

## Victorian Values and the Upper Classes

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AN article under this title could adopt two radically different approaches. It could deal with the extent to which the Victorian upper classes accepted or rejected a specific group of 'Victorian Values', so called because they in some way encapsulated the essence of Victorianism. Or it could be a discussion of all the values which informed the upper classes in the Victorian period.

In fact it opts for the second approach. In the welter of sets of values which were to be found at work in different groups and circumstances during the sixty-three years of Victoria's reign, it seems neither possible nor desirable to try to select one group as quintessentially Victorian. Whereas the values to be found among the Victorian upper classes at least provide a real object of enquiry, even if a far from simple one. It is complex because there is so much variety. What common ground is there, for instance, between the 4th Marquis of Hastings, who wasted his fortune, dissipated his health, and died worn out and near bankrupt at the age of 26 in 1868, and his almost exact contemporary the 2nd Viscount Halifax, politician and pillar of the High Church, who died, revered by all, at the age of 93 in 1934. And yet both were, in rather extreme forms, representative of different sections of the High Victorian upper classes.

Not only were upper class values varied; they cannot be fitted into a drawer labelled 'upper class only', as distinct from middle or lower class values. A more convincing model is one in which different sets of values are

seen working through different (though sometimes overlapping) sections of all classes. One can see this model at work, more generally, in all the different interests and enthusiasms which informed the Victorians. Almost any Victorian activity can be followed up the social pyramid to a peak made up of aristocrats or upper gentry. Those lower down the pyramid looked for such people, if possible to lead them, but at least to give their group or movement the seal of upper class approval, and, as it were, symbolize and sanctify for them their own enthusiasms. And so the High Church looked to Lord Halifax in England or Lord Glasgow in Scotland, the evangelicals to Lords Shaftesbury, Harrowby, Tollemache and Radstock, the Catholics to the Earl of Shrewsbury and, later, the Duke of Norfolk and the Marquis of Bute; the Temperance movement to Lord Stanhope, Lord and Lady Carlisle, Lady Henry Somerset and Sir Walter Trevelyan; the racing fraternity to the grandees of the Jockey Club; scientists to the 7th Duke of Devonshire, pugilists to Lord Queensberry, astronomers to Lord Lindsay, firemen and fire brigades to the Duke of Sutherland, musicians to Lord Dudley, botanists to Lord De la Warr, widows to Lord Cholmondeley, and so on and so on.<sup>1</sup> In every county the farming community looked up to an inevitable peer, who was chairman of their county agricultural society; and farmers all over Britain could feel that Lord Hartington spoke for them when he said that the proudest moment of his life was when his pig won first prize at Skipton Fair.<sup>2</sup>

It is worth picking out three large, and certainly not mutually exclusive groups from the complex Victorian scene, and looking at them in more detail with particular emphasis on the upper classes. These are earnest Victorians, Victorian swells, and Victorian gentlemen.

'Earnest Victorians' is perhaps too vague a category but it does correspond to something which anyone who has studied the Victorian period will recognize. It entails an attitude to life both serious and moral, characteristic of people who took their religion and their marriage-vows seriously, and believed that they were put in this world to cultivate their talents and assets for the benefit of others, not themselves, and had a duty to do so. The earnest middle-class Victorians have been much written about. The earnest working-class Victorians included all those serious-minded artisans who attended chapel, temperance meetings and evening lectures, and became the backbone of the Co-operative movement and the Trades Unions. It was a commonplace amongst the Victorians themselves that the Victorian upper classes, or at least a significant section of them, had also

<sup>1</sup> Much of this list derives from the list of the relevant societies and their chairmen in the 1860s editions of *Whitaker's Almanack*.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Holland, *Life of Spencer Compton, 8th Duke of Devonshire* (1911), vol. 2 p. 226.

become earnest in this way. As Charles Kingsley put it, in 1862, 'the attitude of the British upper classes has undergone a noble change. There is no aristocracy in the world, and there never has been, as far as I know, which has so honourably repented, and brought forth fruits meet for repentance; which has so cheerfully asked what its duty was, that it might do it.'<sup>3</sup>

Duty is the operative word. In 1844 Lord Shaftesbury condemned Eton and approved of Rugby in these terms: 'It does not make the man required for the coming generation. We must have nobler, deeper, and sterner stuff; less of refinement and more of truth; more of the inward, not so much of the outward gentleman; a rigid sense of duty, but a delicate sense of honour; a just estimate of rank and property, not as matters of personal enjoyment and display but as gifts from God, bringing with them serious responsibilities, and involving a fearful account; a contempt of ridicule, not a dread of it; a desire and a courage to live for the service of God and the best interests of mankind . . .'<sup>4</sup>

Florence Nightingale, who used the clarion call of duty to drive the supremely aristocratic Sidney Herbert to his death, portrayed him as follows: 'Eager and enthusiastic in duty, cared little for the reward, and not at all for the credit. No assertion of self; purity of nature and high principle'.<sup>5</sup> Writing about himself and his home he commented that: 'There is not a spot about Wilton which I do not love as if it were a person. If one had nothing to do but consult one's own taste and one's own ease I should be too glad to live down here a domestic life'.<sup>6</sup>

When the 1st Duke of Westminster died in 1899 one of his obituaries wrote of him that 'he thought of himself not so much as a private millionaire as the head of a great public institution or trust'.<sup>7</sup> The biographer of the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne wrote as follows about that most patrician of late Victorian statesmen: 'A great noble, cultivated and accomplished, the owner of historic titles and of historic houses, he was one of those who, from motives of duty and patriotism, deliberately chose the toil and responsibility of political life in preference to the existence of cultured ease and pleasure which was within his reach'.<sup>8</sup>

At the head of this particular pyramid Queen Victoria and the Prince

<sup>3</sup> Charles Kingsley, 'Preface to the *Undergraduates of Cambridge*' in the 1862 edition of *Alton Locke*.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury*. K.G. (London, 1886), vol. 2, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Cecil Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale 1820-1910* (London, 1950), p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Gervase Huxley, *Victorian Duke* (London, 1967), p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Newton, *Lord Lansdowne; a Biography* (London, 1929), p. 491. Lansdowne was at Balliol and Jowett had impressed on him that 'wealth and rank are means and not ends, and may be the greatest evil or the greatest good as they are used'. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Consort set the supreme example of domesticity, purity, religious seriousness and devotion to duty – killing devotion, in the case of the Prince Consort as of Sidney Herbert. They are sometimes considered to have been adopting middle class values in doing so.<sup>9</sup> It is surely more meaningful to say that they epitomized and encouraged a trend which could be found in all classes, and had roots running well back into the early decades of the century. There was a sizeable section of the Victorian upper classes who lived very different lives from those lived by Victoria and Albert, who were disapproved of by Victoria and Albert and a powerful section of the middle classes in consequence – and who made fun of Victoria and, especially, Albert in their turn. But there was an equally important section who gave Victoria and Albert their admiration and devotion and were all that they in their turn could have wished for: high-minded, church-going families, to give an example from many, like the Lytteltons of Hagley, so perfectly presented in the diaries of Lucy Lyttelton, later Lady Frederick Cavendish.<sup>10</sup>

No doubt this kind of seriousness was stimulated by members of the middle classes, by Arnold at Rugby, for instance, or Jowett at Balliol. But this is to say no more than that upper class life-styles have always been influenced by idea-preaching and image-creating members of the classes below them – in a very different way, for instance, by Beau Nash and Beau Brummel in Georgian days. There does not seem much point in trying to give class tags to movements of ideas, and to argue about the contribution to the Tractarians of the upper class Pusey, and the middle class Keble and Newman, or to radical thought of the upper class Shelley and the middle class Godwin.

The contrast, in an upper class context, between earnest Victorians and the world of Victorian swells is beautifully made in *Left Hand, Right Hand*, the first volume of Osbert Sitwell's reminiscences. He compares the character of his paternal grandmother Louisa Lady Sitwell with his maternal grandparents, the Earl and Countess of Londesborough.<sup>11</sup> Lady Sitwell (an Irish Earl's daughter) was a good and pious Evangelical, who refused to go to the theatre, moved in a circle of Low Church clergymen, founded a home for fallen women, and poured out her religious meditations into her diary; she was the widow of a baronet who had been as serious-minded

<sup>9</sup> For example James Laver, *Victorian Vista* (London, 1954), p. 26. 'Each age seems, on retrospect, to be dominated by one particular class, the features of whose life we regard as characteristic of the whole epoch. In this sense, the Victorian era was essentially middle class. Even royalty cultivated the bourgeois virtues . . .'

<sup>10</sup> *The Diary of Lady Frederick Cavendish*, ed. John Bailey, 2 vols, (London, 1927).

<sup>11</sup> O. Sitwell, *Left Hand, Right Hand* (London, 1945), esp. pp. 128–47 (Londesborough), 147–159 (Sitwell).

as herself – and a friend of Lord Shaftesbury's. Lord Londesborough was one of the richest peers in England. Sitwell quotes a description of him at the Henley Regatta: 'Swell, I love that word, for a person of extreme elegance and splendour. Our permanent local swell, and a big one at that, was Lord Londesborough. The scene . . . of his entertaining Henley parties was a houseboat, named the Ark, from which, however, we could issue if we wished, and take a little tour in punts or canoes or skiffs on the crowded river. But the company it was that so greatly delighted me . . . theatrical stars of both sexes, with the very prettiest of the actresses, together with a select band of our host's innumerable friends, for the most part, like himself, of noble rank . . . Lord Londesborough was a patron of the stage, and was reputed to have lost £30,000 in one production . . . Babel and Bijou, a musical spectacle'. As his grandson put it: 'Yachts, races, coaches, carriages, sport of every kind, especially shooting, speculation and the stage, were the chief channel he had found for ridding himself of his earthly burden'.<sup>12</sup> The quintessential scene of his glory was the intensely fashionable annual cricket week at Scarborough which he inaugurated and presided over from his Scarborough house, Londesborough Lodge. When at Scarborough he would process down to the sea front on three-quarters of a mile of red carpet, laid down for the occasion.<sup>13</sup>

Dash and style were the qualities expected of a swell. He was exquisitely turned out; he shone and glowed all over, whether in Piccadilly or on the hunting field, and the same care informed his grooms, his footmen, his beaters, his gleaming horses and carriages. Lord Londesborough's was one of the four equipages so faultless that it was allowed inside the railings at Buckingham Palace on state occasions (a piece of information we owe, rather unexpectedly, to the diarist Kilvert).<sup>14</sup> The main claim to fame of the 5th Earl of Hardwicke is that he invented a preparation which gave an extra sheen to his top-hat. 'I can see him now', wrote Lady Battersea, 'in faultless attire, with his carefully arranged black satin tie, his beautiful pearl pin, his lustrous hat balanced at a certain angle on his well-brushed hair, his coat-sleeves always showing precisely the same amount of white cuff, his pleased-with-himself-and-the-world expression'.<sup>15</sup>

Swells were not expected to be faithful to their wives; having mistresses or affairs with married women of their own class was acceptable and even admired. Nor were they expected to pay their tradesmen, or bother about money, except about ways of getting rid of it. As Captain Donald Shaw, writing as 'One of the Old Brigade', put it in *London in the*

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 30, quoting W.B. Maxwell, *Time Gathered* (London, 1937).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> *Kilvert's Diary*, ed. W. Plomer (London, 1938–40), vol. 2, p. 177 (7 April 1872).

<sup>15</sup> Constance, Lady Battersea, *Reminiscences* (London, 1922), p. 153.

*Sixties*, there were only two unforgiveable sins: buggery and cheating at cards.<sup>16</sup>

There is no question who was at the top of the hierarchy of swells: to Queen Victoria's grief it was the Prince of Wales. She grieved because the world of the swells lacked so entirely the values which her husband had bequeathed to her. As Lady Warwick, who moved in the Prince of Wales's set as a young married woman, wrote in her recollections, 'we considered the heads of historic houses who read serious works, encouraged scientists, and the like, very, very dull, and they had only the scantiest contact with us . . . On rare occasions, if a book made a sufficient stir, we might read it, or, better still, get somebody to tell us about it, and so save us the trouble'. But, as she put it, 'of course the Marlborough House set had glamour; indeed, glamour was its particular asset'.<sup>17</sup>

Glamour was expensive. Racehorses, actresses and lavish entertaining cost money, not least entertaining the Prince of Wales. Among mid-Victorian swells both Lord Londesborough and Lord Chaplin had to sell substantial portions of their estates. Lord Hardwicke went bankrupt in 1881. Christopher Sykes, the Prince of Wales's especial friend, would have gone bankrupt, if the Prince had not baled him out.<sup>18</sup> Lord Hastings ran through almost all his very large fortune in four years, mainly on the race-course. He lost his money in style. In 1867 he was cheered on the race-course at Ascot because he had lost £120,000 in a week's racing, had taken the loss so coolly and paid up so promptly.<sup>19</sup> That was the style of a swell. It was a long way removed from Lord Shaftesbury, presiding over missionary meetings at Exeter Hall.<sup>20</sup>

The line of the swells, whose great days were in the sixties, seventies and eighties, can be traced back to the dandies and bucks of late Georgian and

<sup>16</sup> Donald Shaw, *London in the Sixties* (1908), p. 145, quoting George Payne. The first offence is not specifically named, but the quoted example of the 'recent H - affair' involving the brother of a peer and major in a crack regiment seems to refer to Charles Hammond, Lord Arthur Somerset and the Cleveland Street scandal.

<sup>17</sup> Frances, Countess of Warwick, *Afterthoughts* (London, 1931), pp. 40-1.

<sup>18</sup> Sitwell, *op.cit.*, pp. 71, 132-33 (Londesborough); *Dict. National Biography*, supplement II (Chaplin); Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography* (London, 1892-1912) 5 (Supplement II), entry under Hardwicke; Christopher Sykes, *Four Studies in Loyalty* (London, 1946), pp. 11-39. Other Victorian swells who experienced serious financial troubles included Lord Dupplin, Charles Buller, the 8th Duke of Beaufort, and Sir Frederick Johnstone. No doubt their situation was exacerbated by the agricultural depression in the last decades of the century.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Blyth's readably slapdash *The Pocket Venus: a Victorian Scandal* (London, 1966) appears to be the only reasonably full-length study of Lord Hastings, and contains some good contemporary quotations.

<sup>20</sup> If one tried to relate swells to Matthew Arnold's barbarians one might say that all upper class swells were barbarians, but not all barbarians were swells.

early Victorian days, and forward well into the century to peers like the 'Yellow Earl' of Lonsdale, or the young men of title who waited for their girls at the stage door of the Gaiety – and sometimes married them.<sup>21</sup> But they can also be traced down the social scale through the middle class to the working classes. At every level one can find men who sought for the same qualities of dash and style in dress or behaviour, and were careless about money and ready to throw it about, whether or not they had it.

An obvious image creator is George Leybourne, both in himself and in his music-hall role as Champagne Charlie:

From coffee and from supper room  
From Poplar and Pall Mall  
The girls on seeing me exclaim:  
'Oh What a Champagne Swell'

This hit-song, which he first sang on the stage of the Canterbury Music-Hall in 1868, was promoted off the stage by his enterprising manager Bill Holland and by the Moët Champagne company, which put up the necessary money. Leybourne, dressed as a swell and smoking a big cigar, drove round London in a spanking turnout pulled by glistening horses, visiting public houses to distribute free champagne. He was to have numerous imitators on and off the music hall stages, and himself, in faultless turnout, to continue to sing Champagne Charlie and related songs, until he sank out of sight in the 1880s, almost literally beneath a sea of alcohol.<sup>22</sup>

'Champagne Charlie' became a familiar metaphor, sometimes for a swell of any class (Lord Hardwicke, for instance, was nicknamed Champagne Charlie),<sup>23</sup> but more especially for a middle or working class swell. Here, for instance, is G.R. Sims describing life in and around the Haymarket in 1867: 'Devil-may-care dukes, madcap marquises and eccentric earls mingled freely with the Champagne Charlies of the counting house and the counter'.<sup>24</sup>

Who were these Champagne Charlies? Clearly, they did not have chapel values even if they were occasionally chapel by birth. In a Lancashire context John K. Walton has perceptively analysed the division in the middle classes between non-conformist Liberals and Church of England Conservatives;<sup>25</sup> and perhaps middle class swells were more likely to come

<sup>21</sup> Eight Gaiety girls married into the peerage between 1884 and 1924. See W. Macqueen-Pope, *Gaiety: Theatre of Enchantment* (London, 1949), *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> *The Illustrated Victorian Songbook*, ed. Aline Waites & Robin Hunter (London, c. 1979), pp. 92–4; interview with William Holland, q. *Blackpool Gazette*, 3 January 1896.

<sup>23</sup> Battersea, loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup> G.R. Sims, *Glances Back* (London, 1917), p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> John K. Walton, *Lancashire: a Social History, 1558–1939* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 221–38.

from the latter. One would expect a sizeable number of them to have been connected with the entertainment world, the drink trade, up-market shops, horses, racing or sport of one kind or another. But even outside those directly working in these worlds one does not have to penetrate very deeply into Victorian society to realize that a substantial section of the Victorian middle classes fail to correspond to the puritanical, straight-laced image which has been popularly attached to them. The size and strength of this other world helps explain the fervour with which earnest Victorians attacked it. I can't pretend to have investigated it with any thoroughness, but here are a number of examples – samples, I am sure, from a much larger population.

From the public-house world comes Colonel Baker (1841–99), of Baker Brothers, who started business with his brothers as a licensed victualler in the 1870s, established a string of large London pubs, cafés and hotels around Leicester Square, became a Colonel in the Honourable Artillery Company, and had a family and a substantial house in Cumberland Terrace, Regent's Park – and a mistress and a second family in Gordon Square.<sup>26</sup> His career is reminiscent of that of Alfred Roger Ackerley in the next generation, as so brilliantly portrayed by J.R. Ackerley in *My Father and I*: very much a young swell in the 1880s, going on to become a partner in Fyfe's banana business, earning the nickname 'The Banana King', and fathering two families, both illegitimate and unaware of one another's existence.

The middle classes' answer to the Marquis of Hastings was H.E.S. Benzon, son of an iron-master, and author of that curious little book *How I Lost £250,000 in Two Years* (1889). One of the ways in which he lost it, in addition to betting and wearing a new shirt every day, was in giving a ball at the Royal Hotel, Scarborough, in Cricket Week, for the girls of the Gaiety Theatre, when they were on tour.<sup>27</sup>

John Hollingshead, who became manager of the Gaiety in 1868, was something of a swell, and his successor, George Edwardes, even more of one, to judge from contemporary accounts.<sup>28</sup> So was Frank Matcham, the best and most successful architect of Victorian theatres, and the actor-manager Sir Augustus Harris, with his roulette board in the garden and impulsive outings to Monte Carlo.<sup>29</sup> So was the irrepressible and exquisitely turned out entrepreneur of Champagne Charlie, Bill Holland,

<sup>26</sup> For Baker see M. Girouard, *Victorian Pubs* (2nd edn, London and New Haven, 1984), pp. 95–8, Pl. 60, and accompanying references.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. and M.B. Hawke, 2nd Baron, *Recollections and Reminiscences* (London, 1924), p. 317.

<sup>28</sup> Macqueen-Pope, op. cit., especially pp. 215–17.

<sup>29</sup> *Frank Matcham, Theatre Architect*, ed. B. Mercer Walker (Belfast, 1980), pp. 1, 7–8, 17, especially cartoon on p. 55.



who moved on from London to help establish Blackpool as a working class holiday resort.<sup>30</sup> So was the locally-born owner and builder of Blackpool Tower, Mayor of Blackpool, jauntily turned out yachtsman and lover of royalty, John Bickerstaff.<sup>31</sup> And one would like to know more about Edward Barker Cox, steel-bar manufacturer, enthusiastic fox-hunter, and owner and builder, in the 1870s, of the Talbot public house and music hall in Nottingham – ‘the flaunting Talbot, a source of immorality and degradation’, according to the, one suspects, non-conformist Nottingham town clerk.<sup>32</sup> In general, investigation into the background of the managers, owners, promoters and backers of theatres, music halls and variety theatres all over England, could be one of the most fruitful ways of exploring the world of the middle class swell.

An earnest swell is an impossible concept, and a Christian swell an unconvincing one. But the idea of a Christian gentleman is entirely acceptable, and so is that of an earnest, or at least serious-minded gentleman. The whole concept of the gentleman, as developed in the nineteenth century, and the set of values attached to it, was to be of the greatest importance to the Victorian upper classes. One reason for its importance is that it provided a synthesis of two sets of values. It made serious things glamorous, and glamorous things serious.

One of the main ways it did this was by reviving and adapting the concept of chivalry. It was as modern knights, heirs to a great and glamorous tradition, that Victorian gentlemen could come to the rescue of the oppressed – whether by building model cottages or serving in East End Settlements – woo their wives, be courteous to their inferiors and protective to all women, despise mere money-making or too much cleverness (for character, it was stressed, was more important than intellect), and train their bodies in manly exercise or sporting tournaments with their fellow knights. They dedicated their lives to others; but the seal of knightliness set them apart from and above the rest of mankind.<sup>33</sup>

The ideals of the Victorian gentleman, like other ideals adopted by the upper classes, were worked out, preached or put across by both upper and middle class propagandists – by the upper class Anglo-Irishman Kenelm Digby, by Lord John Manners and the aristocratic youths of Young England, by upper class Christian Socialists like Tom Hughes, Lord Sydney Osborne or Lord Goderich, by upper class novelists like

<sup>30</sup> For Holland see M. Girouard, *The English Town* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 292–4, 298–303.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293–4.

<sup>32</sup> R.S. Tresidder, *Nottingham Pubs* (Nottingham Civic Society, 1980), p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> This section adds nothing to the much fuller discussion in my *Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London, 1981).

Charlotte M. Yonge – but just as much by a powerful company of middle class writers, teachers and artists, by Carlyle, Kingsley, and Tennyson, by the journalists of *Fraser's Magazine*, by Maclise, Watts, William Morris and Burne Jones, by Mrs. Craik of *John Halifax, Gentleman* in London, or Sir Noel Paton in Edinburgh.

Just as with other sets of values, the ideal of the gentleman operated at all social levels. By the second half of the nineteenth century the distinctive question for most better-off Victorians was not whether they belonged to the upper or middle classes, but whether or not they were gentlemen. And if the working classes could not aspire to be as it were fully paid-up gentlemen, a substantial portion of them could and did aspire to gentlemanly values, as the success of the Boy Scout movement among them was to make clear.

Of all the forces and agencies which spread the ideals of gentlemanly behaviour through the upper and middle classes, and provided a common code of behaviour and values for both of them, none was more important than the Public Schools. The reforming movement which undoubtedly started with Dr. Arnold's headmastership of Rugby in the 1820s, spread to other public schools, and led to the remodelling of existing grammar schools in the public school image, and the founding of further public schools all over the country. The two most prestigious and upper-class-oriented public schools, Eton and Harrow, changed along with the schools which catered primarily for the middle classes, so that the similarities between them became more obvious than the differences.

But between the 1820s and 1900 the nature of the public-school movement changed. Of the three types of training with which it was concerned, of the brain, the character, and the body, Arnold had concentrated on the brain and character, but his successors shifted the emphasis to the character and body. Arnold would have been horrified by the change; it is ironic that one of its instruments was the best-selling *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, written by his pupil and passionate admirer Thomas Hughes, with its much-quoted statement 'I know I'd sooner win two school-house matches running than the Balliol scholarship any day'.<sup>34</sup> Implicit in the remark was that devotion to team spirit, which was to become such a feature of later public schools. And behind both team-spirit and stress on bodily training was the inspiring image of the brave and manly knight, who trained his own body in order to serve others, and was loyal to the fellowship to which he belonged. Victorian knights were prepared to fight real battles, in a just cause, as well as moral ones, and believed in the purifying and exalting effects of war, as Dr. Arnold, or for that matter Lord Shaftesbury, surely did not.

The code learned at the public schools could be practised in after life

<sup>34</sup> T. Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (small illustrated edn, 1874), p. 282.

by officers in the armed forces, clergymen, members of the professions, colonial officials, and even by manufacturers and businessmen – though not too easily by these, for Victorian gentlemen were taught to look down on trade. This last attitude was as much a feature of middle class as upper class public schools, and perhaps helps to explain Britain's economic decline in the 20th century. Clifton College was opened in 1862 on the edge of commercial Bristol. Bristol businessmen sent their sons there, but as the official school history puts it, in reference to its greatest headmaster, John Percival, 'Trade and business and money-making generally were looked at rather askance by Percival, and by very high minded Cliftonians who accepted his ideals'.<sup>35</sup>

But the landed classes had no problem in following the gentlemanly ideal. A stereotype emerged to which members of the country aristocracy and gentry were expected to conform, both by their equals and their social inferiors. The ideal upper-class gentleman excelled in manly sports. He looked after his tenantry and the poor. He was courteous to members of all classes. He did not boast or brag. He was not expected to be clever or a patron of the arts, although it was not necessarily held against him if he was. He wore the right things at the right times. He was a keen farmer, but more concerned with winning prizes at agricultural shows than making money – money, in fact, in all its aspects, he left to his agent and his lawyer. If they were as gentlemanly as he was, this did not always lead to financial success.

These are the characters who, no doubt slightly edited for public consumption, crowd the pages of the volumes of country notabilities which were published by the dozen towards the end of the 19th century. They are not quite earnest, and not quite swells. They occupy, very solidly, a middle ground. A quick dip into *Norfolk Notabilities*, published in 1893, produces the following. Captain the Hon. A.E. Fellowes is an able officer, a keen sportsman, and a sound but progressive conservative MP. He has little or no sympathy with Socialists and political agitators, but knows how to show reasonable respect for the opinions of his opponents. He has been President of the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture. He is beloved by his tenants and by all who know him, being held up as a model landlord and a typical English gentleman. Lord Hastings (only a very distant connection of the spendthrift Marquis) has won the Derby and the Leger, is a fine shot and owns very good preserves. He is President of North Norfolk Conservatives Association, and a successful exhibitor of his herd of Norfolk red-polled cattle. His wife is enthusiastic in looking after the welfare of the poor. He himself is exceedingly popular with his tenantry and all classes in

<sup>35</sup> O.F. Christie, *A History of Clifton College, 1860–1934* (1935), pp. 122–3.

the country. 'He is, indeed, the beau-ideal of an English nobleman and country-gentleman'. A similar accolade is given to Nicholas Henry Bacon, of Raveningham Hall: 'Courteous in conduct, kindly in disposition, and modest in manner, he is a splendid specimen of that perfect gentleman which we all admire'.<sup>36</sup>

And didn't they just all admire him. It was stated at the beginning of this article that there is no one value which encapsulates the essence of Victorianism. But there is one which, if not universal, is to be found at all levels and in all classes throughout the Victorian period. This is the belief in social hierarchy, the resulting deference which this led to in those who were not at the top of the hierarchy, and the automatic assumption of the right to lead by those who were. As E.C. Grenville-Murray, writing in no very friendly spirit in 1881, put it in his *Sidelights on English Society*, 'Thackeray's Book of Snobs has not cured a man or woman of the national itch for lord-worship'.<sup>37</sup> This is not, I imagine, one of the Victorian values of which Mrs. Thatcher was thinking, but its importance cannot be ignored.

<sup>36</sup> C.A.M. Press, *Norfolk Notabilities* (Norwich, 1893), pp. 55-6, 79, 97-9.

<sup>37</sup> E.C. Grenville-Murray, *Sidelights on English Society: Sketches from Life Social and Satirical* (2nd edn, London, 1883), p. 271. Murray was the illegitimate son of the 2nd Duke of Buckingham, the most sensationally bankrupt, or near-bankrupt, of Victorian swells.