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SOCIAL MOBILITY IN ENGLAND, 1500-1700*

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS FOURFOLD: FIRSTLY TO SKETCH THE configuration of a western traditional society at a fairly advanced stage of its development, a model that might be applicable to any European society from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; secondly, to produce the evidence for believing that between 1540 and 1640 English society experienced a seismic upheaval of unprecedented magnitude; thirdly to postulate some reasons both for the development of this upheaval and for its termination; and fourthly to speculate about the political and religious consequences. The paper attempts — perhaps rashly — to take a broad overview of the society as a whole, and therefore ignores the important local variations which undoubtedly existed.

I MODELS

The first problem is what sort of a visual image we have of this early modern English society. Sociologists tend to describe pre-industrial societies in terms of a stepped pyramid, the lower classes forming the bottom step, and the aristocracy or plutocracy the apex (because of the erosion of the poor and the growth of the middle-class in contemporary western society, it has turned into a stepped lozenge). But one may reasonably doubt whether this model fits a traditional pre-industrial society. Two alternatives present themselves. The first — let us call it the United Nations model — is a tall skyscraper erected on top of a vast low podium. Within the podium, which extends over many acres, live 95% or more of the population, who are free to move along wide corridors and to rise and descend very shallow staircases within this limited level. The skyscraper itself, within which dwell the remaining 5% or less, is composed of a series of floors for status groups based on the ownership of land. Within it is a single infrequent elevator which always goes down with a full load of failures

* Some of the many errors of sense and logic in early drafts of this paper were pointed out to me by David Bien, Christopher Hill, Michael Walzer, Jerrold Seigel, John Shy and Joan Thirsk. Daniel Baugh went to great trouble in helping me to guess at the number of office-holders. I am very grateful to them for their assistance. An earlier version of this article was circulated for the 1965 Past and Present Annual Conference.

and superfluous younger sons, but often rises half empty. Around the skyscraper itself, however, there wind several ascending ramps, labelled Church, Law, Commerce, and Office. Some people camp out on the ramps, but it is draughty and wet out there, and most of them struggle upwards and then take shelter inside at the highest floor they can comfortably reach.

The second — the San Gimignano model — is a series of vertical towers upon a hill. In this model the hill represents the amorphous mass of the poor and the humble, and the towers a series of more or less independent economic and status hierarchies with their own internal elevators: land, church, law, commerce, and government office are the most conspicuous of these towers.

Neither of these models exactly fits the observed facts, but both are an improvement on the conventional stepped pyramid image. It will be argued in this paper that between 1500 and 1700 English society was moving from the United Nations towards the San Gimignano model as the status of business and the professions rose in the eyes of the landed classes.

II

CATEGORIES

The Hierarchy of Status

In the sixteenth century there was a status hierarchy, not the loose competitive status agglomerations to which we are accustomed today¹. Though there existed a few completely non-integrated groups — artists and stage-players, for example — and four semi-independent occupational hierarchies, the vast mass of the population was fitted into a single hierarchy of status defined by titular rank, and to a certain extent by legal and fiscal privilege. The most fundamental dichotomy within the society was between the gentleman and the non-gentleman, a division that was based essentially upon the distinction between those who did, and those who did not, have to work with their hands. This is a critical division in all societies where human labour is the principal power-unit, apart from the horse and the ox, wind and water. The more extreme conservatives, heralds and others, argued that it took three generations for a family to purge its blood from the taint of inferiority and to become an accepted member of this upper class. In practice such notions seem

¹ L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 49-53, is an earlier attempt to tackle this problem. The present analysis provides what is hoped to be a more sophisticated model.

to have had little effect, but the fact that they could be seriously propounded is evidence that an element of caste theory was to be found in Tudor England.

Within the dual system of gentlemen and non-gentlemen contemporaries recognized a rough sixfold status division:—

Group 1. The dependents on charity, whether widows, aged, or unemployed; also the apprentices and living-in servants, domestic, agricultural, or industrial, who composed as much as 15% to 25% of the adult male population.²

Group 2. The living-out labourers, both rural and urban, agricultural and industrial.

Group 3. The husbandmen, the lesser yeomen (both tenants and freeholders), and the more substantial yeomen; also the artisans, shopkeepers and small internal traders.

Group 4. The lesser, or parish, gentry.

Group 5. The county élite: squires, knights and baronets.

Group 6. The peers: barons, viscounts, earls, marquises, and dukes.

This sixfold status hierarchy is based on the values of a primitive rural society. At the lower levels of groups 1-3 there already existed two parallel hierarchies for urban and rural society, but they can be roughly matched without too much difficulty. But both contemporaries and ourselves are faced with the more vexing problem of fitting into this scheme four semi-independent occupational hierarchies, whose precise relationship to the basic reference groupings was never fully clarified. These were:—

Group A. The merchants. The middling and large-scale exporters of London, Exeter, Bristol, Hull and Newcastle, the wholesalers, the large retailers of the main cities, the customs farmers and government contractors, and the financiers of London. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries they were still regarded in many quarters as distinctly inferior in status to a gentleman. As late as 1669 Edward Chamberlayne stated flatly that "Tradesmen in all ages and nations have been reputed ignoble", and a generation earlier there had been a brisk pamphlet discussion whether or not a gentleman's son lost his gentle status by becoming an apprentice. Because of

² A. J. and R. H. Tawney, "An Occupational Census of the Seventeenth Century", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, v (1934-5), p. 47. P. Laslett, "Clayworth and Cogenhoe", in *Historical Essays, 1600-1750*, ed. H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard (London, 1963), p. 169; and data extracted from "Lay Subsidy Rolls, 1524-25", *Sussex Record Society*, lvi (1957).

this attitude the merchants were a mobile group of transients, very many of whom moved into and out of the group in a single lifetime, and nearly all in two generations; as a contemporary put it at the time, merchants "do attain to great wealth and riches, which for the most part they employ in purchasing land and little by little they do creep and seek to be gentlemen", In other words, the most successful tended to merge into groups 4 and 5.³

Group B. The Lawyers. These ranged all the way from the local attorney and solicitor to grantees like the Master of the Rolls and the Lord Chancellor. Over three-quarters of those trained at the Inns of Court, that is the barristers and above, were of gentry or clergy stock, but we know little about the social origins, economic prospects, or accepted status of the local attorneys.⁴

Group C. The Clergy. These ranged in income and position from the curate to the archbishop, and varied in social origin from the copyholder to the squire. Even in a prosperous and socially and intellectually advanced area like Oxfordshire or Worcestershire, between three-quarters and two-thirds of the early seventeenth-century parish clergy were still of non-gentry origin. Though most rectors were comfortably off, and though the overall average real income probably remained much the same, substantial numbers of vicars and curates were existing on an income hardly different from that of unskilled labourers.⁵ The higher clergy were ruthlessly plundered under the Tudors, and their social origins were generally inferior to those of the lawyers. For example, of twenty-eight bishops in the 1630s, the fathers of only nine were gentry; eight were clergymen, seven were merchants, one was a yeoman and three were artisans or

³ L. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 40. W. G. Hoskins, "The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter", in *Elizabethan Government and Society*, ed. S. T. Bindoff *et al.* (London, 1961), pp. 166-70, 176, 185-6. W. T. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540-1640* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 260-4. P. McGrath, "Records relating to the Society of Merchant Adventurers of the City of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century", *Bristol Rec. Soc.*, xvii (1953), pp. xxviii-xxx. *V.C.H., Yorks., The City of York* (London, 1961), pp. 180-1. T. S. Willan, *The Muscovy Merchants of 1555* (Manchester, 1953), pp. 69-74. Willan casts some doubts on the truth of this picture, but he offers no hard statistical evidence to back up his suspicions.

⁴ L. Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640", *Past and Present*, no. 28 (July, 1964), pp. 58-9. R. Robson, *The Attorney in Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1959).

⁵ D. M. Barratt, "The Condition of the Parish Clergy between the Reformation and 1660" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1949), pp. 18, 180-206. F. W. Brooks, "The Social Position of the Parson in the Sixteenth Century", *Brit. Arch. Ass. J.*, 3rd ser., x (1948). W. G. Hoskins, "The Leicestershire Country Parson in the Sixteenth Century", in his *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1950), pp. 1-23.

below.⁶ It seems that the highest ranks of the clergy were generally regarded as inferior in status to the highest ranks of the legal profession, despite the presence of the former in the House of Lords. The precise reason for this lowly status is hard to determine. Was it the vigorous and widespread anti-clericalism of the age which both lowered respect for the profession and frightened off prospective entrants of gentry stock? Or the lack of assured tenure during a period of theological upheaval? Or the substantially reduced financial rewards to be expected even from a successful career? We do not know, but it is probable that all three factors interacted one upon the other.

Group D. The Administrators. These are the office-holders in the royal household, the major departments of state, and the army and navy, men to whom administration was a professional life commitment. This definition includes all those dealt with by Professor Aylmer in *The King's Servants* except the courtiers at the apex of the system. By the early seventeenth century, these royal servants were predominantly of squirearchy or gentry origin, but with a substantial leavening from yeoman, merchant, and miscellaneous non-gentry stock.⁷

What we have, therefore, is a rural-based status hierarchy running from 1 to 6, the clarity and utility of which is marred by the existence of four occupational hierarchies, A, B, C and D, whose exact positions within this standard system of reference were, and are, uncertain.

Moreover, it is unhappily true that 1, 2 and 3 include well over 90% of the population — perhaps as much as 95% — which means that a great deal of horizontal, and even some vertical, mobility within the vast mass of the population goes unrecognized. In such a society one cannot expect there to be very much upward mobility at the lower levels. Most of the population was living on the land, enjoying a very low income and tied to the soil by the needs of manual labour for food production and distribution. A reasonable guess is that about 95% of the population was still rural in 1500, and about 85% in 1700.⁸ Now in a society in which 90% of the population are manual workers on the land, even if every other job

⁶ Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 40, 405-11. This social pattern (the information about which I owe to Mr. F. S. Odo, a member of my research seminar at Princeton) hardly differs from that of the pre-Reformation church of the 1520s and '30s.

⁷ G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants* (London, 1961), p. 263.

⁸ Gregory King's figures suggest that in 1690 only about 15% of the population was living in towns of more than 1,000 (two-thirds of whom were crowded into London). D. V. Glass, "Two papers on Gregory King", in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, *Population in History* (London, 1965), pp. 174, 178.

and office is filled by one of their sons, still only 11% can expect to change occupations.⁹ Under such circumstances it is evident that the chances of upward economic mobility for the great majority of the population must be very small indeed.

The task of the historian of social mobility is complicated by a variety of difficulties. The degree to which a society appears open or closed both to contemporaries and to posterity depends partly on the prevailing myth, and partly on hard facts. For lack of anything better on which to base their judgements, historians tend to see a society much as the contemporaries saw it. Thus if seventeenth-century Englishmen and nineteenth-century Americans thought of their society as exceptionally mobile, then exceptionally mobile they appear in the history books. But there is also the social reality underlying the myth, a reality which cannot be too remote from the image without creating severe psychic tensions. The general contentment of the greater number is probably most strongly determined by the possibility of minor movement up and down at the lowest levels of groups 1, 2 and 3. But the quality of the society as it is seen by the historian is determined by two quite different factors. The first is the proportion of the lower and middling classes who are able to filter through into the élite; that is the number of ambitious youths who can move up from group 3 to group 4, the speed of acceptance of upwardly mobile elements of A, B, C and D by 4 and 5, and the degree to which income, political power, and status are open to talent among 4, 5 and 6. The second factor is the method by which this filtration occurs. Is it "sponsored mobility" of youths selected for advancement at an early age, an upward movement planned and controlled by the existing élite for its own purpose of functional efficiency and the preservation of status lines? Or is it "contest mobility", the chance product of prolonged and open competitive struggle?¹⁰

The Hierarchy of Income

Tax data and other contemporary records suggest that the hierarchy of status corresponded roughly with the pyramid of incomes, and that the same was true within the four anomalous occupational categories of merchant, lawyer, official and clergyman.¹¹ It should

⁹ S. M. Lipset and R. Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley, 1959), p. 27.

¹⁰ For this distinction see Ralph H. Turner, "Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System", *Amer. Soc. Rev.*, xxv (1960), pp. 855-67.

¹¹ T. Wilson, "The State of England Anno Dom. 1600", *Camden Misc.*, xvi (1936). C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 280-1.

be noted that the spread of income distribution after taxation was enormous by modern standards, perhaps as many as 1,000 families enjoying a net income after tax of £1,000 a year or more, which was a hundred times greater than that of the unskilled labourer.

The Hierarchy of Power

Political power was rather less intimately linked to status than was income, but it was still close. Groups 3-6 and A, B, C and D, nearly all enjoyed the franchise, but in practice contests for seats in Parliament were fairly rare, and political affairs at the local level were run in towns exclusively by A and in the county by 5 and 6, with some support and occasional competition from elements of 4.¹² At the national level, power was exercised by courtiers and officials: that is, a select minority of groups 5 and 6, and the whole of group D.

At Court, a knight from the lower gentry like Sir Walter Raleigh ranked higher in status, wielded more power, and might even enjoy a larger income than a backwoods earl like Bath. But this top Court élite of politicians was too ephemeral in its composition and too amateur in its interests to be regarded as a permanent part of the official class.

III

PATTERNS

The evidence is twofold, contemporary comment and statistics. The former is unreliable, firstly because what seems like great social mobility to contemporaries may appear very small to us; secondly because, when dealing with a small élite class, a numerically very small opening into it may seem gigantic to the élite but insignificant to the outsiders; and lastly because the individual example, which may be quite exceptional, cannot be used to prove a generalization. Finally, myth may not correspond to reality. The rags-to-riches legend of Dick Whittington may bear little relation to the actual life-prospects of an apprentice, although the fact that the legend first appears in 1605 may indicate growing aspirations for upward mobility.

There are three kinds of mobility, of which the first is the rise and fall of certain groups in relation to others. When studying this kind of change, it must be remembered that there are four elements in social stratification: the relative numbers, income, status and political

¹² MacCaffrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17, 22-5, 251-6. Hoskins, "Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter", *loc. cit.*, pp. 163-6. J. E. Neale, *The Elizabethan House of Commons* (London, 1949), *passim*.

power of each group. It is very unlikely that the four will change together in perfect harmony and it may be necessary to construct four different profiles of mobility over time for each group.

The second consists of changes in the profile of stratification, that is to say in the distances between the groups: thus there can be yawning gulfs or barely perceptible cracks separating one social group from another in terms of income, status or power; and the third consists of changes in the scale and range of individual mobility. This last, which is the one which usually attracts most attention but is historically in some ways the least important, has three variables: the direction, upwards or downwards; the height, that is to say the number of steps in the hierarchy to which the individual can climb or descend; and the frequency, the proportion of individuals in the group who are socially mobile.

Changes in Group Profiles

(1) *Numbers.* The great growth of population up to 1620, coupled with the continued engrossing of holdings by rich farmers, and heavy regressive taxation after 1642, must have caused a substantial increase in the size of groups 1 and 2 at the bottom of the heap, and an all too obvious growth of structural unemployment and under-employment which provoked the introduction of exceptional measures of poor relief and social control. Even in 1522-4 about one half of the population of Coventry, one third of that of Leicester and Exeter, and a substantially smaller proportion of the lesser country towns was reckoned to be below the poverty-line, and therefore not taxable. In 1688 Gregory King estimated that over half the total population, rural and urban, earned less than was needed for subsistence. The late seventeenth-century Hearth Tax returns for one Midland village show 30% of all households below the tax level altogether, and a further 46% with only one hearth. In a town like Exeter conditions were even worse, with some 40% of households below the tax level.¹³

Secondly, there was a remarkable increase in the number of the upper classes, which trebled at a period when the total population

¹³ D. C. Coleman, "Labour in the English Economy in the Seventeenth Century", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., viii (1955-6), pp. 280-95. W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England* (London, 1963), p. 83. J. Cornwall, "The People of Rutland in 1522", *Leics. Arch. Soc. Trans.*, xxxvii (1961-2), p. 15; "English Country Towns in the 1520s", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xv (1962-3), p. 66. MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-1. W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant* (London, 1957), p. 195. C. H. Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship 1600-1763* (London, 1965), pp. 231-6, 343-7. W. G. Hoskins, *Industry, Trade and People in Exeter, 1688-1800* (Manchester, 1935), pp. 115-6.

barely doubled. The number of peers rose from 60 to 160; of baronets and knights from 500 to 1,400; of squires from perhaps 800 to 3,000; of armigerous gentry from perhaps 5,000 to around 15,000. This was due partly to the increase of land in private ownership, partly to the abnormally high reproduction rate of the upper classes, partly to the generation of new wealth in trade, the law, office and agriculture, and partly to the casual government attitude towards the inflation of honours.¹⁴

Thirdly, there were striking fluctuations in the numbers of the clergy. The profession contracted sharply — perhaps by 50% — with the elimination of the regular clergy at the Reformation and the subsequent plunder of the Church. In 1560, with no monks or chantry priests left, and perhaps as many as 2,000 of the 9,000 livings unfilled, the clergy were fewer in numbers than they had been for centuries. Thereafter numbers expanded again as vacant livings were filled, curacies increased, and a surplus of talented preachers were taken on as lecturers. The peak of the revival must have been in the 1640s, but the post-Restoration slump in both university education and religious enthusiasm, and the suppression of lecturers, must have cut the numbers back again.

The other professions showed sustained and striking increases in size. In particular the lawyers grew by leaps and bounds. The numbers called to the bar at the Inns of Court increased by over 40% between the 1590s and the 1630s. At the same time there were complaints about the proliferation of attorneys and solicitors. An official survey of 1633 stated that the number of attorneys enrolled in the court of Common Pleas had risen from 342 to 1,383 since 1578, and in 1689 John Aubrey said it was thought that there were nearly 3,000 in England. In 1688 Gregory King reckoned the entire legal profession at 10,000.¹⁵ In addition, the medical profession grew very rapidly, and there may have been as many as 1,000 doctors, surgeons and apothecaries practising medicine between 1603 and 1643.¹⁶

¹⁴ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London, 1964), pp. 163-6. Stone, *Crisis*, ch. iii. J. Cornwall, "The Early Tudor Gentry", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvii (1964-5), pp. 457-61. MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-1.

¹⁵ W. R. Prest, "Some Aspects of the Inns of Court 1590-1640" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1965), p. 385. E. Foss, *Lives of the Judges* (London, 1857), v, pp. 107-8, 421-4; vi, pp. 35-7, 234-6. H. M. C. Rutland MSS., iv, p. 216. *Cal. State Papers Dom.*, 1633-4, p. 251. J. Aubrey, *The Natural History of Wiltshire*, ed. J. Britton (London, 1847), part ii, ch. xvi. MacPherson, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁶ J. H. Roach, *A Directory of English Country Physicians, 1603-43* (London, 1962). R. S. Roberts, "The Personnel and Practice of Medicine in Tudor and Stuart England", *Medical History*, vi (1962); viii (1964).

Though statistics are wholly lacking, it is likely that there was an equally important proliferation of secretarial and administrative jobs. The rise of literacy stimulated the rise of record-keeping, the rise of record-keeping the increase of record-keepers. An increasingly specialized society demanded ever more specialized services. The Court and central royal bureaucracy seems to have been stabilized at about 600 persons up to the Civil War, and showed only limited signs of increase in minor and unauthorized clerical posts, while in the provinces there were about another 600 petty and part-time officials. But the English Revolution — like all revolutions — demanded a great expansion of state employees, partly as soldiers to hold down the defeated party and ward off external threats, partly as officials to exact taxes to pay for the war, and to handle the bold projects of social engineering that revolutionary governments always embark upon. Much of this expansion survived the emergency, and Restoration England found itself saddled with a large navy, a small standing army, and a new force of excisemen, Hearth Tax collectors, Customs officers, Treasury officials, and dockyard workers whose political rôle as obsequious government supporters soon aroused the alarm of the Country Party.

How far these new offices were an avenue of upward mobility is uncertain but they certainly expanded enormously the numbers of the professional and administrative classes during and after the Civil War. By the late eighteenth century the number in these new central offices enjoying fees and salaries of over £100 a year was perhaps around 1,000, while those earning between £50 and £100 ran into several thousands. As for local officers, nothing whatever is known, but here again there must have been several thousand of them. Although the major increase in the number of officers occurred in the hundred years after the accession of William III, there is still some reason to believe that there must have been up to three or four thousand local and central office-holders in 1690 with incomes over £100 and at least as many again with incomes between £50 and £100.¹⁷

Perhaps equally important was the increase throughout the whole

¹⁷ W. T. MacCaffrey, "Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics", in *Elizabethan Government and Society*, ed. S. T. Bindoff *et al.* (London, 1961), pp. 106-8. Aylmer, *op. cit.*, p. 254; and "Place Bills and the Separation of Powers", *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., xv (1965), pp. 65-6. These very rough guesses for 1690 I owe to the kindness of Professor Daniel Baugh. The firm figures for central office-holders in the late eighteenth century are derived from *The Report of the Commissioners on Fees, 1786-7* (P.P., 1806, vol. vii). *Reports of Committees*, vol. xi, pp. 114 ff., 200 ff. *Commons Journals*, vol. xli, pp. 9 ff.; vol. xlii, pp. 48 ff.

of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the numbers of secretaries and agents of private landlords and businessmen.¹⁸ Lastly, it can hardly be doubted that urbanization and greater commercial activity both at home and abroad must have caused a very substantial increase in the numbers of merchants and shopkeepers.

(2) *Income*. Throughout the sixteenth century the pressure of excess supply of labour relative to demand not only increased unemployment but also forced down real wages to an alarming degree, the Phelps Brown index suggesting a decline by as much as 50%.¹⁹ Even if this is an unduly pessimistic calculation, the fall was undoubtedly of a magnitude for which there is no parallel in English history since the thirteenth century. The living standards of the labouring classes went down sharply in the sixteenth century, and stayed down throughout the seventeenth. On the other hand, throughout the whole of the sixteenth century and much of the seventeenth there was a striking rise in the material comforts of all classes from the yeomen upwards, groups who benefited from rising agricultural prices, increased commercial activity, and increased demand for professional services. This is shown by the increase in the amount of domestic equipment mentioned by William Harrison and others and proven by the study of probate inventories; and by the increased number of rooms in housing erected during what has been described as "The Great Rebuilding".²⁰ At the gentry level, there is some rough statistical evidence to suggest that the years 1575-1625 saw more country-house building than any other 50-year period in our history,²¹ which is itself significant proof of a "rise of the gentry".

¹⁸ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-94. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Examples of the new kind of secretarial/professional careers in private and royal service are those of Edward Palavicino at a lower level and John Pym and Sir Benjamin Rudyard at a higher: L. Stone, *An Elizabethan: Sir Horatio Palavicino* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 316-20; M. F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament, 1640-41* (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 318-9, 329.

¹⁹ E. H. Phelps Brown and S. V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of Prices of Consumables compared with Builders' Wage-rates", *Economica*, xxiii (1956), repr. in *Essays in Economic History*, vol. ii, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (London, 1962).

²⁰ W. Harrison, *Description of England*, in R. H. Tawney and E. Power, *Tudor Economic Documents* (London, 1924), iii, pp. 68-72. R. Reyce, *The Breviary of Suffolk*, ed. Francis Lord Hervey (London, 1902), pp. 49-52. F. Bacon, "Observations on a Libel", in J. Spedding, *Life and Letters of Sir Francis Bacon* (London, 1890), i, pp. 158-9. W. G. Hoskins, ed., *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1950), pp. 132-6, 179-83; "Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter", *loc. cit.*, pp. 178-83. M. W. Barley, *The English Farm-house and Cottage* (London, 1961), pp. 38-179. W. G. Hoskins, "The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640", *Past and Present*, no. 4 (Nov., 1953); *The Midland Peasant* (London, 1957), pp. 185-6, 296-8.

²¹ This observation is based on a survey of the evidence in the counties covered so far by N. Pevsner in the Penguin *Buildings of England* series.

It is probable, but not yet proven, that the average income and capital value of the London monopoly merchants and financiers, rose considerably throughout the period.²² The income of nobles and courtiers certainly fell sharply in the late sixteenth century but recovered in the early seventeenth.²³ And lastly the income of the higher clergy was sharply curtailed at and after the Reformation, the process only stopping at the accession of James I. Although the income of some of the lower clergy kept pace with prices, that of the others, particularly vicars and curates, probably fell.²⁴ We do not yet know enough about lawyers or administrators to reach a firm conclusion, although the impression is that their economic position was improving, as was certainly that of medical practitioners. It is an ill wind which blows nobody any good, and the increase of small-pox and venereal disease brought wealth to many doctors' pockets.²⁵

For one hundred years after the Restoration, however, there is reason to believe that the fortunes of the various levels of the landed classes were dramatically reversed from the trends of the previous century. The holdings of the aristocracy and greater landlords steadily increased, those of the small yeomen and freeholders were converted into leaseholds, and the smaller gentry were economically depressed by the stagnation of food prices and the rise of taxation on the land.²⁶

(3) *Status*. After a severe slump in the sixteenth century, there was a marked rise in the middle of the seventeenth century in the status of the lesser clergy, as they became better educated, better paid, and of more genteel social origins;²⁷ secondly, there was an improvement in the status of lesser legal officials like country attorneys, culminating in the formation in 1739 of a professional organization, "The Society of Gentlemen Practisers";²⁸ thirdly, there was a rise in status of the medical profession as a whole as its professional and educational standards improved; and fourthly, there was a slow but steady rise in the standing of the merchant class in the eyes of the gentry. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the old view that the younger son

²² For the wealth of the Jacobean aldermen, see R. G. Lang, "The Greater Merchants of London in the early Seventeenth Century" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1963). Some figures for officially recorded personal incomes are given in W. K. Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480-1660* (London, 1960), pp. 53-4.

²³ Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 156-64, 470-6.

²⁴ C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1956), ch. ix.

²⁵ *The Journal of James Yonge*, ed. F. N. L. Poynter (London, 1963).

²⁶ H. J. Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, x (1940); "La Disparition du Paysan Anglais", *Annales E.S.C.*, xx (1965).

²⁷ See above, note 5.

²⁸ R. Robson, *op. cit.*, ch. iii.

of a gentleman lost his gentility by becoming an apprentice was still held only by a few legal pedants, heralds, and other social conservatives.

These changes were all the product of the upgrading of trade and the professions relative to the landed classes. What cannot at present be determined is whether this was a result of an influx of superfluous younger sons of gentry, who had to be provided for somehow or other; or whether the influx was the result not so much of economic necessity as of a change in attitude towards occupations whose utility to society as a whole was increasingly being recognized. The probability is that the ideological and the economic changes marched hand in hand, thus relieving the historian of the responsibility of distinguishing horse from cart.

Thirdly, at the upper levels there was a striking though temporary fall in the prestige of the peers in the early seventeenth century, demonstrated by a decline in tenant loyalty, gentry deference, and electoral obedience. This decline prepared the way for the abolition of the House of Lords in 1649.²⁹ And lastly there was a similar decline in the status of courtiers, as a "Country" interest and a "Country" morality, expressed in a "Country Party", emerged as a self-conscious interest group with a well-defined ideological content.³⁰

(4) *Power*. In the sixteenth century, thanks to the growing strength of the Crown, there was a decline in the political authority of peers; in the seventeenth century, thanks to the growing power of Parliament, there was a decline in the political influence of courtiers; the beneficiaries of both movements were the greater gentry, although the peers were recovering some of their power again towards the end of the century.³¹ Secondly, the political influence of the clergy was virtually eliminated at the Reformation, a loss which was only partially and temporarily made up in the 1630s. And thirdly there was a marked increase in the influence of the merchant community over English policy — especially foreign policy — thanks to the leverage it could exercise over any government by the offer or withholding of its facilities for credit.

By dividing this analysis of changes in group profiles into four distinct sections, the two important shifts in English society have tended to be lost to view. The first was a polarization of society into rich and poor: the upper classes became relatively more numerous,

²⁹ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-22, 163-4, 266-70, 476-81, 662-8, 743-53.

³⁰ P. Zagorin, "The Court and the Country", *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, lxxvii (1962), pp. 306-11. Aylmer, "Place-bills", *loc. cit.*

³¹ Stone, *op. cit.*, ch. v. M. E. James, *Change and Continuity in the Tudor North* (Borthwick Papers, xxvii, York, 1965).

and their real incomes rose; the poor became relatively more numerous and their real incomes fell. The second was a greater equality among the upper classes: firstly the wealth and power of the greater gentry increased relative to those of the aristocracy; and secondly members of the trades and professions rose in wealth, numbers and social status relative to the landed classes. How far this last development had proceeded can be glimpsed by looking at Gregory King's not implausible guesses about the structure of society in 1688. He estimated that there were 10,000 merchants by land and sea, 10,000 clergy, 5,000 greater and 5,000 lesser officials, 10,000 lawyers, 16,000 persons in the sciences and liberal arts, and 9,000 army and navy officers, making 65,000 in all. When one considers that he reckoned there were only 16,000 gentlemen and above, plus 40,000 wealthier freeholders, and that (if his figures are to be trusted) the total income of the professional and commercial groups was now nearly as great as that of the landed proprietors, it becomes clear that English society no longer conformed to the traditional pattern.³² The landed classes might continue to wield political power and be the arbiters of social status for another two hundred years, but they had now to temper the exercise of this authority with a careful regard for these newer elements in the society.

Changes in Individual Mobility

(1) *Horizontal*. Individual mobility may be horizontal from one geographical area or occupation to another, or vertical, up or down the social and economic scale. The two are interrelated in that although most people move horizontally to avoid slipping downwards, there are still some who do so in the hope of also moving vertically upwards. To the extent that horizontal mobility reflects the second motive rather than the first, therefore, it is an indicator of rising aspirations, though by no means necessarily of rising achievements.

(a) *Internal*. There is good reason to suppose that physical mobility, even in the village, was far greater than is generally supposed. Both the muster rolls and the detailed census returns of two individual villages suggest a turnover as high as 50% to 60% in ten years. If removal by death accounted for some 20%, there are still some 30-40% who moved on in a given 10-year span, which indicates that the seventeenth-century village was very far from being

³² MacPherson, *op. cit.*, p. 280. Professor Baugh tells me that he thinks King substantially overestimated the number of officials in the upper category.

a static or isolated unit.³³ This mobility can partly be explained by the high proportion of the community who worked as living-in servants. These would move away from home to take service and move on again to change employers or to get married. Partly it was caused by a steady process of buying and selling of small properties and engrossing of holdings. A good deal of it, however, was caused by two major trends. There was a movement from the more densely-settled areas into undeveloped land in the forests, the fens and the Highland zone; and there was perhaps an even more massive drift from the countryside to the towns, and especially London. The first movement is difficult to document statistically, but is evident from many local and estate records.³⁴ Moreover there was a very great increase in the volume of food production over these two centuries, so great that England became a net exporter of corn on a very large scale by the end of the seventeenth century, despite the doubling of its population. This has to be explained mainly by the opening up of virgin lands by a restlessly mobile population seeking a living wherever opportunity offered.

The flow into the towns is more easily demonstrated. As one would expect if the population doubled, most towns show some growth after 1550. In the early sixteenth century London had a population of about 60,000, there was one other town of more than 10,000, and not more than fourteen of more than 5,000. Between 1550 and 1650 a few places like Norwich, Newcastle, York and Bristol may have doubled or trebled to between 12,000 and 20,000, but London and its suburbs increased sixfold to about 350,000. By now London was clearly in a class by itself, and it went on growing to about 550,000 by the end of the century. In other words, London comprised perhaps 2% of the population of England and Wales in 1500, 5% in 1600 and 10% in 1700. In view of the very high urban death rates, this massive increase is evidence that a large proportion of the surplus population in the countryside was annually pouring into the capital city. Even when the city was devastated by plague and lost some 15% of its inhabitants, as occurred in 1603 and 1625, so

³³ E. E. Rich, "The Population of Elizabethan England", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., ii (1949-50), p. 259. P. Styles, "A Census of a Warwickshire Village in 1698", *Univ. of Birmingham Hist. J.*, iii (1951), pp. 45-8. Laslett, "Clayworth and Cogenhoe", *loc. cit.*, p. 183. L. M. Marshall, "The Rural Population of Bedfordshire, 1671 to 1921", *Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc.*, xvi (1934), pp. 53-64.

³⁴ G. H. Tupling, *The Economic History of Rossendale* (Manchester, 1927), pp. 42-97. J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century* (Leicester, 1953), pp. 21-2. M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman* (New Haven, 1942), pp. 72, 93-7. P. A. J. Pettit, "Charles I and the Revival of Forest Law in Northamptonshire", *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, iii (1961), p. 54. E. Kerridge, "The Revolts in Wiltshire against Charles I", *Wilts. Arch. Magazine*, lvii (1958), pp. 66-70.

great was the influx that the losses were made up within two years, to judge from the statistics of baptisms, marriages and burials.³⁵ A London parson in the reign of Elizabeth remarked that every twelve years or so "the most part of the parish changeth, as I by experience know, some goinge and some comminge" — a situation which resembles nothing so much as Los Angeles in the mid-twentieth century.³⁶ What effect this enormous shift of population had upon status or living standards is entirely unknown, but it may well have been downward on both counts. Many of these wanderers failed to find a permanent home either on the wastes and forests or in the towns, and there is plenty of evidence — if of a non-quantitative character — for a serious increase of vagabondage.

One rung up the social ladder, however, horizontal mobility was probably more rewarding. It was certainly so for craftsmen trained in a skill through the expensive and tedious process of apprenticeship, for the Hearth Tax returns indicate that the income of the urban craftsman was a good deal higher than that of his rural counterpart.³⁷ In this connection some interesting conclusions emerge from an analysis of the apprenticeship records of London companies. These show that between the early sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries there was a striking change in the geographical distribution of recruitment. Professor Thrupp had noted that in the late fifteenth century nearly half the apprentices of two London companies had come from the North, and there is evidence that this pattern persisted for another 100 years. The only early sixteenth-century records are what survives of the list of men who had completed their apprenticeship and were admitted to the Freedom of the City, mostly between 1535 and 1553. They show that over half came from north and west of a line Trent-Severn-Bournemouth. The pattern is confirmed by the later records of apprenticeship in the Carpenters' and Fishmongers' Companies. Both recruited about 40% from the Highland zone up to the Civil War, but only 20% or less by the end of the seventeenth century. There was a corresponding rise of apprentices

³⁵ Date	London	England and Wales	%
1500	60,000	3,000,000	2%
1600	225,000	4,500,000	5%
1700	550,000	5,500,000	10%

C. Creighton, "The Population of Old London", *Blackwood's Magazine*, cxlix (Edinburgh, Apr., 1891). N. G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London, 1935), ch. xx. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 47. W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England* (London, 1963), ch. iv. MacCaffrey, *Exeter*, pp. 12-13.

³⁶ *The Writings of John Greenwood, 1587-90*, ed. L. H. Carlson (London, 1962), p. 198.

³⁷ P. Styles, "The Social Structure of Kineton Hundred in the Reign of Charles II", *Birmingham Arch. Soc. Trans.*, lxxviii (1962), p. 100.

from London and the four home counties from less than 20% before the Civil War to well over 50% by 1700, rising to 70% or more by 1750. This contraction of the area of recruitment receives striking confirmation from the records of the Cutlers' Company at Sheffield which show that recruits from over 31 miles away fell from 22% to 5% between the second and the fourth quarter of the seventeenth century, and did not rise above 12% for another hundred years. The second important trend over these years was from sons of agricultural workers and smallholders — yeomen, husbandmen and labourers — to the sons of artisans and small tradesmen. This movement was most intense in the late seventeenth century, the proportion of sons of artisans among apprentices rising from 50% to 74% in the Carpenters' Company between 1654 and 1693, and from 39% to 63% in the Fishmongers' Company between 1641 and 1704.³⁸

Just what these two movements mean is not entirely clear. These apprentices were a fortunate élite who were only a tiny minority of the mass of migrants to London and only about a third of whom were destined to stay and become Freemen of the City after their apprenticeship had expired. But the startling decline of immigrants from the north and west, and the almost equally impressive rise in the proportion of sons of artisans, surely indicate a closing of both horizontal and occupational mobility channels. Why this should be so we do not know. Was it due to changing opportunities for employment in the north and west, or to declining attraction of apprenticeship in London; or was it the automatic product of the expansion of numbers of both artisans in general and Londoners in particular, which made internal recruitment more possible? Whatever the cause, it is clear that a phase of very active horizontal mobility both in geographical range and in occupational shift was replaced by conditions of relative quiescence.

(b) *External.* Between 1620 and 1640 some 80,000 Englishmen emigrated to America and the West Indies. Those who survived the first harsh years in America received very much greater land than

³⁸ S. L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago, 1948), p. 211. C. Welch, *Register of Freeman of the City of London in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI* (London, 1908). Kahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-20. C. Blagden, "The Stationers' Company in the Eighteenth Century", *Guildhall Miscellany*, x (1959), pp. 36-52. Bower Marsh, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters* (Oxford, 1913-39), vols. i and vi. Guildhall Library, MSS. 5576/1-3 (Fishmongers); 5184/1 (Bakers). For a discussion of the changing social and economic rôle of apprenticeship and freedom of a Company, see J. R. Kellest, "The Breakdown of Gild and Corporation Control over the Handicraft and Retail Trade of London", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., x (1957-8). E. J. Buckatsch, "Places of Origin of a Group of Immigrants into Sheffield, 1624-1799", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., ii (1949-50), p. 305.

they could ever hope for at home, and there is evidence to suggest that for the humble the move involved some general but modest upward status (and perhaps also economic) mobility.³⁹ Mid seventeenth-century Massachusetts was a rural society of small yeomen farmers, without either landed gentry above or landless poor below.⁴⁰

Far more significant mobility was achieved by colonial exploitation of Ireland. Those who entered the Irish scene in the 1590s, obtained rich pickings in land grants and government offices, and lived to profit by the economic growth of the early seventeenth century, found themselves endowed with great wealth which was easily converted into status by the purchase of an Irish title. The richest man in England in 1640 was almost certainly Robert Boyle, earl of Cork, who had landed in Dublin fifty-two years before as a penniless adventurer.⁴¹ By emigration in the seventeenth century, whether to Ireland, or to America, or to the West Indies, horizontal mobility often became a means of moving upwards.

(2) *Vertical*

(a) *Upward* (economic and status). The basic evidence to support the hypothesis that this period saw a phase of unprecedented individual mobility, upwards and downwards, followed by a fresh period of stability, lies in the statistics for the purchase and sale of land. They rise to a peak in the 1610s, 250% higher than in the 1560s. This great movement had spent itself before the Civil War, and land transfers had begun to slow up after 1620. By 1700 the land market was once again almost as tight as it had been in the early sixteenth century.⁴²

For those who were not gentlemen there were various ways of moving upwards. University education on a scholarship, followed by entry into the church, certainly led to improvement in status, but only in the late seventeenth century did it normally lead to a reasonably

³⁹ *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1929), i, p. 179. S. C. Powell, *Puritan Village* (Middlebury, Conn., 1963), pp. 18-29, 92-116. M. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-80.

⁴⁰ I owe this point to Dr. Kenneth Lockridge.

⁴¹ T. O. Ranger, "Richard Boyle and the making of an Irish fortune, 1588-1614", *Irish Historical Studies*, x (1957). A. B. Grosart, *The Lismore Papers, 1886-88*, 2nd ser., iv, p. 259. Brit. Mus., Harleian MSS., 991, p. 8.

⁴² Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 37, fig. 1. That this rise and fall is a solid reality is supported by a study of the mobility of manorial property in Surrey between 1480 and 1700, carried out by Mr. F. M. Brodhead, a member of my research seminar at Princeton. He has shown that the market for this sort of property was all but dead before the Dissolution of the monasteries, and that it was this political act which set the process in motion; he has also confirmed that the movement reached its peak in the early seventeenth century and then died away again.

well-paid or secure position.⁴³ Shrewd manipulation of the land and the agricultural produce market was far more important: the social and economic rise of many yeomen into the lesser gentry was a well-established feature of the society, at any rate before rents began rising steeply in the early seventeenth century.⁴⁴ Success in the servicing and retail trades offered some limited opportunity for self-improvement, though this was rarely the road to substantial wealth and power. Service as agent or steward of a large landed estate sometimes brought both status and financial rewards.⁴⁵ Apprenticeship to a leading merchant was a common way to rise quite high in the social scale. Commerce was the origin of the family wealth of two out of the fourteen richest Yorkshire squires in 1642, one out of twenty-five leading Somerset squires in the 1630s, 7% of the Early Stuart baronetage, and 4% of the new Early Stuart peerage. These figures suggest that both contemporaries and posterity have exaggerated the scale of the movement, but how it compared with earlier or later periods we do not know.⁴⁶

As for the post-Restoration period, the remarkable commercial expansion of the late seventeenth century clearly created a great deal of new wealth. What is not so certain, however, is how it was distributed. Was it concentrated in the hands of a few men like Sir Josiah Child and Sir John Banks, or was it spread over the mercantile community as a whole? The closing down of the land market suggests that, however it was distributed, less of this wealth than before was being converted into social status by the purchase of an estate, and more of it was being reinvested in long-term mortgages, commerce and banking.⁴⁷ Thus neither the expansion of the bureaucracy nor the expansion of trade are incompatible with the hypothesis of an increasingly immobile society.

For a young man of gentle birth, the fastest ways of moving up the social scale were the lotteries of marriage with an heiress, Court favour, and success at the law. The first of the three is usually neglected or ignored by social historians, but it was probably the

⁴³ M. Curtis, "The Alienated Intellectuals of Early Stuart England", *Past and Present*, no. 23 (Nov., 1962). Hill, *op. cit.*, ch. ix.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *op. cit.*, ch. v.

⁴⁵ MacCaffrey, *Exeter*, pp. 269-70. W. G. Hoskins, *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1955), ch. iv, and "An Elizabethan Provincial Town: Leicester", in his *Provincial England*, p. 107. Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 285-94.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 190. J. T. Cliffe, "The Yorkshire Gentry on the Eve of the Civil War" (London Ph.D. thesis, 1960), p. 96.

⁴⁷ H. J. Habakkuk, "The English Land Market in the Eighteenth Century", in J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann, ed., *Britain and the Netherlands*, ii (London, 1959), pp. 168-73.

commonest method of upward movement for gentlemen. The second, which was only open to a tiny handful of the horde of aspirants, could lead to dizzy heights of wealth and grandeur — witness the careers of the earl of Leicester under Elizabeth, and the duke of Buckingham under James. An analysis of the available evidence suggests that royal bounty reached a peak in the reign of James and then declined. The top positions in the law were also very rewarding in terms of wealth and status, but we have no way of telling what changes occurred over time in the numbers who benefited or the amount of profit they realized. Lastly the commonest, but certainly the slowest, of all the status elevators was thrift and diligence in estate management, a force which carried many gentry upwards into the squirearchy, and one or two squires upwards into the peerage.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that if we substitute India for Ireland, these avenues of upward mobility are precisely those operating a hundred years later, in the middle of the eighteenth century: four fast elevators: marriage, the law, high government service, and the colonies; three medium fast: trade, government contracting and finance; and two slow: estate management, and professions other than the law.⁴⁹

(b) *Downward* (economic and status). Downward mobility was the lot of those who were improvident or incompetent, extravagant or unlucky. History, however, rarely records, and even more rarely pays attention to, such tragedies. The victims sink without trace or comment. The fact that they were extremely common between 1560 and 1640 is proven by the dizzy rise of land sales up to 1620, before the other factors came into play to reduce again the likelihood of ruin and to shut off the supply of land for the market.

The final question, to which no firm answer can be given, is the degree of stability achieved by the socially and economically mobile at this period. Plenty of examples can be instanced of wasteful and dissolute sons of self-made men, who ran through the fortune accumulated by their father and so reduced the family to the status from which it began. And it may well be that the status-seeker of the Tudor age experienced considerable difficulty in founding a family that would last. But when the land market closed down in the late seventeenth century, when the pressures of demographic growth and price revolution eased off, when the strict settlement made alienation of property extremely difficult, when institutional road blocks had

⁴⁸ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-4.

⁴⁹ L. B. Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790* (London, 1964), p. 104.

been erected to confine power to the existing élite, then it may well be that families were established which were capable of withstanding for generations all but the ineluctable processes of biological failure in the male line. Professor Tawney discovered that in ten counties one third of all manors changed hands by purchase and sale at least once every forty years between 1561 and 1640. He also found that of sixty-two large landowning families in the area in 1640, over half were still large landowners in 1874.⁵⁰ These two pieces of evidence put together suggest that those who rose in the social scale in the early seventeenth century, towards the end of the great phase of mobility, had a good chance of establishing their family on the new level of income and status once the avenues of mobility were closed. Indeed, it may have been just these social climbers who were most anxious to slam the door behind them, a suggestion which is supported by the socially very exclusive marriage patterns of the children of the newly risen Henrician and Jacobean peers in the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries.⁵¹

The argument that the period 1560-1640 was an exceptionally mobile one depends upon the statistical evidence, but it is also supported by the weight of contemporary comment running from Thomas Fuller, William Habington and Robert Reyce to the playwrights like Marston and Massinger. In 1665, Edward Waterhouse published his *Gentleman's Monitor, or a sober Inspection into the Virtue, Vices and ordinary means of the rise and decay of men and families*. Though not a very profound analysis, and though sloppily organized, so far as I know this is the first full-scale study of social mobility ever to have been attempted in Europe, and possibly in the world. It is surely no mere coincidence that Waterhouse should have written at the end of this period of maximum upheaval.

IV

CAUSES

Universal Factors

We have very little precise data about social mobility in traditional societies. All we do know is firstly that before the nineteenth century towns failed to reproduce themselves because of the high wastage rate from disease, and that as a result there is bound to be a good

⁵⁰ R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, xi (1941), repr. in *Essays in Economic History*, vol. 1, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (London, 1954): pp. 173-4, 192.

⁵¹ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 629-32.

deal of horizontal mobility from rural to urban areas if town life is to survive at all.⁵² Secondly we know that the random distribution of sterility and intelligence (or lack of it) creates some vertical mobility in all societies, however highly stratified and caste-ridden they may be. There is a high probability that any one family over a period of one or two hundred years will fail in the direct male line; there is also the certainty that the distribution of inherited intelligence and stupidity will not conform to the existing status hierarchy and that inequality of opportunity cannot always prevent consequential mobility upwards or downwards. Thirdly we know that in all societies the most promising avenues of upward mobility, apart from the lottery of marriage, are through occupational Groups A, B, C and D. Both the amount and the range of this mobility will depend partly on the psychological attitudes of the entrants into these occupations (whether they are active risk-taking entrepreneurs, or cautious conservatives with limited ambitions); partly on major long term changes in the demands by society for their services; and partly on changes in the legal and psychological obstacles to assimilation into the élite of the upwardly mobile. If this is the normal situation, there were certain peculiar features operating in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England that gave English mobility its special character, and dictated the remarkable changes that took place over these two hundred years.

Factors particular to early modern England

(1) *Primogeniture.* In all the upper ranks of society primogeniture was the rule.⁵³ Eldest sons usually inherited the great bulk of the estates of peers, gentry and yeoman farmers. Moreover, eldest sons received a better and longer education, and were better placed to obtain rich wives and good jobs at court and in government, thanks to the more energetic patronage of their fathers. Their life chances were therefore very good. In the sixteenth century younger sons were often left small landed estates, either in outright gift or for life or lives, but by the seventeenth century they could normally expect no more than a modest life annuity which expired at their death. They were therefore downwardly mobile from the very beginning of their careers, and were obliged to feed into the professional and business groups if they were to make their way in the world. If they failed,

⁵² J. Le Goff and R. Romano, "Paysages et Peuplement rural en Europe après le XI^e Siècle", Comité International des Sciences Historiques, XII^e Congrès International, 1965, *Rapports*, iii, pp. 21-2.

⁵³ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-83.

their children were liable to sink still further down the scale and disappear into the great mass of labourers and small tradesmen. Examples can be found of this downward process, but the paucity of evidence makes it virtually impossible to demonstrate the trend in statistical terms.

(2) *Family Patterns*. Much more research is needed on this subject but, so far as we can tell, marriages were arranged by parents with an eye to material advantage. At the upper levels among the heirs male there was relatively little interstratal marriage, although great wealth could often buy a socially good marriage for a daughter: thus between 1600 and 1659 some 4% of all marriages of peers were to the daughters or widows of aldermen. Some two thirds of the younger sons and daughters of peers were obliged to marry below them, presumably mostly into the squirearchy. At the lower levels of society, we know virtually nothing about marriage, and until some such study as Charles Tilly has just published on the Vendée has been completed, our ignorance will remain.⁵⁴

The two main requirements for upward mobility — capital and patronage — both hinged on the family. At a time when the interest rate was 10% and long-term credit hard to come by, the easiest road to riches was through inheritance or marriage: for example some 8% of London Jacobean aldermen had, when apprentices, married their master's daughter, while several of the richest merchants of Elizabethan Exeter had got a start by capturing the fancy of a rich widow.⁵⁵ Similarly family connections usually provided the initial leverage to get a man started on a career in this deferential society where success hinged on patronage, as is well exemplified in the case of Pepys.

(3) *The Value System*. Societies are profoundly affected by the way people think of themselves, regardless of objective criteria such as wealth. The most important aspects of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thinking which affected social mobility were:

(a) The Great Chain of Being. The official theory, which was very widely accepted, was that everyone had his place in the social system and that it was his duty to stay in it. Both upward and downward mobility were deplored. This theory was clearly at variance with the facts and in the early seventeenth century there began to be heard more egalitarian ideas which culminated in the

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, App. xxx. T. H. Hollingsworth, *The Demography of the British Peerage*, Supplement to *Population Studies*, xviii (1965), p. 9. H. Tilly, *The Vendée* (Cambridge, Mass.), 1964, p. 97.

⁵⁵ R. G. Lang, "The Greater Merchants of London in the early Seventeenth Century" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1963). Hoskins, "The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter", *loc. cit.*, p. 167.

social and political thinking of the Levellers. These views were egalitarian in that they expressed hostility to the concept of hierarchy, and a desire to reduce the distinctions that cut one group off from another: only the early Renaissance humanists had wished to preserve the hierarchy but to throw it open to talent. Both of these were minority opinions and the more common view was that the functional needs of a modern state could and should be matched to the traditional hierarchy of birth by educating each social group to meet its inherited responsibilities. This re-vamping of medieval social ideals to fit the new political conditions led to an intensification of hostility towards social mobility, which was at the same time undoubtedly on the increase. There was a flood of laments about the decay of ancient families, there was widespread and embittered comment on the ostentatious upward mobility of the merchant class, and there was also a good deal of complaint that consumption standards and patterns of life no longer conformed to the ideal status hierarchy.⁵⁶ This criticism made it very difficult for the arriviste to achieve social acceptability in his own person, although it was usually easy enough for his son.

On the other hand, we shall see that these traditional views were undergoing considerable modification, and attitudes towards the professions were softening markedly by the middle of the seventeenth century. The decline of war and the church as the two major occupations for the upper classes, the rise in educational standards, the shift to an ideal of administrative and political service to the state or local community, the growing realization of the potentialities for upward mobility of trade and the professions, all led increasing numbers of the gentry class, both elder and younger sons, to seek an outlet for their energies in a career in the law and government office, and some in trade and medicine. For both functional and social reasons, the status of the professions was rising relatively to that of the landed classes, so that by the late seventeenth century the church and the armed services were again becoming popular.

(b) Consumption as a test of status. All commentators stressed the obligation to maintain a suitable display as a mark of gentility or nobility. The cost of such displays rose under pressure from below, and there developed a double standard of consumption, that of the old feudal lord with open house and numerous servants in the country, and that of the cultivated Maccenas at Court. Either could be ruinous, and those who tried to maintain both usually spent

⁵⁶ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-36.

in excess of income. Excessive consumption was thus one of the principal causes of downward mobility,⁵⁷ and the obligation to spend to maintain status was a powerful brake on rapid upward economic mobility. At each stage the new rich had to pause and spend freely in order to establish themselves in their position in society.

Destabilizing Factors, 1540-1640

There was a whole series of strongly disruptive forces at work on society between 1540 and 1640, but which were not present to anything like the same degree before or after.

(1) *Demographic Growth.* Firm statistics are impossible to come by, but the best guess is that between 1500 and 1620 the population of England and Wales nearly doubled, from between 2½ and 3 million to 5 million. This added enormously to the labour force and caused horizontal mobility and urbanization. After 1620, however, there is every sign that, except perhaps in the north-west, plague, land hunger, commercial difficulties, family limitation, and emigration combined to reduce the increase to far more modest proportions.⁵⁸

(2) *Differential Fertility.* Between 1500 and 1630 there was almost certainly a differential fertility pattern by which the upper classes produced more children than the poor — the exact opposite of today. Thus an Elizabethan census of some 450 poor families with children in Norwich shows an average of 2·2 children per household, against between 4·25 and 4·7 children per household of well-to-do merchants of Norwich and Exeter. In the countryside the same discrepancy emerges from such data as are available.⁵⁹ The causes of this striking difference are not hard to find.

(a) There was a difference in the average age, duration, and frequency of marriage. For the eldest sons of peers (and probably also of squires) in the late sixteenth century, the average age of marriage (of those who did marry) was 21, and for all children and grandchildren of peers, including both heirs male and younger sons, it was 25 to 26.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 184-8, 547-86.

⁵⁸ *V.C.H., Leics.* (London, 1955), iii, pp. 137-47. W. G. Hoskins, "The Population of an English Village, 1086-1801: a study of Wigston Magna", in his *Provincial England*, pp. 185-200. Lionel Munby, *Hertfordshire Population Statistics, 1563-1801* (Hertfordshire Local History Council, 1964), p. 21. L. Owen, "The Population of Wales in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", *Trans. of the Cymmrodorion Society* (1959), pp. 113. W. G. Howson, "Plague, Poverty and Population in parts of North-West England, 1580-1720", *Lancs. and Chesh. Hist. Soc. Trans.*, cxii (1960), pp. 29-55.

⁵⁹ J. F. Pound, "An Elizabethan Census of the Poor", *Univ. of Birmingham Hist. Jl.*, viii (1962), p. 142. P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London, 1965), p. 69.

For yeomen and below, however, the average age of marriage in the early seventeenth century was 27 to 28. Far more important for fertility is the age of marriage of women, and it is here that the contrast is most marked. Between 1550 and 1625 the daughters of the upper classes married at 20 to 21, whereas daughters of the lower classes had to wait till they were 24 to 25. The reproduction period of the latter was therefore significantly shorter than that of the former, and in the absence of contraception would have resulted in between one and two children fewer per family. The reasons for this pattern of delayed marriage among the lower classes are fairly clear. In the artisan class the seven-year apprenticeship system put a stop to marriage before the age of 25 or thereabouts; in the countryside most young people began as living-in servants for either domestic or agricultural work, while the eldest sons of freeholders or tenant farmers had to wait for the death of their father before they could afford to marry. This pattern determined the female age of marriage, since it seems to have been a convention from top to bottom of seventeenth-century society to marry women only about three years younger than oneself.⁶⁰

Equally important in producing greater upper class fertility was the very high rate of re-marriage at this level of society, so that the interruption of the procreative process by death of husband or wife (which was an extremely frequent occurrence) was reduced to a minimum. There is reason to believe that both marriage and re-marriage was less easy for those in less favourable economic circumstances, and indeed at Lichfield at the end of the seventeenth century as many as 31% of all women in the fertile age-group between 25 and 44 were either widows or spinsters.⁶¹

(b) There was a difference in natural fertility: there is clear evidence that lactation impedes fertility, although the precise share of this effect between the physiological prevention of ovulation and a social taboo on sexual intercourse with a suckling woman is at present unknown.⁶² Now in the upper classes infants were put out to lower-class wet-nurses at birth, whereas prolonged lactation by the mother for up to two years was normal among the poor.

⁶⁰ Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 25. Laslett, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Stone, *op. cit.*, App. xxxiii and further information from peerage genealogies extracted by Mrs. J. C. Stone. Glass and Eversley, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 454, 468. P. Styles, "A Census of a Warwickshire Village in 1698", *Univ. of Birmingham Hist. Jl.*, iii (1951), p. 38.

⁶¹ Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 619-23. Glass and Eversley, *op. cit.*, p. 181. Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Styles, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶² P. Vincent, "Recherches sur la Fécondité Biologique", *Population*, xvi (1961), p. 112. L. Henry, "La Fécondité Naturelle", *Population*, xvi (1961), p. 633.

(c) There was a difference in infant mortality: more upper-class children survived to a marriageable age, since the death rate among upper-class infants was almost certainly lower than among the poor. In one parish of the city of York in the healthy years 1572-85, children under the age of two made up 34% of all burials. The genealogical records of the peerage suggest a considerably lower rate, the expectation of life at birth at that period being about 35 for boys and 38 for girls.⁶³ This was presumably because these children lived in the countryside rather than in towns, and were better housed, better clothed and better fed (though they were admittedly exposed to the attentions of feckless wet-nurses and of doctors, who often did more harm than good). Moreover, in the seventeenth century, there grew up institutions whose practical achievement, if not ostensible purpose, was to eliminate the unwanted children of the poor: both foundling hospitals and workhouses were highly effective infanticide agencies. In early eighteenth-century London, the latter were killing off some 88% of their children, and indeed in some parishes it was reported that "no infant had lived to be apprenticed from their workhouses".⁶⁴

As a result of all these factors, fertility among the upper classes was very high indeed, and the peers had an effective generation replacement rate of unparalleled magnitude — as high as 1.5 for those born between 1550 and 1600. In other words between about 1580 and 1630 the children of peers were producing 50% more children per generation.⁶⁵ The intense competition for jobs and offices in the decades before the Civil War can best be understood in the light of this remarkable demographic phenomenon.

(3) *Price Revolution*. Largely, but not entirely, as a result of this demographic growth, prices rose by between 400% and 650% from 1500 to 1640. Food prices (and therefore agricultural profits) soared, wages and other less adaptable revenues lagged behind. Whole social and occupational groups rose or fell as a result.

(4) *Free Land Market*. Between 1534 and 1650 the Crown seized all the revenues of the monasteries and the chantries, and substantial portions of those of the bishops. To pay for war, it immediately sold much of it, the rest being disposed of at intervals under financial stress. Including all sales of Crown and Church lands, as much as 25% or 30% of the total landed area of the country, which had previously been locked up in institutional hands, may have been

⁶³ *V.C.H., Yorks., loc. cit.*, p. 121. Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-7.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship, 1600-1763*, p. 352.

⁶⁵ Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-4.

released on to the private market between 1534 and 1660. By the Restoration the process was virtually complete.⁶⁶

This throwing of Crown and Church lands on to the market was accompanied by an equally important development which released a huge mass of private property, which had previously been tied up by legal restrictions against alienation. In the late middle ages the entail was a fairly effective barrier against the free disposition of property by the current owner; in the late seventeenth century the strict settlement served the same purpose. Between 1530 and 1660, however, there were relatively few and weak legal obstacles to the alienation of property. The result of this legal situation and of various economic pressures was the massive transfer of land by purchase and sale, which reached a peak in the 1610s. It should be noted that both factors involved, the seizure and dispersal of Church lands and the freeing of private property from restrictions on alienation, were the result of politico-legal action supported and encouraged by the landed classes themselves.

(5) *Increased Commercial Activity.* Foreign trade expanded in sudden bursts, particularly from 1508 to 1551, 1603 to 1620, and 1660 to 1688. More important, but less easy to document, may have been the growth of credit and transport facilities, and the consequent expansion of market activity inside the country. Their development increased both the numbers and the amount and range of mobility of the merchants.

(6) *Increased Litigation.* The end of violence, the growth of commercial activity, and the opening of the land market enormously increased the volume of litigation, the main result of which was to transfer wealth from the landed classes to the lawyers.⁶⁷

(7) *The Puritan Ethic.* The Puritans took a strongly moralistic — indeed medieval — approach to economic affairs, and the puritan merchant was consequently subject to almost intolerable psychological pressures as he strove both to maximize profits and to conform to ethical doctrines of the just price.⁶⁸ On the other hand, insistent puritan indoctrination on self-discipline and the virtue of striving in the calling could hardly avoid producing personalities with strong anal-erotic characteristics and a high achievement motive. Once the children were grown up, their obsession with thrift and hard,

⁶⁶ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 191, 240-2.

⁶⁸ The autobiography of the pious London and Boston merchant Robert Keyne is the *locus classicus* of this dilemma: B. Bailyn, ed., *The Apologia of Robert Keyne* (New York, 1965).

rationally planned, work carried them inexorably along towards the corruptions of wealth and upward social mobility.

There is some reason to believe, however, that this ideological factor did not become fully operative until the 1630s, for its best theoretical expression comes from Richard Baxter. Moreover, evidence of close association of religious Dissent with commercial success does not become plentiful until after the Restoration. Even then the association may have been as much an incidental by-product of exclusion from social and political life under the Clarendon Code as a direct consequence of religious ideology.

More important than this possible economic link, are the indirect and accidental consequences of Puritanism. One is the stress the Puritans laid on Bible-reading, and hence the spread of elementary education. Another is the self-confidence and sense of righteousness arising from contract theology and the doctrine of the Elect, which gave men the assurance to aspire high and to challenge their social, economic and political superiors. Furthermore the democratic, or at the very least oligarchic, tendencies of Puritan church organization worked against the hierarchical and authoritarian concept of society and was thus a destabilizing force. "Purity is Parity" was the slogan of their Anglican enemies, and there was something in the taunt.

Finally one can point to certain chronological correspondences which are, at the very least, suggestive of interconnections. The great age of social mobility precisely coincides with the great age of Puritanism. It is also, perhaps, rather too much of a coincidence that a content analysis of popular literature reveals a high peak of achievement motifs at precisely the same period.⁶⁹ This period of widespread challenges to the official system of values contrasts sharply with the post-Restoration development of Divine Right and Passive Obedience notions, and still more with the smug complacency with which Englishmen regarded the existing social and political order after the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

(8) *Educational Expansion.* The period 1560 to 1640 saw an unprecedented educational boom, which affected all but the lowest levels of society. This did not only produce quantitatively a remarkably literate society; it also turned out an educated gentry and aristocracy in excess of the capacity of government service to absorb them, and lower-class clergymen in excess of the cures of souls available. If for many the fruits of this educational expansion were bitter, the spread of literacy and the increased opportunities for higher

⁶⁹ M. Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), *passim*.
D. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (New York, 1961), p. 139.

education for the children of yeomen and artisans, must have increased the possibility of upward mobility for intellectual talent.⁷⁰ The secularization of the state may have destroyed the opportunity for the occasional child of the moderately humble to shoot up via the church to high political office, but the growth of education and of the professions opened up other and wider avenues to hardly less exalted positions.

After 1640 first the disturbance of the Civil War and then the social reaction of the Restoration put an end to the expansion of secondary and higher education, which went into a decline. After 1660 opportunities for social advancement via the professions must have been proportionately reduced, and confined to those who could still gain access to this narrowed educational ladder.

(9) *Revolutionary Political Action*. One would have supposed that the political upheavals of the English Revolution between 1640 and 1660 must have produced far-reaching social changes. Now it is certainly true that revolutionary activity was itself a vehicle for social mobility, in that previously submerged individuals, low-born parsons like Stephen Marshall, backwoods gentry like Oliver Cromwell, frustrated petty bourgeois like John Lilburne, found an opportunity to take the centre of the stage and even to seize power from their social superiors.

But the temporary collapse of the traditional order and the temporary inversion of rôles had no lasting effect upon English society. It has been shown conclusively that the old landlords, even the royalists, survived the Interregnum far better than might have been expected. No new class of successful generals, entrepreneurs and parliamentary committee men arose out of the 1650s, if only because Church, Crown, and Royalist lands were nearly all restored to their former owners at the Restoration.⁷¹ Lower down the social scale the schemes of the Levellers for converting copyhold tenure into freehold were defeated, and the tenantry and small freeholders were probably depressed by the burden of war taxation, plunder and billeting, rather than elevated by any new official concern for their welfare. The rising government debt and the expansion of government services enhanced the prestige and increased the fortunes of financiers, contractors and leading officials, but the significance of these factors

⁷⁰ Stone, "Educational Revolution", *loc. cit.*

⁷¹ J. Thirsk, "The Sale of Royalist land during the Interregnum", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., v (1952-3), pp. 188-207; and "The Restoration Land Settlement", *Jl. Mod. Hist.*, xxvi (1954), pp. 315-28. H. J. Habakkuk, "Landowners and the Civil War", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xviii [1] (1965), pp. 130-51.

does not seem to have been very great. Society in 1660 looked much as it had in 1640, and the number of new families who had risen, or old families who had fallen, over the previous twenty years does not seem to have been at all exceptional. In terms of permanent social change (as opposed to a permanent legacy of ideas) the English Revolution was the least successful of all the "Great Revolutions" in history.

Stabilizing Factors, 1650—1700

During the course of the late seventeenth century, a series of stabilizing factors became operative which severely dampened the process of social mobility, and at the same time eased social tensions.

(1) Of the main destabilizing factors, demographic growth, price revolution, free land market, educational expansion, Puritan ideological enthusiasm, and revolutionary activity had all been substantially reduced by 1660, some of them beginning to decline as early as 1620.

(2) There was a sharp drop in fertility and a sharp rise in mortality among the upper classes, so that cohorts born between 1625 and 1674 were barely reproducing themselves, and those between 1675 and 1749 were actually falling behind.⁷² This dramatic change from the pre-Civil War condition of an excess of children to be accommodated in a relatively static job market must enormously have reduced social competition twenty-five years later, that is after 1660.

(3) The natural result of a long period of social mobility, followed by civil war and violent political and social upheaval was a determination in the minds of all classes to put a damper on change, and to reassert traditional control by traditional authorities.⁷³ Although in some respects it only accelerated trends already visible in Early Stuart society, this post-Restoration conservative reaction was perhaps the most striking practical consequence of the Revolution. The results can be seen most clearly in the field of education, which was now carefully adjusted to the needs of the élite. Between 1570 and 1650 secondary and university education had been running wild, resulting in a free-for-all competitive struggle uncontrolled by the existing élite, which produced a surplus of qualified men for the available élite jobs, and which failed to indoctrinate them with élite values and élite behaviour patterns. Hence the lamentations of conservatives like Bacon and Hobbes in the early seventeenth century that education was undermining the basis of established society.

⁷² Hollingsworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

⁷³ Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 30-1.

After the Restoration, however, educational opportunities at this higher level were sharply reduced, and English educational patterns settled down to that tradition of "sponsored mobility" which it has retained ever since. By this system a minority of youths are selected by the élite and their agents at an early age for training in classical studies and aesthetic appreciation, in preparation for admission into this exclusive world. The eighteenth-century grammar schools and universities with their limited scholarship facilities, and the public schools of the nineteenth century, both performed this task of indoctrinating the aspiring few with the ideals and values of the existing élite. A recurrence of the dangerously competitive situation of the early seventeenth century has consequently been avoided ever since.

This adjustment of the educational system was only achieved, however, at considerable intellectual cost. It was not only in terms of quantity that English education declined: qualitatively, the Ancients triumphed over the Moderns, and enforced their view of the rôle of classical studies in the curriculum; socially the Royal Society, after a promising beginning as an intellectual group open to talent regardless of rank, degenerated into a club for gentlemanly dilettantes.⁷⁴ By 1720 England had lost its scientific pre-eminence, and the Universities had sunk into a torpor which only the pen of Gibbon could adequately describe.

Parallel to this development, rule by a narrow élite was strengthened at all levels of government. Control of the parish fell into the hands of select vestries of "the better sort". County administration, for example in Northamptonshire, was confined to a smaller, more stable and more closed-off élite group of families.⁷⁵ In the towns the same process had long been at work as control of both guilds and civic government passed into the hands of an ever smaller and less fluid oligarchy. At the Freeman level the same thing was happening, and at York the closing of the ranks seems to have occurred before the end of the sixteenth century. In 1509-18, only 16% of Freeman were sons of Freeman, but the proportion had jumped to 38% by 1594-1603, and to 43% by 1675-99. The same trend is visible at Leicester, and its continuance is indicated by the rise of patrimony and purchase

⁷⁴ Stone, "Educational Revolution", *loc. cit.* M. 'Espinasse, "The Decline and Fall of Restoration Science", *Past and Present*, no. 14 (Nov., 1958), pp. 71-89.

⁷⁵ W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest* (Cambridge, 1946), pp. 18-19. A. Everitt, "Social Mobility in Early Modern England", *Past and Present*, no. 33 (Apr., 1966).

as means of entry into several of the Livery Companies of London in the eighteenth century.⁷⁶

In both the Church and government service, hereditary succession became more marked. In the former this was an inevitable by-product of clerical marriage and growing respect for the dignity of the cloth. In the dioceses of Oxford and Worcester, the proportion of parish clergy who were the sons of clergymen rose from 5% in 1600 to 23% in 1640. In the 1630s, over a quarter of the bishops were sons of clergymen.⁷⁷ By 1660 the Anglican Church was well on the way to becoming a markedly hereditary profession.

Well before the Civil War there is evidence of considerable nepotism in government service. In the early seventeenth century, patrimony and patronage were the two principal keys to entry into government service, with purchase a bad third. The rôle of patrimony is shown by the fact that the fathers of more than half the officials who were sons of peers or knights, had themselves been in government service. Of the whole body, 18% were second generation in the royal service. Almost half came from the squirearchy and above, and about two thirds from the gentry or above. The critical question is whether or not the situation was getting worse, and this we just do not know. Charles I was certainly reacting against this tendency in the 1630s, but this may be evidence of a new political attitude towards the bureaucracy by the absolute monarch rather than of any actual change in recruitment patterns.⁷⁸ All one can say is that an increasing trend towards nepotism and social exclusiveness is what *a priori* one would expect to result from the very high reproduction rate of the landed classes over the previous sixty years.

V

CONSEQUENCES

The Century of Mobility, 1540-1640

Modern societies are learning slowly that widening opportunities and rapid mobility are not necessarily conducive to human contentment. Given the traditional and conservative value system of the age,

⁷⁶ A. H. Johnson, *The History of the Worshipful Company of Drapers* (Oxford, 1914-22), ii, pp. 54-5, 197 n. 1; iv, pp. 253-4, 634, 643. *V.C.H. Yorks, loc. cit.*, pp. 128, 166. W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England*, p. 109. W. K. Kahl, "Apprenticeship and the Freedom of London Livery Companies, 1690-1750", *Guildhall Miscellany*, vii (1956), pp. 17-20.

⁷⁷ Barratt, thesis cited note 5, p. 19. Information supplied by Mr. F. S. Odo.

⁷⁸ Aylmer, *op. cit.*, ch. iii and pp. 263-5.

the great increase in mobility of all kinds in the hundred years from 1540 to 1640 probably created discontent rather than satisfaction, due primarily to the wide discrepancies which developed between the three sectors of wealth, status and power.

(1) *Social Discontent.* This was felt by both the upwardly and the downwardly mobile. One economically rising group, the merchants, felt themselves denied social prestige, and resented the affront. Other economically advancing groups, the successful lawyers and the greater squires, felt themselves excluded from power by the Court, and also resented the affront. Of the declining groups, the wage-earners were in a state of abject misery which found intermittent relief in rioting and mob-violence. The clergy lamented their loss of income and status relative to those of the laity, and under Laud they allied themselves with the Crown in a vain attempt to recover both. An economically static group, the humble parish gentry, resented their stagnation and were consumed with envy at the conspicuous success of merchants, courtiers and squires. Those nearest London felt the resentment most keenly, since they were most aware of the discrepancy in opportunities. Though the gentry of the home counties were better off economically than those of the north and west they were more bitter since they knew what they were missing. Hence the loyalty to Church and King of the poor backwoodsmen of the west and north in the Civil War, and the rallying to the Independent cause of a section of the small gentry of the home counties.

(2) *Religious Discontent.* How Puritanism affected mobility has already been discussed, but we must now examine how mobility affected Puritanism. After all, the two rose and fell together in extraordinary unison, and a reciprocal feed-back system of causation is by no means theoretically impossible. Professor Walzer has suggested that rigid self-discipline at the service of an ideology is one possible response to a condition of anxiety induced by the overthrow of stable social relationships and agreed political, ethical and religious ideals; cheerful opportunism, quietistic withdrawal, and fierce nostalgia for a lost world are others.⁷⁹ It is not difficult to understand the predicament of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Englishmen as the ancient props of their universe fell away. Competing religious ideologies shattered the unquestioning and habit-forming faith of the past; the failure of the Anglican Church to put its house in order left it open to every enterprising under-graduate to draw up an alternative scheme for ecclesiastical

⁷⁹ Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, *passim*.

organization; constitutional conflicts between Commons and Crown disturbed conventional notions of the rôle of the state and posed the insoluble question of sovereignty; the collapse of the quasi-feudal ties of hereditary dependence left men free to seek clientage where they could find it; the decline of the craft guilds freed labour from both rules and companionship; the bonds of kinship were loosened under pressure from new religious and political associations, and from new ideals of love and freedom within the nuclear family. The upsetting of the hierarchy of status as a result of rapid social mobility was thus just one of many factors which generated unease, anxiety, anomie.

At present, it is hardly possible to identify Puritanism as the ideology of groups clearly moving in any particular direction. Many were undoubtedly members of upwardly mobile groups seeking security, companionship and assured status in the emerging society of the seventeenth century. There were newly risen Henrician peers and officials like the Dudleys, Cecils, Norths; rich squires at last freed from dependence on aristocratic power, like Knightley, Barrington and Hampden; new academics and preaching ministers like Laurence Chaderton and Anthony Gilby; new merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans in the flourishing towns. Others were members of the static small gentry class bewildered by the transformation around them and seeking some support, like Oliver Cromwell. Both revolutionary Puritanism and the reactionary "Church and King" conservatism of Laud, Stafford and the backwoods royalists are alternate responses to identical pressures of social change. On the other hand, many of the key figures in the movement, like their Huguenot counterparts in France, seem to belong to rich, ancient, self-confident families, who should have been immune from such fears. The thesis is an attractive one, but there are still many loose ends to be tidied up.

The Decades of Revolution, 1640-1660

I have argued at length elsewhere that it was the temporary decline in status and income of the nobles relative to the gentry which allowed the house of commons to take the centre of the political stage; and that it was this decline in prestige, together with a similar decline of the higher clergy and the ineptitude of the remedies adopted by the Stuarts, which allowed the gentry in the Commons successfully to challenge the establishment in Church and State in 1640. Furthermore it was their vision of an increasingly corrupt, wealthy, wasteful and wicked Establishment which galvanized the squirearchy into

action. Finally, it was the rise in education and in numbers of the urban petty bourgeois, especially of London, which made possible the development of the Leveller Party and of Leveller ideas in the late 1640s. If these hypotheses are correct, the shifts in wealth and prestige among the various status and occupational groups, and the "contest mobility" created by the expansion of education during the previous hundred years, played no small part in generating the tensions that led to political breakdown in 1640, to Civil War in 1642, and to the emergence of radicalism in 1647.

Post-Restoration Stability, 1660-1700

One of the obvious conclusions of this paper is that much more, and more sociologically and statistically sophisticated, research is needed before we will be in a position to confirm or refute some of the most basic assumptions that are commonly made about the character of early modern English society. Contemporaries asserted, and posterity has followed them in believing, that by European standards England was an exceptionally mobile society in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and that this was perhaps the main reason why England was the first European nation to industrialize and why it was successful in avoiding bloody revolution in the process. Now there is no doubt that primogeniture and the confining of a title to the eldest son ensured a steady flow of downwardly mobile younger sons, and so made English society at all times different from that of Europe. But recent work on France has revealed a hitherto unsuspected degree of upward mobility in the apparently caste-structured society of the *ancien régime*. It was Turgot who remarked that "il n'est aucun homme riche qui sur le champ ne devienne noble; en sorte que le corps de nobles comprend tout le corps des riches".⁸⁰ It may well be that it was only in the century 1540-1640, when land was changing hands at a speed which was quite unprecedented between 1200 and 1900, that there was any unusual mobility in the upper ranks of English society as a whole. Could it be that English society closed ranks a century earlier than France, in the late seventeenth instead of the late eighteenth century, and that the reputation enjoyed by pre-industrial England as an unusually mobile society is largely an illusion based on false assumptions and a dearth of statistical evidence?

⁸⁰ F. L. Ford, *Robe and Sword* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953). P. Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis de 1600 à 1730* (Paris, 1960). G. Bluche, *Les Magistrats du Parlement de Paris au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1960). Turgot is quoted by Betty Behrens in *Hist. Jnl.*, viii (1965), p. 123.

If high mobility was only a temporary phenomenon, however, it effected certain structural changes which had profound and lasting results, and which undoubtedly made England rather different from France in the age of Voltaire. The first was the increase in numbers of the squirearchy and gentry, which had far-reaching political and social consequences. Politically, it meant a massive numerical extension of the political nation and so provided the basis for the eighteenth-century constitutional system, which was operated in rough conformity to the interests and aspirations of this broad-based class.

Socially, it meant that for the first time in history the majority of the population were living directly under the eye of a member of the ruling élite. If we may generalize from Buckinghamshire and Rutlandshire, in 1522 only about one village in ten had a resident squire; by 1680 the proportion in the whole country had risen to over two thirds.⁸¹ The potentialities for social and political control were thus greatly increased over what they had been two hundred years before.

The second structural change was the rise of the commercial and professional classes in numbers and wealth, and their consequent acquisition both of a share in political decision-making and of social recognition. The massive increase in numbers had the important social function of absorbing the younger sons pushed out of the landed classes by the primogeniture system. The merchants had little formal power but their economic interests closely interlocked with those of the landed classes, thanks to the dependence of the price of land on the price of wool, in turn dependent on the cloth export trade. The maintenance of this trade was also of vital concern to the government, since a slump not only created a threat to social stability in the clothing areas due to unemployment, but also reduced government revenue from the customs. Furthermore, the growing rôle of the leading London merchants as government creditors and contractors, culminating in the foundation of the Bank of England, gave them considerable behind-the-scenes influence. As a result, foreign, military, and economic policies were increasingly conducted with an eye to the interests, and with the advice, of this merchant élite.⁸²

Along with their admission to the political nation went a rise in

⁸¹ J. Cornwall, "The Early Tudor Gentry", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xvii (1964-5), p. 460. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, pp. 62-3.

⁸² B. E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600-42* (Cambridge, 1959), ch. x. R. Ashton, *The Crown and the Money Market, 1603-40* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 67-78.

their social status. There was a slow but steady shift of attitudes on the part of the landed classes, a growing recognition that the previously anomalous occupational categories formed a series of semi-independent and parallel status hierarchies — the “San Gimignano model”. By the late seventeenth century merchants, lawyers, clergymen and officials were held in much less contempt than they had been a century earlier. The hypothesis (which has yet to be proved) that many of these middle-class occupational groups were of gentry origin would make it that much easier for the landed classes to treat them with respect. It was perhaps this which gave foreigners the illusion that England was a more mobile society than their own.

Three consequences followed from this rise in status. Firstly, there was much more intermarriage between the landed classes and the appropriate economic strata of these occupational groups. Thus of the 105 armigerous gentry of Warwickshire recognized by the Heralds in 1682, two-thirds had mercantile connections (mostly with London) built into their pedigrees somewhere, though only a handful may have owed their economic prosperity primarily to this source. Secondly, the gentry lost their earlier reluctance to put their sons into trade. By the middle third of the seventeenth century nearly half the Freemen of the Drapers’ Company of Shrewsbury and nearly a fifth of the London Stationers’ Company apprentices were coming from gentry stock.⁸³ Thirdly, the business or professional man could acquire the title of “Gent.,” and on occasion even “Esquire”, without having to buy an estate and cut himself off from his economic roots. As early as 1635, there were nearly 1,200 persons resident in London who described themselves as gentlemen, the great majority of whom were engaged in trade or in some professional occupation. In one Hundred of Warwickshire, in the late seventeenth century, a third of the “gentlemen” of the area were now resident in the town of Warwick, and most of them were probably earning their living there.⁸⁴ The substantial shrinkage of land offered for sale on the market thus coincided with a distinct, if less pronounced, shrinkage of demand. An estate was still essential for entry into the restricted élite who

⁸³ Laslett, *op. cit.*, pp. 186, 191. P. Styles, “The Heralds’ Visitation of Warwickshire in 1682-3”, *Birmingham Arch. Soc. Trans.*, lxxi (1953), pp. 131-2. T. C. Mendenhall, *The Shrewsbury Drapers and the Welsh Wool Trade in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 89-91, and App. C. Calculations from the figures supplied in D. F. Mackenzie, “Apprentices in the Stationers’ Company, 1555-1640”, *The Library*, 5th ser., xiii (1958), pp. 296-7.

⁸⁴ J. Grant, “The Gentry of London in the Reign of Charles I”, *Univ. of Birmingham Hist. Jl.*, viii (1962), pp. 197-201. P. Styles, “The Social Structure of Kington Hundred . . .”, *Birmingham Arch. Soc. Trans.*, lxxi (1953), p. 106.

wielded political and administrative power at both county and national levels, but it was no longer necessary in order to be recognized as the social equal of a minor landed gentleman. If 1540-1640 saw the rise of the gentry, 1600-1700 saw the rise of the "pseudo-gentry".

A striking example of this development is Henry Bell. He was born in 1647, his father being an Alderman of King's Lynn, a mercer by trade, and twice mayor of the town. Henry was educated at the local grammar-school and at Cambridge, then spent his life as a merchant and civic dignitary of Lynn, following in his father's footsteps as alderman and twice mayor of the town. But despite this impeccably bourgeois family and career, Bell had gone on the Grand Tour, and was a virtuoso whose great passion in life seems to have been the arts. He wrote a treatise on the invention of painting before the Flood, he was one of the half-dozen Englishmen with a good professional knowledge of Italian architecture, and he practised as an architect on the side. On the other hand his clientele was as urban as himself, being the corporation of Northampton, who enlisted his services in the rebuilding of the town after a disastrous fire, and the authorities and dignitaries of his home town of Lynn.⁸⁵ Here in the flesh is the true *bourgeois gentilhomme*, the self-assured townsman and tradesman with the education, the values and the interests of the cultivated aristocrat. He is a peculiarly English phenomenon, impossible before the late seventeenth century, whose like was unknown to Molière.

Further evidence of this trend rather further down the social scale may be seen in the blurring of that previously crucial division between gentlemen and others by the emergence of a new titular group, sandwiched in between, and comprising parts of, the lesser gentry on the one hand and the upper yeomanry and shopkeepers on the other. These were the people, the numbers of whom were steadily increasing as the seventeenth century wore on, whose names in official lists, etc. were prefixed by the word "Mr."⁸⁶ By 1700 the topmost elements of Group 3 and the lowest elements of Group 4 were beginning to form another status group of their own.

These two structural changes caused by the mobility of the previous hundred years were accompanied in the late seventeenth century by that deliberate restriction of mobility channels which has already been described. At the upper levels there was the narrowing of the avenues of mobility, partly by legal changes devised to preserve

⁸⁵ H. M. Colvin and L. M. Wodehouse, "Henry Bell of King's Lynn", *Architectural History*, iv (1961), pp. 41-62.

⁸⁶ Styles, "Kineton Hundred", *loc. cit.*, pp. 107-8.

existing fortunes and property, and to restrict to established families access to positions of wealth and power; partly by biological changes which caused the striking reduction of the reproduction rate of the upper classes between 1630 and 1740; and partly by economic changes which shut off the disturbing forces of demographic growth and price inflation. At the lower level there was the attempted restriction of horizontal mobility by the pass-law system introduced by the Act of Settlement of 1662; the reduction of educational opportunities to a pattern of carefully sponsored mobility for a selected few; the reduction of the last remaining democratic elements in parish, guild and urban government; and the perversion of the national electoral process by the extravagant use of corruption. These developments prepared the way for the political and social stability of the century following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, during which England was governed by a broad-based but relatively closed oligarchy, part landed, part monied, under the leadership of a still narrower élite of extremely wealthy and influential noble landowners.

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