapboiler and staff there, and began making their own Sunlight Soap.<sup>10</sup> Lever was not a chemist and so focused on the managerial end--advertising, sales, personnel, and finance.<sup>11</sup> After the first year at Warrington, Lever Brothers produced only twenty tons of soap per week. By 1886, however, that number had risen to 250 tons per week, and by the end of 1887, the soapworks was producing 450 tons a week at maximum output.<sup>12</sup> By 1887, it was

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<sup>8</sup> Nigel Nicholson, *Lord of the Isles: Lord Leverhulme in the Hebrides* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Although James Darcey was a partner in the firm, William Lever was the chairman, and thus it was his personality that was the central driving force behind the company and the development of the model village.

<sup>10</sup> Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme*, pp. 45-46.

clear that Lever needed to expand, and after unsatisfactory negotiations with the landlord at Warrington, he decided to find land that would enable him to build a new larger soapworks that would also adequately house his work-force.

In March 1888, Lever began to build his new factory and town of Port Sunlight on 50 acres (later 500) of land along the River Mersey, in the county of Cheshire. On March 3rd during the celebration banquet in Liverpool, Lever announced his intention

to build houses in which our work-people will be able to live and be comfortable -- semi-detached houses, with gardens back and front, in which they will be able to know more about the science of life than they can in a back slum, and in which they will learn that there is more enjoyment in life than in the mere going to and returning from work and looking forward to Saturday night to draw their wages.<sup>13</sup>

The manufacture of Sunlight Soap at Port Sunlight began only several months later in January of 1889.<sup>14</sup> Lever Brothers was made a limited company in 1890 with capital of £300,000, and by 1894, the company went public with £1,500,000 in capital. By the turn of the century, Lever Brothers became the leading soapmakers in Britain.<sup>15</sup>

At Port Sunlight, Lever founded a model industrial town as well as constructed a corporate culture there that allowed for the further growth and success of his company. He also instituted

<sup>13</sup> William Lever quoted at the "Port Sunlight Ceremonies of March 3rd, 1888," in E.H. Edwards' *Messrs. Levers' New Soap Works* (Liverpool: Egerton Smith & Co., 1888), pp. 28-29.

<sup>14</sup> Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*, 2 Vols., (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), p. 45.

employee benefits that preceded the establishment of a comprehensive welfare state. Such tangible benefits included free medical and dental care for employees, old-age pensions, free insurance, and an employee profit-sharing (co-partnership) scheme. Moreover, Lever established many sports recreational facilities, such as a community swimming pool; he also set up a free library, a local nondenominational church, and various social clubs ranging from a temperance organization, a Masonic lodge, to a science and literary society.

Lever was well-known as a philanthropist and art collector. Besides his role at Port Sunlight, he was a generous benefactor of the University of Liverpool (giving a hefty endowment to establish a school of tropical medicine), and his hometown of Bolton, which elected him mayor in 1918-1919. In 1913, Lever attracted national publicity by giving Stafford House in London (a building Lever bought from the duke of Sutherland in 1912 and later called Lancaster House) to the nation. Lancaster House was used by the government to house the London Museum collections, which opened to the public in 1914.<sup>16</sup> With business success and philanthropy, Lever was created a baronet in 1911. In 1917, he entered into the peerage by becoming a baron, only to be made a viscount in 1922, taking the official title of Viscount Leverhulme of the Western Isles. Lever took this title to represent his ownership of two islands in the Hebrides, the islands of Lewis and Harris. He purchased the islands in 1917 and 1919 respectively. He hoped to

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<sup>16</sup> Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 252-253.

bring modern industry and housing reform to these rural Scottish islands, but was forced to give them up after he failed to win support from the local crofters. It is interesting to note that Lever succeeded in his experiment of bringing a sense of tradition and community to his factory workers, but failed in the reverse experiment, to modernize traditional villages.<sup>17</sup>

As a gift to the public, Lever also built the Lady Lever Art Gallery at Port Sunlight, naming it in honor of his wife who died in 1913. The building of the museum began in 1914 and was finally completed in 1922. It has a definite "English" bias, with a good collection of English furniture as well as a matchless collection of Wedgwood pottery. There are also some important paintings by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>18</sup>

It was not surprising that a man in Lever's social position might attempt a political career. He fought, and failed to win, the Birkenhead seat for Parliament three times, in 1892, 1894, and 1895. In 1906, however, after a second attempt, Lever became a Liberal Member of Parliament for the Wirral constituency. Nevertheless, Lever's Parliamentary career was brief (he retired in December 1909) and on the whole rather undistinguished. Lever's single contribution to political posterity was the attempt to introduce the Old-Age Pension Bill in 1907. This bill, however, was quickly rejected by the Commons, only to be taken up

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<sup>17</sup> For more on this episode see Nigel Nicholson, *Lord of the Isles: Lord Leverhulme in the Hebrides* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960).

<sup>18</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 153-154.

a few years later and pushed through the Commons by the charismatic David Lloyd George.<sup>19</sup> After his brief experiment as Member of Parliament, Lever once again focused his full attention on his growing business.

By 1909, Lever was determined not to rely on others for raw materials (essentially palm oil), and this move led to the development of subsidiaries of Lever Brothers in the Congo and the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific. By 1924, Lever's company had become a full-fledged multinational, serving a huge world market with 250 associated companies.<sup>20</sup> The company at the time of Lever's death in 1925, could boast an issued capital of about £57,000,000 and was the largest company of household products in the world.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, in 1929, Lever Brothers and its associated companies joined the Dutch Margarine Unie NV (the result of a merger of the Jurgens and Van den Bergh butter and margarine companies based at Oss) to create the huge multinational of Unilever. Unilever was

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-73.

<sup>20</sup> An important study dealing with Unilever's overseas operations is D.K. Fieldhouse's *Unilever Overseas: The Anatomy of a Multinational, 1895-1965*, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978). Fieldhouse discusses Unilever's development as one of the first, if not the first, "multinational" company. He contends that Unilever had a dual purpose for setting up its overseas subsidiaries: production of agricultural commodities for use or sale elsewhere and manufacture for local consumption. At the turn of the century, Lever Brothers operated plantations most notably in the Solomon Islands, the Belgian Congo (Zaire), and in West Africa (Nigeria). In countries in Africa and Asia, Lever/Unilever initially had to build factories and develop markets from scratch; this method would create initial high costs, but large profits were later made since there was limited local competition, verging on a virtual monopoly of the market. This trend continued for Unilever subsidiaries in developing countries until "decolonization," when foreign subsidiaries' activities in the "open" market were circumscribed by governmental management of the economy. Yet, even after 1945 Unilever subsidiaries still made reasonable profits.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *Unilever*, p. 291.

the holding company of more than 500 associated companies worldwide. The company had the same members on both board of directors, at Unilever PLC with its headquarters in London and Unilever NV which was based in Rotterdam. In 1937, Unilever Ltd. employed total capital of £84,296,107, and by 1949, the multinational employed capital of £108,562,229.<sup>22</sup>

Surprisingly, comparatively little has been written about Lever and his company. His two biographers<sup>23</sup> emphasize similar themes. They stress that his early working experience, much like his Calvinist upbringing, helped Lever develop his later ideas of paternalism. They show that in his family life he fully upheld Victorian middle-class society's emphasis on the "separation of spheres," the ideology that held that men should go out into the harsh and competitive world of business and politics, while the more virtuous and "angelic" woman was to provide moral support and run the household.<sup>24</sup> The two biographers also note the influence on Lever of Smiles' *Self-help*.

The most definitive work on Lever and his multinational corporation is still *The History of Unilever*, by Charles Wilson.<sup>25</sup> In this seminal two-volume work published in 1954, Wilson highlights Lever's competitive nature, his pleasure in going to battle with his rivals, who, like himself, were individualists and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Appendix 18a.

<sup>23</sup> Viscount Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927); W.P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> There is an excellent discussion of the idea of the "separation of spheres" in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*, 2 Vols., (London: Cassell & Company, 1954).



entrepreneurs of a liberal age. Wilson uses the history of Unilever to argue that the individual was the most important factor in the development of nineteenth century industry and in general economic growth. First published in 1954, Wilson's history provides his readers with a virulent defense of industrial capitalism at a time of ubiquitous Marxism, especially among British scholars.

This analysis of Lever and his company should be considered as a case study that puts forward the idea that paternalism was still a prominent and important ideology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Historians of the nineteenth century have generally placed too much emphasis on the influence of laissez-faire Liberalism in later Victorian society. Yet, as early as the 1960s, both Harold Perkin and David Roberts showed that in Victorian Britain the tradition and ideology of paternalism were still very much alive.<sup>26</sup> Perkin's still influential *Origins of Modern English Society* made clear that paternalist views developed as a response to the successful promotion by liberal economists (such as David Ricardo) of laissez-faire ideology and as a reaction against what he labeled "the new entrepreneurial ideal."<sup>27</sup> Perkin maintained that although Liberalism dominated the political and economic scene, paternalist thought survived and anticipated the welfare state. Similarly, Roberts insisted that although not a clearly defined and organized

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<sup>26</sup> See Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> Perkin, *Origins*, p. 241.

creed, paternalism still had deep roots in early Victorian Britain, providing an important social outlook for all levels of society, whether landowner, industrialist, novelist, civil servant, or workers and laborers still constrained by habits of deference.<sup>28</sup>

More recent work confirms that Late-Victorians and Edwardians were not as indifferent towards the poor as once charged. An important aristocratic culture permeated Britain in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the traditional aristocratic value of *noblesse oblige*--adapted to an industrial setting--also played an important part in constructing an effective company culture at Lever Brothers. J.C.D. Clark maintains that during the nineteenth century, British society was still largely religious and dominated by the aristocracy and gentry. British society was essentially an "Ancien Regime," where a patriarchal and aristocratic outlook shaped its politics and society until the early twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> Martin Wiener and Correlli Barnett also argue for the continuity of aristocratic culture but use it to explain the causes of British economic decline. They blame the failure of the nineteenth century entrepreneurial spirit on the middle-class emulation of aristocratic values, values that shunned industry.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> J.C.D. Clark In *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Correlli Barnett, *The Pride and the Fall: The Dream and Illusion of Britain as a Great Nation* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

Kim Lawes argues for the revival of paternalist ideals during the height of Liberalism (1815-33), but adds that paternalist thought was a vital link to understanding the increasing role of the state (which acted as a substitution for community and familial responsibility) as a solution for British economic and social problems.<sup>31</sup> Paternalists saw misguided government policies as causes of nineteenth century social and economic problems and thus argued that the individual relationship to the state should be based on an "organic and holistic" view of society.<sup>32</sup>

Focusing on late Victorian England in *Work, Society, and Politics*, Patrick Joyce argues that paternalism was still a prominent ideology in politics and dominated the culture of the factory.<sup>33</sup> Joyce suggests that the limited class antagonism in this period can be attributed to entrenched tradition of deference and dependency amongst the working classes in the factories. Drawing on this long tradition of scholarship, this study argues that late Victorian paternalism was largely a reaction against, and a mitigation of, economic and social changes brought about by industrialization.

The concept of paternalism, with its long history and shades of meaning, calls for clarification. Roberts defines paternalism

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<sup>31</sup> Kim Lawes, *Paternalism and Politics: The Revival of Paternalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Lawes particularly focuses her study on Michael Thomas Sadler, who headed the Parliamentary campaign for factory reform in 1832, as well as discussing the influence of other Tories who wrote for *Blackwood's Magazine*. The Factory Act of 1833, was not the result of Utilitarian rationalism, but more influenced by Sadler and his Tory supporters entrenched paternalism (*Paternalism and Politics*, p. 21).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the factory in Later Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980).

as based on four assumptions: that the one acting in the paternalist role holds authority, that society is based on hierarchy, that society is organic, and pluralistic. Clarifying the last parts of this definition, an organic society is one in which every part of the body politic had an appointed place (essentially the extension of the "Great Chain of Being" idea) and individuals or groups function together in that place in order to produce a harmonious society. A pluralistic society comprises many spheres, each with its own hierarchies. This concept allowed for government and authority to be personal. As Roberts maintains, "to know and to be known by those one governed was central to English Paternalism."<sup>34</sup>

In paternalist culture, each person and social group have reciprocal duties. It was the duty of the upper classes to protect (both physically and morally), help, and most importantly, guide those in inferior positions, as it was the duty of inferiors to listen and obey their superiors. Paternalists were "backward looking," believing that society was more balanced in the past (particularly in the Medieval and Tudor-Stuart period). In both early and late Victorian Britain, paternalists argued for the need for a moral and spiritual regeneration of society. They believed that morality should govern all interpersonal relations, including economic relations. The easing of social ills and spiritual regeneration could only be carried out by those with property and

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<sup>34</sup> Roberts, *Paternalism*, p. 4.

rank--by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the new middle classes.

Lever belonged in this paternalist tradition. As we will see in Chapter Four, he presents himself as an authority, as a wise man with social and economic answers for his employees as well as for the nation. These answers were based on his assumptions of a hierarchical society and, importantly, an organic one in which each person had his/her contribution to make for the common good. Lever's paternalism, however, was steeped in middle-class values and discourse. He modified his industrial paternalism to include Victorian middle-class values such as self-help, a belief in progress, and domesticity.<sup>35</sup>

Focusing on paternalism's excessive control and authoritarianism, business historian David Jeremy calls Lever an "Enlightened Paternalist."<sup>36</sup> Jeremy argues that Lever used "religious and pseudo-religious devices"<sup>37</sup> and his preeminent position in the company and town as an instrument of labor control. He suggests that with the ever-expanding company and town, Lever could no longer resort to face to face relations and, therefore, had to resort to other means of social control.

This study differs from Jeremy's by recognizing the importance of a company culture as opposed to a religiously-based

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<sup>35</sup> Although Lever would later take an aristocratic title and become a peer of the realm, his social and cultural outlook was essentially middle class--that class which he was born and subsequently by which he was influenced.

<sup>36</sup> David J. Jeremy, "The Enlightened Paternalist in Action: William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight," *Business History* 33 (1991): 59-81.

<sup>37</sup> Specifically, Jeremy points to Lever's appointment of a new town minister in 1900, who also served as welfare director. He also notes Lever's control of the Boy's Brigade, the Sunday School, and the Masonic Lodge.

authoritarian control to stimulate loyalty and worker satisfaction. While recognizing Lever's desire to control his workforce, my study focuses on the importance of cultivating a positive company image and of convincing workers to identify with this image and thus with the company, its founder, and his ideals. With company growth, only through such worker identification could Lever guarantee a stable and efficient workforce (including management) that would realize his advanced social views and high profits.

Providing an effective corporate culture, then, was one way of maintaining employee loyalty and establishing a sense of community in the midst of company growth. In the early twentieth century, once the company grew to the size of a multinational, Lever could no longer rely on his earlier more personal paternalism. Instead he had to construct a sense of community for a wider audience without completely shedding the ideals of paternalism. This sense of community was achieved by using periodicals (especially company literature) and media events to construct a company identity, or what Benedict Anderson called an "imagined community."<sup>38</sup>

Business scholars, such as Robert Waterman and Thomas Peters believe that scholars should also look at corporate culture in analyzing a corporation's success. The authors maintain that "excellent" companies all have strong cultures that promote and

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<sup>38</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

reflect a company's positive image.<sup>39</sup> They challenge Alfred D. Chandler Jr.s' argument<sup>40</sup> that administrative structure and coordination are the keys for modern successful corporations. Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy also argue against Chandler's rationalization thesis as the driving force for corporations. They propose that "deep-seated traditions and widely accepted and shared beliefs governed modern business organizations, just like they did primitive tribes."<sup>41</sup> Deal and Kennedy define these shared traditions and beliefs as "corporate cultures." They argue that successful business cultures all have four elements: a widely shared company philosophy and values, an emphasis on the importance of people, the presence of heroes and heroines (the president and the product), and the use of ritual and ceremony.<sup>42</sup>

John Griffiths provides the only discussion other than this one of the company culture at Lever Brothers.<sup>43</sup> Griffiths, following the work of Charles Dellheim,<sup>44</sup> argues that there was a

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Warner Books, 1984).

<sup>40</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). Chandler argues that rapid economic and population growth created a need for administrative coordination. To achieve this, "entrepreneurs built multi-unit business enterprises and hired the managers needed to administer them." The emergence of the salaried manager, then, led to profitable flows of materials and the efficient allocation of resources for future production and distribution (p. 484).

<sup>41</sup> Terrence E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Publishing, 1982).., p. iv.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-15.

<sup>43</sup> John Griffiths, "'Give my regards to Uncle Billy...': the rites and rituals of company life at Lever Brothers, c.1900 - c.1990." *Business History* 37, (1995): 25-46.

<sup>44</sup> C. Dellheim, "The Creation of Company Culture: Cadburys, 1861-1931," *American Historical Review* 92, (1987): 13-44; and "Business in Time: The Historian and Corporate Culture," *Public Historian* 8, (1986): 9-22. Dellheim provided the model for analyzing company culture and examining how it is transmitted and received by employees.

positive company culture that developed at Lever Brothers during the first half of the twentieth century. He also follows the contention that historians should not buy wholesale into Alfred D. Chandler Jr.'s thesis that corporate success can only be found in the efficient formation of the company's organizational structure and managerial strategy. On the contrary, historians should not neglect the highly productive influence of what Griffiths termed the "softer side" of corporations, such as their cultures.

Company culture at Lever Brothers, says Griffiths, was simply the result of "the founder's humanitarianism coupled with enlightened self-interest."<sup>45</sup> While Griffiths focuses on the many tangible benefits that Lever provided at Port Sunlight which helped to form a strong company community, he does not describe or define the type of culture cultivated at Lever Brothers. Detailing the paternalist culture based on middle-class values and national concerns at Lever Brothers is the goal of this study.

While paternalism is often contrasted with Liberalism and while Lever ran his company based on modified paternalist ideals, he also exhibited traits of classic liberalism, such as the belief in free trade and progress. Michael Freeden's work on "New Liberalism,"<sup>46</sup> helps us make sense of Lever's seemingly contrasting political and social views. Lever was a New Liberal. And as a New Liberal, Lever advocated that through cooperation between state and the individual, social security could be implemented.

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<sup>45</sup> Griffiths, "Give My Regards," p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).



Further, Avital Simhony and D. Weinstein show that New Liberals deliberately broke away from the "narrow" and "selfish" individualism associated with traditional liberalism.<sup>47</sup> New Liberals attempted to reconceptualize the meaning of liberalism by highlighting an individual's "mutual dependence over competitive independence and appreciation of common enjoyment over private enjoyment."<sup>48</sup>

Lever was essentially an industrial paternalist, creating a successful company by allowing workers to develop a secure and loyal corporate identity. Lever constructed this corporate culture by using religion, adult education, and sport, as well as providing extensive welfare benefits, such as free medical care and a profit-sharing scheme, for his employees. More importantly, however, Lever used his personal ethos to help his employees forge and sustain a strong corporate identity. He promoted his paternalist image against the backdrop of contemporary discourses: national conversations on decline, empire, gender, and social conditions, using these discourses to highlight his own agenda. Lever also constructed his image with the use of modern advertising, and at times he had to defend himself and his business practices in the national press. This carefully crafted image was maintained well after the founder's death in 1925.

Chapter Two and Three introduce the period of study and discuss key economic and social movements of late eighteenth and

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<sup>47</sup> Avital Simhony and D. Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

nineteenth century Britain that significantly influenced Lever's ideology and the formation of his company. Specifically, Chapter Two looks at early industrialization, consumerism, and the emergence of a cultural critique (the Condition of England Question). Chapter Three places Lever within the late Victorian context, analyzing the rise of a mass market and the development of modern advertising. The role of image construction is the focus in Chapter Four. By analyzing his public addresses and ethos, this work traces how Lever created an effective self and company image within the major discourses of the period. Chapter Five focuses on the rhetoric of architecture at Port Sunlight. Port Sunlight's architecture reflected paternalist ideals and responded to the critics of industrialization by relying on influences such as the Gothic Revival and the English Garden City movement. Chapter Six shows how Lever cultivated and protected his moral image in order to maintain deference from his employees, and promote, largely through carefully planned advertising, the huge multinational corporation that he founded. Chapter Seven applies the recent historical emphasis on collective identity to a local and corporate identity, an identity that I argue developed in Port Sunlight and contributed to the formation of company culture at Lever Brothers. This study traces how Lever developed a modern bureaucratic corporation, yet maintained traditional paternalist elements that tied the workers to the company rather than alienating them.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Setting the Stage: Early Industrialization and the Emergence of the Condition of England Question, 1750-1870**

The culture that formed Lever's paternalist views and allowed for the development of his multinational company began to emerge during the late eighteenth century and matured during the next. Even though nineteenth century Britain was a society marked by profound change, some traditional elements and ideas remained and paradoxically were used to alleviate some of the economic and social pressures caused by industrialization. It is only in this context of economic, political, and social change that we can fully understand and analyze Lever's paternalist ideas and the subsequent creation of a strong corporate culture at Lever Brothers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Lever's company grew into a major multinational corporation as a result of a general increase in the standard of living (especially for the working classes) along with the development of a mass consumerism. This chapter, however, focuses on the beginnings of industrialization and consumerism to give both background and context for the development of the Condition of England discourse which influenced Lever and other late Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals and businessmen.

## **Industrialization**

Despite qualifications and revisions, the concept of an industrial revolution remains the best way of summing up the enormous social and economic changes experienced in Britain from 1750 onwards.<sup>1</sup> Especially after 1850, changes in British society and the economy were drastic and irreversible. Aristocratic values, such as paternalism, remained influential in British society and culture. These values, however, were employed mostly as a reaction to a rapidly changing and confusing world--a world characterized by industrialization, mass consumption, and elements of democratization.

Although a revolution in manufacturing and the economy first began in Britain between 1740-1780, it was during Queen Victoria's reign, particularly the latter half, that economic and social change was most obvious. Even if Britain as a nation became politically powerful and rich during the nineteenth century as a result of massive increases in industrial production, wealth was still concentrated in the hands of a privileged few, for

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<sup>1</sup> J.C.D. Clark and F.M.L. Thompson point out that although industrialization eventually led to fundamental change in the British economy, it was a slow and often intermittent process. In other words, these historians argue that the term "revolution" is misplaced. In *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Clark maintains that as late as 1830, most British workers were still employed in traditionally agrarian or domestic industries, the country still reliant on the sail and horse-driven transport, and the society largely religious ("Confessional State") and dominated by the landed orders (an "Ancien Regime"). Thompson argues in *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain: 1830-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), that although change occurred in urbanization and the workplace, the traditional ties of family and localism helped workers to adjust to their new environment. Transformation during the nineteenth century was a long drawn-out process, and social revolution was avoided precisely because of a mixed bag of the old order and new industrial forces.

industrialization created greater inequalities of wealth than ever before. The economic disparity was most obviously witnessed in the poor housing and sanitary conditions of the urban slums of the nineteenth century.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a demographic revolution had occurred in Britain; the population had exploded from 5.5 million for England and Wales in 1700 to about 9 million in 1801 (and 1.6 million for Scotland) and 21 million in Britain by 1851.<sup>2</sup> Without this population growth and the rise in consumer demand, there would have been less incentive for producers to innovate and expand. The population explosion, then, provided the dynamism for the industrial revolution to continue; it provided employment opportunities and led to an increase in families, and this in turn caused further population growth.

There was also an important population shift--from the countryside to the major cities and towns--that developed during the course of the nineteenth century. In 1800, for example, Birmingham had a population of 74,000, Bristol 64,000, Edinburgh 83,000, Manchester 90,000, and Liverpool 80,000; by mid-century, the population had risen to 233,000 for Birmingham, 137,000 for Bristol, 202,000 for Edinburgh, 303,000 for Manchester, and 376,000 for Liverpool.<sup>3</sup> Cities were linked together by the railways which spurred along further development and growth; older

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<sup>2</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics, 1750-1970* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13.

more established cities grew, and new towns, like Crewe and Barrow-in-Furness, emerged as a result of the railways.<sup>4</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, patterns were emerging that would continue to develop and fundamentally change the structure of an economy and society. Beginning in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries, industrial production expanded at a higher and sustained rate--two percent per annum. Between 1783-1802, trade in Britain nearly trebled; between 1750-1800 coal production doubled from five to ten million tons; pig iron production was four times that of 1740 and quadrupled again from 68,000 to 250,000 tons. But it was the cotton industry largely based in the North of England that showed the most spectacular growth: from 1781-1800 raw cotton imports quadrupled from 10.9 to 51.6 million pounds.

A revolution in agriculture was also a factor that played a part in industrialization. Between 1700-1850, there was over a four-fold increase in agricultural production which fed the population and spurred industrial growth.<sup>5</sup> New farming techniques like crop rotation allowed farmers to change their methods of cultivation and expand into wider markets. Furthermore, agricultural profit provided capital for industrial investment.<sup>6</sup>

Imperial interests and foreign trade also helped economic growth

<sup>4</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965) p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault, *The Industrial Revolution and British Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> F.M.L. Thompson, Harold Perkin, in *The Origins of Modern English Society: 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul., 1969), and J.V. Beckett in *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), highlight the important role of the aristocracy in providing capital and investing in modern industry.

by increasing demand for British products and providing raw materials for the new factories. Thus, the rise of incomes, especially with the middle ranks, meant more surplus cash for consumer goods, thus creating huge demand. This in turn accelerated the shift to what Thomas Carlyle called the "Cash Nexus," where human relations were determined by contract and profit and no longer by personal ties or obligation. Victorian intellectuals, politicians, and businessmen were frequently concerned about this reliance on the cash-nexus, and thus they argued that because of it, modern society was more susceptible to social revolution. Even the great defender of liberal democracy, J.S. Mill, had warned that "democracy for all can not work if there is too great a gap between the rich and poor."<sup>7</sup>

### **A Consumer Revolution**

Beginning in the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, the middle classes (and by the late nineteenth century the working classes) were not only involved in the process of production, but they became conspicuous consumers as well. This consumer demand in Britain transformed the British economy and enabled more people to acquire material possessions than ever before.<sup>8</sup> What used to be thought of as luxuries, now became "decencies," or even "necessities."<sup>9</sup> The Consumer Revolution "was the necessary analog to the Industrial Revolution, the necessary

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<sup>7</sup> Terence H. Qualter, *Advertising and Democracy in the Mass Age* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of eighteenth Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

convulsion on the demand side of the equation to match the convulsion on the supply side.<sup>10</sup>

Fashion and advertising were two essential components of this new consumerism, leading directly to class emulation. Material possessions were increasingly prized for their fashionability. Women could, by the eighteenth century, follow fashion daily in the advertisements in magazines and the London and provincial press, and buy clothes from the numerous and expanding commercial outlets. Previously, the ability to acquire and wear such fashions was limited to few, but during the eighteenth century, "rising real family incomes brought them [fashionable consumer goods] increasingly within the reach of the many."<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, the rich led the way in consumption. They indulged themselves in "an orgy of spending," with their magnificent houses, superlative Chippendale furniture, porcelain and Wedgwood pottery, cutlery and wallpaper. The signs of conspicuous consumption and fashion novelty became "an irresistible drug."<sup>12</sup> The upper classes always had the ability to spend, but it was only during the eighteenth century that others consumed as well. For instance, the middle classes spent more than ever by imitating the rich, and, then, the rest of society as they imitated the middle class had a huge impact on demand and subsequently production. Spurred by social emulation and class competition, people surrendered to novelty, fashion and commercial

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 10.



propaganda (usually through advertising in newspapers like London's first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, as well as magazines such as *The Spectator*).

While the concept of the Consumer Revolution was first developed by eighteenth century historians to describe the rise in consumption, the consumerism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was still a minority consumerism, but it is in this period that the conditions were in place for a genuinely mass consumption society.<sup>13</sup> During the eighteenth century, the market expanded but largely to include the bulk of the middle ranks (includes lesser gentry, professions, merchants, shopkeepers, yeomen, and craftsmen) and did not include a large number of wage-earners. Even with £20 a year income, wage-earners would have little left over for significant quantities of household goods; clothing was second only to food in household expenditure.<sup>14</sup> The eighteenth century Consumer Revolution was important for the upper and middle ranks, but mass consumption would have to wait until the latter half of the nineteenth century.

### **The Condition of England Question**

It is in the social and economic context discussed above that a group of writers and intellectuals began during the early nineteenth century to criticize the harshness of industrialization and unrestrained capitalism, offering a different way for Britain.

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<sup>13</sup> Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London: Routledge, 1988). Using new primary sources such as probate inventories, Weatherill argues that there was a limit to consumer behavior during the eighteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

Historians locate the origins of this Condition of England debate first with the Romantics, and then the publication in 1829 of Carlyle's *Sign of the Times* and *Sartor Resartus* in 1834. Other writers, artists, and, later, businessmen soon followed and entered into a national discourse on what Carlyle called "the Condition of England." Michael Levin argued that this social discourse was particularly prominent among British literary circles during the "turbulent 1840s." It was during the 1840s that Britons witnessed famine, massive immigration (about 400,000 Irish immigrants arrived in England in the decades following the Potato Famine of 1846), the often traumatic and difficult transition to an industrial society, radical political movements such as Chartism and Owenism, as well as a series of European-wide revolutions.<sup>15</sup> All this acted as a "warning of what Britain might face" in the near future.<sup>16</sup> This future was one that critics saw as mired by problems such as mechanization of society, the growing gap between the classes, and spiritual decline.

The Mechanical World: Britons were first warned of the inherent dangers of a "Mechanical" world with the publication in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829 of Carlyle's essay, *Sign of the Times*. It is in this short essay that Carlyle first complains of living in a world in the midst of great change. Carlyle begins his essay:

Were we required to characterize this age of  
ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Levin, *The Condition of England Question: Carlyle, Mill, Engels* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 16-29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional,  
Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all  
others, the Mechanical Age.<sup>17</sup>

From the very beginning of the essay, the audience becomes aware that Carlyle would take any of the epithets above, save that of the "Mechanical." He laments of how "our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside," and of how "the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one."<sup>18</sup>

Carlyle also directed his venom at the institutions of the day; institutions like the Royal Society were also mechanical in nature. Gone were the days of individual patrons supporting artists and philosophers; now institutions molded minds through their journals and by their dues, stifling individualism. "Men are grown mechanical in head and heart as well as in hand," said Carlyle, "they have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force, of any kind."<sup>19</sup>

Carlyle had begun the national discourse on the problem of living in a "modern" society; it was soon followed by others. As Raymond Williams acknowledges, any study about the response to industrialization would not be complete without also looking at Victorian novelists who provided their readers with "some of the most vivid descriptions of life in an unsettled industrial

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* edited with an introduction by H.D. Traill (New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 271.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* with an introduction by Douglas Jerrold (London: Everyman's Library, 1960), p. 261.

society."<sup>20</sup> The industrial novels, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855), Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), and George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866), not only provided detail and criticism of the "new society," but they also established a common "structure of feeling."<sup>21</sup> In both prose and fiction, these industrial critics lamented the loss of individuality and the destruction of nature. They also criticized the artificial character of industrialization as well as its harsh social inequalities.

A Widening Gap: The Rich and the Poor: In *Past and Present*, Carlyle warned that in the 1840s, there was a staggering two million workers who were sitting in "(w)orkhouses, Poor-law prisons; or have 'outdoor relief' flung over the wall to them,-- the workhouse Bastille being filled to bursting . . . They sit there, these many mouths now; their hope of deliverance as yet small."<sup>22</sup> He continued by criticizing the Poor-law as only a "temporary measure; an anodyne, not a remedy: Rich and Poor, when once the naked facts of their condition have come into collision, cannot long subsist together on a mere Poor-law. . .and yet, human beings cannot be left to die!"<sup>23</sup> The problem was magnified when in the midst of such depravity, there was still "plethoric wealth" in the realm. And this wealth, argued Carlyle, "has yet made nobody

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<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

rich; it is an enchanted wealth" since those who were in material possession of it (the landed aristocracy as well as business aristocracy) were full of "idle luxury alternating with mean scarcity and inability . . . instead of noble thrift and plenty."<sup>24</sup> This is clearly a direct attack on laissez-faire capitalism and the lack of moral and spiritual leadership among the elites in Britain. Carlyle was especially critical of the aristocracy whom he accused of being decadent and failing to do their duty.<sup>25</sup> He had expected the elite to "rule with responsibility," instead of giving over to "frippery, idle luxury, and blood sports."<sup>26</sup> The consequences of such action, argued Carlyle, could prove fatal when "in the midst of plethoric plenty, the people perish; with gold walls, and full barns, no man feels himself safe or satisfied."<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Carlyle was not just critical of the lack of the "Moral" or "Spiritual" in Victorian society, but he also attacked the changes in the "Social System." Carlyle warned of "how wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> David Cannadine points out in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) that although the landed aristocracy had adapted to changing times (by recognizing the growing power and influence of the middle classes through political reform such as the Reform Act and the Repeal of the Corn Laws), they were still economically and politically powerful. In fact, Cannadine claimed that the aristocracy held social hegemony until the late nineteenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Levin, *The Condition of England Question*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In his novel, *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle once again used a vituperative tone to set in motion the national discourse on the "Condition of England Question." He used effective cultural analogies to describe two very distinct and opposite groups that were solidifying in industrial England. The two groups Carlyle described were "Dandyism" and "Drudgism." "Dandyism" is associated with cosmopolitan wealth while "Drudgism" simply represents the grinding poor.

Carlyle warned:

I could liken Dandyism and Drudgism to two bottomless boiling Whirlpools that had broken-out on opposite quarters of the firm land . . . Or better, I might call them two boundless, and indeed unexampled Electric Machines (turned by the 'Machinery of Society') with batteries of opposite quality; Drudgism the Negative, Dandyism the Positive: one attracts hourly towards it and appropriates all the Positive Electricity of the nation (namely, the Money thereof); the other is equally busy with the Negative (that is to say the Hunger), which is equally potent. Hitherto, you see only partial transient sparks and sputters: but wait a little, till the entire nation is in an electric state; till your whole vital Electricity, no longer healthfully Neutral, is cut into two isolated portions of Positive and Negative (of Money and of Hunger); and stands there bottled up in two World-Batteries!<sup>29</sup>

For Carlyle, then, "industrialism" meant "selfishness." He watched with growing anxiety and sadness the division of the business world into the few wealthy capitalists and the thousands

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Carlyle, with an introduction and notes by Rodger L. Tarr, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh in Three Books* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 209-210.

of struggling wage earners."<sup>30</sup> He argued that with the continued growth of industrial capitalism, "there would be a widening of class inequalities."<sup>31</sup>

In the late 1860s, Matthew Arnold, in *Culture and Anarchy*, echoed Carlyle's concern for social fragmentation and a declining national and spiritual culture, also warning of the probability for social revolution.<sup>32</sup> Following Carlyle, Arnold attacked the materialism and selfishness evident in laissez-faire capitalism. "Our social machine is a little out of order," said Arnold, "there are a good many people in our paradisiacal centres of industrialism and individualism taking the bread out of one another's mouths."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Arnold showed concern for the possible abuse inherent in a society that valued too much "liberty," or as he phrased it, an "Englishman's right to do as he likes."<sup>34</sup> For without the establishment of certain ethical and moral boundaries, the society becomes a Darwinian nightmare, or what political scientists would refer to as a zero-sum game--a society divided by some winners and many losers.

Ruskin also criticized the "selfishness" of most industrialists and argued that they should instead take into account the "human" factor in the political economy. Ruskin presented his audience with a different definition of "wealth" and

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<sup>30</sup> Carrie E. Tucker Dracas, *Carlyle's Essay on Burns* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1909), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited with an introduction by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

"value." He proclaimed in block letters that "THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE." He further explained that

(1)life, including all its powers of love, joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is the richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others.<sup>35</sup>

It was a mistake, therefore, simply to look upon "wealth" and "value" as an absolute material entity to be accumulated as an end in itself. For there were serious moral and social consequences attached to such selfish actions--desperate poverty and an uneducated underclass for starters. "The rich," complained Ruskin, "not only refuse food to the poor; they refuse wisdom; they refuse virtue; they refuse salvation."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the system was so immoral that "all political economy founded on self-interest . . . brought schism into the Policy of Angels, and ruin into the Economy of Heaven."<sup>37</sup> Ruskin thought the economic and social climate of mid-century Britain so abhorrent that he claimed, "luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant; the cruelest man living could not sit at his feast unless he sat blindfolded."<sup>38</sup> Industrialization did not only produce inequality and promote gross materialism, it also destroyed the moral character of work as well as the natural landscape of the land.

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<sup>35</sup> John Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from his writings* Edited with an introduction by John D. Rosenberg (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 271-272.



Spiritual Decline: Much of the nineteenth century social and cultural critique was dominated by a religious or spiritual theme. Carlyle, for example, believed that industrialization was the result of spiritual decay, and so his solution for the social problem was a "rebirth of faith."<sup>39</sup> Essentially, he believed that industrialization was "a gigantic metaphor for the mechanization of human society and the death of the human spirit."<sup>40</sup> As a Romantic critic of what he contemptuously called the "Age of Machinery," Carlyle grudgingly accepted the "material benefits conferred by mechanical progress," but still "doubted whether the triumph of mechanism signaled an improvement in the spiritual and social aspects of existence."<sup>41</sup> He looked to the past for answers.

Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold were all part of "the romantic protest tradition," arguing that "much of value had been lost in the transition to modern society. These protesters sought to regain what they perceived as the spiritual, communal, and aesthetic strengths of traditional society."<sup>42</sup> They wanted "to forge anew the links between British society and its natural environment, its past, and some sense of spiritual or nonmaterial reality."<sup>43</sup> In *Past and Present*, Carlyle had dramatically stated that "our England, our world cannot live as it is. It will

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<sup>39</sup> John Taylor, *Popular Literature and the Construction of British National Identity, 1707-1850* (San Francisco, CA: International Scholars Publications, 1997), p. 170.

<sup>40</sup> Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1745-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

connect itself with God again, or go down with nameless throes and fire-consummation to the Devils."<sup>44</sup>

The first "Victorian Sage" further criticized the reforms of the Liberal Party and the rationalism of the Utilitarians. Men like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill also criticized the social consequences of industrialization and pushed for reform, but Carlyle argued that they failed to "take into account the value of spiritual forces in controlling men."<sup>45</sup> Carlyle thought the "power of human reason was severely limited," and furthermore, he believed the utilitarian reliance on statistical fact gathering was both "wrongheaded and dangerous," and essentially "part of the intrusion of the Machine into all aspects of life."<sup>46</sup> He argued that genuine social reform could not arise out of a system that "sought to eradicate mystery from human experience."<sup>47</sup> Carlyle believed that "statistics created a universe peopled by abstractions rather than by real individuals with genuine needs and hopes."<sup>48</sup>

Ruskin also worried about the new industrial landscape and denounced the lack of morality associated with the new industrial cities and towns. In a speech to the Mechanics Institute in 1859, he lamented that

(t)he changes in the state of this country  
[that] are now so rapid . . . that from shore  
to shore the whole of the island is to be set as  
thick with chimneys as the masts stand in the

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<sup>44</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 261.

<sup>45</sup> Dracas, *Carlyle's Essay on Burns*, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

docks at Liverpool: that there shall be no meadows in it; no trees; no gardens; only a little corn grown upon the housetops, reaped and threshed by steam.<sup>49</sup>

Like Carlyle, Ruskin, in *Modern Painters*, also complained of the spiritual decline of modern society. The profoundest reason for this darkness of heart," exhaled Ruskin, "is, I believe, our want of faith." Ruskin continued:

There never yet was a generation of men (savage or civilized) who, taken as a body, so woefully fulfilled the words 'having no hope, and without God in the world,' as the present civilized European race. . . . Nearly all our powerful men in this age of the world are unbelievers; the best of them in doubt and misery; the worst in reckless defiance; the plurality, in plodding hesitation, doing, as well as they can, what practical work lies ready to their hands.<sup>50</sup>

Critics of industrial capitalism, then, first attacked the vast inequality of wealth inherent in the system. At a period when Britain was acknowledged as the richest and most powerful nation in the world, the country still produced such poverty, easily witnessed by Victorians in the insalubrious urban slums.

Furthermore, this social critique focused on the waning of a moral, spiritual, and organic community. The critics warned that if the industrial process was not reversed, then Britain would face social revolution or even anarchy.

The Call: The discourse of the period did not only offer a critique of the Victorian social and economic system, but it also

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<sup>49</sup> Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, p. 223.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

provided theoretical solutions. These nineteenth century critics often looked to the past and pleaded with political and particularly business leaders to provide for a more humane and socially responsible world. What was needed, said Carlyle, was "noble just (i)ndustrialism," where business leaders would create "not cheaper produce exclusively, but fairer distribution of the produce at its present cheapness!" Only then, said Carlyle, shall we again "have a society with something of heroism in it."<sup>51</sup> Carlyle demanded that the "Captains of Industry" act as the new noble aristocracy, for "if there be no nobleness in them, there will never be an Aristocracy anymore."<sup>52</sup> Business leaders, explained Carlyle, needed to create "a noble Chivalry of Work," in which men would no longer view work only in terms of cash payment and exploitation.<sup>53</sup> Instead, the business aristocracy needed to recognize the social dangers present in Victorian Britain and correct them. "Look around you," extolled Carlyle,

Your world-hosts are all in mutiny, in confusion,  
destitution; on the eve of a fiery wreck and  
madness! They will not march farther for you,  
on a six-pence a day and supply-and-demand  
principle.<sup>54</sup>

Carlyle continued by telling the business elite to shape up, bring stability to the masses by developing a pre-industrial paternalist system. "To order," exclaimed Carlyle, "to just subordination;

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<sup>51</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 260.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>53</sup> Levin pointed out in *The Condition of England Question*, that both Karl Marx and particularly Frederick Engels' owed much to Carlyle. For one can see this influence in Engels' famous essay on the *Condition of the Working Classes in England*.

<sup>54</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 264-265.

noble loyalty in return for noble guidance."<sup>55</sup> If the economic and social system was not altered, argued Carlyle, there would be serious consequences for the nation.

One of the most notable arguments for the social consequences of unrestrained capitalism was given by Matthew Arnold. Arnold argued that since Victorian Britain was bound by class division, lacked spiritualism, nor had any feeling of altruism (or as one might say in pre-industrial society, the "Commonweal,"), the nation was heading towards anarchy. For Arnold the solution was to be found in reinventing a national culture through state-sponsored education.<sup>56</sup> Arnold believed that the country needed to develop a "classical" respect for the common good through the diffusion of "beauty and intelligence," or what he called "sweetness and light." "The pursuit of perfection," claimed Arnold, "is the pursuit of sweetness and light. He who works for sweetness and light, works to make reason and the will of God prevail. He who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion."<sup>57</sup> Arnold believed that people in society should try to "see things as they really are," and promote reason, intelligence, and perfection which he associated with "Hellenism." Still, people also needed to be endowed with a strong moral center, guided by principle and "strictness of conscience," which he associated with "Hebraism."<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, for Arnold, "Hellenism" was the more needed in Victorian society.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>56</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. xix.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-148.

### The Nostalgia for the Middle Ages: Community and Aesthetics:

As Alice Chandler and Mark Girouard have shown, Victorians often found themselves reassured and enchanted by an idealized version of the Middle Ages.<sup>59</sup> In Sir Walter Scott's novels, for instance, one could escape to a world in which "leaders and the led interacted in a vital community that sustained and promoted both social cohesion and individual acts of heroism."<sup>60</sup> Thus, Carlyle glorified the "medieval monastic community as a social ideal that revealed the existence of other points of juncture apart from the cash nexus."<sup>61</sup> Moreover, he used "the contrast between his idealized vision of the Middle Ages and his present reality to voice his anti-industrialism."<sup>62</sup> This view is most obvious in *Past and Present* (1843).

Carlyle saw the social indifference and conspicuous consumption of the landed and business aristocracy as a far cry from the caring paternalism of feudal lords and churchmen. He understood the limitations of state ("Government can do much, but it can in nowise do all") and instead called for "those who stand practically in the middle of it; by those who themselves work and preside over work (the captains of industry)" to act like "a noble Master, among noble Workers."<sup>63</sup> Carlyle believed that business

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<sup>59</sup> Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970); Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>60</sup> Veldman, *Fantasy, The Bomb, and the Greening of Britain*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 260.

leaders needed to follow the example of the medieval lord by developing strong personal ties of loyalty. He reasoned:

The Feudal Baron, much more,--how could he subsist with mere temporary mercenaries around him, at sixpence a day; ready to go over to the other side, if seven pence was offered? He could not have subsisted;--and his noble instinct saved him from the necessity of even trying! The Feudal Baron had a Man's Soul in him; to which anarchy, mutiny, and the other fruits of temporary mercenaries, were intolerable.<sup>64</sup>

Carlyle's philosophy never really varied during his life. Simply put, his philosophy was "a revolt; or rather, a counter-revolution. In a word, it is *anti-mechanism*."<sup>65</sup> No doubt Carlyle's philosophy was heavily influenced by his earlier Calvinism and central to this philosophy was the belief that "the universe is fundamentally not an inert automatism, but the expression or indeed incarnation of a cosmic spiritual life," where one must eliminate from the universe "everything alien to it," even at the cost of personal happiness.<sup>66</sup> Carlyle, along with Ruskin, advocated "getting back to the land," or cooperation.

As Carlyle before him, Arnold also contrasted modern society with that of the Middle Ages. Arnold reasoned that

For a long time . . . the strong feudal habits of subordination and deference continued to tell upon the working class. The modern spirit has now almost entirely dissolved those habits, and the anarchical tendency of our worship of freedom in and for itself, of our superstitious faith, as I say, in machinery, is becoming very manifest.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>65</sup> John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London: Archon Books, 1962), p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

More and more, because of our want of light enable us to look beyond machinery to the end for which machinery is valuable, this and that man, and this and that body of men, all over the country, are beginning to assert and put in practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes; his right to march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes. All this, I say, tends to anarchy.<sup>67</sup>

With the publication of *Modern Painters* (1847), Ruskin began a commentary on Victorian art, stimulating an interest in the visual arts that would be the impetus for the creation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood a year later.<sup>68</sup> Along with Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites felt a genuine nostalgia for the past and the consensus was that "in spite of material progress, the world was getting steadily uglier."<sup>69</sup> They wanted art (and society for that matter since Ruskin argued that art was a reflection of the character of its age), whether literary or visual, to be judged by a clear aesthetic standard, which could be found by relearning and reflecting on Medieval art and architecture. For example, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin complained that

the title 'Dark Ages,' given to the mediaeval centuries, is, respecting art, wholly inapplicable. They were, on the contrary, the bright ages; ours the dark ones. I do not mean metaphysically, but literally. They were the ages of Gold; ours the ages of umber.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 76.

<sup>68</sup> Significantly, Lever owned one of the finest collections of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Britain. The paintings are currently housed and on public display at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Hough, *The last Romantics* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1961), p. xiii.

<sup>70</sup> Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, p. 87.



Ruskin also promoted the idea of the artist as more than just a painter or artisan, but also an imaginative creator and social commentator. "The principle of fidelity to inner experience," was an essential canon of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>71</sup> But, by the 1850s, Ruskin had turned away from the study of art in itself, and instead focused on the type of social conditions that could stimulate the arts. In the late 1850s, Ruskin delivered lectures on this topic in the industrial Midlands.<sup>72</sup>

Ruskin argued that beautiful art or design simply could not be produced under existing conditions. "Beautiful art," said Ruskin, "can only be produced by people who have beautiful things about them, and leisure to look at them."<sup>73</sup> He continued by pleading with industrialists: "Unless you provide some elements of beauty for your workmen to be surrounded by, you will find that no elements of beauty can be invented by them."<sup>74</sup>

Ruskin continued his social criticism of industrial capitalism a year later with the publication of a controversial series of essays titled as *Unto The Last* (1860). John Rosenberg argues that *Unto The Last* was received with so much hostility by Victorian readers largely because Ruskin "attacked every principle held sacred by the economists and industrialists of the age."<sup>75</sup> According to Rosenberg, Ruskin was "denounced as a monger of heresies who must be crushed, lest his wild words open a 'moral

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<sup>71</sup> Hough, *The Last Romantics*, p. 53.

<sup>72</sup> John D. Rosenberg, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, p. 219.

<sup>73</sup> Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>75</sup> Rosenberg, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, pp. 219-220.

floodgate . . . and drown us all.'"<sup>76</sup> Ruskin had attacked the immorality of nineteenth century liberalism, particularly those ideas associated with the works of David Ricardo. "In all the ranges of human thought," said Ruskin, "I know none so melancholy as the speculations of the political economists on the population question."<sup>77</sup> He continued by sarcastically explaining that

(i)t is proposed to better the condition of the labourer by giving him higher wages. 'Nay,' says the economist, -- 'if you raise his wages, he will either people down to the same point of misery at which you found him, or drink your wages away.'<sup>78</sup>

Ruskin wanted to connect art with religion. He was fascinated by religious forms and the "kinship between religious experience and the practice and appreciation of art."<sup>79</sup> For Ruskin, "all art is worship." The best example of the connection of art and religion can be seen in Ruskin's chapter, "The Nature of Gothic," in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53). In this chapter, Ruskin explained how "the architecture of the North is rude and wild: but it is not true, that, for this reason, we are to condemn it, or despise. Far otherwise: I believe it is in this very character that it deserves our profoundest reverence."<sup>80</sup> He went on to describe the symbiotic relationship of the work of the Medieval craftsman with the raw beauty of nature. Ruskin recalled

this wildness of thought, and roughness of work;  
this look of mountain brotherhood between  
cathedral and the Alp; this magnificence of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>79</sup> Hough, *The Last Romantics*, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Ruskin, *The Genius of John Ruskin*, p. 172.

sturdy power, put forth only the more energetically because the fine finger-touch was chilled away by the frosty wind, and the eye dimmed by the moormist, or blinded by the hail; this out-speaking of the strong spirit of men who may not gather redundant fruitage from the earth, nor bask in dreamy benignity of sunshine, but must break the rock for bread, and cleave the forest for fire, and show, even in what they did for their delight, some of the hard habits of the arm and heart that grew on them as they swung the axe or pressed the plough."<sup>81</sup>

Yet he argued that Gothic architecture was not only noble for its "savageness," but a higher nobility could be found "not of climate, but of religious principle."<sup>82</sup> For Ruskin, Gothic architecture represented the Christian ideal of "individual value for every soul," and furthermore it "confesses its imperfection, in bestowing dignity upon the acknowledgment of unworthiness."<sup>83</sup> He does not just glorify the "rude and wild" and imperfect beauty created by Gothic craftsmen, but implicit in the praise of the "Gothic" is a harsh criticism of the impersonal and spiritless culture created by an unhealthy reliance on mechanization.

Scholars such as Raymond Williams and Michael Levin, focused on novelists, literary essayists, and social and cultural critics in analyzing the Victorian discourse on the Condition of England. This discourse, however, was also joined in the late nineteenth century by the "Captains of Industry."<sup>84</sup> Men such as Lever, attempted to formulate practical solutions to England's social

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>84</sup> Carlyle first used this phrase referring to the employers of organized labor in *Past and Present* (1843).

problems. Many of Lever's social and cultural views were formed in the context of this great Victorian debate. Through his speeches, architectural rhetoric, business practices, and parliamentary action, he took part in this national discussion. Lever's construction of a moral and paternal image responded to and reflected national concerns surrounding this debate. He realized the importance for industrialists in the late nineteenth century to acknowledge and situate themselves in the prevailing discourse on the Condition of England since they had been for so long demonized by it.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Late Victorian Context: Mass Consumerism, Advertising, and Middle-Class Cultural Critique**

Industrialization forced changes on British society. It created a massive increase in national wealth and consumption as well as allowing for a better standard of living for many Britons by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Still, persistent social problems remained a sour aspect of British life. This period brought about higher wages for workers and stabilization in the price of food, thus allowing for a general increase in the standard of living.<sup>1</sup> But, paradoxically, this period of industrial growth and mass consumption still witnessed working-class slums, with all the trappings of poverty, crime, overcrowding, and unsanitary living conditions.<sup>2</sup> As Asa Briggs explains, "Victorian cities were places where problems often overwhelmed people."<sup>3</sup>

Early and mid-nineteenth century critics had pointed out the desperate poverty that still existed in both the rural countryside and the new urban slums. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, "the Condition of England" issue had still not subsided,

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<sup>1</sup> There is much controversy among historians over the standard of living for the working classes in Victorian Britain. This debate will be analyzed later in the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> In *Victorian Cities* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), Asa Briggs points out that in 1884 Liverpool had 1200 persons to the acre, many of whom lived in cellars.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

with Late Victorians referring to it as "the Social Question."<sup>4</sup> Writers such as William Morris, as well as businessmen such as Lever, were concerned with the social condition of the masses for multiple reasons: they were prompted by moral questions as well as fears of social revolution. They also worried about imperial concerns (was the British race really fit to rule?) and world economic competition. Furthermore, some critics, such as Morris, were also concerned about the cultural effects of mass consumerism. If the working classes were materially better off by the late nineteenth century, were they buying the right things? These late Victorian and Edwardian critics identified social problems in various layers of modern life.

Rising real wages for the working class after 1870 meant a change in consumption patterns. Money wages rose as a result of the fall in food prices which in turn resulted from several good harvests in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Also, women and children joined the labor force to increase family wages. With more women employed, demand increased for goods previously made at home (clothes, beer, candles, furniture, and of course, soap). Increased wages also allowed for the consumption of luxuries such as tobacco, and alcohol, as well as the purchase of daily newspapers and weekly magazines, and participation in leisure activities such as traveling to resorts or attending the races or Saturday football matches.<sup>5</sup> This new mass consumerism

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Clark, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: The Penguin Press, 1996), p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1981), pp. 66-82.

incited George Orwell to claim that "a revolution in England had been averted by 'fish and chips and strong tea.'"<sup>6</sup>

While the beginnings of a consumer revolution might be found during the eighteenth century, mass consumerism (in other words, consumer goods reaching the working classes) was only a reality after 1870. This mass consumerism, along with industrialization and an increased standard of living for most Britons were essential factors for the establishment and development of Lever Brothers. And paradoxically, the company culture developed at Port Sunlight as a reaction to persisting social problems associated with industrialization.

Advertising, a key component of Lever Brothers' success, both facilitated and responded to this late Victorian society that "devote[d] a high priority to the acquisition and consumption of material goods and services."<sup>7</sup> If we owe the development of advertising to the consumer boom during the eighteenth century, it was the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that witnessed advertising on a truly modern or mass scale. During the decades after the Great Exhibition, advertising "became the primary beneficiary of, and vehicle for, the commodity spectacle first synthesized in 1851."<sup>8</sup> At mid-century, advertising was modest--most advertising was still found in the streets of London (usually

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), p. 39.

<sup>7</sup> Terence H. Qualter, *Advertising and Democracy in The Mass Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 5.

in shop windows)<sup>9</sup> and few professionals were actually employed in the advertising business. In 1844, for example, according to the *Advertiser's Guardian*, only hundreds could be identified in the advertising industry.<sup>10</sup> In the late nineteenth century, manufacturers rather than advertising professionals still controlled their advertising campaigns. With the proliferation of advertising firms (such as J. Walter Thompson) in the early twentieth century, however, the advertising industry took more control over the advertising message and also marketed itself as a commodity to sell.

The 1880s was the transitional period from the sort of advertising that was suitable for the "fragmented Victorian economy" to advertising appropriate for a truly mass market.<sup>11</sup> This shift in the advertising business coincided not just with the rise in working-class incomes and mass consumerism, but also with the development of the popular press. Until the 1890s, most advertisements were found in middle-class periodicals, such as *Ladies Magazine* and *The London Illustrated News*, with the working classes only "eavesdropping."<sup>12</sup> By the 1890s, however, popular

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<sup>9</sup> For a history of advertising before 1850, see *Advertising and the European City: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Clemens Wischermann and Elliot Shore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Richards, *The Commodity Culture*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Hilton, "Advertising, the Modernist Aesthetic of the Marketplace? The Cultural Relationship Between the Tobacco Manufacturer and the 'Mass' of Consumers in Britain, 1870-1940," in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* eds. Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Richards, *Commodity Culture*, p. 7.



newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*, emerged as the leading vehicles of mass advertising.<sup>13</sup>

In appealing to the new mass market, manufacturers advertised both a specific brand name for the product, and they used a symbol (trademark) for immediate identification. Companies such as Lever Brothers and Pears realized that they could "charge a higher price for goods with a memorable brand name and attractive packing; in turn, they urged consumers to accept no substitutes."<sup>14</sup> Soap was effectively advertised in three ways. First, it could be wrapped in individual cartons which provided for name recognition (amounting to free advertising) and could also be used for promotional programs. If a consumer collected a certain number of wrappers, he/she could trade the wrapper for other goods, varying from lithograph prints to jewelry and linens. The advertisements could also be used as collectibles themselves, reprinted in greeting cards, bookmarks, calendars, or posters. Finally, advertisements in this period were most effective when used in the periodicals of the new popular press.<sup>15</sup> Confident manufacturers, like Lever Brothers, used these three methods and based their advertisements on reputation and known integrity, allowing for the sale of an enormous amount of soap.

Most advertisers relied on "noncontroversial" images that would not "offend any particular segment of the market, or that

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

used references so culturally conservative that the advertisements had the potential to appeal to all."<sup>16</sup> Some commodities were specifically targeted to a distinct social class, but more frequently advertisers produced marketing campaigns that "transcended class boundaries."<sup>17</sup> Advertisements urged consumption "by assuring the consumer that she was not alone: the product was consumed by thousands."<sup>18</sup> For example, in a 1906 advertisement for Lever's Monkey Brand Soap, a monkey's face is imprinted onto a radiant sun overlooking the various rooftops of a town; thatched roofs and spired turrets represent the various social groups in the town. The caption says, "Great and small it shines for all."<sup>19</sup>

Of particular importance to this study are the marketing techniques of the late nineteenth and twentieth century that frequently connected the advertised commodity to popular images of the British Empire, monarchy, patriotism and national identity, as well as middle-class domesticity.<sup>20</sup> Using the Empire to sell commodities not only stimulated patriotism and national identity, but flooding the Empire with British consumer goods also represented the Victorian preoccupation with progress: they provided jobs and produced wealth at home, while transplanting British "civilization" to the dark corners of the Empire. Moreover, late Victorian advertising used the popularity of the

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<sup>16</sup> Hilton, "Advertising," p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, *Commodity Culture*, p. 5; Similar themes are also discussed in Loeb's *Consuming Angels*.

monarchy<sup>21</sup> to sell commodities to the masses. Thus, Queen Victoria became not just the image of British imperial and national greatness but also a "consumer queen."

All of these elements are reflected in an 1897 advertisement for Sunlight Soap. The advertisement of June 28, in *Graphic*, connected the Queen's Jubilee with Sunlight Soap. The advertisement provided pictures of a young Victoria at her accession in 1837; next to this image was a more stately and regal picture of Victoria in 1897. Surrounding the portraits were flags of the three lions and the Union Jack as well as flowers that connect the Queen's crown with the crests of her empire. Below the image read the royal warrant: "Soap Makers By Special Appointment To Her Majesty."<sup>22</sup>

Lever Brothers was one of the first British corporations to understand the huge impact and sales potential of effective advertising. In particular, Lever's advertising targeted working-class women with his new Sunlight soap--an innovative hard soap with high proportion of copra oil or palm kernel oil that produced lather more easily. This new soap was introduced as a product that would make the work of housewives easier, and Lever used innovative methods of advertising to highlight this point.<sup>23</sup> Lever

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<sup>21</sup> See David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance, and the Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' 1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Cannadine argues that the monarchy's popularity increased during the nineteenth century when Victoria was deliberately associated with British national identity through the use of "invented traditions" such as the Jubilee celebrations.

<sup>22</sup> Richards, *Commodity Culture*, p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> For a good analysis of advertising (with illustrations) at Unilever, see W.J. Reader's *Fifty Years of Unilever: 1930-1980* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

also cut and wrapped soap in distinctive bars and packets using modern principles that "today underlie all large-scale marketing of mass-produced consumption goods."<sup>24</sup>

By mid 1890s, Lever's business moved from a private partnership worth £27,000 to a public company worth £1,500,000 because of this new consumer market and the power of modern marketing techniques. Moreover, Lever's business expanded into other types of cleaning products which were all marketed along the same lines as Sunlight. Lifebuoy health soap, another brand introduced in 1894, took advantage of the popular preoccupation with germs and hygiene. This was the age of Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch, and the fear of contagion worked perfectly into the selling of soap. This preoccupation with cleanliness and sanitation was also part of a wider cultural obsession with moral and religious purity (see Chapter 7). In 1899, Lever introduced Lux flakes (a soap and clothes washing detergent) which continued the principle of less work for the housewife since Lux produced more suds than did other soap and therefore required less scrubbing. Lux and Swan Soap were also advertised as luxurious soap for middle-class consumers; (again see chapter seven). By 1904, Lever Brothers was selling 60,000 tons of soap a year in the U.K. and was the leading soap manufacturer in Britain.<sup>25</sup>

The rise of the soap industry must be seen in the context of rapid industrialization and the growth of modern advertising. The

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change*, 2 Vols., (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

growing cities and towns, the factories and subsequent pollution all created the need for soap, especially for the lower classes in the inner cities. Lever took advantage of this mass consumerism, where "the smoke and grime of urban industrial life made soap a necessity where previously it had been almost a luxury."<sup>26</sup> He successfully tapped this popular market by using modern methods of advertising. Therefore, the mass market for soap emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth century as a result of industrialization, but this market could only be realized after 1860 with a general increase in the standard of living of town workers. By the 1870s and 1880s, the market expanded further.

Although historians disagree about the impact of industrialization on the working-class standard of living before 1850,<sup>27</sup> there is no real debate about its impact after 1870. The decades after 1870 saw a rise in real wages. Britons were "enjoying an average standard of living that was historically

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> This debate on the pre-1850 standard of living of wage earners centered around the work of E.J. Hobsbawm and R.M. Hartwell. Hobsbawm took the "pessimistic" view, arguing in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), that between 1790-1850, both the quality of life and real wages of the working classes had not improved. During the first half of the nineteenth century, mortality rates had not decreased, unemployment figures remained high, and the lack of a rise in per capita food consumption all point to the "dark view" on the standard of living for wage-earners. Hobsbawm concedes, however, that these three indexes do improve during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and by 1900, industrialization did bring about an "absolute improvement in material living standards" (*Labouring Men*, p. 65). In "The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800-50," in *The Standard of Living in Britain in the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Arthur J. Taylor (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1975), Hartwell, on the other hand, supports the view for a rising trend in living standards during the first half of the nineteenth century. Relying largely on wage-price data, consumption figures, and the rising national income figures compiled by economic historians such as Phyllis Deane, he concludes that the average real income doubled between 1800-1850, and the average per capita income increased by fifty per cent by 1830 (*The Standard of Living*, p. 95).

unparalleled." Even if contemporaries in the 1880s talked of a "Great Depression, by which they meant primarily a depression of prices and profits . . . for most employed workers at the time, money wages generally held steady while the cost of living fell."<sup>28</sup> More specifically, the years 1875-1895 saw the purchasing power of the working classes increase by about forty per cent. This working-class prosperity was the direct result of cheap imported food and industrial efficiency. There was, of course, still "poverty amidst this growing plenty," even though "for all the justifiable alarms which attended the years of trade depression, it was only the unfortunate few who were not appreciably better off in 1895 than they had been twenty years earlier."<sup>29</sup>

Edwardian Britain, however, witnessed the leveling of the general standard of living and consumption. This period of retraction can be explained by the higher cost of food and fuel, even though some of this new expense was offset by generally stable housing rents. For example, the building boom in London before 1905 held rents firm in a period of generally rising prices; in smaller urban areas, rent increases between 1905-1912 averaged less than two per cent.<sup>30</sup> There were, of course, other signs of material improvement during the Edwardian years. The British (including the working classes) traveled more than ever before as well as indulging themselves in leisure activities. It was not unusual for holiday-makers and excursionists from the East

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<sup>28</sup> Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur J. Taylor, "The Economy," in *Edwardian England: 1901-1914*, ed. Simon Nowell-Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 127.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

End of London or the industrial North-West of England to travel by train or car to seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Southport, or Bournemouth.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, music halls, public museums, and sporting events, particularly football, were popular forms of entertainment for the masses in the early twentieth century.

On average, real wages and, therefore, the purchasing power of the working classes during the Edwardian period had declined in relation to the late Victorian period. In 1909, Edwardians such as C.F.G. Masterman and A.L. Bowler questioned the general perception of the great Edwardian prosperity. Masterman complained about the bipolar society of both poverty and extravagance, whereas Bowler cynically suggested that the perception of great wealth and general affluence in the early twentieth century was nothing more than "illusions, fostered by the newspapers."<sup>32</sup> The "Condition of England Question" had resurfaced once more.

Historians must be careful when only analyzing wages in terms of change over time. Factors such as regional variations and the mobility of labor should also be carefully scrutinized and put in context of the general nineteenth century and post-war historiographical debate over the standard of living.<sup>33</sup> But even with that caveat established, for the period 1850-1914, a "regional analysis of the labor market is a powerful antidote to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> A. L. Bowley quoted in Arthur J. Taylor, "The Economy," in *Edwardian England*, p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> See E.H. Hunt, *Regional Wage Variations in Britain: 1850-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

overdoses of pessimism concerning the effect of industrialization on living standards."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, if one considers the various regions in Britain, one should not be surprised to learn that even by 1880, there were many parts of the country still hardly more industrialized than they were two centuries earlier.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the group that should receive the most compassion in this period were the rural laborers from such diverse areas as southern England, northern Scotland, and pockets in Wales.<sup>36</sup> And the wage variations between heavily industrialized areas and rural Britain became even wider because employers continued to invest "in areas where demand for labor was already substantial and wages high."<sup>37</sup>

Another factor in the standard of living discussion (besides regional variations) is a statistical analysis of wages by occupation. In 1885, Leone Levi furnished a report to Sir Arthur Bass, M.P. on the *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes*.<sup>38</sup> Yet, even though Levi recognized differentials in wages by skills and positions within the same industries and also by occupation in different industries, he still concluded that by 1884, the Kingdom had increased its wealth and thus "the position of the working classes has likewise greatly improved."<sup>39</sup> He argued that there were frequent instances of social mobility (workers moving into the ranks of the middle classes by owning a shop or having sufficient shares in business and savings in the bank). On

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>38</sup> Leone Levi, *Wages and Earnings of the Working Classes* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 30.



average, wages in all working class occupations had risen while expenses, like rents and food, had stabilized.<sup>40</sup> By 1884, the average wages for the common laborer were 20 to 22 shillings per week, while the wages in 1857 only 15 to 17 shillings, a 30 per cent increase.<sup>41</sup> Although during the latter half of the nineteenth century one witnessed the continuation of dire poverty,<sup>42</sup> most had more disposable income than they had ever before.<sup>43</sup>

Industrialization created a new society in Britain. Pre-industrial society had been transformed from a "basically static, hierarchical, profoundly religious world of rural self-sufficiency . . . into the secular, individualistic, dynamic world of mass production, urbanization and corporate ownership."<sup>44</sup>

Industrialization also brought about a changed society in social organization (through population growth, urbanization, and the shift to factories) and social class (birth of a middle and working-class consciousness). Moreover, industrialization produced great social and administrative reform in the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., See also John Burnett's *A History of the cost of Living* (Aldershot, England: Gregg Revivals, 1993). Burnett argued that in looking at the history of prices (which is key to understanding the standard of living), one must factor into the general equation distinct patterns or "waves" in price fluctuations; between 1790-1820 average prices rose rapidly; they fell between 1820-1850; rose again between 1850-1873; and fell significantly after 1873. Barnett concluded that the standard of living improved for most during the last half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31; Levi claimed that what also helped increase the average wages of the working classes was overtime pay and the piecework as well as supplemental earnings from wives and children.

<sup>42</sup> As detailed in the famous reports on destitution by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree.

<sup>43</sup> Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market*, p. ix.

<sup>44</sup> Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society: 1780-1880* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 3.

professionalization of government in the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Still, the most important social development was the development of a new social structure. This new society was based on the "horizontal solidarities of class in place of the old vertical connections of dependency and patronage."<sup>46</sup> Much of the rise in class antagonism began because of the geographical segregation of the classes in cities and towns and the alienation between workers, on the one hand, and their employers and the landed orders on the other. With the rise of population, urbanization, and the increased size of the economy came a dramatic increase in the size of the state and corporate bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy, historians have often stressed, is one of the standards for a "modern" state; it ideally allows for efficiency in a complex and populous world. Pointing out its negative effects, however, sociologist Max Weber argued that bureaucracy leads to increased social stratification.<sup>47</sup> For many critics and observers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, large bureaucracies (and the growth of cities) gave rise to a general feeling of alienation in society--an impersonal aspect to human relations.

Such a view is echoed by French sociologist Emile Durkheim who found that the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century

"had destroyed the moral ties that had sustained the individual in

<sup>45</sup> Perkin further develops this theme in his seminal work, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1990). Perkin argues that a new and growing society of experts contributed to the continuing growth of the middle class and the dissemination of middle-class values.

<sup>46</sup> Perkin, *Modern English Society*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Max Weber, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building; Selected Papers*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

traditional society."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, much like Carlyle and Ruskin, Durkheim argued that because of increased secularization in urban and industrial society (that undermined traditional religious authority and social cohesiveness), individuals faced *anomie* or alienation in society.<sup>49</sup> Durkheim, and Karl Marx for that matter, believed that this alienation of labor would lead to class conflict and social unrest.<sup>50</sup> This alienation in late Victorian society, explains Terence Qualter, became "less an objective state of living than a feeling of disassociation from the world at large . . . that man has lost his identity or selfhood."<sup>51</sup> He goes on to explain that

work, which in a preindustrial society was a strong harmonizing, socializing agency, became a desocializing force in an urban industrial environment. In most large cities, those living in one neighbourhood may work in dozens of scattered locations, the work community disconnected from the living community.<sup>52</sup>

With such societal change, the fear of revolution and moral degeneration from below was very real and very worrying for many nineteenth century intellectuals and the middle class. Asa Briggs noted that "Victorians began to interest themselves in cities in the late 1830s and early 1840s when it was impossible to avoid

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<sup>48</sup> John Merriman, *A History of Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), p. 889.

<sup>49</sup> See Emile Durkheim, *Selected writings*, Edited, translated, and with an introduction by Anthony Giddens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>50</sup> See Karl Marx, *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*, Edited with an introduction by Dirk J. Struik and translated by Martin Milligan, (New York: International Publishers, 1964).

<sup>51</sup> Qualter, *Advertising and Democracy*, p. 17; See also E. and M.J. Josephson, *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (New York: Dell Pub. Co., 1962), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

investigation of urgent problems. They were horrified and fascinated by the large industrial cities."<sup>53</sup> Surveys of city life carried out by charitable, religious and sometimes governmental agencies published results that made it difficult to ignore.

The burgeoning use of statistics in the late nineteenth century pointed to a general increase in workers' wages and standard of living but still highlighted sanitation and disease problems in the worst parts of the city.<sup>54</sup> Such statistics fueled the fears of the middle class and its cultural sages. During the Victorian period the central government set up the Statistical Department and organized the Royal Commissioners of Inquiry,<sup>55</sup> and so took the first step in seriously assuming responsibility for the general well-being of the poor. The Victorian middle classes were sympathetic towards reform since it provided the opportunity to refashion the character of the working classes, turning them into moral, hardworking, and loyal subjects.<sup>56</sup> Thus, reform would offer the chance to mold the lower orders in the middle-class image of a Christian and industrious worker.

Two influential statistical reports were those of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree; these studies stimulated the State into taking social and political action. In the 1890s, desperate overcrowding in London was cataloged by the investigations of

<sup>53</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> The Statistical Department was set up within the Board of Trade in 1832; the Royal Commissioners came under the jurisdiction of the Home Office and their role in investigating working-class conditions in the factory as well as in the urban slums was vital in assessing the national social problem which led to some important reforms, such as the Public Health Act of 1848.

<sup>56</sup> See David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the Welfare State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).

Booth (1840-1916), a wealthy Liverpool shipowner. In his famous report, published in several volumes during the 1890s, Booth worked with teams of investigators who, using modern statistical methods, described the appalling conditions for some of the working-classes by searching London street by street. Booth's findings showed that about thirty per cent of London's working population were living in poverty.<sup>57</sup>

Seebohm Rowntree(1874-1954), a member of the chocolate-manufacturing family, analyzed working-class housing in York. In his book, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life (1901)*, Rowntree showed a similar percentage of poverty for the provincial city of York as Booth's survey of London had earlier shown. This suggested that poverty for wage-earners was a national problem which needed state intervention.

By the early twentieth century, British cities remained

a patchwork of private properties, developed separately with little sense of common plan, a jumble of sites and buildings . . . a social disorder with districts of deprivation and ostentation, and every architectural style, past and present, to add to the confusion.<sup>58</sup>

This urban quagmire even forced George Bernard Shaw to suggested that all British cities be torn down and rebuilt from scratch.<sup>59</sup>

The last quarter of the nineteenth century might have seen social improvement in relation to the situation in the first half of the

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<sup>57</sup> Clark, *Hope and Glory*, p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

century, but was it enough? The perception by many intellectuals and captains of industry was that it was not.

In this period, poverty was "dramatically 'rediscovered' by upper and middle-class intellectuals, politicians, and some captains of industry at just the time when the poor were becoming less poor, when more of them were moving from the unskilled to skilled occupations and from worse-paid to better-paid ones."<sup>60</sup> By the 1880s, the poverty problem had been "relativized." It no longer focused on basic needs, but rather by what the New Liberal economist, J.A. Hobson, had called "felt wants." For it was in this period that "poverty was measured not only against the rising expectations of the working class but also against the rising affluence of the upper class. . . the rich were getting richer at a faster rate than the poor were getting less poor."<sup>61</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the real grievance was not that "the poor were being pauperized," but that they were being deprived "of acquiring a higher standard of living and a larger share of the nation's wealth."<sup>62</sup> Thus, it was now the high expectations of both the middle and working classes that had reinvigorated and renewed the earlier national discourse on the "Condition of England" question.

William Morris, following in the footsteps of his mentor Ruskin, joined the national discourse and spoke out against "industrial hideousness" and the abuses inherent in capitalism.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>63</sup> Graham Hough, *The last Romantics* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1961), p. 84.

Like Ruskin, he used art "to reject the mainstream economic and social assumptions of his day," and particularly, he used an "idealized vision of the Middle Ages to highlight the shortcomings of industrial society and to illuminate the path forward out of the industrial and capitalist wasteland."<sup>64</sup>

In a lecture given to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London (1893), Morris claimed that one could best witness an "Harmonious Architectural unit" in Medieval society and thus "Gothic Architecture is the most completely organic form of the art which the world has seen."<sup>65</sup> Morris argued that art and architecture are so vital to society because they "are man's expression of the value of life," as well as "the production of them makes his life of value."<sup>66</sup> Gothic architecture, said Morris, was the product of the free and individual craftsmen who was endowed with a "freedom of hand and mind," and yet who was not constrained by the fetters of "Greek superstition and aristocracy," nor "Roman pedantry." For this Medieval craftsman understood the roughness of nature, the use of natural materials, as well as the "beauty of simplicity" and the necessity of "inventive suggestion." Morris also noted the communal spirit of Gothic architecture. "But from the first," claimed Morris, "this freedom of hand and mind subordinated to the co-operative harmony

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<sup>64</sup> Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb, and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> William Morris, *News From Nowhere and other Writings*, edited with an introduction by Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 332.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

(seen with the gildsmen of the Free Cities) which made the freedom possible."<sup>67</sup>

Raymond Williams argues that Morris' central significance to the social discourse of his day was that he "sought to attach its general values to an actual and growing social force: that of the organized working class."<sup>68</sup> The way forward for Morris, then, was the immediate introduction to Britain of modern socialism. In "How I Became a Socialist," published in *Justice* in 1894, Morris defined socialism as creating a society that

should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked . . . all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all--the realization at last of the meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH."<sup>69</sup>

He acknowledged the intellectual debt owed to Carlyle and Ruskin for standing up to liberalism, or what he called "Whiggery," and continued: "Apart from my desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization."<sup>70</sup> For Morris, this civilization brought such misery, poverty and inequality, while "its eyeless vulgarity" had destroyed art, "the one certain solace of labor."<sup>71</sup>

As the founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, he believed that mass production had destroyed the excellence of the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 148.

<sup>69</sup> Morris, *News From Nowhere and other Writings.*, p. 379.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



"free craftsman."<sup>72</sup> His "Gothic" revival was not simply about the aesthetic but was also heavily weighed down with morality. What set Morris apart from other socialists "was his profound moral and ethical core: his perception that a revolution is worthless unless its spirit can touch the hearts and minds of ordinary people."<sup>73</sup> He had once announced that "a Communist community would require a moral revolution as profound as the revolution in economic and social power."<sup>74</sup>

Both Ruskin and Morris, then, pushed for the concept of an "organic" society, stressing "interrelation and interdependence."<sup>75</sup> This idea of the "organic" was actually a forerunner to socialism, "an essential preparation for socialist theory, and for the more general attention to a 'whole way of life', in opposition to theories which constantly reduce social to individual questions."<sup>76</sup> Yet, "organic" theory supported authoritarian politics as well. The "organic" idea, as promoted by Ruskin, may have been "perfectly acceptable to socialists, but the ideas of *design* and *function* . . . supported not a socialist idea of society but rather an authoritarian idea, which included a very emphatic

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<sup>72</sup> According to Paul Thompson in *The Work of William Morris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), Morris was not completely against mechanization. Although he did use individual craftsmen frequently in his firm (Morris and Co.), his primary income was ironically derived from production by machinery. Certainly Morris can be viewed as a complex man who had an often contradictory character. He was a man who espoused Marxist doctrine, yet became a successful businessman as well. Graham Hough probably most accurately describes Morris as a "Bourgeois Socialist."

<sup>73</sup> Charles Harvey and Jon Press, *William Morris: Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 140.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

hierarchy of classes."<sup>77</sup> Significantly, the New Liberal economist J.A. Hobson understood this point: "This organic conception," said Hobson,

gives order to his (Ruskin's) conception of the different industrial classes and to the relations of individual members of each class; it releases him from the mechanical atomic notion of equality, and compels him to develop an orderly system of interdependence sustained by authority and obedience.<sup>78</sup>

Lever promoted this "organic" idea in a lecture promoting the Six-hour work day. He explained that

we can have no so-called leisured class or moneyed class unless all classes can enjoy the opportunity in their lives of leisure and money in symmetrical proportion. Not in equal proportions, because there is no such thing as equality or uniformity in God's scheme of man or of nature. But nature's and man's Creator never planned that one section should be starved whilst another section be overfed without decay and death resulting. Therefore, our problem can only be solved by increasing wealth and increasing leisure.<sup>79</sup>

In another speech to the Royal Institute of Public Health in 1910, Lever further argued that

only by consideration of the welfare of the employee, only, in fact, by acting as trustee for the employee, and not solely as beneficiary, can we realize the prevention of waste in business or justify the enjoyment of the great power possessed by capital and management.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 140.

<sup>78</sup> J.A. Hobson quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> William Lever, *The Six-Hour Day and Other Industrial Questions* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919), p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> William Lever, "Inaugural Address to the Royal Institute of Public Health, Birkenhead Congress, July 18, 1910." Port Sunlight Heritage Centre, p. 4-5.

The type of "organic" society discussed by Morris that relies on hierarchical implications does not sound to dissimilar to Lever's paternalist community established at Port Sunlight, one that also formulated a relatively complex hierarchical corporate structure.

Like Morris, Lever criticized the social and economic "polarization" in Victorian Britain, but he looked to find remedies within a "modern context." Earlier in the nineteenth century, Carlyle had called to arms the new potential "heroes" of Victorian society--the "Captains of Industry"--and Lever was one of several industrialists, like Titus Salt and George Cadbury, that answered the call.<sup>81</sup> The solution for Lever was to turn to the idea of a spiritual and moral community, yet to cultivate a community that was still reliant upon and developed around an industrial framework.

Earlier critics, such as Carlyle and Ruskin, might have brought the social issue to the national consciousness with their useful invective and emotional cries for a more moral, spiritual, and organic universe, but it was ironic that the Utilitarian-inspired rational use of statistics would actually lead to

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<sup>81</sup> Lever was part of a wider world of businessmen who were also social reformers appalled with nineteenth century working-class conditions. Titus Salt (1803-76) was a wool-spinning manufacturer and Liberal M.P. from 1859-1861. He built the model factory village of Saltaire, near Bradford in 1853 (see Ian Campbell Bradley's essay, "Titus Salt: Enlightened Entrepreneur," in *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-century Society* ed. Gordon Marsden (London: Longman, 1990). George Cadbury (1839-1922), a contemporary of Lever's, was a Quaker and owner of the famous cocoa and chocolate firm who established his model factory town in Bournville, near Birmingham. Like Port Sunlight, Bournville provided a fine example of improved working-class housing and town planning, thus joining the Garden City movement of the late nineteenth century (see Charles Dellheim's "The Creation of a Company Culture: Cadburys, 1861-1931," *American Historical Review*, 92, 1987): 13-44.

political and social reform, increasing the government's role in social welfare during the years leading up to the Great War.

Lever himself can be considered to be a New Liberal.<sup>82</sup> He was centrist rather than left, however, since he still supported the deeply entrenched principles of laissez-faire and the maintenance of the British Empire.<sup>83</sup> Yet Lever saw the need for social reform at home as well as the necessity of tapping into the potential of mass consumption; he realized that lasting social reform could not be achieved without increasing the wages of the working-classes and without, at the same time, turning them into conspicuous consumers. Similar to classical liberalism, New Liberalism continued to affirm "faith in the progress of intelligent rational, and sociable humanity to overcome the defects of social organization."<sup>84</sup>

New Liberals understood the notion that social policy must be planned, organized, and comprehensive in nature. Social security had to be achieved by a cooperation between state and the individual. "The new liberalism," argues Freeden, "was in large part a reaction to the separation of the state and economy, the recoiling of the centrist liberals from a socialism that attempted to fuse the two was an abdication of much of the spirit of

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<sup>82</sup> For an in-depth account of New Liberalism, see Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and Avital Simhony and D. Weinstein, *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter Four. Late nineteenth and twentieth century imperialists were concerned about the physical and moral condition of the British working classes for two key reasons. First, they wanted to avoid a working-class revolt at home. Also, they needed working-class participation in the imperial mission and assurance that the British remained a "fit" race to rule.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Freeden, *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought 1914-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 11.

reforming liberalism."<sup>85</sup> Generally speaking, the establishment of a compulsory, contributing state-backed system was a recognition of the role of "community" in supporting human needs. Lever's social experiment at Port Sunlight, however, preceded that of the state by at least two decades. The social benefits and sense of community created at Lever Brothers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had to take the place of the state.

As a New Liberal, Lever supported the government's role in providing for a welfare state. For example, as a Liberal M.P., from 1906-1909, Lever introduced a bill pushing for state old-age pensions (paid for by a graduated income tax) and continued to support the state funding of education. He also supported the Housing of the Working Classes Amendment Bill, calling for local authorities to acquire land to build houses with cheap rents for the working classes. As an autocratic businessmen used to swift action, it is not surprising that Lever did not stay in Parliament long. Claiming the need to focus on his growing business, Lever resigned from Parliament, disappointed by the slow and often painful legislative process.<sup>86</sup> It is the contention here that Lever instituted significant employee benefits at Lever Brothers, such as pensions and free health service, not only to build company loyalty but also to supply a model for the state.

The national discourse on the Condition of England begun by important Victorian writers, then, was joined by captains of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>86</sup> W. P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976), pp. 70-73.

industry as well. And Lever, for example, used the discourse on national problems to highlight his experiment at Port Sunlight and construct his paternalist and humane image. As a result, social and cultural theories of tradition reemerged as one way to deal with the social and cultural crises caused by industrialization, urbanization, and population growth. Lever's paternalism and his company culture at Port Sunlight reflect such reactions to the vulgarities of modern life, even as one acknowledges that Lever took advantage of the late nineteenth century new working-class consumerism. He represents renewed form of industrial paternalism, that took advantage of a growing and far-reaching industrial consumer society. He maintained control and improved the social and economic conditions of his work force by using paternalist ideals of *noblesse oblige* within an industrial setting while paradoxically emphasizing self-reliance.

It was the living conditions and politicalization of this new working class that concerned Lever and other industrialists during in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>87</sup> Lever wanted to tackle this new sense of the impersonal and potentially

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<sup>87</sup> The political and cultural influence of the middle-classes came under threat during the late nineteenth century with the widening of the electoral franchise, the growing power of the trade union movement, and the emergence of a working-class political party. The reform bills of 1867 and 1884 had extended the franchise to include almost all adult urban and rural workers. The Trade Union Act of 1875 ended previous limitations on unions, and, by the turn of the century, about a quarter of British workers belonged to a union. Once the working-classes were enfranchised and unions fully legalized, it was only a matter of time before the working classes could support their own political party. The Labour Representative Committee, which became the Labour Party in 1906, was founded in 1900 by the socialist, Keir Hardie. Labour, however, only won two seats in the general election of that year; thirty seats in 1906; 63 seats in 1918; and by 1922, the party won 142 seats, thereby becoming the official opposition.

dangerous society by improving both the living and working conditions of his workers. He essentially had four general motivations: first, Lever needed to find ways to attract and control his work force; second, Lever felt a religious and moral obligation to help the working classes; third, improving relations between the employer and employee would lead to increased productivity (providing for greater profit for the employer as well as higher wages and a better standard of living for the employees), which would, of course, be good for business and avoid a revolution from the masses. Lastly, Lever indicated that such action would have the larger benefit of leading to the economic and moral health of the nation. All could be achieved by looking back and constructing a pre-industrial "community" but shrouding it in middle-class values that still functioned within an efficient industrial setting. Significantly, Lever expected that Port Sunlight would be used as a model for government as well as for other businesses and industries in Britain. Port Sunlight might act like a British "City upon a Hill," and the success and fame Lever received for his "community" motivated him to attempt similar social experiments in the Congo and Hebrides.

Although clearly an ardent capitalist, Lever, echoing other nineteenth century critics, blamed much of the social and economic problems of the industrial capitalism on the "cash nexus." In first using paternalism, and later a sophisticated corporate culture, Lever tried to restore the sense of self and give workers a strong cohesive identity (unlike the perceived "unhealthy" class

identity they were developing) in the midst of great social and economic change.



## Chapter 4

### Image, Ethos, and Corporate Culture

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr.'s popular book, *In Search of Excellence*,<sup>1</sup> promotes the idea of corporate culture by analyzing successful American companies. They argue that "excellent" companies, such as IBM, MacDonald's or Proctor and Gamble, all have "apparently ordinary employees" who believe so strongly in their product or service that they go to extraordinary lengths to produce quality products or to satisfy their customers. In one of many anecdotes about these "excellent" companies, Peters and Waterman recall the image of a Proctor and Gamble executive who

red in the face, furiously asserted to a class in a Stanford summer executive program that P&G 'does too make the best toilet paper on the market, and just because the product is toilet paper, or soap for that matter, doesn't mean that P&G doesn't make it a damn sight better than anyone else.'<sup>2</sup>

The authors maintain that "excellent" companies all are shrouded in such "stories and imagery," and furthermore, have "cultures as strong as any Japanese organization."<sup>3</sup> Peters' and Waterman's defense of American corporate culture appeared in the context of the post-war Japanese economic "miracle." By the 1960s, Japan had

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Warner Books, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xix.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. xix-xx.

the second largest GNP in the world (next to the United States), and this stiff competition from Japan produced much anxiety in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Especially during the 1980s, business executives and scholars began to study and discuss the culture of successful Japanese corporations.<sup>5</sup> Peters and Waterman found that successful companies are on the whole "doing the same, sometimes cornball, always intense, always repetitive things to make sure all employees were buying into their culture--or opting out."<sup>6</sup> Image, corporate culture, and corporate excellence are all connected, and, as we will see with Lever, they were not necessarily new to late twentieth century American or Japanese corporations.

This chapter examines Lever's image construction, arguing that Lever's personal image was integral to the early companies' development and subsequent company culture. Lever's public persona was effective because he was aware of and responded to the dominant discourses of his period, including important late nineteenth and early twentieth century national discourses on gender, empire, and social and economic division. Responding to public concerns, Lever attempted to strike a balance. He presented himself as authoritative and "manly," yet caring; he was at the same time an agent of empire and capitalism, yet claimed to be moral. He wanted both profit and worker welfare. Lever drew on national insecurities in this discourse and presented himself

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<sup>4</sup> See William K. Tabb's *The Postwar Japanese System: Cultural Economy and Economic Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> The success of Japanese corporations culminated in American fears of economic and cultural decline, fears that only subsided with the general crash of the Asian economy in the late 1990s.

<sup>6</sup> Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, p. xx.

and his company as solutions. He was successful because he was aware of national concerns (such as the conditions of the working classes and Britain's flagging dominance in world affairs) and sensitive to them in his image construction. Lever's personal and company image was important for the consumers who bought his brand name products and also for the maintenance of employee corporate culture.

Through his public addresses, Lever created and maintained his persona as an enlightened paternalist and as a responsible empire builder. There is an important link in nineteenth century thought and discourse between imperialism and the condition of the working classes. Nineteenth century imperialists argued that empire would not only guarantee British economic expansion and political world dominance, but would also promote social stability at home by providing jobs. This argument is best summed up by the words of Cecil Rhodes: "The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war you must become imperialists."<sup>7</sup> The empire was seen as a "safety valve," a way of siphoning off excess population and thereby relieving unemployment. If empire was the answer to Malthusian fears in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the economic depression of the 1870s spurred late Victorians to once again claim that "emigration would solve immediately the twin problems

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond F. Betts, *The False Dawn: European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 131.

of overpopulation in Britain and labour shortage in the colonies."<sup>8</sup> As Raymond Betts puts it, "social discontent could be channeled outward, to the still growing world of empire."<sup>9</sup> No politician supported this imperialist idea more than Lever's contemporary, Joseph Chamberlain. As colonial secretary (1895-1903), Chamberlain promoted "constructive imperialism," in which empire and social welfare were directly linked.<sup>10</sup> For men like Chamberlain and Lever, the empire was vital to Britain's economic survival and the well-being of the working classes.

### **Building a Halo: Lever's Construction of Ethos**

Lever constructed his image by using company publications and taking advantage of the new and vital role of advertising. For advertising served the dual role of reinforcing the company culture as well as increasing Lever Brothers' sales in household goods. As a pioneer in British advertising, Lever clearly understood the power of image. On the subject of advertising, Lever wrote that "the whole object of advertising is to build a halo round the article."<sup>11</sup> If we substitute "the article" for Lever himself, the same guiding principle toward personal image or ethos applies here. Lever constructed a "moral" paternalist image as the leader and founder of his company and attempted to do the

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<sup>8</sup> Marjory Harper, "British Migration and the Peopling of the Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Betts, *The False Dawn*, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 134; Part of Chamberlain's solution was to introduce an economic system of imperial preference (free trade within the empire), but also to provide for tariff reform (protectionism) to protect British industry.

<sup>11</sup> William Lever to John Cheshire, 13 June 1909 quoted in Charles Wilson's *History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change* 2 Vols., (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), p. 21.

same for his products. This "halo" was vital in maintaining the corporate culture, particularly during the transition from a relatively close-knit family run company (that fostered a sense of community) to a huge multinational (that in many ways constructed an artificial community).

Lever, as we have seen, was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Samuel Smiles. To explore Lever's image-making and ideas about leadership, we must turn once more to Smiles and also to the theories of two other Scotsmen, George Campbell and Hugh Blair, both eighteenth century philosophers of rhetoric. During the nineteenth century, Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) and Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres* (1783) were the standard nineteenth century texts on rhetoric. They were staples in the schoolroom and on gentleman's shelves. Reprinted over twenty times, Campbell's major work was "easily adapted to the literacy needs of mass education in a commercial-industrial society."<sup>12</sup> Blair's *Lectures* went through 283 versions between 1783-1911.<sup>13</sup> Campbell, Blair, and Smiles' theories apply to Lever's constructed image; they focus on "morality" and "character" as necessary conditions for being an effective orator or leader.

In *Self-Help*, Smiles discusses the necessity of the "gentleman character" and the appearance of such for effective

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<sup>12</sup> Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, editors, *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1990), p. 661.

<sup>13</sup> The influence and dissemination of Blair's work during the nineteenth and twentieth century is described in Stephen L. Carr's article, "The Circulation of Blair's *Lectures*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32 (2002): 75-104.

leadership. Smiles believes that character "is the noblest possession of a man, constituting a rank in itself, and an estate in the general goodwill; dignifying every station, and exalting every position in society."<sup>14</sup> He defined the essence of "manly character" as truthfulness, integrity, and goodness, and if one possessed such "character," one would "always command an influence, whether it be in the workshop, the counting-house, the mart, or the senate."<sup>15</sup> By analyzing Lever's speeches and the accounts of his actions in the company journals, we see how Lever's image follows the pattern presented by Smiles. For Lever presented himself to be a benevolent gentleman who was endowed with both virtue, and character.

Smiles' emphasis on character is echoed in the words of leading rhetorician, George Campbell. In *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Campbell discusses the orator's image or as he referred to it as the "estimate of himself which . . . is obtained reflexively from the opinion entertained of him by the hearers, or the character which he bears with them."<sup>16</sup> According to Campbell, the rhetor needs to identify with his audience by appealing to the passions through sympathy. But, sympathy (such as Lever's publicly acknowledged sympathy for workers' low wages and poor conditions), says Campbell, can be weakened by two ways: low opinion of the orator's intellect or a negative opinion of his/her morals. The latter is the more worrisome of the two: "for

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, ed. Asa Briggs (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 360.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, p. 785.

promoting the success of the orator, it is a matter of some consequence that, in the opinion of those whom he addresseth, he is both a wise and good man."<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Hugh Blair contrasts the ineffective orator who is motivated by ambition with the man of virtue and character who effectively persuades the audience. The virtuous orator persuades as he "spoke always to the purpose, affected no parade of words, used weighty arguments, and showed them clearly where their interests lay."<sup>18</sup> During Lever's public appearances, we see how he took every opportunity to distinguish himself as a virtuous man with the audience's interest in mind. Following rhetorical advice, he often showed himself first sympathetic and then as a "wise and good man."

For example, in promoting the six-hour work day, Lever first showed his sympathy for workers before laying out his program.

We must remember the deadening effect of general factory life. From fourteen years of age to seventy years of age is a long life-span, and if you consider the conditions of attending, for eight hours a day, the same automatic machinery and following the same routine, with its continual deadly, monotonous round of toil, those of us whose employment is varied will realize how this bites into the soul of a man or woman and tends to corrode it. There is not that variety that human life thrives on.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 787.

<sup>18</sup> Blair quoted in Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, p. 822.

<sup>19</sup> William Lever, *The Six-Hour Day and Other Industrial Questions* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919), p. 17.

Using inclusive pronouns, Lever invited his audience to put themselves in the place of the worker, as Lever himself had. He invites empathy. Also, there is an implied threat to his upper-class audience that echoes Matthew Arnold's discussion on anarchy. Without culture and education, the factory worker will corrode and become less than human, thus endangering an orderly society.

Like Blair, Lever defined culture in terms of "taste" and continued to draw on dominant ideas cultivated by Blair, who defined taste as "the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and of art."<sup>20</sup> Blair also argued that "good taste" was a vital component of rhetorical persuasion that could lead a person to higher intellectual pleasures and even virtue, arguing that "the exercise of taste is moral and purifying."<sup>21</sup> Lever models his use of culture on these popular principles. For example, in a speech delivered to the Imperial Arts League on March 18, 1915, Lever explained that "to Art belongs the sphere of raising the ideal of the masses of the people, gladdening the mind, raising it and cultivating it."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, for Lever, art, and culture in general, needs to provide a public service. "Art for Art's sake is meaningless," said Lever, "Art for the service of humanity and for the People is a great and inspiring ideal."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Hugh Blair quoted in Bizzell and Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition*, p. 803.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 802.

<sup>22</sup> William Lever, *Art and Beauty and the City* (Port Sunlight: Lever Bros., 1915), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 18.



In arguing for the need to improve working-class culture and education, Lever logically turned his sympathy towards children. He argued that the six-hour day could lead to an overall improvement in their education. Lever began by asking, "(c)an we fancy anything more sordid than life of a boy (or girl) who goes into the factory to-day under the stress of modern conditions?" He then reasoned that

The present boy goes at fourteen years of age, and then to seventy years of age (if he survive) he sees nothing but the factory, except for a few holidays, so few that he scarcely knows how to systemize and make the most of them, and his horizon, his whole outlook on life, is so stunted that he cannot live the life he was intended to live. It was never the creators intention to send us into this world as so many "hands"--He sent us with imagination, He sent us with the love of the country, He sent us with ideals and outlook, and these are simply stifled under the present industrial system.<sup>24</sup>

Lever particularly manipulated his audience to support his program by focusing his sympathy on women. Lever continued,

the six-hour day is already a most urgent and much needed condition of working hours in all industries where women and girls are employed.... a large proportion of women engaged in industries, whether married or single, have, unlike their fathers and brothers, some housework to do as well as their work in industrial employment. And these hours of housework and the resulting fatigue must be remembered when considering their hours of work in the factory, workshop, or office.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

Lever's view on women was essentially conservative and supported middle-class Victorian values. He did not challenge women's role as caretaker of the home, but still he showed concern that as an industrial worker, she must perform double duty. In Lever's view, even the wife who worked in the factory was Ruskin's "household queen." The maintenance of middle-class values of the home were persuasive to his middle-class and upper-class audience and to workers who valued Lever's "enlightened paternalist" image.

Because "our home life is the secret of our sturdy, honest British character," Lever saw a pressing need for safe and comfortable housing for the working classes.<sup>26</sup> Slums create health problems and lead to loss of work time and wages for the worker and the company through ill health. Lever used this argument on health and housing to push his own housing agenda at Port Sunlight.

Lever, then, further promoted his image as a sympathetic, moral, and paternalist employer. He reasoned:

if houses are crowded fifty and over to the acre that the death rate in that area will be over twenty-five per one thousand and the loss of time through sickness over ten per cent out of the possible year's work, the infantile mortality rate will be high, and the physical condition of the growing children poor and unsatisfactory; but that if the houses are built so as not to exceed twelve houses per acre, thus allowing ample space for air and gardens, playing fields and so forth, the death rate will be under fourteen per one thousand and the loss

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<sup>26</sup> William Lever, *Inaugural Address to the Royal Institute of Public Health, Birkenhead Congress, July 18, 1910* (Port Sunlight: Heritage Centre), p. 6.

of time from sickness will be negligible quantity out of the possible year's work, and that the infantile mortality will be low and the physical condition of the growing children excellent and most satisfactory.<sup>27</sup>

Lever further extended the argument for good health and housing by suggesting that Britain's economic position in the world was reliant on it: "Healthy home life has made England what she is, and England's future position among the nations of the world depends upon the maintenance of healthy home life."<sup>28</sup> Once again focusing on the question of beauty and morality in the home, Lever asserted, "[s]urround a home with slums and you produce moral and physical weeds and stinging nettles. Surround a home with a garden and you produce the moral and physical beauty and strength of the flower and oak."<sup>29</sup>

The above examples of Lever's speeches show how he rhetorically constructed his moral image. Lever assumed the role of a teacher, sometimes preacher, and sometimes sophist. Lever showed himself sympathetic and appealed to his audience's emotions. He invited his audience to empathy, but he also alluded to the threat of an uncontrollable working class. He showed that not only did he have the interests of his workers at heart but also those of the middle and upper classes who feared the uncontrolled lower classes. Lever constructed his image of wisdom and morality, ending each scenario with statements of truth

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

pertaining to the human condition and soul. He offered himself and his company as practical (and not just theoretical as Ruskin, Carlyle, and other intellectuals had done) solutions to the social, cultural, and economic problems caused by rapid industrialization.

Lever frequently made universal claims, positioning himself as one who knew "truth." In a discussion on the British wartime industrial situation, he made universal claims regarding individual happiness, linking industry with improvements in education and even the broad idea of beauty. He stated that

every healthy human being seeks happiness, and has to find happiness in supplying the wants of the body with food, clothing, and shelter. And equally happiness can only be found in feeding mind and soul with ideals of beauty, art and learning.<sup>30</sup>

Lever, echoing Arnold, lauded the saving grace of culture, claiming to know ideal beauty and art, and its effect on "healthy humans." Again Lever implied only a subhuman would not be elevated by culture.

Another example of such universal claims can be seen in a speech to the Royal Institute of Public Health at Birkenhead in July, 1910. In this speech, Lever advocated the importance of good physical and mental health for business success; he attempted to be modest about his speech but claimed to be telling truths. "How imperfect my exposition of these truths has been," said

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<sup>30</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 5.

Lever, "my own realization of their importance and of my inability to adequately address you makes most glaringly apparent."<sup>31</sup>

The examples above clearly show that Lever positioned himself as a wise, sympathetic leader who speaks well. But they also show that in his own discourse, Lever drew on the concerns of the day, answering some and stirring up others. Lever also had to answer and deal with some of those concerns as a national politician and not just as an industrialist.

Lever served as a Member of Parliament for the Wirral constituency between 1906-1911. In Parliament, as a politician and successful industrialist, Lever promoted his social and economic views on the national stage as well as solidified his image as a social visionary and sympathetic employer. As a member of Parliament, he pushed for state-sponsored old-age pensions, salaries for M.P.'s, and of course, the six-hour work day. He touted his accomplishments in Parliament as a social reformer and democrat, and boasted,

We have also seen the Health Insurance Acts, and I had the honour of carrying two bills preceding the Government Acts--the Old Age Pensions Act and the Payment of Members Act--which latter gives the means to any constituency to select its member without consideration as to whether he can afford to pay his railway fares to London and his lodgings when he is in London. Just think what it has meant to give old age pensions, improved education, medical attendance on school children, and health insurance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lever, "Inaugural Address," p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 40.

Echoing the catchphrase of Bentham and the Utilitarians, Lever suggests that "a system that made for the greatest good for the greatest number would be a right system in a democratic country."<sup>33</sup> In the tradition of the Utilitarians, Lever frequently relied on statistics to persuade his audience and claim benevolence. Although joining Carlyle and other cultural critics of industrial society, Lever also revealed a faith in some methods of industrial rationalization. He turned toward the use of statistics as a predictive tool for understanding society. Yet, for Lever, science could never replace a divine presence for the metaphysical underpinnings of knowledge; scientific methods might be used, however, to discover the extent of and find answers for social ills.

Interestingly, much of the debate about methods of social study in late Victorian Britain coincided with the study of "community." Although the study of and search for "community" was not new to late nineteenth century writers, the concept in the late nineteenth century was frequently associated with the new discipline of sociology.<sup>34</sup> Lever was influenced by both the reforming zeal of the Utilitarians as well as the late Victorian social theorists who argued that social inquiry should be modeled on positive sciences.<sup>35</sup>

Lever also cultivated his image as a patriot, an empire builder, and frequently linked imperial and business concerns. He

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Sandra M. Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-3.

publicly promoted (and often provided a plan for) radical reform of post-war British business practices, largely along the lines followed in the United States. Lever was careful, however, in using the United States as a model, as touting American accomplishments could dilute his message of the primacy of British power. On the one hand, he emulated American business practices (especially in the area of marketing and advertising) and also heavily invested in the U.S. economy by setting up a Lever Brothers subsidiary there. On the other hand, as a British patriot and imperialist, Lever emphasized the threat by the ever-expanding industrial and commercial power of the United States. He stressed this threat, with the goal of pushing other British businessmen to embrace his views. Lever warned, "we are in competition with America. Don't think for a moment that our allies in the trenches will be our allies in commerce... whatever ideals we have in this country, we shall have to reckon with the ideals the Americans have."<sup>36</sup>

Lever used the competition between the United States and Britain to further his views regarding production. The British trade unions, Lever pointed out, favored restricted production. Lever did not. He was concerned about the slow pace of British production compared to the United States. In a speech given on January 19, 1918 in Huddersfield, Lever provided some worrying statistics.

In 1886 the output of a certain class of  
worker in the United Kingdom was 312 units;

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<sup>36</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 45.

in 1906 (twenty years after) this output had been reduced to 275, and in 1912 it had dropped to 244--from 312 to 244 in the twenty-six years in the United Kingdom. In the United States, whilst in 1886 the output per worker was at 400, it went up to 596 in 1906, and in 1912 to 600, so that whilst we went down the United States have gone up 50 per cent.<sup>37</sup>

Lever placed much of the blame for the downward trend in production on the misguided leadership of British trade unions, not on British workers or on British ideas.

In contrast, he spoke well of union leadership in the United States. He complimented the U.S. President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers. Unlike British trade unions, Gompers did not talk about restricting production. In his Huddersfield speech, Lever quoted Gompers:

We are not going to have the trouble here that Britain had with restriction of production . . . Work two shifts if you please, or work your machinery all round the twenty-four hours if you like, within three shifts, and we will agree, but we insist on the normal working day, with full physical effort. We will not agree to that overwork, producing the effect of over-fatigue, which destroys the maximum of production, undermines the health of the individual worker, and destroys the capacity for full industrial effort.<sup>38</sup>

As Lever pointed out, that was almost word for word what he had proposed earlier (except Lever advocated the six-hour work day while Gompers favored the eight-hour day).

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



Although he argued that British unions were incorrect in trying to restrict production since "increased output is the road to betterment and prosperity," Lever did not want to come across as overcritical of union leadership. He praised union members as well-meaning. "I do not want you to believe," says Lever,

that I think unions are not doing good work according to their lights. I have never met a Trade Union official yet who has not impressed me with his sincerity in desiring to do the best for his members; but it is a mistaken policy (restricting production), that is all.<sup>39</sup>

Lever's solution for the productivity problem was the introduction of the six-hour work day. In promoting his view, Lever maintained his image as a patriot, aware of the threat of American competition and armed with the knowledge to beat it.

Lever was not always impressed with or influenced by American management techniques. He was horrified by some new American business practices. Lever was a public opponent of Taylorism,<sup>40</sup> the scientific management theory that found its way over the Atlantic during the first decades of the twentieth century:<sup>41</sup>

"[Are] we not equally ignorant and equally doomed to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> See Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Norton, 1967). In this work first published in 1911, Taylor introduced time-and-motion study to increase efficiency in the factory or company. The essence of Taylorism revolved around a clear focused task for each worker. Management planned ahead and wrote down specific instructions for each factory worker. The instructions include the specific task, the time allotted for the task, and the setting of high production goals. If the worker succeeded in completing the task satisfactorily in the allotted time, the worker eligible for a significant increase (30 to 100 per cent) in wages (*Principles*, p. 39). Taylor argued that only by applying a "scientific" approach to the employee task, would companies reach the ultimate goal of greatly reducing costs while increasing outputs.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), p. 188.

disappointment if to-day the employer-capitalist relies on the magic of 'perpetual motion' fetish of long hours of toil, with low wages for employee-workers?"<sup>42</sup>

According to Richard Vinen, Taylorism did not transplant well to Europe and thus lacked the influence and success that it had in the United States--an impact most clearly evident in Ford's factory in Michigan. Vinen argues that the reason for this failure is because of cultural differences and the fact that the dissemination of Taylorism in Europe "was refracted through the theories of Frenchman Charles Bedaux, who produced a scheme that placed a heavier emphasis on the simple speeding up of work."<sup>43</sup> In Contrast, in the United States "revisionist Taylorites were trying to produce a more humane version of rationalization to take more account of workers' needs."<sup>44</sup> It was the more crude, less humane European version of Taylorism that Lever rejected. This rejection allowed Lever to participate further in the discourse on the solutions for the problems of industrialization.

Although he rejected Taylorism in general, Lever was influenced by some aspects of the theory. The rationalization of work brought about key changes, changes that Lever himself promoted and adopted. Taylorism led to the creation of larger economic units; only large companies could afford to buy new machinery and hire experts.<sup>45</sup> Lever's factories utilized up-to-date machinery (such as the conveyor belt). Lever argued for the

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<sup>42</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Vinen, *A History in Fragments*, p. 188.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

overall positive effects of using new technology and up-to-date machinery in the modern factory. Although many late Victorian thinkers had feared the dehumanizing influence of modernization, Lever always argued that modern sophisticated machinery would allow for more efficiency in the factory which would bring about an increase in production. Such an increase in productivity would result in a decrease in workers' hours as well as an increase in workers' wages, thus promoting a better lifestyle for the worker and thus for the nation.

On the macro level, Lever argued that to maintain economic greatness, Britain as a nation needed to direct its energy to the production of more wealth, and that this could only be achieved by an increase in machine power. More machines meant more production and thus more profit to pay the workers. Lever further argued that "wealth is the greatest, wages the highest, and hours of labour the shortest where capital invested in machine power is the greatest per head of the people."<sup>46</sup> The better the machinery, the more intelligent the worker becomes. This is logical, claimed Lever, because workers who run machines need leisure and further education to think well, and with leisure and good training, workers can increase production over fifty per cent.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, leisure for workers would act as a stimulant for trade since leisure increases "wants" while long hours produce the opposite effects.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Viscount Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 199.

Lever promoted the Victorian idea of "self-improvement rather than self-indulgence to fill the future leisure hours."<sup>49</sup> On the six-hour day system, Lever argued that workers would use part of their newly acquired time on compulsory state training. Workers between fourteen and twenty-four would spend two hours each working day on technical or higher education and physical training.<sup>50</sup> Workers over age twenty-four until age thirty would prepare for National Service by spending two hours of their working day on military training.<sup>51</sup>

Like any Taylorite, Lever wanted to avoid waste. Yet, for Lever, the greatest loss was "the appalling waste caused by over-fatigue of the workers, resulting in inefficiency, bad health, lost time, and premature decay and death."<sup>52</sup> The solution was to work machinery for more hours and workers for less. "We must have a six-hour working day for man and women," said Lever, "and by means of six-hour shifts for man and women we must work our machinery twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four hours per day."<sup>53</sup> Lever believed that all work could be done in two shifts of six hours a day and could be achieved without fatigue. The first shift would begin at 7:00 am and, after a fifteen minute break (refreshments to be provided at the company's expense) at 8:45 am, would end at 1:15 pm. The afternoon shift varied somewhat in order to allow for a

<sup>49</sup> J.P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976), p. 172.

<sup>50</sup> In 1917, Lever instituted a Staff Training College at Port Sunlight for this purpose. Workers between fourteen and eighteen could attend classes on the company time and for free. Other workers could take evening classes for a nominal fee which could be returned at the end of the session for those employees who attended regularly and proved themselves as students.

<sup>51</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 172.

<sup>52</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

half-holiday on Saturday afternoons. From Monday to Thursday the second shift commenced at 1:15 pm and finish at 9:00, but from 1:15-8:45 on Friday, along with a half an hour refreshment break. The shifts alternated so a worker could have the mornings free one week and the afternoons the next.<sup>54</sup>

Lever argued that a fresh worker could produce more in six hours than a fatigued worker could in eight; thus, an unfatigued worker could produce as much in a thirty-six hour week as a fatigued worker in a forty-eight hour week. The key was the greater efficiency of an unfatigued worker since the worker would be more alert and thus be able to tend to more machines.

But while embracing aspects of Taylorism, Lever upheld his moral paternalist image. He attacked this transplanted theory of rationalization as being inhumane and counterproductive in the long term. He argued that

the only scientific management that I have any belief in...is a knowledge of human nature. You cannot force human nature. If you set tasks for human nature, as seems to be the basis of what is called Scientific Management, it will surely break down. Human nature can respond enormously to sympathy, to a kindly touch, to a participation in the fruits of its industry, to share of the profits it has helped to create.<sup>55</sup>

While urging increased production, Lever maintained focus on the employee. In his speeches, he actively resisted the assumption

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<sup>54</sup> Leverhulme, *Leverhulme*, pp. 201-202.

<sup>55</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 41.

that machinery would dehumanize the workforce. He cultivated his ideal of industrial paternalism.

Central to Lever's vision of industrial paternalism was the Victorian preoccupation in the inevitability of progress. "Our national future stability," said Lever,

has its sure foundation in the fact that both employer-capitalist and employee-worker are each becoming more and more intelligent every year that passes. The day is fast coming when both will be intelligent enough to recognize that their interests are identical and that the prosperity of either depends on the prosperity of both.<sup>56</sup>

Lever opposed the view that industrialism necessarily exploited workers. Lever positioned the worker and capitalist on the same level, with the same goals.

In promoting his vision of industry, Lever had to recognize and respond to reality--the reality so forcefully captured by those cultural and social critics of industrialization discussed in the two earlier chapters. His response was to admit the slow progress of reform and to hold up his business and his paternalism as a solution. He pushed for radical social and economic reform. In a discussion on the British industrial system in 1918, Lever showed his anxiety about the lack of progress with the social conditions of the working class. He lamented that "our industries progress, science progresses, but we have little or no corresponding progress in conditions of comfort for the workers."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

For Lever, the solution to this social problem was for others to emulate his social experiment at Port Sunlight and to implement two general policies for the nation: the six-hour work day and co-partnership.

In 1909, Lever introduced a type of profit-sharing scheme which he called Co-partnership. By this time, the chairman had decided that Prosperity-sharing had outlived its usefulness.<sup>58</sup> It had some early success, playing a major role in the construction of Port Sunlight and its institutions. Yet, it was only effective while the company was relatively small and based in Port Sunlight. By 1909, however, Lever Brothers was an international concern, and a new type of profit-sharing scheme needed to be implemented which could apply to all the employees of Lever Brothers and its subsidiaries. Employees who met the requisite qualifications (over twenty-five years old and with the company for at least five years) were given "Co-Partnership Certificates" which entitled the holder to an annual dividend (only after at least a 5 percent dividend for the Ordinary Shareholder had been met).

Co-partnership, however, was not the answer to increased productivity and better labor relations at Lever Brothers (although it was often promoted as such in Lever's speeches and the company journals). Unlike shares, Co-Partnership Certificates had no cash value, and the scheme only heightened class tensions. Co-partners were divided into four distinct economic classes:

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<sup>58</sup> Prosperity-sharing was Lever's earliest form of a profit-sharing scheme for Port Sunlight. In the early years of Port Sunlight, a share of the company's profits was earmarked for the employees collectively to help maintain the village and its institutions.

Directors, Management, Salesmen, and Staff. Company Profits would be distributed in gradations. The higher ranks of staff would of course receive more certificates and higher dividends. In 1912, there were two thousand co-partners who held certificates with a nominal value of £350,000. That year, the dividend was about 10 percent and Lever Brothers distributed about £40,000. The average dividend was £20, but based on the ranking system, the majority of employees who qualified for co-partnership certificates were Class D and thus received only a small dividend.<sup>59</sup> Thus an employee who earned £100 annually, only received a dividend of between 30s. and £5 a year.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, there was an autocratic and "moral flavour to co-partnership" that could be perceived by some as oppressive. Before being awarded certificates, the employee had to sign an agreement stating that he would not "'waste time, labour, materials, or money. . .and [that he would] further the interests of Lever Brothers and its associated companies and his fellow co-partners to the best of his skill and ability.'"<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the certificates could be canceled if the co-partner "were guilty of neglect of duty, dishonesty, intemperance, immorality, willful misconduct, flagrant inefficiency, (or) disloyalty to his employers."<sup>62</sup> For example, when electricians at Lever Brothers supported their union's call for a "sympathetic" strike (electricians in Merseyside went on strike over the hiring of a

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<sup>59</sup> Wilson, *Unilever*, p. 154.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-154.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



non-union foremen at a munition factory in Aintree, near Liverpool) in September of 1918, Lever reduced and in some cases suspended their co-partnership certificates. The union was told by Lever that certificates were "varied at his discretion."<sup>63</sup>

Through co-partnership, Lever still promoted his enlightened paternalist and moral theme. He argued that

the lifting of the employee from the lower lever of the wage drawer to the higher level of the profit earner and prosperity sharer is bound to improve his efficiency, to increase his capacity for intelligent and profitable employment; and in thus developing his highest faculties-mental, moral, and physical.<sup>64</sup>

Lever also argued that loss-sharing must go hand in hand with profit-sharing. Employees must be secure in salary and wages, but profit sharing allows the employee to build up personal interest and loyalty in the business. Yet, if the business is not successful, "capital and management lose the fruit of their life's work. The employee cannot justly be placed in a position of indifference to success or failure."<sup>65</sup>

Lever also placed great confidence in co-partnership as one important way to create a viable corporate culture. He argued that if established, co-partnership would develop a sense of community among both employees and employers in the modern industrial world. In explaining this position, Lever first echoed critics of industry by recalling the sense of community in the preindustrial world:

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<sup>63</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 173.

<sup>64</sup> Lever, "Inaugural Address," p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Modern industrialism is not very old-not two centuries old, and that is a short time in the history of the world. Prior to that man and master worked side by side. The master knew his Jack, Tom and Joe, and Maggie and Jane and Mary--in fact, every employee in the place. And they all knew him; they all came to him in their troubles. He knew their domestic worries and anxieties, and he helped and encouraged them. That worked until the introduction of machinery, the business became so great as to render a continuance of the position impossible.<sup>66</sup>

The "master" should know the employee and care for much more than just his labor. Yet, since this can no longer be achieved because of rapid growth, Lever said that "the only thing that can restore to any degree that condition of two centuries ago is Co-Partnership."<sup>67</sup>

In promoting his views and his image, Lever built on the ideals valued by the Victorian critics of industry; community, responsibility, and humanity. He stated that a share of the profits "would humanize our industries," and would "make for brotherhood, and, above all, it would make the working man no longer antagonistic to Capital, because he would be a Capitalist himself."<sup>68</sup> In practical terms, both co-partnership and the six-hour day were more powerful as an idea that promoted Lever's image rather than as a successful policy established at Lever Brothers. The six-hour day was never implemented in any of Lever's factories (although the eight-hour day was) largely because of the

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<sup>66</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

resistance of the trade unions. The trade unions could not find any such provision in their rules and further argued that any reduction in hours would probably lead to an immediate reduction in wages. Co-partnership had a limited effect on the average worker's wages and suffered from the occasional appearance of "despotism--or at any rate heavy paternalism."<sup>69</sup> Both key ideas of Lever's were only successful as rhetorical tools. "The real value of those schemes," says Charles Wilson, "did not lie in the immediate degree of success or failure which they achieved but in the new attitude and heightened effort which they represented."<sup>70</sup>

Lever's focus on "community" was essential to the effectiveness of his constructed image. In a speech on urban housing reform delivered to the North End Liberal Club in Birkenhead on October 4, 1898, Lever once again promoted his image as an "enlightened" paternalist by focusing sympathy on working-class housing conditions. He claimed expertise in this area and suggested a solution for the problem of overcrowding. In this address, Lever argued that the overcrowding in working class areas was "a scandal and disgrace, as well as a danger to the physical and moral well-being of the nation."<sup>71</sup> He listed statistics about the comparative death rates in urban and suburban areas; in urban areas, the death rate is generally double that of the suburbs. But to Lever, overcrowding was a moral as well as a business problem; both employers and employees lost out when the worker had

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<sup>69</sup> Wilson, *Unilever*, p. 148.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>71</sup> Lever, *The Six-Hour Day*, p. 155.

to take a disproportionate number of sick days (employers lost production and employees lost wages).

The solution to this problem of the slums was to follow the example of Lever's Port Sunlight by moving the working classes out of the city center to the suburbs. Lever suggested that the municipalities buy cheap land in the countryside surrounding the town and erect houses that would be rented out cheaply. Public transportation would also have to be improved and made inexpensive. For the "total cost of rent and transport at the suburbs," said Lever, "must not exceed the cost of rent alone at the centre."<sup>72</sup> The municipalities would still get their rates and at the same time provide jobs for those persons involved in the construction business. Supporting his public image as a moral leader and truth teller, Lever asserted that

far greater than the financial aspect is the improvement that such a policy would bring about in the condition of the people. I speak from experience when I say that nothing elevates and raises the man, his wife, and family, so much as placing them under the most favorable conditions with regard to their homes.<sup>73</sup>

In ending the address, Lever concluded: "We are the richest nation in the world. We require fresh outlets for our capital. Nothing that could possibly be suggested would give a greater return to the nation than the one I have indicated."<sup>74</sup> Lever connected the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

well-being of the nation with family, and business. British economic success and power began in the civilized British home.

Lever's practical solutions for the continuing problems in industrial Britain were presented with constant emphasis on moral character and education. No doubt Lever was influenced by and responding to Victorian critics of industrialization on this point. "The mastery of a machine," said Lever,

can only be accomplished by development of high character as well as high skill in the employee-worker. The obtaining of the most from the machines requires the highest intelligence along with the highest character, and so we tend to get further from the brutes and nearer the angels.<sup>75</sup>

Lever was successful because he responded to ongoing discourses that allowed him to shape his image as an enlightened paternalist. He linked industry with morality and humanity. Lever explained how a "drunken or debauched workman is incapable of working a modern sophisticated machine . . . whilst the steady workman of character is complete master of his job and machine. The whole tendency of modern machinery is to improve the workman whilst increasing his wages and reducing his hours of labour."<sup>76</sup> Much like a preacher, Lever's promotion of good character and morality for his employees suggested to his audience and potential consumers the emulation of his own high moral character. "Equally," said Lever, "modern industrial conditions improve the employer-capitalist. Modern industrial conditions demand and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

necessitate an employer of not only high ability, but also of high character."<sup>77</sup>

In his public addresses, Lever presented himself as an employer-capitalist of principle and character. He claimed to be concerned about the health and happiness of his employees. For example, at the Royal Institute of Health, Lever promoted his business as avoiding worker dehumanization. Here Lever promoted the importance of mental health for workers (years before it became popular to do so in corporations). He argued that physicians needed to research health in the workplace. Lever then moved on to how businesses succeed and offered his answers to problems of the worker. He thought that the key to overall economic success was the cooperation between forces of production--management, capital, and labour. And this cooperation, argued Lever, was only possible through moral principle and right action.

In discussing the disturbing trend in British business of keeping costs low and profits high, (thus ignoring the human element in companies), Lever said that "the highest business success does not rest on a narrow selfishness (employers not considering the well-being of the employee), but on a high moral basis. And this applies with equal force and truth to the employee as it does to capital and management."<sup>78</sup> In discussing good management, Lever preached that "expediency can never alone provide an effective motive power for our right thinking and right

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Lever, "Inaugural Address," p. 5.

acting. Principle, rightly interpreted, only can do that."<sup>79</sup> No doubt this moral principle was a good way to maintain the corporate culture--making employees at Lever Brothers feel that they were led and were a part of something "moral" and worthy and also allowing consumers to feel that they were purchasing a "good" product from a "moral" company.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 5

### Port Sunlight: Lever's Architectural Rhetoric

"The banner of the Romantic Revolt was passing from the literary to the visual and architectural arts."<sup>1</sup> E.P. Thompson

While William Morris was writing *The Earthly Paradise* in the 1860s, he had thought that "literature was no more than a skirmish on the edge of the main battlefield . . . poetry could withdraw into a world of its own: and the poets could shut out the Philistines by refusing to read their work. But architecture was impossible to ignore."<sup>2</sup> The critics of industrialization moved during the latter half of the nineteenth century from literature to the realms of art and architecture. The Neo-Gothic architecture that developed in the nineteenth century was itself part of the Condition of England discourse; it emerged, said E.P. Thompson, as a reaction to the "degradation of the human spirit at the hands of industrial capitalism."<sup>3</sup>

Although on some level Gothic architecture never went out of style,<sup>4</sup> there was such a renewed interest in the medieval arts

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<sup>1</sup> E.P. Thompson *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival; An Essay in the History of Taste* (New York: Scribners, 1950). In this book, Clarke said that "from 1600-1800 perhaps no year passed which did not see the building of some pointed arch and gabled roof, or the restoration of some crumbling tracery" (p. 13).



during the nineteenth century that it was truly a "Gothic Revival."<sup>5</sup> The Gothic Revival began in the mid-eighteenth century when Horace Walpole increased the size of his house, Strawberry Hill, at Twickenham near London. Although eighteenth-century writers and artists had focused on the classical world as the basis of modern civilization, "by the middle of the eighteenth century it was beginning to be recognized how much England owed to the Middle Ages . . . Gothic began to be an acceptable alternative for country houses."<sup>6</sup> Architect Sanderson Miller soon followed Walpole, and in 1754-55 he refurbished Lacock Abbey in Wiltshire. Henry Keene used the Gothic Revival style as well in his remodeling of Arbury Hall (from 1750) in Warwickshire. Architect James Wyatt was also taken by the general antiquarian spirit of the time and began to build in the Medieval style. The best example of Wyatt's work was the mansion, Fonthill Abbey, begun in 1796 for the millionaire William Beckford.

Gothic architecture was the result of the renewed interest in medieval poetry and art. Its central ideas were essentially "Romantic," through its association with nature, the spiritual, the sublime, and the picturesque.<sup>7</sup> John Ruskin, William Morris and the Catholic architect, Augustus Pugin, were the great proponents of the Gothic Revival during the nineteenth century. Between 1850-80, the movement took on momentum in Britain with monuments

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<sup>5</sup> See Chris Brooks, *Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon, 1999); Michael J. Lewis, *The Gothic Revival* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 87.

and public buildings built in the Gothic style. Alfred Waterhouse's town hall in Manchester, the Midland Hotel, St. Pancras Station, in London by Gilbert Scott, G.E. Street's Law Courts in the Strand, and the duke of Westminster's remodeling of Eaton Hall in Cheshire are all fine examples of this turn to the Medieval style.<sup>8</sup> To the Victorians, said Mark Girouard,

such houses conjured up images of an old-style English gentleman, dispensing hospitality in a great hall, with fires blazing in the great arched fireplaces, smoke rising from innumerable chimney-stacks . . . and generous sheltering roofs over all.<sup>9</sup>

Pointed arches, large windows (often in stained glass which provided an extra taint of the religious or pious) and vaulted ceilings were all aspects of the Gothic Revival which had "no commitment to symmetry or level skylines, so that it could be made as broken and irregular as was desired."<sup>10</sup>

Besides Ruskin and Morris, Pugin was perhaps the most influential supporter of this Gothic Revival during the Victorian period.<sup>11</sup> And much like Ruskin and Morris, Pugin rejected the ugliness and secular nature of modern architecture. He wrote the *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* in 1841 so that "the present degraded state of ecclesiastical buildings' might be remedied."<sup>12</sup> More than anyone, Pugin was responsible "for

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<sup>8</sup> Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 273.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 272-273.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive catalog of Pugin's architectural designs and exhibitions see Megan Aldrich and Paul Atterbury, *A.W.N. Pugin: Master of the Gothic Revival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 131.

the revival of craftsmanship . . . (he) saw the need for craftsmen who understood the old forms."<sup>13</sup> But unlike the Protestants Ruskin and Morris, Pugin insisted that the Gothic revival "must depend on revival of the feelings from which it originally sprang . . . it must be part of a general religious, and truly Catholic revival."<sup>14</sup> He offered this architectural revival "not as another style for architects to choose from, but rather an embodiment of 'true Christian feeling'."<sup>15</sup>

Still, like Ruskin and Morris, Pugin argued that one should use art (and especially architecture) as a way to judge the quality of the society that was producing it. By criticizing architecture, he could criticize a whole civilization. In *Contrasts*,<sup>16</sup> Pugin analyzes the architecture and social climate of a town in 1440 with that of the same town in 1840. In 1840, he describes a society in both a moral and aesthetic crisis. In the Victorian town, one finds the abbey ruined, bordered by an ironworks; the churchyard has been turned into a pleasure ground; there is a new jail, gas works, and, of course, a lunatic asylum--all the necessary prerequisites of a depraved, materialistic, and spiritless society.<sup>17</sup> Pugin was making a connection between religious truth and architectural truth; essentially he believed that people would be "better and nicer if surrounded by Gothic

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<sup>13</sup> Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 180.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 131.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *Contrasts: or a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle ages and the Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day, Showing the Present Decay of Taste.*

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 132.

detail."<sup>18</sup> For Pugin, "the life of the Middle Ages was not strange or impossible, but the only good life."<sup>19</sup> He urged contemporary society to use the social structure of the Middle Ages as a model for reform, and only then, "when the piety and public spirit of that time were re-established could a true Christian architecture arise."<sup>20</sup> As a result of the work and writings of Pugin and Ruskin, nineteenth century Gothic architecture was often associated with both "Christianity and with truthfulness," and therefore a Gothic house stood for "good principles as well as good cheer."<sup>21</sup> Architecture, then, does not only involve aesthetic or practical uses, but style is often concerned with image-making; its form displays a message and represents an ideal.

Architecture continued to contribute to the societal discourses later in the century through the Garden City movement, which built upon the developments of the Neo-Gothic but responded directly to concerns of the late nineteenth century, concerns about the excesses of industrialization, empire, but also to such concerns as the identity and "Englishness" of the working classes. Port Sunlight was a major contributor to this Garden City movement and thus to its part in the national discourse.

The Neo-Gothic and Garden City movements and the concerns that produced them significantly influenced Lever and thus the architecture and planning of Port Sunlight. Drawing on the Gothic

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<sup>18</sup> David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture: the development of a theme in architectural history and theory from the Gothic revival to the modern movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 197.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, p. 273.

but promoting Garden City movements, he worked to create a company village that embodied his philosophical, business, and political ideals. In doing so, he used Port Sunlight as a rhetorical text. Through the architecture of buildings, the architectural use of space, and through town governance, Lever argued that his more humane version of capitalism would answer critics concerns and maintain Britain as the great political, cultural, and economic power. The audience for his "experiment" included the British public, policy makers, critics of industrial capitalism, and on a practical level, his employees.

One can identify in architecture and language "their shared semiotic and semantic powers."<sup>22</sup> Lever himself felt that the visual arts worked best by presenting a subtle rhetorical message. He once said that

a beautiful picture or other work of art does not lecture us, or humiliate us, or browbeat us into thoroughness and efficiency. Works of art preach to us their lesson in silence. But they speak it to our very soul in a way we cannot resist nor resent.<sup>23</sup>

And as those supporters of the "linguistic turn" in architecture would argue, architecture, like language, is "infinitely expressive and communicative. . .[it] behaves much like a text."<sup>24</sup>

The rhetoric of the Garden City movement, like the Neo-Gothic, rejected the squalid and inhumane consequences of the

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<sup>22</sup> Georgia Clarke and Paul Crossley, *Architecture and Language: Constructing Identity in European Architecture, c. 1000-c. 1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> William Lever, *Art and Beauty and the City* (Port Sunlight: Lever Bros., 1915), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Clarke and Crossley, *Architecture and Language*, p. 13.

Industrial Revolution, and through its architecture, represented an ideal. Garden cities symbolized the beauty, health, and sense of community found in an "English" preindustrial village.

The utopian Ebenezer Howard was the leading visionary behind the rebuilding of garden cities in Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. While garden cities, such as Titus Salt's Saltaire, George Cadbury's Bournville, and a good deal of Port Sunlight, had been built before Howard published his manifesto, *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898 (published as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* in 1902), for Howard, the earlier garden cities "provided physical models and a practical illustration that decentralization was indeed possible."<sup>25</sup> But Howard was also influenced by the "Back to the Land Movement" (which established twenty-eight rural utopian communities during the nineteenth century) and of course, Ruskin, Morris, and other nineteenth century reformers who provided the first effective protest against industrialization "in favor of a return to a rural life based on craft production and a sense of community."<sup>26</sup>

Howard criticized industrial capitalism (particularly its reliance on private ownership) for creating such desperate poverty along with unsanitary and crowded urban slums. His solution was to build relatively small and manageable cities that would allow for a "healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Hall and Colin Ward, *Sociable Cities: The Legacy of Ebenezer Howard* (New York: J. Wiley, 1998), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

country life."<sup>27</sup> These garden cities would be built on municipally owned cheap agricultural land. The land would be held by "four gentlemen of responsible position and of undoubted probity and honour" in public trust for the garden city community or, as Howard sometimes put it, the "Town-Country Magnate."<sup>28</sup> At the center of the city would be a common garden, which would be surrounded by cultural buildings such as a library, museum, theater, and city hall; industrial areas would be placed on the outer edges of the city. Howard planned for his garden cities to be connected by modern and cheap modes of transportation.<sup>29</sup>

The first Garden City Association was established in 1899 (renamed in 1941 as the Town and Country Planning Association). Besides Bournville and Port Sunlight, the first garden city built along Howard's lines and carried out by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin (the movement's most famous architects) was Letchworth (1903) in Hertfordshire. Other famous garden cities included Welwyn (1919) and the ambitious Hampstead Garden Suburb. Lever had influence at Hampstead since he owned a mansion there (The Hill) and became a trustee of the suburb. Hampstead Garden Suburb was founded by Henrietta Barnett in 1906 and planned by Parker and Unwin. Barnett featured Port Sunlight in her lectures as well as the literature on Hampstead.<sup>30</sup> The Garden City movement also

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<sup>27</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* edited with a preface by F.J. Osborn with an introduction by Lewis Mumford (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-55.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1988), p. 48.

influenced the development of new towns and suburbs in Britain and Europe after 1945.<sup>31</sup>

Lever was an integral part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Garden City Movement. In 1905, he became a board member of the first Garden City Company but resigned shortly after because the board refused to follow his advice on offering freehold sites. Still, we see in Port Sunlight the architectural influences (and the symbolism associated with them) of both the Gothic Revival and the Garden City movement. "The era in which Port Sunlight was conceived," claims Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom,

was a golden age of English domestic architecture. The influence of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the refinement and sensitivity of Late Victorian aestheticism took their place in the new relaxed and confident 'domestic revival'.<sup>32</sup>

Evident among the public buildings and cottages of Port Sunlight are half-timbering, molded and twisted chimneys, carved woodwork and masonry and ornamental plasterwork that "exhibited the high quality of external materials and detailing . . . [to] illustrate the sensitivity to materials typical of the Arts and Crafts Movement's Edwardian phase."<sup>33</sup>

As architectural style represents an ideal or image, Port Sunlight itself was perhaps Lever's most successful rhetorical

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<sup>31</sup> For an in depth look at the effects of the garden city movement on post-war architecture see Ibid; Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Walter L. Creese, *The Search for Environment: the Garden City, Before and After* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.



strategy. Additionally, architectural style is often identified as a "potent sign of national identity."<sup>34</sup> Through his architectural style at Port Sunlight, Lever defined the town as "English," as "clean and beautiful" and as having a sense of "community." In discourses of the time, cleanliness was often identified with morality and beautiful architecture was an essential element in the architecture of great empires or nations. The layout of the village embodied the ideals of a preindustrial or "Medieval" English community. In a local newspaper, Lever explained that his rationale for establishing Port Sunlight was "to Socialize and Christianize business relations and get back again in the office, factory, and workshop to that close family brotherhood that existed in the good old days of hand labour."<sup>35</sup> Port Sunlight is a visual representation of the image that Lever constructed verbally. The town embodies Lever's emphasis on paternalism, community, beauty, and middle-class family values. Lever's village is in itself an argument against the uncivilizing effects of industrialization as well as a proposal for his brand of capitalism. He offered it as a model for Britain as a whole. Furthermore, a sanitary and orderly village was itself an effective advertisement for Lever's household products.

In an address to members of the Architectural Association in 1902, Lever explained to his well-educated audience the purpose of Port Sunlight. He began by giving a brief history of the growth of the company and works, and then stressed that "the village was

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<sup>34</sup> Clarke and Crossley, *Architecture and Language*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Birkenhead News*, 24 November 1900.

part of the scheme from its very inception."<sup>36</sup> In 1888, Lever said that the company moved its works from Warrington in Lancashire to Port Sunlight, to have "the advantage of a plot of land on which we shall have ample room for works without crowding, and plenty of space for the erection of dwelling-houses for the work-people employed, which has always been our idea."<sup>37</sup> And from the very beginning, Lever insisted that "parks and recreational grounds . . . (would) become the feature of the village,"<sup>38</sup> and the "planning and designing simple, beautiful, and inexpensive buildings suitable to village life and village means."<sup>39</sup> One way Lever was able to create this rural village around a modern factory was to surround roads and pathways with plenty of foliage and trees and make sure that "they [the roads] shall still form wherever possible curves and sweeps following the lines of the ravines."<sup>40</sup> Fens in the area were also drained to avoid illness and to provide more playing fields and grass-covered open spaces.<sup>41</sup>

The first phase of the village was completed in 1898; Port Sunlight had 278 houses, several public buildings, shops and schools. Ten years later, the village had incorporated a further 130 acres, built 720 houses and boasted of a population that

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<sup>36</sup> William Lever, *Paper Read at a Meeting of the the Architectural Association, London, March 21, 1902* (Port Sunlight: Heritage Centre, 1905), p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> William Lever, "Port Sunlight Ceremonies of March 3rd, 1888," in E.H. Edwards' *Messrs. Levers' New Soap Works* (Liverpool: Egerton Smith & Co., 1888), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Lever, *Architectural Association*, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> W.L. George, *Labour and Housing at Port Sunlight* (London: Alston Rivers Ltd., 1909), p. 8.

reached about 4,000.<sup>42</sup> In 1902, Lever commended the architects of the earliest buildings and the public recreational facilities in Port Sunlight for giving "to it its distinctive English village character."<sup>43</sup> These public buildings were all owned by the company and included the Gymnasium, Open-Air Swimming Bath, Open-Air Theatre, Hulme Hall, the Collegium, Village Post Office, The Club, Gladstone Hall, two School Buildings, a Church, and the "Bridge Inn," the local public house. W. L. George, an independent scholar and contemporary of Lever's who wrote the first detailed analysis of Port Sunlight in 1909, commented that without these public institutions, "Port Sunlight would not stand out so markedly as it does from among industrial villages; it could still boast of fine Works and good cottages, but it could not claim to have influenced directly the social habits of the people."<sup>44</sup>

The first three buildings served useful recreational and cultural services, but have now been demolished. The Gymnasium (demolished in 1981-82) was designed by architects William and Segar Owen. It was timber-framed and weather-boarded containing three halls which were all fully equipped with exercise apparatus. The gym was open to all for a yearly subscription of three

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Wilson, *History of Unilever: A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change* 2 Vols., (London: Cassell & Company, 1954), p. 146.

<sup>43</sup> Lever, *Architectural Association*, p. 12; Although Lever gave his architects credit, it must be noted that he was directly involved in most, if not all, the architectural planning at Port Sunlight. His son claimed, in *Viscount Leverhulme*, that Lever was "never happier than when seated in front of a plan with a drawing-board, ruler and T-square ready at hand" (p. 86).

<sup>44</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 105.

shillings and six pence; non-employees could also use the gym, but they had to pay an extra shilling and six pence.<sup>45</sup>

The Open-Air Swimming Bath (demolished in 1975) was also designed by William and Segar Owen; built next to the pool were dressing huts with thatched roofs. The pool (which could be heated and one suspects often was) was oval in shape and very large, a hundred feet by seventy-five. Although originally built only for the residents of Port Sunlight, outsiders could bathe if they joined the Swimming Club (a nominal fee of two shillings per annum was required).<sup>46</sup>

The Open-Air Theatre was planned by George Grayson and Edward Ould, but "defeated by the weather," (an ominous sign occurred when three thousand spectators found themselves drenched at the opening ceremony in June, 1903) was enclosed in 1906 and called the Auditorium (which was considered unsightly and thus demolished in 1937).<sup>47</sup> While in service, the Auditorium was well-used. It could seat about twenty-five hundred to three thousand persons and was used for lectures, dances, and "above all to rescue the stage from the vulgarity and the puerility into which it is too often plunged."<sup>48</sup> The theatrical productions were usually amateur and had to be morally sound and of good taste--British comedies seemed to be especially popular. One such play, R.C. Carton's aristocratic farce, "Mr. Hopkinson," was performed by the "Manor

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 124; Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, appendix I.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 125; Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, appendix I.

<sup>48</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 111.

Mummers," a theatrical troupe led by Lever's relatives from Thornton Manor. "Smith," by W. Somerset Maugham, was another comic play put on by the "Manor Mummers." The Port Sunlight Players Club also took to the stage with comic productions like Hubert Henry Davies' "Mrs. Gorrings's Necklace."<sup>49</sup>

Most productions were organized and booked by the social secretary who was appointed by the directors of Lever Brothers and who controlled all the public buildings and events in the village. The social secretary was also in charge of keeping a close eye on manners and propriety at company-sponsored events. One representative regulation regarding village dances required "girls over eighteen had to submit the name of men to the social department, which issues invitations to them unless there be reasons that militate against them." Girls under eighteen were actually supplied with dance partners by the company.<sup>50</sup>

The next series of public buildings, Hulme Hall, the Lever Library and Museum, and Gladstone Hall, are of great architectural significance (largely being built in the Tudor-Gothic style) and still stand today. Hulme Hall was built in 1901 and designed by W. and S. Owen. It was originally built as a girls' dining hall which could seat fifteen hundred, but because of its beauty and size, it was later used primarily for dances, theatrical productions, and lectures.<sup>51</sup> The Lever Library and Museum contained books and exhibits given or lent by Lever.<sup>52</sup> Not

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<sup>49</sup> *Progress*, 12 (October, 1912): 54-56.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, appendix I.

<sup>52</sup> The museum was moved once the Lady Lever Gallery was completed in 1922.

surprisingly there was a chemical exhibit with a reading and workroom attached. There were two reading rooms in the library, one for each gender. To use the library and to check out books, one had to become a member and pay a nominal fee of two pence a year. George complained that many patrons read "penny dreadfuls," but he was still impressed that about half of the library members read serious books of historical, artistic or scientific interest (such as the *Life of Lord Randolph Churchill*).<sup>53</sup>

Gladstone Hall, or as it is now called, Gladstone Theatre, was built in 1891 and designed by William Owen. It was built of half-timber and brick (much like most of the mock-Tudor buildings in Port Sunlight) and had large windows. The hall was the first public building in Port Sunlight and originally served as a men's dining room. Once a new dining room was built in 1910, however, the hall was used for lectures and theatrical productions.<sup>54</sup>

The school buildings were designed by John Douglas and Daniel Fordham and paid for by Lever. Thus, the company originally controlled two school buildings (technically there were four schools that occupied only two buildings; two for infants and one each for the juniors and seniors) on Park Road. After the Education Act of 1902, however, the schools were taken over by the Cheshire County Council.<sup>55</sup> The schools have always been co-

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<sup>53</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 118.

<sup>54</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, pp. 33, 35.

<sup>55</sup> The Education Act of 1902 was largely the work of the Conservative, A.J. Balfour. To try to establish a coordinated national system of education, the act called for the establishment of a central Board of Education and the replacement of school boards for local education authorities, such as county or borough councils.

educational and the teachings nondenominational. George described the buildings as

beautiful, built of bright red brick and covered with creepers; everywhere again we find large windows, abundant ventilation, perfect heating arrangements. The schools tell the same tale as all the other public buildings: hygiene, cheerfulness, and beauty. Each of the two schools has a large hall, very high and Gothic in design.<sup>56</sup>

Christ Church was designed once more by W. and S. Owen and built between 1902-04. The church (as well as the Lady Lever Art Gallery) was paid for by Lever's personal funds. Its architectural style is Neo-Perpendicular from the late Gothic Revival. It is built of red sandstone and had Arts and Crafts details.<sup>57</sup> The church seats six hundred parishioners comfortably and about nine hundred uncomfortably. It was initially built as a nondenominational church, representing a fairly even number of Anglicans and Nonconformists, but later was vested in the Congregational Union.<sup>58</sup> Technically, the minister was chosen by church members, but Lever used his high position as chairman of the Divine Services Committee to appoint the first minister of Christ Church, Samuel Gamble Walker.<sup>59</sup> Before Lever handed over the church to the village, he left a small endowment for the

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<sup>56</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 168; Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, p. 91.

<sup>57</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 109.

<sup>59</sup> David J. Jeremy, "The Enlightened Paternalist in Action: William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight," *Business History* 33 (1991): p. 67.

church with a proviso that church members could appoint any future minister, but he had to "be in Congregational orders."<sup>60</sup>

The Bridge Inn was designed by Grayson and Ould and modeled on an old-fashioned English village inn where a "passing glance will instinctively remind one," described the company journal *Progress*, "of the bygone coaching days of Merrie England."<sup>61</sup> And in the old English inn "liberal fare and homely treatment, together with price and quality," could be found as "our forefathers did in their hostelries of old."<sup>62</sup> The Bridge Inn actually ran as a temperance house from October 1900 to February 1903. As a long-time supporter of the Temperance movement, Lever was not inclined to allow a public house in Port Sunlight. Yet, with the insistence of many of his employees, he allowed a referendum on the issue. Every adult male and female in the village was allowed a vote. Needless to say, the workers overwhelmingly voted (472 against 120) for the establishment of a license. Still, with a population in 1908 of about 3,600, Port Sunlight would have been allowed under the Licensing Bill of 1908, to have one license per six hundred, or six licenses in all.<sup>63</sup> There remained, and still is, only one public house in Port Sunlight.

In speeches and newspapers Lever promoted Port Sunlight and, at the same time, used Port Sunlight to promote himself as an

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<sup>60</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> *Progress*, 1 (November, 1899): 95.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> *Progress*, 4 (January, 1903): 23; George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 114.



"enlightened paternalist" and social reformer by providing the cost of establishing such a model village. The total cost of buying one hundred and forty acres of land, and building the roads, public buildings, and cottages reached £350,000. Lever highlighted the fact that "upon this £350,000 Lever Brothers Limited receive no interest or return whatsoever, the rents being fixed<sup>64</sup> at such an amount as only to pay for rates, taxes, repairs, and maintenance."<sup>65</sup> He argued that the company was not looking for direct profit but "though no return is expected from the capital sunk in the village, a more than adequate one is indirectly derived from the health and better work of well-housed and contented workers."<sup>66</sup> Later, a more sophisticated system of village finance (called prosperity-sharing) was applied.

Yet, probably the most important factor in recreating this "preindustrial community" was providing for open spaces--including parks, recreational fields, gardens, and land for any future development.<sup>67</sup> The goal for Lever was to avoid the problems of overcrowding that plagued industrial cities and towns. To achieve this, Lever argued that one could not crowd too many cottages into the allotted acreage since "[p]roper housing conditions require not only proper air space and good planning within the home, but

<sup>64</sup> In 1902, the rents had increased from 3 shillings per week to 5 shillings per week because of the cost of maintenance.

<sup>65</sup> Lever, *Architectural Association*, p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> W.L. George, *Engines of Social Progress* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907), p. 121.

<sup>67</sup> Ralph R. Morton, "*Housing Renewal at Port Sunlight*" (M.A. Thesis., University of Liverpool, 1974). Morton traces the history of housing maintenance and improvement at Port Sunlight since 1930 and suggests that the high standards of housing continued after Lever's death largely because of the generous allowance of open space as well as the insistence of high standards of maintenance on buildings that were built to last.

equally the provision of large open spaces and recreation grounds outside the home."<sup>68</sup> The communal grounds encouraged a sense of community that combated the personal isolation associated with working conditions in the modern factory. Port Sunlight was built and maintained, therefore, not for any direct economic gain, but instead, to house company workers comfortably and to construct a village "community." This "community" would allow the individual to feel a sense of shared identity as well as to establish loyalty as a vital component of the company culture.

While promoting his own investment in Port Sunlight, Lever devised a way of providing tenants with a sense of communal ownership. Since the company held the view that "labour has the right to participate in profits, but that right is collective," Lever announced a prosperity-sharing scheme (the forerunner of Co-partnership) that would provide funds for any future village needs.<sup>69</sup> In a limited way, prosperity-sharing was a type of profit-sharing scheme; it allowed a share of the profits to be issued to the workers in a lump-sum for "the purpose of keeping up the Village and its institutions."<sup>70</sup> In the early years of Port Sunlight, Lever argued that the workers' share of the profits should be "earned collectively" and therefore, the amount earned should also become "the property of the community."<sup>71</sup> Lever

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<sup>68</sup> William Lever, *Opening Address for a Visit of International Housing Conference to Port Sunlight*, August 9, 1907 (Port Sunlight: Heritage Centre), p. xvii.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>70</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

defended his view in 1903 to a French scholar of garden cities, Georges Benolt-Levy. Lever said

If I were to follow the usual mode of profit-sharing I would send my workmen and work girls to the cash office at the end of the year and say to them: 'You are going to receive 8 pounds each . . . (s)pend it in the public-house; have a good spree at Christmas' . . . (i)nstead of that I told them: '8 pounds is an amount which is soon spent, and it will not do you much good if you send it down your throats in the form of bottles of whiskey, bags of sweets, or fat cheese for Christmas. On the other hand, if you leave this money with me, I shall use it to provide for you everything which makes life pleasant, viz. nice houses, comfortable homes, and healthy recreation. Besides, I am disposed to allow profit-sharing under no other than that form.'<sup>72</sup>

W. L. George argued that this system of prosperity-sharing was preferable to profit-sharing because the worker was not "subjected to the demoralizing influence of irregular bonuses," but instead the worker is "given the opportunity of occupying a good house at a low rate in pleasant surroundings, and in taking part in an elevating communal life."<sup>73</sup>

Lever's speech and his prosperity-sharing scheme in general bring to light the tensions in late nineteenth century culture in ways that Lever would not have intended. In spite of his contention that English workers, if given the proper environment,

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 19; Once the company became an international concern and grew beyond Port Sunlight, Lever had to institute a new profit-sharing system called co-partnership (in which preference shares in the company were given to employees depending on years of service and position) that would benefit all employees of the firm and not just those in Cheshire.

could become representatives of taste and culture, he implied here--echoing mid-century sentiments--that the working classes are uncontrollably driven by their appetites. Their insatiable hunger (for alcohol and junk food) would drive them against reason to spend their money foolishly. Thus, Lever defined what was pleasant for his workers (obviously not whisky and fat cheese) and doubted their ability to make "moral" decisions with their money without his intervention. Instead of an aristocratic paternalism that relegated the lower orders to the status of perpetual children and therefore always in need of both assistance and discipline, Lever exhibited a "middle-class paternalism." He tried to implement policies that produce self-disciplined, self-reliant, rational individuals; yet he could not, in fact, trust his workers and so hedged them in with infantilizing rules and restrictions. For if workers were left to their own devices, they might not have reflected his constructed image.

To control his workers effectively, Lever provided for a sense of community at Port Sunlight by deliberately turning to images and ideals associated with an ancient "English" society. He used the Garden City movement as his guide. This movement, says Standish Meacham, was "embedded in a vision of Englishness."<sup>74</sup> Meacham further argues that often the symbols and ideas of "Englishness" put forward and discussed by reformers of the period were nothing more than an "invented set of perceptions."<sup>75</sup> "The

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<sup>74</sup> Standish Meacham, *Regaining Paradise: Englishness and the Early Garden City Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

inventors of Englishness," says Meacham, "employ history as they make and remake the past."<sup>76</sup> The garden city reformers, such as the architect and town-planner Raymond Unwin or Howard, described the preindustrial village as a green and organic community that promoted unity and harmony and was therefore devoid of any "modern" class antagonisms. The reformers in turn tried to ignore the darker side of preindustrial history, such as the rigid hierarchy and social problems caused by enclosure. But, in the end, the leaders of the garden city movement had to recognize that their ideal community could not support democratic ideals. In other words, like a real pre-industrial community, the new garden cities would have to be built around the structure of paternalism.

Meacham connects the emphasis of "Englishness" in garden cities with class hierarchies. He argues that the "Englishness" in the garden city "implied a cultural paternalism that again connected the present to the past."<sup>77</sup> In the construction of a rural pre-industrial community, the "well-to-do" and the poor each had a set of duties to carry out. The "uninstructed" poor had to accept "tutelage from a leisured class of committed social educators in the virtues of an Englishness grounded in a hierarchy of values," while the rich had to give the poor that careful instruction. "A genuinely English community," said Meacham, "could be achieved only through cultural giving and receiving."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

Clearly this culture of paternalism dominated the company and village of Port Sunlight.

Meacham also argues that for upper middle-class and middle-class reformers, the invention of Englishness "serves a therapeutic purpose by using the past in such a way as to mitigate present fears and perceived dangers."<sup>79</sup> The possible dangers of class conflict, moral and physical decay, democracy, and the general "end of the century malaise," would require the "present difficulties and uncertainties" to be resolved "within a knowable context."<sup>80</sup>

The symbolic was of the greatest importance in the Garden City Movement. During this movement, religious and industrial planned villages used the rural village as a model in attempting "to resolve the anomaly of the artificial creation of a community."<sup>81</sup> Gillian Darley argues that the importance of these "fake villages" can be seen "in the symbolism and associative qualities they imply. If the sense of community can be induced as readily as the authentic touch of age, the model village builders will have succeeded in their aims."<sup>82</sup>

In attempting to create his community and answer some of the social problems associated with industrialization, Lever focused on both interiors and exteriors, creating communal spaces and private pristine family homes. As seen in the analysis of Lever's

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Gillian Darley, *Villages of Vision* (London: Granada Publishing, 1978), p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

speeches, he held the family up as a necessary institution for British success. This emphasis on the family--the middle-class family--is embodied in the attention Lever gave to Port Sunlight's cottages and in the architectural design of the cottages themselves. "In considering Garden City Life," said Lever, "the most healthy conditions of the human race are obtained where the home unit exists in a self-contained house with the living rooms on the ground floor, and the bedrooms on the floor immediately over."<sup>83</sup> Lever argued that houses should be built at least fifteen, preferably twenty-five feet from any roads as well as having plenty of space in the rear for a garden.<sup>84</sup> The Victorian home, after all, was often defined as a sanctuary from the competitive and sometimes immoral world. In a lecture to members of the International Housing Conference at Port Sunlight in 1907, Lever detailed the planning and architectural layout of the family dwellings. He explained that there were essentially two types of housing in Port Sunlight: the parlour-house and the cottage. The living area of the cottages all had three bedrooms upstairs; downstairs the cottage had a living room, kitchen, scullery, bathroom, and larder. The parlour-houses only differed from the cottages by having an additional bedroom and parlour on the ground floor.

On a wider scale, in promoting Port Sunlight and his own image, Lever also tied Port Sunlight's success as a model company village to the future of the nation. Even before the works and

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<sup>83</sup> Lever, *International Housing Conference*, p. xix.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

village of Port Sunlight were actually built, Lever addressed his employees about the potential and importance of their new adventure.

We have assisted to-day at the ceremony of cutting the first sod, and planting the flag of "Sunlight" in another district, and I hope that, before long, we shall see the once quiet locality dotted over with working men's cottages, and swarming with those busy bees of industry that tend so much to the well-being and welfare of our nation.<sup>85</sup>

Lever thought the village and his paternalist company should be a model for solving the social and economic problems that plagued the British nation. "The Cottage Home is the unit of a nation," said Lever, "and therefore the more we can raise the comfort and happiness of home life, the more we can raise the standard of efficiency for the whole nation."<sup>86</sup> After providing statistics that showed the superior health and growth patterns for children in Port Sunlight compared to similar demographic areas in Britain, Lever argued that

(U)nder favorable conditions, as regards employment and housing and general environment, such as exist at Port Sunlight, the most intelligent of the working classes will provide their full share and even more of the future population and that Port Sunlight showed the way to the rest of England.<sup>87</sup>

For Lever, favorable conditions related to housing and architecture. He argued that moral character, beauty, and happiness were essential ingredients for both business success and

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<sup>85</sup> Lever, *Port Sunlight Ceremonies*, p. 44.

<sup>86</sup> Lever, *International Housing Conference*, p. xvii.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



national greatness. But these could only be achieved under the right conditions. "None of us would attempt," said Lever, "to grow fragrant flowers and wholesome fruit except under favourable conditions. And favourable conditions are equally essential for the growth and development of good citizens."<sup>88</sup> The argument is best summed up as follows: "to capture Art and Science, the beautiful, and thoroughness, efficiency and happiness," said Lever, one needs "fresh air, healthy homes, fine streets, avenues, parks, pleasure-giving salubrious suburbs, well planned and made convenient and accessible by rapid transit facilities. In short, substitute salubrious suburbs for squalid slums."<sup>89</sup>

As a soap manufacturer, it is also not surprising that Lever wanted the cottages to be orderly, clean, and conducive to family life. In a speech given at the Port Sunlight Ceremonies of March 3, 1888, Lever stated:

(b)elieving that cleanliness is next to Godliness, my brother and myself propose that each home shall have a bath . . . We also believe that the workmen and the girls . . . should go home clean from their daily toil, carrying none of the dirt of their work with them, and this will necessitate the provision of lavatories in connection with the new works.<sup>90</sup>

Tellingly, Lever did not wish for the homes modeled on those of the middle class to be soiled with working class dirt. The worker's homes--in homage to the middle class in whose image Lever hoped to shape them--should not show evidence of their daily toil. Also, on a more practical level, the village had to promote

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Lever, *Port Sunlight Ceremonies*, p. 29.

Lever's product, Lever's company, and his social and business ideas. "A workman's cottage," said Lever, "must fit like a glove the wants of the tenant if it is to be a successful attempt to provide for the happiness and comfort of himself, wife and family."<sup>91</sup> While in this quotation Lever emphasizes the tenants' desires (even though he chooses the glove), Lever's rules and regulations of village life inform us of his desires and the function of Port Sunlight as visual rhetoric.

For example, both types of housing had a front garden which would act as a "screen from the road" and would be "kept in proper order and cared for by ourselves (the company)."<sup>92</sup> Lever argued that the best method for keeping the "character of the village" and avoiding any "unsightliness" was for the company itself to have responsibility for maintaining the front gardens.<sup>93</sup> To Lever's horror, he discovered that tenants sometimes used the front gardens "as fowl runs and dustbins," and thus he was "always anxious to keep them unobstructed."<sup>94</sup> According to Walter Creese, "the street picture was a constant preoccupation with the architects and owners in establishing the type of community life they wished to support."<sup>95</sup> For Lever, "the visual image was always paramount" and thus Port Sunlight was planned to project itself at all times as orderly and clean.<sup>96</sup> It was equally important that this image be maintained not just for the employees of Lever

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<sup>91</sup> Lever, *Architectural Association*, p. 18.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Creese, *The Search for Environment*, p. 117.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-120.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121.

Brothers, but also for visitors and passers by. For example, on Greendale Road, Lever and his architects deliberately built some of the best and most picturesque rows of cottages facing the railway embankment.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, each block of cottages received allotment gardens which were placed as near as possible to each cottage. These gardens could be used to grow vegetables or flowers, but not to keep poultry. These rules indicate Lever's fear that workers needed direction and might not be "civilized" in the terms dictated by the middle class, echoing contemporary middle-class distrust and fears of the "lower orders." Further articulating this view, W.L. George wrote in *Engines of Social Progress*, that housing was the most important and immediate social problem for Britain. He explained that

a comfortable home has sufficient attractions to counterbalance the temptations held out by drink, betting, and other forms of immorality. If the middle classes are self-respecting and thrifty, it is mainly because their homes are happy, and they are not practically driven out of them by dirt, overcrowding, and ugliness, into the garish and unhealthy light of the streets.<sup>98</sup>

For George, decent housing, education, and "refinement" were the keys to social progress which he defined as

the promotion of the universal welfare of the individual and of the State. Progress is the evolution of man towards happiness . . . and social progress is the adjustment of the conditions of social life in such a manner as may hold forth to all men the prospect of leading happy lives,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> George, *Engines of Social Progress*, p. 9.

thanks to their own efforts and in proportion thereto.<sup>99</sup>

According to George, Lever's Port Sunlight and George Cadbury's Bournville both met such high conditions. He even went so far as to say that Port Sunlight was "the most picturesque modern village in England."<sup>100</sup> In describing the village, George painted a picture of rural charm: "When one walks through the Village, the impression of country is strongest."<sup>101</sup> George commended the village architects for avoiding problems of monotony by dividing the estate into small blocks, with each building holding between two to seven cottages and having plenty of open space and allotted gardens. Yet, it was also important that the general impression created by the cottages not appear too various and haphazard. This was achieved by keeping buildings within common scale.<sup>102</sup> Still, the variation of styles and materials at Port Sunlight was "impressive," said Creese.<sup>103</sup> Apart from the ten or eleven different styles used within each superblock of cottages, the various materials used included tile, slate beams, brick, roughcast, red sandstone, and finally white plaster.<sup>104</sup> George commented that white roughcast is "extensively used at Port Sunlight, and anything fresher and more charming than the little white houses, spotlessly clean with their French widows, leaded

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., *Labour and Housing*, p. 61.

<sup>102</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, p. 27; When Lever planned and built the Lady Lever Art Gallery, he was particularly mindful of keeping the only neo-classical building in Port Sunlight to scale.

<sup>103</sup> Creese, *The Search for Environment*, p. 122.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

panes, and gaily painted woodwork I cannot imagine."<sup>105</sup> Further rustic touches were created by using Early English and Queen Anne styles--using bay windows to accentuate light, ivy and even some thatched roofs, and Tudor-style wooden architectural beams.<sup>106</sup> It is no wonder that with such high standards of workmanship as well as a fastidious emphasis on order and maintenance, Port Sunlight was viewed as a "shrine for the worship of cleanliness."<sup>107</sup>

Yet, these favorable conditions came with a price for the workers who lived there since, as with any type of paternalism, there included a certain loss of independence. Villagers were required to follow a fairly strict behavioral and moral code. For example, the first rule listed in the *Regulation of Tenancies on the Port Sunlight Estate* (1903) was that only employees, and usually permanent employees, were allowed to live in the village. And the directors of Lever Brothers had the final word on workers' applications to let a cottage in the village. To maintain the homogeneous nature of the village, tenancies were week to week, and the tenant was forbidden to sub-let the cottage. If tenants who no longer worked at Lever Brothers could keep their house, the village of Port Sunlight would "by degrees pass into the hands of outsiders . . . non-employees would draw a bonus in the shape of

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<sup>105</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 67.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., *Engines of Social Progress*, pp. 118-119; Lever was also interested in the preservation of ancient half-timbered buildings outside of the Wirral. For example, Lever donated funds for the Hall i' th' Wood, a fifteenth century structure near Bolton where Samuel Crompton had supposedly invented the spinning mule.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., *Labour and Housing*, p. 177.

improved housing at a low rate, to which the workers at the Factory are alone entitled."<sup>108</sup>

There were also strict regulations regarding lodgers.<sup>109</sup> For instance, "Tenants desirous of having Lodgers must have themselves registered at the Offices of the Company as so desirous, and each Lodger's name and occupation must be handed in to the Office by the tenant."<sup>110</sup> Lodgers also had to also be employees of Lever Brothers, and if in a single house, all lodgers were required to be of the same gender. Moreover, to avoid any possibility for overcrowding, "Tenants with families of more than two children, or with children over twelve years of age, must not keep lodgers."<sup>111</sup>

The rules regarding lodgers were designed in part to foster the village and company image of cleanliness. As George explained, "[t]he rules concerning lodgers show on the one hand that the authorities are determined to keep up the moral tone of the village, and on the other, that overcrowding is not to be allowed to nullify the value of the general scheme."<sup>112</sup> Other housing regulations dealt specifically with health and cleanliness. For example, if any tenant has an infectious disease, the tenant must report the case "at once" to the company or estate office. And significantly, any authorized company

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 83; In general, employees who quit Lever Brothers were allowed a month to vacate their cottages.

<sup>109</sup> According to *The Regulation of Tenancies*, a "Lodger" was defined as a person neither the parents of or the children of the tenant. Married children of the tenant (and their spouses), however, are considered lodgers.

<sup>110</sup> Lever, *International Housing Conference*, p. xxxi.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> George, *Labour and Housing*, p. 84.

official could enter any house at any time to inspect a house to maintain order and cleanliness.

Lever was a manufacturer of basic household goods who was offering an answer to the problems that had plagued British industry. He was aware that his village should promote and support the claims he made in his speeches and Parliamentary debates. "In the village of Port Sunlight," said Meacham, "one breathes the same air of carefully crafted, fastidious unreality that emanates from Walt Disney World." Yet, "beyond the factory, the benevolent circumstances under which men and women went about their lives in the magic kingdom of Port Sunlight did not allow for much criticism of the lively sorcerer who created it."<sup>113</sup> Lever was once chastised on this point in 1919 by a letter from the Secretary of the Bolton Branch of the Engineers' Union. He was told that

(n)o man of an independent turn of mind can breathe for long the atmosphere of Port Sunlight. That might be news to your Lordship, but we have tried it. The profit-sharing system not only enslaves and degrades the workers, it tends to make them servile and sycophant.<sup>114</sup>

In 1909, at a meeting introducing co-partnership to the employees of Lever Brothers, the chairman made it clear that one of the conditions that would allow the scheme to be successful was that any employee benefits had to be "at the discretion of the firm." For even if certain standard conditions that would allow profit-sharing benefits were met (besides the prerequisite age and

<sup>113</sup> Meacham, *Regaining Paradise*, p. 33.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *The History of Unilever*, p. 150.

service restrictions, the employee had to be at least twenty-five and serve in the company for at least five years) the company, said Lever, "shall want to know who it is before we say 'Yes'." Therefore, there was also a moral hurdle; the employee had to be of "good character," and promise not "to waste time, labour, materials, or money in the discharge of his duties."<sup>115</sup> Port Sunlight may have been a model garden community, but it was still a community that was well-regulated by the founder's strong Victorian mores. Some critics charged the founder of the village with "stifling paternalism."<sup>116</sup>

An effective way to deal with such criticism was for Lever to reinforce continually the view that people who worked and lived in Port Sunlight were in enviable positions. This was achieved with articles printed in company publications, such as *Progress*, a journal available to all employees of Lever Brothers for a nominal fee, and *Woman's World*, a magazine largely targeted towards working-class women consumers and filled with household hints and images of ideal domesticity. Of course, Port Sunlight itself represented such an image. For example, in an article entitled "An Ideal Village," in *Woman's World*, there are detailed descriptions accompanied by photographs of Port Sunlight buildings and institutions as well as glowing accounts of village life. In one article, Port Sunlight was described as "the most charming of

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<sup>115</sup> "Partnership Scheme: Meeting of Employees of Lever Brothers Limited, February 25, 1909," Papers of the Port Sunlight Heritage Centre, Port Sunlight, Merseyside.  
pp. xxxiv-xxxvii.

<sup>116</sup> Darley, *Villages of Vision*, p. 13.



industrial villages," being both "quaint and peaceful," and suggesting the appearance and air of "an old Surrey village."<sup>117</sup> The country village imagery is a persistent theme. The writer's first impressions of the village occur on "a beautifully fresh spring morning" where there is a

gentle breeze blowing. The sun is smiling pleasantly on the rich red roofs of the cottages. The birds are chirping cheerily overhead, fluttering hither and thither among the budding boughs of the trees which line the broad and trim-kept roads.<sup>118</sup>

Further, Port Sunlight is described by the woman's journal as having a "settled air of peace," reflecting "an old-world content brooding over the place aptly in keeping with its Old English architecture."<sup>119</sup> Port Sunlight village is "the delight of all who visit it and the pride of all who live in it."<sup>120</sup> The villagers are "happy folk," said *Woman's World*, especially if one compares "their delightful cottage homes with the miserable tenements we have seen in the great seaport of Liverpool, not three miles distant."<sup>121</sup> After an extensive survey of the village and its institutions, the article ends with a deep moral tone in a subheading entitled "The Lesson of Port Sunlight." Port Sunlight proves, said the woman's journal, that "the lives of the toilers need not be necessarily dull and sordid, nor stunted by the debasing tendencies of ugly surroundings, utterly devoid of the

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<sup>117</sup> *Woman's World* (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers Ltd., 1901), p. 460.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 460.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 463.

refining influences which cheerful circumstances and a bright wholesome atmosphere can bestow."<sup>122</sup> Echoing dominant themes from Lever's public addresses, this journal associated the Port Sunlight experience with the social betterment and economic success of the nation and empire. "Were all the work-people of our great country placed in such favorable circumstances," said *Woman's World*,

our British race of workmen and workwomen . . . would be a brighter, sturdier, more intelligent race; and we Britons would hold not merely 'a vaster Empire than has been.' but the individual units of that Empire would compose a strong, and healthy, and self-reliant race ever in the vanguard of civilisation and progress.<sup>123</sup>

During the late Victorian period, the Condition of England discourse shifted by also taking into account the needs of the Empire. Now the social discourse was concerned not just with the spiritual and moral condition of workers, but also with their fitness as a ruling race. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, national and provincial charities and self-help groups, assisted destitute children, the unemployed, and especially women to migrate to the colonies. Economic depression, eugenic concerns, and "an upsurge of imperialistic sentiments" in the late nineteenth century helped reinforce the view that female

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 473.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

migration was justified because it "civilized the colonies while reducing the chronic surplus of women in Britain."<sup>124</sup>

Even the late Victorian social reformer, William Booth had a clear vision of Empire "populated with sound--if surplus--British stock," and produced a colonial scheme in 1890 to "rehabilitate the 'submerged tenth' of Britain's population."<sup>125</sup> The argument put forth in *Women's World* and other Lever Brother publications was that the working class could be "bettered" as representatives of empire if put in a middle-class home and given middle-class opportunity. Lever seemed to imply, however, that the process of "culturing" the workers was gradual and thus insisted upon restrictions and checks to make sure that his employees homes stay crisp and white--as expected for soap company employees and for agents of the British Empire.

The company journals reinforced the image of the village's beauty and cleanliness, showing the positive effects of these attributes on visitors. *Progress* especially highlighted that Port Sunlight had the intended effect on its audience and visitors. This publication printed detailed (always positive) impressions of visitors, of village life, and of the village's founder, often accompanied by photographs and diagrams that showcased Port Sunlight's beauty. These visitors' responses to Port Sunlight--even if filtered through a Lever Brothers' editor--allow insight

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<sup>124</sup> Marjory Harper, "British Migration and the Peopling of the Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 3 *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter, (1999), p. 81.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 82; Booth's Salvation Army was responsible for the migration of over 200,000 working-class to the colonies by 1930.

into the impact and persuasiveness of Lever's visual rhetoric. But at the same time, we recognize, by carefully and extensively cataloging visitor reaction in *Progress*, that Lever and the editors of the journal were participating in image promotion and answering their critics by arguing that both visitors (especially distinguished visitors) and residents value the village and its founder.

Visitors to Port Sunlight, then, also helped to reinforce Lever's image. There were many visitors to Port Sunlight in the early twentieth century; the village received over 54,000 visitors in 1909.<sup>126</sup> Some of the visitors were so distinguished that it gave the company and village journals an opportunity to reinforce the company culture by extensively covering the visits, detailing the tours, and hanging on every positive comment from the guests. Distinguished visitors to Port Sunlight included William Gladstone, Herbert Asquith, David Lloyd George, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Albert, King of Belgium, the Crown Prince of Siam, and King George V and Queen Mary in 1914. This last visit was written about extensively and treated with jubilee- like fanfare.

Herbert Asquith's visit to Port Sunlight in July 1912, was treated as a watershed event in the village, and thus it received top billing in the October issue of *Progress*. "There was pretty village decoration from centre to circumference," said the company journal, with "our choicest ornaments being the children . . . in charge of baskets of flowers nearly as big as themselves."<sup>127</sup> The

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<sup>126</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, p. 47.

<sup>127</sup> *Progress* 12 (October, 1912): 130.

Boys' Brigade were there also, lining up as a guard of honor before the Prime Minister's motorcade. Importantly, the Prime Minister was presented with a "full bound scarlet Morocco album," which included an address from the workers as well as numerous photographs of Port Sunlight. This was a good example of how Lever promoted his ideas through the image of Port Sunlight. The album was so "weighty," explained *Progress*, "as to need a special bearer."<sup>128</sup> The works manager, Edward Wainwright, gave the address on behalf of the employees of Lever Brothers. He praised the government's passing of the national insurance and old-age pension schemes, but added that much was still to be done, pointing to Lever's superior pension program and co-partnership scheme. Asquith replied by praising Lever and the workers of Port Sunlight and defending his government's initial steps towards social reform. "Even the most cursory view (of Port Sunlight)," said Asquith,

impresses upon one's mind the enormous services which the enterprise, intelligence, public spirit, patriotism of a single man, or a single set of employers, can do to solve . . . the most pressing problems of our industrial life. This place, with its manifold comforts and attractions, is a splendid tribute to Sir William Lever. It is a tribute . . . to those in every department of his business who has co-operated with him in building up one of the greatest industrial enterprises in the country.<sup>129</sup>

Another public opportunity to promote Lever and Port Sunlight's image occurred during George V and Queen Mary's visit

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 133-34.

to Port Sunlight in March 1914. "Port Sunlight was and remained," said *Progress*, "the central and prominent feature of their Majesties' visit to the Wirral."<sup>130</sup> As with Asquith visit, both the king and queen were given a "casket containing views of the village and works" as well as "some specimens of the productions of the Port Sunlight works."<sup>131</sup> Draped from the buildings of the many institutions at Port Sunlight were numerous signs of welcome.<sup>132</sup> And although patriotic flags and decorations were also evident, "by general agreement of the villagers, the houses of the Village were too pretty in themselves to require an elaborate scheme of decoration."<sup>133</sup> For nothing needed to obscure, reported the *Progress*, "the beauty of the architecture."<sup>134</sup>

Post-visit impressions from the royal visitors as well as remarks by Lever employees and the national press were carefully recorded. In a letter addressed to Lever, the king's private secretary, Clive Wigram wrote:

Their Majesties were deeply interested in witnessing the various processes in the manufacture of soap, and in seeing the daily life and surroundings of those employed in this great industrial organization. The heart welcome accorded . . . was greatly appreciated, while the fact that one and all seemed bright and cheerful added to the joy and pleasure of Their Majesties visit.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *Progress*, 14 (April, 1914): 35.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>132</sup> In *Lord Leverhulme*, Jolly says that before the royal visit instructions were given to workers and villagers on how to behave in the presence of royalty (p. 152).

<sup>133</sup> *Progress*, 14 (April, 1914): 50-51.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Employees' positive remarks on the visit were also published. It was "a great day in our Governor's life, and he deserves it," said one employee. Another commented that "the reminiscences of this great day will help us all amid the details of our work-a-day life, and we congratulate our Chairman and his co-directors upon the honour of Their Majesties visit."<sup>136</sup> The royal visit was indeed a success for Lever and Port Sunlight. The special correspondent to the *Times* covered the visit and wrote of a "voyage of discovery in the stupendous and endless wonder of Port Sunlight." The *Daily Telegraph* described Port Sunlight as "a land of teeming activity," while the *Daily Dispatch* praised Lever as a "Lancashire man who has won through by sheer merit . . . a captain of industry who was able to show his King that this country still possesses the power to lead the world in business enterprise."<sup>137</sup> Significantly, all of these responses were republished in the company journal.

There were also countless labor delegations, industrialists, government officials, as well as architects from different nations that visited and commented on the model village. Notable among the architects and foreign garden city advocates were Georges Benoit Levy (secretary of the French Garden City Association) who visited and later praised Port Sunlight in his *La Cite-Jardin* (1904). Bernhard Kampffmeyer (chair of the German Garden City Association) was similarly positive in *Aus Englischen Gartenstadten* (1910) after his visit.<sup>138</sup> Port Sunlight's carefully

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>138</sup> Hubbard and Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, pp. 46-47.

crafted image as a model garden city, then, traveled beyond British shores. Besides the work of Levy and Kampffmeyer, Hermann Muthesius, in *Das Englische Haus* (1905), spread the influence of Port Sunlight and English domestic architecture to the Continent. (47) Muthesius visited Port Sunlight and rated it as being of the highest standard in early twentieth century English house-building. "Port Sunlight," he said,

will always be honored with the highest recognition. For it is here that the gates of a new world were first opened; in place of the dismal appearance of utilitarian buildings we were shown a new vision; in place of the misery associated with the barren rows of workers' terraces we find joyfulness and homeliness.<sup>139</sup>

Conferences were frequently held at Port Sunlight. One such gathering was the Meeting of the International Housing Conference in 1907. Lever gave the keynote address (which has been already been extensively quoted from in this chapter). But the conference was not only used to promote Lever's social ideas and public image through his long speech, but it was also an opportunity for the architecture of Port Sunlight literally to shine; delegates could see for themselves the model industrial village and works in architectural form and action.

In July 1901, the Garden City Association met in Liverpool and Port Sunlight with Lever serving as the president of the conference. Ebenezer Howard gave a lecture outlining the objectives of the Association, and afterwards all the delegates visited Port Sunlight. At the meeting, letters of support for the

<sup>139</sup> Hermann Muthesius, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 47.



movement and Port Sunlight itself were read out loud and published in *Progress*. The Bishop of Hereford wrote: "Your movement has in it the promise of so much good to the working classes that I wish it all possible success, and I desire to be associated with it as a member of the association." Sir Alfred Jones went further suggesting that "Port Sunlight was one of the sights of the world."<sup>140</sup>

The Vice-President of the Association, George Cadbury, was also present, stating that he agreed with Lever's argument concerning profit-sharing and suggested that if both he and Lever could set up a system that promoted social "justice" but not "charity," then others could do it as well. As Lever had done earlier, Cadbury went so far as to consider housing reform as "patriotic." "To move out from the towns," said Cadbury, "was the most patriotic course for the manufacturer. The death rate at Bournville had fallen to 8.8, at Port Sunlight it was also a point under 9, while in Birmingham it was 21, and at Liverpool 24."<sup>141</sup> This theme of patriotism (and moral disposition) was also highlighted by George Harwood, an M.P. representing Bolton. "Speaking of the law of environment," explained Harwood, one could not "expect decent citizens to come out of indecent surroundings. The most costly thing a country could have was bad people, and therefore the Association's movement was not only economic, but patriotic."<sup>142</sup> After the delegates toured the village, it was

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<sup>140</sup> *Progress*, 3 (January, 1902): 316.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

reported by *Progress* that the general impression given by the delegates was that

as an object-lesson in social betterment Port Sunlight had no equal anywhere, that it was an ideal Garden City, and was undoubted proof that the housing problem could be solved even by private enterprise.<sup>143</sup>

In a later meeting of the Garden City Association in December 1902, at Liverpool, Lever opened the meeting with a speech outlining the "Three H's" as a means for the Association's success. First, the Association had to appeal "to the hearts of the people" who witnessed the "evils and sufferings" of people in cities and towns because overcrowding. Second, the "heads of the people" must be convinced by offering an "attractive and efficient scheme of constructing a town." Finally, the Association must also deal with "the hand, by setting people to work in forming a Garden City, the example of which would cause many other such Garden Cities to be added."<sup>144</sup> Ebenezer Howard then approached the lectern and provided pictures of Port Sunlight and Bournville as prime examples of "prosperity" in the "Garden City enterprise." He further argued that the "country town magnate" (and not the town or country) was the key to solving the double problem of congestion in the towns and "the serious depopulation of the rural districts."<sup>145</sup>

There were other public events that brought visitors to Port Sunlight. For example, the opening of the Auditorium in July 1903

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>144</sup> Lever quoted in *Progress*, 4 (January, 1903): 21.

<sup>145</sup> Ebenezer Howard quoted in Ibid., 22.

brought the Mayor of Bolton (John Miles) and his fellow town guests to Port Sunlight. There were three thousand present at the ceremony, and *Progress* covered the visit. "To many of the visitors," said *Progress*, "this, their first visit, came as a revelation . . . a first glimpse of the model houses, bright and beautiful, standing with a broad expanse of green yard in front . . . was like a peep into some modern fairyland."<sup>146</sup> Moreover, on a visit to Hulme Hall, the visitors were also impressed with the "spaciousness and airiness of the building, and above all with the glorious sunlight shedding its rays through the many windows." The visit ended with Henry Vivian, a Bolton delegate thanking Lever Brothers for setting a "magnificent example [to] employers all over the world." In a final glowing and frankly over-the-top statement, Vivian said: "(i)t had been said that cleanliness was next to godliness, and if that were so, Port Sunlight must be very near Heaven."<sup>147</sup>

*Progress* also recorded some thoughts about Port Sunlight of the non-distinguished visitor as well. A page of the company journal was frequently devoted to a column entitled, "As Others See Us." In this column were listed visitors comments much like blurbs on the back cover of a bestselling novel:

" A most instructive and interesting sight."  
-- A Liverpool visitor.  
"We wish to thank you for the privilege of  
visiting the most complete factory we ever  
inspected." -- A London visitor.  
"A most impressive wonder of industry."

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<sup>146</sup> *Progress*, 4 (July 1903): 255.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

-- A Hyde visitor.

"Finely organized, and apparently great attention paid to comfort and health of employees."

-- A London visitor.<sup>148</sup>

Excerpts from other sources were also reproduced for the Port Sunlight readers. For example, *Progress* quoted *The Red Letter* describing Port Sunlight as a "model town of clean-cuffed, collared, and happy-faced people."<sup>149</sup>

While most criticisms of Port Sunlight were met by positive repetition in print, *Progress* did occasionally address direct criticisms. For example, in May 1903, the company journal replied to an article (in an un-named English magazine) that criticized Port Sunlighters' lackluster interest in their village's recreational and social institutions. This negative article left readers with the perception that Lever's workers were either overworked, or worse, that Lever employees refused to take an active part in the village culture because of some illwill towards management. *Progress* accused the author of the article of rushing to judgment and writing without having the sufficient facts at hand. For the author/visitor, explained *Progress*, made a "hurried visit to the Village, looked in at a few institutions, and found few people about them. This was natural, as the critic made his flying visit during working hours."<sup>150</sup> The defense of Port Sunlight continued by making a comparison between the relatively mediocre attendance at institutions (such as the Social Club, Technical

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<sup>148</sup> *Progress*, 1 (November, 1899): 87.

<sup>149</sup> *Progress*, 1 (June, 1900): 382.

<sup>150</sup> *Progress*, 4 (May 1903): 174.

Institute, or Mutual Improvement Society) in Liverpool, Birkenhead, and London, compared to the high attendance--in proportion to the population--at Port Sunlight. Moreover, *Progress* provided statistics and quotations from the *Birkenhead News* on the high voter turnout in the District Council Elections, further casting doubt on the critics accusation of apathy in Port Sunlight. The local newspaper reported: "In Sunlight Ward no less than 98 per cent of the whole electorate were polled, a fact which is probably without a parallel in the history of any constituency in the Kingdom."<sup>151</sup> While Port Sunlight occasionally received criticism, we shall see in the following chapter that Lever himself was not immune to receiving critical blows to his carefully crafted public image.

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<sup>151</sup> *Birkenhead News* quoted in Ibid.

## Chapter 6

### "Lord Leave-a-hole" and "Port Moonshine": Lever's Image Under Attack

In 1895, Lever ran for public office. He hoped to be elected as a Member of Parliament for Birkenhead, an ambitious challenge since Birkenhead typically returned a Conservative to Westminster. According to Lever's first biographer, this local election was fought "with a fervour exceeding even that of the two previous contests."<sup>1</sup> The Tories had won the seat narrowly in the last election and were desperate to retain the seat. "Party feeling ran high" and Lever was "attacked from every conceivable standpoint."<sup>2</sup> At one point he was the target of such vituperative attacks that a mass meeting of employees was organized at Port Sunlight to refute such "libellous, lying statements."<sup>3</sup> The employee meeting was covered by the *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, which stated dismay that anyone (especially in the Wirral) could criticize "the character and sincerity of Mr. W. H. Lever," whose actions "have so manifested themselves as influences working unselfishly and devotedly for the public weal, and the advancement of his fellows in their material and social life."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927)., p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, 1 (July, 1895): 74.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

At the meeting, the employees protested comments "uttered by a gentleman in Birkenhead," who clearly must have spoken "while labouring under some fitful hallucination."<sup>5</sup> They referred to comments made by Lever's political opponents, who during the heat of the election, called Lever a "'mean, contemptible specimen of humanity.'"<sup>6</sup> All employees present then passed a resolution that Lever had in fact the "respect of every employee, and that they always received the most generous and considerate treatment at his hands."<sup>7</sup> In spite of employee support, Lever lost the election.

In 1906, however, after four attempts to win a seat in Parliament, Lever was finally elected as an M.P. for the Wirral Division of Cheshire. He stood as the Liberal candidate for another seat that "had never been represented in Parliament by a Liberal."<sup>8</sup> And not surprisingly, during this hard-fought campaign, Lever's carefully constructed image as an "enlightened paternalist" again came under attack from Tory political opponents, and thus the image had to be defended. *Progress* described the campaign as "conducted in a fair manner, allowing for the 'election fever' and its exciting periods."<sup>9</sup> It was during one of these "exciting periods," however, that statements made by the opposite party "roused the Port Sunlight workers to a pitch of excitement hardly to be conceived."<sup>10</sup> The Tories accused Lever of laying off employees after they reached the age of forty-five. It

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Progress*, 7 (March, 1906): 85.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

was also alleged that at Port Sunlight full trade union rates of wages were not paid. "That excitement," said *Progress*, "found vent not in inane grumbling, but in a strong, well-directed attack organized and carried out by the employees themselves."<sup>11</sup>

These "falsehoods" were first dealt with by a consortium of workers at one of Lever's meetings. Representing the delegation of workers was Joseph Darby, an engineer, who spoke to the thorny issue. Darby called the opposition's statements "lies" and pointed out that there were many employees over forty-five years at Lever Brothers and a few who were even approaching the tender age of seventy. He also explained that not only were trade union rates paid at Lever's, but so were the standard rates for overtime. Furthermore, employees were given a week's paid vacation every year.<sup>12</sup>

Following the meeting, a demonstration, led by the Port Sunlight Prize Band and those employees between the ages of forty-five and seventy, moved through the Cheshire division. *Progress* recalled how the demonstration "caused a sensation, and the sight of so many old men taking the trouble to drive in open conveyances on a cold winter's day for the sake of their appreciation of and love for their employer, did much to convert many strong Tories."<sup>13</sup> Other meetings were held at Port Sunlight in which employees could voice their outrage at the Tory claims about their chairman.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 86.



Other "malicious statements" were made by Lever's political opponents. They had also suggested that Lever employees were "working and voting" against their employer. *Progress* wrote that this actually had the unintended effect of motivating "Port Sunlighters up to a frenzy of work."<sup>14</sup> For example, the work-girls were so keen that "in some cases entire rooms were very tastefully decorated with festoons, chains, and mottos in the party colors (yellow and blue)."<sup>15</sup> The company journal claimed that only eight out of five hundred and thirty-five residents of Port Sunlight failed to cast a ballot. The article provided several photographs of motor wagons taking Port Sunlight workers to the polls as well as pictures of demonstrations that supported Lever. After Lever had won the election, close to five thousand people gathered outside the head office and auditorium to cheer Mr. and Mrs. Lever. "As a local newspaper put it," said *Progress*, "Sunlight was ablaze."<sup>16</sup> And even after Lever had left the Port Sunlight, "the bells of Christ Church rang, people paraded the Village singing, flags and party colours were displayed from houses and across roads, and a general holiday was taken."<sup>17</sup>

With his election campaign, Lever witnessed his carefully constructed image under attack, and thus he was frequently obligated to defend himself and his company in the local and national press. Two highly publicized episodes, the Northcliffe trial and the Augustus John incident, were also important

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

instances that sprung Lever and his public relations people into action.

In 1906, Lever had to defend his enlightened paternalist image, resorting to the law as well as the press. The Northcliffe libel case (Lever Brothers Limited v. Associated Newspapers Limited) was a lawsuit for defamation filed by William Lever against several newspapers owned by the famous media magnate, Lord Northcliffe. Northcliffe's publications like the *Mirror* and the *Mail* criticized Lever for creating the Soap Trust. Lever sought to combat these cost increases by essentially pooling the resources of the major soap manufacturers. The newspapers accused Lever of being a monopolist, cheating the consumer, and treating his employees poorly.

The suit was tried both in the courts and by public opinion, and it proved to be a resounding victory for the soap manufacturer--Lever being awarded the sum of £50,000 plus taxed costs, which was at the time the highest monetary amount in the history of British libel awards. The final tally for Lever Brothers totaled £91,000 since there was a related decision in Scotland against a number of Scottish newspapers owned by Northcliffe.<sup>18</sup> Other soap companies who were members of the short-lived Soap Trust took advantage of Lever's legal victory and managed to procure settlements from Northcliffe's Associated Newspapers. The total amount of damages paid by Northcliffe for

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<sup>18</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, pp. 138-139; W. P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976), pp. 55-57.

his attacks on the combine is estimated to have reached just over £200,000.<sup>19</sup>

In 1903, Lever pushed for what he considered was the inevitable progress toward combination of manufacturers. In a speech given to the annual gathering of the Port Sunlight Men's Meeting on January 11, 1903, Lever argued that a combine--much like Marx's (dialectic) stages of history--was nothing more than the latest and perhaps final stage in the progress of business. And although Lever understood that "the very idea of large combinations is always alarming," he believed that since capital required for business kept increasing, combines were a necessary step in providing more capital for companies. In a Trust, said Lever, companies would be more easily able "to make large purchases, to buy improved machinery, to engage a large and experienced and talented staff. . . and so they (the companies in the combine) can live on a smaller percentage of profits."<sup>20</sup> The idea of the Trust, then, was to group together "a number of limited companies . . . the object being concentration of capital and concentration of effort; if these combines result in cheaper production and more abundant supply undertakings will be successful."<sup>21</sup>

The economies that could be had as a result of combination were considerable. For example, Lever estimated that £200,000

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe: A Biography of an Empire* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> William Lever, *The Six-Hour Day and Other Industrial Questions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1918), p. 263.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 262-263.

could be saved annually for advertising alone. In September, 1906, Lever and Joseph Watson (the chairman of Watson's soap firm) began this process of economy by canceling several advertising contracts, including a £6,000 contract Lever had made with Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*. Other estimates of savings included: £100,000 for combined buying of soda ash and cardboard boxes, and £100,000 for economies made in agents, travelers, and traveling and selling expenses. Lever's total estimation of savings for the combine reached £700,000.<sup>22</sup>

In 1906, Lever had decided on the creation of a Trust because of the dramatic rising costs of raw materials and the brutal competition in advertising and gift-scheme, which had hit Lever Brothers hard and affected all the soap manufacturers.<sup>23</sup> Lever argued that the Trust would benefit the average consumer by providing a cheaper product of high quality. And this in turn would lead to higher turnover and profits, thus providing higher wages for workers. What he did not count on, however, was the avalanche of negative press he would have received at the hands of Lord Northcliffe's publishing empire.

Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe (1865-1922), the successful publisher of the popular newspapers such as the *Daily*

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Wilson, *History of Unilever* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1954)., p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson argues that the situation in 1906 was far more serious than the soap manufacturers had realized at the time. For the economist, part of the problem besides the sudden and dramatic increase in raw materials, could be found in the old problem of supply and demand. The standard of living for the working class had stagnated by the 1890s. A fall in real wages then, most probably contributed to a lack of sales in soap--a product still considered by the average working-class housewife to a luxury rather than a necessity. In other words, soap might have been the first item to be cut from the average household shopping list.

*Mail*, the *Evening News*, and the *Daily Mirror*,<sup>24</sup> objected to this "Trust," believing it to be nothing more than a monopoly carefully orchestrated by William Lever, the chairman of the leading soap manufacturer in Britain. Northcliffe's newspapers harshly criticized Lever as an avaricious monopolist, who threatened the British public with less product and high prices. At first the press, including Northcliffe's publications, reported the matter in an even-handed tone; the Trust was a reasonable reaction to the sudden emergence of high priced fats and oils. But, later, the reporting took on a much harsher tone.

Northcliffe's newspapers ran catchy headlines such as: "Trust Soap Already Dearer;" "Dismissal of employees begins;" "Soap Trust Arithmetic -- How 15 ounces make a pound;" "Soap Trust Victims;" "Weights Reduced;" "The 15-Ounce Pound." The Northcliffe press accused Lever of grinding the faces of the poor. The *Mail* exclaimed, "if ever hunger and poverty followed upon the ruthless operation of a great 'combine' . . . . it waits upon the Soap Trust. It goes straight at the throat of people living on the verge of starvation."<sup>25</sup>

The *Daily Mail* and *Mirror* published lists of combine soaps and urged readers to boycott them. The newspapers also supplied a list of soaps to buy that were Trust-free. The papers published derogatory comments made by "shopkeepers and the public hostile to the Trust" about the labor conditions at "Port Moonshine." The

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<sup>24</sup> In 1908, Northcliffe reached the apex of his publishing career by buying the prestigious *Times*.

<sup>25</sup> Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, pp. 141-142.

Northcliffe newspapers also accused the Trust of "trying to corner the market in raw materials" and charged that it was "prepared to use 'unsavory substances' in its soap."<sup>26</sup> This statement was incorrect. Lever had considered altering the chemical formula of Sunlight by using cheaper oils (such as whale oil), but in the end he thought better of it, not wanting to risk lowering the quality of his most successful product.<sup>27</sup> Instead of raising the price of soap Lever tried discretion (or deception?) by lowering the weight of a bar of soap by one ounce. He only informed retailers by printing a notice on the inside flap of delivery cartons, "in order, it was said later (by Lever Brothers) . . . not to disturb the design."<sup>28</sup>

Cartoons found in the *Mirror* were perhaps the most damaging to Lever and his company. They represented Lever as "an unspeakably repulsive and odious figure; the 'Port Moonshine' of the articles was the home of sweated labour and tyrannical oppression of master over man."<sup>29</sup> The most famous cartoon appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 22, October, 1906 under the title "The Greedy Soap Trust." It featured a rather obese businessman with a thin French mustache dressed in a black suit with "Soap Trust" printed on the front of his top hat. The businessman is selling soap to a frail poor woman who is holding a bar of soap with the words "15 oz. same as one lb." Behind the shop counter is a picture of "Port Moonshine," the vile businessman clearly meant to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *History of Unilever*, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *History of Unilever*, p. 80.

represent Lever. Also in the background are the signs: "IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT -- LUMP IT;" "WE DON'T CARE ABOUT YOU WE WANT MORE OF YOUR MONEY;" And on the counter itself are two more posters. The first poster says: "SOAP. 15 OZS TO THE LB. -- AND IF WE HAVE ANY OF YOUR CHEEK WE'LL MAKE IT 14 OZS;" the second poster is visual and shows employees of "Port Moonshine" being booted down a staircase. The caption at the bottom of the cartoon reads:

POOR WOMAN--Please, Mr. Soap Trust, isn't this pound an ounce short?  
MR. SOAP TRUST--Well, what are you going to do about it?  
You may think yourself lucky I let you live. I'm the boss of the situation, and no one else can make soap except me, and I'll put as few ounces in the pound as I like and raise the price to what I like, and if you don't get out I'll call the police.<sup>30</sup>

Not all of the press were up in arms over the proposed combine. In the midst of the furor, a report in the Financial and Commercial Supplement of the *Times* appeared on October 29th. The loftier *Times* dealt with the situation in a far more favorable manner for Lever and was critical of Northcliffe's widely circulated publications. The *Times* reasoned:

If soap costs more to make now than it did a year ago the public must pay more for it, and this must happen whether the present Soap Combination breaks up or not, but if economies can be effected by reasonable combination among makers, it is not wise of the public to object, especially as the combinations possible in this country are so severely limited in the scope of their

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

ambitions. When, if ever, we have to fight in this country a real monopolist Trust we shall need all the moral forces of public condemnation which at present being dissipated in needless cries of 'Wolf!' But if 'wolf' is cried too often the real danger, when it comes, may be unheeded.<sup>31</sup>

As Lever's first biographer points out, had the article appeared in a more widely read newspaper it might have done much "to allay the rising tide of public anxiety and alarm."<sup>32</sup>

Lever defended himself in both the company journal and the local newspapers. In December 1906, *Progress* reported on the annual meeting of the Northern Council of Grocers' Association, held in Manchester on November 13. The company journal focused its report on the comments of John Kellitt, a Northern grocer and J.P. from Liverpool. Kellitt began his speech by arguing that Lever's Trust was not a combine, "but was simply an arrangement which they, as members of an Association, had the right to make themselves."<sup>33</sup> He insisted that the Trust was a positive good since the manufacturers "had combined together to do what they could to do away with some of the objectionable features of the soap trade, such as coupons, wrappers, and prize-giving schemes."<sup>34</sup> Kellitt believed that the trade "had lost their heads over the matter," largely because of all the negative and unfair coverage in what he derogatively termed the "Yellow Press."<sup>35</sup> He further

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<sup>31</sup> *Times*, October 29, 1906.

<sup>32</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, pp. 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> *Progress*, 7 (December, 1906): 377.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* This is ironic since Lever Brothers was initially responsible for introducing the wrappers and prize-giving schemes.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



blamed the press for making dangerous and unpatriotic suggestions regarding the Soap Trust. For example, Kellitt was appalled that a certain class of paper (the *Mirror*) had the audacity to suggest that retailers and consumers support and promote American brands of soap. Such newspapers, said Kellitt were even to blame for inciting the jingoism that "brought on the Boer War, and left this country very much poorer as the result."<sup>36</sup>

On November 10, the *Liverpool Daily Post* covered a Liberal Party meeting held at Port Sunlight that dealt with similar themes and ended up as a personal rally of support for the newly elected Lever. Three thousand people were in attendance and when Lever entered the Auditorium, the "utmost enthusiasm was shown," followed by the singing, "with great heartiness," of the national anthem.<sup>37</sup> In tackling the sensitive issue of Northcliffe's attack on Lever, the local press paraphrased Walter Peel, the chairman of the local Liberal Party, who claimed that

he could not pretend to know the amount of iniquity that Mr. Lever was accused of, because he never read the particular class of newspaper in which the allegations were made. He had, however, read Mr. Lever's speech at Hoylake last week,<sup>38</sup> and Mr. Lever's word was good enough for them (applause). He himself was not interested in watching the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>37</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, November 10, 1902.

<sup>38</sup> This entire contents of this speech was printed in the *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury* on November 3, 1906. Lever was addressing his constituents at the Hoylake meeting and while the majority there sung his praises (literally singing "He's a Jolly Good Fellow"), the newspaper reported that there were also "groans" and chants of protest "from the unfriendly section of the audience." In this speech, however, Lever once again defined the Trust as an "Amalgamation" and defended his role as an enlightened industrialist. He promoted his role as an fair and equitable employer of thousands of workers and for establishing a company that contributes greatly to the national wealth.

Harmsworth newspaper combine (laughter) performing this little comedy which it had brought out.<sup>39</sup>

Peel also added that he had "every confidence in Mr. Lever's good faith and honesty of purpose," blasting the *Daily Mirror* as being unpatriotic and a danger to British manufacturing. He sarcastically criticized "the patriotic journal that urged war in South Africa" for advising consumers in Britain to buy American soap. Moreover, the *Mirror* helped the public's decision by actually printing a list of American soaps. All this fuss over the combine, said Peel, would lead to drastic unemployment at Lever Brothers and the British soap industry as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

Lever defended himself personally in an interview printed in an October 20 issue of the *Liverpool Daily Post*. The local paper began the interview by praising Lever's openness in discussing the controversy surrounding the Soap Trust. The reporter, said the newspaper, "found him [Lever] as courteous as ever, and ready to give all the information in his power."<sup>41</sup> In the interview, Lever explained the need for the combine (to counter the sudden high price for raw materials) and explicitly stated that he had "no sinister designs upon either the distributors or consumers of soap," but that the combine was simply "an amalgamation of a number of firms to manufacture soap more cheaply and to distribute it more economically."<sup>42</sup> Lever was also asked about the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, October 20, 1906. In this article, Lever also listed the other firms that joined the combine. These companies included such established firms such as Gossage and Sons, Crossfields, and Hodgeson and Simpson.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

possibility of layoffs and whether or not this combine would lead to price increases. On the first point, Lever claimed that an arrangement was made that "none of the old employees," especially those who have been "loyal and faithful" would be made redundant. Still, those "unsatisfactory servants" would not "be entitled to consideration; but the others will be treated generously."<sup>43</sup> Lever emphatically denied that price increases would occur, since this would allow other manufacturers, especially those from "Germany and other countries," to "flood the market."<sup>44</sup>

Although the *Liverpool Daily Post* leaned favorably towards Lever's position, the local newspaper attempted some balance on the issue by pressing Lever in later interviews and also publishing unfavorable letters to the editor. In an interview with Lever printed in late October, the *Post's* reporter questioned the soap manufacturer's reputed statement to the firms in the Trust that over 25 per cent additional profit was expected even though Lever had publicly claimed that "the public would be the first to profit from the combine."<sup>45</sup> Lever refuted the statement saying that "no promise of 25 per cent additional profit was made," and that "the only question that was discussed was the capital."<sup>46</sup> Yet, when asked if the Trust would lead to the rise in soap prices, Lever could not promise any stability in prices,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, October 24, 1906.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

since that was based on the prices of raw materials, which he claimed had risen by 24 per cent in only a twelve month period.<sup>47</sup>

In an October 19 letter to the editor, Greaves Lord remained unconvinced by Lever and his supporters' claim that the Soap Trust was simply an "amalgamation of interest" that would lead to higher quality goods and cheaper products. Lord referred to the Trust as a monopoly or cartel that would drive out all competition, especially the small manufacturer who could not afford the higher price of raw materials. This "monopoly" would lead to "many evils," explained the writer. For example, there would be the inevitable rise in prices followed by mass unemployment for workers of the small manufacturers. Basically, like all combines, the Soap Trust's sole concern would be only for "the commercial advantage of the interests concerned."<sup>48</sup>

Still, no publication was so hostile to Lever's combine as the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*. There are three explanations as to why Northcliffe's newspapers became increasingly nasty to Lever's new Trust. Wilson and Jolly suggest that there was a financial reason for the increasing hostility towards the Trust. A few weeks after the announcement of the trust, newspaper reporters learned that the Trust planned "to lessen the costly competitive advertising."<sup>49</sup> When Lever and other soap manufacturers withdrew thousands of pounds worth of advertising from both local and national newspapers, the overly critical and downright

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, October 19, 1906.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson, *History of Unilever*, p. 80.

"vituperative" tone emerged from the Northcliffe press.<sup>50</sup> Jolly maintains that Northcliffe seemed all too prepared to drop the assault on the Combine if Lever and the other manufacturers returned to the old level of expenditure on advertising. Lever, however, turned down this verbal offer.<sup>51</sup> The stream of negative publicity continued and Lever sued for libel.

Another possible reason for such hostility towards Lever and the Trust surfaces from an analysis of Northcliffe's readership. Northcliffe published for the newly literate masses. He used his newspapers to stir up emotions and show his mostly working-class readers that his papers were "champions of the public against powerful adversaries."<sup>52</sup> Northcliffe had some cause to believe that he held the moral high ground for criticizing the Soap Trust. In the United States, Theodore Roosevelt was in the midst of a campaign to "bust the trusts," reinvigorating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. In late nineteenth century America, there were hundreds of trusts, such as John D. Rockefeller's famous Standard Oil. The process of breaking up the trusts revealed much political corruption.<sup>53</sup> The British press covered these events. For Northcliffe, the attack on Lever's Soap Trust not only sold papers, it also served as a warning of an "American" problem that could take root in Britain.

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<sup>50</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 48; Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe*, p. 141.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson, *History of Unilever*, pp. 81-82; Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, p. 141.

Significantly, the newly literate working classes happened to be Lever's principal market as well, and thus, the effect on Lever's sales were drastic. The Soap Trust crumbled under the persistent media assault. On November 23, at a meeting in Liverpool, the chairman of Watson and Cosfield, one of the leading soap manufacturers in the Trust, proposed an end to the short-lived combine. Lever did not vote on the matter, realizing that the dissolution of the Combine was inevitable. The soap industry soon reestablished the old weights and prices. In 1906, Lever's sales plummeted to 60 percent below sales for the previous year. Lever was even forced to close down the Building Department at Port Sunlight, albeit temporarily, in an effort to cut costs. Thus, all construction in the village and works came to an abrupt halt. Furthermore, the companies' Preference shares, valued at £10 before 1906, fell to £8 a share, devaluing the company by approximately £500,000.<sup>54</sup> In 1906, Lever Brothers had capital employed at just over £4,000,000.<sup>55</sup>

The Northcliffe press claimed victory. Imbued with the virulent nationalism of the time, the caption on a *Daily Mirror* cartoon on 26 November read: "The British Lion Destroys the Greedy Soap Trust," with the illustration of a British Lion standing proudly over the vanquished figure of *Signor Soapo Trusti*.<sup>56</sup> No doubt this cartoon helped to undermine Lever's image construction.

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<sup>54</sup> Wilson, *History of Unilever*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>56</sup> Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, p. 142.

The libel action began at the Northern Circuit Court held at St. Georges' Hall, Liverpool on July 15th, 1907. Among the impressive team of counselors representing Lever Brothers were Sir Edward Carson, K.C. and F.E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead). Not surprisingly, the defendant (Northcliffe) had no less a high-powered set of lawyers to represent him; they included Rufus Isaacs, K.C. (later the Marquis of Reading), H.E. Duke, K.C., and Norman Craig, K.C.<sup>57</sup> The high-powered lawyers added to the public interest of the case.

The first two days of the trial were taken up by the plaintiff's description of the development of the amalgamation and a point-by-point answer to the allegedly libelous statements made in the Northcliffe newspapers. On the second day, Lever himself entered the witness box. Northcliffe was abroad during the entire trial and his conspicuous absence from the courtroom must have played against his chances of success. On the other hand, Lever acquitted himself well in court. He refuted "in the clearest manner possible the accusations which had been made against him, his answers time after time being, with but slight variation, the same: 'A lie,' 'Another lie,' 'Absolutely false,' 'A most unblushing lie.'"<sup>58</sup> Lever's lead counsel, Sir Edward Carson, also helped the soap manufacturer's case by pointing to Lever's

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<sup>57</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

background of "enlightened industrial practice" and his philanthropic endeavors.<sup>59</sup>

The *Times*' report on the case suggested Lever's testimony was the key to his victory against Northcliffe. On July 17th, the third day of the trial, Northcliffe's lead counsel, Rufus Isaacs, rose and said:

My Lord, with the assistance of my learned friends I have carefully considered my clients' position. In view of Mr. Lever's statements on oath in the witness-box and the impression made both upon myself and my friends, and no doubt upon the Court, by those statements, it is impossible for my clients to continue their defense upon the lines on which it has been drawn. On their behalf, therefore, and with their full concurrence, I beg to withdraw the plea of justification. They (the clients) wish to withdraw unreservedly every imputation made upon Mr. Lever's honour and integrity . . . there will be no issue for the jury except damages.<sup>60</sup>

Edward Carson, playing it cool, responded that Mr. Lever could accept no such compromise since "for months and months an attempt has been made to blacken Mr. Lever's character and the company's . . . Mr. Lever must be allowed to go to the jury to obtain such damages as will vindicate his reputation"<sup>61</sup> The judge, the Honorable Justice A.T. Lawrence, tried to encourage a compromise by supporting Isaacs' last statement. Carson asked for a brief recess since Isaacs had taken him by surprise. During the

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<sup>59</sup> Jolly says that Lever's legal team were housed and entertained at Thornton Manor before the trial. They were also given a tour of the factory at Port Sunlight where they had a chance to see the "Sunlight ethos" first-hand.

<sup>60</sup> *Times*, July 18, 1907.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



interval, the opposing lawyers were in serious discussion--a scene which Jolly described as something just short of an auction. Each time a number was uttered by Isaacs, there was a swift shake of the head from opposing counsel until the number of fifty was reached. Isaacs then rose and announced to the judge that a settlement of £50,000 and costs had been reached by the two sides.<sup>62</sup> The judge expressed his satisfaction of the settlement and said that if he "had been called on to deal with the articles, and if no more justification had been put forward than appeared from Mr. Lever's cross-examination, I should have dealt with them in no hesitating or measured manner."<sup>63</sup> According to the *Times*, the court cheered and Lever was further heralded by a local crowd on leaving St. George's Hall, in Liverpool. Moreover, he was welcomed and congratulated by 3,000 of his employees upon his return to Port Sunlight.<sup>64</sup> They, in turn, were given the afternoon off in celebration.

Lever, on returning to his political duties on July 22, received a standing ovation when he took his seat in the House of Commons. Lever's public image was restored, although the Trust and the subsequent libel case overshadowed Lever's political career.<sup>65</sup> Still, in tune with his moral paternalist character, Lever gave the libel award to Liverpool University as an endowment for the School of Town Planning and Civic Design, for the School of Russian Studies, and for the School of Tropical Medicine.

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<sup>62</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> *Times*, July 18, 1907.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 74.

Finally, Lever gave a transcript of the full record of the case to the university library ensuring that an accurate description of the trial would be easily available to the public.<sup>66</sup> Probably some damage to Lever's image was inflicted by the Northcliffe press attack. But once the trial was over and Lever had been vindicated, Lever's image as a moral businessman and employer was largely restored and upheld.

Although politics and the formation of the Soap Trust led to widespread attacks on Lever's image, his interest in the art world also brought public criticism. Lever's first negative foray into the national press occurred in 1889 when he began to collect art for both his mansion at Thornton Manor and for his advertising campaigns. In that year, Lever became embroiled in "one of the controversies about art which editors of Victorian journals could rely upon to fill columns with unenlightened indignation."<sup>67</sup> In 1889, Lever bought a painting from the Victorian artist, W.P. Frith, after visiting a Royal Academy exhibition. The painting was called *The New Frock* and it pictured a fresh-faced girl holding up a bright white pinafore. Several months later, Lever featured the painting in an advertisement poster for Sunlight Soap and changed the title of the painting to *So Clean*.<sup>68</sup> Frith voiced his indignation publicly and Lever was forced to defend himself and, it seems, the rights of all property-owners. He claimed that

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<sup>66</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, p. 139.

<sup>67</sup> Jolly, *Leverhulme*, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Wilson, *History of Unilever*, pp.41-42.

he had bought the painting and held the copyright; he could, therefore, do as he pleased with his own property.

Lever argued that he was actually providing a service to society by filling the working-class demand for good quality reproductions.<sup>69</sup> He even managed to get the highly influential painter, Sir John Millais, to support his cause. In an interview conducted by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Millais said that if the reproduction was of good quality, he had no complaint. Millais made much of his fortune in reproductions; his painting, *Bubbles*, had been used earlier in a Pears soap advertisement.<sup>70</sup> Clearly, Millais possessed a finely tuned "appreciation of the values of Lever's commercial world."<sup>71</sup>

Lever was one of those Victorian collectors who argued that reproductions (even in the form of advertisements) actually "enhanced rather than diminished art" since the art could now reach a larger audience.<sup>72</sup> Good art would lift the cultural and moral lot of the working classes by surrounding them with beauty and feeling. By the early 1890s, much of the Victorian press had joined Lever and other middle-class collectors in the "Art for the People" movement. Major publications, such as the *Magazine of Art* and the *Manchester Daily Guardian* "enthusiastically endorsed" this "commodification of fine art."<sup>73</sup> They praised the new middle-class patrons for promoting the eternal and "aesthetic value" of art

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<sup>69</sup> Dianne Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 342.

<sup>70</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, p. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle class*, p. 340.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

alongside commerce. With the help of the press (and leading artists like Millais), Victorian advertisers would in due course also win the respect of the art world.<sup>74</sup>

If in his early years of collecting art (the 1880s and 1890s), Lever was at times cavalier toward original works, redemption occurred later in 1922 when he established a public art gallery in Port Sunlight. Lever, as well as other collectors such as the sugar magnate Henry Tate, attempted through their endowment of civic art collections and museums to "live up to the high ideals the middle class had defined for itself."<sup>75</sup> The late Victorian middle class used art to construct a distinct identity from the gentry and aristocracy.<sup>76</sup> Middle-class patrons created a market for paintings that promoted English village life as well as works that glorified Victorian accomplishments and the moral righteousness sometimes associated with urban Britain. Victorian collectors were essentially "united in their belief that English art had attained a level of visual perfection which made it a superior transmitter of cultural messages."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 249-251.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>76</sup> Besides Macleod, Simon Gunn in "The 'Failure' of the Victorian Middle Class: a Critique," in John Seed and Janet Wolff, eds., *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-century Middle Class* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), also argues that the Victorian middle class developed a distinct identity in nineteenth century Britain. They argue that the middle classes did not become subservient to the cultural tastes of the aristocracy and gentry as some historians such as Igor Webb ("The Bradford Wool Exchange: Industrial Capitalism and the Popularity of Gothic," *Victorian Studies*, 29 [1976]) and Martin Wiener (*English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) have claimed.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

The art world, then, reflected the social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution. During the nineteenth century--a period often referred to as the "golden age" of British art--there was a transition from "one form of patronage to another."<sup>78</sup> Aristocrats ceased to purchase pictures of living artists; the patronage now came from the "new men," the great manufacturers from the Midlands and the North of England. The new upper middle-class patronage not only improved the financial positions of art dealers, but it also greatly improved both the financial and social status of artists.<sup>79</sup> It was thought among art circles, for example, that Millais earned from £25,000 to £40,000 a year. The larger purse for artists was not made just from commissions but also earned by selling copyrights (largely for advertising) and book illustrations.<sup>80</sup> Many Victorian artists now had the means to move from the position of an artisan to a professional and gentlemanly status "devoted to serving the ideals of society."<sup>81</sup>

This cultural development in Victorian Britain provides a link between capitalism and culture and is especially important in Lever's cultural critiques of industrialism. The new patronage makes sense as much of Victorian art reflected the religious and moral values of the new middle classes. Many British artists during this period were

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<sup>78</sup> Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: the Prince of the Victorian World* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Paula Gillett, *Worlds of Art: Painters in Victorian Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 33.

<sup>80</sup> Maas, *Gambart*, p. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Gillett, *Worlds of Art*, p. 68.

deeply religious, and the evangelical faith that stressed the importance of individual responsibility, good works, and moral self-restraint was fittingly expressed in famous paintings such as William Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* and in a multitude of lesser-known pictures.<sup>82</sup>

Lever's activities as an art collector reflect both his need to promote his personal and company image as well as to publicly support the central message of "Christian" morality in Victorian art.<sup>83</sup> During the 1880s, Lever became interested in art solely to advertise his products. Later, however, he became convinced that art could serve as a means for social and moral improvement.

As a novice collector, Lever bought works like Frith's *New Frock*, which focused on simple uncluttered figures and could be effectively used for his advertisements. In his private collection, however, he turned to some of the "Olde" English masters, as well as landscapes and "poetic compositions" of the Aesthetic movement. Importantly, when Lever decided to display his entire collection at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, he changed the direction of his collection once again toward large-scale Victorian narrative paintings, choosing to include paintings that provided a public message.<sup>84</sup>

Although Lever collected a few foreign masters like Titian's *Omnia Vanitas*, Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Gentleman* and Peter Paul

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> The excessive moralizing in Victorian art began to wane somewhat in the late nineteenth century with the rise of the Aesthetic movement. This movement, begun by Henry Whistler and Walter Pater, demanded that artists free themselves from bourgeois social constraints and produce work--as the Romantics had done earlier--with beauty, emotion and individualism as their only guides.

<sup>84</sup> Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle class*, p. 345.

Rubens' *Daughter of Herodias* and *The Death of Adonis*, the bulk of collection comprises nineteenth-century British painting and watercolors. Some eighteenth-century British masters are represented; paintings by Joshua Reynolds (*Venus Chiding Cupid* and *Elizabeth Gunning*) and Thomas Gainborough's portrait of Princess Augusta Sophia, as well as John Hoppner's *Lady Elizabeth Howard* and *Lord Hastings* are good examples. Lever's collection of the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, however, is perhaps most impressive. At the Lady Lever Art Gallery hangs Millais' *Sir Isumbras at the Fort* and *The Lingerin Autumn*; Holman Hunt's *May Morning on Magdalene Tower* and *The Scapegoat*; Ford Madox Brown's *Cromwell on his Farm*; and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*.<sup>85</sup>

Other great nineteenth-century works included Lord Leighton's *The Daphnephoria* and *The Garden of the Hesperides*, Edward Burne-Jones' *The Annunciation*, and several paintings by Sir Luke Fildes, including portraits of Lever (looking rather regal in his mayoral robes) and Lady Lever. Lever also collected many watercolors, including the works of the British greats, William Turner and John Constable, G.J. Pinwell, Sir Hubert Herkomer and Sir Alfred East. In addition, he collected a large amount of Tudor and Stuart English furniture, porcelain and pottery, both Chinese and English. He acquired perhaps the finest collection of Wedgwood pottery in the world.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Port Sunlight News*, 1 (February, 1923): pp. 4-8; Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, pp. 153-155; Leverhulme, *Leverhulme*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

The Frith episode and much of the collection displayed at the Lady Lever Art Gallery suggest that Lever had at times an "utilitarian relationship with art."<sup>87</sup> Yet, what is significant regarding Lever's early acquisitions for his advertising and the criticism he initially received for them (especially with the Frith episode) was his attempt to protect his good name--a name which consumers would immediately connect with the company and its products.

Another important episode dealing with the art world that shows Lever's preoccupation with his image can be seen with the public furor and negative publicity he received over the decapitation of his portrait by the famous Welsh painter, Augustus John. In June 1920, John was commissioned to paint a portrait of Lever. Lever had warned the artist, however, that he "could spare little time, and that he was an almost impossible subject to which no artist had done him justice."<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, John took the job and in late August, the portrait was finished in September and sent to Lever's "bungalow" at Rivington, near Bolton, Lancashire. Lever despised the painting and mutilated it by cutting off the head. Publicly, Lever claimed that he intended to roll up the painting and hide it in his safe at Rivington, but discovering that the safe was divided up into compartments, he cut the head out of the picture and placed only that part of the painting in the safe. Then, the headless torso was put back in the wooden box

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<sup>87</sup> Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle class*, p. 345.

<sup>88</sup> Jolly, *Leverhulme*, p. 190.



and accidentally sent back to Augustus John by Lever's housekeeper.<sup>89</sup>

Not surprisingly, John reacted with bewilderment and anger. He wrote to Lever for an immediate explanation for what John said was "the grossest insult I have ever received in the course of my career."<sup>90</sup> John also threatened that such an act of vandalism might have to be given full publicity.<sup>91</sup> Lever's reply, said the *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, was "friendly and conciliatory," apologizing "handsomely to Mr. John," and explaining how "the mistake" occurred.<sup>92</sup> Lever blamed the whole affair on his housekeeper and asked that the affair be kept private. The last words of the letter suggested Lever's frustration with the whole episode. He concluded: "I am sure you have no wish to annoy me, as I have no wish to annoy you."<sup>93</sup> Lever did not get his wish. John's answer was "to inform the Press of the matter: the story was then published, with photographs of the work, before and after the treatment."<sup>94</sup> After publication, John says that he received telegrams of support from colleagues as far away as Japan and America. In November, public demonstrations in London and Florence took place.

On Guy Fawkes Day, November 5, 1920, students of the London Art Schools gathered in Hyde Park "bearing aloft a gigantic replica of the celebrated soap-boilers's torso, the head being

<sup>89</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, October 9, 1920.

<sup>90</sup> John to Leverhulme 31 September, 1920 quoted in Holroyd's *Augustus John*.

<sup>91</sup> Augustus John, *Chiaroscuro: Fragments of Autobiography by Augustus John* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954), p. 112.

<sup>92</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, October 9, 1920.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> John, *Chiaroscuro*, p. 112.

absent: this was accompanied by eloquent expressions of indignation, scorn and ridicule."<sup>95</sup> According to the *Times*, "A 'guy' bearing the inscription, 'Lord Leave-a-hole,' was burnt in Hyde Park by a band of art students from the Slade School as a protest against Lord Leverhulme's action in decapitating the portrait of himself painted by Mr. Augustus John, an old Slade student."<sup>96</sup>

The story crossed the Atlantic. The *New York Times* first ran the earlier story on October 10th of John's initial objection to Lever's handiwork, citing the rather overblown view of *The Daily Express* that the dispute "promises to become the art sensation of modern times."<sup>97</sup> Both sides of the argument were presented in the article, Lever not surprisingly stressing ownership and copyright, while John held that "the mutilation of a work of art is unjustifiable, even if the mutilator happens to own the picture."<sup>98</sup>

On November 6, 1920, the *Liverpool Daily Post* described the Hyde Park protesters in the most descriptive terms and clearly made light of the matter:

Hundreds of students from most of the London art schools, all freakishly garbed, took the little matter of the 'decapitation' . . . into their own hands. . . London has rarely witnessed a more serio-comic scene. It was more of a mad May Day revel of the jolly, joyous and laughing days of Elizabeth than a modern celebration of the time-dishonoured festival of Guy Fawkes.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *Times*, November 6, 1920.

<sup>97</sup> *New York Times*, October 10, 1920.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*, November 6, 1920.

Moreover, the "wild procession," said the local newspaper,  
came alive with jazz-colored figures of pretty  
girls and young athletic men. Most of them wore  
the painter's smock, on which were painted the  
most absurd designs, while there were men ferociously  
bewhiskered, with grinning young faces painted  
in ochre reds and vivid Prussian blues, set off  
by the picturesque black coats of the Quartier Latin.<sup>100</sup>

The rest of the article reported of how the protesters poured  
petrol over the "Leverhulme guy" and burned it while "the band  
stuck up a catchy air, and round and round went a wildly leaping  
circle in prelude to half an hour of dancing of the most eccentric  
sort."<sup>101</sup>

The *New York Times* painted a picture of the public protest in  
a more serious manner. Although the American newspaper also  
described some of the colorful scenes above, it still did not lose  
sight of reporting the central message of the art students in  
insulting and protesting Leverhulme's cavalier attitude towards  
John and the art world. The *New York Times* said that above the  
"grotesque procession" was a caricature of the portrait with the  
words "What is the matter with it?" while behind it "was borne a  
monstrous looking top-hatted Guy Fawkes, waving a knife in his  
right hand."<sup>102</sup> Also, following the effigy of Lever was a drawing  
of a "haloed St. John."<sup>103</sup>

Such expressions of indignation towards Lever were not just  
felt and heard in Britain and the United States. A twenty-four

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> *New York Times*, November 6, 1920.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

hour strike was declared by the *Confederation Generale des Rittartisti Italians* in protest of Leverhulme's actions.<sup>104</sup> In his autobiography, John recounted this international show of support. He said that

In Italy they went further. A twenty-four hour strike was called, involving everyone connected with the painting industry, including models, colourmen and frame-makers. A colossal effigy entitled 'Il Le-ver-hulme' was constructed of soap and tallow, paraded through the streets of Florence, and ceremoniously burnt in the *Piazza dei Signori*, after which the demonstrators, reforming, proceeded to the *Battisteria* where a wreath was solemnly laid on the Altar of St. John. . . .<sup>105</sup>

The London art students and the Florentine members of the painting industry were publicly protesting what they considered to be "His Margarine Majesty's" blatant disregard for art and the artist.<sup>106</sup>

Interestingly, early in the dispute, the *New York Times* stated that "Lord Leverhulme expressed no opinion as to his liking or dislike of the portrait."<sup>107</sup> But clearly Lever could not have been too pleased with the portrait. He wrote to his friend, Wilson Barret, that the portrait was "Chastening" and "humbling to pride."<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Lever's son wrote that his father was "deeply wounded" by such an inaccurate portrayal. The Second Leverhulme further recollects:

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<sup>104</sup> *New York Times*, November 3, 1920.

<sup>105</sup> John, *Chiaroscuro*, p. 112.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Holroyd, *Augustus John: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 467.

<sup>107</sup> *New York Times*, October 10, 1920.

<sup>108</sup> Leverhulme to Wilson Barret, in Jolly's *Leverhulme*, p. 191.

He spoke to no one about it at the time, and the publicity in the Press was the first which any of us heard about it; indeed, it was not until some time afterwards that I could persuade my father to show his old friend, Jonathan Simpson, and myself the square containing his head. When we did see it we understood and sympathized with his feelings, as would anyone bound to him by ties of affection.<sup>109</sup>

Nicholson says that Lever was angry at "the florid face, drooping jaw and hard thin mouth. . . but it was not so much the face that distressed him, as the hands, with their long, corroded, purple fingers, curved like talons."<sup>110</sup> John perhaps was expressing his hatred of big business by portraying Lever as power hungry and gluttonous. This painting clearly did not reinforce Lever's image of himself, and so he tried to hide what he saw as nothing more than blasphemy. For Lever, the painting was a slur upon his good name and character as a caring employer, philanthropist, and public supporter of the arts.

In 1915, Lever had given several lectures on the importance of art and beauty in a modern society. He argued that "art and the love of the beautiful are essential to the development and progress of any community."<sup>111</sup> Like Ruskin, Lever believed that art and beauty were a "civilizing" and morally uplifting force for humanity. "Art and the beautiful," said Lever, "can express in outline, form, and colour the joys and sorrows, the loves and

<sup>109</sup> Leverhulme, *Viscount Leverhulme*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>110</sup> Nigel Nicholson, *Lord of the Isles: Lord Leverhulme in the Hebrides* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960)., p. 11.

<sup>111</sup> William Lever, "Address given at St. George's Road New School, Bolton, April 10th, 1915" in "*A.B.C. Series and Others* (Port Sunlight: Heritage Centre), p. 22.

hopes of life, and can thereby make life something nobler, better, purer, happier."<sup>112</sup> Lever argued that great art would not only lead to personal gratification and happiness, but also lead to the nation's sense of progress. In a speech given at the opening of the spring Exhibition of the Oldham Art Gallery on February 15, 1915, Lever explained that

the foundation of every truly great work of Art is the beautiful, then, the masterpiece in itself has produced happiness and pleasure. And the reason here is not far to seek. There is no real permanent happiness apart from right conduct. Art and the beautiful raise up in mind and soul an association of ideas and experiences suggesting prophecies of the ideal and the beautiful in conduct and character. The harmony in Art and the beautiful suggest, again silently and with extreme sensibility, the ideal for conduct in our daily lives. Art and the beautiful unconsciously create an atmosphere in which happiness and the virtues grow and flourish. Art and the beautiful civilize and elevate because they enlighten and ennoble.<sup>113</sup>

Lever insisted that art and business should not be antagonistic to each other. He argued that one could not be successful without the other. "The fact is proved to be," claimed Lever, that "Art and Commerce are the obverse and reverse of the same medal, both commemorating the nation's progress and development."<sup>114</sup> Art needs business to supply a market for paintings and business needs art to stimulate the imagination,

even inspiring to "intelligent thought and action in business

<sup>112</sup> William Lever, "Address delivered at the Opening of the Spring Exhibition of the Oldham Art Gallery, Monday, February 15, 1915" in *"A.B.C." Series and Others* (Port Sunlight: Heritage Centre), p. 6.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

affairs which alone can win success."<sup>115</sup> In an address given in February 1915 at the opening of the Spring Exhibition of the Oldham Gallery, Lever claimed that

The whole history of the world has proved that, so far from the love and cultivation of beauty and art threatening disaster to Trade and Commerce, they have, on the contrary, proved a most powerful stimulus to their rapid growth and expansion. The fact is proved to be that Art and Commerce are the obverse and reverse of the same medal, both commemorating the nation's progress and development.<sup>116</sup>

Echoing Matthew Arnold, Lever continued on this theme by suggesting that "the man or nation incapable of aspiring after the beautiful and artistic is incapable of that supremely intelligent thought and action in business affairs which alone can win success."<sup>117</sup> Lever argued that success could be achieved through the influence of the visual arts, since both businessmen and workers would learn a valuable lesson in "thoroughness and efficiency."<sup>118</sup> And to have both lasting art and success in business, "the price demanded," said Lever, was "careful study, laborious hard work, and constant attention. . . The artist or business man with negative virtues of character (such as indolence and pleasure) can never achieve success."<sup>119</sup>

For Lever, the beauty in visual arts would also allow for the development of good character and personal happiness. In other words, the visual could support and perpetuate Lever's moral

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> William Lever, *Art and Beauty and the City* (Port Sunlight: Lever Bros., 1915), p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

image. It was, then, particularly hurtful and embarrassing for a self-proclaimed supporter of the fine arts to be assailed as indifferent to art, or worse, accused of being the "butcher" of paintings by both artists and the press. Lever's image was under public attack and he had to come to its defense.

Yet, Lever defended his action in the press more as a businessman rather than as a famous patron of the arts. For Lever, the issue was simply a matter of copyright; he had purchased the painting and could do with it as he pleased.<sup>120</sup> Holroyd says that John took the wider view "that money purchased merely the custodianship of the picture."<sup>121</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* went further in its support of John and artists' rights in general. The newspaper declared,

[t]he bottom fact of the case is that there is something in a work of art which, in the highest equity as distinct from the law, you cannot buy . . . Whatever the law may allow, or courts award, the common fairness of mankind cannot assent to the doctrine that one man may rightfully use his own rights of property in such a way as to silence or interrupt another in making so critical appeal to posterity for recognition of his genius. The right to put up this appeal comes too near those other fundamental personal rights the infringement of which is the essence of slavery.<sup>122</sup>

Only in 1954, after correspondence between William Lever's grandson and John himself, did the argument come to some sort of satisfactory conclusion. The famous portrait was mended and

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<sup>120</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 192.

<sup>121</sup> Holroyd, *Augustus John*, p. 468.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.



Leverhulme's head was sewn on to the headless body. Dr. Johann Hell performed the delicate procedure; the complete painting was first shown at the Augustus John Exhibition of 1954 at the royal Academy of Arts.<sup>123</sup> The restored painting hangs today in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, "the scars still visible on the canvas," says Nigel Nicholson, "which Leverhulme mutilated in anger at what he saw."<sup>124</sup>

Jolly speculates that Lever most probably "wanted a fine commanding portrait for the Company so that when his actual attendance at headquarters became rarer and eventually ceased altogether, his presence would still be apparent."<sup>125</sup> After all, Lever's image was more needed than ever since it was in 1921 that the company headquarters moved from the factory village of Port Sunlight to Lever House in London. Lever's company had turned from a relatively close knit "charismatic" structure to a huge "bureaucratic" multinational. Image and corporate culture would have to play a part in maintaining Lever's "progressive" ideas of labor relations.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Nicholson, *Lord of the Isles*, p. 11.

<sup>125</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 196.

## Chapter 7

### **Cultivating Loyalty: Corporate Identity, Patriotism, and Empire**

In the summer of 1920, Lever was faced with his first serious strike. The strike occurred as a result of union demands for higher wages and a dispute between two competing trade unions, the Warehouse and General Workers' Union and the Liverpool Shipping Clerks' Guild. During the War, the Warehouse and General Workers' Union recruited the majority of factory workers and clerical staff at Port Sunlight. By 1920, however, much of the clerical staff switched their membership to the Liverpool Shipping Clerks' Guild. In competing for membership, both unions wanted the management at Lever's to recognize their organization as the sole negotiating authority. Lever refused. He believed that the freedom of any worker to choose whichever union he/she wished to belong to was a private matter. The Warehouse and General Workers' Union called their members--both the clerks and factory workers--out on strike. The strike only lasted twenty-one days, and remarkably it was the only self-contained strike (as opposed to a "sympathetic" strike) at Port Sunlight during Lever's tenure (1888-1925).<sup>1</sup> This lack of industrial dispute at Lever Brothers'

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<sup>1</sup> Viscount Leverhulme, *Lord Leverhulme* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), pp. 226-227; J.P. Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1976), p. 178.

during a period when Britain was rife with workers' strikes needs to be explained.

This chapter argues that along with the construction of Lever's personal ethos (Chapter 4), the forging of a company identity based on the ideals of the middle-class family and national consciousness was a key factor in creating a strong company loyalty, which limited major industrial action at Port Sunlight.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter's focus on company identity builds upon Patrick Joyce's work on northern factory culture in the late nineteenth century. In *Work, Society, and Politics*,<sup>3</sup> Joyce challenges the general consensus among social historians of the 1960s and 1970s that the central consciousness of workers revolved around the concept of class. He maintains that the working classes cannot be understood by looking only at the most vocal and visible group--the "Labour Aristocracy" and trade unionists. Instead, he argues that it was the culture of the factory rather than outside political ideology that was the major experience for the majority of the working classes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, late nineteenth century working-class identity was largely formed in the factory where its culture permeated all aspects of life, including religion, leisure, family, and education. This identity, argued Joyce, was based on

<sup>2</sup> The company was not affected by the General Strike of 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Late Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> In *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Questions of Class 1848-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Joyce argues that historians should look at social history not just through the lens of class, but also other local identities, shaped by the shared experience of northern political radicalism, provincial broadside ballads, dialect literature, and popular entertainments (cinema and the music halls).

the deference and dependency inherent in late nineteenth century factory paternalism. Joyce argues that there was limited class antagonism in the second half of the nineteenth century precisely because "the tie of employer and worker was one of emotional identification, in which the worker acquiesced in his own subordination."<sup>5</sup> This occurred because of the entrenched tradition of deference. This deference

was an aspect of the class relationship of employers and workpeople with sufficient power at the time greatly to erode the consciousness of conflict, but never to displace it, to change the form in which conflict was perceived but not to obliterate its perception.<sup>6</sup>

The habits of deference were hard to break. For example, socialist campaigners in a 1890 Blackburn election complained that workers failed "to support their own kind but are happy to defer to the gentlemen."<sup>7</sup>

Lever fits into Joyce's model of a northern factory owner who controlled his workforce by relying on the practice of paternalism and the traditional culture of working-class dependence. Yet, Lever expanded the paternalist model, by constructing--largely through the print media, advertising, and his public appearances--a benevolent and enlightened image of himself as well as constructing an effective company identity and culture at Port Sunlight. The town itself was fashioned to uphold this identity, for, as Joyce points out, what made late Victorian paternalism so

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics*, p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

effective was the employers' ability to develop the factory town "in such a way that the evolution of the sense of neighbourhood community was permeated by the presence of the workplace."<sup>8</sup>

Corporate identity at Lever Brothers did not develop in isolation; it was forged through contemporary culture, politics, and by other overlapping identities, such as national identity and class. Company identity was constructed in relation to the more familiar imagery and rhetoric of national identity, patriotism, and the civilizing mission inherent in late nineteenth century British imperialism.

Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay define identity as "constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation."<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Hall and du Gay claim that

identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves . . . They [identities] relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself.<sup>10</sup>

Lever created a company identity by "inventing tradition," by associating his local company identity with a more familiar

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

national identity. He also constructed an ideal worker identity, one that drew not on typical images of the working classes, but on the seemingly more "respectable" values and morality of the middle classes. Port Sunlight itself, then, contributed to the construction of this ideal. As noted in Chapter Five, in planning Port Sunlight, Lever and his architects drew on the garden city movement and re-imagined the small house, "cloaking working-class housing in a middle-class disguise."<sup>11</sup>

Corporate culture was one way of maintaining employee loyalty and establishing a sense of community in the midst of company growth. In the early twentieth century, once the company grew to the size of a multinational, Lever could no longer rely on face to face personal relations and had to find a different sort of "community." This corporate culture was partly created by using company literature and constructing what Benedict Anderson termed an "imagined community." "Pseudo-events," or today we might refer to it as "media-events," were staged using modern technology (in this case the press) to create an image or manipulate an audience also contributed to this created culture. As Daniel Boorstin argues, a "pseudo event" is never spontaneous, but arises because "someone has planned, planted, or incited it."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Boorstin maintains that these events are "planted primarily for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced."<sup>13</sup> Lever

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<sup>11</sup> Gillian Darley, *Villages of Vision* (London: Granada Publishing, 1978), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

manipulated his employees and consumers by planning "pseudo-events" which were written about (often accompanied by photographs) in the local press and company literature. With the continuous growth of the business,<sup>14</sup> company literature was an effective method for developing and promoting company culture. And as Benedict Anderson points out, language and literature are integral to the formation of collective identities.<sup>15</sup> For literature, says Anderson, "implies the refraction of even 'world events' into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time."<sup>16</sup> Vernacular literature provided a sense of community in a more populous and bureaucratic world.

The company literature created in print the ideal Lever employee. Company publications defined workers as patriotic (loyal to both country and company), moral, and of course, hardworking. The employees, as readers of company literature, could accept the role or identity offered them or reject it, at the cost of then defining themselves as antithetical to the attractive and lofty identity that the company offered. A recent work by Regina Blaszczyk discusses how companies "imagined their

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<sup>14</sup> According to Charles Wilson's *The History of Unilever* (London: Cassel & Company, 1954), in 1894 Lever Brothers had a total capital employed of just over £1,500,000. By 1925, however, that figure rose dramatically to £64,500,000 (see appendix 3) as well as employing just over a quarter of a million people.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63

consumers" as a method of assessing trends in demand.<sup>17</sup> But what is important when studying Lever Brothers is to recognize how Lever and his company leaders imagined their workers and offered to them well-defined roles and identities. Lever constructed an "imagined" community of company employees at Port Sunlight and later, when the company stretched beyond the confines of Port Sunlight to the wider world, for the multinational as a whole. Lever created several company sponsored publications such as the *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, *Progress*, and the *Port Sunlight News* to construct his company identity.

The *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal* was the first company publication beginning in 1895 and forerunner of *Progress*,<sup>18</sup> the official company journal (1899-). Both publications were printed and published for the staff by Lever Brothers in Port Sunlight. They included letters from salespeople, countless photographs of the works, cottages, and public buildings at Port Sunlight, motivational poems, letters from customers praising soap, as well as international advertisements. The journal also included personal information of employees--weddings, births, deaths, awards, anniversaries, retirements celebrations, information on new products/contests, Port Sunlight proverbs, selling tips, and of course detailed descriptions of the various "pseudo-events."

The *Port Sunlight News*, which was also printed by Lever Brothers, began later in 1922 and was designed to supplement

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<sup>17</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. x.

<sup>18</sup> By 1925, *Progress* had a world-wide circulation of a quarter of a million.



*Progress* by focusing specifically on village cultural events and news, allowing more space in *Progress* to be devoted to the international concerns of the growing multinational. Like the *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal* and the early editions of *Progress*, the *Port Sunlight News* was filled with reports of cultural events that Lever attended: dances, award ceremonies and club meetings. It also included obituaries, editorials, and all the latest information about Port Sunlight sporting teams, pictures of houses, the factory, Port Sunlighters' participating in concerts, sports, and even local festivals.<sup>19</sup>

In the first article of the first issue of *Progress*, the company excused its lack of personal contact because of its large size and hoped that the introduction of *Progress* could act as a new medium which can give "a hearty hand-shake to all members of our staff," and bring "you [the employee] into contact with ourselves [management] and with each other."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the editor said that the journal would also keep the employees in touch with the "progress and development of the business, not only at headquarters, but also at out various branches at home and abroad."<sup>21</sup> The letter stressed the desire that the employees would actually write *Progress* and the company edit it. *Progress* would "supply us with the means," said the editor, "by which both your power and our influence will be increased tenfold."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Only employees of Lever Brothers were eligible as subscribers to the *Port Sunlight News* for a fee of one shilling per annum.

<sup>20</sup> *Progress*, 1 (October 1899): 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

To support its aim, the journal published numerous letters by employees to provide evidence of the publication's success. For example, J.P. Gray, the chairman of Lever Brothers in Australia praised *Progress* for its important role in providing for the company an international community. He said of the periodical that

its progressive, healthy, and pleasant news must have a strong influence in making the employees of Lever Brothers Limited throughout the world recognize that they are in reality a co-operative family of workers, thoughtfully considered and cared for with the knowledge that earnest work combined with integrity and ability will be recognized with its opportunities. Writing thirteen thousand miles away, *Progress* has made me feel more in unison with you at Port Sunlight and throughout the world.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in a letter to *Progress* published in October, 1899, D. Griffen, an agent, commends the company journal for providing an "imagined community." "All hail! Progress," said Griffen,

(t)hanks are due to the promoters for giving us the opportunity of chatting with one another, through its medium, on matters of vital interest to each reader. It will atone in some degree for the lack of inspiration derived from personal intercourse with the members of the firm with which we are associated and have the pleasure of serving, and whose interests are our interests.<sup>24</sup>

In December, 1899, the New York office of Lever Brothers also praised *Progress* for "drawing more closely together the many members of the Staff of Lever Brothers Limited, scattered

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<sup>23</sup> *Progress*, 1 (June 1900): 366.

<sup>24</sup> *Progress*, 1 (October 1899): 52.

throughout the world."<sup>25</sup> And a district agent from Philadelphia, Mrs. Francis Summerville discussed the importance of *Progress*, praising Lever Brothers, and motivating its readers by saying that

some companies use their employees like slaves,  
but all D.A.'s should consider it an honour in  
Philadelphia to work for Lever Brothers Limited . . .  
let us keep plodding on, holding our heads up high  
above each and every obstacle; our motto, Purity,  
can be procured by every person who uses the great  
dirt extractor, SUNLIGHT SOAP.<sup>26</sup>

Even as early as 1899, there seemed to be an awareness among the management at Lever Brothers about the lack of "personal" relations in a large business. At a meeting of the heads of the works departments and managers on November 14, Lever began by stressing that "one of the drawbacks of a business so large as ours was the fact that it was utterly impossible for the heads of the firm to know and meet every employee in the ordinary course of business."<sup>27</sup> He continued by praising his employees for their loyalty and support "at all times."<sup>28</sup>

This was an important meeting in which quasi-democratic proposals were suggested and later implemented by the company. These proposals gave the perception that all employees were participating in business and policy decisions at the company. This policy change was specifically designed to build up the corporate culture. The first proposal suggested that each department should have a committee that would convene regularly

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<sup>25</sup> *Progress*, 1 (December 1899): 99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> *Progress*, 1 (December 1899): 102.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

(including a manager and a foreman from each department) to discuss how each department could be more efficient by recognizing problems and formulating solutions to it. Any ideas proposed by these committees were to be considered by a council consisting of the heads of all the departments. If a proposal was accepted by the council, it then went to the managing directors for final approval. After the usual period of self-congratulation for the employees and for the company's "fine management," it was also proposed that each department should have a suggestion box (largely dealing with the key points of "Efficiency, Economy, and Comfort") for the employees as large. Lever was given the credit for establishing such a "democratic idea." Moreover, approved proposals would be published in *Progress* and prizes given at the end of the year for the most valuable suggestions. Any suggestion, even those that were anonymous, would be considered.<sup>29</sup>

Besides employee suggestions, there were also prize competitions for papers submitted to the head office that promoted company identity and community. *Progress* listed the prizewinners of such competitions. There was the best essay on "The Mutual Interests of Employer and Employee," and "How to Foster a Good Feeling between Heads of Departments and Assistants," as well as papers on the best ways of selling soap to grocers or why a housewife should use Lever soaps instead of others. Depending on the competition, prizes ranged from £3 for first place to 10 shillings for third.<sup>30</sup> Such contests allowed employers a voice in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> *Progress*, 1 (November, 1899): 96-97.

the company and thus strengthened their identification with Lever Brothers.

At times the company journal seemed almost defensive about the lack of personal touch in the growing business. For example, in an article covering the retirement party of W. S. Lockhart of the Traffic and Press Advertising Department, *Progress* writes of Lockhart as "one of the very few remaining members of the staff who was with Lord Leverhulme in the days when the Works were at Warrington, when the Chairman was in personal touch with all his employees."<sup>31</sup> One way of achieving a sense of personal touch was to tie Lever's employees through the use of company literature.

Another effective method of constructing corporate identity was to print Lever's letters to his employees and to record his travels, appearances, and speeches at key events through the company journals. Lever's overseas trips were well recorded, and especially noted were the positive comments made by the foreign press about the chairman or company itself. In a trip to the United States taken in November 1919, Lever gave several speeches promoting his business ideals (largely dealing with his well-known stance on the Six-Hour Day and Co-Partnership). *Progress* quotes the *Boston Post* in one such event in which the "Six Hours day system sentiments [were] applauded strenuously by the largest luncheon attendance the Chamber of Commerce ever had."<sup>32</sup> Of course in the same issue there proceeded an article describing Lever's recent hectic schedule for one day before he took his trip across

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<sup>31</sup> *Progress*, 20 (January 1920): 27.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

the Atlantic, in which the chairman worked "sixteen hours himself, while advocating six hours for others."<sup>33</sup> Additionally, in describing a scene at Copley-Plaza, the same Boston reporter wrote of the scene of "women crowding the balconies" and of Lever "presenting his views in such conservative language, and with so much good taste, charm of manner, and sound common-sense that the 795 business men of Boston who listened to him were moved repeatedly to applaud the most radical labour doctrines ever heard at a business men's meeting in that city."<sup>34</sup> When providing details about Lever himself, the company publications aimed to encourage reader familiarity and pride in their founder. They also hoped to reinforce certain qualities in the employees, such as hard work and taste.

One Lever publication, the *Wallet*, was initially established specifically to motivate the sales force, but also clearly supported and promoted the company's image and overall culture. Since one of Lever's first jobs was working as a traveling salesman for his father's grocery shop, he had first hand experience in knowing how to motivate his sales force. Through travelers' or district agents' conferences and literature, Lever created a community of Lever Brothers' salesmen that could exchange ideas, inspire colleagues and offer a community of support. In discussing the importance of the travelers' magazine for the sales staff, one district agent (unnamed) was quoted in the *Wallet* saying that he enjoyed "the community spirit" and felt

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

"more enthusiastic through knowing what my fellow D.A.'s are doing in other parts of Great Britain."<sup>35</sup>

This publication, however, did not just allow for the development of a "community" of salesmen, but also furthered the overall goal and "moral" cause for the group or company. For example, Lever had frequently argued for the development of "character" in youth. One way to achieve this was by fostering a travelers' apprentice scheme or "Vocational Guidance Plan" through the Lever League of Student Salesman. In this scheme (which was discussed at length in the *Wallet*), boys, in their spare time, were given the opportunity of "earning and learning," being taught "self-reliance, initiative, perseverance, politeness and courtesy, how to approach people, and how to sell their own services to an employer." These students were guided by "specially chosen men, who have had experience with boys, and who are responsible to the firm for the training and moral welfare of their students."<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the *Wallet* promoted Lever's apprentice scheme as a solution to national and imperial problems. The company magazine reprinted the front page of a local Hull newspaper and next to the lead heading "Unemployment England's Most Vital Problem," was an article promoting Lever's apprentice scheme, "as if suggesting a remedy," reasoned the magazine.<sup>37</sup> Also, not only was the scheme a method "to obviate this labour unrest . . . by building a foundation which will prevent it in the future," but in the method

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<sup>35</sup> *Wallet*, (August, 1923): 3.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from Hull's *Eastern Morning Herald*, October 26, 1923 in the *Wallet*, (January, 1924): 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Wallet*, (January, 1924): 1.

"we are gaining moral as well as material advantages, thus using a most effective weapon for helping the Empire."<sup>38</sup> The scheme was truly democratic, being open to any boy in the country between the ages of fourteen to eighteen. In targeting possible candidates for the scheme, salesmen traveled around the country giving lectures and presentations particularly to schools that "are for the benefit of boys in receipt of Poor Law relief."<sup>39</sup> D.A.'s were further urged by the company to take interest in the scheme not just because of "the deplorable state of working conditions to-day," but also to do everything in their power "to promote this work for the benefit of British boys."<sup>40</sup>

As one of the fathers of modern advertising, Lever oversaw other company publications that the salesforce gave to consumers. The company devised an information booklet for his customers called *Sunlight Soap and How to Use it*. Since this was a period that placed great emphasis on self-help and respectability, the booklet provided for direct advertising and at the same time gave useful information for those people who regarded themselves as "respectable," whatever their income. Thus, the little publication in turn gave respectability to Sunlight Soap and the company itself. As distributors of self-help guides, the employees stood in the role of guide--one who could guide homemakers towards middle-class British respectability. The product guides provided workers active roles, not only as

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Wallet*, (August, 1923): 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



salesmen but as upholders of British culture. Similarly, the *Sunlight Almanac* (1895-1900) provided general information ranging from embroidery and child care, to a guide for buying and preparing good and clean food. The 470-page illustrated book, *Woman's World* (1901), also provided advice on many aspects of domestic life.

### **Invention of Tradition and Pseudo Events**

Inventing tradition was a nineteenth century attempt to create strong national or collective identities.<sup>41</sup> Historians agree that national identity was well-established in the British Isles during Victoria's reign. In *Britons*, Linda Colley argues that British identity developed soon after the Act of Union in 1707.<sup>42</sup> This British identity was superimposed on other regional/national loyalties within Britain (Scottish, Welsh, Irish) as well as strong identities in localism.<sup>43</sup> Colley believes that in the eighteenth century, this British identity was constructed against an "obviously hostile other," usually Catholic France, and throughout the course of the nineteenth century, was maintained by the heavy demands of Britain's imperial interests. Hordes of Scots, Welsh, and English soldiers and administrators were needed to run and maintain Britain's "formal" Empire. The

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<sup>41</sup> See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain, England, Scotland, Wales: The Making of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

"British" now had a new "Other" to enhance their unified national identity--the colonial natives who were of different skin color, customs, and religion. As this chapter will show, Lever used the national identity and "civilizing mission" associated with late nineteenth century imperialism to help construct the Lever corporate identity.

Other historians see the construction of British identity as a nineteenth century development.<sup>44</sup> David Cannadine argues that during the nineteenth century the British monarchy reconstructed itself, and in doing so, also constructed a "British" identity. The British monarchy invented traditions--such as the magnificence that surrounded the Queen's Jubilee celebration (along with sufficient quantities of commemorative pottery and medallions for conspicuous consumption) and the adoption by King Edward VII of a "full-dressed ceremonial occasion" of the state opening of parliament--that were in fact new but gave the impression of being old. Eric Hobsbawm also places the construction of national identity in the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> He argues that the "British" used patriotic songs, flags, and sports (often invented traditions) to bind people with little else in common (in other words the different classes) to the secular state. As Hobsbawm points out, sport traditions that seem ancient, such as the Cup Final, often turn out to be late nineteenth century developments.

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<sup>44</sup> David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance, and the Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,' 1820-1977," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*.

Such traditions included professional players, the formation of football leagues, the F.A (Football Association) Cup, regular Saturday afternoon match attendance, and now famous rivalries between city teams such as Everton and Liverpool.<sup>46</sup>

Lever binded the classes together by creating company traditions and even myths through company literature and through "pseudo-events" (that were reported in company literature). Lever (often accompanied by his wife) attended and supported many of the social club meetings at Port Sunlight. Company journals reported meetings and events attended by the chairman, and so worked to reinforced Lever's image and help forge the company culture. Stories of such events provided an opportunity for Lever to construct his moral paternalist image while defining the employees and villagers by including all the readers in the event.

For example, Lever and his wife attended a "Conversazione" at the Girls' Institute in October 1899. Besides other directors of the firm, two hundred members of the institute were present. The article, four pages long and complete with photographs, provided intricate detail of the event. Port Sunlight's cultural societies were on show at this meeting. Exhibits from the Scientific and Literary society were on display (along with a picture of all its members in front of the society building). The Port Sunlight choir performed, and a cinematic show received a "warm greeting, especially those slides depicting scenes in Port Sunlight."<sup>47</sup> Lever addressed the members after tea, and supporting his

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>47</sup> *Progress*, 1 (November, 1899): 91.

paternalist image, he reminded the girls of the work for which the institution was established; he "felt sure that the girls appreciated all that was being done for their social improvement."<sup>48</sup> Lever particularly stressed four points: he urged the girls to maintain their physical health; and, to have the ability to earn a living; to take an interest in the refinements of life (of course "by means of the facilities offered at the institute"); to be dutiful to their fellow-workers which "would establish a bond of friendship and sympathy amongst all, and this friendly relationship would make everyone feel all the happier."<sup>49</sup> Significantly, this issue of the company journal also promoted domesticity, reproducing what *Progress* considered to be the prettiest porch in the village by highlighting its ivy, flowers, and arched entrance.

Public lectures also provided opportunities to reinforce Port Sunlight's image. In September, 1899, Lever attended a lecture in Gladstone Hall. The lecture was given by Dr. W. H. Tolman from the New York League of Social Services, and entitled "What more than wages?" Tolman talked about "how some American employers are bettering the condition of their employees."<sup>50</sup> The *Birkenhead News* published an account of this lecture and *Progress* reproduced appropriate sections from the piece that supported the image of the Port Sunlight community as a progressive and moral place. The end result was an article that focused more attention on Lever and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *Progress*, 1 (October, 1899): 43.

Port Sunlight than on the American's original subject. The object of the lecture, said the local newspaper, was "to put into communication in all parts of the world employers and others who are desirous of doing something for the betterment of the conditions of the employed."<sup>51</sup> The newspaper continued by praising Port Sunlight and the founder himself:

it would be impossible to imagine more appropriate surroundings for the delivery of such a lecture than the picturesque industrial village of Port Sunlight. . . The improvement of the homes, surroundings, and social condition of the workers of the world has for years been the master passion of Mr. Lever's rich and useful life, and the unique village which now surrounds the enormous soap works at Bebington is a glorious monument of faithfulness to a lofty ideal.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, the moral of Tolman's address and Lever's "thoughtful speech," said the *Birkenhead News*, was to highlight

the successful experiments at the manufacture of Messrs. Patterson Brothers, makers of the National Cash Register, Dayton Ohio, and the works of Messrs. Lever Brothers Limited, at Port Sunlight, [which] afford convincing testimony of the pecuniary success which rewards employers who are in close sympathy with those whom they employ. Generous treatment, we are told . . . attracts the highest class of workmen and secures the best work.<sup>53</sup>

Banquets honoring long service at Lever Brothers served as the ideal environment for buttressing Lever's public image and the company's corporate identity. These events were thoroughly

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

reported in the company literature.<sup>54</sup> On March 26, 1899 Lever attended such a service awards banquet. The key theme in his speech dealt with the community of spirit and duty. Lever referred to all workers, whether management or factory hands, as a community of "brothers." Trying to promote company unity in midst of a national coal strike, Lever pressed for harmony and loyalty to one's company and peers. Lever said,

do not imagine for one moment that the world is divided into more than two classes. We here at Port Sunlight only recognize those who do their duty and those who do not . . . we are all absolutely necessary in our various places and positions in this and in other industries such as this or greater than this in the United Kingdom . . . it is against the interests of the working man to attempt to divide the workers--whether blackcoated or working-man's jacketed--into two classes. We are all one; we have all got to work together to secure the success of the undertaking we are involved in.<sup>55</sup>

Lever's rhetoric emphasized collective identity. With his frequent repetition of "we," he encouraged readers/listeners to identify with him and to understand, in turn, his identifications with them.

Coverage of important cultural and political events also provided opportunities for the construction of company and village identity. One such event was the opening of the Lady Lever Art Gallery by Princess Beatrice on December 16th, 1922. Port Sunlighters shared their common experiences (those not physically

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<sup>54</sup> For twenty-five years service an employee received silver-gilt medals, while those who reached fifteen years earned certificates and gold watches.

<sup>55</sup> *Progress*, 12 (January, 1912): 104-105.

there participated by reading about them) in the details and pictures of the "pseudo event." The opening of the gallery was reported in detail. The journal recorded Princess Beatrice's words when she declared the building open: "the magnificent Art Gallery dedicated to the memory of one who I know was greatly loved by the people of Port Sunlight."<sup>56</sup> The report also recounted the large attendance, five hundred guests including Port Sunlighters and distinguished visitors. During the ceremony one such visitor, H. R. Greenhalgh, "voiced the thanks of the inhabitants of the village and neighborhood to Lord Leverhulme for having established so beautiful a treasury of art in their midst."<sup>57</sup> This event was also a good opportunity to discuss the patriotic aspect of Lever's art collection. The *Port Sunlight News* described the art collection in great detail and proudly claimed that Lever himself had "wished to make it (the collection) thoroughly representative of British art."<sup>58</sup> The company, its workforce, and also its cultural institutions supported British prosperity.

Many of these local and company festivities and events were deliberately given the patina of age; in other words, although Port Sunlight was a new town, events often became "invented traditions." One such "invented tradition" was the celebration surrounding the chairman's birthday. On the nearest Sunday to Lever's Birthday, an annual special service was held in the Lyceum

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<sup>56</sup> *Port Sunlight News*, (December, 1922): 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

for "young people." At the event, the Children's Choir sang verses chosen by Lever, and afterwards, Lever sent a message in which he referred to the village children as his "Nephews and Nieces."<sup>59</sup> The children were coached to give thanks to their "Dear Uncle" and wish him a happy birthday.<sup>60</sup>

Another important event that took on the status as an "invented tradition" was the New Years' Festivities at Lever's Cheshire estate, Thornton Manor. As early as 1903, *Progress* noted that "(i)n accordance with their time-honored custom, Mr. and Mrs. Lever invited the employees of Lever Brothers Limited, as well as those connected with the social work in Port Sunlight, to spend an evening at Thornton Manor. . . (c)abs, busses, and wagonettes were provided for the conveyance of the guests."<sup>61</sup> The guests were invited in "detachments" since Thornton Manor could not accommodate all in one evening. There were three nights of celebrations, all well-documented in *Progress*. "Thornton Manor to the visitors," said the company journal,

was a scene of splendor, and the preparations for the receptions were carried out on the most lavish scale. After divesting themselves of their cloaks and wraps, the guests proceeded to the Music Room, where they were presented to the host and hostess. Though the introductions were in conformity with the law of etiquette, they were presented, although not absolutely necessary, for our Chairman keeps in such close touch with the employees that nearly every one of them is personally known to him.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Although Lever usually attended this annual event, he happened to be away on business in this instance. Even so, it is significant that as a "tradition," the event was still held.

<sup>60</sup> *Port Sunlight News*, 1 (November 1922): 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Progress*, 4 (February 1903): 49.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.



The article promoted Lever's style of paternalism--Lever and his wife were indeed lords of the manor, yet the guests were not peasants but well-mannered representatives of the working classes who appreciated the splendor while upholding middle-class manners and customs. The report continued to emphasize the merriness of the event. There was much dancing and singing. In the music room was a carefully planned out evening of performances ranging from Offenbach to the very patriotic Gilbert and Sullivan. Before the party broke up, toasts to Lever were given followed by a rendition of "He's a jolly good fellow" and of course, "Auld Lang Syne." Lever then rose and gave a short speech in which he thanked all for attending and then made clear that "he preferred to think of his workers as his companions, and those gatherings were calculated to foster such a feeling of interest between him and them." Lever then "took it that they [the workers] had one object, and that was to live good lives themselves and help their fellows to do the same,"<sup>63</sup> emphasizing worker identity as both moral and dutiful.

Interviews with Port Sunlight villagers shows that such events were effective in binding workers to the company culture. Dorothy Weaver, a Port Sunlighter from 1906-1937, discussed for the village history some of those village and company events that became "invented traditions."<sup>64</sup> She talked of receiving books from Lever on her birthday, parties for the children and employees on

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> The oral histories were recorded by the Port Sunlight Heritage Centre and I recognize the possible bias. Yet, the vivid memories of such events after so many years indicate their influence.

Lever's birthday, the many socials and concerts held in the Collegium and Hulme Hall. She also mentioned fondly of the celebrations surrounding Founder's Day; the fireworks and sideshows for children on the nearest Saturday to Founder's Day. She recalled watching every year the Sunday School procession through the village, always led by Lever himself and the annual Sunday School picnic at Thornton Manor in which Mr. and Mrs. Lever provided donkey rides and boat rides for the children who were also given a box of sweets to take home.<sup>65</sup>

Lever would frequently turn up at these social events as well as at employee and village meetings, much like a member of the royal family in his chauffer-driven Rolls Royce, remembered employee William Proctor. Proctor was a member of the Cheshire Volunteers Regiment during the Great War and worked at Port Sunlight from 1910-1950 in the boiler room of the factory power station. He recalled Lever's motivational and caring speech to volunteers in which he promised to pay half the wages to their wives while away (other maintenance money came from army pay). Proctor also mentioned the "damn fine turnout for Founders' Day."<sup>66</sup>

The company journals, such as *Progress*, often tried to attach Lever employees to the history of the place by offering recollections from employees of the early days of Port Sunlight. For example, Mrs. Spencer, the wife of Samuel Spencer, a Frame Room manager, who came to Port Sunlight from the original factory

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<sup>65</sup> Port Sunlight Heritage Centre, record number 53, Dorothy Weaver interviewed by Malcolm Moore, July 10, 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Port Sunlight Heritage Centre, record number 51, William Proctor interviewed by Malcolm Moore, 17 July, 1989.

in Warrington, recalled her early experiences and impressions in *Progress*. She wrote of how she saw "this beautiful Village grow from one of the waste places of the earth into a place of peace and prosperity. . . for is not Port Sunlight known all over the world over, and admired as an example of what an industrial village can be, but too seldom is?"<sup>67</sup>

Spencer also remembered the key events in the history of the Village, such as the "Grand Old Man's" (Gladstone) speech in Gladstone Hall and the charm of holding church services there before Christchurch was built. She recalled the tea parties and dances held in the Hall as well as the "jolly times at the Manor," remembering of "how we used to pile into the waggonettes provided for us, and what a most enjoyable time we had!"<sup>68</sup> She talked fondly of the employee holiday excursions to North Wales and Brussels and summed up her interview by praising Lever. "I cannot help thinking," said Spencer, "that it is a marvelous place to have been built in a little over thirty years, and that a marvelous brain conceived and a marvelous will carried out such a transformation."<sup>69</sup>

### **Patriotism, National Identity, and Empire**

The company journals not only built an "imagined community" by covering "pseudo-events" and publishing employee articles and letters, but they also contributed to the building of company identity also by focusing on patriotism and national identity.

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<sup>67</sup> *Progress*, 20 (January 1920): 13.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Lever played a central role in associating national identity with corporate identity and British economic strength. He often promoted British national identity by publishing letters of his various travels. For example, when Lever was in the United States traveling from New York to Vicksburg, he praised Britain in a letter published in the *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, thus promoting British identity while faced with another foreign culture.<sup>70</sup> On the train Lever said that he understands "how England appears to traveling Americans so much like a garden. . . . As we look out of our carriage window, we see no charming hedge-rows, and no green meadows, but instead ugly snake-fences and monotonous fields without the slightest tinge of green about them."<sup>71</sup> England is described as an old "civilized" country cultivated carefully from generation to generation while America is characterized as raw, wild and "unfinished."<sup>72</sup>

Yet, the letter warns of the awesome potential of the United States, a country with "enormous natural resources and with every variety of climate," as well as a people who are "workers," described as being without "a lazy bone in their body."<sup>73</sup> Lever may have disapproved of some American business methods (particularly Taylorism), but he was still worried about American economic dominance and with it British decline. With other public

<sup>70</sup> In *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Marjorie Morgan discusses how travelers (in this case mostly British tourists on the Continent) often redefine their national identities when faced with a "foreign" culture. She says that the "foreign" culture acts much like a mirror in which the travelers are forced to reassess and more sharply construct their identity.

<sup>71</sup> *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, 1 (April 1895): 36.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

figures,<sup>74</sup> Lever voiced his concern about the rise of trade unions and with it, labor unrest and lower production. Moreover, Lever and other public figures like Joseph Chamberlain were not only concerned that Britain "was being pushed to the margins of events by more vigorous overseas competitors [especially the U.S. and Germany]," but also, "they regretted what they saw as the moral decline in national character and national calibre."<sup>75</sup> Lever believed that these factors would lead to economic collapse and the disintegration of the British Empire.

In another letter from Lever to the selling and branch office staffs, the chairman remarked on the "*Esprit de Corps*" and loyalty that was developing within the company. Once again, the patriotism analogy was applied to construct corporate identity.

"The prevailing impression," said Lever

was that the Staff at each of our Branch Offices is becoming more easily knit together, and is more capable of acting unitedly. An *Esprit de Corps* is springing up with just that proper amount of devotion of the respective Staffs to their own respective chiefs and their own territory, which, in any case of nations, we call loyalty and patriotism. This is exactly as it should be. . . unless we are loyal and devoted each of us to those under whom we serve, we shall never be able to do full justice to ourselves, or to the trust imposed upon us, and our growth and progress will be stunted and dwarfed.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> In a lecture series entitled "Britain in 'Decline'?" (Waco, TX: Markham Press Fund, 1998), David Cannadine argues that key Victorian figures such as Lord Salisbury and Joseph Chamberlain, publicly voiced their concern that Britain was in decline and thus reform was essential for national recovery. Chamberlain was famous for his national campaign for tariff reform.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Progress*, 1 (June, 1900): 353.

In an article reproduced in *Progress* from N.C.R., the journal of the National Cash Register Company of Dayton, Ohio, manager John Patterson wrote about "the Secret of English Success." Patterson paid a visit to England and asked ten Englishmen to state in one word "the secret of England's success in the past." Patterson wrote that all answered in one word or synonym. 'Honesty'." But using the analogy of patriotism and Empire, the secret of British success, added *Progress*, was also due "in some measure to British grit. 'England expects every man to do his duty' is an axiom which is as faithfully observed to-day as when the words were voiced by Admiral Nelson."<sup>77</sup>

Much of Lever's personal image as well as the constructed collective identity at Port Sunlight was reinforced by borrowing national images. When Lever became a Viscount, his ascension to the House of Lords was celebrated alongside Armistice Day. "On Armistice Day we had double reason for flying our flags in Port Sunlight," said the *Port Sunlight News*, "since the annual day of thankfulness for the cessation of international strife synchronized with the announcement that our Chief had received new proof that he was one whom the King desired to honour."<sup>78</sup> Lever was received at Port Sunlight as if he was a conquering national hero, "where flags and streamers were but the outward manifestation of an inward grace."<sup>79</sup> And when Lever got out of his car in front of the factory entrance, "he was enthusiastically and

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<sup>77</sup> *Progress*, 4 (January, 1903): 27.

<sup>78</sup> *Port Sunlight News*, 1 (December 1923): 10.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

affectionately mobbed," and "the kiss he received from a plucky girl was a very representative token."<sup>80</sup> Once in the administrative building, Lever was greeted by three cheers and a rendering of "He's a jolly good fellow."<sup>81</sup>

Essays on patriotism were common in the company journals. Patriotism, like corporate identity, focused on similar ideals of loyalty, duty, and a sense of community. The *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal* defined patriotism as the "Love for one's country" and described it as a virtue since it forces people to

take an interest in the well-being of our country and enhance that well-being by all honorable means in our power. . . to even sacrifice ourselves, if need be, for the accomplishment of that beautiful sight presented us by a community of men and women of generous impulses and broad-minded views, kindling eyes and sympathetic hearts.<sup>82</sup>

Even company meetings were imbued with "patriotic" imagery, as in an annual business meeting held in July, 1895, the day before the Port Sunlight Festival in which employees from all over Britain, Canada and the Continent converged upon Port Sunlight. Lever chaired the meeting and began the affair by first proposing a toast to the Queen and Royal family. The company journal then described a speech by J.A. France from Newcastle, as both "uplifting and patriotic." In praising the limitlessness of the company (and Empire?), the journal said that "it seemed to him [French] as if this business were an example of British pluck

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, 1 (June, 1895): 63.

alone as brilliant as anything that adorned the pages of naval history."<sup>83</sup>

Of course, at no time was there such a correlation between company identity and nation as during, and just after, the Great War. The heading of the first issue of *Progress* after the declaration of war was simply, "The Great War: Port Sunlight and the call to arms."<sup>84</sup> The issue defended Britain's role in the war and highlighted Port Sunlight's role in the ensuing conflict; from the military and ambulance service volunteers to those who would remain at service on the Home Front (including the aged Chairman). Although first announcing the coming of war as a "crime against Brotherhood," *Progress* then (by paraphrasing Lever's speech to the Port Sunlight contingent of the Ambulance Brigade) argued that "the quarrel is not a people's one . . . but has arisen out of the decisions of certain crowned heads and military bureaucrats infatuated by the love of their own militarism."<sup>85</sup> Not surprising, Britain's (and especially Port Sunlighter's) participation in the War was defended on strict moral grounds. "Our country pointed the way to peace; the weight of the armaments precipitated war . . . Germany persisting, England was bound by her international obligations to take her share in the fighting."<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, *Progress* reasoned that

Port Sunlight felt in a special degree the  
powerful emotion which . . . thrilled our country  
and the whole Empire . . . uniting us as one

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<sup>83</sup> *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal*, 1 (July, 1895): 69.

<sup>84</sup> *Progress*, 14 (October, 1914): 97.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



people in the armed protest against an appalling crime. For Port Sunlight remembered that it knew Belgium well, that its people had visited Belgium . . . that it had Co-Partners in Belgium . . . Port Sunlight manifested her intense sympathy with that country.<sup>87</sup>

In addressing the first Port Sunlight ambulance men, Lever once again highlighted the just cause for Britain's entry into the conflict. He argued for "the union of the country against militarism, and on the certainty of our winning a victory over it. . . (t)he purity and grandeur of our purpose, the defense of our homes and of civilization against the military spirit, would make our soldiers invincible."<sup>88</sup> In praising both the company and national spirit and sense of duty of Port Sunlighters, Lever said that "it was no accident that had decided the 1,400 recruits and reservists to go from Port Sunlight at their country's call. It was the direct consequence of the fact that everyone in Port Sunlight, through his home or the system of Co-Partnership, was interested in the whole of our undertaking."<sup>89</sup> Never to give up on promoting his image as well as the company's, Lever argued that only with progressive ideals (such as Co-Partnership) that promote social welfare and harmony could militarism, and thus war, disappear, paving the way for social and economic progress.

In another speech directed to the Port Sunlight volunteers for the Wirral Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment, Lever not only

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

praised the volunteers for their patriotism and sense of duty, but he also defended his role on the Home Front. He reasoned that

We may not be there in the body, but we shall be there in the spirit. Remember, we have our work to do here. Men like me, between the ages of 60 and 70, they say are no good for fighting. I think I am doing my part of the fighting in keeping the works going. There are the wives and children to be seen to.<sup>90</sup>

The names of the volunteers were listed in *Progress* as well as descriptions of the very emotional sending off of the recruits from the Port Sunlight train station. Subsequent articles discussed the narrative course of the War as well as those Port Sunlighters who had fallen or were injured. In the January issue of *Progress*, the number of casualties from Port Sunlight were given as 1,226; 417 dead, thirty-seven missing, seventy-six prisoners of war and 694 wounded, a staggering number for a place the size of Port Sunlight.<sup>91</sup>

After the War, a soldier stationed in Germany wrote to *Progress* to praise Lever products. He wrote that his landlady was "delighted . . . when she was able to buy a tablet of "Sunlight," after practically four years without this treasure." The soldier continued that "(t)here is no doubt whatever of the Germans being grateful for the return of good soap once again."<sup>92</sup>

### **Morality, Identity, and Paternalism**

The company journals not only provided a sense of company identity and community, but also promoted employee morality. By

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>91</sup> *Progress*, 20 (Jan 1920): 11.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

doing this, the company literature, in turn, defined their identity as "men who had done something to benefit the world, to brighten the lot of labour, to preach the evangel of cleanliness, and who had introduced into commercial circles a bond of sympathy and friendliness to save them from the cut-throat competition of selfishness to which trade often descended."<sup>93</sup>

One way of showing the inherent "morality"<sup>94</sup> of the company was to differentiate the company's "English morality" from cut-throat American business ideas. As Lever also highlighted in his public addresses, the company literature criticized the harshness of American capitalism and its reliance on scientific management. For example, in the *Port Sunlight News* on December 15th, 1923, at an annual prizegiving connected with Lever's Education scheme,<sup>95</sup> manager John Knox announced that in America there was no such college scheme for employees and so "he felt proud of Lever Brothers."<sup>96</sup> C. W. Barnish, another manager at Lever's, agreed with Knox that there was no such "place as Port Sunlight in America . . . and he felt proud, as he was sure they all did, of belonging to that wonderful community, and thankful for all the great advantages they had. And they felt very thankful that they

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>94</sup> Defined here as a mixture of fair business tactics tinged with a sense of altruism towards the society at large.

<sup>95</sup> This scheme's purpose was to promote employees further education so that they might have the opportunity of taking leading positions in the business. Lever Brothers would pay all the class fees if an employee attendance was above eighty per cent and prizes would be awarded for examination successes. At this awards ceremony, one hundred and fifty-five employees got their fees paid and one-hundred and two employees received prizes ranging from five shillings to five pounds.

<sup>96</sup> *Port Sunlight News*, 1 (December, 1923): 11.

still had Lord Leverhulme to inspire and guide and control it."<sup>97</sup> Scientific Management was then directly attacked as not being a compassionate and humane system. "If each day we come to to our work with light hearts and cheerful faces," said Barnish,

if we recognize the true spirit of Co-Partnership welding us together, if we feel as we go home at night that we can truthfully and honestly say to our innermost souls that we have done our duty that day, then I call that Scientific Management, and any system that will bring that out of a man and a woman is a million times a better system, contains a million times more brotherly love in it, than a mere watch in the hand, ticking off, ticking off, how in a certain number of minutes a certain output could be made.<sup>98</sup>

In April, 1906 during a meeting of agents at Port Sunlight, an agent, Mr. Dance, gave a speech discussing employee loyalty and the moral responsibility of agents of the company, essentially outlining the essence of corporate culture at Lever Brothers. He said that "there is only one course . . . to work as though the success of the Firm depended entirely on our individual efforts. Lever Brothers Limited is really *our* Firm."<sup>99</sup> And as agents have to deal with the world outside of Port Sunlight, it is imperative, explained Dance, that they be "representative of all that is tactful as well as all that is diligent."<sup>100</sup> Dance continued: "I do not like the term "employee," because I always think it sounds as

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Progress*, 20 (January, 1920): 39; This is an interesting point since there were similar places in the United States. One such example was the model industrial town of Pullman, Illinois. During the 1880s, George Pullman, the founder of the Pullman Palace Car Company, built a spacious, well-landscaped town for his employees that included "modern" conveniences (such as indoor plumbing, sewage, and a gas works) as well as recreational facilities.

<sup>99</sup> *Progress*, 7 (June, 1906): 169.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

though you were hanging on the fringe of a multitude of workers; I would rather have the term "representative." For even an office-boy is "representative of all that is careful in putting up the post at night and seeing that the right letters get into the right envelopes. . . . If all representatives work up to that "ideal" than there be "SUCCESS TO OUR FIRM."<sup>101</sup> This reliance on the unity of purpose in which every person, whether manager or part-time machinist, has their assigned roles and duties is typical of paternalist theory.

In promoting the companies' moral position, District Agent G. A. Shaw, wrote in to *Progress* to inform of how a Methodist minister addressed his congregation by focusing on the "good and bad" found in advertisement boards. He discussed the immoral or bad associated with tobacco and whiskey advertisements and then highlighted the moral or good--an advertisement for Swan Soap. The soap advertisement, said the Methodist minister, was a fine example of an announcement that showed that "cleanliness is next to Godliness."<sup>102</sup> Besides any physical benefits of using soap, then, ideas of cleanliness were deeply associated with religion. Largely through advertising, soap manufacturers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century not only relied on contemporary evangelical images of physical and moral cleanliness, but also "drew on the long tradition of bathing, which went back to the ancient Roman, Hebrew, and Islamic washing rituals that

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>102</sup> *Progress*, 1 (October, 1899): 19; This phrase was credited to John Wesley who used it in a sermon on dress in 1788.

linked moral and spiritual purity to bodily cleanliness."<sup>103</sup> An increased attention to cleanliness during the nineteenth century coincided with a religious revival, a Christian and civilizing mission within the Empire, as well as an increased concern for physical health.<sup>104</sup>

Much of *Progress* was devoted to personal testimonies of people who used Lever products. Such testimony praised the products and subsequently implied praise of the employees who sold and produced such products. For example, in 1902, a chiropodist and manicurist wrote in to *Progress* to inform the company that she used Swan Soap on her clients. *Progress* reasoned that "whilst the lady referred to admits that she uses our specialty on all hands, she also makes open confession that it is good for the sole (soul)."<sup>105</sup> In the same issue, Port Sunlight was praised by a Philadelphian doctor and his wife who visited Liverpool and Port Sunlight in 1902. "We simply cannot find words to tell you of the pleasure we felt," said the doctor, "in seeing the good you do in your village with its lovely homes for the working people. The great contrast of the homes of the working people of Port Sunlight

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<sup>103</sup> Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> Sivulka points out that even with the dissemination of germ theory throughout Europe and the United States, notions of "filth" theory were still popular. "Filth" theory relied on the idea that fomites (inanimate objects such as towels, baths, or bedding) spread infection and disease. Thus, both "germ" and "filth" theories contributed to the widespread use of soap during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (*Stronger Than Dirt*, pp. 59-60).

<sup>105</sup> *Progress*, 3 (January, 1902): 11.

and other poor working people through England is very great indeed."<sup>106</sup>

Also, soap was even credited with performing "miracles." In one article, a lady told an agent working in Winnipeg that Lifebuoy Soap had saved her daughter and grand-daughter's lives when it was applied to a gash her daughter received on her head by a rusty nail. After two weeks the "wound was completely closed and the scar slowly disappeared." And when the lady's grand-daughter was bitten by a dog causing "running sores in various parts of the body," after Lifebuoy was used to clean the wound everyday, "not a trace of the sore was to be seen" within a month.<sup>107</sup> The product was not just for cleansing, but it also "saved lives." Lifebuoy was advertised as such. In 1902, an advertising campaign was launched that promoted Lifebuoy's disinfectant qualities. The advertisement featured a distinguished grey-bearded sailor (with a telescope and a medal) in front of a large life preserver with stormy sea in the background. It claimed to "ensure freedom from the danger of infectious diseases."<sup>108</sup> In a later advertisement, Lifebuoy was more specifically, and amazingly, credited with destroying "the living germs of typhoid, diphtheria, cholera, smallpox, and other infectious diseases," making this remarkable soap "the enemy of disease and the friend of health, hence a lifesaver."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>108</sup> Part of a Lever Brothers' advertisement quoted in Sivulka, *Stronger than Dirt*, p. 140.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

Advertisements and personal testimony in the company journals linked product and employee and further enforced collective identity as one based on goodness and usefulness. By reporting such events in its literature, the company defined both its product and workers as moral. Such an emphasis on group identity discouraged dissent, and suggested that those who did dissent would jeopardize both their individual and collective well-being. Dissenters risked labeling themselves as antithetical both to the lofty ideals of company patriotism and general moral levity. Still, nowhere do we see the moral and cleansing imagery associated with soap more than in its application in the Empire.

### Empire and Soap

The company literature linked employees to empire building--they are not simply salesmen and factory hands, but are integral parts of Britain's "civilizing mission." In a poem published in *Progress* entitled, "Sunlight's There," one sees such parallels clearly to the civilizing mission of British imperial conquest.

You may traverse every mile of British ground,  
You may visit every habitable place,  
And in every country SUNLIGHT will be found,  
For our adverts always stare you in the face . . .

Our samples, cards, and pamphlets flood the land;  
We have the plates and signs at every grocer's door:  
Household words are LIFEBUOY, SWAN, and MONKEY BRAND,  
And we scatter books and Almanacs galore.

It's a marvel to the world the way we've grown;  
We've reduced the cares of many a busy wife;  
And where Soap was once a luxury unknown,  
We have made it a necessary of life.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>110</sup> *Progress*, 1 (June, 1900): 375.



This poem shows the role of commodity culture in British imperialism. In *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock introduces the concept of "commodity racism" and argues that multinational companies such as Lever Brothers could exert "coercive power" and influence as great as "any gunboat might."<sup>111</sup> Through advertising, photography, and imperial expositions, says McClintock, one sees the conversion of the "narrative of imperial Progress into mass-produced consumer spectacles."<sup>112</sup> She argues that during the later nineteenth century, "Victorian cleaning rituals were peddled globally as the God-given sign of Britain's evolutionary superiority, and soap was invested with magical, fetish powers."<sup>113</sup> Commodities allowed for the

mass marketing of empire as an organized system of images and attitudes. Soap flourished not only because it created and filled a spectacular gap in the domestic market but also because, as a cheap and portable domestic commodity, it could persuasively mediate the Victorian politics of racial hygiene and imperial progress.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, domestic commodities were "mass marketed through their appeal to imperial jingoism." In turn, the commodities helped "reinvent and maintain British national unity in the face of deepening imperial competition and colonial resistance."<sup>115</sup>

One sees this analogy of soap and civilization especially in advertising. For instance, one Lever Brothers' slogan actually

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<sup>111</sup> Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather, : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

claimed, "Soap is Civilization."<sup>116</sup> In another example, a Pears' soap advertisement links Kipling's White man's Burden to cleanliness. The advertisement shows a distinguished British sea captain through an enlarged porthole (in full white dress) washing his hands at his sink while in the background are several ships, some at sail while others are offloading boxes of soap. A second Pears' advertisement depicted a black man kneeling in front of a European who is presenting "the native" with a bar of soap. The caption reads:

The first step towards lightening The White Man's Burden is through reaching the virtues of cleanliness. Pears' Soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances. While amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place--it is the ideal toilet soap.<sup>117</sup>

Using soap was linked to domestic order at home as well. Women, especially the new working-class consumers, were a key target group for soap manufacturers in the latter half of nineteenth century. Advertising of Lever household products differed according to class. Sunlight Soap was directed toward the working classes, while other brands, like Swan or Lux, appealed to the more affluent middle-classes who still viewed soap as a luxury rather than a necessity.

Advertisements for Sunlight Soap appealed to working-class women through sympathy. The company expressed its understanding of the difficulty associated with household chores and claimed to

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

offer some relief of physical hardship by using Sunlight Soap. One such advertisement showed a young working-class man leaning over to read a Sunlight poster with the title in large bold letters: "WHY DOES A WOMAN LOOK OLDER SOONER THAN A MAN." The reasons listed all dealt with the dire health effects of laborious heavy washing, with its hot boiling and scrubbing. Sunlight alleviated this physical problem since clothing "could be washed in lukewarm water with very little rubbing."<sup>118</sup> Another advertisement showed a working-class woman smiling while hanging her clean and very white linens; a boy is playing in the light snow. The caption reads: "Sunlight gets the Washing Done Leaving Time for Sport and Fun."<sup>119</sup>

Advertising for Lux Soap flakes and Swan Soap clearly targeted a more "refined" audience. These advertisements were sexually suggestive, featuring beautiful "seductive" women with perfect ivory complexions. The very names of the soap, "Lux" and "Swan," exuded sophistication and elegance. In these advertisements, the soap was never used for menial purposes; it represented leisure and luxury. In a Lux advertisement of 1900, a woman, shoulders bare, is about to take a bath in her spacious Roman marble tub. She "casts a seductive look" as she pours the flakes into a dish, "a clear attempt to imply abandon."<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> W.J. Reader, *Fifty Years of Unilever, 1930-1980* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. vi.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>120</sup> Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 62-63.

Similar themes are found in a Swan advertisement of 1902. A shapely woman is being attended to by a black servant before she enters her Roman bath. Next to her stands a Grecian urn and in the serene water floats a large white bar of Swan Soap. The main caption reads: "THE FAVORITE SOAP FOR THE TOILET IS WHITE FLOATING SWAN SOAP BECAUSE IT IS DAINTY, PURE, AND FRAGRANT. IT IS SOUGHT AFTER BY LADIES."<sup>121</sup> "Scantly clad seductresses" were successful in marketed soap to women, says, Anne Loeb, because advertising men convinced women to accept their "masculine fantasy as a feminine ideal. The seductress offered women an image of one aspect of their ideal selves, as sexually attractive, powerfully irresistible."<sup>122</sup> But, the women in these seductive advertisements were never English contemporaries, for such "daring expressions of intimacy" might seem "too bold for Victorian protagonists."<sup>123</sup> The women in these sexual advertisements were always ancient or Elizabethan, perhaps reminding their audience of "other eras of greatness."<sup>124</sup>

The selling of soap reinforced the power of white men who supplied the commodity to women (both lower-class and middle-class women) and to the colonized. Using familiar analogies of power and success through the rhetoric of empire and British identity, Lever Brothers acted as an imperial power by using the imagery of soap to help construct a strong corporate identity.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

In several articles of *Progress* we see the image of a company that is on a moral and civilizing mission, both at home and with the Empire. For example, in "Where Sunlight Penetrates," the title of an article which follows a picture of three smiling African boys in European dress, the caption reads: "Their "Mas," who take in washing, swear by Sunlight Soap."<sup>125</sup> In the same issue, *Progress* promoted Lever products abroad:

From the pampas and prairies of America, the desert wastes of Africa, and the plains of Central Asia, letters and postcards come from the most remote, out-of-the-way, unimaginable places, testifying to the fact that "Sunlight" is to-day penetrating therein in a double sense. They, one and all, paraphrase, in their own way, the well-worn tag: "East, West, Sunlight's Best."<sup>126</sup>

One such message came from the Himalayas (from the district of Mirzapore) and said in a postcard that they "use SUNLIGHT everyday--it is well-known all over India." The message was written by a missionary who no doubt, says *Progress*, minds "the close relationship that is said to subsist between 'Cleanliness and Godliness,'" and carries not only "Sunlight" to the hearts of men, but "Sunlight" of another sort for their clothes and bodies as well."<sup>127</sup>

The company journal hailed Lever as an empire-builder. In a lecture given in Gladstone Hall called "A Thousand Miles up the Congo," Reverend J. Lawson Forfeitt of the Baptist Missionary Society praised Lever's business for its "civilizing" effects in

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<sup>125</sup> *Progress*, 7 (October, 1906): 305.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

Africa. Lever was invited to the lecture as was T.P. O'Connor, the local M.P. for Birkenhead, who spoke a few words, praising both the lecturer and Lever himself. O'Connor recognized the missionary as one of the "heroic men who had abandoned home comforts and pleasures to bring civilization of the Gospel to uncivilized places and sacrifice some measure of his health." He then applauded Lever for not just "having founded a new town, but now that he was an Empire builder and was attaching the Congo to Port Sunlight, he wished him success in an enterprise which was bound to be an advantage both to our people at home and to the people of the Congo."<sup>128</sup> Forfeitt showed slides and described African life during his lecture, and concluded with wishing Lever well with his experiment in the Congo. "May all success attend his [Lever's] efforts on the Congo," said Forfeitt, "not only from a commercial point of view, but also may he prove a mighty helper in advancing the material and moral welfare of the natives."<sup>129</sup>

The destruction of much of the slave trade in the Congo in the early nineteenth century paved the way for a different--but not less brutal--type of European exploitation. The Congo was initially opened up to a new and profitable trade in rubber, ivory, palm oil, and gum during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Since, at the time, the leading European states considered the Congo as "no man's land," companies from Portugal,

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<sup>128</sup> *Progress* 12 (January, 1912): 7.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

Britain, France, and Belgium all conducted trade there.<sup>130</sup> It was not until 1888 that the issue of who should control the Congo was settled. As a result of the Congress of Berlin, the region came under the personal control of King Leopold II of Belgium who had commissioned Henry Stanley to explore the interior of the Congo (1879-1882) and establish treaties with chieftains that granted Leopold sole trading rights and political authority of them.<sup>131</sup>

In the Congo, Leopold allowed companies ruthlessly to work the Congolese to harvest rubber and extract ivory tusks for both the king and any companies who he gave a concession. Millions of workers died as a result of Leopold's system. This "culture system" was so demanding that many of the Congolese starved to death because they were unable to trade, hunt, and farm their own lands for crops. Others were simply worked to death, some were even murdered.<sup>132</sup> Leopold's agents organized a system of brutal exploitation with the help of an "armed body of natives, with white officers of several nationalities."<sup>133</sup> The Belgian king had personally ruled the Congo like an "absentee merchant-prince," until scandal forced Leopold to hand over his possession to the Belgium Parliament.<sup>134</sup> News of the atrocities reached Britain through the reports of missionaries. This led to the creation in Liverpool of the Congo Reform Association (1904), founded and led

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<sup>130</sup> Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 33.

<sup>131</sup> Raymond F. Betts, *The False Dawn: European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 90.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>133</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 110.

<sup>134</sup> Betts, *The False Dawn*, p. 195.

by a former executive of the Congo department of the Elder Dempster shipping company, E.D. Morel. He was supported by such businessmen as John Holt and William Cadbury. Lever, however, was not actively involved in this movement. Morel and his supporters helped to rouse public opinion against Leopold, "all more or less reflecting the view of Cecil Rhodes that an audience with the King was 'like a half-hour with Satan.'"<sup>135</sup>

Lever initially turned his interest towards the Congo in 1911 in an attempt to control the price and quantity of raw materials (essentially palm oil) for his factories. But the scandalized history of the Congo also provided an opportunity for the famous "enlightened paternalist" not only to secure raw materials, but also to improve greatly conditions for the African workers there. Lever's business and personal reputation enabled him to negotiate generous trading rights with the Belgian government who were looking for investors after Leopold's death in 1909. For the Belgian government, Lever could bring "badly needed respectability to Congo affairs."<sup>136</sup> Lever created a new subsidiary of Lever Brothers, *Les Huileries du Congo Belge*, to run the palm oil mills. The agreement called for the lease two million acres of land (for thirty-five years, after which the land would become the company's personal property) in return for the company paying the workers a minimum wage, providing schools, hospitals, roads, railways, and telegraph communications throughout the territory.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-115.



Lever's first settlement in the Congo was at Leverville, near Lusanga. There were five Lever Brother settlements in the Congo altogether (the others being Alberta, Elisabetha, Basongo, and Ingende), each with an oil mill. Lever hoped that altogether the mills could process at least 100,000 tons of palm fruit per annum.<sup>138</sup> The *Huileries* gradually attracted local villagers to work in the oil mills since they were provided rations and could use their weekly wages (paid in francs) to buy cheap goods (such as cloth and salt) from the company store at 20 percent less than those charged by the merchants in town.<sup>139</sup> Recruiting local workers was not difficult because, as Lever put it, apart from a couple of tribes, the population was "poor, underfed, ravaged by sickness and inter-tribal warfare, and all were cannibals."<sup>140</sup>

Lever took advantage of his risky African adventure to discuss his civilizing efforts there. In a speech published in *Progress*, Lever explained that in Africa,

men were not of the same colour as ourselves. The sun has kissed their faces and made them black, and they are working to produce the raw materials which we use. Men of their own race who are engaged in that work do not understand why these men should work and get money, and it often happens that men come into our factories out there with arrows sticking in their backs--aimed there by other natives who do not want them to come and earn money. But these African natives who come into the factories out there are not forgotten. We cannot make them Co-Partners; we have no record of where they live; but I want to read to you what Father Mathieu Renier of the Kishantu Mission out

<sup>138</sup> Wilson, *Unilever*, p. 177.

<sup>139</sup> Jolly, *Lord Leverhulme*, p. 127.

<sup>140</sup> Wilson, *Unilever*, p. 174.

there, says, so that you may know what we are doing on prosperity-sharing lines for the Belgian Congo natives. He says: --

"The capitalist enterprise of Messrs., Lever will have been a social benefit. In this case the capitalist development does not hamper the native development; it has, on the contrary, stimulated and guided it."<sup>141</sup>

Lever's speech tells employees of their good fortune to work unhindered (unlike the murdered 'natives') for a company that produces benefits throughout the colonies. The hardworking "natives," according to Lever, are deserving of co-partnership even though this cannot be achieved because they have no address. This situation contrasts deeply to the Port Sunlighters who have "ideal" cottage homes provided for them. Since the "natives" can give no home address, they are outside "respectable" culture. Lever's vignette reinforces the company's positive role in the "civilizing" mission while hinting at the superior working and living conditions of most Lever employees, especially those employees at Port Sunlight.

### **Patriotism and Unions**

The January 1920 issue of *Progress* reported in detail Lever's participation in a ceremony to distribute certificates to three hundred new Co-Partners. Lever's presentation, which was read by company employees all over the world, depicted the Co-Partner as a member of his family. As would a family patriarch, Lever told his personal story and encouraged his employees to follow in his footsteps, as if to carry on the family/company name. "We would

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<sup>141</sup> *Progress*, 20 (January, 1920): 50.

all be one happy family," said Lever, "and, as in the case of a family, each would gradually begin to take his share, and, as he grew up, would feel that he was contributing to the success of the firm."<sup>142</sup> Co-Partnership was simply the next stage in the gradual maturation and development of the worker within the company.

Lever's speech, however, revealed that not all the members of the family were content. In his presentation, Lever also issued warnings and expressed concern that the negative attitude of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Association might spread to other union members. Fearing the possibility of wage cuts and a weakening of the union position, the Carpenters' and Joiners' Association called for their members to reject Co-Partnership. The Association pressed for "the discontinuance of the acceptance of any benefits by members of their Society in any shape or form whatever."<sup>143</sup>

Lever warned his employees of the consequences of their taking industrial action. He proposed to any union members a "square deal" in which he argued that if a Lever Brothers' employee and Co-Partner went on strike after the company had refused arbitration, then Lever Brothers could not cancel any dividends or Co-Partnership Certificates. But, if "Lever Brothers' men or the men of other employers by whom they were called upon to strike in sympathy, refused to refer the dispute to any tribunal properly constituted, and a strike occurred, the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

Partnership Certificates would be canceled."<sup>144</sup> Lever said that the "business could not be carried out in a state of warfare, and a strike was warfare. Men had to strike many times . . . to obtain justice," but it would only be fair to strike as a last resort.<sup>145</sup> Lever turned from the family theme to focus on the home front. Using the image of the home front in war, Lever said that if a strike occurred as a result of the refusal of arbitration, then it was not reasonable that dividends continue to be paid to those employees who "left their comrades to bear the heat and burden of the day, to keep the ship on the water and the home fires burning under those circumstances."<sup>146</sup>

Lever clearly defined his loyal employees as moral and patriotic while he dismissed workers who struck as disloyal to both the corporate family and nation. In other words, strikers were clearly defined as unpatriotic. Lever claimed that Co-Partnership "produces finer and better men and women, which enables a man the better to provide for his widow," and "if we work shoulder to shoulder, and not in warfare," we will get bigger dividends as well as making "us happier in our daily lives."<sup>147</sup>

G. Wiltshire, a manager of the printing department, not surprisingly supported Lever's argument on Co-Partnership and the trade unions. He wondered of what trade unions could possibly complain about at Lever's--For "all our Trade Union rules were adhered to at Port Sunlight: we get Trade Union rates of pay; and

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

on top of that we are sharing in the profits of the Company."<sup>148</sup>  
On behalf of the Office staff, A.G. Ealey linked patriotism with company loyalty and thus to strike would be an unpatriotic move. Co-Partnership is "a sane and courageous attempt," explained Ealey,

to co-operate with the spirit of progress in giving practical shape to the legitimate aspirations of workers, and to proceed along the line of reform in the sound old British way of one step at a time . . . For after all, there is an old English proverb which says that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. My Lord, for the past ten years we have fared on Co-Partnership pudding, and, if one may judge from the appearances of this magnificent audience, we have fared exceedingly well.<sup>149</sup>

Ealey promoted the moral image of the company by quoting Carlyle and thus placing Lever in the tradition of anti-industrial protest. Yet, Lever adds to the tradition his humane form of industry which would please even industrial critics such as Carlyle. Ealey explained:

From a strictly legal standpoint, the firm has discharged its obligations upon payment of the salaries agreed upon, but Co-Partnership, dissatisfied with what Carlyle called the "cash nexus" as the basis of industrial relations, seeks to add equity to legality . . . I believe that we stand on the threshold of that brighter day foretold by the singers of bygone times: Shelley, Browning, Swinburne, Morris, and others.<sup>150</sup>

Lever associated patriotism with company loyalty rather than with union or class loyalty. In other words, he associated

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49.

patriotism and duty with the lack of strikes. Lever claimed that the strike in 1920 was not the cause of any dispute between the company and the employees, but only between two competing Trade unions. "Lever Brothers have suffered," said the chairman, "because they adhered strictly to their determination to protect the rights and liberties of their employees."<sup>151</sup> Lever seized the high moral ground once again. The strike collapsed because the public disagreed with the attitudes of the trade unions. Lever always argued for the right of trade unions to exist and even strike as a last resort, but after this experience, he believed that recent union attempts to "tyrannize over its members" were "losing the good opinion of the public." This negative attitude of the unions would doom the movement, said Lever, "to disaster, collapse and ruin as were the German War Lords in their selfish, brutal attempt to trample under foot the rights and liberties of other nations."<sup>152</sup> In this instance, union bosses were described as unyielding, even "stupid" as well as unpatriotic (even "German").

*Progress* promoted the management's cause and company image by republishing favorable comments from local newspapers regarding the strike which ran from May 31-June 19. The *Liverpool Courier* of June 11th, 1920 remarked: "Relatively speaking, of course, the employees at Port Sunlight have had so little to complain of wages or working conditions . . . but it is no question of betterment that has produced this stoppage at Port Sunlight."<sup>153</sup> "The ablest

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<sup>151</sup> *Progress*, 20 (July, 1920): 99.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

brains in the Trade Union Movement," continued the *Liverpool Courier*, "are alive to the fact that you cannot distribute more wealth if you diminish the amount of wealth produced. But the number of Trade Union officials who understand this economic truth is not large--otherwise this strike at Port Sunlight would not have taken place."<sup>154</sup>

The *Liverpool Echo* said on June 10, that the dispute actually discredited the Trade Union movement. The local paper explained:

Messrs. Lever Brothers have fairly and squarely fulfilled their duty when they recognize the various Trade Unions, leave their employees free to join any Trade Union they choose, and then express their willingness to negotiate at all times with the accredited representatives of the employees.<sup>155</sup>

Both Liverpool newspapers were generally sympathetic to working class concerns.

Lever's son, W. Hulme Lever, as acting Chairman, remarked that the company "deeply regretted the situation" and that the strike could only have been averted if the company given way to a matter which "affected one of the vital essentials of British liberties."<sup>156</sup> In a meeting in Liverpool, the strike ended with the workers accepting Lever's terms, which were that they return to work with the same jobs and wages but without the rights to Co-Partnership. This agreement had been sanctioned by a Joint Industrial Council on June 16th. In the immediate years following the strike, workers' wages saw no rise. In fact, they worsened.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

The slump in the British soap industry in the early 1920s forced Lever to cut wages and a thousand employees at Port Sunlight. Under the circumstances, Lever was proud that wages were still above the union level.<sup>157</sup>

Lever's company constructed loyalty, company culture and identity through powerful discourses of morality, family responsibility, and patriotism. Company culture was extended beyond a small local community by company literature which consistently focused on the above themes, presenting employees the attractive offer of aligning themselves with a successful company and at the same time with values of moral goodness and national identity. Lever Brothers constructed a connection between the company and "traditional" values. The company relied on in-house and local publications to help invent traditions and supply pseudo-events. These worked to cement the connection and extend such moral and traditional values to employees, thereby allowing for the construction of a vibrant and relevant company identity.

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<sup>157</sup> Jolly, *Leverhulme*, p. 222.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

Last year, 2002, witnessed corporate scandals on a scale never seen before. Accounting swindles at two of America's largest corporations, Enron and Worldcom, exacerbated the problems of global economic recession and declining stock markets. This new crisis in business has led to calls of corporate reform and renewed the interest in corporate cultures. Recently, in analyzing the causes of such scandal, many commentators have highlighted the corruption of corporate cultures by poor management and leadership. Critics are once again talking about the need for moral business leaders in creating sustainable corporate cultures. In this context, a new look at Lever Brothers seems appropriate. If employee morale and consumer confidence is to be restored in the wake of such corporate scandals, then new images and corporate cultures need to be constructed.

This study has shown that the development of a corporate culture at Lever Brothers did not just rely on tangibles, such as instituting profit-sharing, pensions, and providing recreational facilities. Intangible factors such as the formation of image, ethos, and rhetoric all precipitated and maintained the formation of a collective local and company identity that allowed for the development of a positive corporate culture at Lever Brothers.

Maintaining the moral image and creating a corporate culture were all the more important by the early twentieth century since Lever Brothers had grown from a relatively modest British company to an international concern.

Moreover, this work shows that the construction of a companies' culture cannot be studied in isolation. One needs to analyze the corporate culture of business within the political and cultural context of the period. As one of the first multinational corporations to establish such a "modern" form of business culture, Lever Brothers was an appropriate vehicle for this purpose. For company cultures not only reflect the ideals of their founders and management, but also participate in the discourses of contemporary society. In this case, the discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century dealt with the role of advertising and mass consumerism, the Condition of England Question, imperial demands, as well as public worries of national decline.

In establishing a middle-class paternalism, Lever forged an effective image of himself, his company, and his village. He constructed and defended this image through public addresses, architectural rhetoric, and by using company, local, and national publications. This carefully constructed image was an important element in the development of an overall corporate culture that helped thrust Lever Brothers into multinational status. At Port Sunlight, Lever instituted employee benefits that preceded a modern welfare state. He also created a strong corporate identity

for his employees by using company literature and staging social events.

On a wider scale, this dissertation argues that paternalism, even if in a slightly modified form, was still a prominent and important ideology for work and society in Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As we saw in this study, paternalism was one way of "controlling employees through the pretense of family imagery, thus providing space for the manager to act as 'caring' and 'protective' head of the industrial 'household.'" <sup>1</sup> Moreover, like the Victorian family, a paternalist management can present itself as "powerful, detached, sometimes stern, yet benevolent and caring." <sup>2</sup> Late nineteenth and twentieth century paternalist ideas have (as seen in the British financial services industry) legitimized the managerial prerogative "in the eyes of both those who are 'protected' from the harsh reality of decision-making, and the decision makers themselves." <sup>3</sup>

Lever used paternalism to construct his personal image and build his company culture. Still, his type of paternalism had to be adapted to the modern society of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Lever constructed an "entrepreneurial" paternalism that paradoxically promoted a pre-industrial emphasis on community, yet was heavily burdened by Victorian middle-class ideals of morality, self-reliance, and domesticity.

<sup>1</sup> Deborah Kerfoot and David Knights, "Management, Masculinity, and the Manipulation: From Paternalism to Corporate Strategy in Financial Services in Britain," *Journal of Management Studies* 30 (July 1993): 665.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Guthey, "Ted Turner's Corporate Cross-Dressing and the Shifting Images of American Business Leadership," *Enterprise and Society* 2 (March 2001): 124.

<sup>3</sup> Kerfoot and Knights, "Management, Masculinity, and the Manipulation," p. 665.

Presently, Port Sunlight is a popular tourist destination that provides tours of the garden city and the impressive Lady Lever Art Gallery. Yet, one can still see the steel towers and puffs of smoke from the Port Sunlight Unilever-Faberge factory that is discreetly placed to the North-west of the town. The factory, however, now has a greatly reduced relationship with the old village. Unilever is a major multinational corporation with headquarters based in London and Amsterdam. Port Sunlight is now just one of the hundreds of factories in the Unilever conglomerate.

In 2000, Unilever officially handed over control of the town to the Port Sunlight Heritage Trust. The Heritage Trust is responsible for the protection and general maintenance of the Port Sunlight cottages, institutions, and grounds. It is based in the Port Sunlight Heritage Centre across the road from the factory and Gladstone Hall. The Heritage Centre still promotes Lever's image by providing tours and selling older versions of Lever soap and other commodities (such as postcards, books, and posters) in its shop. It has an impressive library and reading room for Lever and Port Sunlight studies. But today, the Trust and Heritage Centre also perform double duty as a real estate agency. Most employees at the factory no longer live in Port Sunlight since rents are prohibitively expensive and many of the cottages are now for sale.<sup>4</sup> The more affluent in the area have moved in and the village has over the last twenty years or so lost its working-class character,

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<sup>4</sup> Only in the late 1970s were non-employees of Lever Brothers permitted to buy homes in Port Sunlight.

much like other garden cities have, such as Hampstead Suburb and Bourneville. It is ironic that housing built specifically for the working classes is now trendy, much-desired housing for the middle classes.

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